Perceptual Justification and the Demands of Effective Agency

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ABSTRACT: Pragmatist responses to skepticism about empirical justification have mostly been underwhelming, either presupposing implausible theses like relativism or anti-realism, or else showing our basic empirical beliefs to be merely psychologically inevitable rather than rationally warranted. In this paper I defend a better one: a modified version of an argument by Wilfrid Sellars that we are pragmatically warranted in accepting that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true, since their likely truth is necessary for the satisfaction of our goal of effective agency. On the version of the argument I defend, the great good for human life of control over our empirical circumstances renders our goal of effective agency reasonable. But only if our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true—and only if we accept that this is so, assuming it as a premise for inference and a guide for action—will the success of our actions be due to our effective agency, not mere luck. Since we're warranted in taking the necessary means to our reasonable ends, we're warranted in accepting that our perceptual beliefs are generally justified, and so that skepticism about empirical justification is false.

1. Introduction

In this paper I defend a pragmatist response to skepticism about the external world. Various skeptical theses have been advanced regarding our external world beliefs: that no such belief is strictly certain, for instance, or that none counts as knowledge. My argument concerns a more radical one: that, regarding the external world, "we never have the slightest reason to believe anything" (Harman 1973: 3). It addresses *skepticism about empirical justification*, the thesis that none of our beliefs about the external world is justified. Specifically, it argues, not that

this thesis is false, but that *we are warranted in accepting* (in a sense to be specified) that it's false, since we're warranted in accepting that some such beliefs of ours are justified.

One central impulse of the pragmatist tradition is its staunch opposition to skepticism. Despite vehement intramural disagreements, pragmatists remain united in their insistence that we can resolve—or sometimes dissolve—many perennial philosophical puzzles by appealing to the practical function of our thought and talk. Perhaps no such puzzle has been more frequently identified as ripe for pragmatist resolution than skepticism: pragmatism's anti-skeptical utility is often construed as pivotal to its appeal. And yet, on closer examination, many pragmatist responses to skeptical problems have relied on highly dubious anti-realist theses such as phenomenalist theories of meaning, or relativistic or epistemic accounts of truth. Others, in a more Humean, psychologistic vein, have sought to substitute mere descriptions of our psychology or social practices for rational support for our empirical beliefs, and so have delivered only "exculpations where we wanted justifications" (McDowell 1994: 8). It would be reasonable, then, if neutral onlookers tended to regard pragmatism's anti-skeptical contributions in a dim light.[1]

In this paper, I'll defend a different pragmatist response to skepticism. It's suggested by a remark by pragmatism's founder, Charles Sanders Peirce, that we must accept that we can reach true explanations of observable facts in a finite number of attempts, even absent

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[1] The reader may notice that I have considered only pragmatist attempts at *resolution* of the skeptical problem here, not attempts at *dissolution*. But the latter may be at least as prominent in the history of pragmatism: Hookway suggests that Peirce's "fundamental" response to skepticism is a form of doxastic conservatism that rejects the skeptic's demand for justification for our current beliefs as simply misguided (2012: 29n13; cf. §1.3 throughout), and the guiding impulse of Dewey's pragmatism was its "reject[ion of] the dualistic epistemology and metaphysics of modern philosophy" (Field undated), including its felt need (so to speak) for an answer to the skeptic. On this point (if few others!), I instead side with Rorty, who remarks that: "The pragmatist *philosopher's* context of inquiry is . . . the context in which one wonders whether and why justification should be thought to lead to truth" (2000: 266), and in which one does not accept facts about when we *in fact do* take claims for true as adequate answers to such wonderings. Due to my continuing to accept the early modern skeptical problematic and standards for knowledge, a reviewer suggests that my position might fairly be described as *realist neo-pragmatism*. I find the label congenial.

evidence for this claim, "for the same reason that a general who has to capture a position or see his country ruined, must go on the hypothesis that there is some way in which he can and shall capture it" (1931–58, vol. 7: ¶219). This passage suggests that key empirical beliefs of ours can be *pragmatically* warranted: warranted by their figuring as necessary conditions for our realizing rationally indispensable goals. This suggestion is developed by a later pragmatist who resolutely opposed both anti-realism and psychologism: Wilfrid Sellars.[2] In §2, I consider Sellars's argument that we're warranted in accepting that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true, since only if they're likely to be true can our end of *effective agency* be realized. In subsequent sections, I modify this argument in light of—and defend the modified version from—various objections.

2. Sellars's Argument

Sellars offers this argument to dispel a familiar problem of circularity that seems to render empirical justification impossible. On the one hand, it doesn't seem reasonable to hold particular perceptual beliefs without any antecedent, independent reason to think that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true.[3] On the other, it's unclear how we could know that they're likely to be true except via induction from perception's past success, and such an inductive argument would presuppose the truth of particular perceptual beliefs. Thus our warrant to regard our perceptual beliefs as generally likely to be true apparently depends on our warrant to accept particular perceptual beliefs, and vice-versa. This seems viciously circular, and so to render perceptual justification impossible. (And since structurally similar

[2] For Sellars's rejection of both external world and scientific anti-realisms, see his 2007 [1963]; for that of psychologism, see his 1980: 5–7, 32, 59–60.

[3] Sellars doesn't explain why this cannot be reasonable, and *neo-Mooreans* disagree (Pryor 2000). But one now-familiar argument that it cannot suggests that it would license objectionable forms of *bootstrapping* (Cohen 2002).

arguments could be run concerning other putative sources of empirical justification, this problem ultimately threatens the possibility of empirical justification generally.)

What we apparently need is an *a priori* warrant for the claim that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true.[4] But since this claim isn't a conceptual truth, how could such a warrant be available? If we construe this warrant as *pragmatic*, not evidential, Sellars proposes, an argument for its availability emerges:

> Its central theme would be that achieving a certain end or goal can be (deductively) shown to require a certain integrated system of means. [. . .] [T]he end can be characterized as that of being in a general position, so far as in us lies, to *act*, i.e., to bring about changes in ourselves and our environment in order to realize specific purposes or intentions. [. . .]
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> [S]ince agency, to be effective, involves having reliable cognitive maps of ourselves and our environment, the concept of effective agency involves that of our [perceptual] judgments being likely to be true, i.e., to be correct mappings of ourselves and our circumstances.
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> Notice, then, that [. . .] it is reasonable to accept [that our perceptual judgments are likely to be true], simply on the ground that unless they *are* likely to be true, the concept of effective agency has no application. (Sellars 1979: ¶¶67–68, 82–83; some italics omitted).

