But the light of the human mind is God. . . . Knowledge of the truth is Divine.
—LACTANTIUS (1885), iii, iii, i.

(N)

The Putnamian Argument, (O) The Argument from Reference, and (P) The Kripke-Wittgenstein Argument from Plus and Quus

ARGUMENTS FROM KNOWLEDGE, REFERENCE, AND CONTENT

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IN THIS CHAPTER, I will examine three of Alvin Plantinga's (2007) arguments for the existence of God: (N) the Putnamian argument (or the argument from global skepticism), (O) the argument from reference, and (P) the Kripke-Wittgenstein argument from *plus* and *quus*.[1] I shall refer to these as the argument from knowledge, the argument from reference, and the argument from content. They are in many respects parallel. They begin with skeptical arguments against the possibility of knowledge, reference, or content and convert them into arguments for God's existence.[2]

I shall focus on the skeptical challenges posed by Hilary Putnam (1978, 1981) and by Saul Kripke's (1982) interpretation of Wittgenstein (1953). Putnam's brain-in-a-vat puzzle attacks the possibility of knowledge and of reference, given an assumption of metaphysical realism. Putnam flips the argument, using the possibility of knowledge and reference to undermine realism. Kripke's puzzle raises a skeptical challenge—one variously described as concerning meaning, content, and rule-following—and then offers a skeptical solution. Paul Boghossian (1989, 1990) flips the skeptical puzzle to argue for a realist, non-reductive, and judgment-independent account of content. My goal is to extend the arguments of Putnam and Boghossian to arguments for the existence of God.

The key idea behind these arguments is straightforward. Content and the knowledge of it are, among other things, infinitary and normative. These features of content,

Kripke argues, make it impossible to account for a speaker's content in terms of facts about that speaker's past usage, mental history, or even dispositions, since a finite being's dispositions are finite. I shall go further: The normative character of content transcends any naturalistic relation or set of facts. Its infinitary character transcends any relation to any finite set of finite minds. Content thus requires a non-naturalistic relation to an infinite set of finite minds or to an infinite mind. The only live options for accounting for content are thus pragmatism and theism. If pragmatism fails, then theism is the only remaining option.

SKEPTICAL ARGUMENTS

Skepticism, as generally understood, attacks the possibility of knowledge. But skeptical challenges can extend beyond the theory of knowledge to theories of meaning and reference. W.V. Quine's (1960, 1969) thesis of the indeterminacy of translation is a skeptical challenge, as is the Kripke-Wittgenstein puzzle concerning *plus* and *quus* (Kripke 1982).

Skeptical Arguments about Knowledge

Say that *A* has a belief or perception *s* that portrays the world as being a certain way—that portrays an object or circumstance *o* as having a property *P* (or having an individualized property *Po*, or a trope *P*/*o*, or being such that *Po* is true; the metaphysical differences are immaterial for our purposes). We can ask whether *A*'s mental state portrays the world as it actually is, at least in this respect. That is, in this case, we can ask whether *o* really does have *P*.

To make this slightly less abstract, imagine that *A* sees a triangle and thinks, "That's a triangle." On what I will call a traditional understanding of meaning—roughly from Plato through Locke—the word "triangle" stands for an idea or concept, which we might designate as *triangle*.

The traditional skeptic challenges the connection between what *A* means, says, or refers to and facts, objects, and properties in the world—in this case, whether that really is a triangle, and whether anyone could know it to be one. The semantic skeptic challenges the connection between a word, thought, or utterance and a content—in this case, whether "triangle" stands for the right concept, whether the concept stands for the right property, whether "that" stands for the right object, and even whether "is a" stands for the right relation between the object and the property. The skeptic in general sees the possibility of a mismatch between mental or linguistic entities and something else—something those entities are meant to portray or represent, such as objects, properties, states of the world, or mental or linguistic contents.

The skeptic may raise either of two possibilities. The metaphysical possibility of mismatch concerns whether the mental or linguistic entity could match what it is supposed

to represent, or whether there is any fact of the matter about whether it does so. The epistemic possibility of mismatch concerns whether we could know it to match what it is supposed to represent (Boghossian 1989, Greco 2012):

Traditional Epistemic: Can I know I match the world?
Traditional Metaphysical: Could I match the world?
Semantic Epistemic: Can I know what I mean?
Semantic Metaphysical: Could I mean anything?

Consider the challenge concerning the relation of mental states to the world. Think of *A*'s utterance or thought, "That's a triangle," as portraying an object *o* as having a property *P*. We might represent the situation as follows, in which the subscripts indicate that meaning, reference, and in general content may be dependent on *A*'s idiolect or conceptual repertoire:

A: That$_A$ (standing for object$_A$) (isa)$_A$ triangle$_A$ (standing for the concept *triangle$_A$*)
The world: *o* has property *P*

We can now ask the epistemic questions, how *A* or anyone else could know whether "triangle$_A$" or *triangle$_A$* stands in the appropriate relation to *P*; whether "That$_A$" refers to o; whether "(is a)$_A$" stands in the appropriate relation to the relation of predication (indicated by "has" above); and whether *A*'s thought stands in the appropriate relation to the world. We can also ask the metaphysical questions of whether *A*'s words and concepts could have content, whether *A*'s thoughts could stand in the appropriate relations to the world, and whether there could be any fact of the matter about their having those contents or standing or failing to stand in those relations. The epistemic questions represent the skeptic's familiar challenges to knowledge. The metaphysical questions represent challenges to the possibility of truth, reference, or content.

Skeptical Arguments about Content

Imagine different temporal stages of the same person or counterparts of the same person in different possible worlds. Could I mean or know that I mean the same thing I meant five minutes ago, or might have meant if today were not Saturday, if I had not just blinked my eyes, or if my cat were not about to jump off the table?

