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Between Reason and Common Sense
On the Very Idea of Necessary (though Unwarranted) Belief

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§1

> "The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason."
> – G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*[1]

Chesterton, in his characteristically compact yet profound way, is speaking here on the subject of madness and sanity. Madness, he tells us, is commonly ascribed to poets and mystics, people over whose beliefs passion, sentiment, and faith hold sway, while sanity is attributed to those in possession of "rational" minds, scientists and mathematicians, for instance, whose beliefs are governed by the inductive and deductive calculi. But the truth, Chesterton asserts, is exactly the opposite: it is the rationalist who is more accurately described as bordering on insanity, and the mystic who is more properly called sane.[2]

This is because those who are guided solely by reason mistakenly think that everything can be understood. In attempting to understand everything, however, they discover that at the end of the day they understand nothing; in looking for everything to make sense – in the rationalist's sense of 'sense' – *nothing* seems to make sense. But, for those who allow that *not* everything can be known through rational means, those who permit *some* things to remain mysterious, everything else can be understood with great clarity. For to forgive a few things for not making sense is to license *the rest* in making sense. With Chesterton:

> As long as you have mystery, you have health; when you destroy mystery you create morbidity . . . The whole secret of mysticism

1. In G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 24.
2. Ibid., 21.

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> is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand. The morbid logician seeks to make everything lucid, and succeeds in making everything mysterious. The mystic allows one thing to be mysterious, and everything else becomes lucid . . . Like the sun at noonday, mysticism explains everything else by the blaze of its own victorious invisibility. Detached intellectualism is . . . all moonshine; for it is light without heat, and it is secondary light, reflected from a dead world.[3]

It is my view that this is importantly correct, although my interest in this essay is in neither madness nor sanity but, rather, *reason* and *reasonableness*; in particular, I am interested in whether one must have rational grounds for all of one's beliefs in order to be properly considered reasonable. My purpose, in part, is to address the subject of skepticism from a specific, though tangential direction.

Why tangential? Because all the *direct* combat over skepticism is being waged by those who *share* fundamental assumptions about belief. After all, what are the combatants fighting over? The rationalist claims that it is possible to justify our beliefs and, thereby, to attain knowledge. The skeptic, contrariwise, argues that the justifications for our beliefs are always prone to overwhelming challenge and that consequently, claims of knowledge are mere pretensions.[4] On first glance, this might seem like an instance of clear opposition, but notice several things about the controversy:

First, the skeptic agrees with the rationalist in spirit, if not in conclusion, since both think it appropriate to demand warrant for all of our beliefs; the skeptic is simply of the view that none is ultimately available. Second, this mutual regard for the appropriateness of ubiquitous demands for warrant points to a further commonality on the

3. Ibid., 32–3.

4. The most devastating skeptical challenges center around the idea that nothing could imaginably serve as justification for a particular belief (say, in the existence of an external world). This is, of course, the thrust behind Descartes' classic "Argument from Dreaming," in which all the evidence that I am engaging with material objects is consistent with my dreaming, in which case, no such objects are present. See Meditation One of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. John Cottingham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13–14. A variation on this idea is the argument that our sensory experience only *counts as evidence* in favor of the belief in an external world, if the belief in the external world is already independently justified. Since the only way to justify its existence is through our experience, the belief in the external world is, in principle, without warrant. This is at the core of the "I, II, III Argument," discussed by Crispin Wright in his "Facts and Certainty," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LXXI, 434–439.

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issue of reasonableness, for justification is a normative concept. Thus, if justification is properly requested for all of the things we believe, it is but a short step to conclude that where there is no justification, we *ought not* to believe. If, in light of this lack of justification, we nonetheless do believe, we are being unreasonable.[5] The rationalist and skeptic agree on this point. The disagreement between them is simply a matter of the rationalist thinking that justification is available (and we are thus, reasonable), and the skeptic thinking that it *not* available (and we are thus, unreasonable).

Because of these two points of agreement, it would seem fair to characterize *both* of our combatants as being "rationalists." For each is committed to the view that reason must govern over belief through the medium of justification and, as a consequence, that it is the possession of justification that defines who is reasonable and who is not. Thus, skeptics, as well as both traditional Empiricists and [capital 'R'] Rationalists, can be said to espouse rationalism, in my sense of the term, since they all share a common vision of the governing role of reason in the sphere of belief.[6]

The view that I want to examine in this essay, and which is expressed atmospherically through Chesterton's prose, is tangential precisely because it is not a part of this consensus and thus, does not take on the issue of skepticism directly. It *denies* that reason ultimately has jurisdiction over belief and therefore rejects both of the tenets expressed above. The ubiquitous demand for justification and warrant in the case of belief is thus not appropriate and as a result, it may not be proper to call unreasonable the person who believes without justification or warrant. In this rejection of the fundamental principles of rationalism, then, the view that I will discuss effectively *dismisses the relevance* of the skeptic's criticisms of our beliefs.

5. Barry Stroud has argued that we can cleave apart the issue of our reasonableness in *claiming* to believe or know P from the issue of the *validity* of the skeptic's negative claims. The skeptic might be right that we never know or are justified in believing P, though it is nonetheless reasonable for us to *assert* that we know or are justified in believing P. For Stroud, such a split verdict makes sense, because in his mind 'reasonable' has purely practical rather than epistemic connotations. But, for reasons that will soon be apparent, I will not want to restrict our use of 'reasonable' to characterizations of practical possibility or utility. See Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 58–69.

6. On a closely related note, see Hilary Putnam's discussion of the common assumptions shared by metaphysical realists and Rortyan "anti-representationalists" in "The Question of Realism," in *Words and Life*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

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§2

> The sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason . . . Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations.
>
> – David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*[7]

The view we will explore (which, for lack of a better name, I have called 'common sense naturalism') rests essentially on the idea that there are certain fundamental things which, as a matter of necessity, we must believe, despite the fact that there are no rational grounds for them. This idea receives its most explicit expression in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, but common sense naturalism is not simply a repackaging of Hume's philosophy. It also involves ideas from Thomas Reid, Rudolph Carnap, G. E. Moore, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. So, an important procedural point to observe is that while I will make use of the history of ideas, this is not an essay *in* the history of ideas. My aim is to draw a coherent picture out of views found in the authors mentioned, but there will be no systematic attempt to give an historically accurate picture of those authors or their philosophies.

