

THE FORMAL FOUNDATIONS OF OUR EPISTEMIC PRACTICES

by

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For my brother, Lawren: all thoughts are prey to some beast.*

*Bill Callahan. "All Thoughts Are Prey to Some Beast". *Sometimes I Wish We Were an Eagle*. Drag City, 2009. Vinyl record.

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Abstract

There is a dominant tradition in epistemology that largely begins with René Descartes' search for a firm foundation for the sciences. Epistemologies after the fashion of Descartes that seek what he sought—namely, real foundations that act as epistemic guarantors—are invariably forced into a radically sceptical position about the possibility of knowledge. There is an alternative tradition in epistemology, i.e., the contextualist tradition, which sees its modern instantiation in the work of Michael Williams, who was largely inspired by Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. Looking further back into history to the early-modern period, Thomas Reid represents an early instantiation of this tradition. In what follows, I pursue and defend an account of the contextualist tradition in epistemology, arguing that ultimately our capacity to know is constituted by our form of life, that is, by the kinds of creatures we are, and the kind of aims and interests we happen to have. Further, I argue that the contextualist account of knowledge, in abandoning the notion of real intrinsic epistemic properties, is not driven into a radically sceptical conclusion, and so, presents a viable alternative to traditional epistemology.

List of Abbreviations Used

EIP	Thomas Reid, <i>Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man</i> .
IHM	Thomas Reid, <i>An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense</i> .
OC	Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>On Certainty</i> .
PI	Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> ,

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In what follows, I will pursue and defend a contextualist tradition in epistemology that runs counter to a dominant tradition that largely begins with René Descartes. In attempting to put science on a firm foundation, Descartes developed his method of doubt, a method that, once followed through on, blocks the possibility of knowing anything at all. Descartes does not hold that his method entails this consequence: instead, he produces a *Deus ex machina*, invoking God as the ultimate epistemic guarantor.

However, epistemologies after the fashion of Descartes that seek what he sought, namely, real foundations on which our knowledge might rest, but are committed to a secular epistemology and therefore do not have the theistic solution at their disposal, are invariably forced back into a radically sceptical position about the possibility of knowledge. This, as we will see, is a result of the target of such projects, namely, foundational beliefs whose justification is a real, self-contained inherent property; a property that is supposed to be independent of, and neutral to, the aims and activities of the knowers who hold those beliefs. The aim of giving an account of knowledge where its basis is real, independent, and neutral characterizes what I will call traditional epistemology.

An alternative tradition in epistemology, i.e., the contextualist tradition, sees a modern instantiation in the work of Michael Williams, who was largely inspired by Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. Looking further back into history to the early-modern period, Thomas Reid is an early instantiation of this tradition. This contextualist tradition holds that, rather than our beliefs being justified by the real intrinsic properties of

foundational beliefs, our beliefs are justified by contexts that are constituted by contingently certain beliefs, that is, beliefs that are held to be certain relative to an epistemic context. This account of knowledge, in abandoning the notion of real intrinsic epistemic properties, is not driven into a radically sceptical conclusion, and so, presents a viable alternative to traditional epistemology.

1.1 Aims

This paper has two central aims: 1) to identify and articulate a contextualist tradition in epistemology that runs counter to what I have called traditional epistemology, and 2) to give a plausible defense of that tradition by showing that it accounts for our actual knowledge practices—both the ordinary everyday ones and the advanced specialized ones—and that it avoids the sceptical conclusion that the traditional epistemological project entails.

I will achieve this first aim by tracing a route from Williams to Wittgenstein, and from Wittgenstein to Reid. These three thinkers will act as touchstones in defining an alternative epistemological tradition, namely, what Williams calls contextualism. I take it that there are others in this tradition, and others might have been chosen as touchstones, but Williams, Wittgenstein, and Reid each present an account of our epistemic practices that have substantive structural similarities such that there is a strong kinship present in their views.

Achieving the second aim is embedded in, and concomitant with, achieving the first. By tracing this route through the aforementioned thinkers, I will argue that an alternative account of our capacity to know emerges in detail. By taking up Williams'

diagnosis of the traditional epistemological project, I will show that the traditional epistemological project offers an untenable account of the nature and structure of knowledge that necessarily results in a denial of our capacity to know, i.e., in radical scepticism. Williams' diagnosis suggests a viable alternative account of our capacity to know, and such an alternative account, as we shall see, is present and fully articulated in and between Wittgenstein and Reid.

A tertiary aim of this paper is to offer a new—i.e., contextualist—reading of the nature and function of Thomas Reid's first principles of common sense. Reid has sometimes been read as a 'moderate' foundationalist, a providentialist, and alternatively as a naturalist¹, but the contextualist nature of Reid's first principles has no prominence in the literature associated with his epistemology. In taking on Reid as the third touchstone in tracing a contextualist tradition in epistemology, I will argue that a contextualist reading is a viable way to interpret the nature of Reid's first principles.

The thesis that these aims centre around is that our capacity to know is constituted by our form of life, that is, by the kinds of creatures we are, and the kind of aims and interests we happen to have.

1.2 Structure

I will pursue the aims outlined above over the course of three chapters, followed by a conclusion that seeks to summarize those three chapters

¹ For the moderate foundationalist reading of Reid, see, for example, John Greco, "Reid's Reply to the Skeptic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, Cambridge University Press, 134-155, 2004. For the providentialist reading, see, for example, Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, Oxford University Press, 1993. For the naturalist reading, see, for example, Patrick Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism" in *Philosophical Quarterly*, 52 (2009) 437-456, 2002.

In Chapter 2, I will give a brief sketch of Descartes' epistemological project. Subsequently, I will take up Williams' diagnosis of the traditional epistemological project, i.e., the project that takes on giving an account of knowledge after the fashion of Descartes, in order to show that this project presupposes an untenable account of our knowledge. Williams argues that the Cartesian epistemological project entails three conditions that an account of knowledge must meet: a totality condition, an epistemic priority condition, and an objectivity condition. I will follow Williams' route in arguing that, taken together, these three conditions entail 1) epistemological realism, the view that there are real objects that are the target of epistemological inquiry and that such objects necessarily structure justification, and 2) substantive foundationalism, the view that our beliefs are justified in virtue of real inherent epistemic properties, or by being traceable to beliefs with such properties. These views, taken together, entail a radical scepticism.

In tracing the entailments of the traditional epistemological project to a necessitation of radical scepticism, Williams concludes that we are under no epistemic obligation to accept the sceptic's account of knowledge. Having undermined the sceptic's account, Williams identifies an alternative kind of foundationalism: formal foundationalism. This is the view that holds that foundational beliefs are contingently beyond doubt in virtue of the role they play in a particular epistemic context, rather than possessing real inherent epistemic properties that make them self-justifying. Formal foundationalism is the heart of the contextualist alternative account of knowledge that Williams offers.

In Chapter 3, I will begin by sketching the basic aims of the contextualist alternative, followed by an analysis of Wittgenstein's account of the structure of our

epistemic practices. First, as background, I will argue that the target of a contextualist account of knowledge is the diverse variety of epistemic activities wherein we employ the term ‘knowledge’, and that it is this diversity of activities that an account of knowledge should seek to make sense of. Further, I will argue that, once the view that certain beliefs have intrinsic epistemic properties has been abandoned, justification can no longer be treated as a natural relation between beliefs; rather, justification consists in interest relative normative standards that are constitutive of epistemic contexts. Second, I will give an account of what counts as a context, and distinguish interests as a subset of the features that make up contexts. This will provide a theoretical backdrop for my interpretation of Wittgenstein and Reid.

My discussion of Wittgenstein will pursue four main elements of his account of the structure of our epistemic practices: language-games, norms of description, hinge-propositions, and world pictures. I will begin by giving an account of the seeds of Wittgenstein’s formal foundationalism in his *Philosophical Investigations*. I will then give an account of Wittgenstein’s metaphor of language-games: Wittgenstein’s account of our epistemic practices in *On Certainty* makes liberal use of this metaphor to describe a subset of language-games, a subset wherein knowledge and its associated terms are employed, that I will call epistemic-games. Epistemic-games are constituted by epistemic constraints like games are constituted by rules.

With the metaphor of epistemic-games in hand I will turn to, in Wittgenstein’s terms, the logic of certainty, doubt, truth and falsity, and knowledge. On Wittgenstein’s account of logic in *On Certainty*, “everything descriptive of a language-game is part of

logic” (OC §56). So, I will treat each of the above concepts as playing a role in structuring our epistemic-games.

Finally, I will turn to a discussion of norms of description, hinge-propositions, and world pictures, which are the constituent parts of epistemic-games. Norms of description lay down rules that constitute epistemic practices. Hinge propositions are propositions that must hold fast as constituents of epistemic practices. World-pictures are the sum total of hinge propositions and norms of description that together create a background against which we might justify our beliefs.

. In Chapter 4, I will turn to giving an account of Reid’s first principles of common sense, arguing that they play the role of hinge-propositions, and that, therefore, there is a substantive structural similarity between Wittgenstein and Reid’s accounts of our epistemic practices.

First, I will outline Reid’s tack against the sceptic, aiming to draw out similarities with Williams’ and Wittgenstein’s antiscpticism. Subsequently, I will give an account of the general structure of Reid’s first principles, taking up an argument from Patrick Rysiew that they are constitutive principles, i.e., constitutive of epistemic practices, and, further, that first principles are regulative, not in virtue of possessing inherent epistemic properties that give rise to natural justificatory relations, but by acting as rules. This is to say that they both describe constituent elements of epistemic contexts, and also act as norms within those contexts, much as rules do in the game of chess. Finally, I will I take up some examples of specific first principles, and groups of first principles, arguing in each case that they act as hinge propositions, thus constituting a particular epistemic context or group of related epistemic contexts.

1.3 Scope

The account I trace and articulate herein is a descriptive structural account of our capacity to know, and the foundations of our epistemic activities. In introducing this structural account, I have noted that it runs counter to the tradition that holds that foundational beliefs are naturally independent and neutral. As I stated above, the central thesis that my aims centre around is that our capacity to know is constituted by our form of life, i.e., by the kinds of creatures we are and the kind of aims and interests we happen to have, which is to say the foundations of our beliefs are, in fact, *not* independent and neutral with respect to our aims and interests and, we might add, with respect to our projects and desires.

Given that the account that follows entails that the foundations of our knowledge are contextual rather than independent and neutral, some immediate and important consequences follow—consequences that are beyond the scope of my present aims. For example, the non-neutral contextual nature of the foundations of our knowledge entails that power dynamics, projects of oppression, wicked and immoral desires, and so on might all play a role in attributing knowledge to epistemic agents, resulting in a variety of epistemic harms, e.g., silencing in testimonial contexts, and the subjugation of minority epistemic viewpoints and knowledge. I find these considerations to be both plausible and compelling, and in need of serious consideration and redress.

Even though such considerations are beyond the scope of the present project, I take the descriptive work that this paper consists in to be preliminary to addressing precisely the kinds of harms listed above. Bringing the contextualist structure of our epistemic practices to light provides an avenue for identifying and addressing a variety of

epistemic harms. Having the contextualist structure of our epistemic practices clearly in view makes it possible to identify and address harms to knowers when they are enforced, implicitly or explicitly, by that structure. So, though I will not touch on epistemic harms here, the reader should keep in mind that addressing epistemic harms is part of my motivation for giving this contextualist account of the structure of our epistemic practices.

Chapter 2: Diagnosing Cartesian Epistemology

Epistemology has been in the grip of scepticism since Descartes first introduced his familiar thought experiments—The Dream Argument and especially The Evil Genius Argument. These arguments set the stage for a prevalent strand of epistemology wherein scepticism is the natural and unavoidable consequence of philosophical theorizing about the justification of knowledge. The sceptical problems that emerge in Descartes' inquiry into the possibility of justifying knowledge are radical problems. They do not merely challenge us to evaluate some of our beliefs against the stricter epistemic standards that his method of doubt introduces, but stand as a challenge to the possibility of our having any knowledge at all. In what follows I will adopt Michael Williams' diagnosis of the Cartesian epistemological project that shows how the scope and method of the Cartesian inquiry ensures a sceptical conclusion. In pursuing this diagnosis of the Cartesian epistemological project, I will argue that it is structured on certain unnecessary assumptions about the proper target of an epistemological inquiry. By undermining these assumptions, I will show 1) that we are under no epistemic obligation to accept the sceptic's picture of knowledge, and 2) that once we are free of the force of the sceptic's account of knowledge, there is an alternative strategy open to us for giving a general account of knowledge that will not force us into a radically sceptical conclusion.

2.1 Cartesian Doubt and the Search for Firm Foundations

A brief sketch of the starting place of Descartes' epistemological inquiry will show that radical scepticism arises as a consequence of his attempt to give a general account of our

knowledge of the external world. Such generality is concomitantly an epistemic goal of, and a methodological necessity for, Descartes' project. Descartes begins his inquiry into knowledge by methodically doubting everything he has previously taken himself to know in an effort to start his epistemology without assuming that any of his beliefs are justified.

