

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Assumptions of the Skeptic

by

Onkar Ghate

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF

PHILOSOPHY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

AUGUST, 1991

© Onkar Ghate 1991



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service    Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-71105-1

Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

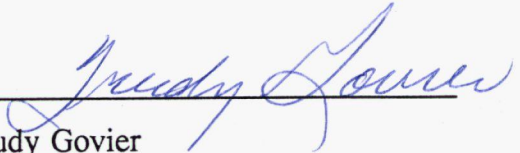
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled, "The Assumptions of the Skeptic," submitted by Onkar Ghate in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



Supervisor, Thomas Hurka  
Department of Philosophy



John Baker  
Department of Philosophy



Trudy Govier  
General Studies

Date: August 26, 1991

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I discuss and analyze some of the skeptic's arguments. I contend that none of his arguments successfully establish the type of skepticism being examined in the thesis. Chapter One deals with the general issue of classifying forms of skepticism, and there I identify the type of skepticism that will be addressed in the thesis, namely, a skepticism that attacks the justification for our belief in an external world, construing "justification" in an ordinary, not overly demanding, sense. Chapter Two discusses whether recent externalist and internalist theories of justification can diminish the force of the skeptic's arguments. I argue that the theories can, but that the skeptic's arguments can be reformulated so that they retain their force even in the light of new theories of justification.

Subsequent chapters discuss and analyze various skeptical arguments. Chapter Three discusses the argument from error, which says that we are unable to distinguish some errors from cases of knowledge. I argue that in employing any specific form of error, the skeptic must implicitly admit that we can distinguish between cases of knowledge and such errors, and therefore no skeptical conclusion follows. I also describe a possible equivocation in the argument, which explains in part why the argument appears to have force. Chapter Four discusses the argument from dreams, which says we cannot tell that we are awake rather than dreaming. I discuss three separate versions of the argument. The first two are similar in

structure to the argument from error, and are therefore unpersuasive for reasons similar to those that make the argument from error unpersuasive. The third version of the argument from dreams is quite different in structure from the argument from error; the third version says that we have two types of incompatible experiences (dreaming and wakefulness), and we are unable to tell which one, if any, gives us knowledge of an external world. I hold that this argument cannot establish the claim that the two types of experiences are incompatible, and therefore is unsound. I then end the chapter by discussing why we hold that dreaming is a non-cognitive process. Chapter Five discusses the argument from an evil demon. The strong interpretation of the argument does not address the type of skepticism I am examining, and so I do not discuss it. However, I argue that the weak interpretation of the argument, which says that it is inconsistent to maintain both that an evil demon is logically possible and that our belief in an external world is reasonable, is unsuccessful. I hold that the two claims are in fact compatible. Finally, in Chapter Five I also discuss arguments put forward by the skeptic in hope of showing that realism ultimately leads to skepticism about the external world. I argue that some forms of direct realism do not lead to this conclusion, and also that, contrary to the skeptic's claims, direct realism is not necessarily naive and untenable.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Tom Hurka for accepting to supervise my thesis, since it concerns a topic somewhat out of his area of expertise, and of course for his helpful comments and criticisms, which I am sure made my thesis much better than it otherwise would have been.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER ONE: Classifying Types of Skepticism .....	3
CHAPTER TWO: Externalism, Internalism, and Skepticism .....	17
CHAPTER THREE: The Argument From Error .....	31
CHAPTER FOUR: The Argument From Dreams .....	48
CHAPTER FIVE: The Argument From an Evil Demon .....	73
CONCLUSION .....	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	104

## INTRODUCTION

In almost any introductory class in philosophy, the issue of skepticism is discussed, because one of the texts normally assigned to the students is Descartes' "Meditations on First Philosophy"; at least this was the case with my introductory class in philosophy. In the span of a few brief pages Descartes attempts to make us doubt to some degree almost the entirety of the beliefs we commonsensibly hold to be true. Initially, the skeptical arguments Descartes presents appear quite powerful; indeed, in introductory philosophy classes usually not much attention is paid to the form or structure of the skeptical arguments themselves--it is taken for granted that they are quite persuasive--; rather, most attention is paid to Descartes' endeavour to refute the skeptic via the cogito ergo sum principle and the arguments for the existence of God.

But attention should also be paid to exactly how the skeptical arguments proceed. What implicit assumptions do the arguments make? Are the arguments sound? And, if sound, do the arguments necessarily cast doubt on our alleged



knowledge of the external world, or can they be reinterpreted so as to be consistent with this knowledge? It is these types of questions that I wish to investigate in this thesis. But before proceeding with this investigation, the exact type of skepticism to be discussed must be clearly defined, because all types will not necessarily fall under the same analysis. In Chapter One and Chapter Two I define the type of skepticism to be investigated, and the following chapters proceed with the investigation. In those later chapters I try to show that the skeptic's arguments are unsuccessful in establishing the type of skepticism being discussed; I hope, however, that even to those I do not persuade, my thesis will be of value for making explicit exactly how and on what assumptions the skeptic's arguments proceed.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CLASSIFYING TYPES OF SKEPTICISM

The term "skepticism" is a quite general term, used to designate a group of related positions. There are various dimensions along which to measure skepticism and by which one can differentiate between types of skepticism. It will be useful to consider three such dimensions.<sup>1</sup> The first dimension is subject matter. There are philosophers skeptical about ethical knowledge, inductive knowledge, knowledge of other minds, of the unobserved, of an external world, etc; sometimes skepticism is even construed as the thesis that we do not have any knowledge on any subject matter. Knowing what subject matter the skeptic<sup>2</sup> is addressing obviously helps us classify the type of skepticism he is advancing.

---

<sup>1</sup>My classification of skepticism here is based on that found in Alvin I. Goldman's Epistemology and Cognition, 28-30.

<sup>2</sup>I use the phrase "the skeptic" in a broad sense; most likely there is or was no person who held all of the skeptical views that I will be examining. The phrase "the skeptic" is used simply as a device to refer to a person who advances some skeptical argument or view.

A second dimension along which skepticism can be measured is purpose. Is the skeptic's purpose to attack our alleged knowledge or our alleged justified beliefs in some area, claiming that he knows that a condition of knowledge or of justification has not been satisfied? Or is his purpose perhaps to claim that we cannot tell whether or not a condition of knowledge or of justification has been satisfied, and he therefore recommends that we suspend judgement on the matter and be guided only by "appearances"?

A third dimension by which to measure skepticism is strength. As Goldman observes, "a skepticism's strength is inversely related to the strength of the epistemic achievement that it disputes."<sup>3</sup> The dimension of purpose is the dimension along which we measure what the skeptic is attacking, perhaps a condition of justification or a condition of certainty, and the dimension of strength is the dimension along which we measure how the skeptic formulates the condition that he is attacking. If the skeptic is claiming that we cannot achieve certainty, for example, where he understands a certain belief to be a belief that cannot be revised in the light of new evidence, many would probably agree with the skeptic's claim; but they would not think that such a skepticism threatens much of our knowledge. This type of skepticism would therefore be a weak form of skepticism.

---

<sup>3</sup>Alvin I. Goldman, Epistemology and Cognition, 29.

Still within the dimension of strength, a distinction can be drawn between direct and iterative skepticism.<sup>4</sup> Direct skepticism sees itself as challenging first-order claims, such as the claim that S knows that-p, or that S justifiably believes that-p; iterative skepticism sees itself as challenging second-order claims, such as the claim that S knows that he knows that-p, or that S justifiably believes that he justifiably believes that-p. Obviously, iterative skepticism is a weaker form of skepticism than direct skepticism.

The type of skepticism with which I will be herein concerned can be described as follows: it is a skepticism that questions the justification of our beliefs about an external world, where "justification" is understood in a normal, not overly demanding, sense; this would make the resulting skepticism, if successfully established, relatively strong. Let me explain briefly why I wish to discuss this type of skepticism.

Traditionally, the skepticism epistemologists have been most interested in is skepticism about the external world, with skepticism about knowledge in general running a close second. I have difficulty, however, in understanding skepticism about knowledge in general. The common objection to such a skepticism is that if the skeptic claims that he knows that we do not know anything, his claim is self-refuting. And if he does not claim to know that we do not know anything, how will he be able to convince us that we do not have any knowledge? Moreover, in

---

<sup>4</sup>See Peter Klein, Certainty: A Refutation of Scepticism, 5-6.

presenting his arguments, the skeptic presupposes that he and we understand the meaning of the terms being used, understand in general what the conditions are for having knowledge or justified beliefs, understand some rules of proper thinking, etc., which shows that we cannot be in total ignorance.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons I will be discussing only skepticism about the external world. But as we shall see, arguments put forward to try to establish skepticism about the external world, such as the argument from dreams, could be used in hope of establishing an even more extensive form of skepticism.

Skepticism is most often thought of as a thesis denying that we have knowledge in some subject area. But given the distinction between justification and knowledge, it is I think closer to the skeptic's intentions to construe skepticism in the way that I have and hold that the skeptic is challenging the justification for certain claims we make, and if justification is required for knowledge, thereby challenging some of our knowledge. This leaves open the possibility for the skeptic to allow that if knowledge is a wider category than justified true belief, that is, if some knowledge is not equal to justified true belief, then we might have such

---

<sup>5</sup>Leo Groarke points out in Greek Skepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought that ancient skepticism has often been characterized as an extreme (unmitigated) type of skepticism, one that rejects all belief and in effect claims that we know that we do not know anything (8-12). Ancient skepticism is then quickly dismissed by modern philosophers as inconsistent. But as Groarke demonstrates throughout the book, the ancient skeptics were mitigated skeptics, accepting various forms of belief (see, for example, 12-14); mitigated skeptics do not dogmatically assert that we know that we do not know anything.

knowledge.<sup>6</sup> (But even if we do have such knowledge, what the skeptic wishes to know is how we can tell we do, what our justification is for thinking that we have such knowledge.) Note that if this indeed is the spirit of skepticism, then it is not clear whether skeptics have traditionally been direct skeptics, claiming that a condition of knowledge has not been met, namely justification, and therefore that we do not know that-p; or whether they have traditionally been iterative skeptics, claiming that we cannot show or have no justification for believing that a condition of knowledge has been met, and therefore we cannot justifiably believe that our belief that-p is knowledge. In the next chapter I will make an attempt to determine whether it is best to view skepticism about the external world as direct or iterative skepticism.

