PART II

Disagreement in Philosophy

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Philosophical Renegades

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Do you get worried when you discover that some of your philosophical colleagues disagree with your philosophical views? What if you know these colleagues to be *smarter* and, with respect to the relevant issues, *better informed* than you? Suppose the situation is more worrisome still: you find that a *large number and percentage* of the people you know full well to be smarter and better informed than you in the relevant area hold positions contrary to your own. Will you, or should you, waver in your view? And then there is the nightmare scenario: suppose the belief in question, the one denied by a large number and percentage of the group of people you fully admit to be your betters on the relevant topics, is one of the most commonsensical beliefs there are. Are you going to retain your belief in that situation?

It is common for philosophers to have philosophical opinions on topics outside their areas of specialty. Not only that: a good portion of those opinions are highly controversial. Take an analytic metaphysician who has firm opinions on content externalism, evidentialism, and the Millian view of proper names despite having done no serious research in the philosophy of mind, epistemology, or the philosophy of language. If this is an average philosopher, then she will know that some of the people who work in those other areas and disagree with her are not just better informed but smarter than she is. How can she rationally think they are all wrong?

In this essay I examine the "nightmare" case described above both generally with regard to any area of inquiry and with respect to philosophy. After looking at the general case I will focus on its most extreme application: learning that one's epistemic superiors deny just about the most commonsensical claims imaginable.

Children do not say the damndest things; philosophy professors do. Some of them say that there are no baseballs. Or that nothing is morally wrong. Or that twice two isn't four. Others truly believe that there are no beliefs. Or that taking one cent from a rich person can instantly make them no longer rich. Or that no claims using vague concepts are true (not even "Dogs are dogs"). Some hold that nothing is true, as truth is an inconsistent concept. Many think that fire engines aren't red (or any other color). And of course some hold that we know next to nothing about the external physical world.

The proponents of these views aren't fools. Many of them are among our best and brightest. They are as intellectually virtuous and accomplished as anyone in philosophy. Some are outright geniuses. Over many years they look at the evidence as carefully and competently as anyone, and then with full sobriety come to contravene common sense—and often enough they have to fight hard against their own prejudices in order to endorse their radical conclusions.

And yet, if you are a typical philosopher then you probably believe that they're all wrong in endorsing those "error theories." This wouldn't be so bad but for the following facts: you are well aware that often enough the philosophers who hold the anti-commonsensical opinions are generally more informed than you are on those topics, they have more raw intelligence, they have thought and investigated whether the claims in question are true longer and in more depth than you have, they have thought about and investigated the relevant topics longer and in more depth than you have, they are just as or even more intellectually careful than you are, and they have understood and fairly and thoroughly evaluated virtually all the evidence you have seen regarding those claims (and usually quite a bit more evidence). I know this is all true for me compared with many philosophers who endorse anti-commonsensical philosophical theories, and if you don't think it's true for you, you're probably deluded. You know perfectly well that you're not a top philosopher on the metaphysics of material composition. Or the metaphysics of cognition. Or metaethics. Or the philosophy of mathematics. Or vagueness. Or theories of truth. Or the metaphysics of color. Or the nature of knowledge. At the very least, let's assume that the above list of facts apply to you with respect to some of those philosophical areas. Despite having genuine respect for people you know to be your epistemic superiors with regard to the relevant topics, you continue to disagree with them on those very issues: you are an *epistemic renegade*. This certainly looks epistemically naughty.

In this essay I present an argument for metaphilosophical skepticism, the thesis that in the nightmare scenario if one retains one's belief, then in most interesting cases that belief retention is *seriously epistemically defective*. What the defect is, however, depends on the circumstances as well as how various epistemic notions are interrelated. If the belief is highly theoretical (e.g., Millianism for proper names, evidentialism, content externalism, four-dimensionalism), then I hold that the renegade's belief will be unwarranted, unjustified, and blameworthy. However, if the belief is a commonsensical one held in the face of an error theory (e.g., "I have hands" versus a philosophical theory that says there are no composite objects), that belief may well be justified and amount to knowledge even after being retained; what the serious epistemic defect amounts to in that case depends on how the central epistemic concepts are related to one another. This amounts to a new, peculiar, and highly contingent kind of radical skepticism.[1]

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[1] I argued for a related thesis in my 2010. That essay had major flaws, including an imprecise argument and a different thesis. The present essay is perfect.

If the skeptical thesis is false, then we *do* have full-fledged knowledge in the nightmare scenario involving error theories and our retaining our commonsensical beliefs is epistemically a-okay. As I will argue this would mean that many of us know perfectly well that many of the most popular philosophical theories are false despite the facts that we are well aware of our status as amateurs with respect to those topics, that we are aware of the impressive arguments for those theories, and that those arguments are generally as good as and even superior to the arguments in other philosophical areas. The startling consequence is that large portions of metaphysics, the philosophy of language, the philosophy of logic, the philosophy of physics, and metaethics are bunk and philosophers should give up most of their error theories despite the fact that their supporting arguments are generally as good as or even better than other philosophical arguments. Thus, *whether or not the skeptical thesis is true* for the error theory cases we get interesting epistemological results.

This is a long essay, so it is prudent to give its structure here. In sections 1–4 I discuss the general phenomenon of disagreement with recognized epistemic superiors and articulate why it seems that if a person retains her belief upon finding herself in that situation, then her doing so will thereby be significantly diminished in some important epistemic respect. In section 5 I will present the official rigorous argument for metaphilosophical skepticism. Objections to the premises of that argument make up sections 6–11. In section 12 I consider what the epistemic defect should be in the cases of a commonsensical belief held in the face of disagreement with an error theory. Finally, in section 13 I consider the epistemological consequences of the falsity of metaphilosophical skepticism, which in my view are just as interesting as the consequences of its truth.

1 The purely scientific case

Suppose you believe Jupiter has fewer than ten moons because that's what you heard when you were in school thirty years ago. However, suppose also that over the intervening years evidence has accumulated in favor of a theory that there are over 200 moons orbiting Jupiter. As a result, a large number and percentage of professional astronomers have, independently of one another, come to accept the new theory. You become aware of these two facts, about the evidence and the resultant professional opinion. Still, you reject the new theory even though you admit the hard truth that the professionals have all your evidence and much more. You just think that they must have made some mistake, as it seems absurd to you that a planet could have over 200 moons. You are aware of their opinion, their comparative expertise, and their epistemic advantage over yourself. And yet you think they are wrong and you do so even though you fully admit that you have no evidence that they lack or have overlooked. You're not a professional astronomer. Presumably, you'll say in your defense that they just must have made a mistake *somewhere* in digesting the new evidence, although you don't know what the new evidence even is or what the mistake might be.

On the face of it, your belief that there are fewer than ten moons of Jupiter won't amount to knowledge. Your belief might be true of course; the professionals aren't infallible. And your belief started out with some impressive justification, as it was acquired in what we can assume is the usually reliable way of reading reliable science textbooks (though many of the authors of those books have since recanted, so your belief-forming process really doesn't look reliable under that highly relevant description). But given that you are perfectly aware of the large percentage and number of specialists who disagree with you, you admit that they are your epistemic superiors on the topics in question, and you admit that you have no evidence that they lack, your belief won't amount to knowledge even if it's true.

The numbers and percentages of specialists matter. If there were just a couple outlier professional astronomers who thought Jupiter had over 200 moons, but you were aware of a great many other specialists who insisted the number was fewer than ten even though they were well aware of the outliers' opinion, reasoning, and evidence, then perhaps you could still *know* that Jupiter had fewer than ten moons even though you *admit* that the outliers are genuine experts and have all the evidence you have as well as much more evidence. You note that all the other specialists think the outliers are wrong and so you conclude on that basis that the outliers must have made a mistake somewhere in evaluating the evidence, or they lack some evidence that the other experts have, even though you may not have the slightest idea what the mistake or extra evidence is.

One's awareness of the specialists' views also matters. Suppose the "over 200 moons" theory is based on evidence that was generated with some new technology that has been proven to work in many areas but is now being applied in an area for which it is not suited. Suppose further that there was no then-current way the scientists could have foreseen this limitation. Now pretend that inter-country communication among astronomers is poor, so even though there is a large group of astronomers in the UK, say, who are well aware of and perhaps using the new technology (and thus taking the "over 200 moons" theory very seriously), in the US very few astronomers have even heard of the new technology let alone used it. (This scenario isn't realistic today, but that hardly matters.) Finally, pretend that you're an amateur astronomer in the US who has never heard of the new technology or the "over 200 moons" theory and who believes—correctly and on the basis of sound if ultimately inconclusive evidence—that Jupiter has no more than ten moons. While it's true that if you had occasion to learn about the new technology you would not be able to even suggest that there is anything wrong with or inapplicable about it, the mere fact that some people with whom you don't communicate have made an error that you could not rectify doesn't seem to sabotage your knowledge that Jupiter has fewer than ten moons. Since you're not part of their epistemic community, their mistake doesn't infect you in an epistemic manner.

To make this clearer, consider an amateur astronomer in the UK who is your counterpart in the following ways: she also believes that Jupiter has fewer than ten moons and holds this belief on the basis of the same evidence that you use. However, unlike you, the UK amateur knows that there is impressive evidence that Jupiter has well over ten

moons. She knows this because she knows that the top UK astronomers wouldn't be convinced of the "over 200 moons" theory if they didn't have impressive evidence (again, this is not to say that she thinks the top UK astronomers are infallible or even right on this particular issue). Roughly, since the UK amateur knows that there is impressive evidence against her belief, and she has no counter to that evidence, her belief is thereby epistemically diminished compared to yours. Her familiarity with the new technology and with the excellent sociological status among experts of both the soundness of the new technology and the subsequent "over 200 moons" theory sabotages her knowledge. We will see later that this epistemic difference between you and your UK counterpart has significance also for metaphilosophical skepticism.

The conclusions drawn in the previous paragraphs seem pretty reasonable, even though we've skipped over important qualifications (which I'll get to below). But when we substitute philosophical for scientific inquiry nothing seems so obvious anymore. Pretend that 45 per cent of the philosophers who have thoroughly examined all the apparently relevant issues in metaphysics conclude that there are no non-living composite material objects; another 45 per cent have come to the opposite conclusion; and the final 10 per cent remain agnostic on this point. The philosophers in the first group think there are no baseballs even though there are swarms of particles that are arranged baseball-wise. Suppose further that these philosophers don't hedge their view. They hold that whenever an ordinary person says, under ordinary circumstances, something like "There are four baseballs in the trunk of the car," what she says—and believes—is just plain false even though perfectly reasonable and useful. In such a society would an ontologically commonsensical philosopher who is an amateur at metaphysics but who nevertheless is aware of the impressive status of the "no non-living composites" view fail to know that there are baseballs?

2 Introduction to metaphilosophical skepticism

In recent works I have explored this issue as it applies to hypotheses that have significant empirical backing as well as philosophical interest.[2] In this essay I want to do two things: radically revise my treatment of the general case and then examine the extraordinary case when the anti-commonsensical hypothesis is "purely philosophical" in the sense that there is little or no straightforward scientific evidence for it and the reasons offered in its defense come from purely philosophical thought alone—often but not exclusively metaphysics. Thus, for the most part I will set aside views such as color error theory (no ordinary physical objects are colored), which has significant empirical backing, in order

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[2] In my 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2010, and 2012. There has been excellent recent work on the general topic of the epistemic consequences of disagreement with epistemic peers (see the papers and references in this book as well as the Feldman and Warfield volume). In the cases examined in this essay, however, the disagreement lies with one's admitted epistemic superiors, not peers. On the face of it, it's more of a challenge to rationally retain one's view in the presence of disagreement with multiple recognized epistemic superiors than a single peer.

to focus on purely philosophical matters such as compositional nihilism (there are no composite objects; Rosen and Dorr 2002, Sider ms.), artifact nihilism (there are no artifacts; van Inwagen 1990, Merricks 2001), moral error theory (there are no positive, first-order, substantive moral truths; Mackie 1977), mathematical error theory (there are no positive, first-order, substantive mathematical truths; Field 1980, Field 1989, Balaguer 1998), semantic nihilism (no assertions made with or beliefs expressed with vague terms are true; Sider and Braun 2007), and radical skepticism (there is virtually no knowledge).[3] The line between the philosophical theses with little or no scientific backing and those with significant scientific backing is usually considered to be generously fuzzy, but there are obvious examples on either side of the line. I focus here on the examples far on the philosophy side.

In evaluating metaphilosophical skepticism we need not evaluate the radical anti-commonsensical philosophical theories themselves. Indeed, I will assume for the sake of argument that they are all false and the commonsensical beliefs listed earlier are all true. Clearly, appropriate awareness of the credentials of a false theory can still ruin one's knowledge of a fact. Consider the Jupiter case again but now imagine that *all* professional astronomers have long accepted the "over 200 moons" theory (and there are many of these astronomers, they are independent thinkers, and so forth). You become aware that there is unanimous favorable expert opinion on the "over 200 moons" theory. As before, you think that they must have made some mistake, and your *one and only* reason is that you think the idea that a planet could have over 200 moons is just plain nuts. In this case you don't know that Jupiter has fewer than ten moons, even if against all odds your belief is true and the old evidence described in your childhood science texts was sound.

3   The renegade

In this section I present two conditions that the subject satisfies in scientific cases like the one involving Jupiter's moons. Then in the following two sections I'll explain how the metaphilosophical skeptic uses these conditions in her argument to reach her new kind of skepticism.

The first condition, immediately below, looks complicated but the idea behind it isn't: all it's really doing is making precise the vague thought that hypothesis H is taken by the significant portion of the relevant specialists to be true, and person S (who is an amateur with respect to H) knows that fact about the specialists as well as the fact that H's truth means P's falsehood.

Condition 1: Person S is familiar with hypothesis H (e.g. "Jupiter has over 200 moons") and with many of the issues surrounding H, including knowing the key facts that H is inconsist-

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[3] Philosophers occasionally use "error theory" to refer not to the theories listed above but to subsidiary claims regarding how those theories can account for why common sense goes wrong.

ent with P[4] (e.g. "Jupiter has fewer than ten moons") and that H is "live" in the following strong sense:

(i) For many years many of the best members of her contemporary intellectual community (e.g. professional astronomers who study the large bodies of our solar system) have thoroughly investigated H in order to determine whether it is true.