In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume invokes the idea of an unwarranted necessary belief, when discussing the skepticism that inevitably results when reason is pressed beyond a certain point in our investigations. In the Introduction to the *Treatise*, for example, he tells us that "When we see that we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented; tho' . . . we perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles, beside our experience of their reality."[8] Later, when describing the escalation of doubt that occurs when we try to ascertain grounds for the reliability of our reasoning capacities themselves, he says:

> Shou'd it here be ask'd me, whether I . . . really be one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in any thing possest of any measures of truth and falshood; I shou'd reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly

7. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 187.
8. Ibid., xviii.

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> of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel.[9]

Thomas Reid, in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, talks similarly of the impossibility of genuinely assenting to the skeptic's conclusions and, thus, of the air of necessity that surrounds certain fundamental beliefs:

> Some philosophers . . . have maintained that the testimony of sense is fallacious, and therefore ought never to be trusted . . . It is one thing to profess a doctrine of this kind, another seriously to believe it, and to be governed by it in the conduct of life. It is evident that a man who did not believe his senses could not keep out of harm's way an hour of his life; yet in all the history of philosophy, we never read of any sceptic that ever stepped into fire or water because he did not believe his senses, or that shewed in the conduct of life less trust in his senses than other men have.[10]

Hume explains that it is lucky for us that nature intervenes in this way, for the skepticism that results from the over-extension of reason would otherwise leave us with a dangerous "delirium" and "melancholy." Indeed, there are points in the *Treatise* where Hume, like Chesterton, seems convinced that the impulse to overextend our reason is a threat to our mental health, and that we are thus fortunate to have a favorable nature, which provides a check on this destructive tendency.[11]

In the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, the message is essentially the same. Upon explaining that a skeptical philosophy reveals to us that reason can never provide ultimate justification for our beliefs concerning "matters of fact," Hume says,

> Nor need we fear that this philosophy . . . should ever undermine the reasonings of common life, and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action, as well as speculation. Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever. Though we should conclude . . . that in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind which is not supported by any argument or process of the understanding; there is no danger that these reasonings, on which almost all knowledge

9. Ibid., 183.
10. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, reprinted in *Inquiries and Essays*, ed. Ronald Beanblossom and Keith Lehrer (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 163. G. E. Moore argues that no philosopher has ever lived in a manner consistent with his skepticism in "A Defence of Common Sense," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1959), 40–42.
11. Hume, *Treatise*, 269.

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> depends, will ever be affected . . . If the mind be not engaged by argument to make this step, it must be induced by some other principle of equal weight and authority . . .[12]

In all of these passages, a certain *impossibility* is suggested with regard to the idea that we might hold skeptical views about epistemologically fundamental things: the existence of the external world, the general reliability of the senses, or that the future will be like the past, to name several prominent examples. And it is evident that at least the *practical* impossibility of being skeptical about such things is intended in these passages.[13] Reid points out the impossibility of action without taking the reliability of the senses for granted, and Hume describes the psychological irresistibility of such common beliefs as those we've mentioned, the moment we leave the study and go back to ordinary life.[14]

This idea of the incompatibility of skepticism with our conduct in ordinary life has been exhaustively commented upon,[15] and it has been equally often argued that such an assertion of practical impossibility, when taken by itself, provides no epistemological response to the skeptic at all; indeed, it appears to involve a direct *concession* to the skeptic's primary claim. For the manner and tone of the reply would suggest something like this: "Yes, you are correct that there can be no rational grounds for these fundamental beliefs, but we nonetheless must believe them all the same. Call us unreasonable if you like; this is simply what nature has ordained."[16]

12. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 41.
13. It is important to notice how modern skepticism differs on these grounds from its classical predecessor. For example, Sextus Empiricus claims that the proper result of skepticism should be a complete suspension of judgment, to the point that we literally believe *nothing*, and it is Sextus' view that far from such a surrender to skepticism yielding "delirium and melancholy," it is instead the *key to our happiness*. See Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* Book I, Ch. IV.8; Ch. XII.25, reprinted in Brad Inwood and L.P Gerson, tr. and ed., *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 302–8.
14. Hume, *Treatise*, 269.
15. See, for example, Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Chs. II & III and Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 2–10.
16. Along these lines, consider the following from Hume:

> We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things, and are not able to accompany them with so sensible an impression, as we do those, which are more easy and natural.
>
> Hume, *Treatise*, 268.

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So although there may be disagreement as to whether or not this purely practical interpretation of the idea of unwarranted necessary belief is faithful to Hume's authorial intentions,[17] there *is* a general consensus in the literature that the purely practical reading of the idea of unwarranted necessary belief does not, in and of itself, suffice to refute or otherwise avoid the skeptic's thesis.[18] Indeed, it is claimed that the practical reading affirms the skeptic in the manner characterized above. In a contrarian spirit, I would like to suggest that there may be more epistemological force to the purely practical reading of the concept of unwarranted, necessary belief than might appear obvious at first glance.

'Rational' and 'Reasonable' are concepts, both of which carry normative force; they speak to how one *ought* to conduct oneself, in both the mental and behavioral senses of 'conduct'. But 'ought' implies 'can'. After all, it would seem unreasonable to suggest that someone ought to do something which he is not capable of doing. It cannot be the case, for instance, that I ought to feed every starving child on the planet, since I am incapable of performing such a feat, and this is true in spite of the fact that it is *also* true, in an abstract sense, that every starving child ought to be fed.