Observe that the way I have construed skepticism makes the skeptic claim that he knows (or justifiably believes) that we have not satisfied a condition of justification for our belief in an external world. I do not think it would make much difference to my analysis, however, if one viewed the skeptic only as saying that he cannot tell or decide whether a condition of justification has been satisfied, but that he does not know for sure that it has not been.

---

<sup>6</sup>William P. Alston argues that there are other forms of knowledge than just justified true belief; see his "Justification and Knowledge", in Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge, 172-182. He also remarks that Descartes and Locke, for example, had a quite different conception of knowledge than that of justified true belief; see his "Two Types of Foundationalism", in Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge, 19.

Finally, it is often said that the skeptic proposes in his arguments more demanding conceptions of knowledge and justification than the ordinary ones, which perhaps makes his arguments go through but allows them to establish only a very weak form of skepticism. Unless I discover evidence to the contrary, however, I will assume that the skeptic is using ordinary conceptions of knowledge and justification.

Given this delineation of the type of skepticism that I will be investigating, we should now ask how the skeptic hopes to establish his negative thesis. For the most part, the skeptic argues dialectically. He argues from premises that we accept as true or that we admit are as likely to be true as their opposites. The latter type of premise might be a premise that we think is false, but all the skeptic claims is that on careful analysis we must admit that it is as likely to be true as what we actually believe. From these sorts of premises the skeptic hopes to show that our belief in an external world is not justified; he is not trying to prove that there is no external world but only that we must admit that we have no good reasons for thinking that there is one. Thus it is essential for the skeptic either to use premises that we actually believe or to use premises that we admit are as likely to be true as some proposition we do in fact believe, if he is to make us doubt our knowledge. For if he uses premises that we think are false, his argument may be valid but it will not make us doubt our knowledge, because we will think the argument unsound.

A very important issue, one that will colour my entire discussion of skepticism, is: Who has the burden of proof, the skeptic or non-skeptic? There are

two broad ways in which one can understand the skeptic's arguments. The first of these ways views the skeptic as attempting to point out inconsistencies, confusions, and incoherences, in our alleged knowledge of an external world. Given our conception of the external world and how we think we get knowledge about it, and given some things that we think are true of the external world, the skeptic holds that he can show that in the last analysis these beliefs about an external world are confused and inconsistent. The skeptic claims, furthermore, that the confusions and inconsistencies he has uncovered jeopardize the justification of our belief in an external world. Viewing skepticism in this fashion places the burden of proof on the skeptic: the onus is on him to point out the confusions and inconsistencies present in our beliefs about the external world and about what it takes to get knowledge of this world.

The second way to view the skeptic sees him as asking the non-skeptic why he believes in an external world, and, finding that the non-skeptic puts forward no satisfactory reasons, concluding that the non-skeptic has no grounds to believe in an external world; the non-skeptic's belief is not justified. Viewing skepticism in this fashion places the burden of proof on the non-skeptic: the onus is on him to give reasons for why his belief in an external world is not arbitrary.

In my discussion of skepticism, I will regard skepticism exclusively in the first way; the skeptic has the burden of attempting to point out confusions and inconsistencies in our belief of an external world. Let me give some motivations for taking this approach.



The problem of the external world is closely linked with the issue of realism versus anti-realism. In A Dictionary of Philosophy, realism is characterized as

[m]ost commonly the view (contrasted with idealism) that physical objects exist independently of being perceived. Thus understood, realism obviously reaffirms the standpoint of common sense, and it achieves the status of philosophy only because a case against it has been seriously argued.... [M]any thinkers have, on various grounds, been puzzled over how perceptions (or experience of any sort) can yield knowledge of a mind-independent world; and some have concluded that such a world is unknowable or non-existent, and that what we call physical objects are in fact mind-dependent.

Idealism is characterized in A Dictionary of Philosophy as

[t]he name given to a group of theories that have in common the view that what would normally be called "the external world" is somehow created by the mind.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Anthony Flew, ed., A Dictionary of Philosophy, entries "realism" and "idealism", 299 and 160. Although it is not absolutely clear whether the entries are discussing epistemological realism and idealism, or metaphysical realism and idealism, I take it that they are discussing the former; in any case, I am using "realism" and "idealism" to designate epistemological theories. These two characterizations would need to be worked over and key terms explained in order to have an adequate distinction between the two views. However, these rough characterizations are sufficient for my purposes.

It could be said not unfairly that what differentiates the idealist from the external world skeptic, who are both anti-realists, is that the idealist thinks the very conception of realism represents a profound mistake and therefore concepts like truth and knowledge should not be understood in realist terms (where for the realist these mean obtaining knowledge of things external to and independent of our mind); whereas the external world skeptic thinks that realism makes sense, or at least that the conception can be understood, but that we are in fact unable to secure truth or knowledge, understood in a common-sense, realist manner. The skeptic argues that we cannot secure knowledge about an external world; the idealist reinterprets the notions of truth and knowledge, making no reference to an external world, and as a result thinks we can secure truth and knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

In the light of this link between the notion of the external world and the debate between realism and anti-realism, we can get a better understanding of the issue of the burden of proof. In placing the burden of proof on the non-skeptic (about an external world), what one is asking is for the non-skeptic to explain his view of the fundamental relation between the mind--consciousness--and its objects or content. What reasons does the non-skeptic have for thinking that the objects of consciousness are external to, and exist independently from, our consciousness of them? In giving such reasons, the non-skeptic, a realist, would be giving reasons for believing in an external world. Indeed, I think that any positive epistemological

---

<sup>8</sup>See Leo Groarke, Greek Scepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought, chapter VII, who makes this contrast between skepticism and idealism.

theory that purported to be a realist theory would have to explain why it takes the relation between consciousness and its content to be one where the content is to be understood as non-mental objects existing independently of one's consciousness of them. And any positive epistemological theory that purported to be an idealist theory would have to explain why it takes the relation between consciousness and its content to be such that the content is mind-dependent and has no existence apart from the consciousness of it.<sup>9</sup>

So the issue of epistemological realism versus idealism has life outside of specifically skeptical problems. Whether or not the skeptic existed, one would have to defend why one construes the relationship between consciousness and its content in realist or idealist terms, and explain why one thinks knowledge does or does not extend beyond mental experiences.<sup>10</sup> There is nothing particularly novel or distinctive about challenging the grounds for realism, which is essentially what the skeptic does when viewed as not having the burden of proof, for this is what the idealist must do in order to refute realism.

---

<sup>9</sup>I am here concerned not only with the meaning of statements, whether "This is a tree", for example, refers to an external world, as the realist and external world skeptic claim, or refers to mental experiences, as the idealist claims, but also with actual knowledge. Is our knowledge in fact restricted to mental experiences, as both the idealist and external world skeptic claim, or does it also extend to the external world, as the realist claims?

<sup>10</sup>This is the type of argument G.E. Moore tried to offer in "A Refutation of Idealism", in his collection of essays Philosophical Studies, 1-30. See also David Kelley, The Evidence of the Senses, chapter 1, where a general and abstract defense of realism is offered.

For this reason, I have elected to view skepticism as an attack on our belief in the external world via attempting to show that this belief is fundamentally confused, and that much of our alleged knowledge of the external world is inconsistent, rather than to view skepticism as simply asking (as idealism does) whether there are any reasons to be a realist. And this places the burden of proof on the skeptic.

My response to skepticism will be from a realist standpoint because I think that a realist view of the relationship between consciousness and its content can be successfully defended. But I will offer no such defense here. The course I think such a defense would take, however, would be along the lines of describing our perceptual experience and of explaining why such experience is best described as a realist theory would describe it: the objects that we perceive are non-mental and exist independently of the perception of them.<sup>11</sup> Thus skepticism as I have formulated it is not asking what our reasons are, based on our perceptual experience, for believing in an external world, but rather is trying to demonstrate that even if we have some good reasons for this belief, inconsistencies and paradoxes in our alleged knowledge about an external world can be discovered, thereby showing that in the final analysis such alleged knowledge is not justified.

---

<sup>11</sup>As we shall see, the issues of how to describe perceptual experience and of how to formulate the relationship between consciousness and its content will be of some importance in the subsequent analysis of skepticism.

Since this is how I am interpreting the skeptic, my response to skepticism will make use of principles about the external world that we think we know, without attempting to show that these principles are in fact knowledge. Such a response does not beg the question because the skeptic is attempting to point out inconsistencies and paradoxes in our alleged knowledge of the world--I hope to show that these inconsistencies and paradoxes do not exist. My argument will not, however, be of the following form: we have reasons for believing that there is an external world, therefore any argument trying to establish that this belief is unjustified is necessarily unsound.

The three types of skeptical arguments that I will be discussing are the arguments from error, from dreams, and from an evil demon. But as we shall see in Chapter Five, the argument from an evil demon, interpreted in its strongest form, does not address the type of skepticism I am addressing, and so lies outside the scope of the thesis. I mention this now so as not to raise any false expectations. But I do think that one interpretation of the argument from an evil demon can plausibly be viewed as attempting to point out inconsistencies and confusions in our common-sense beliefs, and it is that interpretation which I will examine in Chapter Five.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that my view of skepticism and the burden of proof has some historical support. Leo Groarke, for instance, has argued that

[n]othing is more important to an understanding of the [ancient] sceptics than an appreciation of the Greek commitment to a "realist" account of truth. It maintains that a claim is true if it corresponds to an objective world that exists independent of the mind....

Greek philosophy's assumption that "truth" means realist truth...is obvious in thinkers such as Pythagoras, Heracleitus, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics....

