Skepticism is a defining problem within philosophy, both as a historical matter and as a systematic and methodological issue within contemporary debates. However, the various discussions around its character, conceptual history, and the philosophical threat it establishes have consistently been carried within a very compartmentalized structure. Discussions of skepticism are alive within contemporary analytic epistemology, the history of philosophy from ancient Greek philosophy through early modern and post-Kantian reflections, and even in continental philosophy broadly conceived. The arguments, insights, conceptual tools, and conclusions achieved and defended in these sub-fields rarely impact or influence each other. In some cases, this lack of communication has hindered the recognition of traditional forms of skeptical problems as instantiating genuine cases of skeptical arguments. For example, the reflections around skepticism in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy have little in common with epistemological doubt framed in the typical brain-in-a-vat or dreaming scenarios. The result is that many analyses of the skeptical problem often claim to provide wholesale refutations or dissolutions of its threat while concentrating on a particular variety, kept isolated from others in order for it to appear ‘defeated’ by the given anti-skeptical argument.

This volume is a welcome attempt to go beyond strict or canonical distinctions and approaches concerning skepticism. Edited by G. Anthony Bruno, lecturer in post-Kantian philosophy at Royal Holloway University, and A. C. Rutherford, PhD Student at Bonn University, the volume traces its roots in roots in a 2014 conference held in Bonn. The collection combines contributions spanning basically all of the main areas and historical perspectives that have had skepticism at their forefront. In doing so, the editors have assembled an impressive line-up of world-leading experts on skepticism and their respective field of specialization. We can find household names in the contemporary analytic discussion of philosophy, such as Crispin Wright and Duncan Pritchard, scholars of epistemology within the Kantian and post-Kantian traditions, such as Brady Bowman, Andrea Kern, and Hannah Ginsborg, and experts

1 This does not mean that no epistemologist has attempted to provide broader perspectives into their anti-skeptical strategies. Household names such as Ernest Sosa, Michael Williams, and John Greco all have shown sensitivity to other main areas of skeptical reflection.
2 A clear instance is the proliferation in recent epistemology of strategies purporting to show that skepticism is self-defeating, a kind of strategy that anybody with more than a passing familiarity with the discussions around Pyrrhonism should view with at least some suspicion.

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in those areas of the history of philosophy more traditionally connected to the problem of skepticism such as Casey Perin and Michael Forster for ancient Greek philosophy and Donald Ainslie for Hume. Even perspectives of a more ‘continental’ bent are present in the volume thanks to renowned philosophers such as Markus Gabriel and Sebastian Rödl.

In this sense, the collection already achieves a crucially important result, leaving almost no area of Western philosophy’s engagement with skepticism untouched. With a whiff of irony, the only prominent absence is a contribution explicitly on Descartes and Cartesian skepticism. However, the depth and breadth of the philosophical and epistemological analysis carried out in the volume manage to make this absence unnoticeable. Perhaps, in the spirit of progressing the comprehension of the skeptical problem, such an omission might even be considered necessary.

Given the number of contributions and the limited space available here, I will not try to survey every single essay collected in the volume. I will try instead to draw a common thread between specific areas of engagement with skepticism, hoping to provide some insight and criticism to foster further discussion. The areas I will focus on will only superficially respect the subdivisions of the volume established by the editors. This is not because their choice of grouping together the essays is to be found in any way wanting. Rather, the idea is that some themes crucially re-emerge between these groupings, and following such connections can help show how different thematic approaches to skepticism have more in common than initially thought.

We can start by approaching those essays that handle skepticism from the contemporary analytic perspective. Crucially, these contributions all engage with it through broadly Wittgensteinian lenses, following recent research in what is called ‘Hinge Epistemology.’ Concerning this aspect, it is necessary to point out that one of the contributions is a re-print of a founding stone of contemporary hinge epistemological debate, Crispin Wright’s *Facts and Certainty*. Originally published in 1985 in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, it is a landmark paper within epistemology for at least three reasons. Firstly, it was one of the first fully Wittgensteinian approaches to the problem of skepticism, aiming to make full use of the epistemological reflections of *On Certainty*, and that paved the way – together with works by Michael Williams and Marie McGinn – for Hinge Epistemology as we know it today. Secondly, it introduced a distinction between Cartesian and Humean skeptical problems. While Cartesian skepticism is the more mundane formulation in terms of undetectable scenarios of mass deception, Humean skepticism focuses on our *right to claim* perceptual warrant based on perceptual experience. Finally, it is the initial step towards Crispin Wright’s own anti-skeptical strategy, the idea that we
have a priori non-evidential entitlements to trust ‘cornerstone’ propositions such as ‘There is an external world.’