Epistemologically, the goal of Descartes' inquiry is, famously, to put scientific knowledge, i.e., knowledge of the external world, on a firm foundation. In attempting to do so he is not trying to find a firm foundation for some particular piece of knowledge. Rather, he is looking for the *kind* of thing that, once discovered, might always serve as a foundation for knowledge of the external world. Firm foundations are meant to be the guarantor of certainty in that they are beyond doubt. Knowledge that is inferred from firm foundations will also be beyond doubt, so sceptical arguments are introduced in part to test whether certainty has been secured.

Methodologically, Descartes cannot examine his beliefs about the world one by one, inquiring into their foundations and rejecting those that aren't well founded. To do so would be, on Descartes' account, impractical and unnecessary. Rather, in order to start without assuming any of his beliefs are justified he has to introduce a radically sceptical argument that will threaten all his beliefs about the external world all at once. Descartes writes, "[My beliefs] need not all be reviewed individually, for that would be an infinite task; as soon as foundations are undermined everything built on them collapses, and therefore I will challenge directly all the first principles on which everything I formerly believed rests" (19). Descartes begins his inquiry by presupposing that his beliefs about the external world must stand or fall together, and that they will stand or fall together in virtue of their foundationalist structure.

Descartes' strongest sceptical argument comes in the form of The Evil Genius Argument. In this argument, Descartes introduces the possibility that all of his beliefs are the result of deceptions perpetrated by a powerful evil genius. This argument can be summarized as follows:

P1: If I know P (some proposition about the external world) then I must know I am not being deceived by an evil genius.

P2: I do not know that I am not being deceived by an evil genius.

C: I do not know P.

The possibility that Descartes is being deceived by an evil genius threatens the possibility of his knowing anything at all about the external world. Further, it seems that such a sceptical hypothesis even undermines his certainty about *a priori* truths, such as those of mathematics and geometry, for these beliefs too could be the result of deception. The particulars of the sceptical scenario in question are not important. For example, the possibility that Descartes is a brain in a vat is equally devastating to the possibility of his having knowledge. What is most relevant for our purposes here is the structure of the argument. At first gloss, the structure of this argument appears to rely solely on the principle of epistemic closure: my knowing P entails Q (that sceptical hypotheses don't obtain). If I do not know Q then I do not know P. Therefore, I do not know P.

The epistemic closure principle has a certain intuitive plausibility such that we might not want to reject it wholesale: for example, if I know that *this* is a crow, surely I

know that it is *not* an eagle. However, on Williams' account, even if we were to abandon the epistemic closure principle, we would not get out from under the sceptic's thumb:

Notice that the sceptic can put forward knowing that one is not dreaming [or knowing that one is not a brain in a vat, etc.] as an independently and intuitively plausible condition on acquiring perceptual knowledge of the world, so that his argument need not invoke any general principle of closure. The sceptic need not claim that knowing P implies knowing the falsity of everything incompatible with P (or with our knowing that P). Since his argument does not invoke any principle of closure, it cannot be met by denying such a principle. (Williams 84)

A more plausible account of the sense in which sceptical hypotheses threaten our knowledge of the external world is given explicitly by Williams (83), and by Michael Hymers. Hymers writes, "[T]he Cartesian sceptic presents an *underdetermination* argument, which purports to show that a certain body of evidence—my experiences as if of a world beyond my senses—could be explained just as well by some sceptical hypothesis as by the hypothesis of an external world" (169). This leaves us in a more troubling position because—even if we hold that the epistemic closure principle is too strong a standard for knowledge, or can be rejected wholesale—we cannot dodge the sceptic by simply rejecting the closure principle (Williams 84-85). In appealing to underdetermination, sceptical arguments effectively drive a wedge between experience and the world by introducing a plausible condition on acquiring perceptual knowledge.

Once sceptical arguments have been introduced, it is this gap that has to be closed if we are to be able to claim that we have knowledge of the external world.

2.2 Williams' Diagnosis: Totality, Objectivity, and Epistemic Priority

Williams offers a diagnosis of the traditional, i.e., Cartesian, epistemological project aimed at giving a general account of knowledge of the external world. On his account, the Cartesian project has three distinct but interdependent conditions on a philosophical account of knowledge: a *totality condition*, an *epistemic priority condition*, and an *objectivity condition*. Taken together, these three conditions entail 'epistemological realism' and 'substantive foundationalism'—concepts I will take up again towards the end of this chapter.

The totality condition holds that a properly philosophical account of knowledge will not merely explain some particular instance of knowledge of the external world, but will give an account of knowledge that is completely general in that it will show that all knowledge is founded on genuinely and intractably indubitable beliefs that once discovered can serve to undergird any and all knowledge (Williams 90-91). This condition will already be familiar from the sketch of Descartes' starting place given above, but the totality condition is hardly peculiar to Descartes.

Epistemologists since Descartes have largely, and perhaps uncritically, taken the totality condition to be central to epistemology. They have presupposed that knowledge, or at least the large class of knowledge that is knowledge of the external world, should be able to be accounted for under a general theory. For example, Barry Stroud writes, "What we seek in the philosophical account of knowledge is an account that is completely

general in several respects. We want to understand how any knowledge at all is possible—how anything we currently accept amounts to knowledge” (qtd. in Williams 90).

The *totality condition* leads rather directly to the *epistemic priority condition*. The epistemic priority condition, simply stated, holds that experiential knowledge—i.e., “that which remains when knowledge of the external world is set aside” (Williams 90)—is prior to knowledge of the external world. Williams writes, “[I]f we are to understand how it is possible to know *anything at all* about external reality, we must trace our knowledge to knowledge we should still have even if we know nothing about the world” (89). In order for an account of knowledge to be completely general and non-circular, there must be a starting place that is prior to, and independent of, our knowledge of the external world, and we must be able to transition from knowledge that is not about the external world to knowledge that is about the external world. Williams writes, “No explanation of how we come to have knowledge of the external world that depended on our already having some would show the required generality” (90). Therefore, only by tracing our knowledge to something independent of and prior to knowledge of the external world could we provide a general account of such knowledge. Here we can see the skeleton of foundationalism emerging in outline; a general account of knowledge requires a natural order of priority, and that natural order of priority has a foundationalist structure. Recall that Descartes began his inquiry by presupposing that his beliefs about the external world must stand or fall together. In virtue of the epistemic priority condition they stand and fall together because of their foundationalist structure—only by undermining his epistemologically prior beliefs is Descartes able to undermine all his beliefs at once.

Finally, *the objectivity condition*, simply stated, holds that “[t]he knowledge [traditional epistemologists] want to explain is knowledge of an objective world, a world that is the way it is independently of how it appears to us to be or what we are inclined to believe about it” (Williams 91). The objectivity condition and the epistemic priority condition are interdependent in the sense that the order of epistemic priority is dependent on there being a mind independent, i.e., external, objective world, and knowing anything about the external world is dependent on there being knowledge that is epistemologically prior to knowledge of the external world. These two conditions work in tandem to produce a foundationalist account of the structure of knowledge, but they also ensure that we have to face the gap between our experience and our knowledge of the world that is rent open by sceptical arguments.

2.3 Epistemological Realism and the Epistemologists Dilemma

Taken together, these three conditions entail what Williams calls ‘epistemological realism’:

If human knowledge is to constitute a genuine kind of thing—and the same goes for knowledge of the external world, knowledge of other minds, and so on—there must be underlying epistemological structures or principles... This is not realism as a position within epistemology—the thesis that we have knowledge of an objective, mind independent reality—but something quite different; realism about the objects of epistemological inquiry. (108)

The realist commitment that the Cartesian project entails comes into focus in the epistemic priority condition: the priority of experience-independent knowledge is not conventional but actual; knowledge of the external world is not conventionally dependent on such prior knowledge but actually dependent on it.

We are now in a position to get a better view of the depth of the problem that the sceptical argument above poses for epistemology: not only must I be able rule out sceptical hypotheses in order to know anything about the external world, but I must be able to do so independently of my knowing anything about the external world. On the basis of the three conditions outlined above—the totality condition, the epistemic priority condition, and the objectivity condition—there is necessarily a gap between what I know independently of my knowledge of the external world and my knowledge of the external world. This gap is enshrined in what Williams calls the epistemologist’s dilemma, and Williams suggests that there is no way to close this gap without violating one of the three conditions, conditions which seem to follow naturally from wanting to give a general account of our knowledge of the external world.

Any attempt to close the gap between experiential data and worldly facts while respecting the totality condition, the epistemic priority condition, and the objectivity condition will involve yielding to the sceptic in some way. On Williams’ account, given the generality of the traditional epistemological project, this gap cannot be closed empirically, conceptually, or dogmatically. Experiential data “cannot be linked empirically with any facts about the world for, in accepting such linkage, we would be crediting ourselves with knowledge of the world in violation of the totality condition” (Williams 91). Recall that sceptical scenarios and objective reality are both compatible

with our experiences, so we cannot use experiential data to close the gap between experiential data and worldly facts.

Neither can we maintain that experiential knowledge and worldly facts are linked conceptually because “conceptual connections between experiential data and worldly fact seem to be ruled out by the thought experiments that the sceptic appeals to to establish the neutrality and autonomy of experience” (Williams 91). As we have already seen, we not only need experiential data to be neutral and autonomous in order to give a general account of our knowledge of the world, but the connection between experience and hypotheses about that which is beyond experience is underdetermined. To insist on a conceptual linkage between experiential data and worldly fact is just to beg the question against familiar sceptical scenarios.

Further, if we try to dogmatically insist that such linkages exist, e.g., by insisting that it just is the case that things are as we are inclined to believe they are, “we make the way the world is dependent on how it appears to us, in violation of the objectivity requirement” (Williams 91). Recall that the objectivity condition holds that “[t]he knowledge [traditional epistemologists] want to explain is knowledge of an objective world, a world that is the way it is independently of how it appears to us to be or what we are inclined to believe about it” (Williams 91). We could insist on such a linkage at the expense of objectivity, but we would be out of the business of giving a general account of how we know about the external world, thus yielding to the sceptical conclusion that no such knowledge is possible. Williams writes, “[I]n the context of the attempt to assess the totality of our knowledge of the world it seems impossible to either respect or violate the

objectivity condition: whatever we do looks like succumbing to the sceptic” (91). This is the epistemologist’s dilemma.

On Williams’ account, this leaves us with a new dilemma: either the Cartesian project is coherent—i.e., intelligible—and doomed to fail, or it isn’t intelligible, but we are pushed to a higher order scepticism—i.e., we may know things about the external world, but we have not, in rejecting scepticism, provided any explanation for how we know things about the external world—the very thing an epistemological inquiry is after. He explains:

Suppose we find that we cannot hope to ground our knowledge of the world in the way the traditional epistemologist has invited us to, because of some defect in the ideas about justification involved in the notion of even trying: we would still not have explained to ourselves how it is we ever come to know anything about the world. Unless we show that the sceptic’s question is actually unintelligible, it will remain dissatisfyingly unanswered. (Williams 93)

So, rather than being sceptical about our knowledge of the world itself, we are forced to be sceptical about the possibility of accounting for our knowledge of the world. Either way, we should still feel a lack in having failed to provide a general account of our knowledge of the external world.

Initially, it seems the sceptic has won her battle. From the mere intelligibility of the attempt to give a general account of knowledge flows a sceptical conclusion. As dire as this seems, the new dilemma contains the seeds of a two-fold strategy. First, we have

to show that there is something unintelligible about the sceptical challenge posed by the Cartesian epistemological project. Second, we have to show that there is, in the offing, an alternative strategy for giving a general account of our knowledge that will not force us into a sceptical conclusion.

At the outset, the traditional epistemological project certainly seems comprehensible enough. However, if we can undermine the notion that there is a real, comprehensible object of inquiry, we can begin to undermine the force of the dilemma and make way for an alternative general account of our knowledge of the world. On Williams account, the Cartesian project has to assume “‘our knowledge of the world’ picks out the kind of thing that might be expected to be susceptible to uniform theoretical analysis, so that failure to yield to such analysis would show a serious gap in our understanding” (Williams 102). Traditional epistemologists, sceptics, and respondents to the sceptic looking to defend ‘our knowledge of the world’, all take the ‘objects of epistemological inquiry’ for granted. Williams wants to “recover some naiveté” (103) about the objects of epistemological inquiry in order to fairly assess the comprehensibility of the traditional epistemological project.

2.4 Two Types of Foundationalism: Substantive and Formal

The Cartesian project is aimed at identifying immovable, certain foundations, as they are the kind of thing that would allow us to ground our knowledge on something that is susceptible to a general account of how we know anything at all about the external world. Williams distinguishes between two types of foundationalism: substantive foundationalism, and formal foundationalism. I will return to formal foundationalism

shortly, but it is substantive foundationalism that undergirds the Cartesian epistemological project. Substantive foundationalism is the form of foundationalism that entails what Williams calls ‘epistemological realism’. It specifies that the beliefs that function as terminal points for chains of justification are fixed and have inherent epistemic properties, and that relations of epistemic priority are natural.

