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Replies to Nagel, Neta and Pritchard

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I have long admired the work of Jennifer Nagel, Ram Neta and Duncan Pritchard. Each of them is an extremely impressive philosopher from whom I've learned much over the years. To have the three of them participating in this symposium on my book, *Radical Skepticism and Epistemic Intuition*¹ (henceforward *RS&EI*), is a great honour as well as a delight. Many thanks to each of them for taking the time to read my book and to write up such excellent, challenging and helpful comments. I won't be able to address everything they say, but I'll try to address their main concerns in the space available.

1. Reply to Nagel

In her contribution to this symposium, 'Responding to How Things Seem'² (henceforward *RHTS*), Nagel is concerned mainly with what I say about how our perceptual, a priori and epistemic beliefs are justified. In particular, she objects to my two-fold claim that (i) the justification of such beliefs involves their being based on evidence consisting of conscious mental states (such as seemings) and that (ii) these beliefs can be justified in this way even if the worldly facts are not as the beliefs say they are. But I add something that she likes and wants to tweak. I say that what matters for justification is that these beliefs *are in fact* based on evidence consisting of conscious experience and that they *do in fact* fit that evidence (i.e. they are epistemically fitting responses to it). Here's how Nagel sums up her contrary view in the final paragraph of *RHTS*:

1 Bergmann (2021).

2 Nagel (forthcoming).

I've argued that in the perceptual case, we should cut out the middleman of seemings, and say that what matters is that your state of mind fits and is based on how things are. So also in the epistemic case, I want to say, what ultimately matters is that our epistemic intuitions are actually responsive to states of knowledge in the world, not just that they seem that way to us.

Given that she's proposing an alteration to what I say about justification, while cutting out the middleman of seemings, I'll assume that she too is talking about justification. So, if I understand her correctly, she's making the two-fold claim that (i) the justification of our perceptual and epistemic beliefs involves their being *responsive* to what the world's like (rather than based on evidence consisting of conscious mental states) and that, contrary to what I say, (ii) these beliefs *cannot* be justified in this way if the worldly facts are not as the beliefs say they are. She concludes by adding the following tweaked version of what I say: what matters for justification is that these beliefs *are in fact* responsive to the states of the world they're about and that they *do in fact* fit those states of the world.

Let me start by addressing the concern that evidence understood as a conscious mental state is a sort of unnecessary middleman between our justified beliefs and the world. It will be helpful to begin with a bit of clarification because in order to understand the particular view of mine to which Nagel objects, it needs to be set in its larger *externalist* context – a context that I'm often (but not always!) silent about in *RS&EI*.³ The reason I'm often silent about the larger externalist context is that, in this book, I'm trying to market my response to radical scepticism as something that internalists and externalists alike can endorse. So I often highlight only the parts of my view that can be accepted (in different ways) by both groups. Some of my externalist colleagues in epistemology (e.g. Jack Lyons, John Greco and Tom Senor) have rightly pressed me to be more forthcoming about what we see as the externalist truth of the matter. Prompted by them, I've tried to be clearer about that in *RS&EI*, even if you still have to read carefully to notice it.

My view is, roughly, the externalist one that a belief is justified just in case it's formed in accord with proper function.⁴ This view entails a 'formed in the right way' requirement, which implies that any belief can fail to be justified if it's not formed or held in the right way (*RS&EI*, pp. 119–20). But because my view is an externalist view, it doesn't require, for justification, that a belief be formed in response to conscious experience. It allows that there could be justified beliefs formed in response to one's environment without

3 See, for example, pp. 127–8, 154 n. 7, and 160–3.

4 More precisely, S's belief B is justified iff (i) S does not take B to be defeated and (ii) the cognitive faculties producing B are (a) functioning properly in response to all of S's mental states, (b) truth-aimed and (c) reliable in the environments for which they were 'designed'. (See *RS&EI*, p. 128 n. 47 and other places in *RS&EI* listed in the index under 'proper function'.)