Sellars uses "effective agency" synonymously with "being in a general position to act": an effective agent can change herself and her environment so as generally to succeed in realizing her intentions. So I'll use this term in reconstructing his argument. But I will interpret this notion in a somewhat demanding sense. We shouldn't regard a being as an effective agent provided only that it can do something that's generally followed by its desired end's obtaining. There must be a non-lucky connection between the obtaining of the means and

[4] Such a warrant might seem straightforwardly impossible: after all, doesn't our very concept of perception arise experientially? Yes, but this does not prevent us from deploying it in *a priori* knowledge, any more than the fact that our concept <dog> arises from experience renders the judgment *Dogs are animals* an *a posteriori* one. What is relevant for the *a priori*/*a posteriori* distinction is the means of justification of the judgment, not the means of acquiring the concepts of which it's composed.

that of the end; further, the agent must be creditable with control over her actions.[5] (These stipulations will be important later.)

I reconstruct Sellars's argument thus:

1. I have the end of being an effective agent.
2. One can be an effective agent only if one's perceptual beliefs[6] are likely to be true.
3. So, it's reasonable for me to accept that my perceptual beliefs are likely to be true.

The argument's premises seem plausible. (1) seems true of each of us: we all act, and we all want our actions generally to succeed. Indeed, this seems not only true, but psychologically inevitable.[7] (2) also seems true: as Sellars notes, our perceptual beliefs will be likely to be true iff our representations of our environments and our positions within them are generally accurate, and it's hard to see how, if they weren't generally accurate, our actions could generally succeed. (Seemingly we'd too frequently run into objects, overlook predators, step off of cliffs, etc., to generally succeed in our aims.) The argument's most dubious aspect concerns validity: whether (3) follows from (1) and (2). But one might think that, if we adopt an end—and *cannot but* adopt it—then it's reasonable for us to accept that we'll succeed in achieving it, and so that necessary conditions for its realization will obtain.

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[5] In case these stipulations need motivation: suppose I'm an archer, and at one afternoon's archery session, I hit the target every time. This doesn't manifest effective agency if my arrows only found their mark due to fluke winds, or if every time I drew back, you nudged me into the right position as I released the bowstring. In the former case, the means and end aren't sufficiently closely connected; in the latter, I lack control.

[6] I'll talk of perceptual *beliefs* rather than *judgments*. Nothing turns on this.

[7] Mightn't this end be idle, however? Isn't it true that aiming at goals presupposes being an effective agent in the first place, obviating the need to aim at effective agency itself? No: aiming at goals presupposes *being an agent*, but not that one's agency is *effective*. (What is further true, however, is that aiming at particular goals presupposes *aiming*—at least implicitly—at being an effective agent. Indeed, this will be crucial to my argument in §7.)

If Sellars's argument seems initially promising, though, forceful objections can be raised to it at every point. In subsequent sections I consider and respond to these. Specifically:

- In the preliminary §3 I suggest that the sense of *acceptance* at issue in the argument is not belief, but assumption as a basis for inference and action; and I note that the argument offers only a skeptical, not a straight solution to skepticism about empirical justification.
- In §4 I consider the objection that (1) cannot support any claims about what is reasonable for us to do, since it's a descriptive premise, not a normative one. I concede the objection, replace (1) with a suitable normative premise, and argue that this replacement premise is true and can be warranted *a priori*.
- In §5 I consider objections that (2) can be warranted only *a posteriori*, and even that it's false. I reject these objections, suggesting that (it's knowable *a priori* that) the alleged counterexamples the objections adduce leave our actions' success a matter of luck, and so don't involve effective agency.
- In §6 I consider the objection that the argument is invalid and that the auxiliary premise needed to render it valid is false. I concede the objection and offer the modified version of Sellars's argument I endorse. It replaces (2) with a similar premise that can be motivated on similar grounds as (2). Adding a true auxiliary premise renders the resulting argument valid.
- In §7 I consider a parody argument designed to yield pragmatic warrants for patently unreasonable empirical beliefs. I argue that it fails. That's because intending to perform any particular action implies intending (so far) to be an effective agent, and the latter intention commits one to accepting that one's

perceptual beliefs are likely to be true—and so rejecting empirical claims that conflict with one's perceptual evidence.

- I conclude in §8 by, first, explaining how (3) is relevant to skepticism about empirical justification (namely, it yields a pragmatic warrant to accept that skepticism is false) and, second, explaining the value this skeptical solution has (namely, preventing skeptical arguments from undermining the rational credentials of our ordinary ways of thinking and acting).

§3. Two Preliminaries

This last remark about (3)'s relevance raises two points that merit preliminary attention. First, in what sense of *acceptance* does the argument purportedly show that it's reasonable to accept that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true and that skepticism is false? The obvious answer is *belief*, and this does seem to be the sense Sellars himself intended.[8] But one might object that belief is essentially regulated for truth, so that "the deliberative question *whether to believe that p* is transparent to the question *whether p*" (Shah & Velleman 2005: 497). (Plausibly, that's why beliefs aren't under the subject's direct voluntary control.) Pragmatic reasons are the "wrong kind of reason" for belief (Hieronymi 2005), and while they sometimes influence our beliefs, they can't figure in reflective deliberation about what to believe. If that's right, then since the Sellarsian argument aims to influence deliberation about whether to accept that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true, we should construe it as concerning some mode of acceptance other than belief.

[8] He tells us that he "use[s] 'accept', in the first instance, as roughly equivalent to 'come to believe'" (1974: 438n2). (Moreover, he notes, claims can be reasonable to accept in that sense without being reasonable to base one's actions on [ibid.: 410ff.].)

Instead, we can follow Catherine Elgin's suggestion that, while to believe that *p* is "to feel that *p* is so," to accept that *p* is "to adopt a policy of being willing to treat *p* as a premise in assertoric inference or as a basis for action where our interests are cognitive" (Elgin 2010: 64; she, in turn, credits Cohen 1992 for the distinction). It isn't under my direct voluntary control whether I feel that some claim is so. But it is under my control whether I adopt a policy of the sort Elgin describes, and pragmatic reasons seem like appropriate grounds for doing so. (Returning to Peirce's general: it isn't up to him whether he feels that he'll succeed in capturing the position that will save his country. But it's up to him whether he thinks and acts as if he will, and pragmatic reasons may strongly favor his doing so.) Thus Sellars's argument could yield reasons that bear on whether we should—and can influence whether we do—accept in Elgin's sense that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true even if it cannot concerning whether we (should) believe this. Therefore, I'll construe his argument as addressing whether this claim is reasonable to accept in Elgin's sense.[9]

The second point is this: the Sellarsian argument purports to show, not that skepticism about empirical justification is false, but only that we have strong *a priori* pragmatic reasons to think and act as if it's false. Thus it is not a *straight* but a *skeptical* solution, in Kripke's sense:

> Call a proposed solution to a sceptical philosophical problem a *straight* solution if it shows that on closer examination the scepticism proves to be unwarranted; an [. . .] argument proves the thesis the sceptic doubted. [. . .] A *sceptical* solution of a sceptical philosophical problem begins on the contrary by conceding that the sceptic's negative assertions are unanswerable. Nevertheless our ordinary practice or belief is justified because – contrary appearances notwithstanding – it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable. (1982: 66).

