

## Critical Notice: *Essays on Skepticism*

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skepticism; closure principles; underdetermination; transcendental arguments; anti-individualism; self-knowledge

### 1. Introduction

*Essays on Skepticism* is a collection of Anthony Brueckner's articles on epistemological skepticism from the last 25 years. Or rather, as Brueckner is a prolific writer, it is a selection. As a selection of a single contemporary philosopher's essays on skepticism, I harbor little skepticism that Brueckner's *Essays on Skepticism* is the best that there is to be found.

The volume consists of an introduction and 36 chapters, of which 31 are previously published journal articles. The remaining 5 chapters are previously unpublished. The chapters are of very different substance and length ranging from two-page pieces that make a critical point or a pointed criticism to long and substantive pieces. The introduction is, in Brueckner's trademark style, concise and to the point. Towards the end of it Brueckner writes:

[The problem of skepticism] ...is an incredibly rich and difficult problem that must be approached in a careful and patient manner. As one often finds in philosophy, the devil is in the details. (p. 5)

The essays themselves exemplify this methodological credo. From the earliest papers to the latest, Brueckner criticizes impatient solutions to skeptical problems. A great number of specific anti-skeptical arguments are assessed and argued to be wanting. On the other hand, Brueckner is also arguing that various anti-skeptical argument *strategies* that have been dismissed deserve to be



reassessed. In a similar spirit, Brueckner does not presuppose that there is a skeptical problem to be answered. Rather, he scrutinizes the structure and cogency of a range of skeptical arguments.

Since it would be inappropriate to discuss a careful and patient collection of essays in a careless and hurried manner, I will not seek to provide a comprehensive discussion. Rather, I will supplement a broad overview with some more specific but representative discussions (giving some preference to unpublished papers). This approach is more congenial to the book's approach than a broad, generic discussion. So, I hope that it will be both illustrative and informative.

## 2. Overview

Here's a paper criticizing an anti-skeptical transcendental argument, and here's another criticizing a closure-driven skeptical argument. Here's a piece suggesting a novel skeptical argument, and here's another considering the relation between anti-individualism and self-knowledge. The volume illustrates why Brueckner is regarded for providing a large number of critical articles on a wide variety of issues. If one considers those essays in the order they were written over the course of 25 years, one might get the impression that Brueckner is an opportunistic theorist who contributes to the literature on skepticism in an entirely piecemeal manner. A nice thing about the present selection, therefore, is that it succeeds in providing a fairly unified and coherent treatment of skepticism that shows how this underlying theme ties together strands of Brueckner's work. However, the interrelations between Brueckner's various contributions are often subtle, and the volume does not have the structure of a monograph. For example, the format yields numerous repetitions, terminological changes and non-equivalent statements of similar arguments and principles etc. But nevertheless, the volume largely succeeds as a sustained investigation.

The organization of the volume contributes a great deal to this sense of coherence, structured, as it is, around four interrelated themes. In Section I, Brueckner discusses the problems and prospects of (Kantian) transcendental arguments. Section II is devoted to contemporary semantic answers to skepticism and contains three parts—one on Putnam, one on Davidson and a single-chapter part on McDowell. Section III concerns self-knowledge and is divided in two parts. Part A concerns content externalism and self-knowledge whereas Part B addresses an argument to the effect that they are incompatible (the McKinsey Problem). Finally, Section IV concerns the



structure of skeptical arguments and the epistemic principles and assumptions invoked therein.

The organization of the *Essays on Skepticism* makes it apt for use in teaching. One could easily base an advanced undergraduate course or a research seminar around one of the sections by supplementing it with selected papers from the other sections. Another reason why the volume is a reasonable choice for teaching is that Brueckner is a good model of philosophical writing due to his clear and to-the-point style.

### 3. Transcendental Arguments from Content Externalism vis-à-vis the McKinsey Paradox

I will merge my discussion of Section I on transcendental arguments, Section II on semantic answers to skepticism, and Section III on self-knowledge in order to emphasize interconnections between them.

The opening Chapters 1 and 2 consist of “Transcendental Arguments” I and II, respectively. These papers contributed both to establishing Brueckner on the philosophical scene in the midst of a renewed interest in skepticism and to setting the direction for much of the body of work that constitutes *Essays on Skepticism*. A Kantian Transcendental argument may, according to Brueckner, be characterized as one “...which purports to show that the existence of physical objects of a certain general character is a condition for the possibility of self-conscious experience” (Chap. 1, p. 11). In the introduction, Brueckner characterizes an anti-skeptical transcendental argument more broadly as an argument that “... starts from a slender premise about, roughly speaking, one’s mind, a premise that even a skeptic will grant as known” (p. 1).