any ‘middleman’ of conscious mental states.⁵ Such beliefs wouldn’t involve *basing* as I understand basing, since that’s a relation between one’s belief and one’s other conscious mental states. Nevertheless, even externalists in epistemology who (in this way) reject a basing requirement on justification tend to think that *human perceptual* beliefs of cognitively healthy humans are formed in response to sensory experiences and/or perceptual seemings. In other words, although it’s false that justification *requires* that a belief be based on evidence in the form of conscious mental states, it’s plausible that justified *human perceptual* beliefs invariably *are* based on evidence in the form of conscious mental states. Something similar can be said about human a priori beliefs in necessary truths: when held in an a priori way, these invariably *are* held in response to intellectual seemings about what must be the case. Likewise, human beliefs about rationality, when held via intuition, invariably *are* formed or held in response to epistemic intuitions or seemings. Put more carefully, my view is that, as far as I can tell, there are no clear cases of justified human beliefs (perceptual, a priori or otherwise) that are not formed or held in response to evidence in the form of the believer’s conscious mental states.⁶

Because of my externalism, I’m quite open to learning of good reasons for giving up the view that the justification of human beliefs always involves what Nagel calls a ‘middleman’ consisting of evidence in the form of conscious mental states. In fact, I already think that justification doesn’t, as a matter of necessity, require this middleman. It’s just that, as far as I can tell, all clear cases of justified *human* belief do involve such a middleman.

Thus, my response to Nagel’s concern that my account of justification involves the ‘middleman’ of evidence in the form conscious mental states is that I agree with her that such a middleman isn’t required for all possible cases of justification. But, *first*, I think it’s exceedingly plausible that all actual cases of human perceptual belief in fact require such a middleman, and that there aren’t any cases of human perceptual belief that are clearly justified but not formed in response to a middleman consisting of evidence in the form of conscious mental states. And, *second*, I think this point generalizes to all beliefs.⁷ If anyone has a clear counterexample to these two claims, I’m open to changing my mind and I’d be happy to stand corrected. That correction wouldn’t conflict with my externalist view of what is required for

5 In Bergmann (2006: 61–4), I give examples of possible beliefs that could be justified without any such middleman.

6 See *RS&EI* p. 154, n. 7 and p. 120, including n. 24, and Bergmann (2018).

7 Non-occurrent stored memory beliefs need separate treatment. Two things to consider in connection with them are: (i) whether they are based on anything once they are retrieved and made occurrent and (ii) whether they were based on anything when they were first acquired, before they became non-occurrent (i.e. when they were stored). Plausibly, both when they were occurrent before being stored as non-occurrent beliefs and when they were retrieved and made occurrent again, they were based on conscious mental states. That conclusion is enough for my purposes, since I can say that all clear cases of justified human beliefs either are or were (when they were occurrent) based on conscious mental states.

justification, since I deny that, in general, justification requires a middleman consisting of conscious mental states. Instead, that correction will only show that I'm wrong about what the norm is for justified *human* belief.

I'll conclude my response to Nagel by addressing a comment she makes in *RHTS* in connection with her main concern about *RS&EI* discussed above. Nagel objects to my claim that the evidence in a good case is the same type of conscious experience as the deceptive evidence in a bad case. She agrees with my conditional claim that *if* my understanding of evidence is correct, *then* the evidence in the good case is the same type of conscious experience as the deceptive evidence in a bad case. But she thinks my understanding of evidence is mistaken.⁸ About half-way through *RHTS*, she nicely lays out my example where a good case of a perceptual belief about a basketball is changed to a bad case. It's a case where you have a normal perceptual belief about a basketball in excellent viewing conditions – a belief that is based on your sensory experience. Then, in a single moment and in a way undetectable by you, a demon annihilates the basketball and replaces your basketball-caused sensory experience with a demon-caused hallucinatory sensory experience that has the same phenomenology. Later, the demon gets you to hallucinate the removal of the basketball from your field of vision, which gets you to believe that the basketball has been removed. All of this suggests that the basis of your belief before and after the basketball's annihilation is the same thing, namely, the conscious experience in response to which you believe (both in the good case and the bad case) that the basketball is there. If we think of evidence as I and many others do – namely, as the conscious mental states on which we typically do or should base our beliefs – it follows that the evidence is the same in the good case and the bad case. It's true (as I note in *RS&EI* pp. 10–12) that the term 'evidence' sometimes refers to other things, such as propositions that confirm or best explain our belief contents or objects and events presented in a court of law. But there's also a standard use of the term in which it refers to the conscious mental states on which we base our beliefs. And that natural usage is the one I employ most often in *RS&EI*.

