22. ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN BELIEFS: ODEGARD, RESCHER AND KLEIN*

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ABSTRACT. This paper presents a critical review and discussion of three recent major theories of epistemic scepticism. Odegard and Rescher both agree that real knowledge entails certain beliefs. But they both fail to see how beliefs could be absolutely certain. Klein's book, *Certainty: A Refutation of Scepticism*, presents the strongest possible view in favor of absolute certainty. I pay attention to its technical details and development by Klein. My conclusion is that Klein's theory rests on some presupposed ideas that are either counterintuitive or then make the theory trivial: one's certainty of truth becomes the same as the truth itself.

I

Knowledge and certainty are together poisonous. If the stuff is mishandled it causes a condition called epistemic scepticism. Scepticism has little practical effect, but the state is embarrassing anyway because it implies that something is wrong in your cognitive system. Three philosophers have recently recommended their own brand of cure: Peter D. Klein, Douglas Odegard, and Nicholas Rescher all admit that knowledge entails certainty but they argue that, properly understood, certainty is not impossible to reach.[1] Precautions against scepticism are available. Here they differ drastically both from those who, like Peter Unger, argue that scepticism is unavoidable if knowledge entails certainty, as he says it does, and Keith Lehrer who thinks that we can do without certainty.[2] A variety of interesting theories exist.

I shall either accept (on intuitive grounds) or directly argue for the following key points: (i) Epistemic certainty is either absolute or of some more moderate type; and certainty is either evidential or subjective (or, psychological). (ii) The idea of 'absolute subjective certainty' does not make sense because it is in principle impossible to reach. (iii) 'Absolute evidential certainty' is an epistemically trivial notion. (iv) Thus a non-sceptic is forced to work with the idea of less strict modes of certainty. (v) But it is questionable whether this type of certainty needs the title of *certainty*.

My discussion focuses on Klein's views: Klein confuses justification with belief as the intended bearer of certainty because he does not make a clear difference between *justification* and *belief-construction*. Thus he does not succeed in giving an account of how an epistemic agent can reach certainty even in 'simple cases'.

II

Let me identify three different views concerning epistemic certainty. (1) Klein offers the following 'defeasibility definition' of empirical knowledge:

> S knows that p if and only if
> (K1)   p is true
> (K2)   S is certain that p on the basis of some proposition, e.
> (K3)   e justifies p for S; or, S has the right to believe that p.
> (K4)   Every initiating defeater of the justification of p by e
>   for S is a misleading initiating defeater (or no additional
>   but ultimately anomalous evidence may exist).

(Klein, *Certainty*, 150 and 8).

His strategy is to show that K3 and K4 jointly entail that the truth of p is *certain*, on the basis of evidence e. Actually we are dealing with two types of *absolute certainty*: K2 speaks about S's psychological, or subjective, certainty, or about the fact that S is sure. K3 and K4, on the other hand, are designed to guarantee that the evidence for p is certain, or that S has the final right to be certain. However, looking at Klein's definition one may ask whether K2 speaks about *absolute* certainty. I think it does, although Klein wavers at this point (see 113–14). What must be added, then, via K4, to S's evidence and justification when 'e justifies p for S' to make S also sure? This question is especially interesting because K3 and K4 are said to be so strong that they guarantee the satisfaction of K1. If p is justified and certain, p is also true. Because of this very strong nature of K3 and K4 it is not at all clear how they are related to S's subjective beliefs and their certainty, in other words, K2. How can Klein answer a question about the mode and generation of subjective certainty in K2? (See sec. *III* below.)

(2) Odegard thinks that knowledge requires absolute certainty but also that no certainty logically entails the truth of p. He distinguishes between subjective and evidential certainty and says that p is absolutely certain if it cannot be refuted. His view is clearly weaker than Klein's. Odegard writes:

> Something is *absolutely certain*, given someone's total evidence at a given time, if, and only if, (i) it is plausible given that evidence, and (ii) there is no good counterevidence in relation to that evidence. (Odegard, *Knowledge and Scepticism*, 32).