In Chapters 1–6, Brueckner criticizes a number of anti-skeptical transcendental arguments and strategies and critiques thereof. These include various Kantian strategies and two critical assessments of Barry Stroud’s famous critique of transcendental arguments (Chap. 4 and 6). However, it is worth emphasizing Chapter 5, “Transcendental Arguments from Content Externalism,” because it marks a very important overlap with Section II, *Semantic Answers to Skepticism*, as well as Part III *Self-Knowledge*. As the survey in Chapter 5 illustrates, the transcendental arguments from content externalism can vary quite greatly depending on how the above mentioned “slender premise” is construed. In Chapter 5 and Part II, Brueckner considers construals that derive from Searle and, more prominently, Putnam (Chap. 7–11) and Davidson (Chap. 12–13).

However, Brueckner is especially preoccupied with a transcendental argument from content externalism or anti-individualism of the Burgean variety (Burge 1979, 1982). Here the relevant “slender premise” about one’s own mind is the thesis that many of one’s thoughts are partly individuated by patterns of relations to the external environment. The second key premise required for the argument is that we have privileged access to the contents of our own thoughts. In Chapter 5, Brueckner structures the discussion by “a naïve way of constructing such an argument”:

- (1): If I am thinking that water is clear, then I have had causal contact with H<sub>2</sub>O (rather than XYZ).
- (2): I am thinking that water is clear.
- (3): So, I have had causal contact with H<sub>2</sub>O (rather than XYZ) (Chap. 5, p. 95—numbering of premises added).

The first premise is allegedly established a priori by a version of a Twin Earth thought experiment (Putnam 1974, Burge 1982), and so, the reasoning goes, the skeptic has no reason to reject it. Likewise, the skeptic has no reason to reject the second premise insofar as privileged access is justificatorily independent from the sense experience that the skeptic is skeptical about.

Brueckner argues that the naïve transcendental argument from content externalism fails. However, in order to illustrate what I claimed to be a nicety about the volume—that it illuminates connections between Brueckner’s articles—it is worth connecting the naïve argument to the discussions of self-knowledge in Section III before considering Brueckner’s assessment of it. In particular, it is worth noting that the naïve argument may also be conceived as a reductio of the compatibility of content externalism and privileged access—the so-called McKinsey problem.

The McKinsey problem owes its name to Michel McKinsey who proposed that the reasoning similar to that of the naïve transcendental argument is, in fact, a reductio of the compatibility of content externalism and privileged access. The reason why is that if both (1) and (2) can be known a priori and the inference to (3) is also a priori, then (3) itself can be known a priori. But since (3) is a substantive and specific truth about the world, it is unreasonable to suppose that it can be known a priori. Therefore, (1) and (2) are incompatible.

Brueckner’s Chapter 18 was the first explicit response to McKinsey’s problem in the literature that unfolded in the 1990s, and Chapters 19–23

elaborate on this response.<sup>1</sup> The core of Brueckner's response to the McKinsey problem consists in arguing that content externalism (anti-individualism) does not entail or otherwise involve the assumption that thinking water thoughts entails that one has been in contact with H<sub>2</sub>O (rather than XYZ). So, (1) cannot be known a priori (see Chap. 18, 19, and 23). Brueckner often illustrates this claim by noting that a content externalist can consistently assume (and should assume) that one can think empty thoughts—thoughts that fail to refer to anything, such as phlogiston-thoughts (Chap. 23). A corollary is that (3) cannot be a known priori because it cannot be known a priori that one's concept of water is not empty, such as the concept of phlogiston.

This summary of Brueckner's response to the McKinsey problem leaves out considerable interesting detail that includes criticism of alternative responses due to Brewer (Chap. 20) and Wright (Chap. 21). But it illustrates why Brueckner rejects the naïve transcendental argument from content externalism. To see this connection, let's return to Chapter 5. Here Brueckner notes, first, that a content externalist may simply argue that (1) is false and, hence, not knowable and, hence, not knowable a priori. Moreover, Brueckner argues that whether or not the content externalist is committed to (1), it cannot be known a priori by a Twin Earth thought experiment. To know (1), one needs to rule out that one's water concept is not empty and this may only be done a posteriori. So, Brueckner's reasons for rejecting naïve transcendental arguments are identical to his reasons for upholding compatibilism between content externalism (anti-individualism) and privileged access to one's own mental states.