[9] Wright similarly frames the non-evidential, pragmatically grounded species of warrant (viz., *entitlement*) he develops as a warrant for "a mode [. . .] of *acceptance* of a proposition which can be rational but which [is] not tantamount to believing," one that involves "acting on the assumption that P or taking it for granted that P or trusting that P for reasons that do not bear on the likely truth of P" (2004: 176–77).

Sellars himself didn't actually concede that skepticism about empirical justification cannot be directly refuted.[10] But I'll concede this here, since the thesis I'll defend is that a modified Sellarsian argument can nevertheless pragmatically warrant our using perception to guide empirical inquiry and practice. (I'll address the objection that this thesis is insignificant even if true in conclusion.)

4. Does (1) Matter?

A first objection to Sellars's argument suggests, not that (1) is false, but that it cannot help to establish (3). (1), after all, is just a psychological fact, and so has no direct bearing on what's reasonable for us to think or do. Compare: that I believe that *p* does not, of itself, give me any reason to believe that *q* even if I know that *p* entails *q*. (If my belief that *p* is unjustified, then I rationally ought not believe that *q*, but only suspend my belief that *p*.) Similarly, the objector might charge, the mere fact of my adopting an end says nothing about what attitudes I might reasonably adopt toward necessary conditions for its realization. To think otherwise would be to fall prey to psychologism.

I noted in §2 that we can say more for our end of effective agency than simply that we adopt it: seemingly we cannot but do so. As Crispin Wright remarks in defending a pragmatic argument much like Sellars's—one aimed at establishing our entitlement to accept any claim "(we have no evidence against and which) needs to be true if rational decision-making is to be feasible and effective"—"rational agency is nothing we can opt out of"

[10] I think Sellars actually offers two independent responses to skepticism: a semantic argument meant to directly refute it (one similar to Davidson's [2001: 213] argument that "our view of the world [must be], in its plainest features, largely correct," since "the stimuli that cause our most basic verbal responses also determine [. . .] the content of the beliefs that accompany them"), and the pragmatic skeptical solution under consideration here. I cannot defend here, though, either this interpretation of Sellars's epistemology or my judgment that the latter anti-skeptical argument's prospects are better than the former's. (I do so in other work in progress.)

(2004: 198). Wright suggests that this fact can support the entitlement just mentioned, but it cannot do so any more than the mere fact of our commitment to rational agency. Both facts are merely psychological; they cannot found warrants.[11]

Moreover, if it were sufficient to warrant our acceptances to show that they derive from attitudes we cannot but have, this would hardly vindicate pragmatic responses to skepticism. Rather, it would render them superfluous, since Humean psychologistic responses already do this: they show that we cannot but accept such foundational claims as that our perceptual beliefs are generally true. (If we think we doubt them in the study, once we return to backgammon, we see this to be mere pretence.) If that were enough to show our acceptance of them to be warranted, the appeal to pragmatic reasons would add nothing. This appeal serves a valuable function only if our warrant to accept a claim must derive not merely from an attitude we cannot but have, but from one that's positively warranted.

The objector is correct, then, that the Sellarsian argument cannot succeed if it begins from (1). Rather, it must begin from

1*. I have the reasonable end of being an effective agent.

Why think that (1*) is true of each of us? The answer might seem obvious: if we don't act, we'll starve, and if we aren't effective agents, we'll fall off cliffs or be eaten by predators. Our lives will be, if not brutish, at least nasty and short. Since this outcome is disvaluable, our goal of being effective agents seems warranted by its enabling us to avoid it. The problem with this obvious thought is that it overlooks the skeptical context in which the Sellarsian argument operates. The argument purports to identify, not just any old warrant for accepting

[11] Despite my disagreement with Wright here, my argument owes much to his epistemological writings. I differ from him, though, in centering my anti-skeptical proposal on (a non-psychologistic version of) *entitlement of rational deliberation* (2004: §VII), not *entitlement of strategy* or *entitlement of cognitive project*, the two species of entitlement most central to Wright 2004 & 2014, and the latter of which seems key to his epistemology of perception (2004: §VI).

that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true, but an *a priori* warrant, so as to avoid circularity. But only empirically can we know that if we don't act, we'll starve. Basing the argument for (1*) on such empirical premises would thus prevent the argument from achieving its purpose.

The question, then, is whether there are any goods such that it's knowable *a priori* that being effective agents is necessary for us to achieve them. And there is such a good: *control over our empirical circumstances*. We value being in control. Often (though not always), we disvalue things that go badly for us more when they don't come about by our choice and can't be ameliorated by our efforts. (Consider: giving birth to a child can involve the same amount of physical pain as an assault, but if undertaken resolutely and in joyous anticipation, it likely will involve less *suffering*. It likely will be a less disvaluable experience overall.) Nor do we simply find ourselves with a desire for control that we cannot shake: we reflectively endorse our desire for it, judging it to be greatly valuable—indeed, indispensable for mature human flourishing.[12] If, then, being an effective agent is necessary to realize the good of control over our circumstances, then the goal of effective agency will be warranted thereby.