The main point is that a rational and well-informed agent, S, if he is to be absolutely certain that p, can have no reason to suspect the truth of p. The total lack of the agent's counterevidence against e and p makes it impossible for him to entertain seriously any idea of the truth of a proposition incompatible with p. The presupposition is, of course, that only evidence-based counterarguments count against e and p, and therefore merely hypothetical troubles can be neglected. This is certainly so, but because p need not be true we must also check what happens if S believes that p on the basis of e, when e fully confirms p and p is still *false*. In this anomalous case p may still be absolutely

certain for S; but if it is, Odegard's words "there is no good coun-
terevidence" become ambiguous: if p is in principle knowable and false,
the counterevidence against p must exist somewhere, although it is now
supposed that S is not acquainted with it. In such a troublesome case it
is not easy to agree with Odegard that S can (or, should) be absolutely
certain. The point is that good counterevidence is available to better
informed agents and, consequently, S's absolute certainty is an objec-
tively premature attitude. Certainly Odegard can respond by saying that
if the counterevidence is practically impossible to find nothing is wrong
with S's claim to subjective certainty. S will not be disappointed as to
his original evidence. Nevertheless, knowing our general fallibility, S can
be granted only *relative certainty*, as it seems to me. It may be also
possible to say that S is absolutely certain within a given evidential
context.   But the very existence of the limited context and of our per-
sistent suspicion that in a generalized situation and a broader time per-
spective S's belief that p is true might not be safe from counterevi-
dence casts a shadow over any epistemic optimist.[3]

(3) Our subjective epistemic possibilities are realistically described
by Rescher. According to him, neither 'objective, evidential certainty'
nor 'absolute certainty' are needed for the existence of empirical knowl-
edge. Both are merely fictional notions according to a 'fallibilist'. Never-
theless, a fallibilist avoids scepticism:

> The fallibilist holds that a perfectly justified knowledge-
> claim may prove wrong, but yet that--recognizing and con-
> ceding this--one may be entirely justified in insisting that
> *in this case* such a strictly theoretical prospect can reason-
> ably be put aside. (Rescher, *Scepticism*, 112).

Rescher's theory of subjective knowledge-claims, or warranted beliefs,
allows that S may sometimes justifiedly maintain that he has taken all
his relevant and available information into account and therefore he can
relax, and be certain. What S cannot do is to make it finally and abso-
lutely clear to himself that his present epistemic position in relation to
the truth of p and the desired characteristics of his evidence-set e is
exactly that which gives him the right to be certain. Nevertheless, S is
indeed certain, and a fallibilist need not deny that certainty is a neces-
sary requirement of knowledge.

We have identified three views. The difference between Rescher
and Odegard seems to be mainly the result of their different attitudes
towards the question of what S should think of the generalized idea of
human fallibility. They both argue for its existence: yet Odegard is
ready to forget it if S's evidence is otherwise good enough. Sometimes
counterevidence will be absent from any conceivable extension of S's
original evidence-set e. Thus S, according to Odegard, can be absolutely
certain. What S seems to be missing, if I interpret Odegard correctly, is
a systematic method of distinguishing the successful claims to absolute
certainty from those where some hidden counterevidence still exists,
e.g., because p happens to be actually false. S's certainty-related suc-
cess is partly a matter of epistemic *luck*. Rescher, on the contrary, re-
mains aware of this aspect of luck and the related problems with S's
evidence. He allows S to be certain only in a weaker, non-absolute
sense:

> there is here, in the case of certainty–claims . . . a gap
> between the content of a duly warranted claim and the evi-
> dential base we have in hand for its support. (Rescher,
> *Scepticism*, 111-12).

No ascription of 'absolute certainty' to any knowledge–claim can be le-
gitimated.

It then remains to be seen whether Klein can support his radical
idea that S can be certain in such a sense that it is not captured either
by Odegard or Rescher. But if Klein wants to show that human certainty
entails the truth of our beliefs we have an initial reason to adopt a
pessimistic attitude towards the success of his enterprise: Can he point
to a *systematic connection* between the lack of counterevidence to e and
S's belief grounded on e? And can he fill the *epistemic gap* mentioned
by Rescher?

III

(1) The key problem we face is determining how strong and convincing
Klein's idea of certainty really is. Let us look at his intricate technical
terms. (Klein's text is highly technical. I refer to his book for more de-
tails.) In his definition of knowledge (see K4) the term 'initiating defeat-
er' means the following: Assume S has at a given moment of time a be-
lief-set E and that it has a subset e which confirms p, according to
some logic of confirmation, so that p is justified for S. If this confirma-
tion of p by e is not overriden by any defeating evidence h, p is *ab-
solutely certain*. Counterarguments against e may surprise S, which is to
say that there exists evidence h such that h may be true though it is
not in E.