In keeping with this, sceptical arguments are put forward as an attack on realist truth, countering the notion that we can transcend our subjective outlook by arguing that our beliefs are necessarily relative to human nature and perception, the culture we live in, philosophical commitments, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

If this is the correct interpretation of the ancient skeptics, and I think it is, their philosophy consisted of more than just the general claim that given our perceptual experience, we have no more grounds to say that the content of this experience is non-mental and exists independently of our perception of it than to say that the content is mind-dependent. The ancient skeptics took our belief in the external world as intelligible and thought that we might have some reasons for this belief; however, they also thought that they had produced arguments showing that even if we have some reasons for this belief, in the final analysis our common-sense

---

<sup>12</sup>Leo Groarke, Greek Scepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought, 19-20. In his book, Groarke does not make it perfectly clear whether the skeptic is attacking the meaning of our statements or their justification. I have said that the skeptic agrees with the realist (as against the idealist) that some of our statements refer to an external world (which establishes their meaning), but that the skeptic believes we cannot justify these statements; I think this too is Groarke's implicit view.

account of an external world is confused and inconsistent, which means that our belief in an external world is unjustified.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXTERNALISM, INTERNALISM, AND SKEPTICISM

As I noted in Chapter One, skepticism is usually understood as an attack on our knowledge in some subject area, but an examination of the skeptic's arguments reveals that what he is actually questioning is the justification for our beliefs. (Many skeptics probably thought that justification was a necessary condition for having knowledge.) The external world skeptic, of course, questions our justification for believing that there is an external world. He asks, for instance, why, given our account of dreams, we are justified in believing that we are awake rather than dreaming. And if neither our belief that we are awake or that we are dreaming is justified, he asks, why do we think we have knowledge of an external world, since we admit that when dreaming we do not have such knowledge?

Because what the skeptic is questioning is whether a condition of justification has been satisfied for some of our beliefs, and because he thinks he can show that a condition has not been satisfied, we must ask if his arguments work against most plausible theories of justification. The recent debate in the theory of justification



focuses on externalist and internalist accounts of justification. So what I specifically want to ask is whether the skeptic's arguments have the same force against both types of accounts. One should note that the issue of externalism and internalism is also discussed as a debate concerning the nature of knowledge. But this can plausibly be reinterpreted as follows: if knowledge equals justified true belief, and an externalist account of justification is accepted, one has an externalist account of knowledge; mutatis mutandis for an internalist account of knowledge. In any case, I am focusing on externalist and internalist conditions for justification.

In assessing how the two accounts fare against skeptical arguments, we first must have some conception of the pattern of these arguments. Typically, the skeptic's most forceful arguments rest on the claim that a subject is unable to distinguish between having and not having adequate grounds for his beliefs. The subject cannot tell whether or not he is in a strong position to get the truth, whether or not he is in a truth-conducive position. So far as the subject can tell, the skeptic argues, it may in fact be the case that he is in a truth-conducive position, such that most of his beliefs on a given subject matter (the external world, for example) will be true; but it may just as well be the case that he is not in a truth-conducive position, such that most of his beliefs on a give subject matter will be false. What the skeptic maintains is that if it is indeed the case that a subject cannot tell what position he is in, then there is no more reason to assume that the subject's beliefs are true than false. The subject's beliefs in the given subject area would be unjustified.

Each skeptical argument that I will discuss exhibits this pattern of argument. The arguments from error, from dreams, and from an evil demon, all posit a situation where we do not have knowledge of an external world, and then claim that we cannot distinguish between this situation and a situation of actual knowledge. The arguments are said to go from weaker to stronger because it supposedly becomes more and more difficult to distinguish the two situations from one another. It is thought to be more difficult to distinguish between dreams and knowledge than between perceptual illusions (and other types of error) and knowledge, and still more difficult to distinguish between the deceptions of an evil demon and knowledge than between dreams and knowledge. What I wish to consider is possible responses that externalist and internalist theories of justification can give to this type of argument.

Externalist theories of justification are held to be recent innovations; it is thought that most accounts of justification in the history of philosophy are internalist ones. And those who criticize externalist accounts often do so on the basis that these new accounts violate internalist constraints and thus have, in effect, changed the subject.<sup>13</sup> But it turns out that it is very difficult to specify precisely what this internalist constraint is which has supposedly been part of most traditional theories of justification and which has been violated by the externalists. Internalists often

---

<sup>13</sup>My discussion of externalism and internalism is based on William P. Alston's "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology", in Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge, 185-226. See also Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, chapter 3.

speak of the fact that what justifies a belief must be within the cognitive grasp of the subject. They often identify justification with being epistemically responsible or reasonable, and they think that this is only possible if the subject has within his cognitive possession the grounds that could justify his belief. Otherwise, how can it be said that the subject is being reasonable or unreasonable? If he cannot tell whether or not he has good grounds for his belief, how can he guide his cognitive behaviour and act reasonably? It is this requirement of justification that internalists think externalist theories violate. Externalist theories of justification, like internalist ones, specify what it takes to adequately ground a belief--popular externalist suggestions include that the belief bears an appropriate causal connection to the facts which it is about, that the belief was formed by sufficiently reliable cognitive processes and methods, and that the belief "tracks" the facts which it is about. But externalist theories, contrary to internalist ones, supposedly do not require that the subject cognitively possess the grounds which make his belief justified. What is not clear in this debate, however, is what it means to cognitively have or possess good grounds for a belief.

One way in which "possession" is understood by internalist theories is that the subject must have a belief that there are grounds for his belief that-p. The grounds themselves need not be a belief--they could be a perceptual experience, for instance--but to possess the grounds the subject must have a belief that there exists such grounds--a belief that a perceptual experience of a certain sort exists. But is it enough merely to have a belief that the grounds do in fact exist? Is my belief that

there are martians on Mars justified simply because I believe that there is a perceptual experience that can serve as grounds for this belief? It would seem not. My belief that such a perceptual experience exists itself must be justified. Furthermore, it seems that I must also justifiably believe that the grounds are good grounds for the belief they support. Even if my belief that a certain perceptual experience exists is justified, is my belief that there are martians on Mars justified if I have no reason to think that this perceptual experience is good grounds for my belief about martians? Clearly not.

To summarize, this type of internalist theory views "cognitive possession of grounds" for a belief that-p to consist of having a justified belief that I have grounds for the belief that-p and a justified belief that these grounds are good grounds for supporting the belief that-p. This version of internalism faces a number of problems, perhaps the most serious being the need for an infinite regress of higher-order justified beliefs. The theory, and the regress it faces, runs as follows:

For S's belief that-p to be justified, S must cognitively possess good grounds for this belief, where "possession" means that

(1) S must justifiably believe that grounds G exist and that G are good grounds for supporting the belief that-p.

The regress is created because:

(2) S must also justifiably believe that grounds G2 exist and that G2 are good grounds for supporting the belief in (1) (namely that

grounds G exist and that G are good grounds for supporting the belief that-p) in order for his belief in (1) to be justified. And,

(3) S must also justifiably believe that grounds G3 exist and that G3 are good grounds for supporting the belief in (2)...

As Alston remarks, this regress cannot be stopped by adopting a coherence theory, which allows for circularity in justification.

The preference for a circle over an infinite set is not available here. Since there is a regress of levels, we are foreclosed from doubling back. No adequate-support belief at an earlier stage will serve to do the job required at a later stage because it will have the wrong content.<sup>14</sup>

Supposing this type of internalism were acceptable (no doubt some have held something like it), however, we can see that it is susceptible to the pattern of argument employed by the skeptic. As we have already discussed, the skeptic tries to argue that a subject S is unable to tell whether the grounds supporting his belief that-p are good grounds or not, unable to tell whether or not he is in a truth-conducive position. And this type of internalism says that S must justifiably believe that his grounds for his belief that-p are good grounds if his belief that-p is to be

---

<sup>14</sup>See William P. Alston, "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology", in Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge, 185-211, for a discussion of this type of internalism and the various problems it faces; the quote is from 211.

justified, precisely what the skeptic is saying S cannot do. So given this type of internalist theory of justification, the skeptical pattern of argument would have force and, if successful, would establish as its conclusion direct skepticism, since it challenges the justification for a subject's belief that-p (the distinction between direct and iterative skepticism was made in Chapter One).

The above type of internalist theory of justification is a strong form of internalism. A much more moderate form would maintain that a subject's belief that-p is justified so long as it is possible for the subject to cognitively access and thus to possess the grounds that justify his belief, where this access must take place in a reasonable period of time of critical reflection by the subject on his beliefs and his cognitive situation.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, this version does not require that the subject have any such direct accessibility to the grounds for thinking that the first grounds were in fact good grounds for the belief that-p. That is, the grounds to justify a higher-order epistemic belief, such as the belief that I am justified in believing that-p, need not be directly accessible to the subject.

For this type of internalism, the skeptical pattern of argument, if successful, might be able to establish iterative skepticism but definitely not direct skepticism. The only time we would have to determine whether the grounds for the belief that-p

---

<sup>15</sup>For motivations for this type of internalism and problems with it, including the problem of what to say about children and adults who are unable to critically reflect on their cognitive situation, or at least unable to report the result of this reflection to other people, see William P. Alston's "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology", in Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge, 211-226.

are good ones or not, to determine whether we are in a truth-conducive position or not, is when we are trying to determine if we are justified in believing that our belief that-p is justified. To determine this, we would have to decide whether our grounds for the belief that-p are in fact good ones--and it is precisely this that the skeptic hopes to show we cannot do. But we do not have to do this in order for our belief that-p itself to be justified. Furthermore, since the moderate internalist has given no account of how to justify higher-order epistemic beliefs, such as the belief that one's belief that-p is justified, only maintaining that the grounds for this higher-order belief need not be directly accessible to the subject, it is not clear whether or not a completely worked out moderate internalism would in fact be susceptible to the skeptical pattern of argument.

An externalist theory, defined negatively as a theory that says that it need not be possible for a subject to access the grounds for his belief that-p by critical reflection (in a reasonable period of time), need not be concerned with either direct or iterative skepticism. Such a theory qua externalist theory does not hold that the subject must be able to distinguish between good and bad grounds for any of his beliefs to be justified, be it first-order beliefs or higher-order ones. The only point relevant to the justification of a belief is whether there are in fact good grounds for it, and usually, that these grounds were in some sense responsible for the subject acquiring his belief. Note that it is true that many externalist theories, such as

Robert Nozick's or Alvin Goldman's<sup>16</sup>, which are in the "relevant alternatives" tradition (this term is usually applied to theories of knowledge rather than to theories of justification as I am doing here), do discuss skepticism and think that it presents issues that must be dealt with. But I think this is due not to the fact that these theories are externalist ones but rather to the particular content that Nozick and Goldman have given to their theories. Goldman, for instance, places great import on the fact that a belief must be formed in a reliable manner for it to count as justified. And he analyzes reliability in part by saying that a reliable process must yield the correct result--classifying the belief as true or false, for instance--in situations similar to the one we believe to be actual. This means that to have a justified belief, the processes used by the subject to form his belief must be processes that are able to distinguish or differentiate between various similar cognitive situations. And this opens up the possibility that the skeptical pattern of argument will regain its force. (Goldman, however, does not think that a skeptical scenario such as a "demon world" is a relevant alternative.) So although it is true that some fully developed externalist theories might be vulnerable to the skeptical pattern of argument, there is no reason that externalist theories of justification, qua externalist, need be so vulnerable.