Nagel gives a different account of the basketball example.⁹ She says that before the demon is involved, your belief is responsive to the presence of the basketball and that after the demon is involved, your belief is responsive to the activity of the demon who causes your hallucination. So in the good case, your belief is responsive in a truth-conducive way to the basketball part of the world; but in the bad case, your belief is responsive in a misleading way to the demon part of the world.

8 Nagel (forthcoming), third paragraph.

9 See her comments on my basketball case, which she gives near the half-way point in Nagel (forthcoming).

By way of response, note *first* that the two-part reason for thinking that the belief is directly responsive to the sensory experience and not the seemingly perceived object is that: (i) when we remove the object without changing the sensory experience, the belief stays the same and (ii) when we change the sensory experience (e.g. hallucinating the removal of the basketball) without changing the external world, the belief changes. This supports my account of what the belief is responsive to over her account. *Second*, it's important to see that my view can accommodate some of what Nagel wants to say about beliefs being responsive to the world. There is a sense in which what she says is very Reidian, given that Reid was a direct realist of sorts who thought the objects of perception were things in the external world, not sensory experiences in our minds. I'm sympathetic with this Reidian idea and with Nagel insofar as she is endorsing it. And there's a way to endorse this Reidian idea while maintaining my 'middleman' view of evidence as conscious mental states. I could just say that, in the good case, our *direct* perception of objects in our environment is occasioned by our sensory experience, which we treat as evidence for the existence of these objects.¹⁰ In saying this, I wouldn't be agreeing with the disjunctivist, since I'd be saying that the evidence is the same in the good case and bad the case. Instead, I'd be saying that in the good case of perception, the object of perception is something in the external world, such as a basketball; and in the bad case of hallucination, either there is no object of hallucination or something in the external world – perhaps the region of space where one believes there is a basketball or the air in that region – is the (misconstrued) object of hallucination.¹¹ This approach doesn't have the downside of rejecting the New Evil Demon (or NED) intuition, which says that our evidence in the good case is the same as our evidence in the bad case. And it would allow me to endorse my view about evidence while also capturing at least some of what Nagel wants to say about the way in which our beliefs in the good case are responsive to objects in the external world.

2. Reply to Neta

In his contribution to this symposium, 'From Inputs to Beliefs'¹² (henceforward *FITB*), Neta simplifies the main sceptical argument considered in *RS&EI* in a 3-premise argument (see numbered propositions 1–4 at the beginning of *FITB*). He says that I object to this argument by getting us to consider an example where we can see that premises 2 and 3 are true and the conclusion, 4, is false. Since this argument is valid, an example with these

10 In this vein, Wolterstorff (2001: 96–110) interprets Reid as saying that our sensory experience occasions our direct perception of objects in our environment.

11 See Alston (1999: 190–2) for some related discussion, but note that I'm not hereby endorsing the main thesis of Alston (1999).

12 Neta (forthcoming).

features shows that premise 1 is false. If we set aside subtleties and nuance, that's a fair summary of one of the main things I'm up to in the book.

Neta's response to me is to argue that I'm mistaken insofar as I have failed to give an example where premises 2 and 3 are true and 4 is false. He focuses on my Jack and Jill case, which he initially accurately describes, and he sets out to show that there isn't a way to understand it so that premises 2 and 3 are true and 4 is false. I will raise two objections to Neta's *FITB*. First, although, in his initial account of the Jack and Jill case, Neta accurately describes Jack's sceptical hypothesis, later he mischaracterizes it. Second, Neta lays out an intriguing argument and then presents me with a fascinating dilemma based on that argument and intended to show that my Jack and Jill case is not (as I claim) one in which premises 2 and 3 are true and 4 is false. But for reasons I will explain, Neta's dilemma fails.

On my first objection: Neta initially describes Jack's sceptical hypothesis as the hypothesis that he is in the Matrix, where the Matrix is as it is described in the 1999 movie by that title. That's how I described the hypothesis in *RS&EI* (p. 112). Neta then wonders (in the second quarter of *FITB*) if Jack's sceptical hypothesis is that he's dreaming or on an operating table, or that he's a hallucinating alpaca or Henry Kissinger suffering from dementia (Neta opts for the latter scenario). But it is none of these. Jack's sceptical hypothesis is that he, like those in the movie, is a human in a liquid-filled pod and connected to the Matrix. Finally, in the third quarter of *FITB*, Neta suggests that we interpret Jack's sceptical hypothesis as 'simply the general hypothesis that our total body of evidence is generally misleading – that is to say, so thoroughly misleading that it contains no clear indication of being misleading'. Again, that's a mistake. It may well be that Jack's sceptical hypothesis includes the feature of having misleading evidence that contains no clear indication of being misleading. But it isn't *simply* that. It's that he's in the Matrix, as it's described in the movie. So Neta is mistaken in suggesting that these alternatives are reasonable interpretations of Jack's sceptical hypothesis.