The puzzle is not just about modal or temporal parts. Think of *B* as someone attributing content to *A*'s utterances and concepts. Think, in other words, of "That$_B$" as an articulation of an interpretation of "That$_A$," "triangle$_B$" as an articulation of an interpretation of "triangle$_A$," etc. We can then ask how anyone could know whether "triangle$_A$" means

the same as "triangle$_B$," whether *triangle$_A$* = *triangle$_B$*, whether "That$_A$" and "That$_B$" co-refer, whether "(is a)$_A$" means the same as "(is a)$_B$," or whether object$_A$ = object$_B$. In short, we can ask whether the terms in *A*'s utterance mean the same when uttered by *B* and whether *A* and *B* share the same concepts, refer to the same things, or have the same concept of predication. We can ask whether there is any way to know the answer. We can also ask whether it is even possible for any of these things to hold. The epistemic question: How could anyone know what *A* is referring to or what *A* means? The metaphysical question: Is there any fact of the matter about what *A* is referring to or what *A* means? Are meaning and reference even possible?

This reasoning applies even to *A* himself. *Triangle$_B$* in that case is not simply *triangle$_A$*, which is of course self-identical, but an account or interpretation of *triangle$_A$*, perhaps *A*'s own account or interpretation. And *A*'s interpretation of his own concepts is not necessarily correct. The same holds of linguistic items, as Plato's early dialogues dramatically illustrate. Socrates shows his interlocutors that their interpretations of their own terms and concepts are inadequate. Content is opaque.

SKEPTICAL SCENARIOS

Let's begin with traditional epistemic skepticism. Classic skeptical arguments typically start from a mental state—typically, a perception or belief—and invoke a skeptical scenario designed to undermine our faith in its veridicality or truth. The mental states in question are intentional; they represent, stand for, or are of or about things, events, properties, or states of affairs. They present them as being a certain way. If they are that way, the mental state is veridical (if it is a perception) or true (if it is a belief). If not, the mental state is illusory or not true.

Call a situation in which an agent has a veridical or true mental state directed at a state of affairs a *match* for that mental state. Putnam is dismissive of this locution: "But the notion of a transcendental match between our representation and the world in itself is nonsense" (1981, 134). In his view, the realism implied by "match" and skeptical scenarios stand or fall together, and he is happy to dismiss the skeptical arguments to be advanced in this section as nonsense. But a match in the sense I am outlining does not have to be "transcendental," whatever that means. You think that Concord is the capital of New Hampshire, and it is; that's a match. I look out the window and see a rock squirrel, and there is one there; that's a match. I go to the eye doctor, look at the astigmatism chart, and see some of the radial lines as darker than others; that's not a match. A variety of authors, including Wittgenstein (1953) and Sellars (1956), find this kind of talk acceptable case-by-case or for a limited portion of discourse, but not globally; they think the skeptic can challenge any given putative item of knowledge, but not all at once. For now, let's table these considerations, to which we will return in the section on pragmatism.

A skeptical scenario for a mental state is a situation, indiscernible from a match for that state from the agent's point of view, in which the same mental state is illusory or not true.[3] Putnam's skeptical scenario is that of a brain in a vat:

> Here is a science fiction possibility discussed by philosophers: imagine that a human being (you can imagine this to be yourself) has been subjected to an operation by an evil scientist. The person's brain (your brain) has been removed from the body and placed in a vat of nutrients which keeps the brain alive. The nerve endings have been connected to a super-scientific computer which causes the person whose brain it is to have the illusion that everything is perfectly normal. There seem to be people, objects, the sky, etc; but really all the person (you) is experiencing is the result of electronic impulses travelling from the computer to the nerve endings. (1981, 5–6)[4]

In a skeptical scenario, the situation is indiscernible from a match, not just given that mental state itself but given the totality of all the agent's possible mental states. Someone seeing what appears to be a puddle on the road ahead may not be able to tell whether this is a mirage or a veridical perception of a puddle, but traveling a bit further will reveal it to be one or the other. People under the influence of Descartes's evil genius, however, may not be able to tell whether any of their experiences are veridical or any of their beliefs are true, no matter how much experience they might accumulate or how much reasoning they do. The same holds of other skeptical scenarios, for example, that I am a brain in a vat or someone trapped in the Matrix.[5]

There is an important question whether all interesting skeptical scenarios are global. Consider Holliday's (2016) definition: "The skeptic describes a scenario v in which all such beliefs (i.e., all beliefs the agent holds in v) are false, but the agent is systematically deceived into holding them anyway." It seems possible that a demon might deceive me on a proper subset of my beliefs while leaving others intact, however; consider a demon who deceives me solely with respect to my perceptual beliefs, for example, or with respect to my beliefs about conscious beings. Indeed, the brain-in-a-vat scenario is of this kind; it is not clear how that scenario threatens my logical or mathematical knowledge, much less my knowledge that I exist. Interesting skeptical scenarios can be and generally are more limited than challenges to all of everyone's beliefs. Hence, skepticism is worth taking seriously even if Wittgenstein and Sellars are right that a truly global skepticism would be unintelligible.

THE KNOWLEDGE CHALLENGE

Given a perception or belief, we can distinguish situations that are matches, in which the perception is veridical or the belief is true, from situations that are not matches, in which

the perception is illusory or the belief is not true, and specifically from the subset of those that are skeptical scenarios, in which the agent cannot discover that the perception is illusory or the belief is not true. We begin with a skeptical premise:

(1) Given a state of mind *s*, among our epistemic possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *s*.

To go further, we need to think about what it would take to defeat the skeptic's strategy. There are many options concerning the needed relationship between skeptical scenarios and matches.[6] I will not try to adjudicate them here. I will use "matches are closer than skeptical scenarios," or, turning it around, "skeptical scenarios are more remote than matches," as placeholders for whatever the appropriate condition might be. And I will speak of discounting skeptical scenarios as shorthand for ranking them as more remote than matches.