However, Brueckner discusses some more sophisticated strategies for anti-skeptical arguments from content externalism than the naïve transcendental argument (see, e.g., Chap. 5, 9, and 10). In general, Brueckner suggests that "...the anti-skeptical prospects of such a refutation are dim" (Chap. 9, p. 152). But he is also arguing that while the prospects of a refutation may be dim, they have not been shown to be hopeless (Chap. 6 and 10).

One reason for cautious optimism may be reflected by what appears to be a shift in anti-skeptical strategy. Brueckner's latest papers do not exclusively

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<sup>1</sup> Brueckner was the most active proponent of compatibilism. Michael McKinsey and Jessica Brown advocated for incompatibilism. The dispute has been less prominent since Brown changed her position to a version of compatibilism (see Brown 2004 and Gerken 2007b for a criticism). As far as I can gather, Brueckner's papers use 'content externalism' and 'anti-individualism' interchangeably. This is presumably because Burge's theory is the target of the problem. As Brueckner notes, his responses are congenial to the "pre-emptive" responses in Burge (1982, 1988).

focus on refuting an already established skepticism deriving from Putnam's brain-in-a-vat (BIV) scenario. Rather, they seek to question the assumptions operative in such a BIV argument in light of content externalist accounts of representational mental states. In Chap. 10, for example, Brueckner considers whether content externalism may be employed to argue against the skeptical *premise* that S does not know that she is a BIV rather than to argue against the skeptical *conclusion*. Brueckner's discussions suggest, I think, that the former strategy is more promising than the latter. Perhaps this is an important methodological lesson that may be learned from Brueckner's work on transcendental arguments. In any case, it may be illustrative to consider a concrete example of this strategy in a bit more detail.

#### 4. Terms of Envatment

As mentioned at the outset, Brueckner is equally concerned with problems of responding to skepticism and problems of generating skepticism in the first place. To illustrate the latter, I will consider Chapter 11 (a short and previously unpublished paper, "Terms of Envatment," co-written with Jon Altschul). Brueckner describes it as "a brief coda in which the limitations of the Putnamian strategy are discussed" (Introduction, p. 3).

Chapter 11 begins by noting a problem for deriving a skeptical conclusion from Putnam's BIV scenario and auxiliary assumptions. This problem may be presented as a dilemma for a brand of BIV skepticism according to which a subject cannot know that he is not massively deceived due to being envatted. On the one hand, if the subject is imagined to be envatted late in life, he will have a large number of true memory-generated beliefs about the world he used to inhabit. On the other hand, if he is envatted early in life, he will soon enough undergo a conceptual change and begin to form true beliefs about features of the computer program. In either case, the "...brain in a vat will not lead a life in which he is massively mistaken about his world" (Chap. 11, p. 175). The assumptions figuring in or underlying this dilemma might be questioned by the BIV skeptic. For example, the BIV skeptic might challenge the first horn of the dilemma by arguing that the subject fails to retain his true memory beliefs after the envatment.

However, Brueckner and Altschul suggest that the skeptic need not quarrel with these assumptions. For the assumption that the subject cannot rule out a BIV scenario in which he is massively deceived is not required if a piecemeal BIV skeptical argument may be provided instead. In order to consider this form of BIV skepticism, the chapter turns to a standard closure-driven

argument that plays a pivotal role in many of Brueckner's essays. Here, as elsewhere, the "standard skeptical argument" is given an explicit formulation at the outset (Chap. 11, p. 175). The terminology is as follows:  $\varphi$  is any external world proposition that a thinker S claims to know,  $\psi$  is a skeptical counterpossibility to  $\varphi$  and ' $\rightarrow$ ' stands for the material conditional, ' $\rightarrow >$ ' stands for the strict conditional and ' $K_{>}$ ' stands for 'S knows that  $\_$ ':

- S1:  $[K(\varphi) \ \& \ K(\varphi \rightarrow > \neg\psi)] \rightarrow K(\neg\psi)$
- S2:  $K(\varphi \rightarrow > \neg\psi)$
- S3:  $\neg K(\neg\psi)$
- S4:  $\neg K(\varphi)$

This argument schema may work as a template for deriving skepticism about the vast majority of external world propositions. The idea is that for each external world proposition,  $\varphi$ , a specific skeptical counterpossibility,  $\psi$ , can be devised. Often, this will be the counterpossibility that S was envatted the day before generating the belief that  $\varphi$ . Thus, the chapter concludes that "...the skeptic can provide a piecemeal procedure for producing a spate of skeptical arguments, each of which targets some proposition  $\varphi$  that S claims to know. For each  $\varphi$ ,  $\neg K(\varphi)$ " (Chap. 11, p. 176).