On Williams account, epistemological realism is not just the view that there are real objects that are the target of epistemological inquiry, but the view that the nature of such objects necessarily structures justification. Recall the connection between certainty and firm foundations that was noted at the outset: firm foundations are meant to be the guarantor of certainty because beliefs inferred from certain foundations will themselves be certain. On this view, beliefs can be categorized into natural kinds, and real relations between kinds of beliefs structure justification. Williams writes, “The broad, fundamental epistemological classes into which all propositions, hence derivatively all beliefs, naturally fall constitute an epistemic hierarchy which determines what, in the last analysis, can be called on to justify what” (116). Some beliefs, due to their *actual* epistemic priority, are inherently capable of being justifiers, while other beliefs cry out for justification, and can only be justified by being traced to a belief that is naturally prior and needs no further justification. Further, recall that from the totality requirement, which we might gloss as the requirement that our account of epistemology be entirely general, the priority condition immediately emerges—because in order for an account of knowledge to be completely general and non-circular there must be a starting place that is prior to and independent of our knowledge of the external world. The naturally epistemologically prior beliefs that the Cartesian view seeks are found in experiential

knowledge, and, as we have seen, the gap between experiential knowledge and our knowledge of the world leaves us in the epistemologist's dilemma.

As we have seen above, the Cartesian epistemological project has to suppose that static, metaphysically real terminal points end our chains of justification, thus undergirding our knowledge. On the Cartesian view, the structure of justification is such that in order for knowledge to be certain it must be founded on propositions that have inherent epistemic properties that allow them to function as guarantors of certainty. Such epistemologically real foundations serve as "invariant epistemological constraints underlying the shifting standards of everyday justification" (Williams 113). Williams argues that if there are no epistemologically real foundational beliefs then there are no such invariant epistemological constraints. Williams writes, "We must reveal some kind of *theoretical integrity* in the class of beliefs we want to assess. If we can do this, human knowledge is a possible object of theoretical investigation. But not otherwise" (103). He considers, and rejects, two possibilities for theoretically integrating knowledge: topical integration and epistemological integration. Recall that the epistemologist's dilemma suggests a two-fold strategy: First, we have to show that there is something unintelligible about the Cartesian project. Second, we have to show that there is, in the offing, an alternative strategy for giving a general account of our knowledge that will not force us into a sceptical conclusion. If it can be shown that the Cartesian project has an unintelligible object of inquiry, i.e. that there is no theoretically integrated thing to which 'our knowledge of the world' refers, we can set aside the sceptic's seemingly insurmountable challenge and focus on giving an alternative account that doesn't yield the same sceptical conclusions.

If knowledge were topically integrated we would expect to find that all of our adequately justified beliefs could be integrated into a coherent, singular view of the world (Williams 104). Williams argues that it is obvious that the objects of epistemological inquiry cannot be topically integrated, because “[t]here is no way now, and none in the prospect, of integrating all the sciences, much less all of anyone’s everyday factual beliefs, into a single coherent system: for example, a finitely axiomatized theory with specified rules of inference” (104). Here, I take Williams to be pointing to the fact that our uses of the word ‘know’ range over a vast number of beliefs in a correspondingly vast number of domains of knowledge. Even if we restrict the scope of the relevant beliefs and propositions to those that are the subject of ‘the sciences’ there still seems to be a huge diversity in the sources and justifications attached to them. Because of this diversity, it is unreasonable and inappropriate to suspect that the beliefs that make up scientific knowledge, let alone all our knowledge, are of a topically integrated kind.

Knowledge is epistemologically integrated if the beliefs it consists in are “subject, in so far as they are meant to be justified or to amount to knowledge, to the same fundamental, epistemological constraints” (Williams 104). For example, in tracing all his pre-critical beliefs to the senses, Descartes assumes that his beliefs are epistemologically integrated, i.e., that they stand or fall together because their justification is uniformly structured on foundational beliefs. If these foundations are undermined by sceptical arguments, then any beliefs that rest on them are undermined in turn. However, as we have seen, the Cartesian epistemological project has to assume that beliefs are structured this way in order to give the kind of general account of knowledge that is the target of their project, and it is assuming that knowledge is structured this way that allows

sceptical arguments to get off the ground in the first place. The Cartesian epistemological project provides no independent grounds for thinking that knowledge, or even the restricted class ‘knowledge of the external world’ is uniformly structured this way. In the absence of such grounds, there is nothing to compel us to accept the account of knowledge that the Cartesian epistemologist presents. Substantive foundationalism is a methodological necessity for the Cartesian epistemological project. However, as Williams writes, “[S]ince the sceptic himself is irrevocably committed to distinguishing between methodological necessity and truth, it [being methodologically necessary] does not show... that the doctrine is true” (127). The Cartesian sceptic has to be able to find grounds independent of methodological necessity for thinking that knowledge is epistemologically integrated, but the fact that beliefs are not topically integrated seems to suggest we ought not to expect to find them epistemologically integrated either. If the sceptic could give us such independent grounds for thinking that knowledge is epistemologically integrated, it would go a long way towards obligating us to accept her account of knowledge, in which case we might be stuck with scepticism, but I take Williams to have shown that the sceptic has no such grounds, and that there are none to be had in the offing. Therefore, we are under no epistemic obligation to accept the sceptic’s account of knowledge, and are free to pursue an alternative account.

As noted above, Williams distinguishes between two types of foundationalism. In contrast to substantive foundationalism, formal foundationalism makes a more modest claim about the terminal points of chains of justification. On a formal foundationalist view, justification depends on letting certain beliefs function as fixed terminal points, but their ability to function as such does not depend on their having intrinsic epistemic

properties. Rather, it depends on their being used as such. Some propositions might be treated as foundational out of practical necessity, or because doing so serves some particular purpose or interest. For example, one that we will return to later, holding that nature is uniform as a foundational proposition in a predictive scientific practice. Formal foundationalism is structurally similar to substantive foundationalism—on both views, chains of justification depend on there being terminal points that are not subject to doubt—but formal foundationalism does not entail any metaphysical commitments. Foundational beliefs in formal foundationalism are contingently beyond doubt, but this is a function of the role they play in a particular epistemic context, not an inherent property of the belief itself.

Let me return briefly to the discussion of scepticism as an argument from underdetermination by the evidence. Recall that Cartesian sceptical arguments hold that the evidence radically underdetermines hypotheses about our knowledge of the world. Further, recall that the foundations Descartes is seeking are meant to be *the* guarantor of certainty for anything that is to count as knowledge, and that knowledge that is inferred from such foundations will also be beyond doubt. Treating foundational beliefs as contingently fixing contexts of justification has the benefit of avoiding the radical underdetermination that sceptical hypotheses bring to light. On the formal foundationalist view I adopt from Williams, the relevance of alternative hypotheses is also fixed by the epistemological context in question. Any competing hypothesis whatsoever that is introduced has to be taken to be relevant if foundational beliefs are taken to be epistemologically real in Williams' sense; they have to be able to withstand any doubt we can raise against them because of their perfectly general character. If some set of real,

static foundational beliefs undergirds all our knowledge, then all competing hypotheses are relevant. However, if the scope of foundational beliefs is restricted to a particular context, the hypotheses that are relevant to that context are the only ones that can challenge the beliefs that play the role of terminal points for chains of justification in that context. While this leaves open the possibility that in the peculiar context of the Cartesian epistemologists all hypotheses that are consistent with the evidence have to be considered relevant alternatives, it blocks such alternatives from ranging over every possible domain of knowledge. I will return to this point in the following chapter when we turn to a discussion of Wittgenstein's criticisms of G.E. Moore.

Williams' formal foundationalism contains the seed of the alternative that is the second part of the two-fold strategy that was discussed above. In order to show how formal foundationalism can offer an alternative general account of our knowledge of the world we have to reconsider the nature of our target. We have already seen that 'our knowledge of the world' doesn't pick out a theoretically integral kind, but we should not despair that this means that we have no hope of giving a general account of 'our knowledge of the world'. Here it will be helpful to introduce a distinction that Williams makes between the traditional account of knowledge and a deflationary account of knowledge:

[A] deflationary account of "know" may show how the word is embedded in a teachable and useful linguistic practice, without supposing that "being known to be true" denotes a property that groups propositions into a theoretically significant

kind. We can have an account of the use and utility of ‘know’ without supposing that there is such a thing as human knowledge. (113)

This deflationary account of knowledge is tied up with a deflationary account of truth. Williams’ deflationary account of truth holds that justification is not a static connection between theoretically coherent kinds, but an “interest-relative” “context-sensitive” relation (113). Truth is a function of interest-relative context-sensitive relations between beliefs and their justifications, nothing more. A deflationary account of knowledge that supposes a deflationary account of truth is the target of an alternative general account of our knowledge of the world. Such an account should make sense of our use of the word ‘know’ and our everyday knowledge practices, as well as specialized uses of ‘know’, e.g., in particular scientific practices.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

In the chapter that follows, I will use Wittgenstein’s account of knowledge to flesh out Williams’ notion of formal foundationalism, and to argue for a form of epistemological contextualism. The contextualism I will argue for will take a deflationary account of knowledge as its target. My account of knowledge will be aimed at showing the general formally foundationalist structural character of knowledge across a myriad of every day and specialized epistemic contexts. This form of contextualism is kindred to what Williams himself argues for, but this view is also present in the later writings of Wittgenstein, and scattered throughout the works of Thomas Reid. Williams writes:

[T]he antidote to [substantial] foundationalism, indeed to epistemological realism generally, is contextualism. To adopt contextualism, however, is not just to hold that the epistemic status of a given proposition is liable to shift with situational, disciplinary, and other contextually variable factors: it is to hold that, independently of all such influences, a proposition has no epistemic status whatsoever. (119)

Williams' first pass at a statement of contextualism points out that the epistemic status of a proposition is a matter of context. In formal foundationalism, propositions that function as terminal points are fixed, for a time and at a place, by contextual factors, and independent of such factors have no epistemic status whatsoever. It is contexts, and not some inherent property, that endows beliefs with their epistemic status. In the next chapter, I will argue that this view is present in Wittgenstein, and in the following chapter that this same view is present in Reid. I will aim to show how both of these views form a contextualist account of knowledge that is still general in that it holds that the justification of belief is roughly foundationalist in structure, but not susceptible to the radical scepticism that emerges from Cartesian epistemological inquiry because this foundational structure is formal rather than epistemologically real.

Chapter 3: Wittgenstein and The Structure of Epistemic Practices

In this chapter I will turn to Wittgenstein's account of the structure of our epistemic practices. The goal in turning to Wittgenstein's account is to flesh out the details of what Williams has called formal foundationalism, with an eye to giving a general account of the structure of our knowledge that isn't susceptible to the sceptic's perpetual doubts. I will argue that what Wittgenstein calls 'hinge-propositions' act as the formal foundations on which justification rests. Further, in fleshing out the details of formal foundationalism, I will lay the groundwork for interpreting Thomas Reid's epistemology along the same lines. Before fully turning to Wittgenstein, I will outline the landscape of the form of contextualism I am arguing for.

3.1 Deflationary Knowledge and Regulative Justification

The deflationary account of knowledge that contextualism entails is a blurry concept. Because, in order to avoid the sceptical problems outlined above, this account hinges on accepting the argument against the theoretical integrity of knowledge, it should come as no surprise that the proposed target of our inquiry will not have anything like a theoretically integrated character. Rather, I am interested in giving an account of the various practices where we, as human beings, employ the concept of knowledge and its related concepts. Further, the account of justification attached to such a deflated target is an account of the normativity of justification. The traditional foundationalist's view of justification, on Williams analysis, is that some beliefs, i.e., foundational beliefs, are justified in virtue of real epistemic properties while others, i.e. non-foundational beliefs,

cry out for justification, and that these non-foundational beliefs can only be justified by tracing their inferential heritage to epistemologically real foundational beliefs. With this view abandoned, justification ceases to look like a relation that hinges on the natural properties of beliefs; there are no natural relations to be found that justification could consist in. If we can't analyze justification as a natural relation that holds between beliefs, then what is left is the giving of justifications relative to purposes: we want to have a principled way of sorting our beliefs so we can determine which ones we should employ in our reasoning and which ones we ought to reject, but the scope of justification is limited to where it is practically useful, i.e., where the giving of reasons is relative to purposes. The purpose of the concept of justification, then, is to help us evaluate which beliefs we ought to hold and which we ought to reject where doing so makes a difference to us. This is to say that justification is normative; it consists in standards that our reasons must live up to in order to count as justifying reasons where the giving of reasons serves some epistemic aim.

So, the proposal is this: 'knowledge' is a status *we* grant to some beliefs, and this status is granted to beliefs at the intersection of contexts and interests. Apart from contexts and interests, beliefs have no epistemic status whatsoever. Further, justification consists in applying the normative standards that govern knowledge attribution. These standards also exist at the intersection of contexts and interests; what counts as justification is a matter of what we are trying to do with our knowledge—the strictures of our justificatory standards are correlates of our interests and aims. Further, what counts as justification changes with, and depends on, our needs. So, while justification generally

consists in normative standards, those standards are fluid in that they are context and interest relative.