And it *is* thus necessary, and this is knowable *a priori*. I can't know *a priori* whether I'll succeed in my goal of being an effective agent, or to what extent doing so will enable me to gain control over my circumstances. My circumstances might be unlucky, and so I might still lack control over key harms that threaten me. But I can know *a priori* that if I don't act, or if my agency isn't generally effective, then I'll lack control over my empirical circumstances: I'll

[12] Someone might object that the considerations cited here still represent a merely psychological basis for the end of effective agency: that we desire control over our circumstances, after all, is just another psychological state, not in itself a reason for anything. In reply, this is the reason for noting that we do not merely desire control but, on reflection, judge it to be good: I am according these judgments an authority that enables them to confer warrant on aims that are instrumental for achieving that which they recognize as good. (Why grant evaluative seemings and judgments this authority when I do not grant it equally to perceptual seemings and judgments? Because the former seem to be immune from at least some of the skeptical worries to which I take the latter to be vulnerable: for instance, I don't think I even understand the suggestion that a brain-in-a-vat might be deceived in judging that a pain that feels intrinsically and intensely bad really is bad.)

remain passive—or, at most, uselessly flail about—in the face of whatever the world throws at me. So, we can know *a priori* that we're justified in aiming to be effective agents, since realizing this goal gives us our only chance to realize an indispensable good. (We cannot know *a priori* whether we'll strike out, but we can know that it's better to go down swinging.)

Though this objection was correct, then, that Sellars's argument begins from the wrong premise, (1), we've identified a suitable replacement, (1*), which is not only plausible but seems knowable *a priori*, as the argument's success requires. Let's move on to (2).

5. Can (2) Be Warranted A Priori*? Is It Even True?*

For heuristic reasons, I'll begin with a comparatively modest objection and proceed to a more ambitious one. The modest objection purports to show, not that (2) is false, but that it can be warranted only *a posteriori*. We know by experience that when we act without reliable perceptual evidence, our actions don't generally succeed: we fall off cliffs or get eaten by predators. But could we know this *a priori*? For all we know *a priori*, mightn't we succeed in realizing our aims more frequently by, say, praying that a higher power will grant us success before acting at random than by acting on our perceptual beliefs? (Perhaps the higher power takes special pity on the ignorant.)

In response, we should deny that such supplicants could count as effective agents. True, they act on themselves and their environments, and these actions are followed by their aims' realization. Their actions don't realize their aims, though, but are merely occasions for the higher power to realize their aims for them. Their aims' realization, however frequent, remains merely lucky relative to their actions, and that's inconsistent (as I stipulated in §2) with their effective agency. It's further inconsistent with attributing control over their circumstances to them. So the supplicants aren't effective agents, not least because their

habits of action cannot realize the good that justifies the goal of effective agency.[13] We can know *a priori*, then, that, to be effective agents, our own capacities must be able to render our actions more than merely lucky in realizing our intentions. And if our effective agency is to imbue us with control over our empirical circumstances,[14] the capacities in question must include a means of accurately representing this environment and our place in it: they must include reliable perceptual faculties, ones that produce perceptual beliefs that are likely to be true.

That's also essentially what I want to say to the more ambitious objection: that not only does (2) not admit of *a priori* warrant, it can be shown *a posteriori* to be positively false. On this objection, findings in cognitive science and psychology show that perception aims, not at true representation, but only at enabling adaptive behavior. A balcony upon which one is standing appears further from the ground in proportion to one's fear of falling, and a hill in front of one appears steeper when one is wearing a heavy backpack and so would expend more energy in climbing it (Proffitt 2006). In such ways our perception enables

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[13] It is possible (and, indeed, commonplace) to be an effective agent with respect to some goal even as one's efficacy depends on one's use of some sort of means or implement: I can be effective at hitting the bullseye from 50 meters even as my efficacy depends on my use of my bow. Could it be objected, then, that the supplicants are like this: their efficacy depends on the higher power, and yet they are no less effective agents for that? I think this assessment of the case would be implausible. For an agent's dependence on an implement not to diminish the efficacy of her agency with respect to her goal, it seems to me that she must meet two conditions: first, she must have control over the implement, and second, she must have at least a rudimentary sort of knowledge how her use of the implement will enable her to realize her goal. (If I am reduced to flailing around spastically with the bow, or if I lack even rudimentary knowledge how a bow might propel an arrow toward my target, then I don't seem to be an effective archer even if, fortunately, I should happen to strike the bullseye every time.) But in this case, the supplicants don't control the higher power at all: they are dependent on its pity. And lacking any awareness of their environment (let alone of the higher power's nature), they can't be said to have even the most rudimentary sort of knowledge of how the higher power might achieve their goals in that environment. Accordingly, it seems quite strained to frame them as effective at realizing their ends, or in control of whether their ends are realized, through the means of the higher power.

[14] Actually, the claim needn't be conditional: *any* instance of effective human agency presupposes reliable perceptual faculties. An apparent counterexample is merely epistemic agency. But I can know introspectively (bracketing the external world and the veridicality of perception) that my epistemic agency's success is vulnerable to my phenomenal circumstances: I won't attain my epistemic goals if distracted by sharp pains or intense feelings as of cold or hunger. Thus even effective epistemic agency requires, not just reliable powers of reasoning, but also faculties that imbue one with sufficient control over one's empirical circumstances to reliably ensure that one's phenomenal state conduces to epistemic success.

successful action by presenting "the size and shape of the objects and people we see [as] scaled to the size of our body and our ability to interact with our surroundings" (Proffitt and Baer 2020: 6). But in doing so, it *distorts* our perceptual representations, rendering them (so far) unreliable. So, the objector concludes, our assumption that effective agency requires reliable perceptual faculties is merely a philosopher's bias. It may indeed require *adaptive* perceptual faculties, but our perceptual faculties can be adaptive without being reliable: without tending to represent the physical world veridically.

Before I reply to this objection directly, I'll make some concessions. Effective agency clearly doesn't require infallible perceptual faculties. It doesn't even require perceptual faculties that are reliable in all perceptual environments or concerning every aspect of the physical world. (2) says only that it requires perceptual faculties that generally represent the physical world accurately. But that allows that they sometimes represent it inaccurately—and even that they're generally unreliable in local contexts or in representing particular properties. Moreover, the warrant my (modified) Sellarsian argument confers on our acceptance of the likely truth of our perceptual beliefs is *pro tanto*, subject to defeat by countervailing evidence. If the empirical evidence strongly suggests that perception tends to get certain phenomena wrong, then once we learn this, we're no longer warranted in regarding our perceptual beliefs with respect to those phenomena as likely to be true, the Sellarsian argument notwithstanding.

Still, the objector can't have it both ways: if the idea that we generally "see the world as it is" is merely one of our mistaken, "naïve intuitions" (Proffitt and Baer 2020: 6), then it is unclear how we could have *empirical evidence* of this fact in the first place. For that "evidence" would itself arise from perception, and so the fact would undercut the probative value of the considerations that apparently justify belief in it. On the other hand, if our

perceptual faculties enable us to establish experimentally the distortion or failure of perception in various contexts or with respect to various subject matters, then they must be, to that extent, reliable sources of information about the natural world (including our perceptual faculties themselves): it's because perception gets the broad strokes right that it can yield justified beliefs about the ways it itself gets particular details wrong. It seems, then, that even these objectors must presuppose a background of general perceptual reliability in order to make their empirical case for the limits of that reliability.