What’s interesting for our concerns is the retrospect that Wright wrote for this volume. In this self-analysis of his landmark paper, Wright accentuates several ideas that are sometimes neglected in contemporary anti-skeptical strategies. For example, the insight that to picture the skeptic as a stubborn and obstinate opponent – in itself a feature often found in Moorean or dismissive approaches – is a crucial mistake. What matters is that skepticism arises as a paradox. Unless some satisfactory solution to how we can rightly claim perceptual warrant is provided, we cannot maintain that we possess knowledge of ordinary propositions with a clean intellectual conscience (102).3 This also means skepticism can walk home a victor even if only a tie is reached. There is, at times, the tendency to hold the skeptic culpable in her inability to justify her contention that we necessarily lack knowledge of ordinary propositions. However, this justification is out of reach for her just because (radical) skepticism is incompatible with there being justification at all. By framing the issue as a paradox, one can see how pointing this out brings us not an inch closer to a satisfactory resolution of the skeptical problem.

On the theme of anti-skeptical strategies broadly influenced by Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, we can address Duncan Pritchard’s contribution, which is an analysis and objection to the inferential contextualist answer to skepticism offered by Michael Williams (1996). Pritchard introduces Williams’s perspective as based on the Wittgensteinian idea of rational evaluation based on ‘methodological necessities,’ providing an undercutting answer to skeptical doubt. Pritchard also notices that Williams’s account relies on the idea that to defeat skepticism, there must be a rejection of the thesis of epistemological realism, the idea that propositions have an inherent epistemic status due to their content (226). The rejection of this idea is what motivates Williams’s contextualism. All rational evaluation is local. Independently of this locality, there is no epistemic status to be attached to any proposition.

Pritchard agrees with the rejection of a totality requirement that Williams’s contextualism entails. He himself (2015) defended a Wittgensteinian approach where universal epistemic evaluation is conceived as a mistaken ideal. However, he does not think Wittgenstein’s reflections on rational evaluation can motivate rejecting epistemic priority relations nested within epistemological realism. In fact, for Pritchard, Williams’s contextualist interpretation of hinge propositions errs in viewing our commitment to methodological necessities as a matter of contextual choice. Against this picture, Pritchard counters

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3 Unless otherwise specified, page references will pertain to the reviewed volume.
that some hinge propositions cannot meaningfully be rejected. For example, a commitment to the reality of the past seems to be in place no matter the contextual-defined inquiry we are engaging in. Pritchard motivates this due to what he calls the über-hinge, the commitment to our being not radically and fundamentally mistaken in our beliefs. However, leaving aside this particular explanation – specific to Pritchard’s overall perspective – Pritchard’s argument could be resisted. In which sense is one committed to the reality of the past while doing logic, for example? Both the intelligibility of the practice and what constitutes its methodological necessities do not seem to depend crucially on a commitment to the reality of the past. One can properly do logic while admitting the possibility that the world came into being as it is now five minutes ago or even actively believing this.

For Pritchard, the problem with Williams’s answer is that it is too concessive to skepticism. It might even lie too close to epistemic relativism (232). Here I want to question Pritchard’s use of some Wittgensteinian passages that supposedly tell against a contextualist understanding of hinges. Wittgenstein suggested a deep link between hinges and the intelligibility of our meaning and practices. This is shown in the fact that for a belief to be mistaken, there must already be some sense of shared agreement and background upon which it can be recognized as a mistake. Pritchard reads this as signifying that hinges do not appear to be a matter of choice and that there cannot be radical divergence in hinge commitments, presumably between rational agents. The problem with this conclusion is that simply acknowledging that one must judge in conformity with others to be making a mistake cannot necessitate the impossibility of radically divergent systems of beliefs. What it shows is that we don’t normally have the choice of doing otherwise in our ordinary endeavors. However, this is a simple matter of conceptual necessity: if we want to partake in our society’s epistemic practices, we cannot diverge from our shared commitments already in place. Diverging from them would simply mean not partaking in that practice. For this to entail that there is no possibility of incommensurable contexts, some more substantial thesis on rational commitments and evaluations must be in place. The problem for Pritchard is that doing so could, at least in principle, undercut his own point concerning the implausibility of universal evaluation. It is difficult to understand how one can endorse localism as Pritchard does while simultaneously rejecting tout court the possibility of radical, even incommensurable divergence. An a priori rejection of the latter suggests that there are more than just local evaluative standards.

