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The Unrecognised Error-Possibility and New Sceptical Impetus

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In this paper I discuss the possibility that we are mistaken in our beliefs for a reason that we cannot understand. This error-possibility – which I call the Unrecognised Error-Possibility (UEP) – differs from other sceptical hypotheses primarily in that we cannot imagine it, at least not in the direct way that we can imagine being BIVs. I argue that this feature does not illegitimate it for the purposes of raising a sceptical challenge, and indeed that UEP seems to be capable of motivating much the same sceptical worries as traditional sceptical hypotheses. However, I also argue that the sceptic has something to gain by “going abstract”. In particular, I argue that there is a problem regarding our assessment of UEP (roughly, our taking it to be far-fetched). That problem is, in short, that the abstract framing of UEP seems to deny us the very information that we appear to need in order to assess it in an epistemically responsible way. I also argue – on the basis of what I call the Principle of Understanding – that the Argument from Ignorance is strengthened when instantiated with UEP. The rough idea here is that we cannot have knowledge about things that we do not understand and that, since UEP is framed precisely in terms of that which lies beyond our cognitive grasp, it is accordingly problematic to think that we could know its denial.