One way to talk about the general character of knowledge is to say that ‘knowledge’ is a success term that refers to those beliefs our justifications authorize to play a role in our various epistemic activities, but this by itself is insufficient to get at the deflated nature of our target. We also need to have it in mind that the variety of epistemic activities where we employ the term ‘knowledge’ is extremely diverse, and it is due to this diversity that the concept must remain blurry. Any number of banal examples can point to this diversity: I know there is no coffee in the cupboard so I add it to my grocery list; I know it is raining on the west coast when my sister tells me so on the telephone; I know a rock isn’t sentient; I know that water is H₂O; I know that *she* is the one who robbed the bank because I saw her do it. Even this short list of the kinds of things I might take myself to know seems to have an immediately obvious diversity of uses, causes, justifications, further justifications that I might give if I am asked for them, and things I have to hold as certain in order to make any sense of the claim that I know them. Further, there seems to be a diversity of circumstances where an aim could be served by giving further justification for holding that these beliefs are knowledge. The relationship between each of these instances of knowing is just that in each case we want to say some beliefs have a certain kind of success, live up to a certain standard, that lets us go on with the aims and activities in which those beliefs play a crucial role: buying coffee because there is none in the cupboard, bringing my umbrella out west with me, testifying that *she* is the one who robbed the bank in a court of law.

3.2 Contexts and Interests

Contexts and interests go together. So much so that we might be tempted to collapse interests into contexts by saying, for example, that interests are just one of the many features of contexts that play a role in determining the kinds of standards we employ in justifying our beliefs and attributing the status of knowledge to them. I think this is right, roughly speaking: interests are a feature of contexts. Further, context itself is a blurry concept: the features that are epistemically relevant will shift with our situations and aims, and with the epistemic practices we are engaged in. However, I think it is possible to flesh out the concept of a context, and make a useful distinction between contexts and interests: contexts pick out the broadest scope of features of the world that are relevant to a given epistemic practice, including brute features of the world, while interests pick out a subset of those features, namely, those features that are entirely contingent on human desires, projects, and practices.

It is important to note here that some interests are contingent only in the sense that they are necessitated by the kinds of creatures human beings happen to be: creatures that require food and water, that sometimes seek to sexually reproduce, who are social and cultural animals, whose experience of the world is conditioned in certain ways by their biologically given faculties, and so on. So, some interests are contingent in the sense that our biology might have been otherwise—we are only contingently the kind of creatures we happen to be—but we play no active role in their arising. Other interests arise as a result of social and cultural practices, and individual and collective desires the particularities of which aren't necessitated by the kinds of creatures we are. Counterfactually, we can imagine our biological history being the same and our social

and cultural history being radically different. For example, nothing about the kinds of creatures we are necessitates that we have an interest in space travel, while it does necessitate our interest in food and sex. So, there is a further distinction to be made here between kinds of interests: on the one hand, there are those interests that are necessitated by the kinds of creatures we happen to be. On the other hand there are those interests that are contingent on the kind of social and cultural history we happen to have, and those desires, practices, and projects we happen to engage in that we can imagine having been radically different. I will call these necessary interests and contingent interests, but it is important to keep in mind that while the kind of creatures we are *necessitates* our having certain interests, the kind of creatures we are is itself contingent. We might well have been otherwise, so necessity here is only skin-deep, so to speak. This distinction between kinds of interests will see some play in the following analysis of Wittgenstein's epistemology, but will be particularly important later when we turn to Thomas Reid.

The preceding distinctions between contexts and interests, and between kinds of interests are complicated, though not rendered useless, by the fact that they are interactive and will be, at times, difficult to distinguish in practice. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions that determine what counts as a context. However, recall that 'context' is meant to pick out the broadest scope of features of the world that are relevant to some epistemic practice. Contingent and necessary interests will affect which features of a context count as epistemically relevant, and the kind of contexts we find ourselves in and the kinds of creatures we are will shape the kinds of contingent interests we end up having. There is no order of priority to be found in the interaction between contexts and interests. Rather they are mutually informed and transformed by one another, so while I

cannot offer a definitional way to identify a context or an interest, by attending to the role of the interaction of contexts and interests in attributions of knowledge we can get an imprecise view of their general character.

3.3 The Seeds of Formal Foundationalism in *Philosophical Investigations*

With a pass at the general character of the deflationary account of knowledge that my account is concerned with and these distinctions between contexts, interests, and kinds of interests in hand, let me turn to Wittgenstein's contribution to the analysis of the structure of our knowledge that I am proposing here, that is, to formal foundationalism as a contextualist kind of justification. Wittgenstein's contribution will be drawn primarily from his late-period work, namely *On Certainty*. However, the seeds of this view are already present in *Philosophical Investigations*:

‘[H]ow does an explanation help me to understand, if after all it is not the final one? In that case the explanation is never completed; so I still don't understand what he means and never shall’—As though an explanation as it were hung in the air unless supported by another one. Whereas an explanation may indeed rest on another one that has been given, but none stands in need of another—unless *we* require it to prevent a misunderstanding. One might say: an explanation serves to avert a misunderstanding—one, that is, that would occur but for the explanation; not every one that I can imagine. It may easily look as if every doubt merely *revealed* an existing gap in the foundations; so that secure understanding is only

possible if we first doubt everything that can be doubted, and then remove all these doubts. (PI §87)

Here we can see the seeds of a view that seems to be directly addressing Cartesian scepticism—a view that is reiterated and elaborated on in *On Certainty*. On the face of it, Wittgenstein is talking about explanations—in this case for the meanings of our words—but I think we can apply his thinking here to talk about justification and knowledge because I take him to be talking about explanations that serve as justifications. Further, when Wittgenstein talks about ‘final explanations’ and ‘foundations’, I take him to be talking about final justifications and justificatory foundations.

This passage is suggestive of at least three arguments that can be developed to support the contextualist analysis of knowledge: first, a knowledge claim doesn’t, by its very nature, cry out for a justificatory explanation. Knowledge claims might rest on justifications that could be produced at need, but we don’t have to be perpetually vigilant in searching them out, as the sceptic seems to insist we ought to do. Rather, our search for justificatory explanations ought to begin when *we* have an interest related to a belief that could be served by giving a justification for holding it.

This leads us to the second argument seeded in this passage: that justificatory explanations serve an interest. Wittgenstein gives the example of an explanation serving to prevent a misunderstanding. We might well imagine other epistemic interests being served by justificatory explanations, avoiding misunderstandings being only one of the reasons we might call for a justification. Further, we might not be satisfied by an additional justificatory explanation because it doesn’t meet our needs. We might want a

further justification. For example, we might have two competing explanations for some phenomenon, and a comparison of the further justifications for those explanations might settle which one we ought to prefer. Our preference here wouldn't be a matter of determining which explanation rested on a further justification that was epistemologically better because of its inherent properties. Rather, we might choose one over the other because its justification fits better with other things we take ourselves to know, or does a better job satisfying the epistemic norms we happen to hold in a particular context. The point is this: if a belief need not be seen as hanging in the air crying out for justificatory explanation or final justification, then our justifications can end precisely when our interest has been served, e.g., when we have avoided a misunderstanding, or given reasons that are sufficient to let us go on with an inquiry, or given reasons to prefer one of two competing explanations, and so on. Sometimes our interests won't be served until we reach a final explanation, but its finality consists in our interest being served, not its status as 'real' epistemological bedrock.

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein writes, "Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game (OC §204). The sceptic's move is to insert herself into every chain of justification and demand a final justification, one that terminates at a real (i.e., certain) foundation; but, as we have seen from the analysis of scepticism adopted from Williams, this move is predicated on a view of knowledge that supposes there are real foundations to be found. However, if we can't make sense of these real foundations, we ought not to expect they will satisfy our need for justifications to come to

an end. We can fulfill our feeling that justifications need to come to an end by supposing that that end is in our purposes being served, in giving a justification that lets us go on with an activity, rather than in striking some epistemologically real bedrock. As Wittgenstein says, “If I have exhausted [my] justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do’” (PI §217).

Finally, the third argument seeded at the end of this passage seems to be echoed by a claim we already encountered in Williams’ analysis of the Cartesian epistemological project: the sceptic makes it look as though she has merely revealed a gap in the foundations of our knowledge that was there all along, but by now we should be in a position to reassess the sceptic’s ‘achievement’: it is, in fact, not the case that she has revealed a gap in the foundations of our knowledge. Rather, she has used her pervasive doubt to wedge a gap into every chain of justifications by insisting that our analysis of knowledge must begin with total doubt, and that only by removing those doubts can we give an account of what it is possible to know. Put another way: according to the sceptic, doubt is always on the table.

3.4 The Structure of Knowledge in *On Certainty*

What begin as the seeds of formal foundationalism in *Philosophical Investigations* come to full flower in *On Certainty*. The final point in the paragraph above about the sceptic’s insistence that doubt is always on the table is connected to a central claim Wittgenstein makes in *On Certainty*. He writes, “If you tried to doubt everything you would not get so far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty” (OC §115). The sceptic’s persistent doubt is not an annoying but legitimate gadfly buzzing around

our epistemic aims. Rather, we cannot even make sense of doubt if it is always on the table. This outlines the general tack of Wittgenstein's course against the sceptic: we cannot make sense of the total sceptical doubt that the Cartesian epistemological project proposes.

However, we must be careful not to think of the certainty that Wittgenstein speaks of here as a special metaphysical or even mental status that some beliefs have. Rather, certainty is formal or, we might say, logical. Hymers writes, "[C]ertainty' does not refer to a psychological state of conviction, but to the *logical* status of the propositions that cannot be undermined without undermining the contexts of which they are constitutive" (185). The certain proposition is the one that plays the logical *role* of a foundation in a particular context, e.g., as the terminal points for a chains of justification. Such formal foundations are constitutive of certain contexts of knowledge and of the very possibility of certain kinds of investigations.

3.5 Language-Games and Constitutivity

In a passage from Wittgenstein quoted in the previous section of this chapter, he makes reference to 'the game of doubting'. The metaphor of games is a recurring theme in Wittgenstein's account of language and his account of knowledge. In the passage from Hymers quoted in the previous paragraph, he makes reference to some propositions—i.e., *certain* propositions—being constitutive of contexts of inquiry. The metaphor of games and the constitutive role of certain propositions are connected points. Let me turn now to a brief discussion of the connection between Wittgenstein's concept of language-games and the concept of constitutivity.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein makes frequent use of games as a metaphor for how language functions. On his account, the variety of activities that we call 'language' is similar to the variety of activities to which we assign the word 'games'. Part of what Wittgenstein's language-games metaphor is intended to draw out is that there are no necessary and sufficient conditions that define what counts as a language. Rather, 'language' refers to a variety of activities that share a family resemblance. 'Game', on Wittgenstein's account, is a blurry concept:

One might say that the concept 'game' is a concept with blurred edges.—"But is a blurred concept a concept at all?"—Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn't the indistinct one often exactly what we need? (PI §71)

The blurriness of the concept of games is part of the motivation for treating the concept of knowledge on the analogy of the concept of games. A sharp concept of knowledge couldn't track the variety of activities in which we employ the concept of knowledge. It is the indistinct concept of knowledge, i.e., the blurry concept, which we need in order to give an account of our everyday applications of it.

Further, Wittgenstein writes, "[T]he term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (PI §23). Similarly, we might think of doubting-games, knowledge-games, and justification-games—let's call these epistemic-games—as referring to a variety of epistemic activities. Wittgenstein does not make any distinction here; what I am calling

‘epistemic-games’ just are language-games. I make the distinction to point out that there is a subset of language-games that employ the concept of knowledge and its related concepts (Hymers 197), e.g., doubt, certainty, and justification (perhaps there are more, but certainly these are the central concepts).

Some language-games, like some proper games, have rules. In a game with rules, such as chess, the rules are constitutive of the game. You cannot play chess without rules, and if you change or break the rules, you are no longer playing chess. Wittgenstein writes, “chess is the game it is in virtue of all its rules (and so on)...Where is the connexion effected between the sense of the expression "Let's play a game of chess" and all the rules of the game?—Well, in the list of rules of the game, in the teaching of it, in the day-to-day practice of playing” (PI 197). Chess is a kind of practice that is constituted by its rules. Similarly, certain epistemic contexts are constituted by constraints, e.g., constraints on what kind of doubts are legitimate in that particular context of inquiry, and what kind of evidence might count as a justification for a knowledge claim. We might want to stop short of calling these constraints ‘rules’, because they are not always given explicitly as they are in the game of chess (though we might be able to think of contexts where the rules are this explicit, e.g., the formal constraint of ‘reasonable doubt’ in a court of law, or well-articulated discipline-specific standards for scientific evidence). Rather these constraints are norms. Attributions of knowledge within particular contexts are governed by norms analogously to how some games are governed by rules. Failing to be constrained by these norms means that, whatever else you might be doing, you are no longer playing *that* epistemic-game, just as you would no longer be playing chess if you insisted on moving the rook diagonally across the chessboard. For example, if you invoke

a magical explanation in the context of some discipline-specific domain of modern scientific reasoning, say mysterious powers of the phases of the moon as an explanation of depression in the context of neuropsychology, though you might still be playing *some* epistemic-game, you are no longer playing *that* epistemic-game because magical explanations violate the justificatory norms governing what counts as an explanation in that context, and justificatory norms are constitutive of discipline-specific domains of modern scientific reasoning. Note that this does not entail that there can be no diversity in, or dispute about, what *does* count as an explanation, but at the very least some explanations will be ruled out by the justificatory norms that constitute the domain. Doing neuropsychology necessitates holding that neurophysical states are the causes of psychological states, and explanations that invoke mysterious powers of moon phases can't be justified in that context.