Markus Gabriel’s contribution also focuses on the topic of Locality and contextualism. It aims at showing how a consistent anti-skeptical strategy can be motivated via the denial of the existence of a privileged domain of knowledge,
such as knowledge of the external world. By doing so, one can counter the skeptical import of the principle of cognitive locality, the fact that, as finite human beings, we have available to us only a subset of the states of affairs we are capable of conceptualizing (250).

Gabriel takes this idea, whose origin lay in a debate between Wright and Williams, as expressing the cognitive difference between the access to information available to the subject and our being placed in a much broader environment at any given moment. This means that we are “ensnare[d] ... into a very general skepticism” (251) because the conditions of epistemic warrant are tied to the possibility of grasping the entailment between a fact, the proposition expressing that fact, and the metaphysics of the domain in which these are located. Given our cognitive locality – the fact that we do not have the entire world literally in view – this seems to put epistemic warrant out of our reach. Gabriel’s strategy to overcome this locality skepticism is to abandon the idea that knowledge must be knowledge of the world. His idea is that the concept of the world as a totality having a specific fundamental structure or architecture is what crucially misguides the epistemological question about knowledge (253). It constitutively embeds knowledge within a totality of facts that goes well above and beyond what we can ever hope to know. Gabriel surveys stances that attempt to account for this issue, like pragmatist and contextualist stances, but finds them unable to solve the issue. They try to ignore locality skepticism while still adhering to one of its motivating ideas, namely that the epistemological question still depends on an assumption of the uniformity of the domain of propositional knowledge. Gabriel’s own proposal, epistemological pluralism, rejects the idea that knowledge depends on overall justificatory standards (258) because there is no singular idea or concept of knowledge that one is appealing to when making a judgment or a knowledge claim. Pluralism requires “entirely different things from knowers when it comes to acquiring and defending knowledge claims in different cases” (258).

Gabriel’s perspective is quite interesting in connecting to the epistemological discussion of skepticism a metaphysical element often neglected in contemporary debates. The metaphysical concept of the world is a classic theme in the history of philosophy, especially in those investigations concerning knowledge. The idea that there exists a unitary domain our knowledge is about that constitutes the standards of this very knowledge is pervasive in epistemological theorizing, and its role in generating the skeptical problem hasn’t been analyzed as much as it ought to. Gabriel’s analysis also raises neglected problems in contemporary epistemological discussions, such as the uncomfortable relationship between varieties of contextualism and knowledge being a factive state. However, it isn’t always clear why the existence of cognitive locality must
be capable of engendering the skeptical problem. It is true that ordinary realist stances, both in epistemology and metaphysics, will invariably clash with human finitude. However, while this might forbid us from acquiring some very complex knowledge, it is unclear how this also undercuts ordinary knowledge claims and ascriptions. A possibility in this direction is that even in such ordinary endeavors, we implicitly rely on things we might never know. However, this thesis requires some substantial defense and seems to exclude the viability of possible externalist perspectives.

Additionally, pragmatist stances could very well accept Gabriel’s pluralist point. He is adamant that by doing so, the pragmatist would reject her foundational insight that ‘things must hang together in the broadest possible sense.’ However, adopting pragmatism does not necessitate holding on to this maxim as something over and above the particular domain it is adopted in. Gabriel thinks pragmatism can only be pluralist concerning the assumptions of knowledge and not knowledge as such, but the pragmatist could very well accept that knowledge itself is not merely established by fulfilling overarching standards. If Gabriel thinks that the pragmatist is required to do that because intuitively, even in particular ordinary endeavors, knowledge attributions and ascriptions seem to coalesce into some unitary concept or domain, then the question is why his own proposal isn’t required to explain away this general intuition.