The first thing to note is that the piecemeal BIV skeptical strategy involves not just one but a wealth of different BIV skeptical scenarios, each of which is tailored to a target proposition. The second thing to note is that some of them are more controversial than others. Consider the case where  $\varphi$  is a placeholder for the proposition P4 = *water exists*. Here the skeptical counterpossibility instantiating  $\psi$  is "RE4 = *S was envatted yesterday and provided with mistaken apparent memories like those of a thinker in a water-filled normal world, along with current unveridical experiences as of seeing waves breaking on the beach.*" A footnote adds: "We must add that S loses his veridical Dry Earth memories upon envatment" (Chap. 11, p. 176, n. 6).

As opposed to familiar Dry Earth scenarios, due to Burge and Boghossian, the inhabitants on Altschul and Brueckner's Dry Earth are not massively deceived (Burge 1982, Boghossian 1989).<sup>2</sup> Rather, they have veridical experiences of desert landscapes. This is why the footnote adds that S's veridical Dry Earth memories are, upon envatment, eliminated and replaced with mistaken apparent memories phenomenally indiscernible from ordinary water memories.

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<sup>2</sup> This is not entirely clear from the text. Correspondence with Brueckner clarified the issue.

RE4 raises many questions. But here I will focus on the addition to the original BIV scenario that consists in the assumption that S's veridical pre-entertainment memories are replaced by non-veridical apparent memories. This addition is not dialectically benign given that the point of providing a piecemeal BIV skepticism is to sidestep the dilemma for the original BIV skepticism. In fact, if RE4 is *required* by the piecemeal approach, this approach appears to be little but a detour. The reason why is that given the addition, RE4 seems strong enough to rebut the first horn of the dilemma. Recall that the first horn posed the problem that the envatted subject would not be massively deceived in virtue of retaining many true beliefs in memory. A skeptical argument based on RE4 that assumes that new mistaken apparent memories are supplied and that veridical Dry Earth memories are eliminated appears to preempt this problem. At least, it seems that if the skeptic may legitimately appeal to this assumption, she can equally well appeal to the assumption that all veridical memories are replaced with mistaken apparent memories. But this assumption would put the original BIV skepticism back in business. So, if the kind of assumption that RE4 exemplifies is required for the piecemeal skepticism but is, in effect, strong enough to drive the original BIV skepticism, why bother with the piecemeal skepticism?

More substantially, it should be investigated further whether the modified BIV scenario, RE4, in which S's veridical memories are replaced with non-veridical apparent memories, is as challenging as the original BIV scenario. The assumption that the original BIV hypothesis is possible is partly motivated by appeal to the idea that we can be prone to indiscernible illusions. One can have the same (type-identical) phenomenal states as one is having when perceiving a vase even if there is no vase on a particular occasion. This provides a *prima facie* reason for thinking that it is possible to undergo such an illusion in general, and the BIV scenario is an example of such a possibility. In contrast, the added thesis that antecedently generated representational mental states in long-term memory can be artificially *replaced* with phenomenally different non-veridical apparent memories appears to require a motivation of its own. That is, it should be argued that there is no relevant difference between perception and long-term memory. So, RE4 raises both dialectic and substantive questions.

This is not the place to pursue this complicated matter.<sup>3</sup> So, I will turn to another feature of the argument that Brueckner is preoccupied with. What I

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<sup>3</sup> For relevant discussions in a somewhat different context, namely a slow-switch case in which the subject is not envatted but transported to Twin Earth, see Chap. 17 as well as Ludlow (1995), Tye (1998), and Gerken (2007a, 2009, and forthcoming).



have in mind is S1, which is a version of a closure principle that the essays in Part IV of *Essays on Skepticism* revolve around.

## 5. Epistemic Closure Principles and the Structure of Skeptical Arguments

As mentioned, each of Brueckner's discussions typically revolves around a specific skeptical argument. This makes good methodological sense. Part of what we might learn from considering skeptical arguments is that one of the epistemic assumptions or principles that we tend to rely on or presuppose is, in fact, mistaken. After all, a challenging skeptical argument is one that proceeds from epistemic assumptions that we are antecedently inclined to accept to its intolerable conclusion. These assumptions often reflect epistemic principles. So, skeptical arguments provide a philosophically pressing occasion to critically reflect on epistemic principles and assumptions. Epistemic closure principles are examples of principles that we might well be inclined to uncritically accept if it were not for their role in skeptical arguments.