Here it is worth recalling one of the central contextualist commitments that Williams claims: "To adopt contextualism, however, is not just to hold that the epistemic status of a given proposition is liable to shift with situational, disciplinary, and other contextually variable factors: it is to hold that, independently of all such influences, a proposition has no epistemic status whatsoever" (Williams 119). Wittgenstein's 'games' analogy illustrates how it is that the epistemic status of propositions is dependent on the norms that constitute epistemic contexts, and that independently of such contexts we can't even make sense of what epistemic status would consist in. The connection between the expression 'I know' and the norms that constitute a particular epistemic practice is effected in much the way the connection between the expression "Let's play a game of chess" and all the rules of the game is: in the 'list' of norms, in the teaching of

those norms, in the day-to-day epistemic practices that are constituted by applying those norms. Accordingly, we can treat Wittgenstein's account of concepts like knowledge, doubt, certainty, and justification as a logical or structural account about the constitutive role of particular concepts in our epistemic activities that independently of those activities wouldn't make sense to talk about.

3.6 The Logic of Epistemic Terms in *On Certainty*

On Wittgenstein's account of logic in *On Certainty*, "everything descriptive of a language-game is part of logic" (OC §56). So, in describing the structure of what I have called epistemic-games, I describe their logic. Certainty, doubt, truth and falsity are interdependent logical concepts, which is to say they are part of the structure of our epistemic-games. Each plays a role in the practices in which we employ knowledge related concepts

Certainty, on Wittgenstein's account, is a logical concept about the constitutive role of some propositions in our epistemic practices. Certainty is not a matter of having secured a proposition that could never, under any circumstances, be doubted. Rather, certain propositions are the logical scaffolding that constitutes the possibility of respective epistemic activities. Our ability to inquire runs out where we have to be certain in order to conduct our investigation at all—where no further test is possible without undermining our very investigation. Note that this does not entail that there are propositions that are always and everywhere impossible to doubt in principle. Rather, the possibility of doubting a proposition is constituted by what we hold as certain, and what we hold as certain shifts from context to context, project to project, inquiry to inquiry.

This means that in some circumstances we can make sense of raising a doubt, while in other circumstances we can't make sense of it at all. It also entails that in every given epistemic context some things must be held as certain.

Doubt, then, consists in the logical possibility of inquiring. It exists in contrast to certainty. Wittgenstein writes, "If someone doubted whether the earth had existed a hundred years ago, I should not understand, for *this* reason: I would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not (OC §231). Doubt is only possible where something could be counted as evidence for or against it. Here we might say that the sceptic's doubt is illogical, for no evidence could count for or against her hypotheses. Doubting consists in the possibility that that which I doubt could turn out to be false, and "[w]hether a proposition can turn out false after all depends on what I make count as determinants for that proposition" (OC §5). In the absence of such determinants, there is no possibility of doubting.

Truth and falsity too are logical concepts, that is, part of the logical structure of our epistemic-games. A proposition "is the truth only inasmuch as it is an unmoving foundation of his language-games" (Wittgenstein OC §403). Further, Wittgenstein writes, "'The proposition is either true or false' only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it. But this does not say what the ground for such a decision is like" (OC §200). So, truth and falsity depend on there being grounds on which to decide for or against a proposition. Here we encounter a deflationary account of truth, which, as I noted in chapter two, is the kind of account of truth that a deflationary account of knowledge is bound to: i.e., an "interest-relative" "context-sensitive" relation (Williams 113). An account of the nature of these grounds will be given in the next section.

What of knowledge then? Wittgenstein writes, “‘I know’ often means: I have the proper grounds for my statement. So if the other person is acquainted with the language-game, he would admit that I know. The other, if he is acquainted with the language-game, must be able to imagine *how* one may know something of the kind” (OC §18).

Knowledge, then, consists in those beliefs for which we are in a position to give a justification. We are in such a position when we are in the context of some epistemic-game, i.e., a context constituted by ‘certain’ propositions that are the basis of justification.

3.7 Norms of Description, World-Pictures, and Hinge-Propositions

Some of the norms that constitute epistemic contexts are, on Wittgenstein’s account, what he calls *norms of description*:

It is clear that our empirical propositions do not all have the same status, since one can lay down such a proposition and turn it from an empirical proposition into a norm of description. Think of chemical investigations. Lavoisier makes experiments with substances in his laboratory and now he concludes that this and that takes place when there is burning. He does not say that it might happen otherwise another time. He has got hold of a definite world-picture—not of course one that he invented: he learned it as a child. I say world-picture and not hypothesis, because it is the matter-of-course foundation for his research and as such also goes unmentioned. (OC §167)

Some of these norms of description are, as Hymers notes, “piece[s] of instruction” (OC §36). These pieces of instruction are the basis of our ability to initiate others into

networks of empirical propositions that are the ground of our epistemic practices, i.e., that constitute our ‘epistemic-games’. We have already seen Wittgenstein introduce the notion of a world-picture. It is not merely that I can’t doubt this or that individual empirical proposition. Rather, epistemic activities rest on a world-picture that forms the ground of their very possibility. He writes:

In general I take as true what is found in text-books, of geography for example. Why? I say: All these facts have been confirmed a hundred times over. But how do I know that? What is my evidence for it? I have a world-picture. Is it true or false? Above all it is the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting. The propositions describing it are not all equally subject to testing. (OC §162)

Some norms of description are pieces of instruction in the sense that they are the means by which we would teach someone the ground of our epistemic-games. Wittgenstein writes, “I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long... etc. —We should be trying to give him our picture of the world” (OC §262). It is our world-picture that he would need to grasp to participate in our epistemic-games. The world-picture we hold cannot be subject to epistemic evaluation because all epistemic evaluation must be conducted against the background of *some* world-picture. We could adopt a new world-picture and use it to evaluate the old one, but then our new one wouldn’t itself be subject to evaluation. Wittgenstein writes, “I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it

because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false” (OC §94). Free of such a background, epistemic distinctions couldn’t be made.

Here, perhaps it will be useful to return to the analogy of the game of chess and expand on it. We have already seen that the rules of chess are constitutive of the game. To extend the analogy, it is not just the rules, but also the form of the board in relation to the rules, and the roles assigned to each piece operating in interaction that make it possible to play the game. We might see all of these features that interact to constitute chess as a simple world-picture. We can’t suspect that the rules are changing while we play, or that the board is rearranging itself. We have to hold it as certain that the bishop can move diagonally. All of these things have to hold fast. In teaching someone to play we give them this simple world-picture that the game consists in, and their accepting this picture is the only way that they can play.

On Wittgenstein’s account, the propositions that we hold as certain, the ones that constitute a respective world-picture, are hinges on which the possibility of inquiry turns:

We know, with the same certainty with which we believe *any* mathematical proposition, how the letters A and B are pronounced, what the colour of human blood is called, that other human beings have blood and call it ‘blood’.

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

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

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put. My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things. (OC §§340-344)

This dense sequence of passages argues that it is necessary for certain propositions to hold fast, i.e., to act as hinges. But on Wittgenstein's account this does not entail that there are certain propositions that are always and everywhere beyond doubt:

[S]ince a language-game is something that consists in the recurrent procedures of the game in time, it seems impossible to say in any *individual* case that such-and-such must be beyond doubt if there is to be a language-game—though it is right enough to say that *as a rule* some empirical judgment or other must be beyond doubt. (OC §519)

We are now in a position to see that Wittgenstein's view here is in line with what Williams called formal foundationalism. Certain propositions must be treated as foundations in the sense that they must stay put. Our chains of justification depend on hinge-propositions. These hinges, however, are not merely assumptions that we must be content with. Rather, they form the very fabric of our lives.

3.8 Underdetermination and Moore's Two Hands

There seem to be two obvious advantages of treating knowledge on the analogy of games that Wittgenstein offers us, one of which we have already encountered. First, in treating epistemic contexts as constituted by norms, we can see in further detail how this kind of contextualism avoids the radical underdetermination argument that we encountered in Chapter 2. Remember that in appealing to underdetermination, sceptical arguments effectively drive a wedge between experience and the world. Any reason we give for holding a given proposition can be countered by offering a sceptical hypothesis that might also serve as a reason for holding that proposition, that is, by offering an alternative explanation for the generation of the belief in it. However, recall the example given towards the beginning of this chapter of using a further justification to decide between two explanations of some phenomenon. In that example I suggested that deciding between competing explanations is one of the interests that might be served by giving a justification. Back in the beginning, when scepticism still looked plausible, it seemed that no justification could be given that couldn't be undermined by introducing a competing sceptical hypothesis. However, on our present analysis of our epistemic activities, the kinds of explanations we might accept are constrained by the norms that constitute the context of our knowing, such that not every competing explanation is a viable one because some explanations will violate the norms that our context consists in. The point is not just that some of the sceptic's hypotheses will be ruled out by our context, but that her sceptical hypotheses can't gain any traction in contexts that are constituted by epistemic norms that disallow the introduction of such hypotheses.

Neuropsychology disallows that psychological phenomena could be explained by the manipulations of an evil genius in the same way it disallows that psychological phenomena could be explained by the phases of the moon.

Second, that fact that what counts as certain shifts from context to context, project to project, inquiry to inquiry illustrates one source of confusion about our epistemic capacities that can be avoided by having the contextual nature of knowledge in view. Wittgenstein's central foil in *On Certainty* is the notorious *Here is One Hand* argument from G.E. Moore. Wittgenstein's criticism of Moore is connected to the point above, that a contextual treatment of knowledge avoids the radical underdetermination of hypotheses, but it also illustrates how the contextual treatment of knowledge avoids certain confusions that arise from misusing the concept of knowledge. Moore's argument is this:

I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, "Here is one hand", and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another'. And if, by doing this, I have proved *ipso facto* the existence of external things, you will all see that I can also do it now in numbers of other ways: there is no need to multiply examples. (Moore 165-66)

The thrust of the argument is this: Moore takes himself to know that he has two hands that exist in the external world. However, it is entailed by the arguments given above that the epistemic status of Moore's claim to knowledge is dependent on the context within

which it is given, and what he means to do with his knowing: free of such factors it has no epistemic status whatsoever. If we try to evaluate Moore's knowing that he has two hands independently of a context constituted by epistemic norms, it remains radically underdetermined and the sceptic can waltz in with any old competing hypothesis, no matter how far-fetched.

Wittgenstein's main criticism of Moore is that he confuses the sense in which he 'knows' that he has a hand. Wittgenstein writes, "From its *seeming* to me—or to everyone—to be so, it doesn't follow that it is so. What we can ask is whether it makes sense to doubt it" (OC §2). And it is not under all circumstances that it would make sense to doubt the proposition "I have two hands". As Wittgenstein puts it, "My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it.—it plainly *wouldn't* make any sense to doubt it" (OC §250), so Wittgenstein grants that there is a sense in which Moore could be certain that he has two hands, i.e., that there are contexts in which it wouldn't make any sense to doubt his having two hands. But its making no sense to doubt it, i.e., its being certain, seems to entail that it would make no sense to claim he knows it either. On Wittgenstein's account, we aren't always in a position to *know* the propositions that stand fast for us, i.e., the propositions that are constitutive of epistemic contexts. This is because to say you know something is to say that you have proper grounds for saying it. Recall from the section above that Wittgenstein writes, "'I know' often means: I have the proper grounds for my statement [etc.]." (OC §18). In a context where having two hands is certain, where its being certain is constitutive of that context, it makes no sense to say that one knows, because to know something is for it to be justified within that context. It is to be able to give the grounds

for saying you know, or at least to see what knowing would consist in, what the giving of such grounds would involve. Logically certain propositions are constitutive of contexts of justification, and so cannot be justified within the context. Knowledge and certainty come apart in this way: the propositions whose certainty constitute a particular epistemic context can't be justified within it; rather, they have to stand fast or the context is obliterated. If we go to enquire into their certainty, we are forced into a new context, one where the proposition we are inquiring about doesn't have to stand fast. As Wittgenstein puts it, "I should like to say: Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry" (OC §151).

Further to this, Wittgenstein writes, "My mental state, "the knowing", gives me no guarantee of what will happen. But it consists in this, that I should not understand where a doubt could get a foothold nor where a further test was possible" (OC §356). On Hymers' account, Wittgenstein's criticism against Moore is that Moore confuses psychological certainty with logical certainty:

[W]hen Wittgenstein says that "The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (OC §115), 'certainty' does not refer to a psychological state of conviction, but to the *logical* status of the propositions that cannot be doubted without undermining the contexts of which they are constitutive. Wittgenstein's complaint against Moore is, in effect, that he fails to distinguish psychological certainty from logical certainty (Hymers 185).