Effective agency, I argue, is likewise compatible with local failures of perceptual reliability—and perhaps even enhanced by them!—but not its general failure. Perhaps we'll be more effective agents if we visually represent hills as slightly steeper than they are when we're ill-equipped to climb them: we'll avoid the cost of great exertion for minor benefits. But we couldn't effectively navigate hills if our perceptual faculties represented them where they aren't and failed to detect them where they are, or even if the degrees of steepness our faculties represented differed from the actual ones to an extreme degree. (Sometimes I really must climb a modest hill, heavy backpack notwithstanding, which I presumably couldn't do if my vision represented it as being as steep as El Capitan.) If my perceptual representations of hills were distorted to such an extent, it would be incorrect to ascribe my successful hill-navigation to my effective agency: rather, I'd be merely lucky if they didn't mislead me into counterproductive actions. My reply to the objection, then, is not the ambitious claim that perception must fundamentally be oriented toward accurate representation rather than toward producing adaptive behavior. It's enough to secure (2) that a baseline of generally

accurate perceptual representation is necessary to yield generally adaptive behavior that manifests effective agency.[15]

At the risk of belaboring the point, let me be clear about what I have (not) argued in this section. I haven't argued that our perceptual faculties in fact generally produce true beliefs. (Still less have I argued that this is knowable *a priori*: the question is obviously empirical.) On the factual question, I've only suggested that the attempt to support a negative answer *on empirical grounds* seems self-undermining, since those grounds carry epistemic weight only if our faculties are generally reliable. Whether that suggestion's right or not, though, it's really tangential to my defense of (2), which concerns, not the question of whether perception is reliable, but only whether general perceptual reliability is necessary for effective agency. I've argued that the supplicants cannot count as effective agents, even if they usually get what they want, because their lack of reliable information about their environments leaves their actions' success merely a matter of luck. In the last paragraph, in effect, I extended that argument to agents with perceptual faculties oriented toward adaptive behavior in a way that doesn't coincide with general accuracy of representation. It's not that there couldn't be perceptual faculties like that, or that they couldn't cause actions that tend to get the agents in question what they want. It's only that, if they did, this would represent a

[15] Thus Lupyan's (2017: 82) view, on which "the goal of perception is not truth, but rather [. . .] guiding adaptive behavior," seems consistent with (2) and with our being effective agents, since on his view, perception nevertheless does generally yield "information that is *true enough* for normal human goals (and sometimes generalizes beyond them"—and further, to the degree that perception is *not* veridical, this is "oftentimes" not because it *distorts* the truth, but rather because "there is simply no truth of the matter for perception to provide." His view still allows our agency to be guided by a reliable baseline of perceptual information. Similarly, I needn't disagree with Churchland's (1987: 548–49) claim that "the principal function of nervous systems is to enable the organism to move appropriately," and that representations are valuable only inasmuch as they serve that function, with truth "definitely tak[ing] the hindmost." That our perceptual system is fundamentally oriented toward enabling adaptation, not true representation—and that this sometimes leads it not to yield true representations—is consistent with my thesis that perception *couldn't enable* adaptive, effective agency if it didn't *generally* yield true representations.

mere lucky break, not an exercise of effective agency. If that's right, then it remains plausible both that (2) is true and that it can be warranted *a priori*.

6. Does (3) Follow?

The most serious objection to Sellars's argument is that it's invalid: (3) doesn't follow from the conjunction of (1*) and (2). (All that follows is the unilluminating conclusion that we can satisfy a reasonable end we have only if our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true.) Now, if we can identify one or more plausible auxiliary premises which are such that their conjunction with (1*) and (2) entails (3), then the invalidity of Sellars's argument as initially stated won't represent a deep difficulty. The teeth of this objection come from the suggestion that no such auxiliary premises are available.

It isn't hard to supplement (1*) and (2) to yield conclusions about *some attitude or other* we might reasonably take toward the claim that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true. Consider some auxiliary premises:

4. It's reasonable for one to take the necessary means to one's reasonable ends.
5. It's reasonable for one to hope that necessary conditions for the obtaining of one's reasonable ends will themselves obtain.

(4) and (5) are both quite plausible, since if it weren't reasonable for us to hope that a state of affairs should obtain or to take the necessary means to its obtaining, then it wouldn't seem reasonable for us to adopt the realization of that state of affairs as an end in the first place. And conjoining either (4) or (5) to the conjunction of (1*) and (2) does yield consequences concerning the attitudes we might reasonably take toward the statement that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true, namely, (6) and (7), respectively:

6. It's reasonable for me to intend to bring it about that my perceptual beliefs are likely to be true.

7. It's reasonable for me to hope that my perceptual beliefs are likely to be true.

These parallel Sellarsian arguments do seem capable of establishing (6) and (7), which are anyway independently plausible (though not responsive to skepticism).

The question, then, is whether we can expand the Sellarsian argument along similar lines to establish (3). And the problem is that the parallel claim to (4) and (5) concerning acceptance, (8), is false:

8. It's reasonable for one to accept that necessary conditions for the obtaining of one's reasonable ends will themselves obtain.

One way to see (8)'s implausibility is to recall that accepting that *p* involves using *p* as a basis for action—action not to *ensure that p*, but rather *as if p were true*. And in some cases in which it's reasonable to adopt a certain end because its realization would involve sufficiently great goods, it will nevertheless be unreasonable to act as if it were true (or even likely) that the end will indeed be realized (or as if necessary conditions for its realization will be met), for the simple reason that its realization is very unlikely. There might be a lottery whose payout is sufficiently high relative to the (very low) probability of winning as to render it reasonable for me to adopt the end of winning, and so to take the necessary means to that end of buying a ticket. But it would be extremely foolish for me straightaway to begin acting as if all the necessary conditions for my winning will obtain: buying my dream house, etc. before the winning ticket has been drawn. Even if I may reasonably aim to win, I should continue to act as if I very likely won't.[16] Since (8) says otherwise, it's false, and the proposed extension of

[16] Compare Martin's (2014: 21–22) argument that reasonable hope doesn't imply reasonable action-as-if.

the Sellarsian argument fails: (3) cannot be established via an argument parallel to those that establish (6) and (7).

Instead, to enable it to yield (3), I propose to modify the Sellarsian argument thus:

1*. I have the reasonable end of being an effective agent.