Small 'r' rationalism tells us that we ought only believe those things for which we have warrant. The complimentary suggestion, of course, is that we ought not believe those things for which there is no justification, and this is where the skeptic purports to catch us in epistemic infidelity. But if the common sense naturalist is correct, these epistemological obligations must strike us as unreasonable. For if it is true that we cannot help but believe in the existence of the external world, the general reliability of our senses, etc., is it then reasonable to say that we *ought not* believe in them? And is it legiti-

17. M. Jamie Ferreira does not think it is. According to Ferreira, Hume does offer an account of sorts of the rational justification of natural or basic beliefs through the idea of "proof" as a distinct category of warrant lying between probability and demonstration. See Ferreira's *Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), Ch. 3.

18. Williams, *Unnatural Doubts*, 25–29; Ferreira, *Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt*, 5–6; 41. Also see Francis W. Dauer, "Hume's Skeptical Solution and the Causal Theory of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Review* LXXXIX, No. 3 (July 1980), 357. Dauer's is an ingenious attempt to describe Hume as offering a causal theory of knowledge, à la Goldman. The idea is to show that Hume's claims of necessity on behalf of certain beliefs *does* constitute a straightforward reply to the skeptic's critique, in spite of his claim that these beliefs are not justified in the traditional sense.

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mate to claim that we are being unreasonable, in the *epistemic* sense of reasonableness, if we do believe them?

Hume describes nature as having outfitted us with a limited array of knowledge-gathering capabilities; specifically, we are limited in our investigations of the world to the operations of our senses and the inductive and deductive functions of our minds. Given these limited capabilities, we are capable of knowing quite a bit; we can, in short, provide "warrant" for a great number of the things we believe. But, all of this knowledge and warranted belief depends on our taking a small number of things for granted; beliefs which are beyond the capacity of our naturally endowed faculties to rationally analyze.[19]

What I would like to suggest is that if this is correct, it is *illegitimate* for the skeptic to claim that we are unreasonable in the beliefs we hold. This would be true even in the event that there was, from a God's-eye-view, a brand of warrant, one of which we were unaware, and on the basis of which the belief that there is an external world or other such beliefs might be justified. *We* are not naturally endowed in such a way as to be able recognize it, and thus, such a variety of warrant cannot possibly be the arbiter of reasonableness in the case of our beliefs.

Criteria of proper and improper processes, ways that things ought to go and ways that things ought not to go, are constrained by what is possible for the things and processes in question. This is obviously true in the instance of morals: rules as to how one ought and ought not behave are constrained within the context of what is possible human behavior. Similarly, in the epistemological case, the rules for determining how one ought and ought not to go about *believing* must be constrained within the limits of what it is humanly possible to believe and not to believe.

With regard to the issue of the normative import of arguments from practical impossibility, then, there is a direct analogy between the moral and epistemological cases. It is irrelevant to *my* moral duty

19. Of course, the skeptic will argue that if we don't know these "foundational" things, we know nothing else, since everything else is ultimately inferred in some way from the foundations. Hume's rejection of foundationalism (see Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 149–50), however, allows him to avoid being forced to this conclusion. A good portion of Williams' *Unnatural Doubts* is devoted to uncovering the foundationalist assumptions underlying skepticism.

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that from an abstract perspective every starving child ought to be fed. Doing that is beyond my ability and thus, it is not a moral duty of mine to feed every starving child. Notice that my lack of obligation here is to be understood in a robustly *moral* sense and not simply a practical one. We do not understand this as saying: "You do have a moral duty to feed all the starving children of the world, but you simply can't." Rather, it is due to the fact that I can't feed the starving children of the world that I do not have a moral duty to do so. Charging, then, that the claim of practical impossibility does not carry moral import, gets things wrong in the moral case.

The skeptic's response to our argument from practical impossibility is that from the mere fact that as a practical matter it is impossible for us to accept his thesis, one cannot validly infer that the relevant epistemic obligations do not hold (i.e. that in all cases you ought not believe in the absence of warrant). But, if our analogy with the case of morality is a good one, this also gets things wrong: it is precisely because I can't but believe otherwise with regard to the external world, etc., that I am not epistemologically obliged to withhold belief from them. Although from an abstract, God's-eye-view, the proposition that is the object of my belief is not justified (just as, in some abstract sense, leaving the world's starving children unfed is immoral), it would be wrong to call *me* unreasonable for believing it, given that I cannot do otherwise (just as it would be wrong to call someone immoral for not feeding the world's hungry children, given that doing so is impossible). Thus, as in the moral case, the claim of practical impossibility *does* diffuse the relevant obligation, although this time, the obligation is epistemological rather than ethical.[20]

If we step back and reflect on this issue afresh, this time viewing it as a matter of deliberate choices, it would seem obvious that if the choice is between believing *nothing* on the grounds that one's beliefs ultimately have no warrant, or forgoing warrant in a relatively small number of cases and thus making warranted belief possible in all the rest, the reasonable person would choose the latter and the unreasonable one the former. For the latter person will, at the end of the day, likely have a lot more warranted beliefs than the former person, who has taken his proverbial toys and gone home. The skeptic might

20. Reid runs a version of this argument in his correspondence with Lord Kames. See the discussion in Ferreira, *Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt*, 131.

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stamp his foot and insist that the latter person really has no warranted beliefs at all, because he's taken a few things for granted, but such an insistence would be unconvincing, since it has not been demonstrated that the skeptic's demands for ubiquitous rational justification are themselves justified. And if the common sense naturalist is correct about what is possible and impossible with regard to justification and belief, it would appear evident that the skeptic's doubts are not reasonable and thus, should not be permitted to define what *counts* as reasonable and unreasonable in the case of our beliefs.