My second objection focuses on Neta's intriguing argument (appearing about two thirds of the way through *FITB*) consisting of numbered propositions 5–8. This argument supports the following dilemma that Neta thinks will cause problems for my claim that the Jack and Jill case, as described in *RS&EI*, is one in which premises 2 and 3 are true and 4 is false:

NETA'S DILEMMA

(A) Either (i) we have some evidence for something or (ii) we have no evidence for anything at all.

First Horn

(B) If (i), then – given the soundness of the argument from 5 to 8 – we are rational to be confident that our total evidence is not generally misleading.

(C) If we are rational to be confident that our total evidence is not generally misleading, then we are rational to be confident that Jack's sceptical hypothesis is false.

(D) If we are rational to be confident that Jack's sceptical hypothesis is false, then

(iii) it's false that the sceptic's argument (highlighting Jack's sceptical scenario) gives us a good reason for scepticism (i.e. for doubting that Jack's sceptical hypothesis is false).

Second Horn

(E) If (ii), then (iii). After all, if we have no evidence for anything at all, then no arguments give us a good reason for anything.

Conclusion

(F) Therefore, (iii).

Neta has confirmed (via personal communication) that what I say above accurately captures his dilemma. It's not entirely clear to me how the conclusion of this dilemma is supposed to create a problem for my claim that the Jack and Jill case, as described in *RS&EI*, is one in which premises 2 and 3 are true and 4 is false. But that doesn't matter because, although I find Neta's Dilemma both fascinating and clever, I will argue that it fails to establish its conclusion. It fails because it's false that (B) and (C) are jointly true.

A preliminary remark: (C) from Neta's Dilemma is analytically true if we accept Neta's suggestion (quoted above) that Jack's sceptical hypothesis is 'simply the general hypothesis that our total body of evidence is generally misleading'. But that won't be useful against my claims about the Jack and Jill case since, as already noted, that's not what Jack's sceptical hypothesis is, according to that case.

Here's why I say that (B) and (C) aren't jointly true. There are two ways to understand premise 6, which I'll explain below. On one way of understanding it, Neta's argument from 5 to 8 is unsound, because 6 is false, which means that (B) is false too – since (B) says the argument from 5 to 8 is sound. If we avoid that reading in order to make 6 and (B) true, then (C) is false.

What's important to see, when we think about Neta's argument from 5 to 8 and his dilemma from (A) to (F), is that, *first*, we can have evidence that some of our evidence is misleading and, *second*, this won't prevent us from continuing to rationally have and rely on the rest of our evidence that isn't misleading. Most sceptical arguments depend on these two points. Their proponents don't want these arguments to conclude that we have no evidence for anything at all because then we have no evidence for the conclusions of these very arguments. The sceptical arguments Descartes considered in the *Meditations* were aimed at giving him evidence that some parts of his evidence – but not all of his evidence – was misleading.

Suppose Jack comes to learn that his memory seemings about the details of birthday celebrations of his in-laws are unreliable (his spouse, reasonably, takes this as evidence of Jack's lack of interest in them). This is a case of learning that some of his evidence is misleading. But it doesn't cause epistemic disaster. It just keeps Jack from relying on a part of his evidence that he has learned is misleading. The same sort of thing is going on in Jack's sceptical hypothesis about the Matrix, albeit on a grander scale. Jack is coming to mistrust not just his memory seemings about the details of past family birthday celebrations. In worrying about the Matrix hypothesis, Jack is coming to mistrust all his current and past perceptual experience. But despite mistrusting his current and past perceptual experience, Jack can still trust his introspection about his conscious mental states, his a priori reasoning and insight, and his memories of his introspection and his a priori reasoning and insight.

Now consider premise 6 from Neta's 5–8 argument:

6. It is rational for us to proportion our confidence in a proposition to the degree to which that proposition is supported by our total evidence only if it is rational for us to be confident that our total evidence is not generally misleading.