(ii) H is judged to have an excellent chance to be true by a significant number and percentage of the professionals in the field(s) relevant to H. These same specialists also think that P is probably false, for the simple reasons that the evidence for H is also against P and H and P are obviously mutually inconsistent.[5, 6]

(iii) Many of the professionals who endorse (or nearly endorse) H and reject P are S's *epistemic superiors* with respect to the topics most relevant to H and P: they are generally more informed than S is on the topics involving H, they have more raw intelligence than she has, they have thought about and investigated whether H is true longer and in more depth than she has, they have thought about and investigated the topics surrounding H longer and in more depth than she has, they are just as or even more intellectually careful than she is, they are no more relevantly biased than she is, and they have understood and fairly and thoroughly evaluated virtually all the evidence and reasons she has regarding H and P (and usually much additional evidence or reasons).[7]

(iv) Those professionals reached that favorable opinion of H and ~P based on arguments for H and ~P that are highly respected even by professionals who reject H and endorse P.

A hypothesis needs a *lot* of sociological support in order to satisfy (i)–(iv). For instance, merely being endorsed for years, by some excellent professionals, even internationally famous ones, will not mean that a hypothesis satisfies (i)–(iv). Condition 1 is quite demanding—and keep in mind that it says that (i)–(iv) not only are true but person S *knows* that they are true. For all the good press epistemicism, for instance, gets nowadays it might fail to satisfy (ii) (I suspect it does, but this is not an armchair matter). Furthermore, suppose that theory T was overwhelmingly voted the theory that is the best one we know of and the one that is most likely to be true. It might *still* fail to satisfy (ii) because the voters could also consistently insist that although T is the best and most likely to be true, it is unlikely to be true. The voters could think that we are still quite far from finding a theory that has any real chance at truth. (This won't be the case in which one

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[4] In section 5 we will see that it's not strictly necessary that H and P be logically incompatible.

[5] Here and throughout I use "evidence" to include epistemic support provided by philosophical argument, including a priori argument.

[6] If A obviously entails ~B and X is evidence for A, this usually means that X is evidence against B. There might be exceptions, but they won't apply to the cases at issue in which it's clear to everyone involved in discussions regarding H and P that the evidence for H is also evidence against P.

[7] These professionals I will occasionally refer to as "experts," which means *only* that they satisfy (i)–(iv).

theory is simply the negation of another.) Even the so-called "advocates" of T might not advocate its truth but its status as the best theory around in the sense of being the one on the shortest path to the truth.

When I say that S *knows* that so-and-so is her epistemic superior with respect to the topics most relevant to H and P, I don't mean she dwells on that fact whenever she reflects on her belief in P. Nor do I mean that she has consciously thought about and explicitly accepted *each* of the components of the above characterization of epistemic superiority. Although I don't want any requirement that stringent, I do want something a bit stronger than "S is disposed to accept that so-and-so fits all the superiority circumstances in (iii) from Condition 1." I want something highly realistic, something that actually applies to many of us philosophers who are confident enough to disagree with David Lewis regarding some metaphysical claim, say, and yet wise and reflective enough to readily admit that he knew and understood quite a bit more than we do regarding the topics directly relevant to the claim in question. I want to pick out an epistemic situation we often *actually* find ourselves in when we contemplate how our views conflict with those had by people we know full well to be better philosophers than we are in these areas. But I'm not sure what that really amounts to; as a result I won't offer *stipulations* regarding "epistemic superior" or "knows that so-and-so is S's epistemic superior."

Perhaps something along these lines conveys the relevant kind of awareness of disagreement in the face of epistemic superiority:

- I have consciously recognized that Lewis believes the opposite of what I believe.
- I am disposed to accept virtually all of the conditions in the characterization of epistemic superiority with respect to P, applied to Lewis and myself (part (iii) of Condition 1).
- I am disposed to admit that Lewis is my epistemic superior while simultaneously realizing that we disagree regarding P.

I may not have ever actually said, all in one breath, "Lewis is my epistemic superior regarding P but I'm right and he's wrong about P," but I have admitted in one way or another all three conditions on several occasions. The fundamental problem—I seem epistemically problematic in continuing to believe P—is worse, perhaps, if I have asserted all the parts of (iii) in one breath. But even without the simultaneous assertion, I don't look too good.

When I say that we admit that so-and-so is our epistemic superior on a certain topic or individual claim, I mean to rule out the situation in which you think a group of "experts" are frauds or massively deluded in spite of the fact that they are more intelligent than you are and have thought about H much longer than you have. If you think they are deluded, then you will hardly count them as your epistemic superiors. For instance, suppose there is a large group of people with high "raw intelligence" who formulate and examine all sorts of very complicated astrological theories. You don't understand even 10 per cent of what they are talking about, but you won't take them to be your epistemic superiors on the task of knowing the future because you think they are, well, idiots.

But there are other cases where you don't think the people in question are deluded even though you disagree with them on a massive scale. For instance, suppose you are an atheistic philosopher who respects the work done in the portion of the philosophy of religion that takes theism for granted. You look at the philosophical work on the trinity, for instance, and admire its philosophical quality—at least in some sense. The scholars are grappling with the three-in-one problem of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. As an atheist, you probably think this is a one-in-one issue, as neither God nor the Holy Spirit exists. Will you consider these scholars your epistemic superiors on the topic of the trinity, or on some specific claim C on that topic such as "The oneness in question is not numerical identity"?

Recall that one of the conditions on "recognized epistemic superiority" is this: you have to know that the superior is no more relevantly *biased* than you are. If you strongly believe that the trinity-believers are more biased than you are when it comes to religious matters, then of course they won't satisfy that part of (iii); so, you won't consider them superiors. You escape the skeptic's snare. But even if you thought that they are no more relevantly biased than you are, they still might not satisfy another part of (iii): you have to know that they are *more informed* than you are on the topics involving the claim C. If you are an atheist, then in one pertinent sense you will consider any theist to be much less informed about C and other religious matters compared to yourself, since you will think that almost all of her interesting religious beliefs are false (or based on false presuppositions). But in another sense you will judge her to be your epistemic superior on religious matters, and even particular claim C, as she knows a lot more about religion and various theories of the trinity than you do. You will also take her to know, or at least justifiably believe, many more *conditionals* regarding religion and the trinity than you do (e.g. "If God has quality X, then according to view Y Christ must have quality Z"). Presumably, most of these conditionals have never even occurred to you, as you think the topic is bunk and as a result don't stay abreast of research into the trinity. These observations show that we have to be careful how we understand "relevant matters" and "informed" as they occur in (iii). How they apply to the philosophical cases we're interested in is a topic for section 6.

Here is a preview of what the skeptic's argument will be like. On the face of it, when S learns about her epistemic superiors, as in Condition 1, S's belief in P now faces a *threat*: she's got good reason to think her belief is false. If that threat is not neutralized, then her belief in P won't amount to knowledge. But Condition 2, which I'll get to immediately below, suggests that she has nothing that neutralizes the threat. Therefore, her belief in P no longer amounts to knowledge. That is the very rough line of argument the skeptic will use although I will be offering significant changes to every bit of it, especially the conclusion.

In order to introduce Condition 2, suppose that Condition 1 applies to subject S. That is, S knows full well that a large percentage of the numerous relevant professionals agree that H is true and P is false and that they have this opinion as the result of epistemically upstanding research over many years; further, S knows that she is no expert

on any of these matters. We can suppose that the metaphilosophical skeptic is right to think that in these circumstances S has strong evidence that there is strong evidence for H and against P. In spite of all that, S might still know that her belief P is true, that the contrary hypothesis H is false, and that all those top professionals are just plain wrong. There are several ways S might still know those three things. First, S might know that she has some impressive evidence or other epistemically relevant item that the pros don't have or have insufficiently appreciated. This might be some evidence for P and against H. Or, S might have some rare evidence that shows that the evidence for H is fatally flawed, even though the facts about expert opinion strongly suggested that that evidence for H was good. These possibilities are consistent with the truth of Condition 1 applied to S. I'll be going over these and other possibilities when we turn to the philosophical cases. Condition 2 closes off some but not all of these possibilities:

Condition 2: If S knows of any evidence or other epistemically relevant items that seem to cast doubt on H, ~P, or the alleged evidence for H, then such items, if carefully, competently, and fairly considered by the members of her community of professionals who are thoroughly famil- iar with H and P (including her recognized epistemic superiors on the relevant topics), would be nearly universally and confidently judged to offer only quite weak evidence against H, ~P, and the alleged evidence for H. (In fact, very often even the specialists on H who *agree* with S that H is false and P is true would say as much.)

I designed Condition 2 to fit the following type of case (it may need fiddling with). Pre- tend you are a graduate student in paleontology who is aware of several rival hypotheses about the demise of the dinosaurs and who happens to believe the true meteor hypoth- esis: a meteor wiped out the dinosaurs. Your PhD supervisor asks what you plan to say about alternative hypothesis H in your dissertation (H might be the hypothesis that the dinosaurs were wiped out by a series of supervolcano eruptions). You say that that the- ory isn't very plausible but you're happy to throw in a section showing why it's implau- sible. She *agrees with you* that the meteor hypothesis is correct and H is false but she asks you what you plan to say against H. You give your spiel and she tells you flat out that what you've said is inadequate and you should either do much better with a more criti- cal section or drop it entirely and say in a footnote that you'll be merely assuming the falsehood of H. After all, professor so-and-so right down the hall is an advocate of H, he's certainly no dope, he isn't alone in his expert opinion, and you've offered nothing that puts any pressure on his view or his reasons for his view.

Condition 2 is saying that the experts who accept H and reject P (as well as the specialists who are agnostic on both H and P) know of S's evidence and other epis- temically relevant items that do or might support P or ~H. *They haven't overlooked anything S has*—just like in the graduate student case above. But just because they haven't missed anything doesn't mean that S fails to have an epistemic item that suf- fices for knowledge of P and ~H: there remains the possibility that they *underestimated* the epistemic significance of some of S's epistemic items of relevance to P and H. In the cases we're interested in, in which S is a philosopher, H is a purely philosophical

error theory, and P is an ordinary commonsensical claim, this epistemic item that S has need not be an *argument* that suffices for knowledge of P—at least, it need not be a dialectically effective argument. But our epistemic items go beyond our argumentative-persuasive abilities, especially if epistemological externalism is true.

Call the person who satisfies Conditions 1 and 2 a *well-informed mere mortal* with respect to H. She is *well informed* because she is aware of H, H's good status, and the relation of H to P; she is a *mere mortal* because, roughly put, she has no epistemic item regarding H and P that the experts have overlooked or would not reject and she knows that the advocates for H and ~P are her epistemic superiors on those topics. The graduate student in paleontology is a well-informed mere mortal, "mere mortal" for short. A child and any adult unfamiliar with the field relevant to H are not, as they fail to satisfy any of the demanding epistemic requirements of Condition 1. Another kind of mere mortal is an expert in the general field but whose specialization lies elsewhere. Professor Smith teaches various paleontology classes. She is perfectly aware of H but wouldn't be able to say anything interesting against it. She has the true meteor-killed-the-dinosaurs belief but like the graduate student her belief is too lucky (in some sense) to amount to knowledge. That's the type of person I have in mind as a well-informed mere mortal. I hope that Conditions 1 and 2 capture the important aspects of her epistemic position.

The *renegade* is the well-informed mere mortal who retains her belief in P. She is the target of the metaphilosophical skeptic's argument.

I would be surprised if "S believes P" wasn't polysemous. So, it is important that we not get confused regarding the notion of belief that is relevant here. When you're asked "What is your take on P?" it seems that in at least some conversational contexts, especially ones concerning philosophical questions, you are being asked to take the first-order, direct evidence you know of regarding P and announce how it strikes you as bearing on P. You are not being asked to give your considered judgment on all sources of evidence or take into account what anyone else thinks. Instead, you're being asked for something like your phenomenological intellectual reaction to that limited body of evidence. You're being asked this: when you consider this body of considerations, in which direction are you inclined: P, ~P, or neither? Never mind whether you "follow" or "give in" to that inclination, thereby coming to accept P for instance; that's another issue entirely. Correlative with this task of responding to "What is your take on P?" is a notion of belief that is similarly restricted. When you reply with "I believe P is true" you are not offering an objective assessment but rather a subjective reaction: *here is the doxastic direction in which I happen to find myself moved when I weigh those considerations*.

This is not an unreflective notion of belief, as it might be the result of years of study, but it's still a mere doxastic inclination in response to first-order evidence. Neither is it a weakly held belief, as the inclination in question might be very strong.

I find that a great many highly intelligent students interpret philosophical questions in this manner. I find it fascinating, partly because I find it foreign. I have the doxastic inclinations like everyone else, but I never thought of them as being *beliefs*. It took me years to figure it out, but I now suspect that when I ask my students for their beliefs

regarding a view or argument what they *hear* is often something along the line described above. In particular, when I go over basic issues in the epistemology of disagreement in a classroom there always are a bunch of students who are initially completely puzzled as to why disagreement with other people over philosophical issues should have *any relevance at all* to the epistemic status of their own opinions—even when I tell them that almost every philosopher in the world disagrees with them (as the case may be). Contrary to popular belief among philosophy teachers, these students aren't closet relativists or anything like that; they just interpret the notion of philosophical belief differently from me. I have also met professional philosophers who seem to have the same notion of belief in mind. This inclination-first-order notion of belief even shows up in scientific contexts. For instance, I have had plenty of students hear the questions "Was there a beginning to the physical universe?" and "Assuming there was a beginning, did it have a cause?" in this inclination-first-order manner. I suspect that people hear a question in that peculiar manner when (i) they are aware of some relevant first-order considerations regarding P, so they have some considerations to work with when responding to the question (e.g. unless they are astronomers they will *not* hear the question "How many moons does Jupiter have?" in this way), and (ii) either they think the question is highly philosophical or they think the relevant experts have come to no consensus, so they are free to ignore them entirely.

In any case, I am examining the case when the philosopher's *considered judgment* (not doxastic inclination) of *all* the relevant considerations (not just the first-order ones) is that P is true. A worry here, which I don't know how to finesse, is that the inclination-first-order notion of belief might be very common among philosophers who are voicing opinions outside their specialty areas, if not across the board. If Jen doesn't do any extensive research on free will or determinism, and you ask her what her "take" is on that topic, she might say "I am incompatibilist" even though all she is reporting is the direction of her inclination after gazing at the first-order evidence she is aware of. If this notion of belief is especially common, then the scope of metaphilosophical skepticism is thereby diminished, but only at the cost of drastically reducing the scope of "full" philosophical belief.