The reasonable inquirer presses for reasons within the domain of what is humanly possible to believe and disbelieve; beyond this point, the search is both futile and irrelevant. There may be an abstract sense of justification, which is applicable directly to propositions, and which brings us beyond the boundaries of human possibility, but when the concept is applied to *belief*, it is both pragmatically and epistemologically unsound to extend it that far.[21]

§3

> [I] did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.
>
> – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*[22]

As of yet, we have not examined the skeptic's claim that our so-called necessary beliefs are unwarranted; we have simply proceeded from the assumption that they are and then asked what the impli-

21. This idea that the sound extension of reason in search of justification lies only within the domain of human capability is at the center of Hume's conception of sound enquiry:

> The only method of freeing learning . . . from these abstruse questions, is to enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and show . . . that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects. We must submit to this fatigue, in order to live at ease ever after: And must cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate.
>
> Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 12. Also see the *Treatise*, pp. 263–274.

22. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), §94.

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cations of such a class of unwarranted necessary beliefs could be. As we've seen, the idea of necessity we have been operating with, so far only pragmatic in connotation, carries greater epistemic weight than one might think, and this alone blunts the impact of the skeptic's critique. We now know that we can accept his assertion that these beliefs lack warrant, while nevertheless rejecting his insistence that the requirements of reasonableness demand we disavow them.

But now I would like to concentrate more directly upon the notion of lack of warrant that is so central to the skeptic's critique. Precisely in what sense are the necessary beliefs we have been discussing unjustified? What I will argue is that these beliefs are not unjustified at all, and most certainly not in the way the skeptic intends. Rather, they comprise a background or "framework" of beliefs which must be in place in order for the processes of justification and warrant to operate in the first place. In our discussion here, then, the idea of necessary belief will take on a new, more directly epistemological meaning: the class of beliefs we have identified are necessary in that they are required in order that the justifying of further beliefs and thus, the attainment of knowledge, should be possible. It will be a short way then, to the realization that *belief comes prior to reasoning*, and one important consequence of this will be that concepts such as justification and warrant could never be constitutive of what it is to be a reasonable believer.

H. O. Mounce identifies the idea that belief has priority over reason as lying at the core of *Scottish Naturalism*, a position which is, in many ways, a close cousin to the common sense naturalism that I am espousing. Mounce describes the essence of this position as follows:

> On the empiricist view, we reason on the basis of beliefs which are justified by sense experience. On the naturalist, we can justify beliefs by sense experience only because we already have beliefs . . .
>
> We cannot step outside all our beliefs. This means that we cannot justify our knowledge as a whole, though we may justify one belief by reference to others. 'Belief' said William Hamilton 'is the primary condition of reason, not reason the ultimate ground of belief'.
>
> For the Scottish Naturalists, justification cannot arise unless we are *already* entitled to certain beliefs.[23]

23. H. O. Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2, 13, & 131. Mounce importantly distinguishes this brand of naturalism from the 20th century scientific variety, which is heavily invested in Empiricism.

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When we consider afresh our discussion in §2 now, we can see how such a reading of Hume and Reids' positions makes sense. For it is quite clear that beyond the rather stark claim that we simply *must*, as a matter of natural compulsion, believe that our senses are generally reliable, that there is an external world, and that the future will generally be like the past, and beyond the purely practical assertion that these beliefs are essential for our daily conduct, there is the further suggestion that these beliefs play an indispensable role *relative to our other beliefs*. Recall, for example, that Hume has told us that they comprise ". . . reasonings on which almost all knowledge depends . . ." Unfortunately, beyond this claim, Hume is really quite vague as to just what the dependency is supposed to consist of. What we will want to ask is this: Exactly what kind of non-pragmatic, epistemological necessity does the common sense naturalist want to attribute to his so-called necessary beliefs? The question is an essential one; we simply must make clear the role played by the necessary beliefs vis à vis the rest of our belief system. For it is easy to see how all of this could be misunderstood and take us ways in which we do not want to go.

The necessity we are talking about here is clearly some sort of conceptual necessity; the idea, after all, is that you *can't have* the rest of the beliefs that we have without the belief that there is an external world, that the future will generally be like the past, etc . . . But, if not articulated more precisely, this could sound suspiciously like foundationalism: the view that the great majority of our beliefs are grounded in a few fundamental ones, through some variety of inference. Of course, this is exactly what common sense naturalism is *not* supposed to be, for according to foundationalism, justification *does* go "all the way down to the bottom." The foundationalist claims that most beliefs are justified by inference, and the foundational beliefs are "self-justified," because they are either infallible, indubitable, incorrigible, or in possession of some other sort of special status. Since the common sense naturalist does not believe that necessary beliefs admit of warrant at all, he must make sure that his conception of necessity is not taken in this way.[24]

24. In *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 63–4, Keith Lehrer claims that Reid's epistemology represents a foundationalism in which the foundational beliefs are both fallible and corrigible. Ferreira argues that there are contradictory strains in Reid, vacillating between foundationalism and anti-foundationalism (see *Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt*, 87–115). But the more important issue concerns

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As overused as the metaphor is, the example of a game may give us the best insight into the idea of necessity that the common sense naturalist is working with. The metaphor is particularly *apropos* given that the portion of common sense naturalism, which is the focus of our current discussion, is inspired, in part, by Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*.[25] Consider, for example, the game of tennis and, specifically, the concept of a "fault." If a serve goes into the net or fails to land in the appropriate service box, the umpire calls "fault!" Whether or not a particular serve is legitimate (counts as "in play") or not is determined by this fault-concept. As a result, the fault-concept is *necessary*, in our as-of-yet-to-be-defined sense of necessity, both for the possibility of serving and for the possibility of playing tennis. 'Fault' is a part of the *framework* of the game of tennis and is a concept that must be taken for granted, whenever the game is played.

'Framework' and 'Framework-concept' (or 'framework-belief') are particularly fortunate terms for our purposes, in that they are simultaneously precise and suggestive. They speak to the overall *shape* or *structure* of a thing or practice, as distinct from, and yet essential to the *substance* or *content* of that thing or practice. What we will want to say, then, is that the beliefs we have been concerned with here – that the future will be like the past, that there is an external world, and that our senses are generally reliable – are necessary, in that they

whether, specific epistemological theories aside, we take necessary beliefs to admit of *any* warrant whatsoever. It is in this regard that I cannot ultimately accept Ferreira's treatment of either Hume or Reid, because on that treatment, basic or common sense beliefs wind up *admitting of warrant*, albeit of a sort substantially different from that to which other sorts of beliefs admit. This is antithetical to the basic conceptual structure of naturalism, both of the Scottish and our "common sense" variety.