We say that h is a *defeater* if and only if h and e together fail to
confirm p, or (h & e) $\not\subset$ p. Some initiating defeaters are *misleading* (MID)
and some are *genuine* (GID). MID looks like any defeaters except that
they do not really defeat the evidence e for p; why? It may happen that
a true evidential proposition h renders plausible to S a new *falsehood* w
(w $\equiv$ ~p, and w is not in E) which appears to defeat the evidence e for
p. But in this case w & e may actually fail to defeat p: Because w is
false we make a restriction on its defeating effect so that w may gen-
uinely defeat e only on the condition that E contains a *false* belief e^1
which together with (true) h renders (false) w plausible to S; now h is
a GID. In the case of MID, no such e^1 exists. The point is, simply, that
if E does not contain any relevant errors no new misinformation, howev-
er plausible looking as such, may alone defeat the confirming evidence e
for p. Yet, if a false w is based on a suitable falsehood e^1 already in E,
and thus available to S, S's rational belief that p will collapse. (See ex-
amples below.)

GID are effective counterarguments against p, given E. MID are,
on the contrary, examples of such evidential considerations that use new
information to make acceptable some false epistemic claims; they do not
find sufficient support among the misinformation already in E. S contin-
ues to have in this latter case the full epistemic right to be certain on
the basis of his original evidence.

We can formulate the following Kleinian principle (P): New misinformation does not count against e and p if it is not rendered plausible to S by S's earlier, uncorrected epistemic mistakes. Let us call a GID which defeats without any error in E a *primary* GID (PGID) and a GID which defeats only if conjoined with a previous error in E a *secondary* GID (SGID).[4]

Richard Foley presents the following useful example of SGID:[4]

> Let p be the proposition that last month soybeans sold for more than $1 a pound. Let S's evidence e for p include his reading in the newspaper that p is true, his farmer friends telling him that it is true, etc. In addition, suppose S believes the *false* proposition q, that Brezhnev appeared before the Politburo more than three times last month. . . . Now, let d be the *truth* that in no month where Brezhnev has appeared before the Politburo more than three times has the price of soybeans been more than $1, and suppose that S neither believes nor has any grounds for believing that d is true. Under these conditions, Klein's account implies that S cannot know p, even if p is *true*. (my italics) (Foley, 'Review of Klein's *Certainty*', 563).[5]

Foley thinks that because false belief q had no part in the original justification of true belief p, it is strange to claim, as Klein does, that q together with some truth like d, with which S is not even familiar, would defeat S's evidence for p. Yet, Klein's idea need not be vulnerable to Foley's specific accusations: Klein, as we know, requires absolute certainty; he may therefore adopt a counterfactual approach and say that if S were acquainted with d he would *not* believe p.

However, Foley's idea can be generalized, as follows. Let us return to his soybean-example. We then recognize that if p is S's justified true belief, there will (objectively) exist a SGID; and thus S cannot be certain. One can argue as follows. Suppose p is a *true*, justified belief and that S has at least one *false* belief in his belief-system E, q. Now, the contradiction of p, ~p, defeats the evidence e for p, if certain familiar conditions are fulfilled, so that SGID can be formed (~p is false and thus it cannot be a PGID). Such a secondary defeater can always be formed because, first, x ⊃ ~p is true, if x is a propositional variable and x is false. After substituting q for x, we get q ⊃ ~p; and second, because S believes that q, ~p certainly constitutes a SGID, according to Klein's original definitions. This means that any true, justified belief, like p, entails its own SGID together with any false belief x, such as q, already in E. Consequently, S cannot know anything if S has one single false belief in E. This argument shows clearly that Klein's idea of defeater-formation is too strong. But it is not easy to see what changes in the theory could save it.

Klein's idea of certainty also rests too heavily on his idea of the actual but contingent *lack* of GID in our present world W. The role of *positive* evidence is dismissed, as we shall see. The reason may be that such evidence would not help S to reach full certainty anyway. Let us check what this implies.