Brueckner is not one to provide meta-philosophical remarks, such as the one in the previous paragraph. There is very little discussion in *Essays on Skepticism* on the point and purpose of investigating skepticism or on the best methodology of doing so. Nevertheless, Brueckner's essays have contributed to the present focus on the structure of skeptical arguments and the emphasis on a precise articulation of the assumptions figuring in it. As mentioned, Brueckner often discusses skeptical arguments that rely on a version of a Closure Principle. In Chapter 29, "The Structure of the Skeptical Argument," Brueckner gives a formulation of the principle that knowledge is closed under known entailment:

(CIK) For all, S,  $\phi$ ,  $\psi$ , if S knows that  $\phi$  and S knows that  $(\phi \rightarrow \psi)$ , then S knows that  $\psi$ . (Chap. 29, p. 319).<sup>4</sup>

However, such closure principles have been in dispute since Dretske's attack on them (Dretske 1970, 1971). Interestingly, Brueckner is able to provide a skeptical argument in which we "...need not appeal to the closure

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<sup>4</sup> It should also be required that S competently deduces  $\psi$  from her antecedent knowledge. (CIK) is a principle of epistemic rationality and one need not believe, and hence know, all the consequences of one's knowledge to be rational. While (CIK), as stated, will be subject to counterexamples, in which S fails to competently deduce  $\psi$  from  $\phi$ , this is irrelevant for Brueckner's discussion. So, I follow him in omitting the qualification for the sake of presentation.



principle...” (Chap. 29, p. 324. See also Chap. 36, p. 369, n. 4). The epistemic premise which can replace closure is an *underdetermination principle*:

- (UP) For all, S,  $\phi$ ,  $\psi$ , if S’s evidence for believing that  $\phi$  does not favor  $\phi$  over some incompatible hypothesis,  $\psi$ , then S lacks justification for believing that  $\phi$ .

With (UP) in hand, Brueckner suggests that (where SK is a skeptical counter-possibility to P) “... it is not necessary to appeal to a closure principle which connects my epistemic failure with respect to  $\sim$ SK with a corresponding failure with respect to the entailing proposition P” (Chap. 29, 325). However, Brueckner cautiously remarks that some of the responses to (CIK) apply to (UP). More importantly, he raises the worry that getting from (UP) to skepticism might involve a brand of infallibilism: “... in the end, the skeptic is arguing that my lack of justification for believing that I am sitting ultimately derives from the fact that my evidence for this belief is non-entailing” (Chap. 29, p. 326). This is, of course, a far more radical assumption than UP that only requires that one’s evidence does not favor P over  $\sim$ SK.

The relationship between fallibilism, underdetermination and skepticism is reconsidered more explicitly in the aptly titled Chapter 34, “Fallibilism, Underdetermination and Skepticism.” Here Brueckner focuses on fallibilism about justification and reaches a twofold conclusion. On the one hand, the skeptic must “...respect the assumption of fallibilism” in her motivation of the premise that S does not know that she is not in a skeptical scenario, SK. On the other hand, Brueckner argues that it is “...incumbent upon the anti-skeptic to mount an argument to show *F*, i.e., to show that my putative perceptual justifier *does* favor  $\sim$ SK over SK” (Chap. 34, p. 357). The distinctively Bruecknerian conclusion, then, is that *both* the skeptic and her opponent have intellectually unsatisfying rationales for their positions.

## 6. $\sim$ K- $\sim$ SK

The final chapter—the previously unpublished Chapter 36—is entitled “ $\sim$ K- $\sim$ SK” in honor of the skeptical premise that I do not know that I am not a BIV (the skeptical scenario: SK), which is the focus of the paper. Here the underdetermination principle, UP, does not *replace* a closure principle. Rather, it *supplements* it by providing a motivation for the premise  $\sim$ K- $\sim$ SK. In fact, the motivation involves two assumptions. The first is the contraposition of the above-stated underdetermination principle:

- (UP) If S has justification for believing that  $\phi$ , and  $\phi$  is incompatible with  $\psi$ , then S’s evidence for  $\phi$  favors  $\phi$  over  $\psi$ .



The second is the assumption that experiences do not provide evidence in favor of SK over  $\neg$ SK (since S's experiences in SK are indiscernible from those in  $\neg$ SK):

( $\neg$ F) My experiential evidence for  $\neg$ SK does not favor  $\neg$ SK over SK.