Moore's 'knowing' he has two hands cannot be granted to him on the basis of his feeling of certainty; this feeling alone is no epistemic guarantor, but he can be certain he has two hands precisely when he cannot imagine a further test such that that test wouldn't obliterate the context of his knowing. Wittgenstein writes:

In certain circumstance a man cannot make a *mistake*. ("Can" is here used logically, and the proposition does not mean that a man cannot say anything false in those circumstances.) If Moore were to pronounce the opposite of those propositions which he declares certain, we should not just not share his opinion: we should regard him as demented (OC §155).

So, under ordinary circumstances, Moore 'knows' he has hands in this sense: claiming the opposite would make us regard him as mentally ill, but he does not 'know' in the sense that he could give produce the ground of such a belief if asked, that is, tell us *why* he knows. It is part of the logic attached to certain contexts that you cannot doubt the existence of your hands.

This analysis of Wittgenstein's complaint against Moore fits with the definition of certainty given above, that the certain proposition is the one that plays the *logical role* of a foundation in a particular context, and the further claim that its playing that role is constitutive of certain epistemic contexts. Further, Wittgenstein's treatment of Moore gives us a concrete example of how undetermination can creep in, i.e., when there is no context for interpreting the certainty attached to a claim, and how underdetermination can

be turned away by holding that some propositions are formally foundational in certain contexts.

3.9 The Riverbed of Thought

Moving away from the metaphor of games, Wittgenstein offers the “riverbed of thought” analogy. Getting a grip on this analogy will let us recall to mind the distinctions between contexts and interests and kinds of interests introduced in the beginning of this chapter and see how these distinctions track Wittgenstein’s view. Wittgenstein gives the analogy in five sequential sections in *On Certainty*. I will work through these one at a time in order to draw out the connection between these passages and the distinctions proposed at the beginning of this chapter.

First, Wittgenstein writes, “The propositions describing [a] world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules” (OC §95). This first passage largely covers territory we have already been over: we learn world-pictures, and they are the ground of our epistemic-games. Recall that I resisted calling the norms that are constitutive of our epistemic-games ‘rules’ because they are not given explicitly, but here we can see that this is not importantly disanalogous between games and epistemic-games: both can be learned as a matter of practice without ever having the rules explicitly in view.

Second, Wittgenstein writes, “It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with

time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid” (OC §96). I take Wittgenstein’s point here to be, roughly, that the grounds of our epistemic activities and our inquiries are interactive, and over time can replace one another. Recall that the world-picture we hold cannot be subject to epistemic evaluation because all epistemic evaluation must be conducted against the background of *some* world-picture. The world-picture we presently hold consists in those empirical propositions that have hardened for a time, but this does not mean they are not subject to alteration. Rather, over time some of the empirical propositions our world-picture consists in will become fluid, and become potential subjects of inquiry, while others will harden and become its ground. What I have called necessary interests, those that are due to the kind of creatures we happen to be, might also be seen as hardened channels: subject to slow and imperceptible alteration, but for us they hold fast and make up a relatively stable portion of our world-picture. What I have called our contingent interests are much more volatile and subject to being in a state of flux. Third, and further to this, Wittgenstein writes, “The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other” (OC §97). So, on Wittgenstein’s account, the ‘mythology’ of our world-picture, which is to say the ground of our epistemic activities, is subject to varying degrees of fluctuation: from slow imperceptible change to rapidly shifting change.

This leads to the fourth passage of the analogy. Wittgenstein writes, “But if someone were to say, ‘So logic too is an empirical science’ he would be wrong. Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by

experience, at another as a rule of testing” (OC §98). Logic is the structure of our epistemic-games, but the role of particular empirical propositions—the content of the grounds of our epistemic-games—can shift and trade places.

Fifth, and finally, Wittgenstein writes, “And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited” (OC §§99). Here we can see the full span of continuum of fluidity to solidity in the content of the logical structures of our knowledge: some of this content is like sand that gets moved, stays for a time, and then is washed away to elsewhere, while some is, as it were, hard rock. The river might alter its course in the hard rock of its bed, but if the hard rock changes at all, the changes are imperceptible.

3.10 Concluding Remarks

Wittgenstein’s account of the structure of our epistemic practices realizes the alternative vision of a general account of our epistemology that is not forced into scepticism. It does so by maintaining that knowledge, rather than being a theoretically integrated natural kind, is a product of the logic—i.e., the structure—of our epistemic practices.

In the chapter that follows I will aim to draw connections between Wittgenstein’s account of the structure of our epistemic practices and Reid’s account of epistemology. Reid, as we will see, places an emphasis on the role of our nature, i.e., the kind of creatures we are, in constituting our epistemic practices. While Wittgenstein does not overly emphasize this, it is worth pausing before we move on to give one point of explicit

contact between these views that didn't fit naturally into the account above. Wittgenstein writes:

Now I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life. (That is very badly expressed and probably badly thought as well.)

But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal. (OC §§358-359)

I will argue in what follows that this is an essential point of agreement between Wittgenstein and Reid: that both of them are committed to the idea that we have to hold certain propositions certain, not as a matter of assumption, but as a matter of our form of life, which is to say as a matter of the kind of creatures we are.

Chapter 4: Contextualism and Reid's First Principles

In this chapter I aim to show that Reid is a conceptual predecessor of Williams and Wittgenstein. I will argue that the 'contingent first principles of common sense' that Reid presents in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* can be interpreted along Wittgensteinian lines, i.e., as hinge-propositions. As I read him, Reid presents an early instantiation of the contextualist intellectual tradition in epistemology that runs counter to the Cartesian tradition by presenting an account of knowledge that hinges on contingent, contextually fixed first principles. Further, his account of the formal foundations of our epistemic practices is applicable to both extremely general contexts of knowledge, e.g. the context of all human knowers, and highly specialized contexts of knowledge, e.g. particular sciences. So, Reid's account shows in detail how a contextualist conception of knowledge can account for the diverse variety of practices in which we employ the term 'knowledge' and its related terms.

Drawing from both *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* and *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, I will examine the tack of Reid's course against the sceptic to show that his antiscepticism is kin to both Williams' and Wittgenstein's respective refusals of scepticism. I will then give an account of the general structure of Reid's first principles in order to draw out structural similarities between Reid's and Wittgenstein's respective accounts of knowledge, especially the sense in which Reid's first principles both constitute and regulate epistemic practices, and the sense in which the kinds of creatures we are is what ultimately structures and grounds the possibility of our epistemic practices. Further, I will examine some of the particular

entries on Reid's list of first principles in order to show how they act as constituents of both very broad and very narrow epistemic contexts.

4.1 Reid's Antiscepticism

Where Williams holds that we have no epistemic obligation to take up the sceptic's doubts and that we have practical reasons, e.g., the advancement of epistemic interests that couldn't be advanced if we accept scepticism, to eschew the sceptic's picture of knowledge, Wittgenstein holds that we can't make sense of the sceptics' persistent doubt at all: recall that "if you tried to doubt everything you would not get so far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (Wittgenstein, OC 115). I take there to be strands of both these objections in Reid's refusal of scepticism.

On Reid's account, sceptics have been dishonest about how thoroughgoing their scepticism is. Reid thinks that Descartes' method of doubt is merely semi-sceptical; Descartes, whose method of doubt is a paradigmatic example of radical scepticism, "took it for granted that he thought, and had sensations and ideas" (Reid IHM 71). Though Descartes, on Reid's account, does not offer a reason for halting his sceptical method at his belief in sensations and ideas, Reid thinks he knows why Descartes halts it there: he can't help it. He writes:

A thorough and consistent sceptic will never... yield [to the existence of impressions and ideas]... to such a sceptic I have nothing to say; but of the semi-sceptics, I should beg to know why they believe in the existence of their impressions and ideas. The true reason I take to be, because they cannot help it;

and the same reason will lead them to believe many other things (IHM 71).

Here we can see that Reid accuses Descartes' of not being able to get so far as doubting everything, as he set out to do. This passage seems to suggest that Reid does not find the thoroughgoing sceptic's doubts nonsensical as we might say Wittgenstein does, but he seems to recognize that the deck is stacked against the sceptic in her attempt to doubt everything, so there seems to be a connection between Wittgenstein's claim that 'If you tried to doubt everything you would not get so far as doubting anything', and Reid's accusation against Descartes' that his method of doubt is merely semi-sceptical. As Wittgenstein says, "the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (OC §115). Reid's analysis of Descartes' attempt at radical doubt seems to support such a claim. Descartes' seeming inability to manage the methodological doubt he proposes, on Reid's account, suggests that he thinks Descartes is driven back into certainty, try as he might to doubt. Descartes isn't driven back to certainty by finding the sure footing for science he set out to find; he is driven back by an impossibility in the very logic of his method. When Reid recognizes that Descartes' sceptical method isn't thoroughgoing, i.e., that it already admits of things that cannot help being believed, he seems to think that Descartes himself admits of propositions on which the possibility of doubting turns.

Like Williams, Reid eschews conversations with the sceptic, as she cannot provide any compelling grounds for accepting her total doubt: "to [the thoroughgoing sceptic] I have nothing to say" (Reid, IHM 71). After all, what sort of grounds could a thoroughgoing sceptic offer that wouldn't be immediately defeated by taking on her epistemic stance? None, it seems. Rather, though he views the sceptic's position as

coherent, he finds nothing compelling in it. The sceptic is to be left alone. Reid writes:

If the Sceptic can seriously doubt of the truth and fidelity of his faculty of judging when properly used, and suspend his judgment upon that point until he finds proof, his scepticism admits of no cure by reasoning.... The Sceptic has here got possession of a strong hold which is impregnable to reasoning, and we must leave him in possession of it, till nature, by other means, makes him give it up. (EIP 571).

Where Williams' and Wittgenstein's rejections of scepticism are given largely on conceptual grounds—grounds I take Reid, at least in part, to be motivated by, a large part of Reid's rejection of scepticism is on practical grounds. Reid thinks that we are better off to trust in the senses and go about the business of building knowledge from there. If one cleaves to a thoroughgoing scepticism "it is impossible that his actions could be directed by any rules of common prudence" (Reid IHM 170). This is to say that the sceptic could not live a practical life. Consequently, Reid offers an additional defense, against the sceptic, of our perceptual abilities on both practical and conceptual grounds.

Practically speaking, it is uncontroversial that our perceptual abilities play a role in a myriad of our epistemic practices. Among the things we take ourselves to know perception is the source of an overwhelming number of them, and the foundation of much of our practical action: this much Descartes recognized. Reid writes, [If] I resolve not to believe my senses I break my nose against a post that comes in my way; I step into a dirty kennel; and, after twenty such wise and rational actions, I am taken up and clapt into a

mad-house” (IHM 169-170). It is worth recalling to mind that Wittgenstein said something similar in regards to denying that one has hands: in ordinary circumstances, a person engaged in this kind of radical scepticism will be regarded as demented.

Contra Descartes, whose first target in his method of doubt is knowledge gotten by the senses, Reid thinks that among the things that we are forced into, i.e., that we must take for granted as a first principle, is the epistemic capacity of our perceptual faculties:

My belief is carried along by my perception, as irresistibly as my body to the earth. And the greatest sceptic will find himself in the same condition... It is in vain that he strains against every nerve, and wrestles with nature, and with every object that strikes upon his senses. For after all, when his strength is spent in the fruitless attempt, he will be carried down the torrent with the common herd of believers. (IHM 169)

Conceptually speaking, it may seem that Reid merely begs the question against the Cartesian sceptic, but on Reid’s account, the Cartesian sceptic begs a question of her own in assuming that reason is a better judge of truth than perception:

Reason, says the sceptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception?—they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of

false were into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another? (IHM 169)

Clearly, Reid takes God to be the author of nature here, but we can substitute an evolutionary backstory (or whatever backstory you like) as to how we came to be the kinds of creatures we happen to be, and the argument still seems to hold: we have no independent grounds to prize reason over perception². This seems like a point that Williams would be sympathetic to: if the sceptic can give no independent grounds for prizing reason over perception, then we are under no epistemic obligation to accept her prioritization of our faculties. Reid's defense of the epistemic capacity of our senses is an example of the kind of reasoning that leads to his argument in favour of first principles of knowledge: there are certain things we can't doubt if we are to know anything at all, and among the things we must accept in order to know is the epistemic capacity of our senses.

4.2 The General Structure of First Principles

On Reid's account, first principles are not reasoned to, can't be given any independent justification, and have to be taken as given if we are to have any epistemic capacities at all: they are the constitutive foundation of our ability to make epistemic judgements.

Reid divides first principles into two categories: contingent and necessary. He writes,

"The truths that fall within the compass of human knowledge, whether they be self-evident [i.e., first principles], or deduced from those that are self-evident, may be reduced

² Descartes gives theistic reasons for prizing reason over perception. However, it seems that the prizing of reason over perception is largely taken up by the traditional epistemological project. It is worth noting that this move is uncritical and bizarre given that traditional epistemologists jettison, for secular reasons, Descartes' appeal to god as epistemic guarantor, yet fail to jettison the prizing of reason over perception.

to two classes. They are either necessary and immutable truths, whose contrary is impossible, or they are contingent and mutable” (EIP 468). Our primary concern is with the first principles of contingent truths, because they are the ones that the sceptic is most adamant in denying, e.g., they are explicitly about our epistemic capacity to have knowledge of the external world, our fellow human beings, and so on. As we shall see, the first principles of contingent truths are the basis of our ability to reason about other propositions on the basis of evidence. However, it is worth noting in passing that Reid’s first principles of necessary truths might be seen, to recall Wittgenstein’s riverbed analogy to mind, as the hard rock of the riverbed of thought, i.e., as those principles of knowledge that don’t change at all, or if they do, do so imperceptibly.