It does seem, however, at least to me, that the skeptical pattern of argument would retain its force even if an externalist theory of justification were adopted.

---

<sup>16</sup>Robert Nozick, Philosophical Explanations, chapter 3; Alvin I. Goldman, Epistemology and Cognition, especially chapter 5.



Why is this? At first impression one is tempted to say that although it is true that on an externalist account of justification a subject can justifiably believe that-p without being able to distinguish between there existing good grounds or not for this belief, when it comes to justifiably believing that he justifiably believes that-p, the subject must face the skeptical challenge: he must be able to distinguish whether or not he has good grounds for his belief that-p. Thus iterative skepticism would still seem to have force against externalism.

But this is a mistaken impression. If the justification of this high-order belief is understood in the same way as it is for the first-order belief, and I claimed that it should be so understood for externalist theories, then for a subject to "distinguish" whether or not he has good grounds for his belief that-p means only that he has grounds for his belief that he has grounds for his belief that-p, but not that these (higher-order) grounds are accessible to him or are such that he could specify them. For instance, consider the skeptic's argument from dreams. It may be true that to justifiably believe that my belief that there is a tree in front of me is justified requires that I justifiably believe that I am awake (and not dreaming), but on the externalist theory, to justifiably believe that I am awake does not require that I could specify or even that I could have access to the (good) grounds that justify this belief-it must only be the case that these grounds do in fact exist. So the skeptical pattern of argument loses its force against externalism: neither direct or iterative skepticism can be established against externalism.

The actual reason why we still feel that the skeptical pattern of argument has force, even against externalist accounts of justification, is that the argument really addresses the question of reasonableness.<sup>17</sup> I think internalists are correct when they say that for most traditional theories of justification, acting reasonably was thought to be a part of what it meant to be justified. Perhaps externalist theories can give some analysis of being epistemically reasonable, but nevertheless these theories do diminish the importance of being reasonable in order to be justified. But whether or not being reasonable should be incorporated into a good theory of justification, we nevertheless believe that "reasonableness" is an important epistemic issue. And to hold, for instance, that the belief that there is an external world is more reasonable than the belief that there is not would seem to require that one could specify grounds or reasons for why this is so.<sup>18</sup> It has been said that what externalist theories of justification show is that it is possible that our beliefs are justified; that is, if good grounds exist to support most of our beliefs, then those beliefs are justified. But an (the) important question, it is claimed, is whether we have any reason for thinking those grounds do in fact exist. An externalist reply

---

<sup>17</sup>David Shatz makes a somewhat similar point in "Nozick's Conception of Knowledge", in The Possibility of Knowledge, 254-258.

<sup>18</sup>This is probably too strong. What might be required for reasonableness in this case is only that one could explain to a person that it is on these grounds that he believes there is an external world, and the person would come to agree that, yes, it is on those grounds that he believed and believes there is an external world. The person himself need not be able to specify the grounds in order for his belief in an external world to be reasonable.

saying that our belief that such grounds exist is justified so long as grounds for this new belief exist is entirely unsatisfactory. We are trying to determine whether it is reasonable to believe that such grounds exist, and for this the externalist reply is of no help. Thus the skeptical pattern of argument retains some, if not all, of its force against both internalist and externalist accounts of justification, because it focuses on the condition of reasonableness rather than justification.

To conclude this discussion of externalist and internalist theories of justification and some of their possible implications for the problem of skepticism, we should note that epistemologists such as Laurence Bonjour and Alvin Goldman have made similar observations to my claim that what the skeptic is really addressing is the issue of reasonableness. Bonjour, of course, favours a coherentist account of justification for empirical beliefs. But even if one arrives at a set of beliefs that meet coherentist standards of justification, Bonjour notes that there still remains the question of why to hold that such a justified set of beliefs will be true, of why to hold that they will correspond to an external world rather than, for instance, to the machinations of an evil demon. Why is it epistemically reasonable to aim for a coherent set of beliefs rather than for a haphazard collection of beliefs? Without answers to these questions, without some type of argument showing that justification is truth-conducive, Bonjour believes there are no strong reasons to think that justification is a desirable feature of beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>See Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, chapter 8.

Similarly, Goldman claims that an externalist account of knowledge like Nozick's shows only that knowledge remains possible but non-demonstrable. Goldman believes that what he calls an "explanatory" account of knowledge has the potential to do better.

Using the explanatory account, the epistemologist can do much better. He can show that we have knowledge by showing that explanations for our beliefs in common sense or scientific terms are better than the skeptic's alternative explanations.... However plausible my version of it [a defense of an explanatory account] is, it is clear that our prospect for answering the skeptic is itself better given the explanatory analysis than under Nozick's, which in itself blocks any satisfactory answer.<sup>20</sup>

I think it is quite plausible to interpret both Bonjour and Goldman as being concerned with the idea of trying to show that it is more reasonable to believe that we have knowledge of an external world than to believe that the skeptic's scenarios might be the case; and this makes their points similar to mine.

Thus my conclusion is that the skeptical pattern of argument retains its force against both internalist and externalist theories of justification, because the skeptic is not concerned with the justification but with the reasonableness of our beliefs, whether or not reasonableness is a condition of justification. Consequently, in the subsequent discussion of the skeptic's arguments, I will not pay attention to what the

---

<sup>20</sup>Alvin I. Goldman, "Nozick on Knowledge: Finding the Right Connection", in The Possibility of Knowledge, 163-196; the quote is from 193.

externalist or internalist would say about the skeptic's view of justification or knowledge, or to deciding whether the skeptic, in attacking the reasonableness of our beliefs, sees himself as establishing direct or iterative skepticism.

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE ARGUMENT FROM ERROR

It is often remarked that a general strategy of many skeptical arguments is to argue from the possibility of error.<sup>21</sup> The type of error employed when putting forward this sort of argument, especially when attempting to establish skepticism about the external world, is normally that of perceptual illusions and mistakes; but there is no reason why a skeptical argument could not be formulated for other types of error as well. By his argument the skeptic hopes to demonstrate that a negative conclusion about the reasonableness of our beliefs is warranted because of the fact that we can err.

In An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, Jonathan Dancy describes the general pattern of the argument from error in the following way.

---

<sup>21</sup>See, for example, Alvin I. Goldman, Epistemology and Cognition, 30, and Jonathan Dancy, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, 12.

You have sometimes made mistakes even in areas where you felt most confident; simple mistakes in arithmetic, for example. But nothing you can point to in your present situation tells you that the situation is not one in which you are mistaken. For all you can tell, it is relevantly similar to situations in which you have made mistakes. Since you clearly did not know then, how can you say that you know now? For all you can tell, the situation is no better than the old.

The argument [from error] relies on an epistemological version of the principle of universalizability familiar in ethical theory.... The principle of universalizability tells us...that in the absence of an available difference we must make the same judgement again. There must be something we can pick out if a difference in judgement [between two situations] is to be justified.<sup>22</sup>

Despite Dancy's claim, it is not clear that the argument from error does indeed rest on an epistemological version of the principle of universalizability. Typically, the principle of universalizability functions in ethical theory as follows: a person first makes a claim about the goodness or badness of a specific action in a specific set of circumstances, then claims that a new action in a new set of circumstances is relevantly similar to the old one, and therefore draws the conclusion that this new action has the same moral status (good or bad) as that of the previous action. But one point of contention among the skeptic and the non-skeptic is whether the two situations under discussion, one where we purportedly get a correct answer and one where we purportedly get a false answer, actually are

---

<sup>22</sup>Jonathan Dancy, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, 12. Observe that in any subject area where we err a skeptic could attempt to establish a negative conclusion about the reasonableness of our beliefs; the argument from error need not be restricted to skepticism about the external world.

relevantly similar. Why is not the fact that one situation is correct and one incorrect a relevant difference? Further, Dancy's own characterization of the argument seems to presuppose that the two situations are different, and that we can know this. To be able to point to an actual situation of error, as Dancy does in formulating the argument, seems to imply that we can also point to the correct answer, which means that we are already able to tell that the two situations are different in respect of their truth or falsity. Thus it is difficult to understand how exactly Dancy thinks the argument proceeds, or at least why he thinks it has any force.<sup>23</sup>

Note further that given Dancy's formulation of the argument, even if the skeptic succeeded in convincing us that our common-sense belief that we can divide situations into correct and erroneous ones is confused, and that in reality the two types of situations are similar, the skeptic still would not have established skepticism. The pattern of argument that Dancy ascribes to the argument from error is in fact inadequate to establish skepticism. For the non-skeptic, while preserving the pattern of the argument, could reverse Dancy's formulation and argue that you clearly have knowledge in the situation where you make a correct calculation, and therefore, since the situation claimed as a mistaken calculation is relevantly similar to this one, you also have knowledge in that situation.

Observe that in reversing the argument, the non-skeptic gives a reply to the skeptic that violates common sense, and therefore the non-skeptic implicitly admits

---

<sup>23</sup>Note that Dancy does eventually reject the argument. See Jonathan Dancy, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, 239-241.



that the skeptic is right in claiming that common-sense beliefs are confused and incoherent. For commonsensibly we think that we do make errors and mistakes, which the non-skeptic, in reversing the argument, must deny. But there is of course a difference between showing that common-sense beliefs are confused and incoherent, and establishing skepticism. If it were indeed true that the two types of situations, one where we believe we have knowledge and one where we believe we are in error, are relevantly similar, this fact would show that some of our common-sense beliefs are confused. But in showing this, one still leaves open the question of whether the two types of situations are situations where we have knowledge or where we are in error. And the non-skeptic can coherently claim that the two situations would be situations where we have knowledge. Thus no skeptical conclusion results simply from showing that the two types of situations are relevantly similar. Consequently, I do not think that Dancy's formulation of the argument from error is the best possible formulation of it nor that the force of the argument rests on an epistemological version of the principle of universalizability.