Notice, first, that S can avoid the occurrence of some specific SGID by making his belief-set E as *weak* as possible. The weaker E the

smaller the likelihood that it contains an error; and a SGID always pre-
supposes a falsehood in E. Furthermore, Klein accepts an absolute char-
acterization of 'evidence': 'e C p' allows for no degrees. Thus the weak-
est e, like S's hazy, brief visual perception of a particular object may
well give S the right to be absolutely sure. This happens if no GID ex-
ist; in other words, if no true proposition defeats p as a PGID and E is
such that no SGID can be formed. Here again the poverty of E is epis-
temically advantageous to S. Finally, no amount of (say) deliberately
manufactured falsehoods, like clever misleading explanations against S's
e C p may shake S's right to certainty. This happens if E does not con-
tain a suitable falsehood; thus the new lies represent just misleading in-
formation which does not count against e, even if e were based on a
passing visual image and the new information were really clever and ex-
tensive.

A serious and interesting problem is hidden here: Suppose agent
S1 presents cumulative misleading evidence (MID) against agent S2's
true, justified belief that p. S2 finally decides that S1's statements are
convincing and he subjectively rejects p. In that case S2 has formulated
the following type of belief:

d: S1's arguments against p look *objectively* valid and conclusive.

Or, alternatively,

d^1: S1's arguments against p look valid and convincing *to me*.

Both these propositions look relevant to S2's justification concerning his
idea of p. Accordingly, we realize that if d or d^1 is false a SGID is
available. In that case S2 does not know that p. But if d and d^1 are
true, they are still mere MID.

All this is, of course, utterly paradoxical: If d and d^1 are false, S2
will *not* believe S1's lies; but only if d or d^1 is false could it constitute
a SGID against S2's original justification for p. In other words, only if
we allow d or d^1 to be *true* can we make sense of the idea that S1's
lies make S2 hesitate as to his knowledge–claims. Nevertheless, only
falsehoods may constitute a SGID. But if both d and d^1 are false, this
means that S1 does not care about S2's efforts against the truth of p.
All in all, it is strange that a well-designed misleading counterargument
(d) will be always inefficient. The same holds for the subjectively per-
suasive case (d^1).

In this way we see clearly why the effects of counterevidence
should be made dependent also on S's ideas about it and not only, like
Klein does, dependent on the objective existence and the truth-value of
the counterevidence. S's subjective cognitive states are epistemically
relevant too.

(2) The argument from d and d^1 above indicates that the real
problem is, roughly, that Klein's theory of evidential and subjective cer-
tainty is not really one unified whole.   I shall argue that even if full
evidential certainty K4 obtained S will never be in a position to find *ab-
solute* subjective certainty, and thus S does not know, according to
Klein's own definition of knowledge. K2 cannot be satisfied. In other
words, there is an unbridgeable gulf between K2 and K4. In examples
like Foley's, the letters p, q, d, etc. may designate, not only beliefs, but

propositions and facts, which are in such a relation to S that no corresponding beliefs can be constructed on their basis in some situations where S allegedly knows. This means that the conditions for evidential certainty are so severe that the latter may bear no connection to subjective certainty. This is epistemic *externalism* and it is a position Klein is committed not to assume. To elaborate on this theme, I shall distinguish, more explicitly than Klein, between *belief-construction* and *confirmation/justification*.

We go back to Foley's political soybean example and its SGID. What do 'p', 'q', and 'd' designate? Clearly, p is a true belief, fully supported by S's original evidence e; q is a false belief; but d is no belief at all; it is simply a *fact*. Concerning empirical facts we realize that some true propositions are practically out-of-reach for S, and others are available to S (familiar to S and even objects of belief to S). Let us coin a term and say that p is *out-of-reach* if neither science, technology nor individual ingenuity can help S to verify p.[6] What is (say) at the center of the sun is at present out-of-reach. Klein deals with only two alternatives, namely, a given proposition is either an object of belief or it is not.[7] His approach makes the field of facts look uniform.

Now, to Klein, subjective certainty K2 is not a matter of extending S's belief-set E across the limits of familiarity and availability all the way towards some crucial out-of-reach propositions. To him all facts are evidentially relevant, even those which are truly out-of-reach. What Klein hints at is that some *facts make S absolutely (subjectively) certain without ever entering S's belief-set E.* I shall try to show both that (a) this is impossible but that (b) Klein is indeed committed to this strange idea. First we must check the role *falsehoods* play in this game.