4 The metaphilosophical skeptic's principles

As I conceive the matter, the metaphilosophical skeptic is convinced that there is *something* epistemically bad about what the renegade is doing: when the well-informed mere mortal retains her belief, then she has thereby gone wrong in some important epistemic respect. Notice that the focus is on something the renegade *does*, an intellectual reaction to the discovery of being a renegade. Thus, the skeptic's thesis is just this: *the renegade's action of retaining her belief is seriously epistemically deficient.* The skeptic thinks that this epistemic defect holds of the renegade almost no matter what the true story of knowledge, justification, evidence, reason, and epistemic blame/permissibility turns out to

be, and it holds for virtually any renegade, regardless of her particular circumstances (e.g. the specific H and P involved, the manner in which the belief in P was formed, whether S's belief in P initially amounted to knowledge, and so forth). Therefore, she does not hold her thesis as a result of some complicated epistemological theory (e.g. "Assuming the truth of internalism and evidentialism . . ."); she thinks it follows from general principles that *virtually any* epistemological theory will embrace. As a result, she needs to be flexible regarding the nature of the "serious epistemic defect," as it can't be captive to the truth of how evidence, knowledge, and warrant are related (for instance). Only when I'm finished with the argument for her thesis will we be in a position to see how to interpret this "defect" in this flexible way.

In order to introduce the first principle the skeptic will use in her argument, suppose that Condition 1 is true of person S. On the face of it, this means that her epistemic superiors have some evidence that she doesn't have—evidence that must be pretty strong since it convinced the superiors that the renegade's belief P is false. But there are other possibilities. Maybe they have the same evidence as S but have "digested" that evidence properly whereas S has not. And due to that difference, they have seen that the evidence points toward P's falsehood, not truth. Then again, maybe S isn't deficient in either of those ways (namely, lacking evidence or improperly digesting the commonly held evidence) but has made some calculation error that her superiors avoided. (This might happen if P is the answer to some arithmetic problem.) A calculation error doesn't seem like the evidential mistakes in the first two possibilities, at least according to my understanding of "evidence."

For my primary purpose in this essay—the application of the principles below to philosophers—I know of no relevant difference between the first two possibilities. Further, the possibility of a calculation error won't apply to virtually any philosophical case, since very few if any philosophical disagreements pivot on calculation errors.

There are other possibilities of course. Perhaps S disagrees with her superiors because of a difference in "starting points," and not anything about evidence or calculation. There are various ways of understanding starting points. But I think that it is easy to overemphasize their importance. For instance, if I'm an epistemologist who doesn't work on vagueness or the philosophy of language and logic generally, then when I find out that a large number and percentage of the specialists in the philosophy of logic and language endorse some anti-commonsensical view regarding vagueness (e.g. supervaluationism, epistemicism, non-classical logic) after many years of rigorous investigation, the obvious thing for me to conclude, by far, is that they must have some decent arguments for their view—arguments I don't know about *and* that must be pretty impressive given that they have actually turned so many quality philosophers against common sense. On the face of it, there is no reason to think there is some mysterious difference in "starting points," whatever they are supposed to be, that is leading them against common sense.

In any case, here is the first principle:

Evidence of Evidence (Ev-of-Ev): if Condition 1 is true of person S, then S has strong evidence E_1 regarding her recognized epistemic superiors (her knowledge of the various socio-epistemic

facts about top professional endorsement, such as the four parts of Condition 1) that either (1) there is evidence E_2 (e.g. astronomical evidence) that S doesn't have or has underappreciated, that her recognized superiors have, and that strongly supports the idea that H is true and P is false (after all, it actually convinced many of those superiors that H is true and P is false), or (2) S has made a relevant calculation error that the superiors have avoided.

I chose the name of the principle based on the view that disjunct (2) will not play a role in what follows.

Suppose Homer knows that Sherlock Holmes has an excellent track record in murder investigations; he knows that Holmes is investigating the murder of the maid; he then hears Holmes announce after a long investigation that he has done as thorough a job as he has ever done and that the butler definitely did it. At that point *Homer acquires excellent evidence E_1* (Holmes' word and track record) that there is excellent evidence E_2 (the "detective evidence" Holmes uncovered in his investigation, evidence Homer has yet to hear) that the butler did it. Ev-of-Ev is an extension of that idea, applying it to a community of top professionals (instead of just one person, as in the Holmes case).

What if Homer *is* the butler, Homer is innocent, and he knows perfectly well that he's innocent? I don't think anything changes. Homer still has excellent evidence E_1 that Holmes has excellent evidence E_2 that he, Homer, killed the maid. It's just that Homer also has *other* evidence regarding the situation. His evidence that he didn't kill the maid is much, much stronger than Holmes' evidence E_2, at least under any ordinary circumstances. Now, if Holmes revealed to Homer that Homer's memory of the relevant particulars was incredibly bad, then Homer would begin to take seriously Holmes' strong detective evidence E_2 that Homer committed the crime, as his own evidence that he's innocent—from memory—would now be undermined.

Ev-of-Ev says that when there is a *significant* number and percentage (both of those) of *relevant* people who endorse H, where H is obviously inconsistent with commonsensical belief P, then E_1 is *strong* evidence that there is *strong* evidence E_2 that H is true and P is false (where S lacks or has underappreciated E_2 and the superiors have E_2). I've already addressed my use of "relevant" in parts (ii)–(iv) of Condition 1. Now I will say a few things about the uses of "significant" and "strong."

The use of "significant" comes from part (ii) of Condition 1. One is tempted to ask "How *large* a percentage and number is significant?" I think this might be like asking "How much money do I have to lose before I'm no longer rich?" or, more to the point, "How much evidence do I need before I'm justified in thinking the butler did it?" Suppose that H is the hypothesis that there are no composite artifacts and P is the claim that I have four baseballs in the trunk of my car. If there are 10,000 metaphysicians and philosophers of physics in the world and 90 per cent of them say H and ~P are true or quite likely to be true (and there is no funny business, such as "There was just one of them a year ago and he cloned himself 9,999 times"), then it looks as though the consequent of Ev-of-Ev is pretty reasonable. If there are just six in the world and five say H and ~P are true, then the consequent of Ev-of-Ev isn't plausible (good percentage but sample size too small). If there are 10,000 of them and just 16 per cent say H

and ~P, then the consequent of Ev-of-Ev is much less plausible (good sample size but percentage too small) unless there are extenuating circumstances (e.g. the 16 per cent are the clear superiors of the 84 per cent).[8] I doubt whether there are any magic numbers that would make the following statement reasonable: "Ev-of-Ev is true only when 'significant' picks out a number greater than A and percentage greater than B."

The reason S has for thinking his belief is false is a *strong* reason, something that makes it highly likely that the belief is false. I doubt whether a probabilistic reading of "strong reason" is appropriate here, but something along that line is in order. If you want to make it more precise, think of cases from science or mathematics. With respect to the Jupiter story, you first acquired knowledge of the fact that a large number and percentage of astronomers endorse the "over 200 moons" theory. You rightly took that information, E_1, to be excellent evidence that there is some evidence E_2 that (a) you don't have, (b) they do have, and (c) strongly supports the "over 200 moons" theory.

We can now introduce the rest of the principles she uses in her argument. To begin, assume that S believes P, S satisfies Condition 1, Ev-of-Ev is true, and the possibility of a relevant calculation error is remote. Then this claim follows:

(i)　S has strong evidence E_1 regarding her recognized epistemic superiors that there is evidence E_2 that S doesn't have or has underappreciated, that her recognized superiors have, and that strongly supports the idea that H is true and P is false.

It's natural to think that the truth of (i) means that S faces an epistemic "threat" to her belief in P. We are familiar with defeaters and defeater-defeaters. For instance, you start out believing P, learn some fact Q that suggests P is false or that your evidence for P is inadequate (so Q is a defeater), but then you learn yet another fact R that shows that Q is false or your evidence for Q is inadequate (so R is a defeater-defeater). Something similar applies in S's case. Although her learning E_1 presents a threat to her belief P, or so the skeptic claims, we can easily imagine that she has some extra information that "overwhelms" E_1. (I brought up these possibilities when discussing Condition 2 earlier.) If she has that extra information (that in some sense overwhelms E_1), then she is not epistemically deficient in any way in retaining her belief in P. Moreover, it seems that in order to avoid all epistemic deficiency in retaining P she *must* have some epistemic "item" (evidence, reason, reliability, etc.) that overwhelms E_1; it's not just an option. The next principle makes this idea explicit:

Evidence & ~Skepticism → Defeater (Ev&~Sk→D): if S has strong evidence E_1 regarding her recognized epistemic superiors that there is evidence E_2 that S doesn't have or has underappreciated, that her recognized superiors have, and that strongly supports the idea that H is true and P is false, then if in spite of having E_1 her retaining her belief in P suffers no serious epistemic defect, then she must have some epistemic item that overwhelms E_1.

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[8] The "unless" clause is important in practice. For instance, the percentage of philosophers who endorse the anti-commonsensical epistemicism increases greatly with familiarity of the relevant topics.

At this early stage we leave open what this item might be (e.g. evidence, reason, reliability, etc.) and what it means for it to "overwhelm" E_1.[9] Later we will look at concrete proposals. The skeptic says that since (i) and Ev&~Sk→D are true, we have the result that if S escapes metaphilosophical skepticism, then she has some item that cancels out E_1.

But remember that S satisfies Condition 2, which according to the skeptic makes it unlikely that S has any item that makes her escape the skeptical pit. Here we are appealing to a principle that allows exceptions:

Condition 2 → No Defeater (2→~D): if S satisfies Condition 2, then it's highly likely that S fails to have any epistemic item that "overwhelms" E_1.

When we add that principle to what we have already concluded about S's belief in P, we get the result that it's highly likely that S is caught in the skeptical snare: her retaining her belief in P is seriously epistemically deficient. Again, what the "serious epistemic defect" is will be addressed below in section 12.

5 The metaphilosophical skeptic's argument

Here is the *positive* argument schema for metaphilosophical skepticism, which uses the material from the previous section (the *negative* arguments, which consists of responses to objections, are in sections 6–11):

(a) A large number and percentage of the members of our intellectual community of contemporary philosophers and their advanced students satisfy Condition 1 with respect to some claims P and H. Moreover, the philosophers are renegades with respect to those claims: they think P is true.

(b) Ev-of-Ev is true for the cases mentioned in (a): if Condition 1 is true of one of the philosophers mentioned in (a), then she has strong evidence E_1 regarding her recognized epistemic superiors that either (1) there is evidence E_2 that she doesn't have or has underappreciated, that her recognized superiors have, and that strongly supports the idea that H is true and her contrary belief P is false, or (2) she has made a relevant calculation error that the superiors have avoided.

(c) But in the case of the philosophers and theories mentioned in (a), possibility (2) from (b) is not realized.

(d) Thus, by (a)–(c) each of the philosophers mentioned in (a) has strong evidence E_1 regarding her recognized epistemic superiors that there is evidence E_2 that she doesn't have or has underappreciated, that her recognized superiors have, and that strongly supports the idea that H is true and the contrary belief P is false.

(e) Ev&~Sk→D is true for the cases mentioned in (a): if one of the philosophers mentioned in (a) has strong evidence E_1 regarding her recognized epistemic

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[9] I am not saying that the item in question has to be a *defeater* as currently understood in the literature; I just couldn't think of a better term to use in the principle. What the item may amount to will become clear in section 11.

superiors that there is evidence E_2 that she doesn't have or has underappreciated, that her recognized superiors have, and that strongly supports the idea that H is true and the contrary belief P is false, then if in spite of having E_1 her retaining her belief P suffers no serious epistemic defect, then she must have some epistemic item that overwhelms E_1.

(f) Thus, by (d) and (e) for each of the philosophers mentioned in (a), if in spite of having E_1 her retaining her belief P suffers no serious epistemic defect, then she must have some epistemic item that overwhelms E_1.

(g) But most of the philosophers mentioned in (a) satisfy Condition 2 with respect to H: if they have or know of any evidence or other epistemically relevant items that *seem* to cast doubt on H, or the negation of P, or the evidence the advocates of H have for H, then such items, if carefully, expertly, and fairly considered by the members of her community of professionals who are thoroughly familiar with the relevant issues, would be nearly universally and confidently rejected as insufficient to rule out H, the evidence for H, or the negation of P.

(h) 2→~D is true for the cases mentioned in (a): if one of the philosophers in (a) satisfies Condition 2, then it's highly likely that she fails to have any epistemic item that "overwhelms" E_1.

(i) Thus, by (f)–(h) it's highly likely that her retaining her belief P suffers a serious epistemic defect.

In what follows I am going to assume without argument that the argument (a)–(i) is sound for hypotheses that are live in virtue of scientific evidence ("scientifically live" so to speak): when the live hypothesis that conflicts with your belief firmly belongs to science, then your retaining your renegade belief is seriously epistemically defective. So the argument is assumed to work in the Jupiter case. My project in the rest of this essay is threefold: present the case that the argument is sound for ordinary philosophical disagreements (that don't go violently against common sense), present the case that the argument is sound for the error theory cases, and see what follows from the hypothesis that metaphilosophical skepticism is false in the error theory cases.

The objector to the metaphilosophical skeptic needs to defend her claim that only scientific liveness and mere mortality, and not purely philosophical liveness and mere mortality, are strong enough to generate a skeptical result. She needs, in other words, to point out some *relevant* epistemological difference between science and philosophy, one that shows that purely philosophical liveness and mere mortality is epistemically impotent. There are loads of differences of course, even interesting epistemological ones. The goal is to find an epistemological one that *justifies* the thought that the argument fails for purely philosophical hypotheses even though it's sound for scientific hypotheses.[10]

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[10] There are many objections to metaphilosophical skepticism (e.g. no one is forced to bite the bullets error theorists bite) that I won't deal with because they fail to even suggest any weakness in the original argument or thesis.