Let us try then to formulate exactly how the argument from error proceeds and from where it derives its force. I think the general pattern of the argument from error can best be captured as follows:

- (1) To make an error means that we do not get knowledge about some subject matter of which we are trying to get knowledge.
- (2) For a belief to be reasonable, we must be able to tell that we are not making an error.

(3) For some situations R, we are unable to tell that we are not making an error.

---

(4) Therefore, in those situations R our beliefs are unreasonable.

The skeptic thinks he can deploy this general pattern of argument specifically against our belief in an external world because he thinks illusions are a type of error that we are unable to tell is not occurring when we are allegedly perceiving an external world. "Perceiving" would thus be a situation R, and since we think we get knowledge of the external world through perception, the skeptic can conclude that our beliefs about an external world are unreasonable (insofar as they depend on the validity of sense-perception).

Furthermore, formulating the argument in this manner seems to do away with the need for the skeptic to point to actual instances of error, including illusions, and therefore seems not to leave his argument open to the criticism given to Dancy's version of the argument. As I have interpreted the skeptic, he wants to appeal only to our general notion of "error", to the general fact that we can make perceptual mistakes, without having to specify in his argument any specific instance of error.

The problem with the skeptic's argument is that it is dubious that we are unable to distinguish between cases of knowledge and some cases of error--it is dubious that premise (3) is true. The reason for this is that the concept of error is linked to and dependent upon the concept of knowledge. Our general concept of

"error" or "mistake" is defined as a failure to get or achieve knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, to come to understand any specific form of error, we must know what the truth would be in that specific situation. For example, to come to understand calculation errors, to understand that " $7 + 5 = 13$ " is a mistaken calculation, a subject S must know that " $7 + 5 = 12$ " is the correct calculation. Otherwise, what would it mean to say that S knows that the first calculation was a mistake?

This fact implies that in forming the concept of error we distinguish between actual instances of knowledge and of error. There is no reason to think that premise (3) is true. And thus trying to appeal to our general concept of error without citing specific instances of error does not help the skeptic. To save his argument, therefore, the skeptic would have to give some reasons for thinking that there exist some types of error that we are unable to distinguish from cases of knowledge. But the skeptic never presents such reasons. In trying to establish skepticism about the external world, as already mentioned, the skeptic uses perceptual illusions and mistakes as his general concept of error; and the fact is that we do distinguish perceptual illusions from what really is the case. The only reason that one might accept the truth of premise (3), making the skeptic's argument appear persuasive, is that the argument turns on a type of equivocation. Before considering what this equivocation is, however, I want to try to make clearer exactly what I am and am

---

<sup>24</sup>Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1980) defines error as "an act involving unintentional deviation from truth or accuracy" (definition 1b). See also Leonard Peikoff, "Maybe You're Wrong", in The Objectivist Forum 2 (April 1981), 8-12.

not claiming about the formation of the concepts of knowledge and error, and about the resulting implications this has for the argument from error.

Someone might object that in order to form a concept it is not necessary that we have actually observed instances subsumed by the concept. And this fact is thought to imply that if the concepts of knowledge and/or error were not formed by observing instances subsumed by the concepts, it might be the case that one would not be able to distinguish between cases of knowledge and some actual instances of error. Thus my reply to the argument from error seems to rest on the claim that in forming the concepts of knowledge and of any specific form of error, we must distinguish actual instances of error from actual instances of knowledge, which implies that it makes no sense to say that there is a type of error that is undetectable, which in turn implies that premise (3) is false.

Although I think we do in fact form the concepts of knowledge and of any specific form of error in that way, I need not assume that every concept is formed by distinguishing actual instances subsumed by the concept from other things. I readily admit that some concepts can be formed without observing actual instances subsumed by them, including perhaps some concepts of error. To take an example, suppose that a subject S has never made a calculation error when adding columns of figures. There seems to be no absurdity in claiming that S can understand what it would mean to make a calculation error. S can readily imagine that for the column of numbers "7, 5, 3, 9," a person could write as the sum "25" instead of the correct answer of "24". Thus S can come to understand a specific form of error

without having committed, or observed someone else committing, that type of error. But note that in forming this concept of a calculation error, S had to rearrange things that he takes to be facts about the world and to project a situation that he knows is actually not the case. When S imagines a person writing the answer of "25" instead of "24", he knows that he is projecting a situation in which an incorrect answer is given: the correct answer is "24". For this reason, if one does not ignore the context in which S's concept of a calculation error is formed, it could not possibly be the case that S has evidence to think that he is actually making a calculation error, since he forms the concept by imagining situations where what he knows to be the correct answer is not given.

Thus if a specific concept of error is formed by a process of imagination rather than by observing actual instances subsumed by the concept and distinguishing those instances from other things, premise (2) of the argument cannot make use of this type of error, regardless of whether one imagines that the type of error is undetectable. For there is no basis for saying that a person must be able to distinguish between an imagined situation of error and a correct answer in order for his beliefs to be reasonable, because there is no evidence to think that the imagined situation might be actual.<sup>25</sup> Evidence consists of facts one has observed to obtain which point to the truth or falsity of a certain proposition. In this case, one knows

---

<sup>25</sup>Of course, in keeping with the type of skepticism being examined, I am assuming that we have some evidence to think that we have knowledge about an external world. What I am claiming is that an imagined concept of error poses no threat to this evidence.

that the imagined error is imagined, and that such imagining does not constitute evidence that the situation might be actual.<sup>26</sup>

To render this principle clearer, consider its application to another situation. A biologist can easily project a whale as being a fish rather than a mammal, but this does not lead him to doubt his evidence indicating that whales are mammals, since his imagining takes place within the context of what he has observed and discovered to be the case; these are facts which the biologist has not created or imagined but discovered, and cannot be called into question by what he has imagined. When the biologist imagines that whales are fish, he is aware that what he is imagining is in reality not the case.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the fact that I can imagine that I made a calculation mistake when calculating the sum of "7, 5, 3, 9" does not lead me to doubt that the sum is in fact "24".

It is worth noting that on my view of the process of imagination and its possible role in forming concepts, we could not form the concept of knowledge via the imagination, because the process of imagination carries with it the sense of

---

<sup>26</sup>It might happen that for an imagined concept, say that of a unicorn, we later acquire evidence that what is subsumed by the concept actually exists. Similarly, one could acquire evidence that an imagined error actually occurred, but this would imply that we have some means of distinguishing the error from cases of knowledge (just as having evidence for the existence of unicorns would imply that we have some means of differentiating unicorns from horses) and no skeptical conclusion would follow.

<sup>27</sup>One might also claim that once we discover that whales are mammals, we cannot even imagine that a whale is a fish, because what we would be imagining would not be a whale. Accepting such a claim, however, would depend on the theory of concepts one subscribes to.

projecting alternatives or different situations to those we have found to be the case. And what we have found to be the case is called knowledge. The process of imagination occurs within the context of our knowledge and could not be used to create that context.

It is also worth noting that some would reject my view of the imagination because they uphold a much more radical separation between concepts and empirical evidence or observation. Such a theory might hold that although it is true that we distinguish the concept of error from the concept of truth or knowledge, it need not be the case that in order to understand the concepts of knowledge and error we must have observed instances subsumed by the concepts or must be able to imagine or project instances that would be subsumed by the concepts based on what we have observed. What such a theory of concepts maintains, contrary to my position, is that we can understand the meaning of concepts without knowing whether they bear any type of relation to the things we have observed. We possess and understand many concepts, but it is in effect an open question whether they bear any type of correspondence to the non-linguistic environment that we perceive.

Such a view of concepts, which posits a large "gap" between concepts and observation, is rather ill suited for establishing the type of skepticism that I am discussing. As I have said, in order to point out confusions and inconsistencies in our beliefs about an external world, the skeptic must appeal to premises we either believe are true or believe are as likely to be true as things we do in fact believe. I would think that this is not the case for a theory that posits a large "gap" between

observation and the formation of concepts: many of us find such a theory highly implausible. The conceptual level of consciousness is experienced as a new way of being aware of the same things that one is aware of at the perceptual level of consciousness. At the conceptual level, one is able to group things into various classes, treating particulars as instances or members of a class, and one is able to focus on and mentally abstract properties from the wider context in which they are situated. There does not appear to be a wide "gap" between observation and the formation and meaning of concepts. Nevertheless, my reply to the argument from error does rely on a particular view of concepts and of the imagination, and those who subscribe to a different view, one that maintains that there is a large "gap" between observation and the formation of concepts, would find my reply to the argument deficient.

So my reply to the argument from error is twofold: (i) for all types of error that we have discovered, we are able to distinguish cases of knowledge from such errors;<sup>28</sup> premise (3) is false; and (ii) for all types of error that we have only imagined, there is no reason to hold that we must be able to distinguish such "errors" from cases of knowledge; premise (2) is false. These facts, I argue, can be seen from considering how we form the concepts of knowledge and of error.

---

<sup>28</sup>This principle is restricted to our empirical knowledge, our knowledge about the external world; the principle might not be applicable to our logical or mathematical knowledge.



The only reason the argument seems convincing is that it rests on an equivocation. What causes the argument from error to appear to have force is that premises (2) and (3), which are quite general statements, often get interpreted in one specific way. Premises (2) and (3) say simply that we must have some means of distinguishing situations of error from situations of non-error, but this is frequently interpreted to mean that the only permissible (or possible) means to use in order to distinguish situations of error from situations of non-error is a process of critical reflection on our beliefs. It is this implicit assumption that fuels the argument, and not a reliance on an epistemological version of the principle of universalizability. For there are errors that are not discoverable by critical reflection on our beliefs and that cannot be ruled out by such reflection. One will naturally arrive at a skeptical conclusion if one holds that these types of error must nevertheless be ruled out by critical reflection. More specifically, one will arrive at a skeptical conclusion about our knowledge of an external world from this implicit assumption, because illusions are an example of a type of error that is not discoverable solely by critical reflection.