I likewise cannot accept Dauer's attribution to Hume of a causal theory of knowledge, despite the fact that it is a slippery question as to whether such a theory commits one to the idea that beliefs are *justified* by virtue of their possessing the right causal relations to the world. Regardless, such an attribution would commit Hume to a position on the *truth* and *reliability* of necessary beliefs that would seem totally at odds with both the letter and, more importantly, the spirit of his analysis.

25. The possibility of bringing together the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Scottish Naturalism is described most adeptly in P. F. Strawson's 1983 Woodbridge Lectures, published as *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

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are part of a framework. Like the concept of a fault in tennis, they make possible a certain kind of practice.[26]

In tennis, the sense in which the fault-concept is necessary as a tennis framework-concept is quite transparent; the concept is part of the structure of the game such that one literally *cannot serve* – or, indeed, play tennis at all – without it. Of course, someone can engage in physical movements perceptually indistinguishable from serving and playing tennis, but they would not be *serving* or *playing tennis*, unless those movements were made under the jurisdiction of the fault-concept and within the larger context or framework of tennis and more generally, of sport.[27]

Now, what is the relevant analogy to athletic behaviors in the case of knowledge and belief, and in what way are the beliefs we have been discussing correspondingly a part of a framework and hence, necessary? Upon holding his two hands in front of his face, G. E. Moore famously reasoned that since he had two hands, an external world must exist.[28] But avoiding entirely the enormous and complicated discussion as to what exactly Moore meant by his proof and whether or not it is ultimately sound, surely we can agree on the following point, which is suggested by his exercise: part of what is *ordinarily understood* when people say they know or believe things like 'I have a hand' is that they are talking or thinking of external objects.

What this means must be carefully unpacked. The point is *not* that on the basis of 'I have a hand' one can *deduce* that an external world

26. In *On Certainty*, §97, Wittgenstein speaks of the difference between the movement of water in a river and the shape of the river-bed.

27. This example of indiscernible counterparts, one which is an instance of serving and playing tennis, the other which is not, is derivative of the twins-cases introduced in Arthur Danto's *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), for the purpose of demonstrating that 'art' is a relational concept. Of course, 'serve' and 'tennis' are also relational concepts, in that no specification of bodily movements alone will be sufficient to characterize something as counting as a serve or as playing tennis. One must specify a contextual environment, in order for those bodily movements to be "transfigured" into tennis-movements.

The basic idea of relational concepts arose, interestingly enough, in *response* to Wittgenstein's assertion that concepts like 'game' (and, with Morris Weitz, 'art') cannot be defined in terms of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions; the counter-assertion was that if one includes relational properties, such concepts *can* be defined in the ordinary manner. See, on this point, the landmark paper by Maurice Mandlebaum, "Family Resemblances and Generalizations Concerning the Arts," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (July 1965).

28. G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," in *Philosophical Papers*, 127–150.

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exists; nor is it that in order to *literally* understand the meaning of 'I have a hand', one must understand that it is an external object and thus, that external objects exist. Rather, the point is that statements and beliefs like 'I have a hand', belong to a larger practice which, for lack of a better name, we will call 'physical object talk'. That physical objects are external objects is a part of the very framework of this practice, and thus, the *belief* that external objects exist is always present, in the background, when we are employed in it. Furthermore, this belief is *regulative* of the behaviors we engage in when participating in physical object talk.[29]

The regulative qualities of frameworks – and of the beliefs and statements that are constitutive of them – are revealed most vividly in how we act and, in particular, in how we respond to framework violations.[30] Consider the tennis example again: if, after the umpire calls a fault, a player disputes the call, claiming that the serve was not a fault but, instead, landed in the service box, his complaint makes sense to us; we understand it, not only as a grammatical English utterance, but also as a *tennis-complaint*. If he is wrong, we will tell him that he has made a mistake with regard to his serve's status. But now imagine that a player serves a ball clearly beyond the boundaries of the service box, and despite the umpire's calling "fault!", continues on to the net as if to play out the point. The umpire tells him to stop play, and his opponent walks back to the receiving position, but our player continues to wave his racquet and posture as if he is playing. After a brief discussion with him, we discover that his behavior is not due to the fact that he thinks the umpire erred in his call of a fault or because he did not hear the call, but rather because he thinks that the fault concept is illegitimate. Our reaction here would be quite different than from the first case: we would certainly understand his point, in the sense that he is speaking grammatically sound

29. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein often claims that framework beliefs function like rules. Wright discusses this way of thinking about framework beliefs (or, as he – and Wittgenstein sometimes – calls them, "hinge propositions") in "Facts and Certainty," 453–461, and goes into substantial detail on how framework beliefs work in a normative capacity, relative to the larger belief system to which they belong (although his conclusions are somewhat different than mine).

30. Wittgenstein sometimes speaks as if frameworks can be characterized in terms of dispositions to act. See *On Certainty*, §110. This idea is, of course, importantly connected to the one that we are currently discussing. Insofar as framework beliefs function like rules, they regulate what counts as proper and improper conduct, when taken within the context of a practice, and thus, condition our dispositions to act within that context and in response to violations of it.