We can now formulate a second premise, saying that we have no way of ranking skeptical scenarios for *s* as more remote than matches for *s*:

(2) We have no grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s*.

A third premise:

(3) We can know that a state of mind *s* is veridical only if we have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s*.

The conclusion, of course:

(4) We cannot know that our states of mind are veridical.[7]

PUTNAM'S ARGUMENT FROM REFERENCE

Let's return to Putnam's brain-in-a-vat scenario. Putnam interpretation is notoriously difficult; he tells us that he is going to give an argument of a certain kind, digresses about Turing tests, and then says he has given the argument. No wonder that commentators reconstruct the argument differently! (See, e.g., Brueckner 1992, Forbes 1995, and Warfield 1998.) He begins with the question (1981, 7), "Could we, if we were brains in a vat in this way, *say* or *think* that we were?" No, he answers. We could say or think the words, but they would not have the same contents. "Brain" would not refer to brains; "vat" would not refer to vats. He means his argument to be transcendental in Kant's sense, investigating "the *preconditions* of reference and hence of thought" (1981, 16). But the actual argument is hard to unearth.

Part of the argument is clear:

(5) a. Suppose *A*, a brain in a vat, were to think, "I am a brain in a vat."
b. For any common noun *N*, N_A refers to *N*s only if *A* has a relevant causal connection to real *N*s.
c. *A* has no relevant causal connection to real brains or real vats.
d. So, "brain$_A$" does not refer to brains; "vat$_A$" does not refer to vats.

It does not follow immediately that *A*'s thought is false. All the argument so far shows is that *A*'s thought, despite appearances, does not really refer to brains and vats.

This is enough, however, to generate an interesting skeptical puzzle. I have defined a skeptical scenario for a mental state *s* as a situation, indiscernible from a match for *s* from the agent's point of view, in which *s* is illusory or not true. We can extend the idea to linguistic items. Call a situation a match for an expression *t* iff, in that situation, *t* succeeds in having its intended content—referring to its intended referent, if *t* is a referring term, standing for the intended concept or property, if *t* is a predicate, etc. Say that a skeptical scenario for a term *t* is a situation that is not a match for *t* but is indiscernible from one from the agent's point of view. Putnam's brain-in-a-vat scenario is a skeptical scenario for "brain" and "vat," and thus for "I am a brain in a vat" and "We are brains in vats."

We could formulate this referential portion of the argument:

(6) a. Given a term *t*, among our epistemic possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *t*.
b. We have no grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *t*.
c. We can know that a term *t* succeeds in referring only if we have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *t*.
d. We cannot know that our terms succeed in referring.

The referential argument tempts the thought that, if semantic externalism is correct, then any skeptical scenario for states of mind is also one for certain linguistic expressions: anything that systematically and undetectably disrupts the connection between my states of mind and the world also systematically and undetectably disrupts the connection between terms and their referents. This holds, however, only for a limited range of such scenarios; defining that range lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

Putnam's goal is in any case larger. He wants to show that we are not brains in vats. Putnam claims that if "we are really the brains in a vat, then what we now mean by 'we are brains in a vat' is that we are brains in a vat in the image or something of that kind (if we mean anything at all)" (15).

> But part of the hypothesis that we are brains in a vat is that we aren't brains in a vat in the image (i.e., what we are "hallucinating" isn't that we are brains in a vat). So, if we are brains in a vat, then the sentence "We are brains in a vat" says something

> false (if it says anything). In short, if we are brains in a vat, then "We are brains in a vat" is false. So it is (necessarily) false (15).

Now the moves from "false (if it says anything)" to "false" to "(necessarily) false" are puzzling. Descartes's "I think" is true every time it is thought or uttered, but it is not necessarily true; similarly, Putnam has at best shown that "I am a brain in a vat" is not true any time it is thought or uttered. Even if he succeeds in demonstrating that, he has not reached the conclusion that I am not a brain in a vat (Brueckner 1986, Forbes 1995). Plantinga puts his argument more convincingly:

> So if we were (brains in a vat), we could not so much as think the thought that we were. But clearly we can think that thought (and if we couldn't we couldn't formulate brain-in-vat skepticism); so such skepticism must be mistaken. (2007, 221)

THE CONTENT CHALLENGE

It is easy to turn Putnam's argument into a general argument against the possibility of content. Kripke's skeptical scenario concerns an arithmetical computation I have never performed before—say, 68 + 57. I get the answer "125."

> Now suppose I encounter a bizarre sceptic. This sceptic questions my certainty about my answer. . . . Perhaps, he suggests, as I used the term 'plus' in the past, the answer I intended for '68 + 57' should have been '5'! . . . in this new instance, I should apply the very same function or rule that I applied so many times in the past. But who is to say what function this was? In the past I gave myself only a finite number of examples instantiating this function. . . . So perhaps in the past I used 'plus' and '+' to denote a function which I will call 'quus' and symbolize by '⊕'. It is defined by:
>
> $x \oplus y = x + y$ if $x, y < 57$
> $= 5$ *otherwise*
>
> Who is to say that this is not the function I previously meant by '+'? (1982, 8–9)

Let b be anything thought to have content—a word, a phrase, a sentence, a proposition, a thought, a perception, a concept, etc. Call it a *content bearer*. We can generalize the ideas of matching and skeptical scenarios to all content bearers. Think of a match for a content bearer as a situation in which it succeeds in having its intended content. If it fails, it might have no content at all, or it might have some other content, a counterfeit. A semantic skeptical scenario for a content bearer is not a match for it, but is indiscernible from one from the agent's point of view. We can think of b as "+," for example, and

ask whether it is possible for "+" to have any specific content, addition rather than a close counterfeit, quaddition. This is in part a puzzle about meaning: how is it possible for "+" to mean *plus* rather than *quus*?