Empirical falsehoods are always truths of some alternative possible worlds. But because we are discussing knowledge concerning our present world W only we are not interested in merely possible states of affairs, nor in the set of all falsehoods.[8] We are interested only in those false propositions which are actually given to S in E in such a way that they may change S's idea of the truth of the present world. Merely possible errors do not count; this is a sound idea. All important falsehoods are derivative to S's evidence, like the truth that someone actually uttered w or that S received a misleading message from someone he ordinarily trusts. All epistemically relevant falsehoods are, so to speak, *manufactured by S himself.* (We recall that it is required that S has some falsehood evidentially available to him, via some inferences, when a SGID is formed.)

The point is that S is supposed to be interested only in the present world W, but since falsehoods describe some other (possible) worlds, the domain of S's possible knowledge is divided into two parts: (1) the subdomain of facts and (2) true-or-false evidential beliefs. Merely possible errors, outside S's beliefs, do not count at all. However, even if the role of falsehoods is severely limited as to their evidence-defeating effects *all facts count* without limit. What does this imply in relation to S's subjective certainty? (About evidential certainty, see (3) below.)

S's justification for p, in K3, is characterized in Klein's definition of knowledge thus: "e justifies p for S". Here 'for S' has a key role, if justification is to have something to do with S's beliefs at the level of

K2. Also, in K4, S's justification for p and the existence of mere MID against it depend on some complex ways on the truth–value and the belief–status of propositions. But certainly S's beliefs in belief–set E do not come and go on the basis of their objective truth–value. People believe falsehoods just as they believe truths and, therefore, in reasoning within a belief–system a notion like 'commitment to propositions' must be used, and not 'truth'. When Klein makes an essential reference to 'truth' and 'falsity' as determinants of the defeating force of some propositions he actually crosses the limits of any *possible* extension of S's belief–system E. Justification with certainty is no longer a matter of beliefs. It is, on the contrary, a matter of super–system which consists of beliefs, facts and some properly manufactured falsehoods (see also (3)).

The connection to the 'truth in the present world' cannot be meaningful to S *personally*: First, to check the existence of SGID S must know what elements of e and E are actually false. Second, the fact that no GID exist is not derivable from any evidence S may possess, not even if S knew the truth–value of all the elements of E (excluding p, of course). By definition, initiating defeators are not members of E. If S is to be subjectively certain, he must be able to do without all this information. My conclusion is that evidential certainty cannot be a *necessary condition* of reaching absolute subjective certainty.

The *Paradox of Subjective Certainty* can be presented as follows:

(*i*) If evidential certainty is a *necessary* condition of subjective certainty, subjective certainty is not really 'subjective' as its existence typically rests on factors which are inaccessible to S in a stronger sense than even out–of–reach propositions are.

(*ii*) If evidential certainty is only a *sufficient,* but not necessary, condition of subjective certainty, subjective certainty cannot guarantee the truth of p to S and, therefore, cannot be 'absolute' in this sense. There may exist cases in which S is certain without the suitably strong evidential grounds: a real possibility of error then vitiates S's claims to absolute certainty.[9]

Can one not say that Klein's message concerning K2 can be reinterpreted, at least in reference to our point (*ii*) above, so that its paradoxical flavor will evaporate? One might suggest that K3 and K4 really work and they show exactly when S's evidence e is sufficient to make his belief that p (if it occurs) absolutely certain, given the full characterization of the actual world W. If it happens that S believes that p on the basis of e in such a 'good' context, K2 is actually and objectively satisfied. S has done all that needs to be done; he will not be disappointed as to the practical consequences of following his beliefs, and thus, although S is not *conscious* of all the details of the relations between e, E and the actual world W, S has the right to be sure. The only problem S has is that he is not always able to distinguish the good from the bad cases, or those where K4 is satisfied from those where it is not. If one forgets this element of epistemic luck in S's successful certainty–claims, one will have a satisfactory account of the maximal type of subjective certainty. Perhaps Klein wants to say something like this.

I shall now try to show that Klein *should* hold the view that subjective certainty rests (e.g., causally) on the basis of evidential certainty (cf. (*i*) and (*ii*) above). I shall also show that Klein is highly ambiguous at this point, or rather, that he holds several mutually incompatible views at the same time. The valuable and ingenious technical part of his book is seriously faulted by his inability to explain the relationship between subjective and evidential certainty.