Before discussing how we seem to discover illusions, it is worth noting that the concept of an illusion supports my view that we detect errors only in the context of a body of knowledge. An illusion is a situation where we misperceive an object or, better still, where we make a mistaken judgement about an object. When we see a round tower from a great distance and judge that it is square, we make a mistake. The reason we make such a mistake is that although round and square towers look

different when seen from a close distance, they look similar when seen from a great distance. Notice that in grasping this idea of a round tower looking square, we are presupposing that we know the object being perceived is a tower and that we have determined that the tower is in fact round. Without this body of knowledge, what basis would we have for saying that we are suffering from an illusory experience and that our judgement that the tower is square is wrong? Thus a certain body of knowledge is presupposed when coming to grasp any type of illusion.

An illusion, such as a square tower looking round from a distance, is not discoverable simply by critical reflection on the illusory experience and on some of our beliefs. No matter how long we spent sitting on a hill and looking at a tower in the distance, reflecting on our perceptual experience and our beliefs, we would not discover that the tower looks square but is in fact round. Illusions are discovered only after we first know that the way an object looks can vary depending on our situation and the circumstances in which we are perceiving it. For instance, as I walk through my room, I am in different positions with respect to the things in the room, and as a result they look somewhat different; or, as the sun comes out from behind the clouds the colour of my bed cover looks somewhat different than it did before. These types of situations are different than those in which one is in the same circumstances and sees the objects themselves changing; for example, when watching the water in the kettle as it comes to a boil.

After we have discovered this general fact that the way things appear can change when our position or set of circumstances changes, we begin to discover

situations where the change in appearance is much more radical than that from simply changing our position when looking at an object. These more radical situations are called illusions, and they are such that we make mistaken judgements about the object which we are perceiving. We judge, for instance, that the round tower is square when we see it from a great distance. In such situations it takes a body of evidence to indicate that it is our perception of the object that is varying and not the object itself. That is, it takes a body of evidence in order for us to decide that the tower does not change from being square to being round when we move close to it and change from being round to being square when we move far away from it, but rather that our awareness of the tower--the way the tower looks--changes. Therefore illusory situations are not discovered simply by critical reflection on our illusory experience--it is not possible to tell just from the one experience that it is illusory--but by attempting to integrate our knowledge and by deciding how we should interpret specific phenomena: as the object changing, as in the case of the boiling water, or as our perception of the object changing, as in the case of the round tower.

Thus it is true that we can distinguish illusions from non-illusions, but it is not true that we can do so by critical reflection on our illusory experience; an illusory experience is similar to a non-illusory one. Therefore if the skeptic is requiring that we must be able to tell illusory from non-illusory experiences solely by critically reflecting on the experiences, as seems to be the case in Dancy's formulation of the argument--for though Dancy does not say what he means by "we

cannot tell" and by "an available difference", he seems to mean that we cannot tell via critical reflection--then the skeptic is inflating the requirements of being reasonable. Since illusions and some other types of error are not discovered solely by critical reflection, there is no basis for saying that a necessary condition of reasonableness is that we must be able to so discover them--that, in effect, each separate experience "announces" itself as veridical or non-veridical. Moreover, if it were true that the only way to discover errors is by critical reflection on our experiences and beliefs, we would not be able to discover errors like illusions, and the skeptic would not be able to use such errors in his arguments.

Given this conception of illusions as a type of error not discoverable by critical reflection on our experiences, it may be helpful to consider what our concept of reasonableness supports concerning these types of error. What our concept of reasonableness would support is that a subject have no strong evidence that he is in some illusory or otherwise abnormal condition. For instance, a subject who has not discovered the facts of perceptual relativity may be acting reasonably when he concludes that a round tower is square (because he sees it only from a great distance), but after he has discovered this type of illusion, he must take this knowledge into consideration the next time he sees a tower from a distance; if he does not, we could say that his belief about the shape of the tower is not reasonable, or at least not completely reasonable.

Consider another type of error that sometimes may not be discoverable by critical reflection: calculation errors. To be sure, when the error results from

misapplying the rules of arithmetic, one can usually discover this just by paying close attention to what one is doing. But sometimes one keeps making the same (stupid) calculation error. In these situations one discovers the error by someone pointing it out, by seeing that the result does not square with the results of other calculations, etc. In a case where a person does not discover his error simply by paying close attention to what he is doing, there is no absurdity in saying that he may nevertheless be acting reasonably, because he might not have any evidence that he is making an error. The fact that a person erred does not ipso facto show that he acted unreasonably. But if a person does have evidence that his calculation of the sum of a column of numbers is mistaken, perhaps because the sum does not square with other results, he must take this evidence into consideration when forming a belief as to the sum of those numbers. Here perhaps a requirement of "being reasonable" would be that he checks his calculations again.

A further implication of our concept of reasonableness and its relation to error is that to challenge a person's belief on the basis that he might be suffering from an error like an illusion or a calculation mistake, we must present evidence that the person is making such an error, and not simply claim that since people sometimes do experience illusions or that people sometimes do make calculation mistakes, the person might be suffering from such a condition. We must present such evidence because it is only by specific evidence that we discover such errors as illusions or mistaken calculations in the first place.

Thus I conclude that the argument from error is not a very convincing argument, because we can and do distinguish errors like perceptual illusions from cases of knowledge. The only reason the argument appears convincing is that it turns on a type of equivocation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE ARGUMENT FROM DREAMS

The next skeptical argument to examine is the argument from dreams. The locus classicus of this argument is of course Descartes' "Meditations on First Philosophy", where Descartes writes:

[h]ow often has it happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated near the fire, whilst in reality I was lying undressed in bed! At this moment it does seem to me that it is with eyes awake that I am looking at this paper; that this hand which I move is not asleep; that it is deliberately and of set purpose that I extend my hand and perceive it; what happens in sleep does not appear so clear nor distinct as does all this. But in thinking over this I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see manifestly that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep that I am lost in astonishment.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup>Rene Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy", Meditation I, in The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol I, 145-146.

There are at least three ways in which the argument from dreams can be interpreted, and I will discuss each of the three ways in its turn. The first way, closest to the argument which Descartes seems to be putting forward, can be formulated in the following manner:

#### First Version

- (1) When a subject S is dreaming, S is not aware of an external world.
  - (2) S can reasonably believe that he has knowledge of an external world only if he can tell (distinguish) that he is not dreaming.
  - (3) S is in fact unable to tell that he is not dreaming.
- 
- (4) Therefore, S cannot reasonably believe that he has knowledge of an external world.

Premise (1) of the argument is required because it specifies the reason why we think a person must be able to tell that he is not dreaming in order for his belief in an external world to be reasonable. When a person is dreaming, we admit that he is not in a position to get knowledge of an external world, that his conscious experiences do not bear an appropriate cognitive relation to the external world. So if a person is unable to tell that he is not dreaming, this means that he is unable to tell whether or not he is actually in a truth-conducive position with respect to his beliefs about an external world, making these beliefs unreasonable.



As I remarked in Chapter One, the argument from dreams is generally put forward as a skeptical argument against our belief in an external world, but it could be deployed (in any of its three versions) in hope of establishing an even more extensive form of skepticism. For if it is true that we do not have knowledge about other subject areas just as we do not have knowledge about an external world when dreaming, then the argument from dreams would cast doubt on this other knowledge as well. For example, when dreaming, can we be said to have knowledge of mathematical truths? If a person had dreamt that he constructed a proof for some mathematical proposition, I think we would be inclined to say that he does not thereby know that the proposition is proved, even if the proof he had dreamt of is valid. It seems that when dreaming we are not sufficiently in control (if at all) of our cognitive processes such that we can be said to reasonably believe or not believe a proposition. Thus, taking but one example, our inability to tell that we are not dreaming seems to cast doubt on our mathematical knowledge. But as I remarked in Chapter One, I will be discussing skeptical arguments only insofar as they attempt to cast doubt on our knowledge of an external world.

Let us now consider exactly what this first version of the argument from dreams, if successful, would and would not establish. Perhaps some hold that it would establish the real possibility that we might always be dreaming. We think that the content of a dream is not to be analyzed as the awareness of some aspect of the external world, but rather as the product of some internal, psychological process, somewhat similar to the workings of the imagination. If we cannot tell

whether or not we are dreaming, could it not be the case that we might always be dreaming?

The answer to this question is: no. The argument by itself cannot establish the reality of such a possibility. As Bernard Williams remarks, it is illegitimate to infer from the claim that for any given X, it is possible that it is F (for any given "waking" experience, it is possible that it is a dream) to the claim that it is possible that all X's are F (all our experiences are dreams). Consider an example of the same type of inference that is clearly invalid:

in some sense of "possible", of any given man it is possible [that] he is a younger brother, but in no sense of "possible" is it possible that all men are younger brothers.<sup>30</sup>

Thus without implicitly relying on some further reasons, the argument from dreams, even if successful, could not establish the possibility that we might always be dreaming. Can such further reasons be given? It would seem not. As Williams notes, Descartes' formulation of the argument relies on a contrast between dreaming and other types of experience that we take to give us awareness and knowledge of an external world. Descartes says that he has often dreamt he was sitting by a fire although in fact he was in bed--and to know that he was in bed rather than by the fire is to take certain experiences (ones we hold as occurring when awake) as

---

<sup>30</sup>Bernard Williams, Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry, 55-56.

yielding knowledge of the external world.<sup>31</sup> The very presentation of the argument therefore requires that we are not always dreaming.

So what the first version of the argument from dreams may be said to establish, if successful, is that because we are unable to tell when it is the case that we are not dreaming, we cannot reasonably hold that belief X (say) expresses knowledge of an external world. Thus even though the argument cannot establish the possibility that we might always be dreaming, it does seem to be able to challenge the reasonableness of each and everyone of our beliefs about an external world.<sup>32</sup>

The relevant question now is: Does it present a successful challenge? Bernard Williams' observation that Descartes' formulation of the argument from dreams depends on contrasting dream experiences to waking experiences hints that there is a confusion in the argument itself. Descartes does not merely hold that it is sometimes the case that we are dreaming and sometimes the case that we are not, but he also implicitly holds the stronger claim that we can tell when we are not dreaming. After all, he maintains that although dreaming is experienced as similar to being awake, we have nevertheless discovered that dreaming (contrary to being awake) does not put us in a truth-conducive position with respect to our beliefs about an external world. When asleep, Descartes dreamt that he was sitting by the

---

<sup>31</sup>Bernard Williams, Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry, 57-58.