(7) a. Among our possibilities for "+" are skeptical scenarios for "+," e.g., in which it means *quus* instead of *plus*.
b. There are no grounds for discounting scenarios in which "+" means *quus*.
c. "+" can mean *plus* and not *quus* only by virtue of some fact.
d. If there were a fact by virtue of which "+" mean *plus* and not *quus*, there would be grounds for discounting scenarios in which "+" means *quus*.
e. It is not true that "+" means *plus* and not *quus*.
f. So, "+" has no specific content.

More generally, how is it possible for a content bearer to have one content rather than a counterfeit? Here is an argument that it cannot:

(8) a. Given a content bearer *b*, among our possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *b*.
b. There are no grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *b*.
c. A content bearer *b* can have a specific content only by virtue of some fact.
d. If there were a fact by virtue of which *b* had a specific content, there would be grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *b*.
e. So, content bearers cannot have any specific content.

But that seems to imply that there are no content bearers. It at least implies that contents are vague; no symbol or thought can have any specific content, but can at best have a certain *kind* of content.

JUDO, ACADEMY-STYLE

The central strategy of the arguments from knowledge, reference, and content is to deny the conclusion of these arguments and thereby argue for the denial of one of the premises. Philosophers in the Platonic tradition flip the epistemological argument sketched earlier on its head:

(9) a. Given a state of mind *s*, among our epistemic possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *s*.
b. We can know that some of our states of mind are veridical.
c. We can know that a state of mind *s* is veridical only if we have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s*.

d. So, we have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s*.

The Platonic strategy admits that among our epistemic possibilities are skeptical scenarios. I might be a victim of a Cartesian deceiver. I might be a brain in a vat. I might be in the Matrix. I cannot rule out the possibility of these scenarios. But I can know that some of my states of mind are veridical. I can know that I exist. I can know that this tastes sweet to me. I can know that 7 + 3 = 10. (These examples are Augustine's (1955, 1995).) So, I *must* have ways of discounting skeptical scenarios. I must be able to rank them as more remote than matches, recognizing their possibility while also realizing that they do not prevent me from having knowledge.[8]

It may be worth reflecting on how Plato's judo differs from Putnam's. Putnam argues that if metaphysical realism is true I could not know that I am not a brain in a vat. But I do know that; therefore, metaphysical realism is false.

(10) a. If metaphysical realism were true, then, given a state of mind *s*, among our epistemic possibilities would be skeptical scenarios for *s*.
b. If metaphysical realism were true, we would have no grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s*.
c. If metaphysical realism were true, we could know that a state of mind *s* is veridical only if we had grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s*.
d. So, if metaphysical realism were true, we could not know that our states of mind are veridical.
e. But we can know that some of our states of mind are veridical.
f. Therefore, metaphysical realism is false.

From Putnam's point of view, Plato omits a crucial presupposition embodied in talk of matching and thus implicit in the idea of a skeptical scenario itself.

From a Platonic point of view, however, Putnam's argument, too, omits some crucial steps. We might see more clearly how they relate by making things more explicit:

(11) a. If metaphysical realism is true, then, given a state of mind *s*, among our epistemic possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *s*.
b. We can know that some of our states of mind are veridical.
c. We can know that a state of mind *s* is veridical only if we have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios.
d. So, *either* metaphysical realism is not true *or* we have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s*.

From this combined perspective, both arguments are too quick. Plato ignores his realist presuppositions. And Putnam ignores the possibility of finding grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios.[9]

In a similar fashion, we can flip the brain-in-a-vat skeptical argument about reference:

(12) a. Given a term *t*, among our epistemic possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *t*.
b. We can know that at least some of our terms succeed in referring.
c. We can know that a term *t* succeeds in referring only if we have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *t*.
d. We have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *t*.

Platonists similarly flip the skeptical argument about content:

(13) a. Given a content bearer *b*, among our possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *b*.
b. Content bearers have specific content.
c. A content bearer *b* can have a specific content only by virtue of some fact.
d. If there were a fact by virtue of which *b* had a specific content, there would be grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *b*.
e. So, there are grounds for discounting semantic skeptical scenarios.

Once again, Plato admits the possibility of skeptical scenarios, but insists that there must be grounds for discounting them. Notice Kripke's own reaction to the skeptic he describes; he calls the skeptic's claim that "+" means *quus* "obviously insane" (8). Of course "+" means *plus*. If so, there must be grounds for ranking skeptical scenarios as more remote than matches—for declining to allow the possibility that "+" means *quus* to interfere with its possession of a specific content, namely, meaning *plus*.

Putnam once again would object that distinguishing contents and content bearers presupposes realism about content.[10] But Plato would counter by pointing to the possibility of finding grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios. We might expand the argument to incorporate both:

(14) a. If semantic realism is true, then, given a content bearer *b*, among our possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *b*.
b. Content bearers have specific content.
c. A content bearer *b* can have a specific content only by virtue of some fact.
d. If there were a fact by virtue of which *b* had a specific content, there would be grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *b*.
e. So, *either* semantic realism is not true *or* there are grounds for discounting semantic skeptical scenarios.

Once again, we seem to have two options: embrace anti-realism or find grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios.

TRANSCENDENT GROUNDS

For the moment, I will set the anti-realist option aside, returning to it in a later section. For now, let's seek grounds for ranking skeptical scenarios more remote than matches. The question in both epistemological and metaphysical contexts is, How? What kinds of grounds could there be for discounting skeptical scenarios? How could we have epistemic access to these grounds? What kind of fact could underlie a content bearer's having its content?

Plato's answer is the theory of forms. But his approach applies more generally. The keys are the following premises. The first is metaphysical, the second, epistemic:

(15) For a content bearer *b*, there could *be* grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *b* only if *b* is anchored to something transcendent, the relation to which gives *b* its content.[11]

(16) For a content bearer *b*, we could *have* grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *b* only if *b* is anchored to something transcendent and epistemically accessible, the relation to which is also accessible and gives *b* its content.