Let us trace the development of Klein's ideas about this crucial issue through his book *Certainty*. First, he starts (5) from the alleged fact that "knowledge, even inferential knowledge, is true, justified, and *absolutely certain* belief. . ." 'Certainty' is now assigned to 'belief', as it should be, because Klein is going to discuss the Cartesian argument of the Evil Demon. As we know, a Cartesian insists that if one does not personally feel certain on sufficiently good grounds, one does not know. Klein refers to this Cartesian idea of knowledge and he apparently has nothing to do with any externalist reliability view of knowledge, or causal theory of knowledge. Then he writes as follows:

> It is alleged that knowledge entails certainty and that it is not possible for a proposition to be certain if the evidence for it is, *in principle*, defeasible and falls short of entailing it. (113).

We notice a subtle shift of emphasis here: instead of beliefs being certain, it is said that *propositions* are certain. But propositions are not always believed.

Now, an immodest Cartesian requires absolute subjective, or psychological, certainty. He links S's belief and certainty. Yet Klein says that certainty implies the ultimate and final *right* to the attitude of being sure and 'certainty' comes to mean, for him, S's evidential certainty. Actually, evidential certainty, if it occurs, grounds S's epistemic right to be sure. The crucial question is, accordingly, what is S's proper subjective attitude towards his ultimate right to be certain. We started from Cartesian 'subjectivism' and thus it cannot be correct to say merely that' if S happens to be sure and S in fact has the right to be sure, S knows.

Klein himself recognizes our present problem and posits an explicit requirement, namely *D1* (127): "The distinction between psychological and evidential certainty must be clarified and the relationships explored." How does this happen? First, Klein declares that the two notions are conceptually independent (see 128, 134 and 172). His official view seems to be a 'coincidence theory':

> The belief condition K2 . . ., and the accompanying requisite degree of tenacity are *independent* of the two conditions, K3 and K4, which are jointly sufficient to render a proposition evidentially certain. . . . S would have the right . . . to such tenaciously held beliefs, depending upon how close S's evidence for p approaches the requisite conditions of absolute evidential certainty. (172, my italics).

It is clear that according to this 'coincidence theory', not S's full evidential certainty, but rather the fact that S luckily and without any reason happens to be sure, satisfy K2. K2 need to speak only about

pure feeling, given *some* evidence e. (See the Paradox of Subjective Certainty (*i*) above.)

Next, we should notice how Klein inadvertently refutes his own 'coincidence theory':

> Since a person may be absolutely (psychologically) certain that p on the basis of evidence which does not make p (evidentially) certain for S, even though S has evidence which makes p evidentially certain, the sceptic will correctly point out that both conditions may be fulfilled but that S will still lack knowledge. . . . Consequently, we must require that S's belief that p results from actually having employed a nondefective justification for p. . . . S has the right to be sure that p only when S's belief that p is brought about by having used an epistemically satisfactory process. (149, cf. also 135).

Klein suddenly recommends here a causal or reliability view of knowledge, much to our surprise, because this move entails the truth of point (*i*) of the Paradox of Subjective Certainty. Evidential certainty, together with some 'processes', becomes now a sufficient condition of subjective certainty; but he has already argued that they are mutually independent.

What emerges here is an implicit idea of dividing 'subjective certainty' into two parts, namely, *pure feeling* and a faithful *representation of evidential certainty*. The feeling-element serves in the argument against Cartesianism allowing Klein to use its own language; and the second element provides an externalist account of how beliefs can be both sure and relevant to knowledge and justification.

However, the pure-feeling-part is not what a Cartesian means and the representation-of-evidential-certainty falls victim to my array of arguments employed against the possible connection between subjective and evidential certainty. The possible *subjective* aspect of the representation never reflects the fact that is crucially important to absolute certainty, namely, the actual lack of *all* defeaters against e and p. Moreover, Klein never even comes close to specifying what he means by the "epistemically satisfactory process" that S is supposed to *use*; allegedly, it is a causal process and his term 'use' is in this context only metaphorical.