2*. One can be an effective agent only if one accepts that one's perceptual beliefs are likely to be true.

4. It's reasonable for one to take the necessary means to one's reasonable ends.

3. So, it is reasonable for me to accept that my perceptual beliefs are likely to be true.

(2) drops out of the argument; it is replaced by (2*). But this doesn't render our defense of the truth and apriority of (2) superfluous, since the most natural way of motivating (2*) presupposes (2). Effective agency must be based on generally reliable perceptual faculties: ones that yield perceptual beliefs that are generally likely to be true. But if *I reject* the claim that my perception is reliable, then even if it really is reliable, I still won't base my actions on my perceptual information, and so my agency won't be effective. Hence effective agency plausibly requires not merely that one's perceptual beliefs should in fact be likely to be true, but further that one should accept that this is so, inferring that particular states of affairs one perceptually represents as obtaining probably do obtain—and acting accordingly.

This argument motivates (2*) by pointing out that it is implausible that someone who rejects the claim that her perceptual beliefs are generally likely to be true could be an effective agent. But does that mean that she must positively accept this to be an effective agent? Could she simply remain neutral on the question whether her perceptual beliefs are generally likely to be true, or even ignore it altogether? I don't think reflective neutrality is a plausible option, since this would tend to inhibit basing one's actions on one's perceptual

information in much the same way (though perhaps to a lesser extent) as rejecting the claim that one's perceptual beliefs are likely to be true did. The latter suggestion is more interesting, since it does seem that a being could base its actions on its perceptual information, and so succeed in achieving its ends, without taking any attitude toward the reliability of its perceptual faculties.

Here I think the right response is that such a being would nevertheless not be an effective agent in the sense at issue in (1). For, I contend, agents in this sense not only act, but take up a reflective stance, identifying and endorsing or rejecting principles on which they might act—and thereby taking responsibility for their actions. Not only is this a plausible connotation of our talk of "being an (effective) agent," but further, it is motivated by the stipulation that effective agents should be creditable with control. A being that does not reflect on its reasons for action doesn't seem like one we should credit with control over what it does: even if it can reliably realize its ends, nevertheless, lacking any reflective stance toward those ends or the means it takes toward them, it doesn't seem in control of their realization. (The idea, then, is that control presupposes some measure of *self*-control, which non-reflective beings lack.) For this reason we should conclude that being an effective agent requires not only the absence of doubt toward the claim that one's perceptual beliefs are likely to be true, but the presence of a positive attitude toward it: namely, acceptance.

(2*) is plausible, then. I've argued that (1*) and (4) are, too. And the conjunction of these three premises entails (3). We've found a modified Sellarsian pragmatic argument for (3), then, that is valid and appears sound. This appearance of soundness, however, is called into serious question by the availability of arguments that parody this one to reach unacceptable conclusions. Let's turn to this problem.

7. The Parody Objection

Consider the following argument. I have the end of flying (unaided). Nor do I just happen to have this end: on reflection, I endorse it. (I judge that the experience of flying would be valuable—and, indeed, very cool.) So this end seems reasonable. And it's reasonable for me to take any necessary means to my reasonable ends. Now, in order to fly, it's necessary not only that I'm able to fly, but, further, that I *accept* that I'm able to fly. (For if I don't, then even if I am in fact able to fly, I won't assume this as a basis for action, and so will never attempt to fly.) So, the argument concludes, it's reasonable for me to accept that I can fly, which would involve acting as if I can fly.

This argument is structurally parallel to the modified Sellarsian argument I have put forward. Like that argument, it's valid. It shares a premise with that argument: (4). It includes analogues of (1*) and (2*), and the support offered for those analogues directly parallels that offered for (1*) and (2*) themselves. If that support sufficed to render (1*) and (2*) plausible, then this parallel support should likewise render the analogues plausible. Yet the conclusion of this parody argument is unacceptable: it clearly isn't reasonable for me to accept that I can fly—to jump from great heights with nothing to break my fall, say. Something's wrong with the parody argument. But given that it directly parallels the modified Sellarsian argument, doesn't this suggest that something's wrong with that argument, too?

No: the problem with the parody argument isn't present in the modified Sellarsian one. The problem with the parody argument—on its face, at least—is obvious: it's unreasonable for me to adopt the end of flying unaided, since I have extremely strong

evidence that I'll be unable to achieve this end.[17] The modified Sellarsian argument establishes that it's reasonable for me to regard my perceptual beliefs as likely to be true. My perceptual beliefs will then serve as a standard for assessing the reasonability of my empirical beliefs generally: if some empirical claim conflicts with the balance of my perceptual evidence, then I rationally ought to regard it as unlikely to be true, and so it would be unreasonable for me to believe it. Since my perceptual beliefs tell very strongly against the claim that I can fly,[18] it's unreasonable for me to believe that I can, and so to adopt flying as my end. As Wright (2014: 242) insists (drawing on Wittgenstein), reflective inquiry cannot begin except via pragmatically-warranted trust in claims for which we lack evidence—but once it's off the ground, it imposes standards that we may not contravene on pragmatic grounds.[19]

The reason similar problems don't arise for the modified Sellarsian argument itself is simply that, in the skeptical dialectical context in which the argument is offered, there aren't any empirical beliefs it's antecedently reasonable for me to regard as likely to be true. And therefore I lack any basis for assessing the likelihood that I can satisfy my end of being an

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[17] It's sometimes reasonable to adopt an end that is unlikely to be realized, I've noted, if its realization would be sufficiently valuable. But however great some good might be, it will still be unreasonable to aim to realize if it's sufficiently unlikely to eventuate. (That violence between humans should entirely cease forever, starting tomorrow, would be an almost incomparably great good. But it's still unreasonable for me to aim to realize this state of affairs, since it's just not going to happen.)

[18] At least, they do if it's reasonable for me to accept that memory and induction are reliable, too. I can't treat these topics here. But note, first, that Sellars takes his pragmatic argument to establish our warrant to accept memory's reliability, too; and second, that Wright (2004: §VII) offers a similar argument to establish our warrant to accept induction's reliability. If these extensions succeed, a Sellarsian pragmatic approach can fill this lacuna.