This is, of course, the crux of the entire strategy. What does "transcendent" mean?

x is *transcendent* if and only if *x* is

- independent of individual, finite minds,
- temporally and modally stable,
- infinitary,
- normative, and
- objective.

Let's take these in turn to see why Plato and his followers find each aspect of transcendence important to solving skeptical puzzles. These arguments are mostly implicit in Plato, but appear explicitly in certain early Church Fathers, especially Augustine. They constitute a challenge to philosophers such as Sellars and Quine who reject a relational view of meaning by arguing that the only alternative to transcendence is skepticism.

- *Independence from individual, finite minds*. The Platonic worry can be expressed as a thesis: If a content bearer *b* is anchored to something dependent on individual, finite minds, and that anchoring gives *b* its content, then there would be no grounds for ranking skeptical scenarios for *b* as more remote than matches for *b*, and both content and knowledge are impossible. Kripke's skeptic insists that "+" means *quus*; perhaps in his idiolect it does. We presumably cannot assess the

truth of "68 + 57 = 125" in absolute terms, for it will be true in my conceptual idiolect and false in his. If there is no absolute truth, there is no absolute knowledge; If we cannot know whether "+" means *plus*, full stop, then we cannot know whether 68 + 57 = 125. But matters are even worse, for, as Kripke's puzzle points out, we cannot identify anything about me that grounds the claim that "+" means *plus* even in my own idiolect.

- *Temporal and modal stability*. How do I know what I meant by "+" yesterday? How do I know what I will mean tomorrow? Is there any determinate answer to what I meant yesterday or will mean tomorrow, quite apart from epistemological considerations? The dangers posed by temporal variation also apply to modal variation. Would I have meant what I do by "+" if it had rained today, or if I were currently standing rather than sitting? If the danger of dependence on individual finite minds is a relativism born of a personal parochialism, then the danger of dependence on particular times and worlds is a structurally similar relativism born of temporal or modal parochialism. I cannot know, in the moment it takes to think a thought, whether my thought has the same content at the end of that moment that it had at the beginning. I cannot know whether the cat's presence on the table is changing the meanings of my words and thoughts. Modal and temporal relativism will apply across the board, even to "7 + 3 = 10" and "The better should be preferred to the worse." If there are such eternal truths, then what anchors content will have to be *maximally* temporally and modally stable: eternal and necessary (Augustine 1955).
- *Infinitary character*. Contents are infinitary. This is obvious in the case of "+" or "number," since there are infinitely many numbers and infinitely many triples *x, y, z* such that *x* + *y* = z. But it is true of other contents as well. "Just," "unjust," "courageous," "beautiful," "red," "hungry," and other predicates apply or fail to apply to infinitely many possible objects or situations. The content of a term or concept somehow determines its applicability or lack of applicability in infinitely many possible circumstances. It will not do to point to recursive definitions, for their ability to characterize something infinite in finite terms, while important, presupposes the infinitary character of the contents of the terms appearing in the definitions.

  Normativity. Contents determine correctness conditions. They specify not merely how a term *is* used but how it *ought* to be used. There are, of course, normative terms themselves, which wear their normative character proudly. But every term is normative in the sense that it has accompanying correctness conditions. Kripke's skeptic, who says that 57 + 68 = 5, is wrong; his assertion is incorrect. He ought to get the answer "125." Similarly, a child who calls a baby bear a cat and a beginner in Spanish who calls a dog *el pero* are doing it wrong.[12]

- *Objectivity*. Whatever anchors our concepts must be objective, not only in the sense of being independent of individual, finite minds, but also in the sense of matching the nature of objects. It must solve the problem of truth, providing grounds for our utterances and our thoughts correctly describing the way things are. That means that whatever anchors our contents must match the structure of the world in appropriate ways (Burnyeat 1983). Our concepts must be able to match the properties they are meant to capture—not always, of course, but sometimes, and perhaps even normally. The same is true of our thoughts and utterances, which must be able to match the facts. What anchors content must connect to the world in ways that make these relationships possible.

THE ARGUMENTS FROM CONTENT

We are now in a position to articulate a metaphysical anti-skeptical argument for God's existence. It follows a general strategy, developed by Plato and such early Church Fathers as Justin Martyr, Lactantius, and Augustine, of flipping skeptical arguments into arguments for the forms or for God's existence. How is it possible for our words and thoughts to have content? One simple way to put the argument is that there is no good naturalistic explanation for our ability to refer to things in the world and mean things by what we think and say. Any account of semantic capacities must at some point resort to magic.[13] And the best explanation we have for that magic involves God.

The key premise the early Church Fathers add to the Platonic argument addresses the central weakness of the theory of forms. Within a generation, the Academy had abandoned forms and embraced skepticism—so much so that, even in Augustine's time, "Academic" was synonymous with "skeptic." (Think of the title of his refutation of skepticism: *Contra Academicos*.) The weakness of Plato's theory was epistemic accessibility: How do we know the forms? How can finite minds relate to the transcendent?

The early Church Fathers argued that the only answer is that there is a transcendent causal power making that relation possible. The power cannot be the forms themselves, or the form of the Good, as Plato thought, for our relation to them is precisely the point at issue. Nor can it be generated from finite minds themselves. The best explanation of our relation to the transcendent identifies the transcendent power with God.