Let me make four final points in this connection. *First*, a key point: if the coincidental feeling of certainty were important in epistemology, in the sense that it would both satisfy the necessary condition K2 of knowledge and be also fully independent of evidential certainty, rational S adopts the strategy of always feeling sure, regardless of p and e. He may want to train himself to do so. This argument shows that the mutual independence of the epistemic certainties is a false thesis. *Second*: Klein works within a defeasibility *definition* of empirical knowledge. But any such definition tells only what necessary and sufficient conditions must be fulfilled *if* we have knowledge. The problem of scepticism is, however, of the form 'are these conditions in fact ever fulfilled?' Indeed, the conditions are self-consistent and thus they can in principle be fulfilled. This is trivial. What we need are some general ideas which specify when those defeasibility-definition related conditions

are really satisfied. *Third*: Klein's K1, 2, 3, 4 do not seem to qualify as a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, simply because a connection between K2, or belief, and K4, or evidential certainty, is missing. Klein should tell us how S is to *construct* his certain beliefs. *Fourth*: to speak informatively about scepticism we perhaps need, unlike Klein, to say that S must be such a *rational* agent who takes his evidence properly into account and tries hard enough to find new defeaters. Alternatively, we might specify a causal, reliable mental mechanism which maps S's evidentially relevant surroundings onto his cognitive (neural) networks. These mappings need not be something S is always and fully aware of. However, whether either of the possibilities is strong enough to make sense of the satisfiability of 'absolute subjective certainty' is very questionable indeed.

(3) We are now in a position to examine further Klein's central idea that evidential certainty is logically *sufficient* for the truth of proposition p and, therefore, also for S's subjective certainty in relation to p. Klein presents the following crucially important argument, call it *A*, to support his thesis that evidential certainty gives us the truth:

> *A*:   it is not logically possible both that p is certain and that p is false, because if p is confirmed by e, and there is no genuine initiating defeater (GID) of that confirmation, then ~p is not true. For ~p would be such a defeater.

Klein also thinks that the following is the case:

> *B*:   in order for S to know that p on the basis of e, it is not required that e entail p (185 and 15).[10]

It may seem at a glance that Klein has presented two mutually inconsistent claims. This is not so.

Let us check first what the second quotation *B* means and then compare it with *A*. For example, 'I see a hand now' logically implies that there exists a hand in front of me, if it is the case that one (logically) cannot perceive a hand which does not exist. And Klein says that evidential propositions need not behave in this very strong manner.   But what about *A*? We have an entailment in *A* between the certainty and the truth of p; but this is *prima facie* acceptable because certainty is not based on S's subjective evidence, e. The lack of GID is the main point in *A* and this fact concerns the world W rather than the evidence possessed by agent S. But what is the real *epistemic* status of the absolute certainty-ascriptions?

They seem to have no such status. It can be shown that all valid ascriptions of 'certainty' to p are derivative as to the actual empirical (contingent) truth of p. Epistemically certainty is derivative as to the truth of p. (Logically and conceptually the order may be reversed.) My point is simply that in *A* the statement that proposition ~p would be such a defeater (GID) that destroys the certainty of p, if accepted, depends on the empirical fact that p, and not ~p, is the case. This means that ~p does not qualify as a GID only because it is *false*. If ~p is true, it is a GID. Therefore, p is certain *only if p is true*; but we should realize that p is certain *if* p is true. True p is immune to all counterarguments, especially because all MID are based on errors and these are

S's subjective states. Certainty is the same as the truth. In other
words, all certainty-ascriptions to p are dependent on he contingent
fact that p is true. The existence of certainty hinges on this fact. But
because our necessary and sufficient condition is now genuinely empiri-
cal, and we are (epistemically) interested in this same empirical item, the
seemingly circular ⌐certainty implies truth⌐ is not an epistemological but
ontological statement. Epistemology is interested in our *access* to truth.
Kleinian certainty rests on its prior existence.

   Now, it is highly misleading indeed to say that "if e makes p cer-
tain, the *truth* of p must be guaranteed by e". (185 of *Certainty*). It is
always the truth of p that guarantees the provisional certainty of p
provided by e. If e alone is to guarantee the truth of p, e must contain
true p. And then p alone would be sufficient to guarantee the truth of
p. Because of B (e ⇸ p), this is not generally required.