<sup>32</sup>Bernard Williams, Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry, 57.

fire, but then awoke and found that he was lying in bed; he concludes that he was in reality not sitting by the fire although he dreamt he was. But to draw this conclusion suggests that premise (3) of the argument is false, for it suggests that we can distinguish between dreaming and wakefulness.

Indeed, the first version of the argument from dreams commits the same mistake as the argument from error did. It relies, just as the argument from error did, on contrasting two actual situations, dreaming and being awake, claiming that in one situation we are not aware of an external world and in one situation we are. It then holds that we are unable to tell when it is the case that we are awake and when it is the case that we are dreaming. But how then did we form the concepts of dreaming and wakefulness?

Thus a similar reply given to the argument from error should be given here. Briefly put, the concept of dreaming, a concept denoting a type of experience that does not give us awareness of an external world, is formed by contrasting it to the concept of wakefulness, a concept denoting a type of experience that does give us awareness of an external world. To form the concept of dreaming, we contrast instances of dreaming to instances of being awake. And as was the case with the concept of error, there are two general ways in which we can form the concept of dreaming: either by observing and distinguishing actual instances subsumed by the concept or by imagining such instances. If we distinguish instances of wakefulness from instances of dreaming which we have recalled when awake, then it makes no sense to say that we are unable to distinguish wakefulness from dreaming. On the

other hand, if we have only imagined a process like dreaming, there is no reason to hold that we must be able to distinguish wakefulness from dreaming in order for our beliefs to be reasonable, because we know the concept of dreaming is an imagined concept and that therefore we do not (yet) have any evidence that such a process might actually exist.<sup>33</sup>

The conclusion we can draw from all this is that the reason why we think being able to distinguish between dreaming and wakefulness is relevant to the reasonableness of our beliefs about an external world is that we have observed actual instances of dreaming and concluded that dreaming is not a process which enables us to be aware of an external world. Thus if we have reason to think that we might be dreaming, we have reason to think that we might not be in a truth-conducive position with respect to our beliefs about an external world, thereby casting doubt on those beliefs. But, as we have seen, forming the concept of dreaming by observing actual instances of the process implies that we are able to distinguish between dreaming and wakefulness, and so no skeptical conclusion results; and if the concept of dreaming were merely an imagined concept, like the concept of a unicorn, we would have no grounds for thinking that dreaming actually occurs and

---

<sup>33</sup>Again, I am assuming that we have some reason to think that we have knowledge of an external world, that we are awake. What I am claiming is that our imagination must be understood to operate within a certain context of knowledge (about the external world), and that it cannot be used to cast doubt on that knowledge (see Chapter Three).

therefore no grounds for thinking that we must be able to distinguish wakefulness from dreaming.

One should note that a similar objection to my objection that there is a tension between maintaining that dreaming, contrary to wakefulness, is a process that does not allow us to be aware of an external world, and maintaining that we are unable to distinguish between dreaming and wakefulness, is presented by J.L. Austin in Sense and Sensibilia, where he says that if dreaming and being awake really were indistinguishable, we would not be able to understand what the actual differences are that these two terms try to capture.<sup>34</sup> Barry Stroud has criticized Austin's rejoinder to the skeptic, saying that the argument behind

Austin's rhetorical question "How could we use and contrast the words "waking" and "dreaming" as we do if there were not recognized ways of telling on particular occasions that we are not dreaming?"....fails because it takes no account of how and why the expressions we use come to be applied to the different sorts of occasions to which we apply them. [A]lthough we will be marking a real difference between the occasion to which we apply S and that to which we apply not-S, it does not follow that the distinction we draw is in fact the distinction between S's applying truly to a particular occasion and its not so applying.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup>J.L. Austin, Sense and Sensibilia, 48-49.

<sup>35</sup>Barry Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism, 74, emphasis added.

I am not sure I completely understand Stroud's criticism, but what he seems to be suggesting is that although there may be some differences we attend to when applying the terms "wakefulness" and "dreaming", these differences need not be differences that allow us to say that when awake we are aware of an external world but when dreaming we are not. In short, the distinction we mark when using the terms "wakefulness" and "dreaming" might not correspond to the real distinction between wakefulness and dreaming.

If this is indeed what Stroud is suggesting, then his argument is of the sort that I have described as follows: the skeptic asks the realist what grounds he has for analyzing awareness in realist terms, finds that the realist has no satisfactory grounds, and claims that it is therefore unreasonable to believe that we have knowledge of an external world. Stroud's argument is of this sort because Stroud is saying that it has not been shown that what we call "wakefulness" really is of such a nature that when we are awake we are aware of an external world. This pattern of argument, however, has little to do with the argument from dreams. The argument from dreams does not simply attack our ability to know that we are aware of an external world, but our ability to know that we are aware of an external world given the fact that we dream.

Thus it still remains the case that if one denies that we are able to draw a distinction between actual cases of wakefulness and actual cases of dreaming, the skeptic has no grounds for using such concepts in his argument; and that if one admits that we are able to distinguish the two, no skeptical conclusion follows.

The second version of the argument from dreams focuses on the issue of how to analyze wakefulness (perception). The argument proceeds as follows:

### Second Version

- (1) Although the experiences of dreaming and wakefulness (perceiving) may be distinguishable, the two are sufficiently similar such that the analysis one gives of the object or content of each experience should be the same.
- (2) The object or content of a dream experience is not to be analyzed as awareness of some aspect of an external world.

---

- (3) Therefore, the object or content of a waking (perceptual) experience is not to be analyzed as awareness of some aspect of an external world.<sup>36</sup>

This is not a very persuasive argument, for it does not exhibit the proper form or pattern of a skeptical argument that tries to show that inconsistencies in common-sense beliefs lead to skepticism about the external world. As I said in Chapter One, I see a plausible form of realism being defended by explaining why the proper description of conscious experience is as the realist would describe it: consciousness is essentially the awareness of objects external to and independent

---

<sup>36</sup>This argument is similar to some arguments that are used in hope of establishing a sense-data theory of awareness. These latter arguments make the additional claim that in dreams we are aware of an "internal", mental object, a sense datum, and therefore a similar analysis should be given to what we are aware of in perception.



from one's consciousness of them. If it were indeed the case that dreaming is phenomenologically quite similar to perceiving (below I give reasons for denying this), a realist could hold that dreaming should be analyzed in a similar fashion to perceiving, namely, as an awareness of an external world. The skeptic argues that we know how to analyze the psychological process of dreaming, and since perceiving is very similar to dreaming, we should analyze perceiving in the same way as we did dreaming. But a realist thinks that we are much more certain of how to analyze perception. So he can reverse the argument and claim that we know how to analyze the psychological process of perception, and since dreaming is similar to perceiving, we should analyze dreaming in the same way as we did perceiving.

It is true that we commonsensibly believe that dreaming is not an awareness of an external world, but we also commonsensibly believe that perception is an awareness of an external world. Since both of these are common-sense beliefs, if the skeptic wants to deny the truth of the latter belief, he must explain why it is legitimate to attack it by appealing to the truth of the former; for using the same type of argument, one can just as well attack the former belief by appealing to the truth of the latter. This is why the argument does not have the proper form of a skeptical argument.

Note, however, that in reversing the skeptic's argument the realist would be forced to admit that common-sense beliefs are confused and mistaken. For as I said, hardly anyone thinks that dreaming is a form of awareness of an external world. But as we saw when discussing the argument from error, there is a

difference between the skeptic succeeding in demonstrating that common-sense beliefs are confused and mistaken, and in establishing skepticism. The second version of the argument from dreams can at most succeed at the former task. To achieve the latter task, the skeptic would have to explain why these two processes should be analyzed as processes that do not give us awareness of an external world rather than as ones that do. To advance such an argument would be at least in part to argue that the reasons the realist gives for thinking that perception allows us to be aware of an external world are inadequate. But to argue in this fashion, the skeptic has little need to appeal to the phenomenon of dreaming. Thus I conclude that the form or pattern of the second version of the argument from dreams is not the type required to establish skepticism.

The third version of the argument from dreams differs from the first two in that it questions our very concepts of dreaming and wakefulness. It proceeds in the following manner:

### Third Version

- (1) We have two sets of incompatible experiences, one which we call "wakefulness" or "perception", and one which we call "dreaming".
- (2) At most one of these two incompatible sets of experiences can be an awareness of an external world.
- (3) For our belief in an external world to be reasonable, we must have some grounds for thinking that we can tell which set of experiences allows us to be aware of an external world.

(4) Although we believe that the set of experiences labelled "wakefulness" yields awareness of an external world, we actually have no grounds for preferring this set over the set labelled "dreaming".

---

(5) Therefore, our belief in an external world is unreasonable.

The previous two versions of the argument from dreams both admitted that we can tell that dreaming is a process which does not allow us to be aware of an external world, and because of this they both ran into problems. Those two versions had to implicitly maintain that we can know what dreaming is (a process that does not give us awareness of an external world) without being able to differentiate it from a process that does allow us to be aware of an external world, namely, wakefulness. I argued that this is not the case. If dreaming really is similar to wakefulness (perception), such that we cannot differentiate it from wakefulness, then dreaming should also be analyzed as giving us awareness of an external world. And if we can distinguish instances of dreaming from instances of being awake, as I claim we in fact do when forming the two concepts, then there is no reason to think that we cannot know when we are not dreaming. It is these sorts of objections that the third version of the argument tries to avoid.

The argument admits that we can distinguish between two sets of incompatible experiences (dreaming and wakefulness), but that the way we distinguish the two does not allow us to say which one, if any, is an awareness of an external world. So in a sense the argument questions the validity of our concepts

of dreaming and wakefulness: if these two concepts are taken only to designate two types of incompatible experiences, then they are valid; but if they are also taken to designate respectively a type of experience that does not give us awareness of an external world and a type that does, then they are invalid, because we have no means to draw this further distinction.<sup>37</sup>

Thus the third version of the argument from dreams is designed to block a realist's reply that if it is true that dreaming and wakefulness are indistinguishable (or relevantly similar) then we are forced to analyze both as an awareness of an external world. As I noted above, such a reply violates common sense and thus vindicates the skeptic's claim that common-sense beliefs are confused; but it does not concede the crucial point that our belief in an external world is unreasonable. The third version of the argument tries to block such a reply by holding that the two sets of experiences are incompatible; at most one can be an awareness of an external world, but we do not know which one. This is the important innovation in the third version of the argument from dreams, so let us examine it more carefully.