6 Comments on premise (a)

Premise (a), which says that the renegade situation occurs in philosophy, is pretty clearly true for many philosophers and philosophical claims. I can think of just two objections. Here is the first:

The metaphilosophical skeptic is assuming that there are philosophical experts, just like there are astronomical experts. But this is a dubious assumption. For instance, if there are philosophical experts, then one would think that both Dennett and Chalmers are experts in the philosophy of consciousness. But given the diversity of their views on consciousness, at least one of them is almost completely wrong about the nature of consciousness, thereby ruining his chance at expertise. And if virtually no one is an expert on material composition or vagueness, for instance, then the fact that a significant number and percentage of those non-experts endorse radical error theories doesn't mean that there is strong evidence for those theories.

The idea here is vague, but I assume the objection is targeting Condition 1, which could be crudely summarized with "Person S knows that lots of the *experts* disagree with her." However, in the careful presentation of the metaphilosophical skeptic's argument there is no mention of philosophical "experts." The closest claim occurs in part (iii) in Condition 1:

Many of the professionals who endorse H and reject P are generally more informed than S is on the topics involving H, they have more raw intelligence than she has, they have thought and investigated whether H is true longer and in more depth than she has, they have thought about and investigated the topics surrounding H longer and in more depth than she has, they are just as or even more intellectually careful than she is, they are no more relevantly biased than she is, and they have understood and fairly and thoroughly evaluated virtually all the evidence and reasons she has regarding P (and usually much additional evidence or reasons).

Whether the philosophers described count as "experts" depends on what one means by that vague term. In any case, there is no reason I know of for thinking that this epistemic condition isn't known to be satisfied for many of us with regard to many of our philosophical beliefs (setting skepticism aside).

Here is another objection to (a):

Even our best and brightest are utterly epistemically ill-equipped to find the truth regarding the philosophical problems that we all work on. We are intelligent enough to pose questions that we are incapable of answering. We might as well be young children wondering what it's like to be married for fifty years. In some sense the twenty year old is in a better position than the eight year old, but since both are so far from epistemic adequacy, part (iii) of Condition 1 doesn't really apply to anyone in philosophical matters, as we are all about equally awful when it comes to investigating philosophical questions.

Sometimes I am inclined to accept this depressing view. (Why else are we discussing the very same things Aristotle investigated so many centuries ago, and in largely the same terms?) But if it's true, then surely metaphilosophical skepticism is true too, even if the argument for that thesis given above fails.

I conclude that premise (a) is true for many philosophers and their philosophical beliefs. The only wrinkle is whether it is true for error theories, the extreme case. In the rest of this section I argue that it is true for those theories.

To begin, I'm stipulating that the philosophical hypotheses are genuine *error* theories.[11] For instance, as I understand them compositional nihilism and artifact nihilism say three things: there are no laptops; all ordinary occurrences of "I have a laptop," "Laptops exist," "Some laptops are over $1000" are all just plain false; *and* ordinary people have the corresponding ordinary false beliefs about laptops (so it isn't the case that the sentences are all false but our beliefs have some fancy semantics that makes them true even when "properly" expressed by the false sentences). Theories that merely look error-theoretic about laptops (e.g. "Laptops exist and many cost about $800 but none of them *really* exist, or exist in the fundamental sense," or some contextualism on "exist" or "laptop") are not to the point (e.g. the theories of Horgan and Potrč (2000) or Ross Cameron (2010) are probably not error theories in my sense).[12] I get to pick and choose among theories here, landing on the ones genuinely contrary to common sense.

Even with that clarification, I can think of four promising objections to premise (a) applied to error theories.[13]

First, some philosophers might be tempted to say "Well, no one really believes radical error theories that are genuinely inconsistent with common sense beliefs; so those theories are never live and Condition 1 is thereby not met"; such philosophers are misinformed. Please keep in mind that it is neither here nor there whether as a matter of contingent fact any of these particular genuine error theories is live right this minute; we should not be parochial. Philosophers will believe almost anything—even today, when the percentage of philosophers who endorse the truth of commonsense belief is peculiarly high, historically considered. All one has to do is peruse philosophy journals from fifty or hundred years ago to get a sense of how what seems obviously true in one era is judged obviously false in another era. And in that exercise we are looking at just one century of the actual world.

Here is a second objection to premise (a) applied to error theories:

Although I recognize the anti-commonsensical philosophers to be much more informed and productive than I am when it comes to the topics in question, they aren't my superiors when it comes to *evaluating* those anti-commonsensical theories. David Lewis, for instance, might leave me in

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[11] Whether "error theory" can be defined is beside the point. I'm using that phrase to pick out the theories listed in the essay as well as others that similarly deny huge portions of beliefs that are nearly universal, in being commonsensical in almost all cultures throughout almost all history (including today).

[12] Compositional nihilism strikes some people as incoherent: it says that there are some particles arranged tree-wise, it says that there are no trees, and yet this conjunction is incoherent because the first condition is metaphysically sufficient for the second condition. But that alleged metaphysical connection is denied by the nihilist. Nihilism might be necessarily false (like many philosophical theses) but it's not obviously so.

[13] Some objections clearly won't work. Hegelians deny that we philosophers *ever* disagree with one another in any "substantive" way (Hegel 1995). A desperate move to say the least, despite suggesting deep thoughts about philosophical progress from a temporally wide perspective.

the dust when it comes to generating various worthwhile arguments, concepts, claims, and theories, but he is no better than me when it comes to determining whether those theories and claims are really true. In effect, there are far fewer mere mortals then the metaphilosophical skeptic thinks.

I suppose that view might be correct in a few isolated cases, but for the most part people who are my philosophical superiors in all those ways will be better than I am at evaluating claims in the corresponding area. Take a particular case: vagueness. Timothy Williamson, Roy Sorenson, Hud Hudson, Paul Horwich, and other experts on vagueness are epistemicists (in the possibility we're envisioning, not to mention our actual present time). I, on the other hand, barely even *understand* supervaluationism, how the "definitely" operator works or what it means, the issues relevant to Gareth Evans' famous argument against vague identity, and so on. It's silly to think that I'm anywhere near as good as Williamson, Sorenson, Horwich, Hudson, and the others in evaluating the pros and cons of epistemicism. While it is certainly possible that I stumble on an argument that they don't know about or haven't sufficiently appreciated that dooms their anti-commonsensical theory, we should stick with the *most common scenario*, in which the mere mortal has not had the rare fortune to discover some crucial bit of evidence that all the anti-commonsensical philosophical experts have missed or failed to sufficiently appreciate. Part (iii) of Condition 1 in particular is definitely true of me with respect to the topic of vagueness (as well as many other topics that generate radical error theories) and there is nothing exceptional about that fact.

A third objection says that there are no "genuine" error theories as characterized earlier. Consider the following rough train of thought.

When people "accept" a certain claim in ordinary life, do they think it's *literally true* or are they best interpreted as thinking that it's *true for all practical purposes*? For the most part, they aren't even aware of the contrast, so how do we interpret their assent to "There are four baseballs in the trunk"? (It won't help to ask them, as they don't know the difference.) And what kind of commitment is sufficient for *belief*? Does it have to be literal truth or just practical truth? Or is "belief" polysemous? Maybe it's *indeterminate* whether they have "literal belief" or "practical belief."

One might take those and similar reflections and (somehow) argue that charity of interpretation requires us to say that although (a) the error theorist truly believes that there aren't four baseballs in the trunk, (b) she truly believes that her belief is literally true, (c) the ordinary person truly believes that there are four baseballs in the trunk, and (d) she truly believes that her belief is literally true, "belief" is polysemous and the two operative notions of belief differ in such a way that there is no disagreement: the two baseball beliefs can both be true with no inconsistency (perhaps "true" is polysemous too). I don't know how the argument for this combination of claims would go. For one thing, it hardly seems "charitable" to say that the error theorist isn't disagreeing with the ordinary belief when she insists that she is denying the ordinary person's baseball belief. But what if this no-disagreement view is true anyway?

These are deep waters, but I don't think they matter to the metaphilosophical skeptic's argument: strictly speaking, H need not be logically inconsistent with P. Consider again the Jupiter story. You think Jupiter has fewer than ten moons. You read in

the science section of the *New York Times* a long article detailing the fact that 95 per cent of astronomers have over the last quarter century come to think that Jupiter has over 200 moons. The article includes descriptions of the new methods used to come to the new consensus. However, it turns out that the reporter failed to understand that the astronomers are employing an alternative conception of a moon in such a way that their "over 200 moons" belief isn't at all inconsistent with your "fewer than ten moons" belief. This difference in conceptions is missed by the reporter (imagine that). Even if all of that is true, it seems to me that in this situation you have still been presented with excellent evidence E_1 that there is excellent evidence E_2 against your belief (so premise (c) is true; thus, (a) can be altered so that H and P need not be logically inconsistent). It turns out that E_2 is not excellent evidence against your "fewer ten moons" belief even though it may be excellent evidence for the astronomers' "over 200 moons" belief. But you have no evidence for that fact (the fact that E_2 is not excellent evidence against your belief) and plenty of evidence against it. So even if the error theorists aren't really disagreeing with the ordinary person's belief—or the amateur metaphysician's belief—it seems that the lesson applies anyway, just as in the Jupiter case.

If the amateur philosopher *knows*, or at least has good overall evidence, that her belief isn't really contradicted by the error theorist's theory, then perhaps she has not been presented with excellent evidence that there is significant evidence against her commonsensical belief (as Ev-of-Ev says). But I am confident that not many philosophers are in such a position. So, even when the objection succeeds it will have vanishingly small significance. Near the end of section 11 I will remark on the peculiar way that error theories deny common sense.

Now for the fourth objection to (a) applied to error theories. Assuming that there are genuine error theories and that they are often live, premise (a) makes the additional claim that many contemporary philosophers satisfy Condition 1 with respect to those error theories. But that last claim can be questioned. In section 3 I gave the trinity example, in which the atheistic philosopher will often think that some theistic philosophers are "more informed" than she is regarding the trinity, at least in two senses: they will know more about the various theories of the trinity and they will know many more conditional truths about the trinity. But in a more substantive sense of "informed," the atheistic philosopher will judge the theistic philosophers to be *less* informed than she is when it comes to the trinity: after all, she thinks there is no trinity to puzzle about (all there is is the one human, Jesus).

The reason this phenomenon is relevant is that some philosophers have similarly dismissive views to whole swaths of philosophical inquiry. For instance, some people think analytic metaphysics is nonsense all the way through. I once had a colleague who thought that epistemologists had nothing interesting to work on, and as a consequence was dismissive of the entire enterprise. These philosophers will not count as renegades with respect to theses in those philosophical areas, thereby escaping the metaphilosophical skeptic's argument.

I will offer just a few comments regarding these "dismissive" philosophers. First, I will be considering the possibility that many renegades have epistemic items—such as Moorean

moves—that are sufficient to avoid metaphilosophical skepticism. It's not the case that the only way to avoid skepticism is to think that Kit Fine and Ted Sider are not your epistemic superiors when it comes to material composition and persistence through time, Tim Williamson and Paul Horwich aren't your superiors regarding vagueness, and so on. There is hope for the commonsensical philosopher even if she respects her colleagues and isn't arrogant! Second, notice that the error theories aren't all from metaphysics (although most are). Error theories show up in the philosophy of language and logic, the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of mind, metaethics, and the philosophy of physics as well. And don't forget traditional skepticism, which is an epistemological error theory. So, in order to escape the clutches of Condition 1 via the dismissive attitude, a philosopher would have to be dismissive of an enormous portion of philosophy. Although I won't argue the matter here, I strongly suspect the cure is worse than the disease: the epistemic sin of rejecting the relevant areas of philosophy (thereby avoiding the metaphilosophical skeptic's snare) is larger than the epistemic sin of being a well-informed mere mortal who retains her commonsensical beliefs. Furthermore, one will be faced with the task of responding to the objection that one's own philosophizing is hardly better than that found in the dismissed areas. Indeed, it is difficult for me to see how an informed philosopher could be epistemically responsible in dismissing any *one* of the areas that the error theories fall into, let alone all of them. For instance, all one has to do in order to see the merit in various odd theories in metaphysics is spend a few months thinking about the Statue–Clay case, the Tibbles–Tib case, the Ship of Theseus case, the problem of the many, and a few other puzzles (see sections 1–3 of chapter 5 of Sider 2001 for an introduction to some of these issues). To see the merit in inconsistency views of truth spend a few months grappling with the semantic paradoxes. I'll consider the Moorean move in section 11.

7 Comments on premise (b)

Premise (b), which is Ev-of-Ev, says that if Condition 1 applies to S, then S has superb evidence E_1 (her knowledge of facts about "expert" endorsement) that there is strong evidence E_2 (e.g. philosophical arguments) that H is true and P is false. This principle should not be terribly controversial. It doesn't mean that S should think that E_2 is *really is* strong evidence; it doesn't even say E_2 exists. S might have other evidence E_3 that suggests—or even proves—that E_2 is quite weak or non-existent, where E_3 is more impressive than E_1. For instance, S might know of some relevant fact that the superiors possess but have failed to sufficiently appreciate. (Though Condition 2 will close this possibility off.) S might know that although a significant number and percentage (say 65 per cent) of the relevant superiors think H is true and P is false, a whopping 100 per cent of the thirty or so superiors commonly acknowledged to be the *most* knowledgeable about H and P are firmly convinced that H is false and P is true—despite the fact that these thirty philosophers are fiercely independent thinkers who disagree with one another all the time on many related issues. In such a case S can quite reasonably (not to say truthfully) conclude that the many advocates of (H & ~P) have made some error somewhere that in turn *their* epistemic

superiors have noticed, even though S might not have the slightest idea what it is. (This is similar to the Jupiter case with the small number of renegade astronomers.) So S starts out *knowing* P, becomes a bit concerned when she finds that 65 per cent of the superiors think ~P (since she has been presented with good sociological evidence E_1 that there's good philosophical evidence E_2 against her belief), but then is reassured when she later learns that 100 per cent of the top philosophers independently think P (as she has now been presented with good sociological evidence E_3 that the philosophical evidence E_2 against her belief has been neutralized). In this scenario in which she retains her belief, it seems pretty reasonable that she keeps her knowledge (the metaphilosophical skeptic can admit all of this). But it doesn't do anything to suggest that Ev-of-Ev is wrong.

Here is an objection to Ev-of-Ev.