On Reid’s account, first principles are the basis of all knowledge. In relation to knowledge, Reid distinguishes between two kinds of propositions:

[I]n propositions that are submitted to our judgment, there is a great difference; some are of such a nature that man of ripe understanding may apprehend them distinctly, and perfectly understand their meaning without finding himself under any necessity of believing them to be true or false, probable or improbable. The judgment remains in suspense, until it is inclined one side or another by reasons or arguments

But there are other propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgment [that they are true] follows the apprehension of them

necessarily, and both [the apprehension and the judgment] are equally the work of nature, and the result of our original powers (EIP 452).

This latter kind of propositions are first principles, and they are the ground of our capacity to make epistemic judgments about the former, not because of a natural order of priority in kinds of beliefs, but because they constitute the very possibility of making epistemic judgments at all. According to Reid, belief in the first principles is not reasoned to; they are recognizable as such due to how human beings are constituted. We cannot help but believe them by our very nature. He writes, “The power of judging in self evident propositions...may be compared to the power of swallowing our food. It is purely natural, and therefore common to the learned, and unlearned; to the trained, and the untrained: It requires ripeness of understanding, and freedom from prejudice, but nothing else” (EIP 453).

Reid explicitly says that the first principles are the foundation of all knowledge obtained by reasoning. He writes, “I hold it to be certain, and even demonstrable, that all knowledge got by reasoning must be built upon first principles.... When we examine, in the way of analysis, the evidence of any proposition, we either find it self-evident, or it rests upon one or more propositions that support it” (EIP 455). Reid articulates what sounds like a standard motivation for foundationalist theories of justification; if there are not foundational, self-evident propositions, justification will suffer from an infinite regress of successive justifying propositions. Reid Writes:

I hold it to be certain, and even demonstrable, That all knowledge got by reasoning must be built upon first principles. This is as certain as that every house must have a foundation. The power of reasoning, in this respect, resembles the mechanical power of engines; it must have a fixed point to rest upon, otherwise it spends its force in the air, and produces no effect. (EIP 455)

Therefore, I take Reid's account of first principles to closely resemble foundationalist theories of justification. First principles are facts that are self-evident given how human beings are, in fact, constituted, and are the propositions upon which the justification of all other propositions must ultimately rest. In the following section I will argue that though Reid's epistemology has a foundationalist structure, it is a formal foundationalist structure, rather than a substantive one.

4.3 Self-evidence and Formal Foundationalism

The precise nature of Reid's foundationalism depends on the interpretation of his notion of 'self-evidence'. John Greco has called Reid a "moderate and broad foundationalist". He recognizes that Reid is not a classical foundationalist in the sense that he accepts that the sources of knowledge may be of different kinds, including self-evident propositions. He writes, "The theory is 'moderate' in the sense that Reid does not require infallibility for knowledge... It is 'broad' in the sense that Reid allows a wide variety of sources of both foundational and non-foundational knowledge" (148). However, as I read Greco, his account is ambiguous as to whether the self-evidence of first principles is a matter of

intrinsic properties of the beliefs themselves, i.e., self-contained justifying properties, or if self-evidence is a property of knowers, i.e., a context relative property.

However, it cannot plausibly be maintained that Reid's foundationalism is substantive, i.e., that the 'self-evidence' of the first principles consists in their having real inherent self-justifying properties. Self-evidence, according to Reid, is due to features of knowers, not intrinsic features of beliefs:

All reasoning must be from first principles; and for first principles no other reason can be given but this, that, by the constitution of our nature, we are under a necessity of assenting to them. Such principles are parts of our constitution, no less than the power of thinking: reason can neither make nor destroy them; nor can it do anything without them: it is like a telescope, which may help a man see farther, who hath eyes; but without eyes, a telescope shews nothing at all. (IHM 71)

On Reid's account, the first principles are part of *our* constitution. And though, for Reid, our constitution is given by nature, he maintains that we are only contingently the kinds of creatures we are: nature could have constituted us otherwise. So, Reid's foundationalism is formal: the status of the first principles as foundations is a matter of their justification being immediately and unavoidably recognizable to us, i.e., to human beings, given the kinds of creatures we are, but there is nothing special about the first principles in terms of their intrinsic properties independently of knowers. Their status as foundations is a context relative property.

Note that Reid says reason neither makes nor destroys first principles. Rather, they are the ground of reason. Insofar as justification involves reasoning, e.g., giving reasons for holding or rejecting respective beliefs, there is no sense in which the first principles are justified, or self-justifying, as standardly (substantive) foundational beliefs are thought to be. They stand fast beyond justification because they are the necessary ground of the operations of our capacity to reason. Recall from the previous chapter that I argued, along with Wittgenstein, that hinge-propositions are not merely assumptions that we must be content with, that, rather, they form the very fabric of our lives. Insofar as our lives are the lives of epistemic beings, the first principles form the fabric that the possibility of such a life consists in. We are epistemic creatures, and we are constituted as such. It is in our very nature to have the capacity to know.

4.4 Constitutivity and Regulation

Reid gives several examples which will help us draw a close connection between Reid's account of first principles and Wittgenstein's view that hinge-propositions are constitutive of our epistemic practices, and that certain propositions must hold fast if we are to be able proceed with our inquiries within specific domains of knowledge. Reid writes:

A mathematician cannot prove the truth of his axioms, nor can he prove anything, unless he takes them for granted.... A historian, or a witness, can prove nothing, unless it is taken for granted, that the memory and senses may be trusted. A natural philosopher can prove nothing, unless it is taken for granted, that the course of nature is steady and uniform. (IHM 71-72)

Note that each of these examples involves stipulating a domain of knowledge and a proposition that must hold fast if anything is to be ‘proven’ in that domain. In each case, there is a proposition that acts as a hinge for the epistemological project mentioned. By applying Wittgenstein’s account to these examples we can see that if the ‘natural philosopher’, i.e., scientist, abandons the uniformity of nature, he destroys the very context of his inquiry: he might be able to move to another context, and treat the uniformity of nature as an empirical proposition to be tested rather than the ground of his testing, but he would no longer be playing the epistemic-game he started in. The uniformity of nature, insofar as it is a first principle, lays down a norm that constitutes a variety of practices.

Not only are first principles constitutive of epistemic practices; they regulate over them. Rysiew has argued, using a distinction made by John Searle between regulative rules and constitutive rules, that Reid’s first principles are constitutive principles. Searle writes, “constitutive rules do not merely regulate, they create or define new forms of behavior. The rules of football or chess, for example, do not merely regulate playing football or chess, but as it were they create the very possibility of playing such games” (33-34). Rysiew writes, “Reid regards the first principles of common sense as constitutive principles – they are constitutive (for us, given our nature) of the possibility of cognizing at all” (36). Though Rysiew draws the connection by way of Searle, we can just as easily draw the connection to Wittgenstein, who no doubt inspired Searle’s thinking on the constitutive nature of some rules, by thinking of Reid’s first principles as hinge-propositions, propositions that are constitutive of what, in the previous chapter, we were

calling ‘epistemic-games’. On Rysiew’s account, Reid ought not be seen as giving an argument for the rationality or truth of the first principles; rather, he should be seen as attempting to illustrate their constitutive role in our epistemic practices (Rysiew 451).

Recall Wittgenstein’s language-games analogy. First principles lay down norms that are constitutive of epistemic contexts similarly to how rules lay down norms that are constitutive of games. This entails that first principles do not merely describe what we happen to do; they both create *and* regulate epistemic practices. On Rysiew’s account, the fact that first principles are constitutive means that they are also regulative. Recall that the kind of justification contextualist accounts are concerned with is the giving of reasons relative to purposes, or perhaps better, evaluating which beliefs we ought to hold and which we ought to reject. This is part of the function of first principles. They regulate not in virtue of their inherent epistemic properties that give rise to natural justificatory relations, but by constituting contexts of justification. Returning to our chess analogy, a rule in chess, such as ‘the bishop can only move diagonally across the grid of squares’, is both descriptive and regulative. On the one hand, it is a description of how the bishop is moved in the game of chess. On the other hand, the rule prescribes how one ought to move the bishop. The same is true of first principles. They are not only descriptions of foundational beliefs; they are also prescriptive in the sense that they lay down norms that are constitutive of epistemic practices.

4.5 First Principles in Detail

Before turning to the specifics of Reid's first principles of contingent truths in detail, it is worth noting the modest status Reid affords to his list of first principles:

If the enumeration should appear to some redundant, to others deficient, and to others both; if things, which I conceive to be first principles, should to others appear to be vulgar errors, or to be truths which derive their evidence from other truths, and therefore not first principles; in these things every man must judge for himself. I shall rejoice to see an enumeration more perfect in any or all respects; being persuaded, that the agreement of all men of judgment and candour in first principles, would be of no less consequence to the advancement of knowledge in general, than the agreement of mathematicians in the axioms of geometry has been to the advancement of that science. (EIP 468)

Reid, in his roundabout way, makes no claim to being certain that *his* list of first principles is correct, complete, or irredundant. Rather, he thinks that agreement in first principles is supremely beneficial to the advancement of knowledge. So, when we take up some selections from Reid's list, they should be thought of as the kinds of propositions that might act as first principles, or, as I have argued, as constitutive hinge-propositions. Their being the right ones is beside the point. However, in what follows I will take up some selections from the list given above that I take to be plausible examples of hinge-propositions in order to illustrate how Reid's first principles are constitutive of a diversity

of particular epistemic contexts, and how they are fitted to primarily to our necessary interests, and secondarily to our contingent interests.

Turning now to the principles that Reid has in mind; he gives the following list of twelve ‘first principles of contingent truths’:

1. I hold, as a first principle, the existence of everything of which I am conscious (EIP 470).
2. Another first principle, I think, is, That the thoughts of which I am conscious, are the thoughts of a being, which I call *myself*, my *mind*, my *person* (EIP 472).
3. Another first principle I take to be, That those things did really happen which I distinctly remember (EIP 474).
4. Another first principle is [that we know] our own personal identity and continued existence, as far back as we remember any thing distinctly (EIP 476).
5. Another first principle is, That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be (EIP 476).
6. Another first principle, I think, is, That we have some degree of power over our actions, and the determinations of our will (EIP 478).
7. Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious (EIP 480).
8. Another first principle relating to existence, is, That there is life and intelligence in our fellow men (EIP 482).

9. Another first principle I take to be, That certain features of the countenance, sounds of the voice, and gestures of the body, indicate certain thoughts and dispositions of mind (EIP 484).

10. Another first principle appears to me to be, That there is certain regard due to human testimony in matters of fact, and even to human authority in matters of opinion (EIP 487).

11. [Another first principle, is, That] [t]here are many events depending upon the will of man, in which there is self evident probability, greater or lesser, according to circumstances (EIP 488).

12. The last principle of contingent truths I mention is, That, in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances (EIP 489).

This list of principles is wide ranging: we might imagine each principle operating as a hinge-proposition in a huge number of particular epistemic contexts, sometimes in unison with others on the list, sometimes individually. However, there is no sense in which all the first principles together are constitutive of all epistemic contexts: you don't need all of them for any given epistemic practice.

I take Reid's list of first principles to be representative of the capacities we have that are fitted to what I have called necessary interests, that is, interests we have in virtue of the kinds of creatures we happen to be: the sense in which they are contingent is the same sense in which those necessary interests are contingent: we might have been constituted otherwise. Now, let me turn to some of the individual principles, as well as

some that seem to naturally fit together, to bring in to view that first principles are constitutive of epistemic contexts, that they are operant in both normal and specialized epistemic contexts, and, further, how they are fitted primarily to our necessary interests, and secondarily to our contingent interests.

4.5.1 The Special Status of Principle 7

Among Reid's first principles, principle 7, "That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious" (EIP 480), can be singled out as having a special status in that Reid takes it to be a first principle in *every* context. Principle 7 is special in that it explicitly acknowledges the capacity of human beings to judge between truth and error, i.e., the epistemic capacity of human beings. Reid writes, "If any truth can be said to be prior to all the others in the order of nature, [principle 7] seems to have the best claim; because, in every instance of assent, whether upon intuitive, demonstrative, or probable evidence, the truth of our faculties is taken for granted" (EIP 447).

Further, it is a clear case of a first principle the truth of which could never be inquired into—one that must, in all epistemic contexts, be treated as a hinge on which the possibility of inquiry and proof turns. Even when we have reason to mistrust an epistemic judgment of our own, and turn to others for help, we have to take it for granted that we have the capacity to judge the evidence, testimonial or otherwise, that they produce. We might call this, in Wittgenstein's terms, a certain proposition, the inquiry into which would obliterate the very context of inquiry. It is unique among certain propositions in that it is hard to imagine what could replace it as ground even if we were to try and switch contexts and inquire into its truth. Reid writes, "If any man should demand proof

of this [principle], it is impossible to satisfy him. For suppose it should be mathematically demonstrated, this would signify nothing in this case: because, to judge of a demonstration, a man must trust his faculties, and take for granted the very thing in question” (EIP 480). This is not to say that there aren’t contexts in which we might be mistaken or have a diminished capacity to know: e.g., after having ingested hallucinogens, or being affected by a severe mental illness, but in contexts where we *do* know, our capacity to distinguish truth from error has to be taken for granted. I take principle 7 to be fitted to any and all epistemic interests we have, be they necessary or contingent, and that its being so fitted is part of its unique status on the list.