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English, but we would not understand it as a *tennis-point*. We would suggest either that he did not know the rules of tennis or, if it was clear he did, that he was either crazy or being deliberately obstructive.[31]

What I want to say here is that, in a similar vein, someone who speaks of hands but denies that they are external objects is violating the rules of the practice of physical object talk. Like the tennis player who speaks of the concept of a fault being illegitimate, this person has made a mistake with regard to his use, and thus, his understanding, of the idea of hands and of their relationship to the external world. Similarly, a person who agrees that hands exist, but claims that they cease to exist when no longer perceived, would also be violating the rules of this practice. This is because distinct and continued existence is an essential part of the very idea of external objects, an idea which we've seen is regulative of the practice of physical object talk, to which talk of hands belongs. In both cases, we would understand what the person has said, in that he has spoken grammatical English, but we would not understand his points as *points about hands*. Points about hands are made as a part of external object talk, and thus, are governed by the belief in the existence of external things.

To summarize the point we have been making, the way in which framework-concepts and beliefs are necessary, relative to a practice, is as follows: (i) they are *regulative* as to what counts as engaging in the practice; (ii) they are *determinative* of the normative principles – i.e. what counts as legitimate or illegitimate, warranted or unwarranted, proper or improper, etc . . . – within the practice. Incidentally, it is worth noticing that this reading captures both of the ways in which Wittgenstein has characterized frameworks and the statements that are constitutive of them: it explains why they can be treated as rules, and it explains how they can be seen as dispositions to act.[32]

The common sense naturalist claims that *believing*, *knowing*, and *justifying* are behaviors comprising a practice, which I will refer to

31. Mistakes can only be made *within* frameworks (e.g. the tennis player's belief that his serve was in play, when it was really a fault, is a mistake), so violations *of* frameworks cannot be properly characterized as mistakes. Ibid., §70–75.

32. Ibid., §103 & §105. Also see Michael Kober, "Certainties of a world-picture: The epistemological investigations of *On Certainty*," in Hans Sluga and David Stern, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 411–441.

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here as our 'epistemic practice'. The cluster of beliefs we have focused on in this essay (and, likely, more), when taken as a group, are framework-beliefs of that practice, and are thus regulative of the behaviors we engage in when acting within it, and we are now in a position to properly understand the necessity of those beliefs. Beliefs concerning the general reliability of our senses, that the future will generally be like the past, and that there is an external world regulate what counts as engaging in epistemic practices (i.e. what counts as justifying a belief or pursuing knowledge) and determine what counts as proper or improper epistemic practices (i.e. which are justified or warranted beliefs and which are not). They are thus an omnipresent part of the background, whenever any one of us engages in the practice of justifying a belief or knowing something. One isn't justifying a belief or pursuing knowledge without these beliefs as part of the background (just as one is neither serving nor playing tennis, without the concept of a fault in the background), and one's beliefs are not warranted or unwarranted, without these beliefs as part of the background (just as a serve cannot be "in play", unless taken in the context of the fault-concept).[33]

In our attempt to understand the basic mistake made by the skeptic, it will be useful to adopt (and adapt) a group of terms introduced by Rudolph Carnap.[34] By an *internal* statement or use of a concept, I will intend such a statement or use that occurs within the context of a practice (and thus, within the context of a framework). Thus, our umpire's crying "fault!" upon seeing a serve fail to land in the service box, is an internal use of the term 'fault', within the context of the game of tennis. Similarly, the claim that the belief that I have a hand is warranted is a statement that is internal to our epistemic practices. By an *external* statement or use of a concept, I will mean those statements or uses that *characterize* or are *descriptive of* the framework of a practice. Thus, to say that a fault is a governing concept over the process of serving in tennis is to make external use of the term 'fault', while to claim that there is an external world is to make an external statement that is descriptive of a portion of the framework of our epistemic practices.

33. I believe that this is the sense in which Hume intended his remarks concerning ". . . these reasonings upon which all our knowledge depends . . ."
34. Rudolph Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," in *Meaning and Necessity: A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), 205–221.

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In our first tennis example, the umpire called our player's serve out of bounds; in doing so, he made an *internal* statement to the effect that the serve was illegitimate under the jurisdiction of the fault-concept. In our second tennis example, if not careful, we might interpret the player as doing something similar: after all, when asked why he continued going through the motions of playing, the player declared the fault concept illegitimate. But in doing so, he makes what is known as a *category mistake*; the type of error described by Gilbert Ryle in his critique of Cartesian dualism.[35] For the fault-concept is not the sort of thing that can be illegitimate in tennis; no, it is a part of the very framework which determines what *counts* as legitimate or illegitimate in tennis, with regard to the service. Thus, to apply the normative description 'illegitimate' to the very concept that determines what is or is not illegitimate is to misuse the normative description and to misunderstand the nature of the concept.

The skeptic makes an identical category mistake when claiming that our beliefs in the external world, etc., are unwarranted. 'Warranted' and 'unwarranted', 'justified' and 'unjustified' are, of course, varieties of legitimacy and illegitimacy; they are normative concepts that operate *within* a particular framework.[36] And the skeptic's intended use of these concepts is clearly *internal* in nature. This is most evident in the *expectations* he has of us as a consequence of his purported demonstrations: within the context of our epistemic practices, we are obliged to hang on to our warranted beliefs and to abandon our unwarranted ones. The skeptic tells us that just as we should cease believing in, say, Santa Claus, once the belief has been demonstrated to be unjustified, we should likewise cease believing in the existence of the external world, etc., once these beliefs have been similarly exposed. But now we know that this is to misunderstand the nature of these beliefs and to misapply the concepts of justification and warrant. For these latter beliefs are not the sort that admit of warrant or justification; rather, they are constitutive of the framework which determines what counts as warrant or justification. Surface grammar notwithstanding, they are not anything like the belief that there is a Santa Claus. Warrant and justification

35. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), Ch. 1.
36. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §105.

