

THE HUME-WITTGENSTEIN ALLIANCE. There are, Humgenstein says, certain non-negotiable propositions that would be futile to even try to demonstrate. Indeed, an attempt to demonstrate them would show a misunderstanding of their role in our conceptual scheme. So when Moore offered his proof of the external world on the basis of a common experience (‘Here is one hand and here is another’), he not only missed the sceptical challenge. He also missed an opportunity for a swift response to the sceptic. The sceptic demands a proof—of the external world or of induction—but none can be given. This is because these basic claims are the beginning of any proof. 19 4

But Humgenstein is no conventionalist. It is true that Humgenstein speaks of a special logical role of these propositions in our frame of reference. But he is not saying, with Carnap, that they are accepted for the sake of argument, or that we have decided, for practical reasons, to accept them, and can decide later to dismiss them. To think of them this way would be a mistake, too. Instead, he says that they are so intrinsic to our thinking that doubting them would just be a pretence. 15 17

It is also vital to distinguish between Humgenstein’s position and another kind of naturalism whose best spokesman is Quine. That’s the hard naturalism mentioned at the outset. The hard naturalist argues that we accept every proposition, including the fundamental ones, on the strength of evidence. In particular, accepting them *just works*. But Humgenstein insists that this is to miss the point too, though in a different way. We do accept scientific theories and much else, like our ordinary beliefs, on the strength of evidence. They deliver better predictions and explanations. But we don’t accept the existence of the external world for this reason. To say so would be to concede that, had the evidence turned another way, we would have given up our fundamental beliefs. That, according to Humgenstein, is not possible. 1 20

ONLY CONNECT. What is Humgenstein’s attitude to transcendental arguments? So far, it seems he is moving toward them full speed. But Strawson concedes the power of Stroud’s criticisms. Thus the soft naturalist will not regard transcendental arguments as providing justification for our conceptual scheme. Instead, the task is discover relations among various elements of the scheme, even if these relations are not, strictly speaking, necessary. 21 22 23

HISTORICISM AND RELATIVISM. There is, now, a threat of a different kind. As soon as we have given up the project of justification, perhaps based on transcendental arguments, a possible reaction is that every fundamental truth is not really fundamental. It is fundamental for *us*, specifically, it is fundamental at this time and place. Given how often what previously seemed like an inescapable truth turned out later to be not only escapable, but false, why would we believe in a special class of fundamental, non-negotiable truths? 25

But Strawson is unconvinced. So far as our scheme remains a recognisably ‘human’ scheme, some truths will remain constant. Here, in fact, is their partial list: 27 28

- (i) Existence of the external world.
- (ii) Inductive inference.
- (iii) Causal relations.
- (iv) Other minds.
- (v) Free will.
- (vi) The reality of the past.