We defer to *scientific* experts and liveness; and we ought to. There seems to be a pretty tight connection between being scientifically live and being probably-roughly-true: if a hypothesis has the former quality, then there is good reason to think it has the latter quality. Crudely put, we are all aware that science is reliable. That is why a scientifically live hypothesis that conflicts with your belief poses a formidable epistemic threat to your belief, a threat that must be defused in order for the belief to be knowledge (at least provided you're aware of the threat). But no such connection holds between the characteristic of being philosophically live and being probably-roughly-true. Crudely put, we all know that philosophy is unreliable. So expert endorsement fails to mean significant evidence. A philosophically live hypothesis doesn't threaten our contrary beliefs.

The target of this objection *seems* to be Ev-of-Ev, the principle that mere mortals have strong evidence of strong evidence for H. Alternatively, perhaps the objector is agreeing that such evidence E_1 exists but is saying that by going through the above reasoning the mere mortal gets an epistemic item sufficient for overwhelming E_1; that would mean the objection really targets 2→~D. In any case, I think the objection fails.

The supporter of this objection needs to explain why the fact that we often defer to scientists but not philosophers is epistemically significant. Clearly, if we did so merely because philosophers smell worse than scientists this would not mean that philosophical liveness was less epistemically potent than scientific liveness. So the strength of the objection lies in the plausibility of its explanation for the difference in deferment practice: the objector has to explain why we *justifiably* fail to defer to philosophers.

The objection makes an attempt: we defer to one but not the other because we are aware that the connection between being scientifically live and being probably-roughly-true is much tighter than the connection between being philosophically live and being probably-roughly-true. But I think that anyone who has actually done some science knows that that explanation is empirically false. Scientists put forth false views all the time, and in large quantities. Philosophers and laypeople end up hearing about just the supremely best ones, but the oodles of run-of-the-mill false ones are there too. Nevertheless, the objection is worth taking seriously because we are aware that the *primary* scientific theories, the ones that have been around a long time and are pivotal for research, are epistemically much better than the analogous philosophical theories.

That sounds reasonable: we are aware that long-term vigorous endorsement of a scientific theory by scientists who are experts in the relevant area provides much more reason to believe that theory than long-term vigorous endorsement of a purely philosophical theory by philosophers who are "experts" in the relevant areas. But this argument has a gap in the crucial spot. It doesn't matter whether we know that the *significant scientific endorsement → probably roughly true* connection is stronger than the *significant philosophical endorsement → probably roughly true* connection. The metaphilosophical skeptic can agree with that comparative claim. Her point, which is obviously true, is that the comparative claim is moot. The only thing that matters is this: does long-term vigorous endorsement of a purely philosophical theory by the top philosophers in the relevant areas provide *enough* reason to sabotage my retention of my amateur belief that those theories are false and the relevant part of common sense is true—even if it isn't as epistemically powerful as the analogous scientific endorsement? Just because science beats the hell out of philosophy in this one respect gives us no reason at all to think that philosophical liveness is not epistemically significant enough for the truth of metaphilosophical skepticism. That's the gap in the objection.

What if a philosopher comes to reasonably believe that not only is the *significant philosophical endorsement → probably roughly true* connection much weaker than the analogous science connection (a belief that the metaphilosophical skeptic may agree with) but is so weak that E_1 does not, in fact, supply her with strong evidence that there is strong evidence against P—despite the fact that the above objection supplies no reason for thinking this? This would mean, of course, that she thinks Ev-of-Ev is false. But so what? The skeptic relies on just the truth of that principle; the renegade doesn't have to believe it in order for it to do its work in the skeptic's argument.

But suppose I'm wrong and Ev-of-Ev is false for philosophy. As with the last objection to premise (a), the cure is epistemically worse than the disease. If Ev-of-Ev is false for philosophy, then we have scenarios such as this: when you learn that 44 per cent of philosophers of logic and language say H with respect to theories of truth, you have not acquired strong evidence that they have strong evidence for H. Why might that be? The only answer I can think of: it's because those philosophers don't have any strong evidence for H, even though they've been evaluating H for many years and they started out not only with no emotional attachment to H (H isn't anything like "God exists") but a strong disposition to *reject* H (recall that H is an anti-commonsensical claim). If all that is true, then it says something epistemically horrible about philosophy.

8   Comments on premise (e)

I have already tried to motivate premise (e), the Ev&~Sk→D principle, in section 3. This principle says that if one of the philosophers mentioned in (a) has strong evidence E_1 that there is evidence E_2 that she doesn't have or has underappreciated (and so on), then if in spite of having E_1 her retaining her belief P suffers no serious epistemic defect, then she must have some epistemic item that overwhelms E_1. The skeptic is not putting

any untoward limits on the items that can do the work in overwhelming E_1. Perhaps all that is needed is a huge amount of warrant for P obtained in the utterly ordinary way (e.g. seeing a baseball in the trunk of one's car, for the compositional nihilism case), so nothing like an *argument* against H or E_2 is required. Further, the item need not "counter" E_2 at all. For instance, a person who is mathematically weak will still know that $1 \neq 2$ even if she can't find any error in a "proof" that $1 = 2$ (the "proofs" in question usually illicitly divide by zero at some point). She has no direct counter to the derivation; all she has is a phenomenal amount of warrant for her commonsensical belief that $1 \neq 2$. Perhaps something similar holds in the philosophical cases we are examining, at least for the error theory cases. I will consider that possibility in section 11. All the Ev&~Sk→D principle is saying is that philosophers need *some* item that can do the trick; she is not demanding that the item counter E_2 or H at all—even if she would be right to make such a demand.

I will consider just one objection to Ev&~Sk→D.

(i) In truth, there is no evidence for the purely philosophical error theories, and (ii) because of that fact their sociological liveness does not threaten our beliefs (thereby lowering their warrant levels enough so that they don't amount to knowledge). The arguments supporting those theories are not obviously mistaken in any way, which is why excellent philosophers continue to endorse them, but that hardly means that those arguments supply honest-to-goodness evidence for their conclusions. For instance, if all the experts who endorse hypothesis H and reject common belief P are using fatally flawed methods in gathering evidence for H and against P, then such methods are not generating evidence for H or against P, since "evidence" is a kind of success term that rules out this kind of pseudo-support. This observation is especially warranted for pure philosophy since there is serious reason to think that large parts of purely philosophical argument (e.g. synthetic a priori reasoning) are irredeemably flawed. In other words, in order to escape metaphilosophical skepticism it is not necessary to have any interesting or impressive epistemic item when E_2 doesn't actually exist; and for the error theories E_2 does not in fact exist.

I doubt whether claim (i) is true, for reasons I'll get to in section 11, but I won't evaluate it here, as the objection fails on claim (ii), whether or not claim (i) is true. An example will prove this. Pretend that all the science behind radiometric dating (the main method for figuring out that many things on earth are many millions of years old) is fatally flawed in some horrendous manner, so those methods don't generate (real) evidence (in the "success" sense of "evidence"). Even so, since I have become aware of the fact that the scientific community is virtually unanimous in the view that radiometric dating is accurate and shows that the Earth is hundreds of millions if not several billion years old, my creationist belief that the Earth is just a few thousand years old doesn't amount to knowledge, even if it's true and did amount to knowledge before I heard about radiometric dating and scientific opinion. Awareness of significant expertly endorsed "pseudo-evidence," if you want to call it that, is sufficient to sabotage belief retention in many cases.

Further, the metaphilosophical skeptic need not hold that the evidence for purely philosophical error theories is often or at least some times good enough to warrant *belief*

in the truth of those theories. On the contrary, she might insist that the evidence for error theories is almost never *that* good, so the philosophers who actually believe these theories are doing so unjustifiably.

9   Comments on premise (g)

I don't see much basis for quarreling with premise (g), which is the claim that Condition 2 applies to many typical philosophers with respect to philosophical claims they disagree with. Premise (g) says that the specialists who accept H and reject P (as well as the experts who are agnostic on both H and P) are aware of and unimpressed by S's evidence and other epistemically relevant items that do or might support P or cast doubt on H or E_2. With regard to the error theories, in particular, it is implausible to think that I the amateur have some special piece of evidence or whatnot that the epistemicists or compositional nihilists or moral error theorists have overlooked, as I don't do expert work in any of those areas. Perhaps the error theorists have seriously underestimated the epistemic warrant supplied by, for instance, the alethic reliability of the belief-producing cognitive processes that led to my belief in P, but that is another matter—a potentially important one I'll deal with in section 11. Of course, I might be one of the lucky ones who have reasons that not only cast doubt on H, ~P, and/or E_2 but that would be judged by the advocates and agnostics on H to be new and impressive; premise (g) allows for the existence of such people. The metaphilosophical skeptic's point with (g) is that these people are uncommon.

10   Initial comments on premise (h)

This premise, principle 2↦~D, says that if a philosopher in (a) also satisfies Condition 2, then it's highly likely that she fails to have any epistemic item that overwhelms E_1. Here is one objection to this premise:

When I look at the diversity of opinion of my epistemic superiors regarding H and P, and I see that they are utterly divided on whether H is true despite the fact that they are in constant and rich communication with one another concerning the considerations for and against H, that tells me that those considerations are just plain inconclusive. Let's face it: despite their great intelligence and best efforts they are confused by the arguments they are working on. In some real sense the specialists' opinions *cancel out* when they are divided, as is the case when, say, 40 per cent accept H, 30 per cent reject H, and 30 per cent withhold judgment. And once their views cancel out, we are left where we started, with our initial belief P unthreatened.

The idea here is that the renegade could go through this reasoning and thereby acquire an epistemic item sufficient for overwhelming E_1.

The first problem here is that none of this singles out pure philosophy over pure science; the second problem is that it's pretty clearly false in the scientific case (which suggests it won't be true in the philosophy case). Just think of the Jupiter case again: if

40 per cent of the astronomers accept the "over 200 moons" theory, 30 per cent reject it, and 30 per cent withhold judgment, this shows that the issue is unresolved in the public square, which is exactly where the mere mortal lies. She would be a fool to think her childhood belief regarding the number of moons was correct.

Here is another objection to 2→~D:

Some philosophers have given very general arguments that suggest that virtually all purely philosophical error theories have to be false or at least not worthy of serious consideration due to radically insufficient overall evidence (e.g. Mark Johnston 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Paul Horwich 1998; Frank Jackson 1998; Crispin Wright 1994; Thomas Kelly 2008; for rebuttals to these arguments see Alex Miller 2002 and Chris Daly and David Liggins 2010). Those philosophical arguments supply me with good evidence E_3 that the evidence E_1 (based on expert endorsement) for the evidence E_2 (based on philosophical arguments) for the error theory is misleading. That is, the anti-error theory arguments show that even though E_1 exists and is good evidence for the existence and strength of evidence for an error theory, the evidence E_3 presented by the anti-error theory philosophers cancels out E_1. So, most renegades are exceptions to 2→~D.

Let us assume on behalf of the objector that philosopher Fred *knows* the soundness of some general line of reasoning that really does show that E_1 is misleading evidence for E_2, since the line of reasoning Fred knows about shows that E_2 is actually quite weak. *So we are assuming that there really is a general line of argument that successfully proves that all these error theories are virtually without any support*. Hence, Fred is one of the exceptions to 2→~D. Unfortunately, all this will demonstrate is how lucky Fred is, since the great majority of philosophers are not so epistemically fortunate, regardless of whether such arguments are possible or actual or even actually known to be sound by a few fortunate individuals such as Fred. Matters would be different if it were very widely known that such anti-error theories are correct, but it goes without saying that this isn't the case now; nor was it the case in the past (and there is no reason I know of to think it will become widely known in the near future). The metaphilosophical skeptic can consistently combine her skepticism with the assertion that she, like Fred, *knows* perfectly well that all error theories are false and have no significant supporting evidence (in the "success" sense of "evidence").

There is another way to construe the objection. Perhaps the idea is that if a philosopher sincerely *thinks* she has an excellent argument against all (or a good portion) of the error theories, then that's enough to render her belief retention reasonable. Even if she's wrong about having such an argument, if she merely thinks she has one, then she can hardly be blamed for sticking with her commonsensical belief. Her conviction that she has the magic argument against error theories is enough to win the reasonableness of her retaining her commonsensical belief; the conviction suffices as the required epistemic item.

There's some truth to that line of reasoning. If one really is so clueless that one thinks one has, as an amateur with respect to the operative subfields, an argument of staggering philosophical consequence—which is obviously what her argument would have to

be—then there is something epistemically appropriate in her sticking with her belief. The skeptic should allow this: the belief retention is epistemically flawless. But then she finds epistemic fault somewhere else: the commonsensical philosopher's belief that she has the magic pro-commonsense argument that "should" be rocking the philosophical community. Only the desperately naïve, arrogant, or otherwise epistemically flawed professional philosopher could have such a belief. So, although she may escape the metaphilosophical skeptical snare, she is merely trading one epistemic sin for another.

In spite of my rejection of those two objections to 2⇸~D, in my judgment this premise is the one that is most likely to be false for the cases we're interested in. The *obvious* candidates for epistemic items that are up to the job are, I think, already listed in Condition 2; so they won't help us avoid the skeptical snare. The whole interest in this premise lies in the possible non-obvious exceptions: do typical philosophers who satisfy Condition 1 and Condition 2 usually have epistemic items strong enough that they suffer no epistemic defect in retaining their commonsensical beliefs?

11 The Overwhelming Warrant objection to premise (h)

The one objection to metaphilosophical skepticism that I think has a prayer of working offers an affirmative answer to the question just posed: a considerable percentage of renegades have epistemic items that are sufficient for "overwhelming" E_1. Here is the objection:

Let us admit that when a large number and percentage of recognized "experts" in philosophy believe an error theory based on epistemically responsible investigations over many years and what they consider to be multiple lines of significant yet purely philosophical support, we are faced with impressive sociological evidence E_1 that those theories have impressive philosophical evidence E_2 in their favor—where E_2 is impressive enough to actually convince all those legitimate experts that the error theory is really literally true. After all, it's not plausible that the epistemic weight of their considered opinion all of a sudden vanishes as soon as they move from scientifically relevant considerations to purely philosophical ones.

Despite all that, our commonsensical beliefs have *huge* amounts of warrant backing them up and that's an epistemic item that suffices for the consequent of Ev&~Sk→D. Perhaps reliability comes in here: commonsensical beliefs such as "I have a laptop" and "Dogs are dogs" are formed via extremely reliable and otherwise epistemically upstanding processes, and so the resulting beliefs have a great deal of warrant—even if we aren't aware of its strength. In any case, it takes a correspondingly very powerful body of evidence to render those beliefs unjustified overall, and although we have good reason to think the purely philosophical arguments E_2 for error theories are good, they are not *that* good. Science might be up to the task (as science rejected the "Earth doesn't move" bit of common sense) but not pure philosophy.