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operate as normative concepts only *within* the framework of our epistemic practices (i.e. the claim that a belief is justified or unjustified can only be made internally); they cannot be applied externally to the framework itself. Thus, they can be applied to the belief in Santa Claus, but not to the belief in the external world, etc . . . The skeptic, like the tennis player, has committed a basic category mistake.[37]

This idea that the skeptic makes a category mistake helps us to avoid the pitfalls to which many closely related anti-skeptical strategies have succumbed. In particular, I am thinking of those who have tried to argue that the skeptic's criticisms are literally meaningless or involve some other sort of *linguistic* abuse of words like 'know', 'believe', 'justify', and 'warrant'. One might adopt this kind of position either as the consequence of a verficationist theory of meaning or some version of "ordinary language" philosophy. On a view like Carnap's, for instance, since statements are only meaningful if verifiable, and only verifiable within a framework, external statements and correspondingly, external *criticisms*, like those made by the skeptic, are meaningless.[38]

This strategy suffers from an overwhelming, intuitive implausibility. We certainly *seem* to understand what the skeptic is saying; if we don't, how is it that we are able to answer him or even to characterize his complaints as skeptical?[39] Viewing the skeptic as making a category mistake, in contrast, would seem to possess the virtue of subtlety on this front. On the one hand, it preserves the idea that the skeptic is using words and concepts incorrectly; we need this idea of improper usage to make sense of the air of *puzzlement* that

37. "If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, nor yet false." Ibid., §205.
38. Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," 213–215.
39. Stroud offers convincing criticisms of the charge that the skeptic's criticisms are meaningless, as that charge is manifested in the views of both Austin and Carnap (See *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Chs. 2 and 5). Wittgenstein was himself dubious as to whether the skeptic's utterances are meaningless (*On Certainty*, §37), although there are also places where he argues, in what would seem a contradictory vein, that the framework beliefs the skeptic is questioning are not explicitly represented or even propositional in character at all (§95, §110, §135, §137). Wright seems to prefer this treatment of framework beliefs as not genuinely fact-stating, as well. *I* have tried to carefully negotiate the issue as to the semantics of framework beliefs, treating them as standard in form and propositional in content, although non-standard in function and use.

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characterizes our response to his criticisms (as it characterized our response to the tennis player, in the second example). By saying that the skeptic commits a category mistake, then, we do accuse him of the *misuse* of expressions and concepts.[40] On the other hand, we also acknowledge that, in a literal sense, we do understand what the skeptic is saying. But that is all that we understand; we understand *what* he is saying, but given that he is supposedly talking about a practice with which we are all familiar and for which there is a commonly shared framework of regulating concepts, we cannot understand *how* he can say it. His mistake involves his use of words, but it is not, strictly speaking a linguistic mistake but, instead, a conceptual mistake within the context of a practice.[41]

There is one final point I would like to address, before closing this portion of the essay. Central to the common sense naturalist's epistemology is the idea that framework-beliefs lack warrant, in that they are not candidates for justification. Being definitive and regulative of our justificatory practices, these beliefs can neither be justified nor defeated. But must we not admit that simply describing framework-beliefs in this way is tantamount to offering a kind of justification for them? By arguing that these framework beliefs are necessary for the possibility of our epistemic practices, are we not, in essence, offering a *transcendental argument* on their behalf?[42] Since our epistemic practices are clearly possible – we engage in them daily – our framework beliefs are straightforwardly entailed, given that they are a necessary condition for those practices. But if this is true, then it seems like we have offered what is, in truth, a rationalistic response to the skeptic. Small 'r' rationalists think that reason governs all our beliefs through the medium of justification. By justifying

40. This idea of the misuse of terms and concepts is pervasive in Wittgenstein's characterization of skepticism in *On Certainty*. Consider for example, §63–4, §231, §255, & §279.

41. John Searle argues that the belief in the external world is "a background presupposition on the normal understanding of a very large class of utterances," meaning not that it is required for a literal understanding of the meanings of words, but rather that it is necessary for the proper interpretation of those words within a public context. See his *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 183–190.

42. Searle, who argues for the necessity of the belief in the existence of an external world – "External Realism" as he puts it – in terms similar to ours, sees himself as offering a transcendental argument on its behalf. Ibid., 183–190.

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framework-beliefs transcendentally, we have brought them under the jurisdiction of reason and, as a result, our naturalism would seem to be a version of rationalism in disguise.

Over the years during which I have studied Hume, I have always wondered whether his claim that certain beliefs are necessary for the possibility of our reasoning and other epistemic practices constituted a transcendental argument on behalf of those beliefs and thus, an implicit violation of his own naturalism. Indeed, this has been a major source of tension in my evolving understanding of Hume's philosophy. But I am increasingly convinced that this is really not a problem at all.

For one, transcendental arguments are quite weak, in spite of the necessity they describe; *our* transcendental argument, as far as such arguments go, is extraordinarily weak. For all that it claims is that it is necessary that we hold certain beliefs, if we are to hold others. But this speaks not at all to the *truth* either of the first set of beliefs or of the second; in particular, it provides no argument for the truth of the belief in the external world.[43] If this is a variety of rationalism – and I doubt it is – it is not much of one. For the notion of justification that the rationalist works with is the one that is *internal* to our epistemic practices: on that notion, a belief P is justified if and only if there are good reasons for thinking the belief true. But our transcendental argument offers no such justification for framework beliefs; indeed, it couldn't, if what we've said about framework-beliefs and their relationship to justification and warrant is correct. All that it shows is the conceptual necessity of framework beliefs with regard to a practice.[44] What the transcendental argument really describes is what Hume tries to capture in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*: the conditions that define human epistemic practices and make them possible. Hume's emphasis is on the natural, mechanical conditions required for those practices, while Wittgenstein's is on the conceptual conditions required for them. But the two can be seen as parts of one and the same naturalistic project.

43. Ibid., 184, 194–197. See also, Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism*, 9, 21–24.
44. Whether these practices or frameworks are themselves necessary is an interesting and important question. Hume clearly thought certain such practices or frameworks necessary in a deeply natural sense; Wittgenstein thought them necessary in a less deep, more malleable social sense; while those like Carnap and Quine clearly view them as conventional, matters of choice, akin to the choice of scientific theories. My own view is that each of these positions may be correct, depending upon which practices or frameworks we are talking about.