(17) a. If realism is true, then, given a content bearer *b*, among our possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *b*.
b. Content bearers have specific contents.
c. A content bearer *b* can have a specific content only by virtue of some fact.

d. If there were a fact by virtue of which *b* had a specific content, there would be grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *b*.
e. There could be grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *b* only if *b*'s content is grounded in something transcendent.
f. Something independent of individual, finite minds can ground content only if there is something with causal power, independent of individual finite minds, that makes such grounding possible.
g. Only a transcendent causal power could make possible grounding in something transcendent.
h. Nothing natural is transcendent.
i. Anti-realism grounds content in some feature of a collection of finite minds.
j. A finite collection of finite minds does not suffice to explain the grounding of content.
k. An infinite collection of finite minds does not suffice to explain the grounding of content.
l. The best explanation for the existence of a supernatural, transcendent causal power grounding content in the transcendent includes an infinite mind and, in particular, the existence of God.
m. So, there is a God.

Recall the definition of transcendence. The argument establishes the existence of a supernatural, infinite, eternal, necessary, objective, normative, and independent causal power capable of grounding content. That causal power is normative in the sense that it defines standards for correctness and incorrectness, right and wrong, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice.

This argument is abstract, but it expresses a common religious intuition. God alone gives meaning to the world. In relation to God, this world, our words, our thoughts, and our actions have meaning. If there were no God, there would be no meaning. Existentialism notwithstanding, furthermore, there would be no way for us to assign meaning to anything. This is true not only in the cosmic, meaning-of-life sense, but in the mundane sense that "apple" could not mean *apple* if there were no God. The upshot of the rule-following considerations is precisely that we ourselves cannot assign meanings.

The argument from content must have the form of an inference to the best explanation, for there are gaps that it does not by itself address. The argument does not by itself establish that there is a single transcendent causal power. The argument establishes God's transcendence, but it does not by itself establish omnipotence, omniscience, benevolence, or other components of the classical conception of God. The argument by itself does not provide the explanation of content; it points to a *kind* of explanation, the details of which must be filled in theologically.

THE ARGUMENT FROM REFERENCE

The argument from reference is a special case of the argument from content.

(18) a. If realism is true, then, given a term *t*, among our possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *t*.
b. Terms have specific referents. (E.g., "brain" refers to brains.)
c. A term *t* can have a specific referent only by virtue of some fact.
d. If there were a fact by virtue of which *t* had a specific referent, there would be grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *t*.
e. There could be grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *t* only if *t*'s reference is grounded in something transcendent.
f. Something independent of individual, finite minds can ground reference only if there is something with causal power, independent of individual finite minds, that makes such grounding possible.
g. Only a transcendent causal power could make possible grounding in something transcendent.
h. Nothing natural is transcendent.
i. Anti-realism grounds reference in some feature of a collection of finite minds.
j. A finite collection of finite minds does not suffice to explain the grounding of reference.
k. An infinite collection of finite minds does not suffice to explain the grounding of reference.
l. The best explanation for the existence of a supernatural, transcendent causal power grounding reference in the transcendent includes an infinite mind and, in particular, the existence of God.
m. So, there is a God.

This argument is strongest for terms such as "brain" and "vat" that refer to kinds and have infinitary and normative dimensions. It seems implausible for proper names and demonstratives, apart from a prior argument about the constitution of objects.

FINITE COLLECTIONS OF FINITE MINDS

The argument from content depends on some crucial premises, including a denial that a finite collection of finite minds can ground content. With respect to the key properties involved in transcendence, a finite collection of finite minds is no better than a single finite mind (Blackburn 1984). The skeptical strategy Kripke explores changes the subject, replacing truth with assertibility and normativity with facts of communal agreement, censure, approval, etc. It is hard to assess the importance of the community in this

formulation, for communal acceptability seems to depend on individual acceptability (Blackburn 1984, Boghossian 1989).

The skeptical strategy moreover seems to give up on infinitude altogether. If no finite mind can account for the infinitary and normative features of content, then no finite collection of finite minds can, either, for we still have finitely many occasions of use. Such a collection is still, in aggregate, finite; the uses, occurrences, dispositions, or acts of such a collection still form a finite set. It thus cannot account for the infinitary character of content.

Nor can it account for normativity. Those employing a skeptical strategy replace normativity with practice in such a way that to be incorrect is just to deviate from the usage of the group. The skeptical solution thus seems to tell us not what is correct but what is popular. This makes it hard to distinguish a reform from a change in fashion. Sometimes, after all, the deviant usage is right, or at least better, than the common usage. Sometimes, it is worse, even if it ends up winning the day and changing the usage of the group. Sometimes, of course, it is simply wrong.

A finite collection of finite minds moreover cannot explain temporal and modal stability; the group may change its mind or change its usage, sometimes gradually, sometimes quickly.

Finally, such a collection cannot explain objectivity; it replaces the notion with a shared subjectivity.

INFINITE COLLECTIONS OF FINITE MINDS

Pragmatism poses a more serious threat to the argument than the skeptical solution does, for it holds more promise for explaining transcendence. Suppose content were grounded by an infinite collection of finite minds—if it can be defined, for example, in terms of limits approached by the linguistic usages of finite speakers, much as pragmatists define truth in terms of the limits approached by ideal scientific inquirers. We might even coin a slogan: *Meaning is use at the limit*. Then content could be independent of individual, finite minds. It could be infinitary, for the collection of finite minds underlying content is infinite. If contents are understood in terms of limits, they do not have to be reachable at any finite stage. Contents defined in terms of limits could be temporally stable, for limits do not change as we move along a path toward them. They could not be objective or modally stable in the usual, realist sense, but they could be something close to that if we could show that the limits themselves are independent of initial conditions and paths taken to reach them.[14]

The central question is normativity. How would an appeal to an infinite collection of finite minds explain normativity? The thought might be that the infinitary character of content underlies the problem of normativity. Over an infinite set, one might argue, we

could identify content with use. Correctness would be a matter of agreement with the consensus at the limit. Whether this strategy could succeed is a complicated question I cannot resolve here. I will rest content with a few reasons for doubting the plausibility of a pragmatist solution.