It's worth noting right away that this objection has no applicability outside of error theories. It would be over the top to think that one's belief P had overwhelming warrant when it comes to content externalism, four-dimensionalism, the Millian view of proper names, or hundreds of other philosophical theses. Thus, this objection will not justify the renegade in any of those cases.

There are a couple ways to fill out the objection. It definitely makes this comparative claim W, which I will focus on below: the warrant that renegades have for P overwhelms the warrant supplied by E_2 against P (when it comes to philosophical error theories). At this point the objection can proceed in either of two ways. It can say that the mere *truth* of W gives the renegade an epistemic item strong enough that her belief retention is not epistemically defective—so the renegade doesn't also need to be *aware* that W is true. Alternatively, it can say that the renegade is off the hook only if she is aware that W is true: only with that awareness does she actually *possess* an epistemic item sufficient to secure her belief retention. Here is a Moorean speech that would express the renegade's endorsement of W:

I am epistemically justified in thinking that any argument that says there are no cars, for instance, has just got to have a premise that is less justified than the claim that there are cars—even if I can't put my finger on which premise in the anti-commonsensical argument is guilty. I am justified in gazing at error theories and just saying "That can't be right." Notice that I am engaging in a reliable belief retention scenario: although E_1 is indeed strong evidence that there is strong evidence E_2 for H and against P, E_2 is not strong evidence for H when two conditions hold: E_2 comes exclusively from philosophy and P is a bit of universal common sense. Philosophy has a lousy record of refuting common sense! I grant you that the specialists who consider error theories to have a good chance at being true know a lot more than I do regarding the relevant philosophical matters, but they're not my superiors when it comes to that simple judgment about philosophy. Further, since this Moorean response is so well known, a great many of us renegades have a good reason to think that the evidence E_2 for error theories stinks. So, we renegades have an epistemic item good enough to defang the skeptic; we fall into the class of exceptions to 2↛~D.

Although there are several problems with the Overwhelming Warrant objection, I will look just at claim W, offering five criticisms of it.

First criticism. Much of the warrant for the commonsensical P is also warrant for the anti-commonsensical H. For instance, much of the warrant for "Here is a tree" is also warrant for "Here are some particles arranged tree-wise" (which is the corresponding sentence compositional nihilism offers). In fact, it's often remarked that perception offers no warrant for the former that it does the latter. This holds for many philosophical error theories. And if that's right, then it's hard to see how the *comparative* warrant claim W can be true.

Second criticism. We are familiar with the fact that science, including mathematics, often overthrows bits of common sense. Philosophers often respond with "Yes, but that's science; philosophy's different." I looked at that objection in section 7. But the lesson I want to press here can just grant that philosophy will never, ever overthrow common sense. My objection starts with the obvious observation: *we are already used to common sense being proven wrong or highly doubtful*. It has already failed; the flaws are plain to see to anyone with some knowledge of history. So why on earth should we keep on thinking it's so epistemically powerful given that we have already proven that it's false or at least highly contentious in many stunning cases? Sure, you can find many commonsensical

beliefs that have escaped scientific refutation *thus far,* but so what? What makes you think that with regard to your favorite bits of common sense *this time common sense has got things right*? Pretend that commonsensical beliefs are all listed in one giant book (more plausibly, the book consists of just a great many paradigmatic commonsensical beliefs that are representative of the others). The book was around two thousand years ago. Over the centuries many of the beliefs have been refuted by science: pages and pages have been crossed off. So why should we think the remainder—the ones that have not *yet* been refuted by science—are so epistemically secure? The remainder at the start of the twentieth century wasn't secure; why think the remainder at the start of the twenty-first century is secure? On the contrary, we know that the book is unreliable, and the mere fact that some beliefs are not yet crossed off gives no reason to think they never will be.

This is not to say that we should *withhold judgment* on every commonsensical claim not yet refuted. This isn't the Cartesian reaction to surprising science. Instead, it's the much more plausible idea that we should no longer think that the warrant for the remaining commonsensical beliefs is enormous.

Thus, I find it hard to swallow the idea that today's common sense that has yet to be refuted by science has some enormous body of warrant backing it up. And that makes me wary of the comparative warrant claim W that the warrant that renegades have for P overwhelms the warrant supplied by E_2 against P: it's not clear that the first bit of warrant is being correctly estimated.

Third criticism. In my judgment the arguments in favor of at least some error theories are especially strong, which again puts serious doubt on W. The complete and utter failure to defuse certain anti-commonsensical philosophical arguments suggests that the philosophical reasoning in those arguments, E_2, is not weak—on the contrary it's very strong. For instance, some philosophers have noted that the basic argument for epistemicism (or at least sharp cutoffs in truth conditions) has just about the best chance to be *the strongest argument in the history of philosophy*, notwithstanding the fact that few philosophers can bring themselves to accept it—although it's certainly telling that the percentage of accepting philosophers increases enormously the more familiar one is with the relevant issues. Often the paradox is introduced via a simple argument form such as this:

1. A person with \$0 isn't rich.
2. If a person with \$n isn't rich, then a person with \$(n + 1) isn't rich, for any whole number n.
3. Thus, no one is rich.

It's easy to see how (1)–(3) make up a serious philosophical problem: just consider the following five individually plausible yet apparently collectively inconsistent claims.

- Claim (1) is true.
- Claim (3) is false.

- The argument is logically valid.
- If claim (2) were false, then there would have to be a whole number n such that a person with $n isn't rich but a person with just one more dollar is rich.
- But such sharp cutoffs don't exist for predicates like "person x is rich."

Even the most elementary logic says that you have to give up at least one of those bullet points, and yet no matter which bullet point you give up, you end up with an error theory![14] That's a very strong *meta-argument for the truth of at least one error theory*, although it doesn't say which error theory will be the true one. I have been assuming in this essay that all the error theories are false (in order to give the renegade her best shot at epistemic salvation), but I must confess that I don't see how that assumption could come out true. I won't argue the matter here, but I think the same lesson—we simply must adopt an error theory, no matter what logical option we choose in resolving the paradox— holds for the group of semantic paradoxes, as well as the group of material composition paradoxes. So for at least some of the cases we're interested in, E_2 is indeed strong evidence against P even if the H in question is really a small disjunction of error theories (P will have to be a small disjunction as well).

Of course, one may always hold out for a commonsensical solution to the paradoxes. One can insist that there simply must be *some* approach consistent with common sense that no one has thought of, despite the fact that the large group of geniuses who have been working on the paradoxes for centuries have failed to find one. This sounds like a desperate, baseless hope to me.

I know the following remark won't make me any friends, but I think that in many cases a Moorean response to the philosophical error theories is endorsed only by those people ignorant of the extreme difficulties that error theorists in the philosophy of language, philosophy of logic, philosophy of physics, metaethics, and metaphysics are dealing with. The Moorean response assumes that we are justified in thinking that some premise in the error theorist's argument is far less supported than the corresponding commonsensical claim (which is obviously inconsistent with the error theory). But of course that's precisely what's at issue: the error theorist says that the overall evidence is in favor of her premises and not in favor of the commonsensical proposition whose negation is entailed by those premises. More importantly, the philosopher who thinks *some* error theory has got to be true—although she is agnostic on which one is true—has an even better argument than the individual error theorists. For what it's worth, I was once a Moorean, and I agree that Mooreanism is the most rational way to *start* doing philosophy. In particular, when one first hears about a philosopher who says "There are no trees" one should, rationally, adopt the Moorean approach. But as soon as one educates oneself about (a) the sanity, level-headedness, and intelligence of people who say these weird things; (b) the incredibly long history of the failure to find commonsensical

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[14] In fact, if it turns out that the five bullet points are not collectively inconsistent, contrary to appearances, that still gives us an error theory.

solutions to the paradoxes; (c) the meta-arguments for anti-commonsensical theories; and (d) the history of common sense being refuted by science, then one has to sober up. We don't employ the Moorean move when faced with teams of physicists or biologists who claim to have upended some bits of common sense; we act that way because of the experimental data and inventions those investigators generate (roughly put). The philosophical error theorists generate neither. Instead, they have (a)–(d). After I took a close look at the philosophical paradoxes and reflected on how science has already shown that common sense is not as impressive as it's cracked up to be, I dropped my Mooreanism.[15]

Fourth criticism. Consider a purely scientific case: that of astronomers saying that common sense is wrong about the Sun going around the Earth. They have a *strong explanation* of why every single day it sure looks as though the Earth is still and the Sun is going around it, even though that's all false. But the purely philosophical error theorists also have these explanations, which suggests that they are successfully following the scientific way of combating common sense. I know of no argument at all that suggests that there is anything awful with the compositional nihilist's explanation that we perceive things as composite just because the simples are arranged in certain tight and stable ways. On the contrary, usually it's simply granted as perfectly obvious that no possible experiment could tell the difference between a world with composite trees and a world with just tree-arranged simples! As noted above, it is commonly thought that perception, for instance, offers no support for common sense over nihilism. The fact that "There are trees" is part of common sense comes from the fact that we have certain perceptions; that's the evidential basis. But we would get the very same perceptions if the error theory were true. And if there were something awful with the compositional nihilist's explanation, then why on earth would those people embrace it after so much long-term sophisticated reflection by our best and brightest who are trying to retain common sense?

My fifth reason for not accepting the Overwhelming Warrant objection has to do with the source of discomfort philosophers have with error theories: I think that in some cases it's the result of a misunderstanding, and this causes them to underestimate the warrant for error theories (which in turn leads them to endorse W). Let me explain.

I think there might be a specific disposition at work in *some* philosophers who insist that error theories don't have much backing warrant, a disposition that accounts for a good deal (but certainly not all) of their hard resistance to such theories despite the fact that the arguments supporting them—including the error explanations mentioned in the previous paragraphs—are quite reasonable and evidentially supported.

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[15] Kelly (2008) attempts to show that the philosophical "moderate," who rejects error theories but also thinks there is something procedurely wrong with Moorean moves, lands in all sorts of trouble. He casts the debate as involving the error theorist, the Moorean, and the Moderate. But he fails to consider a fourth participant: the philosopher who rejects the Moorean move but is agnostic regarding the error theories, neither accepting nor rejecting them. This character escapes the woes of moderation.

When a theory says that your belief that fire engines are red is incorrect, you should initially be stunned. The right first reaction should be something like "Well, are they dark orange or purple or what?" Same for other theories: when a theory says that $2^{10} \neq 1024$, or that what Hitler did wasn't morally wrong, or that Moore didn't believe that we have knowledge, or that there are no baseballs, one is disposed to look for explanations such as "$2^{10} = 1044$, not 1024," "Hitler was morally okay because he actually had good intentions," "Moore was lying in all those articles and lectures," and "The whole edifice of baseball has been an elaborate joke erected just to fool you!" And we can't take those explanations seriously for two reasons: there is no evidence for them, and there is no evidence that we made such ridiculous mistakes.

But the error theorist isn't accusing us of any mistake like those. Indeed, although she is alleging false beliefs it seems strained to call them *mistakes* at all. Believing that fire engines are red when in fact they're orange is a mistake; believing they are red when no ordinary physical object in the universe is red or any other color but appears colored in all perfectly good viewing conditions is something else entirely, even though it's still a false belief. When one has a visceral reaction to error theories (you've probably witnessed them: rolling of the eyes, knowing smiles, winks, "that's preposterous," "that just can't be right," "get serious," and so on), often enough it's not reason that is doing the talking. Instead, and here is my attempt at armchair psychology, what is at work here is the disposition to treat philosophical false beliefs as something akin to mistakes, in the ordinary sense of "mistake." And that's a mistake. When a nut says that twice two isn't four but seven, she's saying that we've all made an arithmetic error; when a philosopher says that twice two isn't four *or any other number*, she isn't accusing us of any arithmetic error. And she isn't accusing us of some philosophical error, some error in philosophical reasoning. Instead, she's saying that there is a naturally occurring error in a fundamental part of our conceptual scheme that oddly enough has no untoward consequences in any practical or even scientific realm. And that's *why* the error survives to infect our commonsensical beliefs. The presence of such an error is by no means outrageous; for instance, surely there's little reason why evolutionary forces would prevent such errors. The "mistake" the error theorist is accusing us of is akin to (but of course different from) the error a child makes when counting fish in a picture that has whales and dolphins in it: it's a "mere technicality" that happens to be philosophically interesting (depending on one's philosophical tastes of course). The error theorist is saying that like the child we have made no gaffe, or blunder, or slip-up, or oversight. If you throw a chair at a composition nihilist, she ducks anyway.

None of this is meant to convince you that the error theories are *true*; throughout this essay I have assumed that they are all false. Instead, I'm trying to block the objection to metaphilosophical skepticism that runs "philosophical error theories shouldn't be taken to have a serious amount of warrant because they have lousy explanations for our false beliefs." Due to the peculiar nature of the errors being attributed, I think the error theories are not profitably thought of as radically against common sense (although I stick with the vulgar and call them "radical" from time to time). To say that twice two is seven

and fire engines are purple is to express a view radically at odds with common sense; to say that twice two isn't anything and fire engines have no color at all is not to express a view radically at odds with common sense (although of course it does go against common sense).