The idea that skepticism and the reflections associated with it go beyond the strict epistemological purview is the leading spirit behind the contributions that most explicitly deal with the status of philosophical doubt within the post-Kantian tradition of philosophy. Brady Bowman’s contribution focuses on the self-critical and anti-dogmatic perspective that doubt is endowed with in Schelling and Hegel. Skepticism, in their philosophical systems, is connected with the very idea of intellectual autonomy and freedom. Contemporary epistemology, in this respect, is limited in viewing skepticism merely as a foe or something to be vanquished. The relevance of the German Idealist tradition for discussions on skepticism lies precisely in recovering its role as what allows us to obtain a self-critical stance on our lives as rational epistemic agents.

In this sense, Bowman’s article is noteworthy for its methodological choices. Not only he chooses to place his analysis of the value of skepticism in Schelling and Hegel as orthogonal to the current epistemological assessments of their stances. He does so by fruitfully placing Hegel and Schelling’s reflections in engagement with other perspectives – Gottlob Schulze’s, Descartes, Pyrrhonism – that allows us to capture what is distinctive of the German Idealist approach to skepticism. Bowman stresses that skeptical investigation shows us the route away from the idea that our engagement with the world is a matter of psychological compulsion beyond our control. What matters is
instead the character of practical certainty, the activity of the individual as constituting its being a free rational agent. The positive aspect of skepticism, conceived rightfully as the freie Seite der Philosophie, is its zetetic character, allowing an inexhaustible self-assertion of the rational individual in its engagement with the world.

G. Anthony Bruno’s contribution focuses more on the Kantian impulse behind the reflection around rationality, knowledge, and skepticism that informed so much of the German Idealist tradition. Specifically, Bruno highlights skepticism’s function in instituting a question quid iuris concerning “the very idea of our right to the categories ... [enabling] us to convert them from implicit possessions to rightful property” (206). This has to be contrasted with the question quid facti, traditionally associated with skeptical questioning. In a similar fashion to Wright’s Humean question about the possibility of redeeming our claim to perceptual warrant, for Kant, the pressing skeptical issue concerns establishing what the question quid facti cannot establish, i.e., “[the] consideration of the right by which we possess and use [our categories]” (207).

The relevance of the quid iuris question is perhaps the most important legacy of the Kantian perspective concerning skepticism. It undermines the naïve and unreflective trust in our faculties and source of epistemic normativity. This is something that contemporary epistemology has, at times, issues dealing with. The resurgence of straightforwardly dogmatic stances concerning knowledge and justification betrays a kind of uneasiness or misrecognition of the very idea of the quid iuris question. Skepticism, being more than a mere foe to be eliminated, gives us the impulse to go beyond dogmatic stances toward critical maturity. Bruno also briefly shows how the Hegelian perspective builds on and improves this realization. The inner tensions of our shapes of knowledge are brought to the fore in each step of the developmental stages of our engagement with the world. The pathway of doubt shows how skepticism is philosophy’s negative/rational side.

I want to examine another contribution to this volume whose topic is close to such reflections: Hannah Ginsborg’s take on rule-following skepticism. The problem of rule-following, as identified by Saul Kripke in Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, has a contentious status regarding the problem of epistemological skepticism. It is rare to find discussions of it by contemporary philosophers specializing in epistemology – the most notable exceptions being Crispin Wright and John McDowell. Rule-following skepticism focuses on the possibility of normativity and meaning. Such topics only sporadically feature in more straightforward epistemological discussions. Ginsborg’s aim in her contribution is to rectify this. Against those who understand the problem as being entirely constitutive or metaphysical – such an example is Paul
Boghossian’s (1989) refusal to acknowledge the word ‘skeptic’ in his account of the problem – Ginsborg defends the idea that the rule-following problem is at heart an epistemological issue.

She reads the metalinguistic correctness challenge raised by the rule-following skeptic concerning whether we meant addition or ‘quaddition’ in our past usage as a justificatory demand for the subject’s belief that she meant plus rather than ‘quus’ (151). Ginsborg’s reading goes against Kripke’s contention (1982, 11, 21) that the problem is constitutive in seeking for a ‘matter of fact’ that could unequivocally signify that the subject means plus. This is because the threat would not be as compelling without an actual skeptical challenger, one that presents the possibility of a general error in self-ascription of rule-following. Secondly, the metaphysical reading opens itself to the too-easy objection that Kripke is working with a too-narrow conception of which ‘facts’ could satisfactorily explain rule-following. Additionally, Ginsborg finds unconvincing the link between lack of justification and the purported unavailability of any fact that could explain what rule one is following (154).