First, it is not clear that a pragmatist strategy can explain normativity any more than "You might get caught and go to jail" explains what is wrong with burglary. If you call a tomato a vegetable, you *might* face disapproval, but that raises a Euthyphro question: *Is* your usage incorrect because you face disapproval, or do you face disapproval because your usage is incorrect? The skeptical solution implausibly demands the former. That you will diverge from the eventual consensus—that you in effect are standing against the tides of history—does not make you wrong.[15]

Second, Kripke's objections to dispositional accounts appear to apply to accounts appealing to collections of finite minds, whether they are finite or infinite collections and whether they follow a pragmatist strategy or not. The appeal of identifying competence or truth with usage or belief across some infinite set or at an infinite limit inevitably goes beyond our finite evidence: it requires us to ask what would be accepted in some idealized space. In short, this turns every question of content or truth into a counterfactual question. And if the counterfactual holds, it must be in virtue of some fact. But what sort of fact could this be? We are back in the heart of the Kripke-Wittgenstein puzzle.[16]

It may also be destructive of this option, as Stillwell (1989) argues, elaborating Plantinga (1982). Call an ideally rational scientific community an IRS. This might be a community at a Peircean limit; it might be an idealized community somehow capable of surveying an infinite space in some other fashion. Given the pragmatist's understanding of truth,

p is true if and only if, if there were an IRS, it would accept *p*.

Plantinga and Stillwell argue that an IRS would be transparent to some extent:

If there were an IRS, it would accept that there is an IRS.

By the pragmatist's own lights, that entails that there is an IRS. But that is plainly false.[17]

Finally, how will this strategy be able to discount skeptical scenarios? What grounds could we have for treating skeptical scenarios as more remote than matches? Since skeptical scenarios and matches are indiscernible from the agent's point of view, even given unlimited evidence, ideal inquirers at the limit or having access to an infinite space are no better off than we are when it comes to the central problem of this chapter. Indeed, from the perspective of skeptical challenges, there is no decisive difference between the ideal inquirers and us, their far-from-ideal counterparts.

THE ARGUMENT FROM KNOWLEDGE

The argument from knowledge speaks of *having grounds* rather than there *being* grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios.

(19) a. If realism is true, then, given a state of mind *s*, among our epistemic possibilities are skeptical scenarios for *s*.
b. We can know that some of our states of mind are true or veridical.
c. We can know that a state of mind *s* is true or veridical only if we have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s*.
d. For a state of mind *s*, we could have grounds for discounting skeptical scenarios for *s* only if *s* is grounded in something transcendent and epistemically accessible that connects *s* appropriately to the world, allowing *s* to be true or veridical.
e. Something independent of individual, finite minds can be epistemically accessible only if there is something with causal power, independent of individual finite minds, that makes such access possible.
f. Only a transcendent causal power could make possible epistemic access to the transcendent.
g. Nothing natural is transcendent.
h. Anti-realism grounds content in some feature of a collection of finite minds.
i. A finite collection of finite minds does not suffice to explain our access to something transcendent.
j. An infinite collection of finite minds does not suffice to explain our access to something transcendent.
k. The best explanation for the existence of a supernatural, transcendent causal power making it possible for us to have veridical perception and true beliefs includes an infinite mind and, in particular, the existence of God.
l. So, there is a God.

God is part of the best explanation of our knowledge of the world. Apart from God, I cannot understand the contents of my words and thoughts or their connection to the world. I cannot know whether they have any contents at all. I cannot know whether my perceptions are ever veridical. I cannot know whether my statements and beliefs are ever true. I cannot know that any given perception is veridical or any given statement or belief is true.

This, too, reflects a common religious intuition: Without God, I have no reason to think of this world as anything but a hostile environment, a "field of death" (Nishitani 1982) that is ultimately unintelliglble to me. God aligns my mind with the nature of

reality, making it possible for me at least sometimes to grasp the world as it is. God is the light of the mind, as Lactantius declares, as well as the light of the world.[18]

NOTES

1. Plantinga's paper, under that latter heading, simply says, "See Supplementary Handout," and I have not been able to track down a copy of that handout. So, I make no guarantee that the argument from content as I develop it corresponds to the argument Plantinga had in mind.

2. These arguments belong to a family of anti-skeptical arguments, including arguments from truth, intersubjectivity, interpretation, and communication, which I term *arguments from intelligibility*. For a discussion of the general kind, see Bonevac (forthcoming).

3. Some writers (e.g., Williamson (2007) and Kung (2011)) include under the heading of skeptical scenarios cases in which a belief is true but unwarranted, so that it does not count as knowledge. On that understanding, Gettier cases, fake barn cases, and the like count as skeptical scenarios. I refrain from doing that here, for two reasons. First, these are not cases that are truly indiscernible from matches from the agent's point of view: The agent could come to learn that the other person also has ten coins in his pocket, that the key is not to Jones's car, that there are many fake barns in the vicinity, etc. Second, the question of warrant pertains to knowledge, and so has bearing only within epistemology, having no obvious correlate in metaphysical skepticism.

4. Putnam embellishes this scenario by imagining that, through "some kind of cosmic chance or coincidence" (12), all of us have jointly been wired to a computer network in this way, and always have been, in order to avoid the objection that your reference to things is parasitic on your earlier contact with them, other people's contact with them, or the evil scientist's contact with them.

5. Note that this is the skeptic's way of understanding skeptical scenarios. Descartes, for example, thinks that he can show that we are not under the sway of an evil deceiver. Putnam thinks he can show that we are not brains in vats. So, it might be more accurate to define a skeptical scenario as a situation that is not a match but is *apparently* indiscernible from one from the agent's point of view.

6. I am simplifying somewhat in thinking solely about possible relationships between skeptical scenarios and matches. One might instead choose to focus on relationships between skeptical scenarios and other scenarios, including corrigible non-veridical states as well as matches. Or, one might choose to focus on relationships between matches and non-matches, which might fit skeptical arguments such as the argument from illusion more faithfully than what appears here in the text.