It's also worth noting that in the usual case the philosophical error theorist comes to her anti-commonsensical view *kicking and screaming*, which again suggests that when they endorse an error theory they are doing so on the basis of impressive warrant (and not, for instance, some weakness for anti-commonsensical theories), which again suggests that W is false. Many philosophers consider certain religious views (e.g. there is something morally wrong about non-heterosexual sex, the bread becomes the body of Christ) to be comparably odd and hold that extremely intelligent people have these views only because they have been indoctrinated, usually as children. Needless to say, this isn't the case for philosophical error theories. For instance, Williamson began the project that led to his epistemicism with the explicit goal of *refuting* epistemicism (Williamson 1994: xi)! I myself initially found epistemicism, color-error theory, compositional nihilism, and traditional skepticism highly dubious, but after soberly looking at the relevant arguments over several years I became somewhat favorably disposed to all those theories even if I never quite accepted any of them. In addition, I don't see how anyone can not take error theories seriously if they are actually aware of the array of problems that any theory of material composition would have to solve in order to be comprehensive (e.g. Statue-Clay, Tibbles-Tib, Ship of Theseus, vagueness, problem of the many, and so on). Or just look at the various logical options for dealing with the sorites or semantic paradoxes. The point is this: these error theorists became convinced of the error theories based on the argumentative evidence, since quite often they were initially strongly inclined to *disbelieve* them. So it's over the top to suggest that most philosophers who take error theories seriously do so based only on some weakness for weird ideas, as opposed to strength of evidence.[16]

12 The nature of the epistemic defect

I don't see any good way to defeat the metaphilosophical skeptic's argument applied to "ordinary" philosophical disputes (i.e. those not involving error theories). For example,

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[16] This also casts doubt on the idea that some pernicious *selection effect* skews the percentages of philosophers who are in favor of or at least hospitable to (i.e. not dismissive of) error theories in the philosophy of language, philosophy of logic, metaethics, philosophy of physics, and metaphysics. One might initially wonder whether it's virtually an entrance requirement into the club of philosophers who publish on certain topics that one is strongly disposed to favor error theories. If so, then just because a large number and percentage of philosophers endorse error theories might not indicate significant evidence in favor of those theories. (The reverse holds as well: for some clubs one must toe the commonsense line.) I don't deny that there are selection effects, but a blameworthy weakness for error theories strikes me as implausible (especially over the last few decades compared to other periods in the history of philosophy, as today's philosophers have tended to put a higher than usual epistemic weight on common sense). If anything, a strong aversion to error theories causes philosophers to avoid areas in which they are rife, thereby causing pernicious selection effects in other areas.

if you are a content internalist but not a philosopher of mind and you satisfy Condition 1 and Condition 2, then retaining your internalist belief after finding out about the large number and percentage of disagreeing philosophers of mind means that you suffer a serious epistemic defect.[17] But what is this defect?

The obvious answer: the belief retention is defective in the sense that the retained belief does not amount to knowledge, it's not justified, and the believer is blameworthy for retaining it. So the *action* of belief retention is defective because the *retained belief* is defective in familiar ways. However, I think matters might not be so simple here. I agree that in the ordinary, non-error theory cases the renegade's belief isn't justified or warranted and doesn't amount to knowledge. I'm less sure about the blameworthiness point. For one thing, philosophy is a very individualistic enterprise. Appeals to authority, for instance, are viewed as virtually worthless. Given all that, perhaps the blame that applies to the renegade with respect to non-error theories is relatively mild. So, I would recommend that the metaphilosophical skeptic adopt the modest view that the epistemic defect in ordinary philosophical cases includes lack of knowledge and justification along with at least a *mild* kind of blameworthiness.

The obvious view regarding the epistemic defect in the error theory cases is that it's the same as in the non-error theory cases: the renegade's belief retention is defective in the sense that her retained belief won't be justified or amount to knowledge, even if it was justified and amounted to knowledge before she found out about her disagreeing epistemic superiors. However, a wise skeptic who thinks her thesis is true pretty much no matter what the correct theory of central epistemological notions turns out to be will want to allow the epistemic possibility that in the actual world (if not all possible worlds) propositional knowledge is not only cheap and easy but very hard to knock down once established (so once you know something, it is very difficult to encounter counterevidence powerful enough to ruin that knowledge). Perhaps the "bar" or threshold for justification and warrant is much, much lower than philosophers have thought over the centuries (even now, with race-to-the-bottom reliabilism so popular!). If that's right, then the renegade's retained belief in P might amount to knowledge even if it suffers from a serious epistemic defect: upon learning about her disagreeing superiors her belief's overall warrant decreases considerably—that's the defect the skeptic is insisting on—but remains high enough to meet the very low threshold for warrant and justification. The belief still amounts to knowledge but this is *impoverished knowledge* compared to its status before learning about the disagreeing superiors.

However, although I think this is a theory of the epistemic defect that the skeptic should allow for (as a plausible option), even this theory might not be optimal because it is hostage to the results of the relations among epistemic qualities. As bizarre as it might sound, I think the skeptic should admit that even if her skeptical thesis is true in the error

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[17] The only way I see around this is the idea that the renegade's belief is merely of the inclination-first-order kind I mentioned at the end of section 3.

theory cases, if the renegade's circumstances and the true epistemological theories are peculiar enough (as discussed below) then all the following might be true as well:

1. The renegade's belief P starts out justified, warranted, and amounting to knowledge.
2. Upon learning of his epistemic superiors his belief retains those statuses.
3. Upon learning of his epistemic superiors the warrant that his belief has doesn't change. Thus, the discovery of significant contrary epistemic superior opinion does not diminish the warrant had by the renegade's belief.
4. Upon learning of his epistemic superiors he doesn't acquire any evidence against his belief.
5. He is blameless in retaining his belief.

When I say that the metaphilosophical skeptic should "keep open the possibility" that (1)–(5) are true even though her skeptical thesis is true as well (again, applied only to purely philosophical error theories), I don't mean to imply that the skeptic should hold that her thesis is metaphysically consistent with the conjunction of (1)–(5). All I mean is that she should say something like "For all I can be certain about, (1)–(5) might be true along with my skepticism."

I now have two tasks in the rest of this section: explain why the metaphilosophical skeptic should admit that despite the truth of her position, (1)–(5) might be actually true as well; and explain what "seriously epistemically deficient" means in light of that explanation.

Before I carry out those two tasks, I need to make sure we agree that the epistemic status of the *belief retention* can be quite different from the epistemic status of the *retained belief*. For instance, if my belief starts out unjustified and I encounter a small amount of evidence for it (e.g. a recognized epistemic peer agrees with me, as she has made the same faulty assessment of the evidence), the reasonable thing for me to do *in response to the peer* is keep the belief: the belief retention is reasonable but the retained belief is not. It is harder to see how the situation could arise in which the belief starts out justified, the belief retention is unreasonable, and the retained belief is justified. However, I am in the process of giving reasons for the idea that the skeptic should be willing to say that that may be the situation when it comes to commonsensical beliefs and purely philosophical error theories.[18]

Suppose Mo thinks he might have disease X. He goes to his doctor who administers a test meant to determine whether or not Mo has X. The doctor tells Mo, correctly, that the test has two excellent features: if someone has X and takes the test, the test will correctly say "You have X" a whopping 99.9 per cent of the time and it will incorrectly say "You don't have X" a measly 0.1 per cent of the time; and if someone doesn't have X and takes the test, the test will correctly say "You don't have X" 99.9 per cent of the time

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[18] It's somewhat easier to see how a belief could start out unjustified, the belief retention is unreasonable, and the retained belief is justified: the initial unjustified element is cancelled out by the second unreasonable element.

and it will incorrectly say "You have X" 0.1 per cent of the time. Mo is impressed with these facts and comes to have belief B: if the test says you have X, then there's an excellent chance you have X. I take it that this is a reasonable belief for Mo to have; his belief is also blameless. (If that's not clear, assume that almost all diseases that afflict people in Mo's country occur relatively frequently (nothing like one in a million), and this fact is generally known by the medical establishment and at least dimly appreciated by laypeople such as Mo.) Finally, the belief is true.

Next, the doctor tells Mo that only one out of a million people have X. Let's assume that the doctor has slipped up: in reality, about one out of a hundred people has the disease, the doctor knows this, but she misspoke. At this point Mo doesn't change his belief: he still believes that if the test says you have X, then there's an excellent chance you have X. He doesn't realize that this new piece of information devastates his belief, as follows.

Suppose everything the doctor said *were* true, including that only one out of a million people have the disease. Suppose further that ten million people take the test. Since about one in a million actually have the disease X, or so we're supposing, about ten of the ten million people will have the disease. When those ten people take the test, the odds are that the test will say "You have X" all ten times (as it is 99.9 per cent accurate in that sense). But now consider the remaining people, the 9,999,990 folks who don't have X. When they take the test, 0.1 per cent of the time the test will mistakenly say "You have X." Of 9,999,990 folks, 0.1 per cent is about 10,000. So all told, the test will say "You have X" about 10,010 times: that's the first ten (who really do have X) plus the next 10,000 (who don't have X). But only ten of those times is the test right. Thus, when the test says "You have X," which is about 10,010 times, the test is wrong about 10,000 out of 10,010 times: it's wrong about 99.9 per cent of the time! So if the doctor were right, then Mo's belief that if the test says you have X then there's an excellent chance you have X, would be about as false as it can get.[19]

However, and this is a crucial bit of the story, we are assuming that Mo doesn't currently have the background to grasp these mathematical matters, and as a consequence he does not see how the new (mis)information, about X's extreme rarity (one in a million), ruins the overall warrant he has for his belief. On the other hand, if Jo is a mathematician who had heard precisely the same things as Mo and likewise came to have and then retain belief B, then given her mathematical competence she would be in a position to see the relevance of the one-in-a-million claim. We would say of Jo, but not of Mo, that she "should know better" than to retain her belief B. Both Jo and Mo have made a *mistake* in retaining B, both have an epistemic defect, but only Jo is blameworthy since only she has the cognitive tools and training to see the relevance of the one-in-a-million claim. It would take hours to get Mo to see the relevance, as the above paragraph is too advanced for him; Jo should have seen it immediately.

Moreover, if knowledge is cheap and tenacious—in the sense of being little more than true belief, with a low threshold for warrant, and very hard to dislodge—then Mo's

[19] Given that one in a hundred people actually have disease X, Mo's belief B is true, as a little calculation will show. The case described is a variant of ones used to illustrate the base-rate fallacy.

true belief might amount to knowledge even after hearing and accepting the doctor's misinformation. Given that he knew the 99.9 per cent facts, the brute fact that the disease afflicts about one out of a hundred people, and Mo is dimly aware that virtually all diseases have similar likelihood rates, Mo, like many informed people in his community, started out knowing that if the test says you have X then there's an excellent chance you have X. When he hears his doctor's one-in-million claim he cannot see how it goes against his belief. Since propositional knowledge is so cheap, he retains his knowledge. In addition, because justified belief also has a low threshold, his belief remains justified.

The Mo story can be used to motivate several interesting epistemological theses. For our purposes, it is best thought of as illustrating how the following might come about:

- A person starts out with a belief B that is true, reasonable, justified, and amounts to knowledge.
- Next, he acquires a belief C that in some sense "goes against" the first belief B (this can happen in several ways, either targeting the truth of B, as in the Mo example, or perhaps targeting his justification for B).
- Despite coming to believe C, the person retains the first belief B.
- The retained belief B is still justified and amounts to knowledge, as the "bars" for knowledge and justification are very low.
- But his retaining B is still seriously epistemically defective.

I am *not* saying that renegades with respect to error theories are in the same position as Mo. More specifically, renegades aren't guilty of a cognitive deficiency like Mo is. Even so, the illustration is useful because I think the renegade philosophers might be blameless just like Mo is. The renegade's retained beliefs are *doxastically central* (if one of them is blameworthy, then a fantastic amount of one's beliefs will be blameworthy) and held with a *very high confidence level*. Given those two facts, it seems a bit extreme to have the threshold for blamelessness be so high that one is blameworthy in retaining beliefs that are both central and held with the highest levels of confidence. Humans aren't *that* rational. The metaphilosophical skeptic should allow for the possibility that standards for epistemic blame are relative to the epistemic and doxastic capacities of the subject (or perhaps her community or species).

In order to bring out the relevant complexities concerning the *relative* standards for epistemic blame, consider a non-epistemic example. A twelve-year-old girl plays third base for her Little League baseball team. The batter hits a sharp grounder to her right; she dives to get it but misses and falls down; the ball shoots off down the left field line for a double. No one is going to blame her for missing the ball: not her teammates, not her parents, not the manager, not even herself. However, if Brooks Robinson, who was one of the greatest fielding third basemen in Major League history, had had the very same opportunity and did exactly what the child did, then he would have been blameworthy (for one thing, he would have been accorded an error by the game's official scorer). Despite that difference, which depends on the individual circumstances—especially the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two players—both attempts to field the ball

are "baseball defective." It's a good question as to why the child's attempt is defective even though she was charged with no error and is blameless. The answer is probably something along the lines of "Being able to field that ball is a goal associated with the role of a third baseman, and one that is typically attained by those who pursue the position seriously." I am saying that the metaphilosophical skeptic might want to allow that something similar is true of Mo and Jo: although only Mo is blameless, both belief retentions are "epistemically defective." Despite his present inability to see the error of his ways, Mo's belief retention is epistemically defective because he is an epistemic agent and part of a community that is able to handle the mathematics needed to see the error. It would not exactly *kill* him to see the relevance of the rarity of the disease.

To be sure, questions of blame are tricky—and in ways that may seem to matter to the skeptic's position. Consider a diving leap by Brooks Robinson that fails to snag the ball. He really had almost no chance at getting it, so his attempt is hardly defective. Only Superman could have got the ball! But now imagine a race of superpeople who watch our baseball games. They say that Robinson's dive is "baseball defective," as *their* best third basemen are usually able to snag the ball when faced with that play. But it seems incorrect *for us* to say that Robinson's play is defective. Whether it's defective depends on the relevant standards, and Robinson's attempt does not fail to meet any of *our* standards even if it does fail to meet the alien standards. Something similar may hold in epistemic cases. Perhaps there is a group of super-epistemic aliens for whom induction is just plain stupid. Only horribly weak creatures, they say, employ inductive reasoning. After all, it's not even guaranteed to be truth preserving! They look upon us as primitive epistemic beings. Even if they are right about *all* of that, it is hard to see how it would make it true *for us* to say that all merely inductive reasoning is epistemically defective.

Thus, perhaps some renegades are not blameworthy. However, some *will* be blameworthy: it depends on the tenacity of their belief in P. We can imagine two philosophical renegades, Barb and Ron. Both of them endorse W from the Overwhelming Warrant objection. We then confront them with "Yes, but suppose that 98 per cent of your 10,000 epistemic superiors firmly believed P was false, and it had been this way for centuries; what would you think then?" Barb responds in a level-headed way: "Well, I'd at least suspend judgment, if not accept their view." Ron responds with bluster: "That would just mean those philosophers are nuts." I think that in that scenario Ron comes out blameworthy, perhaps because his dispositions reveal an unreliable belief retention type. In any case, the charge of blame is so complicated that the skeptic is best advised to steer clear of it for the most part.