Here's a reason to think that 6 is false. Notice that it can be rational for Jack to proportion his confidence to the support from his total evidence *even if* his total evidence includes evidence that a proper subset of his total evidence is misleading (as in the case of memory seemings about the details of family birthday celebrations). In that case, to proportion his confidence to the support from his total evidence requires him to mistrust a certain part of his evidence but not to mistrust all parts of his total evidence. For the same reason, it can be rational for Jack to proportion his confidence to the support from his total evidence even if his total evidence includes evidence that a larger proper subset of his total evidence *may be* misleading – for example, his perceptual experience. In that case too, to proportion his confidence to the support from his total evidence requires him to mistrust some parts of his evidence but not to mistrust all parts of his total evidence. What this shows is that 6 is false if interpreted as follows:

6*. It is rational for us to proportion our confidence in a proposition to the degree to which that proposition is supported by our total evidence only if it is rational for us to be confident that our total evidence *does not include significant proper subsets of evidence that are or may be misleading*.

The reason that 6* is false is that it *can* be rational to proportion our confidence to the support of our total evidence even if we think significant subsets of our total evidence are or may be misleading. Thus, if 6 is understood as 6*, then (B) in Neta's dilemma is false, because it relies on the soundness of the 5–8 argument and, therefore, the truth of 6*.

If we want 6 to avoid this problem, we'll need to interpret the final phrase in 6 differently, along the lines of:

6**. It is rational for us to proportion our confidence in a proposition to the degree to which that proposition is supported by our total evidence only if it is rational for us to be confident that our total evidence *is not such that any particular part of it may, for all we know, be misleading*.

Interpreted as 6**, the premise is more plausible. But in that case, 8 and (B) and (C) will need to have 'is not generally misleading' replaced with '*is not such that any particular part of it may, for all we know, be misleading*'. (C), so altered, says:

(C*) If we are rational to be confident that our total evidence *is not such that any particular part of it may, for all we know, be misleading*, then we are rational to be confident that Jack's sceptical hypothesis is false.

But (C*) is false. After all, even if it's not the case that *any particular part of our total evidence may, for all we know, be misleading*, it may still be the case that (as Jack's sceptical scenario says) *significant subsets of our total evidence – for example, our perceptual experience – may be misleading*. Thus, if we interpret Neta's 5–8 argument in one way, premise 6 is false, as is (B) in Neta's dilemma. But if we interpret the argument to avoid that problem and make it more plausible, then (C) in Neta's dilemma is false. Either way, Neta's dilemma fails to establish its conclusion.

3. Reply to Pritchard

In *RS&EI*, I focus mainly on radical scepticism and two anti-sceptical responses: my particularist non-inferential anti-scepticism and inferential anti-scepticism. I briefly discuss but don't give a lot of time to other anti-sceptical responses such as closure-denial, contrastivism, disjunctivism, and certain kinds of contextualism and Wittgensteinian hinge epistemology. Although I emphasize (p. 17) that it is *not* my view that the responses I set aside are hopeless or unworthy of attention, I give three main reasons (on pp. 15–26) for narrowing my focus in this way. Pritchard's contribution to this symposium, 'Scepticism and Commonsense'¹³ (henceforward *S&C*), is aimed entirely at what I say in these 12 pages of my book.

The *first reason* I give (highlighted in *RS&EI* pp. 15–16) is that, instead of using argument by elimination (where competitors to my view are carefully examined and rejected), I chose to make the case in support of my preferred response to radical scepticism by highlighting its virtues and defending it against some important objections. The hope was that if an initially intuitive and natural view, such as my Reidian commonsensism, can have its

13 Pritchard (forthcoming).

strengths emphasized and its alleged problems satisfactorily addressed, this will diminish the motivation for switching to the anti-sceptical positions I set aside, which are less intuitive, less natural, clever views that only a philosopher would propose.¹⁴ I chose this virtue-highlighting approach over argument by elimination largely because I think that the virtues of Reidian commonsensism and its ability to withstand objections make it a compelling and attractive response to radical scepticism. As I also emphasized (pp. 16–17), there's a more mundane *second reason* for narrowing my focus as I did, namely, that space constraints prevented me from giving the careful attention to competing views that would be required for an effective argument by elimination. The *third reason* I give (pp. 19–26) for setting aside certain anti-sceptical positions is that they seem to either underestimate scepticism's appeal (treating it as a less challenging problem than it in fact is) or overestimate scepticism's appeal (granting to it more force than it in fact has).