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§4

> Humility was largely meant as a restraint upon the arrogance and the infinity of the appetite of man . . . But what we suffer from to-day is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never intended to be.
>
> Scoffers of old were too proud to be convinced; but these are too humble to be convinced. The meek do inherit the earth; but the modern sceptics are too meek even to claim their inheritance.
>
> – G. K. Chesterton, "The Suicide of Thought"[45]

Throughout our discussion, we have focused on what the skeptic expects us to do in light of his critique. This focus has been neither accidental nor arbitrary. To use concepts like justification and warrant as mere epithets is at best academic, but if the charges of lack of warrant and justification made by the skeptic are not intended as implicative of some course of action, then this is precisely what he is, a mere caster of epithets.

I take the skeptic more seriously than this and thus, I take it that his criticisms *are* intended to suggest a subsequent course of action. That course of action, of course, is the withdrawal of belief or assent from those things which the skeptic has criticized as being without warrant: that the external world exists, that the future will be like the past, and that our senses are generally reliable, to mention just those that have been at the center of our discussion.[46]

Dealing with the skeptic in this way bears rich fruit. For it is in the engagement with his suggested course of action that we see most

45. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 36–7.

46. In light of these points, it is interesting and instructive to consider Robert Nozick's discussion of skepticism in his *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 15–18. For Nozick, we lose out if we treat the skeptic as an adversary; if we leave him to the "foreign relations" department of our belief systems. In doing so, we take our challenge to be that of defeating his position rather than strengthening our own. Better to treat the skeptic's challenge within the context of our "bureau of internal affairs," where we take what he says as a challenge to bolster our own belief systems.

In treating skepticism as something to be undermined or avoided, it may seem that Common Sense Naturalism employs its department of foreign relations rather than its bureau of internal affairs, and thus, runs afoul of Nozick's intelligent and subtle advice. However, I believe that the naturalist critique really achieves both of Nozick's described tasks; it defeats the skeptic and, in doing so, sheds light upon the question, *how is knowledge possible?*

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clearly what is wrong with his critique. To try and engage skepticism directly, as already discussed, is to accept its fundamental rationalist assumptions; that every belief must come under the jurisdiction of reason and that any belief which cannot be vetted by reason ought to be jettisoned. Within the context of these assumptions, the battle with skepticism must surely be lost, and it becomes difficult to see how knowledge might be possible.

Our way is different. It is through the impossibility of the skeptic's recommended course of action that we discover that he is wrong with regard to his epistemic expectations of us. We know now that it is unreasonable to expect that someone should believe or cease to believe in a way that is not possible for him. But this is exactly what the skeptic recommends, when he tells us that we ought not to believe in the existence of the external world or in the general reliability of our senses. He is telling us to cease believing things that are impossible for us *not* to believe.

From practice we are led back to principle. The skeptic has recommended a mode of practice which is impossible. Such a recommendation is thus unreasonable, and the epistemic obligation that generated it is subsequently revealed as unreasonable itself. But we must now inquire into the deeper principle that is responsible for this mistaken conception of epistemic obligation. *Why* does the skeptic expect us to withdraw from the belief in the external world, etc? Because these beliefs are lacking in warrant; they are without justification. And if they are, the skeptic must be correct, for justification and warrant are normative concepts; where they are present we ought to believe, and where they are not, we ought not to believe.

It is thus that we are led back to the skeptic's original and most basic mistake, the category mistake that spawns his unreasonable conception of our epistemic obligation, which in turn spawns his mistakenly recommended course of action. For it is now revealed that the skeptic thinks that the belief in the external world, etc., are garden-variety beliefs and thus, subject to ordinary epistemological criticism. Of course, he is mistaken in this, but whether his mistake is the result of the seduction of superficial surface-grammatical similarities between framework beliefs and ordinary internal ones or of a more deeply held rationalist prejudice is irrelevant. The simple fact is that the beliefs in question are a part of the very framework within which epistemological criticism takes place and are not themselves

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subject to epistemological criticism. The skeptic's critique is thus misplaced, and his subsequent expectations and recommended course of action are misguided.

Perhaps the most significant thing which is understood by the common sense naturalist and misunderstood by the skeptic is that belief is both *temporally* and *conceptually* prior to reason and thus, to reasoning. Therefore, justification and warrant could never be definitive of or regulative with regard to what it is to be a reasonable believer, for they are concepts that we apply to our beliefs when engaged in epistemological activities, and we must already be believers in order to be so engaged.

The reasonable believer is *not*, as the rationalist and skeptic say, the person who has justification or warrant for everything that he believes. Instead, the reasonable believer is characterized primarily by his understanding of the proper limits and boundaries, and thus, of the very nature, of his own practices: He knows what those practices consist of and what they require; he knows when certain types of enquiry are properly pressed and when they must be suspended; and he knows what to question and what is not a candidate for questioning.

This is what both Hume and Chesterton understood with such great clarity: with a few fundamental beliefs already in place, the grand process of deductive and inductive justification can move forward, making possible the great pursuits of knowledge that have characterized not only the sciences but the entire span of human enquiry. But the moment that the essentially relational character of our epistemic practices is ignored and we press our search for reasons beyond the first stages of belief, we end up with nothing. Far from being skeptical or curmudgeonly, then, and far from desiring the demise or downfall of rational enquiry, both Hume and Chesterton wanted to *insure* that sound rational enquiry could go forward and, indeed, flourish.

What they realized, however, was that rationalism and, in particular, the rationalist *attitude* is fundamentally obstructive to the pursuit of knowledge, whether in the sciences or in any other area of enquiry. That attitude is characterized by the obsessive demand for justification and by the relentless and infinite search for the "ultimate" reasons for our reasons for believing the things we do. But such reasons do not exist; indeed, they *could not* exist. Our pursuit of them, then, is the pursuit of a *wil o' the wisp*, the result of which

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can only be the distortion of our minds, the stagnation of enquiry, and ultimately, the withering of knowledge.

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