[19] This differentiates my pragmatic response to skepticism from Rinard's (2017: §9; incidentally, the flying example is hers). I want mine to accommodate Hieronymi's (2005) judgment—which Rinard rejects—that, generally, our wanting to hold a belief or feeling enjoyment from doing so aren't merely *insufficient* reasons to hold it, but positively *inappropriate* ones. By following Wright's suggestion, I think we can hold these thoughts together: we can hold that, in the skeptical context, where we have no evidence for any empirical belief as against any other, goods crucial to human flourishing generate pragmatic warrants for accepting that certain basic empirical beliefs of ours are likely to be true, but that these basic beliefs found standards of evidence that constrain our warrant to believe—or even accept—subsequent empirical claims.

effective agent: the only grounds on which I can assess the reasonability of this end are pragmatic. That's why the fact that my realizing it is necessary for me to realize a great good for my life—control over my empirical circumstances—suffices to render it reasonable. So the parallel between the two arguments fails.

At least, it fails if we take the parody argument to function in an everyday dialectical context. But, the objector might persist, why not put the two arguments on a par in this respect, too? Suppose I'm in the skeptical dialectical context, without any empirical beliefs whose justification I can take as given. I need to identify an argument that will yield reasons to accept some empirical beliefs, and I've decided to seek out a pragmatic argument. I could rehearse the modified Sellarsian argument, acquire warrant to accept (3), and thereby acquire reasons to regard my perceptual beliefs as likely to be true and, in turn, reasons against believing that I can fly or adopting flying as an end. But couldn't I equally reasonably just rehearse the parody argument instead? If I haven't yet run the modified Sellarsian argument, nothing apparently tells against my doing so: in particular, nothing yet seems to tell against my adopting flying as an end. (I don't yet know myself to have any warranted empirical beliefs that suggest that I can't fly, and so nothing counts in the balance against how awesome it would be.) If we can't find some reason for privileging the modified Sellarsian argument over the parody argument that continue to hold in the skeptical dialectical context, it seems we'll have to grant that the two arguments are on a par after all, which would strongly suggest that both should be rejected.

But there is a reason to privilege the modified Sellarsian argument that extends to the skeptical dialectical context. It's this: to aim to realize any particular empirical state of affairs is already implicitly to aim at effective agency. This is not to say that I adopt all such local aims as mere *means to* my end of being an effective agent: it's reasonable to want to realize

many concrete states of affairs because they would be good in themselves, or because they're instrumental to goods other than my effective agency. It's instead a conceptual point about intention.[20] To intend to φ just is to intend, not only that one's φ-ing come about, but that it come about non-luckily through one's own efforts—i.e. that it come about through one's own effective agency. And since one's forming an intention rationally commits one to seeking the intention's fulfillment, forming any intention will rationally commit the agent to seeking to be an effective agent concerning the state of affairs intended: to monitoring and securing the efficacy of one's agency regarding it. Without aiming to be an effective agent, then, I cannot aim at anything at all. Therefore, even if agents don't pursue their particular goals as mere means to being effective agents—and even if they wouldn't readily describe themselves as aiming to be effective agents—they do indeed aim to be effective agents whenever they reasonably aim to realize particular goals: the latter aim implicitly involves the former.

This means that even in the skeptical context, the modified Sellarsian argument and the parody argument are not on a par. For there's no prospect of rehearsing the latter without the former's having ever gotten a rational grip on one. I couldn't reasonably adopt flying as an end without aiming at effective agency. And if I adopt this latter aim, then I thereby render it reasonable for me to regard my perceptual beliefs as likely to be true, and so provide myself with all the empirical evidence necessary to render it unreasonable for me to adopt (or to rationally require me to foreswear) flying as an end. The lesson here is that the end of effective agency is special: it has a rational primacy that explains why we can reasonably adopt it without regard to the probability of our successfully realizing it. Once adopted, in rendering it reasonable to regard our perceptual beliefs as likely to be true, it

[20] I owe the point that follows to Imogen Dickie.

generates the empirical evidence to which all other empirical beliefs and concrete aims are accountable for their reasonableness. And this means that the pragmatic reasons for belief on which the Sellarsian argument rests need not license irresponsible empirical beliefs, as one might have suspected they would.

8. Conclusion

The modified Sellarsian argument seemingly succeeds, then, in establishing (3): that it's reasonable for the person rehearsing it to accept that their perceptual beliefs are likely to be true. A final worry to consider is that this conclusion is simply irrelevant to the problem the argument was designed to answer.

The problem at issue is posed by skepticism about empirical justification, the thesis that none of our empirical beliefs is justified. But (3), an objector might worry, doesn't actually contradict this thesis, and so the Sellarsian argument defends the wrong claim, one the skeptic never actually denied. The skeptic about empirical justification isn't committed to the claim that we aren't *pragmatically warranted in accepting* any empirical claims. She only insists that we aren't *epistemically warranted (i.e. justified) in believing* any of them. And (3) doesn't seem to bear directly on this thesis, since it merely identifies a claim that it's pragmatically reasonable for us to accept.

Does the Sellarsian argument simply bypass skepticism about empirical justification, then? Not quite. It admittedly doesn't establish that skepticism about empirical justification is false, since it doesn't establish that any of our empirical beliefs is justified or likely to be true. But, as I shall now show, in establishing that we're pragmatically warranted in accepting that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true, it consequently establishes that we're pragmatically warranted in accepting that (some of) our perceptual beliefs are justified. And

that being established, we're therefore pragmatically warranted in rejecting skepticism about empirical justification—in accepting that it's false.[21]

To accept that our perceptual beliefs are likely to be true is, in part, to use this claim as a premise in assertoric inference: for instance, in inferences of the form *my perceptual beliefs are likely to be true; I have a perceptual belief that p; so, it's likely to be true that p*. Now, inferences of this form are defeasible: if some perceptual belief of mine occurs in non-standard perceptual conditions, or if I simply have considerable independent evidence against the truth of the claim believed, then the likeliness to be true that characterizes my perceptual beliefs as a class won't extend to the particular claim in question. Still, absent any available defeaters like this, inferences of this sort will transmit reasons to accept their conclusions, and so to regard particular perceptual beliefs of ours as likely to be true.