Unfortunately, Pritchard's *S&C* has nothing to say about my first reason for setting aside certain anti-sceptical views, so it's not clear what he thinks of this rationale for narrowing my focus in *RS&EI*. Concerning the second reason, he grants that considerations of space often provide a good reason for limiting the topics one discusses at length. But in a book like mine, which develops a commonsense response to radical scepticism, Pritchard thinks it is a mistake not to have more extensive discussion of disjunctivism and hinge epistemology (the two views that form the backbone of Pritchard's own response to radical scepticism). This is a mistake, he thinks, because disjunctivism and hinge epistemology are grounded in our ordinary epistemic practices in a way that gives them a claim to being commonsense responses to radical scepticism and, hence, a claim to being discussed in my book more than they in fact are, if I 'wish to be serious'.¹⁵ Is Pritchard right about this? Do the norms for writing a serious book on my preferred commonsense response to radical scepticism require that I discuss in greater detail Pritchard's two favoured responses to radical scepticism?¹⁶ I'll come back to this question shortly.

Pritchard's response to my third reason is two-fold. First, he makes it clear that he does not find the points I make against disjunctivism and hinge epistemology (where I explain how they underestimate or overestimate the

14 The one alternative response I spend a lot of time on (i.e. inferential anti-scepticism) is also a very intuitive and natural sort of response, at least in many of its manifestations.

15 See (in his *S&C*) the final sentence of his introductory paragraph and the final sentence of the first paragraph of his §5 (quoted in the next footnote).

16 Here's how Pritchard puts the point at the end of his *S&C*:

If we wish to be serious about undertaking a response to radical scepticism that takes commonsense as its starting point, it is thus imperative that we first interrogate the philosophical reconstructions of our ordinary epistemic practices that are presented to us as commonsense.

The context of this remark makes it clear that, according to Pritchard, the interrogation of the philosophical reconstructions mentioned here (which is required if one wishes to be serious) will involve engaging the claims of disjunctivism and hinge epistemology in much greater detail than I do in *RS&EI*.

appeal of scepticism) convincing. He explains how a more careful consideration of these two views reveals strengths and defences of them that I didn't discuss.¹⁷ This is, of course, true, which is why this reaction of Pritchard's is completely understandable and expected given my choice not to engage these views in an in-depth way. This is why I said (*RS&EI* p. 17) that I didn't expect that my third reason for setting aside disjunctivism, hinge epistemology and certain other views would be convincing to proponents of these views. But I expressed the hope (pp. 17 and 22) that, despite this, these proponents would recognize that many philosophers are sympathetic to the intuitive objections I mention to the views I set aside and that this (along with my first and second reasons) makes my decision to set these views aside acceptable. Pritchard's second response (to my third reason for not discussing at greater length the anti-sceptical views he favours) makes it clear that he does not think this decision is acceptable. Instead, as already noted, Pritchard insists that the norms for writing a serious book on my preferred commonsense response to radical scepticism require that I discuss, in greater detail than I did, the two responses to radical scepticism that he favours.

It's difficult to know what to say in reply other than to note that I don't find these alleged norms for writing a book like mine either plausible or authoritative. I acknowledged in *RS&EI* (p. 26) that there is much to be said on behalf of the views I set aside and that there is also much to be said in reply to what is said on their behalf. Pritchard's *S&C* outlined some of what he has said at greater length elsewhere on behalf of disjunctivism and hinge epistemology. I fully agree that it would be very worthwhile for a book to carefully engage Pritchard's full-scale defences of these two views, from the perspective of Reidian common sense, perhaps including a critique of his suggestion that those views have a strong claim to being grounded in common sense. That said, I don't find it at all plausible that the choice not to undertake this worthwhile endeavour prevents a book from being a serious defence of a Reidian commonsense reply to radical scepticism. In fact, I would say that the 240 pages of *RS&EI* that follow the dozen pages that Pritchard's *S&C* discusses *show* that this isn't plausible.