4.5.2 The Social Principles

There is a subset of Reid’s first principles that are fitted to our necessary interests in virtue of the fact that one of the features of how human beings are constituted is that we are social, language using creatures. These are, namely, principle 8, “that there is life and intelligence in our fellow men with whom we converse” (EIP 482); and principle 10, “that there is certain regard due to human testimony in matters of fact, and even to human authority in matters of opinion” (EIP 487). Reid takes the uncontroversial stance that human beings are, by their nature, social animals. He writes, “Our social intellectual operations, as well as our social affections, appear very early in life, before we are capable of reasoning; yet both suppose a conviction of the existence of other intelligent beings” (EIP 69). These social operations are constitutive of a subset of our epistemic practices.

Reid distinguishes between solitary operations of the mind and social operations of the mind. We might view both of these as extremely broad, but distinct, epistemic contexts, the latter of which identifies the variety of contexts in which our fellow human beings play a role in our epistemic practices. On Reid's account, social operations of the mind are those operations that "necessarily suppose an intercourse with other intelligent beings" (EIP 68). It is the social operations of the mind that are grounded in principles 8 and 10.

Among the social operations of the mind that Reid identifies are asking for and receiving information, and giving or receiving testimony (EIP 68). These are slightly more specific epistemic contexts wherein principles 8 and 10 act as hinge-propositions. Giving and receiving testimony, as an epistemic practice, necessitates the acceptance of these first principles. They have to hold fast if we are to treat our fellow human beings as potential sources of knowledge. It must be the case that there are other intelligent beings if we are make sense of acts like giving and receiving testimony. Testimony would seem, at best, truly bizarre if we did not antecedently accept the existence of other minds with the capacity to understand, and accept or reject, our testimony.

As we have already seen, on Reid's account, some of our epistemic capacities are features of our nature, while others are a contingent matter of the kinds of practices we happen to engage in. For a further example, Reid distinguishes between natural and artificial language where the former consists in those signs that human beings have an inborn capacity to understand, while the latter consists in those signs whose use is established by social conventions (IHM 59-60). This distinction is reiterated in Reid's

treatment of our epistemic capacities that depend on our sociality: they are partly natural, and partly conventional.

In the context of the discussion of the first principles that are constitutive of social epistemic contexts it is worth taking note of first principle 9, “That certain features of the countenance, sounds of the voice, and gestures of the body, indicate certain thoughts and dispositions of mind” (EIP 484). Reid takes our capacity for invented, or as he calls it, artificial, language to be parasitic on a basic natural capacity to know the content of other minds in virtue of rudimentary signs, i.e., what Reid calls natural language. So, again, there is a sense in which our basic communicative abilities are fitted to our necessary interests—think of our natural capacity to recognize the hungry cry of an infant—and that we can build on those basic communicative abilities according to our contingent interests. Our scanty linguistic abilities that are due to our nature are the basis of a capacity to develop language to suit our contingent interests. Reid writes, “Mankind having thus a common language by nature, though a scanty one, adapted only to the necessities of nature, there is no great ingenuity required in improving it by the addition of artificial signs, to supply the deficiency. *These artificial signs must multiply with the arts of life, and the improvements of knowledge*” (IHM 52, my emphasis). On Reid’s account, our scanty linguistic abilities that are due to our nature must multiply with ‘the arts of life and improvements of knowledge’. Our ability for linguistic discourse improves alongside our projects and interests, and builds over time. For example, minimally, intercourse with other intelligent beings requires natural language; more elaborate social operations of the mind like giving and receiving testimony require artificial language.

4.5.3 The Uniformity of Nature

Finally, principle 12, “That, in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances” (EIP 489), seems to be a hinge on which many of our scientific investigations turn. We have already seen Reid’s claim that “[a] natural philosopher can prove nothing, unless it is taken for granted, that the course of nature is steady and uniform” (IHM 72). Any epistemic context in which we take ourselves to be able to give predictions is going to hinge on the acceptance of principle 12. The quantity and variety of contexts in which this principle plays a role is staggering. On Reid’s account, it is the basis of our ability to derive knowledge from experience at all. He writes, “We must have this conviction as soon as we are capable of learning any thing from experience; for all experience is grounded upon a belief that the future will be like the past. Take away this principle, and the experience of an hundred years makes us no wiser with regard to what is to come” (EIP 489).

So, while prediction is a central theme of scientific disciplines, it is also a feature of our everyday activities and all of our learning by experience: in some sense, I predict that water will boil rather than freeze on a hot stove element, that the floor will remain solid when I go to get out of bed, and so on. Even these activities involve holding, as a first principle, that what is to be will be as it was in the past. If I truly *learn*, in the sense of coming to know, that fire will burn me, it is because I hold that uniformity in nature will hold.

On the basis of this rudimentary need to suppose that nature is uniform, a need that is once again fitted to interests necessitated by the kind of creatures we are, we have the capacity to develop advanced systems of prediction according to, and in order to

serve, our contingent interests. This is not to suggest that the predictive hypotheses of science are a simple matter of an animalist tendency to suppose the uniformity of nature. Rather, the suggestion is that our most advanced predictive sciences share in a first principle that we hold to in the most mundane of our everyday practices, and on which coming to know on the basis of experience depends. The possibility of engineering spacecraft, or predicting the movements of planets necessitates holding that nature is uniform just as much as boiling water, getting out of bed, or learning that fire can burn me does. So, principle 12 makes for a nice example of a principle that is constitutive of both ordinary, everyday epistemic practices and highly specialized scientific ones.

4.6 Concluding Remarks

I take this chapter to show that there are substantive structural similarities between Reid and Wittgenstein's accounts of how our epistemic practices are structured: both of them involve a claim that the possibility of knowledge entails holding that some things are certain, and these things that we hold certain are not a matter of merely making assumptions and then holding fast to those assumptions, but that those certain principles constitute our very form of life as epistemic beings, and the very possibility of our epistemic projects, interests, and inquiries.

Further, having now traced a formally foundationalist contextualist path back through time from Williams to Wittgenstein, and from Wittgenstein to Reid, I think these three thinkers are touchstones representative of a contextualist tradition in epistemology that runs counter to the Cartesian epistemological project.

Reid's central contribution to that tradition is in fully articulating the degree to which the principles that are constitutive of our epistemic practices—from the very simple to the extraordinarily specialized—arise from our very nature. I take this to entail that, like Williams, Reid thinks that free of such principles we can't make sense of granting some of our beliefs the epistemic status of knowledge.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 above trace a route through a contextualist tradition in epistemology. In tracing this route, I have aimed to defend it as a viable alternative to traditional epistemology by showing that this alternative account of knowledge can account for a the wide variety of practices where we employ the term ‘knowledge’ and its related terms. Each chapter achieves some part of this defense. I will now summarize the course of my arguments in defense of contextualism.

My path through Williams’ diagnosis of scepticism set the stage for my subsequent discussions of Wittgenstein and Reid as instantiations of the contextualist tradition by setting up a two-fold strategy for responding to the sceptic, and providing the initial solution to each part of that strategy. First, after summarizing Williams’ account of the traditional epistemological projects which culminates in his presentation of the ‘epistemologists dilemma’, I take inspiration from what Williams suggests is a consequence of that dilemma: “Unless we show that the sceptic’s question is actually unintelligible, it will remain dissatisfyingly unanswered” (93). I argued that this consequence contains the seeds of a two-fold strategy for responding to the sceptic: 1), we have to show that there is something unintelligible about the sceptical challenge posed by the Cartesian epistemological project, and 2), we have to show that there is, in the offing, an alternative strategy for giving a general account of our knowledge that will not force us into a sceptical conclusion.

Further, I argued that Williams’ diagnosis of scepticism shows that we are under no epistemic obligation to accept the Cartesian’s account of knowledge, because her

project does not present an intelligible object of inquiry, and that we are therefore free to pursue an alternative account. This meets the first half of the strategy that I identify for responding to the sceptic: the sceptic's target, the heart of her epistemological project, is unintelligible. I identify a possibility for meeting the second requirement where I argue that Williams' notion of formal foundationalism is a viable alternative for accounting for the structure of our justifications. I argue that treating foundations as formal gives us the advantage of avoiding the radical underdetermination argument raised by the sceptic, by restricting the scope of relevant alternative hypotheses. Further, I use Williams to argue that we have good reasons to reject the traditional epistemological project as untenable, and that in formal foundationalism we find a strategy for how we might give an alternative general account of our knowledge of the world that does not entail scepticism.

In Chapter 3, I pursued the fulfillment of second requirement of my two-fold strategy by interpreting Wittgenstein's theory of knowledge as a version of formal foundationalism. I began by providing some background terminology for a contextualist account of knowledge: I define a deflationary account of the concept of knowledge as the target of contextualist epistemology—a concept that is necessarily blurry because it encompasses a divergent variety of practices wherein we employ the term 'know'. I argue that the relationship between the varieties of instances of 'knowing' is just that in each case we want to say our belief has a certain kind of success relative to our aims. Further, I define justification as the giving of reasons relative to purposes, and argue that this is the only viable alternative to the view that justification is a natural relation that holds between beliefs.

I define a deflationary account of contexts, arguing that contexts pick out the broadest scope of features of the world that are relevant to a given epistemic practice, including brute features of the world. On my account, context, like knowledge, is a blurry concept: the features that are epistemically relevant will shift with our situations and aims, and with the epistemic practices we are engaged in. Further, I argue that interests are a distinct subset of the features of contexts: they are the features of contexts that are relative to human desires, practices, and projects, and that there is a further distinction to be made between kinds of contexts, namely, between necessary and contingent interests, and that the features of contexts are interactive; there is no order of priority to found among the kinds of features of contexts that I distinguish.

Turning, finally, to Wittgenstein, I examined a passage from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, arguing that this work, written before *On Certainty*, already contains the seeds of a formal foundationalist theory of justification. This section is partially a historical aside, meant to draw a link between *Investigations* and *On Certainty*, but it also provides an introduction to Wittgenstein's more substantial epistemological project in the latter.

I give an account of Wittgenstein's concept of language-games and argue that the deflationary account of knowledge outlined toward the beginning of the chapter is part of the motivation for treating knowledge on the metaphor of games: both are blurry concepts instantiated in a variety of practices. I argue that Wittgenstein's games analogy, an analogy that plays a central role in his account of knowledge, tracks the deflationary account of knowledge at which contextualism is aimed. I argue that Wittgenstein's account of how our beliefs are justified offers a solution to the sceptic's

underdetermination argument, reiterating and elaborating on the argument that formal foundationalism avoids radical underdetermination by restricting the scope of relevant alternatives, and providing a background of norms against which hypotheses might be tested.

So, Chapter 3 offers a deflationary account of knowledge and contexts, and shows that Wittgenstein's version of formal foundationalism accounts for the wide variety of our epistemic practices. Further, throughout my account of Wittgenstein, I show that he maintains a staunch and principled antiscepticism. Therefore, I take his view to satisfy the second half of the strategy for answering the sceptic that I articulated in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 4, I give a contextualist reading of Thomas Reid's first principles of common sense. I begin by giving an account of Reid's tack against the sceptic, aimed at showing similarities between his antiscepticism and that of Williams and Wittgenstein, respectively. I offer a general account of the structure of Reid's first principles, arguing that, despite their 'self-evidence', they can't plausibly be interpreted as substantive foundations and that, rather, Reid's first principles ought to be interpreted as formal foundations, because their being self-evident is a feature of knowers, not an independent, intrinsic property they have in virtue of being real substantive foundations. Further, I argue that there is a close connection between Reid's account of first principles and Wittgenstein's view that hinge-propositions are constitutive of our epistemic practices, because Reid treats the first principles as constitutive of particular epistemic practices. Finally, I argue that, particular first principles and groups of first principles are constitutive of particular epistemic contexts, and that we have the capacity to build on our naturally given epistemic capacities, capacities that are fitted to what I have called

necessary interests, according to needs and desires we have on the basis of what I have called our contingent interests.

Chapter 4 reiterates the plausibility of a formal foundationalist account of our knowledge accounting for the wide variety of our epistemic practices without falling into scepticism. Further, Reid's individual first principles show how specific propositions act as formal foundations for particular epistemic projects.

In sum, I hope these chapters together have shown that contextualism of the formal foundationalist variety is a viable alternative to traditional epistemology in that it can account for a the wide variety of practices where we employ the term 'knowledge' and its related terms without being forced into a radically sceptical conclusion. Further, in selecting Williams, Wittgenstein, and Reid as touchstones, I hope to have demonstrated that contextualism is instantiated in a historical tradition that reaches back at least as far as early-modernity.

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