This shows how the skeptic should admit that for all she can be certain of, her thesis could be true even if (1), (2), and (5) are all true of S. The following story is intended to deal with (3) and (4).[20]

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[20] I couldn't think of the best case: one that handles all of (1)–(5) at once. But keep in mind that all I'm doing here is arguing that the skeptic should be willing to admit that for all she can be certain of (1)–(5) are true even though her thesis is true too. I'm not arguing that skepticism plus (1)–(5) really can all be true.

Suppose Cho is an undergraduate physics major taking a standard course in classical mechanics. She does a problem from her textbook and gets the answer "4π." But the answer key in the back of the book says "$8\pi^2$." And the better classmates in the class agree with the book's answer. She rechecks her answer to make sure there is no calculation error. The teaching assistant for the class agrees with the book's answer. As does the professor. Cho consults a couple of other professors she likes and took courses from in the past: they also agree with the "$8\pi^2$" answer. Cho admits that these people are her epistemic superiors when it comes to classical mechanics, as the evidence for this judgment is obviously quite good and objective. At this point she has excellent evidence E_1—the reports from recognized superiors—that there is excellent evidence E_2 against her answer. Despite all that, Cho sticks with her old answer, merely shrugging her shoulders and stubbornly figuring that what the superiors say "doesn't prove anything" as "no one is perfect." I think it's pretty clear that Cho is being irrational given that she meets Condition 1 and Condition 2; in particular, by meeting the latter condition Cho doesn't have anything up her sleeve, so to speak, that her professors and other superiors are missing. In at least one important epistemic sense she should give up her belief. The reason she should give up her belief is this: she has been given excellent *reason* that it is false, the reason being E_1.

That conclusion seems right. But the interesting point I want to make here is this: even though Cho has been given good *reason* that "4π" is the wrong answer (and that "$8\pi^2$" is the right answer), this may not be the same thing as saying that she has been given good *evidence* that "4π" is the wrong answer. What she actually has is testimonial E_1. The evidence against her belief P (P is the claim that the answer is "4π") is E_2, which is some alternative calculation with which Cho is unfamiliar. Some philosophers would say that E_1 is evidence that her belief is false: at least in most cases if E is evidence that there is evidence against Q, then E itself is evidence against Q. I think there might be counterexamples to that bare principle, although if we throw in more conditions relevant to the disagreement cases the counterexamples may vanish (for all I know). What I want to emphasize here is that even if having E_1 (and recognizing that it's good evidence for the claim that there is good evidence against P) isn't necessarily to have good *evidence* for thinking P is false, it remains true that having E_1 gives one excellent *reason* to think P is false. The issue isn't whether E_1 is evidence. It's definitely evidence of something. The issue here is whether E_1—that body of knowledge which S possesses—is evidence *against P*. Whether it is will depend on what the true story of evidence is, a position on which the metaphilosophical skeptic wants to avoid taking a position since she thinks her thesis is true independently of those details, as philosophically important as they are.

This separation of evidence from reason isn't terribly counterintuitive, as the physics story shows. The Homer-Holmes case works as well. Homer knows that Sherlock Holmes has a fantastic track record in murder investigations and has recently announced that he's as confident as he's ever been that he's cracked the new case of the maid's murder: the butler did it. When Homer learns all this about Holmes he acquires excellent reason to think the butler did it. But does he acquire evidence that the butler did it? Well,

he certainly doesn't have any of Holmes' evidence. A philosopher could become convinced that although Homer has excellent reason to think the butler's guilty, he has no evidential reason.

Cho's physics case is different from Mo's disease case. As we saw earlier, given Mo's epistemic deficiencies, the skeptic might allow that Mo has been given no reason to discard his belief. That's not true of Cho; she has excellent reason to give up her belief. But Cho's case illustrates how one's retaining a belief can be epistemically deficient even though its evidential status has not changed—given certain views about evidence. And if its evidential status hasn't changed, then perhaps its warrant status hasn't changed either. Naturally, it's a significant step from "Her evidential status hasn't changed" to "Her level of warrant hasn't changed." But as I've said a couple times already, the skeptic is trying to articulate her thesis in such a way that it's not hostage to how various debates about evidence, warrant, knowledge, and justification turn out (either next week or in the next century). Her central insight, if it deserves that status, is that if upon learning about her epistemic superiors the well-informed mere mortal retains her belief, then that action of hers thereby suffers a serious epistemic defect.

But what on earth could the defect in the *action* be, now that we've allowed for the possibility that the retained renegade *belief* is warranted, is justified, is blameless, amounts to knowledge, and has no evidence against it? What epistemic defect could the action possibly have? It leads to a belief that is as good as it gets: it amounts to knowledge!

In order to answer the question I first need to explain how the action might be epistemically defective even though the retained belief isn't. Then I'll say what I think the defect is.

Bub thinks claim C is true. But his belief is based on a poor reading of the evidence. Bub sticks with his belief in C despite the poor evidence just because he has a raging, irrational bias that rules his views on this topic. Suppose C is "Japan is a totalitarian state" and Bub has always been biased against the Japanese.

Then he meets George. After long discussion he learns that George is his peer when it comes to politics and Japan. He then learns that George thinks C is true. This is a case of peer *agreement*, not disagreement.

I take it that when Bub learns all this about George, he has not acquired some new information that should make him think "Wait a minute; maybe I'm wrong about Japan." He shouldn't lose confidence in his Japan belief C merely because he found someone who is a peer and who *agrees* with him!

The initial lesson of this example: *Bub's action of not lowering his confidence in his belief as a result of his encounter with George is reasonable even though his retained belief itself is unreasonable.* The right answer to "Should you lower your confidence level in reaction to a recognized peer disagreement?" can be "no" even though the right answer to "If you don't lower your confidence level in that situation, is your belief reasonable?" is also "no." Bub's assessment of the original evidence concerning C was irrational, but his reaction to George was rational; his subsequent belief in C was (still) irrational. The simplistic

question, "Is Bub being rational after his encounter with George?" is ambiguous and hence needs to be cut in two parts: "Is his retained belief in C rational after his encounter with George?" vs. "Is his response to George rational?" The answer to the first question is "No" while the answer to the second question is "Yes."

This story is sufficient to show that one's action of retaining one's belief can be epistemically fine even though the retained belief is epistemically faulty. If we alter the story just a bit, we can see how the action can be faulty while the belief is fine.

Suppose that Bub started out with confidence level 0.95 in C. And he found George to have the same confidence level. And suppose that the original evidence Bub had only justifies a confidence level of 0.2. So like we said before Bub has grossly misjudged his evidence. If in reaction to his encounter with George Bub *did* lower his confidence in C to 0.2 or 0.4 or whatever—whatever level is merited by the correct principles of rationality that make his belief in C rational[21]—*he would be irrational*. If you have a certain level of confidence in some claim and five minutes goes by in which you correctly and knowingly judge to have not been presented with any new evidence whatsoever that suggests that your confidence level is mistaken, then you would be irrational to change your confidence level—even if you happened to adjust so that your belief itself was rational. Now, if you took some time to reassess your original evidence, then of course you might learn something that would justify your changing your confidence level. But if nothing like that has happened, as in Bub's case, then you would be irrational to change your confidence level. So if Bub did adjust his confidence level to 0.2 or 0.4 or 0.6 say, then although his subsequent confidence level might accurately reflect his total body of evidence—so his position on C would now be rational—his *process* to that rational position would be irrational.[22]

The renegade case is like this second story: the action is faulty while the retained belief might be fine. Now that I've explained the difference in the epistemic statuses of the retention action and retained belief, I can offer a conjecture as to what the serious epistemic defect might be in the case of the renegade who retains her belief in the face of her awareness of purely philosophical error theories.

In the imagined possibility that makes (1)–(5) true (for all we can be certain of), knowledge, warrant, and blamelessness are "lower" epistemic qualities. So, perhaps wisdom, deep understanding, cognitive penetration, and mastery (e.g. of a topic) are significantly "higher" epistemic qualities. And being a renegade with respect to error theories inhibits the development of such qualities, at least with respect to the topics relevant to the error theories. If so, that would mean that the belief retention is still epistemically defective, and in a "serious" manner.

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[21] I'm assuming that there is a rational level of confidence for his retained belief. I'm not sure how to argue for this claim.

[22] This seems to show that Bub is epistemically at fault no matter what he does in response to his discovery of George's agreement with him. However, it doesn't show that he is utterly epistemically doomed: he could go back and discover that his initial judgment was unjustified. In that sense it's not quite a case of "damned if you do and damned if you don't."

So here is my theory regarding the epistemic defect in question, the one I recommend for the metaphilosophical skeptic:

- If the true story of epistemic relations is more or less what philosophers have thought, then renegades with respect to error theories lose the warranted and justified statuses of their belief (and hence the knowledge status).
- On the other hand, if the threshold for justified belief and knowledge is much lower than philosophers have thought, then the renegade's retained belief might exceed those thresholds (contrary to the first bullet point) even though its warrant has significantly decreased.
- Finally, if the thresholds are low, if reason and evidence are separated (as in the Cho story), and if evidence and warrant are not separated (as in the Cho story), then although the warrant for the renegade's retained belief might not change upon her learning of her superiors (contrary to the first two bullet points), the belief retention process type is not conducive to epistemic qualities such as wisdom, deep understanding, cognitive penetration, and mastery with respect to the topics the error theories are about (the topics: truth, material existence, meaning, morality, and so on).

I close this section with a few comments on what is meant by "the action of retaining the commonsensical belief P."

One's view of philosophical error theories is utterly divorced, psychologically, from real life. Even an advocate of an error theory will not have her view change her behavior. A color error theorist still says that she likes red cars and yellow bananas; a compositional nihilist will insist to his insurance company that he really did have a television ruined by the flood in his basement. The same holds for philosophers like myself who have become agnostic on the truth-value of error theories. In fact, in many contexts the error theorists and agnostics will say things like "I know that her bag was red," "I think there are four extra chairs in the next room," which when interpreted straightforwardly strongly suggest that they are retaining the commonsensical beliefs. Given that we walk and talk exactly like someone who retains her commonsensical beliefs, if the commonsensical philosopher's belief retention is seriously epistemically defective, it's not defective in virtue of *almost any* of her real-life behavior, including much that is linguistic. Depending on what the notion of belief amounts to, it might be even true to say that in one sense of belief the error theorist and agnostic believe that some cars are red. Instead, the difference between the commonsensical philosopher and the error theorist (or agnostic) comes to the fore in things like their dispositions and certain episodes of behavior, as when she says to herself things like "H can't be right; P is right instead" while the error theorist and agnostic typically end up saying to themselves contrary things.

13 What if metaphilosophical skepticism is false?

I will now show that no matter what your take on the metaphilosophical skeptic's argument, pro or con, you get a new and philosophically interesting conclusion. We all win in that respect.

So let us now assume for the sake of argument that contrary to the Will of God and all forms of justice I have made a fatal error in the previous sections: metaphilosophical skepticism is completely false. So, the renegade's belief in P and ~H amounts to knowledge, is fully justified, and her belief retention suffers no epistemic defect whatsoever. She is perfectly aware of the respected status of compositional nihilism, moral error theory, and color error theory; she knows that she is nothing remotely like an expert in those areas; she has no amazing piece of evidence or knowledge that the error theorists have missed; and yet there is nothing epistemically wrong in her just concluding that all those theorists are wrong and she's right.

If that's the way things are, then by my lights something is terribly amiss in a great portion of philosophy. However, what is amiss in the philosophical community is *not* that the arguments for H must be pretty weak even though they are the well-respected products of our best and brightest working over many years. At least, we have no reason to leap to that conclusion even if we reject metaphilosophical skepticism. We already admitted in the discussion of the Overwhelming Warrant objection that the error theory supporting arguments are at least on a par with many other philosophical arguments and are quite strong. The only problem with the former, it was alleged, was the rare strength of their opponent: virtually universal commonsense.

What must be true if metaphilosophical skepticism is false is that *purely philosophical theories against commonsense are virtually never worthy of belief*. And if that is true, then large parts of philosophy have to change, for the following reason. Virtually all wide-ranging metaphysical theories regarding composition, parthood, persistence over time, and so on, are radically anti-commonsensical at some point (it's not hard to cleave to commonsense if one isn't comprehensive). The same holds for all theories of truth (that don't ignore the semantic paradoxes) and all theories of vagueness and meaning. And yet, if skepticism is false, none of these theories is any good, as we philosophers *know full well* that they are false even if we are aware of our status as amateurs and are perfectly aware of the impressive arguments for those theories.

Ontology, and metaphysics in general, is almost always said to be extremely hard; same for the philosophy of language, logic, and physics. But if the view being presently considered is true, then large parts of these areas are very easy. After all, under the current assumption we already know that any theory that goes against virtually universal common sense is false—because the commonsense beliefs are known, we know which ones they are, and we've done the elementary deduction to see that they entail the falsehood of all the popular error theories.

As pointed out earlier, one can't rely on distaste for metaphysics here. Error theories show up in the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, epistemology, the philosophy of logic, the philosophy of mathematics, metaethics, and the philosophy of physics as well. Further, metaphysical thought is not always the source of those error theories.

To me, that sounds like a justification for saying that many areas of philosophy are bunk. If I, as someone with a definitely amateur understanding of much of the

philosophical areas just mentioned, can *know* that all sorts of error theories are false even though I have absolutely nothing at all interesting to say against those theories—and if this knowledge of mine is not some anemic thing and there is nothing epistemically wrong with my retaining my commonsensical beliefs—then there is something deeply wrong with those areas of philosophy, since many of the most popular and expertly endorsed theories are error theories. Obviously, that last conclusion, "something is deeply wrong with those areas of philosophy," has been endorsed for centuries with respect to some parts of metaphysics, but now we have a novel argument for the novel proposition that leads to it—as well as a *much* more expansive conclusion, going well beyond metaphysics. Not only that: we conclude that those areas of philosophy are bunk despite their relying on arguments *as good as or even better than* those found in other areas of philosophy. That is a paradoxical conjunction.

This gives us my essay's disjunctive thesis that one of the following is true:

- Metaphilosophical skepticism is true. When it comes to ordinary philosophical disagreements, the renegade's belief is unjustified, unwarranted, and at least mildly blameworthy. When it comes to error theories, either we don't know P or our retaining our belief in P is epistemically impoverished in the ways described at the end of section 12.
- A good portion of the philosophy of language, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of logic, metaethics, philosophy of physics, and metaphysics is bunk and error theorists should give up most of their error theories despite the fact that their supporting arguments are generally as good as or even better than other philosophical arguments.[23]

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