Brueckner explicates the motivation for  $\neg$ K-SK as follows: "From UP and  $\neg$ F, it follows that I am not justified in believing  $\neg$ SK, and so:  $\neg$ K-SK" (Chap. 36, p. 369).

This is a rare formal flaw in *Essays on Skepticism*. In fact, it does not follow from UP and  $\neg$ F that S is not justified in believing  $\neg$ SK. Recall that according to UP, justification requires evidential disparity. But  $\neg$ F only establishes parity of *experiential* evidence. So, the consequent of UP is not negated by  $\neg$ F. Hence, the modus tollens argument fails. UP and  $\neg$ F are logically compatible with S possessing non-experiential evidence favoring  $\neg$ SK over SK.

This flaw in the skeptic's UP-based motivation for the premise  $\neg$ K-SK should be taken seriously by someone who, like Brueckner, takes seriously the prospects of transcendental arguments. For, as we have seen, some such arguments that target the premise  $\neg$ K-SK appeal to premises motivated by non-experiential evidence—i.e., by introspection and thought experiments (cf. Chap. 10 and 11).<sup>5</sup>

Setting this criticism aside, Brueckner provides an interesting consideration of whether the UP-based motivation for the premise  $\neg$ K-SK in effect relies on infallibilism about justification. Specifically, Brueckner considers the motivation for  $\neg$ F. He assumes that it begins from a *Sameness of Evidence Lemma* (SEL), according to which "I have exactly the same evidence in the good [veridical - MG] and the bad [skeptical - MG] case" (Chap. 36, p. 376). The question Brueckner raises is whether there is a direct line of reasoning from SEL to  $\neg$ F or whether the reasoning must go via an infallibilist assumption, JEP, roughly that justification for the belief that p must entail that p and the assumption,  $\neg$ ENT, that the proposition *I have SE* (a sense-experience) fails to entail  $\neg$ SK (Chap. 36, p. 379–80).

According to Brueckner, the adoption of  $\neg$ ENT and infallibilism would render the skeptical argument via Closure and UP redundant. But the argument from Closure and UP was supposed to be challenging because it relied on premises that we were antecedently inclined to accept rather than on

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<sup>5</sup> A related worry concerns whether UP is more plausible than  $\neg$ K-SK. For example, someone (a classical reliabilist, for example) may argue against UP on the grounds that it hinges on the strongly evidentialist assumption that all justification is constituted by evidence. In contrast,  $\neg$ K-SK does not have such a theoretical commitment. Thanks to Esben Nedenskov Petersen.



infallibilist principles that we were antecedently inclined to reject. However, Brueckner considers a direct line of reasoning from SEL to  $\neg$ F but concludes that “It’s just not entirely clear whether the charge that the skeptical argument collapses into Infallibilism can be successfully answered by the skeptic” (Chap. 36, p. 381).

As the reader will have become accustomed to at the end of *Essays on Skepticism*, Brueckner’s conclusion is quite open-ended. But Chapter 36 nevertheless illustrates what I take to be a putative methodological lesson from Brueckner’s work: that it is more promising to undermine the motivation for a premise in the skeptical argument than to try to argue against it.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

As mentioned, Brueckner rarely provides meta-commentary on the methodology of his investigations. The investigations do the talking. Yet I think that an important methodological lesson may be learned. With regards to transcendental arguments, I took Brueckner’s discussions to suggest that transcendental arguments were more likely to establish the negation of a skeptical premise than to establish the negation of the skeptical conclusion. With regards to the structure of skeptical arguments, I took Brueckner’s discussions to suggest that it was more promising to argue against the underlying motivation for a skeptical premise than to argue directly against it. So, perhaps the overarching methodological lesson may be that anti-skeptical arguments are most likely to succeed if they seek to prevent the skeptical argument from getting off the ground. Arguing against the motivation for a skeptical premise may be both more promising and, if successful, as illuminating as arguing against the skeptical premise or conclusion.

Brueckner’s book is valuable, in part, because it considers a wide variety of skeptical and anti-skeptical strategies, allowing us to compare these. One would be silly to grapple with the skeptical problems that Brueckner discusses in *Essays on Skepticism* without familiarizing oneself with his discussions. *Essays on Skepticism* marks the best contemporary writing on skeptical problems in part because it sets a high standard for the work that remains to be done before we have an intellectually satisfying grasp of them.<sup>6</sup>

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