CHAPTER FIVE
THE SOLUTIONS OF THE PROBLEM
A PHENOMENOLOGY

This is no time for arguments, my Title
Needs not your School defences, but my sword,
With which the Gordian of your Sophistry
Being cut, shall shew th'Imposture

1. Apagogic Strategies

Prevention, whenever possible, is the only useful strategy against a disease that, once it has taken hold, is incurable. This is a rather unsophisticated truth, whose sole appeal here is that it applies to therapeutic as well as to social and epistemological problems. If there is a difficulty that starts looking irresolvable after a while, a rational alternative may be to stop behaving like a fly trapped behind a windowpane and attempt to ascertain the conditions that make the problem possible—and hence dispose of at least one of them, if no more. The diallelus is exactly such a blind alley. Owing to the basic omnipresence of the notion of justification at all levels of knowledge, there is evidently no way of resolving the problem by means of a direct strategy. The sceptic will always have the last word, unless we modify some essential element in the framework. As a result, the metaepistemological problem compels us to invert our approach. Given the morphology of the problem, no direct solution descending from it (top-down) can ever be successful. It follows that the only alternative is to ascend through the conditions that make the problem
possible (bottom-up), in an attempt to abandon at least one of the various tenets which can be identified as the sources of our difficulty. An indirect strategy becomes indispensable. Borrowing a technical term from Aristotle, I shall henceforth call any such strategy *apagogic*.¹

Though rarely in the terms employed here so far, the need for an apagogic solution of the metaepistemological problem has long been recognised by various philosophers. The task of the present chapter is to provide a phenomenology of such apagogic solutions, and hence highlight their possible limits, still in relation to the morphology of the problem. After such a reconstruction we shall enjoy a clearer view of the conditions that must be satisfied by any new approach that puts itself forward as a successful strategy for overcoming the metaepistemological difficulty. Then we will introduce the proposal to be developed in the following chapter.

2. The Logical Roots of the Apagogic Solutions

At the end of last chapter we came to the conclusion that an apagogic solution of objection⁵⁴ cannot be right-wing, i.e. it never violates Husserl’s *Prinzip*. This has left us with only one alternative. Since an apagogic solution can comply with Husserl’s *Prinzip* only if it is

¹ Originally, ἀπαγωγή in ancient Greek meant “leading away” and covered quite a broad semantic area. In logic, it became a name for any inferential process that argued for a conclusion without following a strictly deductive path. It could be a reasoning based on probable evidence, an abduction, or more often a *reductio ad absurdum*, that is an apagogic proof of an assumption by means of the demonstration of the absurdity or impossibility to which its negation is bound to lead. Apagogic solutions have been developed by L. Nelson in *Progress and Regress in Philosophy, From Hume and Kant to Hegel and Fries*, ed. by J. Kraft, tr. by H. Palmer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), Vol. II, *passim*; by N. Rescher in *Methodological Pragmatism* (New York: New York U. P., 1977), especially the second chapter which presents a type of pragmatic solution; and by R. Amico, *The Problem of the Criterion* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).