7. This is one way to think of skeptical arguments; there are many others in the literature (e.g., Schofield, Burnyeat and Barnes (1980), Annas and Barnes (1985), DeRose and Warfield (1999)).

8. From a contemporary point of view, this seems to commit Plato to denying closure. The argument: I know that $7 + 3 = 10$. I do not know that I am not under the spell of Descartes's demon. (Among my epistemic possibilities is such a skeptical scenario.) I know that if I am under the spell of Descartes's demon, then $7 + 3 \neq 10$. By contraposition, I know that if $7 + 3 = 10$, then I am not under the spell of Descartes's demon. By closure, if I know that $7 + 3 = 10$, then I know that I am not under the spell of Descartes's demon. I know that I am not under the spell of Descartes's demon; contradiction. Plato, however, might be willing to allow knowledge even

given epistemically possible skeptical scenarios. There are yet other plausible options. One is denying contraposition. Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias appear at some points to rely on contraposition, but it creates problems for Aristotle's view that true conditionals have possible antecedents, since $A \rightarrow B$ does not guarantee the possibility of $\neg B$, which is a prerequisite, on his view, for the truth of $\neg B \rightarrow \neg A$. Boethius appears to be the first person to state contraposition explicitly (Bonevac and Dever 2012). So, Plato might indeed have objected to the argument at just that stage. The first statement of a closure principle is in Paul of Venice (1369–1429), so Plato may have objected to it as well.

9. In putting it this way, I do not mean to endorse Putnam's allegation that the very idea of a skeptical scenario presupposes metaphysical realism; it seems to me that an inverted spectrum scenario offers grounds for a skeptical argument without any commitment to a metaphysically loaded thesis. But for now I will frame the argument to remain as neutral as possible on the question.

10. Again, I do not mean to endorse this claim. Sellars (1956, 1963), Quine (1969), and Putnam all reject relational theories of meaning, in part for this reason. But Kripke's skeptical scenario does not depend on any particular analysis of statements such as "'+' means *plus*."

11. I use "anchored" advisedly, generalizing the idea in Kamp and Reyle (1993): anchoring is a relation by virtue of which something has the content that it has. It is typically a causal connection, such as the link between Aristotle and the name "Aristotle," or the connection between H_2O and the word "water." Thinking of anchoring in this way explains why virtually every basic term designates rigidly.

12. See Boghossian (1989, 513):

> Suppose the expression "green" means *green*. It follows immediately that the expression "green" applies *correctly* only to *these* things (the green ones) and not to *those* (the non-greens). The fact that the expression means something implies, that is, a whole set of *normative* truths about my behaviour with that expression: namely, that my use of it is correct in application to certain objects and not in application to others.

13. Though the term comes from Putnam (1981), here I mean it to indicate a non-naturalistic element; I do not mean to imply that all semantic relations are in any sense necessary. It is entirely contingent that the name "Winston Churchill" refers to Winston Churchill. More to the point of this discussion, it is entirely contingent that "+" stands for addition and that "triangular" stands for triangularity. Predicates and concepts have meaning by being anchored to something transcendent, but the connection between the predicate and its transcendent anchor is not itself transcendent.

14. This is a tall order. Peirce (1878), for example, gives us no reason to think that the eventual agreement of all who inquire would be path-independent and invariant across initial conditions. In fact, he gives us little reason to think that it could be achieved at all; why think the series of stages of inquiry converges? Still less does he provide a reason to think that the limit approached by scientific inquiry would be path-independent and invariant across initial conditions without making reference to a mind-independent world. But perhaps such an argument is possible.

15. This concern underlies Bertrand Russell's broader objection to pragmatism as a theory of truth. Say that the ideal inquirers would eventually converge on *p*. Why? The realist would say, *because p is true*. The realist holds that truth explains agreement. The pragmatist reverses the

picture, contending that agreement explains truth; we count *p* as true because the ideal inquirers would eventually converge on it—truth comes to nothing more than belief at the limit. Russell argues that this implausibly makes the world dependent on belief and thus on minds: the pragmatic theory "seems to suggest that if I infer a world, there *is* a world. Yet I am not the Creator. Not all my inferences and explanations could prevent the world from coming to an end to-night, if so it were to happen. . . . Whatever accusations pragmatists may bring, I shall continue to protest that *it was not I who made the world*" (Russell 1919, 26; emphasis added).

16. This leads to an infinite regress worry: if every question turns into a counterfactual question, then the counterfactual question raises a further counterfactual question, which raises yet another, and so on. This may or may not be vicious, depending on the details:

p is true if and only if
p would be accepted throughout a given space *S*, which is true if and only if
'*p* would be accepted throughout *S*' would be accepted throughout *S*, which is true if and only if
"'*p* would be accepted throughout *S*' would be accepted throughout *S*" would be accepted throughout *S*,

and so on. The lengthier counterfactuals might follow trivially if acceptance throughout *S* is transparent in *S*. But such transparency is not automatic; it has to be established.

17. The Plantinga-Stillwell argument relies on the principle Bonevac, Dever, and Sosa (2006) call *contraction*: $\big(A \rightarrow \big(A \rightarrow B\big)\big) \Rightarrow \big(A \rightarrow B\big)$, which is in a Lewis-Stalnaker system equivalent to weak centering, that is, to modus ponens. This should not be surprising, for the Plantinga–Stillwell objection in effect argues that pragmatism falls prey to a conditional fallacy analogous to that which Robert Shope (1978, 412–413) finds in the ideal-observer theory. It remains open to the pragmatist to reject contraction.

18. I developed these ideas in a seminar on Natural Theology East and West at the University of Texas at Austin in 2015. I am grateful to my co-instructor, Stephen Phillips, and to our students for their insightful comments and criticisms as well as their enthusiasm and support.

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