Now, a subject can have a belief that is likely to be true—and that she has good reasons to regard as likely to be true—that is nevertheless unjustified: for instance, she might base the belief on wishful thinking rather than on those good reasons. But in cases of the sort I'm describing here, I will have good reasons not only to regard my perceptual beliefs as likely to be true, but to regard them as so *precisely because they issue from perception, a generally reliable faculty*. In cases of this sort, then, I have good reasons to accept that the perceptual beliefs of mine in question are justified, and so to reject the claim that none of my empirical

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[21] Let me address one point I don't raise below. Someone might worry that, even if I'm right that the Sellarsian argument yields warrant to accept that some of our cognitive states are likely to be true, this can only be true for *acceptances*, not *beliefs*, and so the argument doesn't establish any conclusion about the attitude it's reasonable for us to take toward our empirical *beliefs*. This worry is misplaced. What is true is that, as I conceded in §3, the argument can only yield pragmatic warrant to *accept*, not pragmatic warrant to *believe*. But there's no reason it cannot yield pragmatic warrant to accept a claim *about our beliefs*: namely, that they're likely to be true, and indeed justified. (The objector might retort by asking, if the basis of empirical warrant is not epistemic but merely pragmatic in the way I suggest, why we should ever have any empirical beliefs in the first place, and not only acceptances. But the doxastic involuntarism that motivates the belief/acceptance distinction undermines this retort: we *just do* have empirical beliefs. As Hume discovered playing backgammon, we can't get rid of them if we try. What the skeptic threatens, as Wright [2004: 210] perceptively argues, is our reflective stance toward those beliefs: in particular, "our right to *claim*" that they're justified. It's this right that the Sellarsian argument aims to safeguard.)

beliefs is justified. Of course, these reasons are pragmatic rather than epistemic ones—but since what the Sellarsian argument promised was a pragmatic response to skepticism about empirical justification, hopefully that isn't surprising! The point is just that what this argument secures pragmatic reasons for us to accept really is that our perceptual beliefs are generally *justified*.[22]

Even if the modified Sellarsian argument thus doesn't bypass skepticism about empirical justification, though, it's hard to deny that it doesn't give us as direct an answer to skepticism as we probably wanted: clearly it doesn't give us *epistemic reasons to believe* that our perceptual beliefs are generally justified. So, granting that it does succeed on its own terms, why is this result important? A skeptical solution is, perhaps, better than nothing, but many straight solutions to skepticism have been proposed and gained adherents. In light of that fact, why does the Sellarsian argument merit such close attention? I'll close with two brief responses to this question.

First, it can sometimes feel like we face a problem regarding anti-skeptical positions rather like the one Goldilocks faced regarding porridge: some responses—like disjunctivist ones, or others that appeal to inference to the best explanation—seem "too hot," or implausibly optimistic in their efforts to refute the skeptic on her own terms, while other responses—like externalist, neo-Moorean, or contextualist ones—seem "too cold," attempting simply to evade the skeptical problem rather than to answer it. I won't attempt here to motivate this assessment (which, naturally, proponents of these views won't share!). But those who share it may find Sellars's pragmatic response to be "just right": more ambitious than views in the latter camp in seeking an independent, reflectively accessible

[22] This argumentative strategy—insisting that what non-evidential considerations *entitle* us to accept regarding our perceptual beliefs is that we're *justified*, not merely entitled, to hold them—is indebted to Wright (2004: 207–8).

warrant for regarding our perceptual beliefs as likely to be true, but less ambitious than those in the former in settling for a pragmatic warrant, not holding out for a theoretical one.

Second, one natural worry to have on confronting radical skeptical arguments concerns how we should reasonably think and act in the face of them—or even whether there *is* any reasonable way left for us to think and act. After all, it seems that all our empirical inquiry and embodied action depends for its reasonability on certain assumptions; if no such assumptions can be justified, then seemingly it can never be reasonable to think or do anything, as against anything else. Consonant with this line of thought, Kripke's framing of the distinction between skeptical and straight solutions suggests—and I agree—that what's ultimately at stake in skeptical debates are the rational credentials of ordinary practice (including our ordinary practices of inquiry): skeptical arguments are valuable to the extent that they show ordinary practice does not admit of a certain sort of defense (1982: 66–67), but they unsettle us in apparently showing, further, that it admits of no defense at all.

The value of a skeptical solution lies in its offering warrant for our practices that we can know to survive—to remain available in the face of—the skeptical arguments it addresses.[23] That's what the modified Sellarsian argument gives us: an *a priori* pragmatic warrant for our practice of relying on perception as a guide for our thought and action, one we can know ourselves to have even in the skeptical dialectical context. If that's right, then even if the argument doesn't provide everything we might have hoped for from a response to skepticism, it does address one dimension—seemingly the most important one—of the angst generated by skeptical problems, since it can establish the (pragmatic) reasonableness

[23] Compare Wright (2004: 206): skeptical arguments show that we cannot claim to know "certain cornerstones" of our procedures of inquiry, and suggest that we are therefore irrational or capricious in "proceeding in the ways we do." A skeptical solution concedes the former but can resist the latter by identifying a different sort of warrant for accepting these cornerstones, skeptical arguments notwithstanding.

of much of our thought and action, such problems notwithstanding.[24] It allows us to feel secure in our reasonableness in trusting our perception and going on as we usually do—regardless of whether skepticism can be directly answered, and regardless of whether, were we unable thus to answer it, this would vitiate our justification to believe that our empirical beliefs are justified. And as someone who's tempted by pessimistic answers to both those questions, I find this result a comforting one.

Pragmatists, I've suggested, have sought to defend the reasonableness of our practices from skeptical attacks since the movement's inception. But when they have not gone so far as to embrace relativism or anti-realism to secure the legitimacy of these reasons, they've often substituted psychological inevitability for genuine reasons. An anti-skeptical position centered on the modified Sellarsian argument falls prey to neither pitfall. Without denying realism about the external world or the objectivity of truth, it identifies genuine reasons to hold our perceptual beliefs, and to regard them as justified, that derive from the fundamental practical role they play in our lives: namely, that their tendency to be true—and our acceptance of the fact of this tendency—makes effective agency possible for us. In consequence, this position represents an attractive pragmatist response to skepticism about empirical justification.[25]

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[24] The language of *angst* is Pritchard's. I share his opinion that, in light of that angst, "what reasons we [can ultimately offer] for our everyday beliefs will be of a pragmatic, rather than an epistemic nature" (2005: 204). But my own account of these reasons is *fundamentally* pragmatic, not constitutivist (i.e. rooted in the necessary conditions of "the practice of offering grounds in the first place": ibid.). While my Sellarsian proposal constitutes a *hinge epistemology*, then—it views empirical justification as beginning from unjustifiable general propositions that "are necessary in order for us legitimately to take perceptual experiences to bear [on] beliefs about [. . .] physical objects" (Coliva 2016: 92)—it's based on an *epistemic* construal of hinges, close to one approach suggested by Wright (see my footnotes 9 & 11), not on a *framework* construal of hinges, like Pritchard's and Coliva's accounts (ibid.: 84–86, 94). I think this is necessary for it to avoid psychologism.

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