Setting aside Pritchard's objection that I ought to have written a different book (one that engaged disjunctivism and hinge epistemology more extensively), there's a more interesting question arising from his *S&C*, namely, whether disjunctivism and hinge epistemology provide good objections to the commonsensist view I defend in *RS&EI*. Consider first disjunctivism. Disjunctivists won't grant to sceptical objectors a premise I grant them: that the evidence on which our perceptual beliefs are non-inferentially based

17 Disjunctivism and hinge epistemology have been developed and defended eloquently, powerfully, and at length by Pritchard in the books and papers by him that are cited in his *S&C*.

does not entail the truth of our perceptual beliefs. Disjunctivists think that the evidence in the good case (the favourable case that non-sceptics assume is actual) is better than the evidence in the bad case (where we're demon victims with deceptive evidence that we can't distinguish from 'good case' evidence) because the evidence is truth-entailing (or factive) in the good case but not in the bad case. Opponents of disjunctivism endorse the NED intuition (which says that our evidence in the good case is the same as our evidence in the bad case) and, as a result, think that our beliefs are equally justified in each case. Disjunctivists deny the NED intuition and, thereby, aim to undercut the sceptical objection. The disagreement between the disjunctivist and me concerning how best to respond to scepticism is that I think the disjunctivist underestimates the plausibility of the NED intuition and, thereby, the appeal of the sceptical argument relying on it. The disjunctivist and I are on the same team against scepticism, but we disagree about the strength of one of the sceptic's key premises. For reasons I briefly lay out in *RS&EI* (pp. 22–26), and which Pritchard apparently finds unpersuasive, I think the NED intuition is highly plausible and that objections to it are unpersuasive. (I won't repeat those reasons here.) This applies not only to objections to the NED intuition by Pritchard and others in their work that is cited in *RS&EI* but also to what Pritchard says against the NED intuition in his *S&C*.

Consider next hinge epistemology. Hinge epistemology, of the kind Pritchard endorses (what I call 'concessive Wittgensteinianism'), grants to the sceptic what I don't grant, namely, that *we don't know the falsity of sceptical hypotheses*. I argue briefly in *RS&EI* (pp. 19–22) that, in granting this to the sceptic (independently of good arguments for scepticism), hinge epistemologists join closure-deniers, contrastivists and concessive contextualists in overestimating scepticism's appeal. Here I'll focus on Pritchard's hinge epistemology in particular. As I point out in *RS&EI* (p. 21, n. 15), Pritchard (2016: 92) thinks that, although you might understand the proposition that you are not a massively deceived BIV (brain-in-a-vat), you don't believe it (and, hence, you don't know it). As he puts it, 'thinking that you believe something does not entail that you do believe it' (Pritchard 2016: 92). He goes on to say:

this commitment [to the falsity of a sceptical hypothesis] may feel like a belief to the person concerned in that its phenomenology may be identical to other, more mundane, beliefs that the subject holds. But the import of this point is moot once we remember that the phenomenology of a propositional attitude does not suffice to determine what propositional attitude is in play. (Pritchard 2016: 102)

This is a key point on which Pritchard's hinge epistemology conflicts with my commonsense response to scepticism. I'm convinced that I *do* believe I'm not a massively deceived BIV (and that many others believe similar things about

themselves). As I suggest in *RS&EI* (p. 21, n. 15), Pritchard's claim that I'm mistaken about this is intuitively very implausible. Moreover, although I consider (in many places in *RS&EI*) objections to the view that this belief of mine is rational, I think it's not only rational but an instance of knowledge.

As noted above, it would surely be illuminating, interesting, and worthwhile to have a more in-depth discussion (than I provide in *RS&EI*) of (i) the disjunctivist's objections to the NED intuition and (ii) the hinge epistemologist's defence of the view that I am unable to believe (and, therefore, know) that I am not a massively deceived BIV. Pritchard's *S&C* has helpfully reminded us that there are important points to be made in support of disjunctivism and hinge epistemology that I have not yet engaged in detail. But I have even less space to do that here than I had in the book. Thus, for the purposes of this reply, I'll have to make do with (i) highlighting (as I just have in the two preceding paragraphs) the intuitive attractiveness of my opposition to disjunctivism and hinge epistemology and (ii) recommending a careful reading of Pritchard's own serious work in defence of these views – especially [Pritchard \(2012, 2016\)](#).

There is, of course, much more that could be said in response to each of my critics, but in closing, let me say again how grateful I am to all three of them for their penetrating, challenging and generous comments on my book.¹⁸

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