She argues for the superiority of the epistemic reading by focusing on the opening phases of the argument. Ginsborg reads Kripke as targeting the ‘confidence’ of the subject’s present particular response that she meant plus, challenging one’s certainty. In answering the skeptic, the subject should show that she is not taking ‘a leap in the dark’ when she answers according to ‘plus’ rather than ‘quus.’ Understanding the challenge as epistemic also allows the skeptic to generalize the rule-following threat to a genuine skeptical conclusion. Additionally, for Ginsborg, the skeptic is also targeting the justification for thinking that what one does now is precisely what one did in her past normative conduct. This allows Ginsborg to cast the rule-following problem along a template that formally resembles the traditional closure-based argument for skepticism (157).

Ginsborg’s argument has the merit of recovering a genuinely epistemological dimension that is often lost when approaching rule-following skepticism, and that probably explains why this normative problem is kept separate from epistemological engagements with skepticism. The main problem with her perspective is that she loses track of how the epistemological threat raised by the rule-following paradox depends constitutively on its metaphysical character. If the problem is reduced to an issue of mere justification, of being able to justify one’s certainty in what she does, then it is unclear what could in principle forbid us from simply replying that we are acting according to our previous usage. If this problem is due to a mere possibility of error, a quid facti issue, there seems to be a lack of motivation to take the skeptical question seriously. Instead, rule-following skepticism motivates an epistemological justificatory
question based on a constitutive and metaphysical request: can there be in principle something capable of unambiguously instituting the link between what I do and what I say? Leaving this issue open undercuts the possibility of being justified in believing that I meant plus instead of quus. Without establishing the existence of such a legitimizing fact about our normative lives, there is no ground for my belief that I’m following the rules of addition. Ginsborg’s reading isn’t sensitive to the fact that the justificatory question is constitutionally dependent on a legitimizing demand, a *quid iuris* problem. A possible way to keep together this aspect and Ginsborg’s insight that there is a bona fide epistemological issue is to understand rule-following skepticism as instituting an underdetermination problem. My actions, past usage, past beliefs, and intentions radically underdetermine what I mean when I answer ‘125’ to ‘68+57’. Given that appeal to such facts is underdetermined, something in their support must be provided to make them facts that could justify my claim that I was following the addition rule instead of the quaddition rule. For epistemic justification to be had, a constitutive problem about what grants epistemic merit on a specific fact or ground ought to be solved first.

This suggestion allows us to draw some conclusions concerning the merits of this collection. A recurring theme has emerged in the selection of contributions we analyzed: skepticism goes beyond strictly epistemological concerns and might possess distinctive metaphysical roots. The question of what constitutes the epistemic merit of those basic sources, categories, concepts, and experiences that justify our beliefs cannot be addressed merely by understanding skepticism as a question of possible uneliminated cases of error. Current epistemological debates seem stuck in framing skepticism mainly as dealing with an obstinate, perhaps even obtuse, opponent that just won’t budge concerning our knowledge of ordinary propositions. This volume’s contributions not only offer a broader, more synoptic vision concerning the different varieties and genealogies of philosophical doubt. What they achieve is, most importantly, an understanding of skepticism that goes beyond the epistemological domain and ties it to constitutive and metaphysical problems. Contemporary epistemologists ought to heed the perspectives presented in this book. Even if the individual contributions must focus on specific issues and perspectives, reading the collection as a whole is bound to leave one with dissatisfaction concerning the current state of the epistemological debate on skepticism. Of all the possible readers of this volume, the contemporary epistemologist might be the only one left disappointed. There’s (almost) no discussion of skepticism in relation to forms of internalism and externalism, no analysis of contemporary stances such as knowledge-first, phenomenal conservatism, or proper functionalism. Even the only contemporary epistemological thread pursued is
one deeply influenced by Wittgenstein, whose status in contemporary epistemology is, at best, polarizing. And yet, this might be the main accomplishment of this volume: to progress our understanding of skepticism, to continue dwelling upon BIV scenarios, dreaming possibilities, and Moorean proofs might ultimately be a mistaken approach.

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