   According to Klein, evidence e for p is *certain* if and only if e
justifies p and *p is true*. Now, it is not easy to understand what 'evi-
dential certainty' means because evidence, as such, cannot be certain,
that is, provide an absolute right to S to believe that p. It is required
that the actual world W happens to be in such a state that p is true.
The occurrence of evidential certainty thus depends not on the evidence
S has, or even might have, but on just the same state of affairs S is
interested in in his knowledge-business. If we think in this way,
absolute evidential certainty is the same as the truth. Its connection to
justification can then be understood by saying that evidence e just
specifies the content of what is true/certain: Certainty gives S the
truth-value 'true' of p, and evidence e specifies what the issue is like.
This is how I conceptualize Klein's A and B. It is not all that could be
said about it, but I am convinced that the main problems and explana-
tions lie in this direction.

   Klein's 'evidential certainty' also comes close to a *foundationalist*
notion which it is supposed not to be.[11] I mean that every truth p
about W is self-supporting and incorrigible (etc.) in the sense that the
epistemically ultimate status of certainty follows from the lack of GID
against p, which is nothing but a consequence of its own truth. Every
true p is 'self-certain' and self-verifying. In this way Klein's K3 and K4
are foundationalistic conditions, if they are epistemic at all.

   In sum: These considerations show, as it seems to me, that Klein's
quoted idea of evidential certainty entailing the truth of the justified
proposition is epistemologically *trivial*. It is not illuminating to say that
a true proposition cannot be refuted by its contradiction because the
contradictory proposition is not the case, and only true propositions can
be GID. Yet, without this dubious explanation, there seems to be no way
of determining when exactly the evidence, e, which does not entail p, is
open to the effects of a defeater. But this means only that evidence
does not determine certainty; only truth does: suppose e for p is as
strong as is practically possible; yet, because it does not entail p, e
cannot say anything about the answer to the question of whether ~p is
a GID or not. 'Evidential certainty' does not make sense if it is taken to
be an *epistemic* notion.

IV

Conclusion: We have seen that 'certainty' does not make sense as an absolutely demanding epistemic concept. However, if we take 'certainty' in a less strict sense, it is no longer clear why we need anything like it. 'Justification' might do just the same work in epistemology, especially because no certainty can be stronger than the evidential considerations on which its actual ascription is based. On the other hand, if 'certainty' is used only to indicate that the agent's belief is as strongly warranted as is possible either in its present context or in principle, then 'certainty' is a mere innocent conceptual abbreviation which neither requires nor deserves much attention by epistemologists. Concerning scepticism, it should be clear by now that no non-sceptic need feel any pressure towards answering the sceptic's arguments that the lack of certainty makes knowledge impossible.

ENDNOTES

* This paper was written while I held a post-doctoral research scholarship from the Center for Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh, 1982-83. My thanks are due also to Geoff Sayre McCord (Pittsburgh) and Lorenz B. Puntel (Munich) who provided some valuable comments on my ideas, and to Manu J. Vuorio (Turku). Parts of the paper were presented in seminars in Hampshire College, Amherst, and the University of Pittsburgh Center for Philosophy of Science.

1   Peter D. Klein, *Certainty, A Refutation of Scepticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981). Douglas Odegard, *Knowledge and Scepticism* (Totowa, NJ: Roman and Littlefield, 1982). Nicholas Rescher, *Scepticism, A Critical Reappraisal* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

2   Peter Unger, *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 238 ff.

3   See my "Contextualism, A New Theory of Epistemic Justification?", *Philosophia* 12, 1982, 37-50.

4   *Certainty*, 148. The terms 'primary' and 'secondary' are not Klein's.

5   *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* XLIV, 1984, 560-65.

6   See *Certainty*, 46: S's beliefs are either occurrent or dispositional. I fail to see what is the difference between dispositional beliefs and merely the *available propositions* Klein tries to establish.

7   See *Certainty*, 3, 13.

8   See also Odegard's review of Klein's book in *Philosophical Books* XXIII, 1982, 193-98: "He [Klein] makes no attempt to link certainty and justification", that is, K2 and K3/K4. Klein replies, not very informatively, on p. 201 of the same issue of the journal.

[9]   See Rescher, *Scepticism*, ch. XIII, "Skepsis and Action", and Lehrer, *Knowledge*, 105.

[10]   See, e.g., O.A. Johnson, *Scepticism and Cognitivism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978). Johnson accepts this entailment (see 262).

[11]   See *Certainty*, 48: "I wanted the model of justification to be acceptable to both the coherentist and the foundationalist in order not to limit the plausibility of scepticism".