From the common-sense perspective we believe that there are two types of experiences, wakefulness and dreaming. The first allows us to be aware of an external world but the second does not; the second is similar to the process of imagination. Thus we are inclined to accept the truth of premises (1) and (2); we

---

<sup>37</sup>It is possible that in the passage I quoted above from The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism (when discussing the first version of the argument), Barry Stroud was trying to put forward an argument similar to my third version of the argument from dreams.

believe that we have two sets of experiences that are incompatible with one another, and that at most (and at least) one, namely wakefulness, allows us to be aware of an external world. The skeptic, however, is challenging our ability to draw this distinction between dreaming and wakefulness: he says we cannot tell which type of experience allows us to get knowledge of an external world. The question we must ask, then, is: How do we know that the two types of experiences are incompatible?

When we dream that we are flying (without an airplane or some other machine), or that we have fallen off a high cliff and suffered no injury, for example, the reason we take such experiences to be incompatible with waking experiences is that we know that these things cannot really occur. Because we have discovered certain facts about the world--that humans cannot fly and that humans will be seriously injured or even killed if they fall off high cliffs--we say that our dream experiences are incompatible with our waking experiences. Consider, however, what happens in situations where we discover new, unexpected things about the world. For example, when black swans were discovered, we did not dismiss this discovery because it was incompatible with our old experiences that swans are white; rather, we revised our knowledge to take in to account this new fact. Had a person dreamt of a black swan, however, we would not have revised our knowledge, because we do not think that dreaming puts us in a position to get knowledge of the external world.

In general, to say that a newly entertained proposition X about the external world is incompatible with some proposition Y about the external world is to maintain that we have some knowledge of the external world, namely Y, and that X contradicts this knowledge. But if we have no basis for saying that X was formed in a non truth-conducive position (that our only "evidence" for X, for instance, consists of imagining it) then we must try to either revise our knowledge in order to make it incorporate X, or else explain why the contradiction is only apparent. Therefore if it were in fact true that we have no evidence to specifically say that dreaming is a process that does not allow us to be aware of an external world, as the third version of the argument claims, then we would have no basis for saying that a dream experience in which we were flying, for example, is incompatible with our waking experiences: we would have to say that having dreamt that we were flying consists of evidence that we can sometimes fly. Without being able to say that, contrary to perceptions, dreams do not allow us to be aware of an external world, we would not be able to say that dreams are incompatible with perceptions, and thus not be able to establish the truth of premise (1).

Thus I am arguing that the reason we take dreams to be incompatible with perceptual experiences is that we think perceptual experiences allow us to tell how the world really is; further, we think dreams are non-cognitive experiences, so when our dreams depict situations that, based on our perceptual evidence, cannot happen, we say that dreams conflict with perceptual experiences. And because of these facts we believe that premises (1) and (2) are true. But if one denies, as the argument

does via premise (4), that we know that perception enables us to gain knowledge of the world and dreaming does not, then we cannot establish the truth of premise (1). We would have no reason to say that dreams and perceptual experiences are incompatible.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, although the third version of the argument from dreams purports to block the realist's reply that if dreaming and wakefulness are relevantly similar then both must be said to be an awareness of an external world, in reality the argument cannot successfully block this reply. For if we have no basis for saying that dreaming is not an awareness of an external world, we have no basis for saying that dreams and waking experiences conflict or are incompatible.

Even though I have now given adequate replies to each of the three versions of the argument from dreams, showing that the first version commits the same mistake as the argument from error does, and that the second and third versions are vulnerable on other grounds, it would be fruitful to discuss how we seem to tell that dreaming is not a process that allows us to be aware of an external world; for I think that we can tell the difference between dreaming and wakefulness. But before attempting this, we should note that Barry Stroud and Margaret Macdonald think that any attempt to find such a "test" is misguided, because a test used to distinguish

---

<sup>38</sup>It is worth noting that the skeptic could argue that perhaps we can establish the truth of premise (1) in some other manner; however, I will not consider any such arguments here.

between dreaming and wakefulness will be effective only if we first know that we actually applied the test rather than just dreamt that we applied it.<sup>39</sup>

I think this objection rests on a confusion: only if dreaming and wakefulness were indistinguishable would it be possible to be dreaming that one is distinguishing between the two when one believes that one is in fact distinguishing between the two. If the experiences themselves are distinguishable, however, such that when one is awake one can identify that one is awake, then the possibility that one is actually dreaming when one has determined that one is awake does not arise. Observe that to hold this position, it need not be maintained that it is impossible to dream that one is awake, but only that when one is awake one can know that one is.

Therefore when trying to specify the differences between wakefulness and dreaming, an important point to notice is that there are two separate issues: (i) whether or not we can distinguish wakefulness from dreaming when dreaming, and (ii) whether or not we can distinguish wakefulness from dreaming when awake.<sup>40</sup> To answer the skeptical problem, it is sufficient that we can distinguish the two when awake. To help see this, consider a somewhat similar situation: that of a

---

<sup>39</sup>Barry Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism, 48. See Bernard Williams, Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry, Appendix 3, 309-313, where he describes Macdonald's view and objects to it on grounds similar to the ones I will put forward.

<sup>40</sup>See Bernard Williams, Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry, Appendix 3, 309-313.



drunk. It appears that some people when drunk cannot tell that they are drunk; but this does not mean that when they are not drunk they cannot tell that they are not drunk. Before actually discussing ways in which we might distinguish dreaming from wakefulness, two further issues are worth mentioning.

Firstly, we should ask why it is that some arguments from dreams momentarily persuade us that we cannot distinguish wakefulness from dreaming, when we actually believe that we can. Austin has given a plausible answer to this question. He maintains that we go from the consideration that dreams are described in the same way that normal waking experience is, to the erroneous conclusion that the two experiences must therefore be alike.

It is true...that dreams are narrated in the same terms as waking experiences: these terms, after all, are the best terms we have; but it would be wildly wrong to conclude from this that what is narrated in the two cases is exactly alike.<sup>41</sup>

When we draw this erroneous conclusion and also remember the fact that dreams do not put us in a position to get knowledge about an external world, we feel the skeptical force of some arguments from dreams.

Secondly, if the reasons given for thinking both that dreaming is distinguishable from wakefulness and that dreaming is not an awareness of an

---

<sup>41</sup>J.L. Austin, Sense and Sensibilia, 49.

external world seem inadequate, this by itself should not be taken to mean that we are in fact unable to make these distinctions. There are cases where a person can distinguish something yet not be able to describe how he goes about this. For instance, most of us are able to "read" the facial expressions of our friends, to tell whether they are happy, sad, angered, puzzled, etc., yet most of us would be unable to describe on what basis we make such distinctions, other than by how their faces look. To take another example, I am able to distinguish between the conducting styles of some conductors' recordings of the same symphony, but often I am unable to describe the difference, other than by saying that the recordings sound different. What I am suggesting is that the case might be similar for dreaming and wakefulness: we might be confident that we can both distinguish the two and tell that dreaming is not an awareness of an external world, yet be unable to describe how we make these distinctions other than by saying that we experience the two processes as different.

With this caveat in mind, let us proceed. There are I think two broad ways of distinguishing, from our internal, subjective perspective, between dreaming and wakefulness, distinctions which allow us to conclude that dreaming is similar to the process of imagination and therefore not an awareness of an external world. Firstly, when one is awake there is a sense of exploration of a world that is not present when dreaming. Right now I am sitting at my desk, typing these words on my keyboard. In my room are a host of items: books and bookshelves, a bed, a fridge and stove, a fan, and countless other things. For each of these things, I could

investigate and explore it. I could pick up one of the books, feel its texture, leaf through its pages, read a few sentences, and put it back where I found it. I could open the fridge door, see what is inside, feel how cold each thing is, and then close the door. There are endless ways I can explore the environment around me. My awareness of some aspect of my environment in no way exhausts that environment. This feature of waking experience is not present when dreaming. Although dreams can be more or less vivid, the vividness is not a function of the degree to which one can explore the "dream environment". With dreaming, there is no sense of an enormous detail present that one could explore if one chose to. Note that here it is not relevant that when dreaming people sometimes "think" they are awake, or that someone might dream that he is looking through his fridge. For reflecting back on our dreams when awake, we see that they were like a story unfolding in which we were one of the characters; they do not carry with them the sense that we were in a certain environment and that we were exploring that environment. But this is in part what we mean by "being aware of the external world": the fact that we are individuals in a world with the ability to explore it. Observe further that when we reflect back on previous waking experiences, contrary to our dream experiences, we get this feeling of exploration. When I recall the trip I made to the supermarket this morning, I have the sense that I was in a certain environment, acting in it and exploring it. I could have bought other things than those I did, picked up different fruits from the stands, etc.

From the internal perspective, therefore, dreaming is much more akin to the process of imagination, which yields highly selective and not very detailed experiences, and which we know does not allow us to be aware of an external world, than to the normal course of waking experience. Note further that dreams are often a combination of images and verbal description: in such cases a dream is like a story being told, with few detailed images. One can say what one dreamt about, but not how this felt or looked, because such images were not present. This is quite similar to the process of imagination but different from normal waking experience, which is radically non-linguistic.

More evidence for this view that dreaming is similar to the imagination but not to perception is provided by our concept of day-dreaming. Day-dreaming designates an activity where one lets one's imagination run relatively freely, contemplating situations that one finds pleasurable. It is significant that this activity is called "day-dreaming", because it shows that when we compare dreams to other experiences, they are seen as much more similar to the experiences of the imagination than to perceptual experiences. And just as we conclude that imagining objects or situations is not like perceiving them and is not an awareness of an external world, so we conclude the same for dreaming about objects.

Another factor in thinking that dreaming is similar to the imagination is that in dreams one is often an object in the dream and not seen as the subject experiencing the dream. So long as we can tell that these types of dreams are similar to other dreams, this fact helps us classify the process of dreaming. In

perceptual experience, we are always the subject of the experience and do not "see" ourselves as objects in the world. But by a process of imagination we can project ourselves in a world and "observe ourselves", so to speak, from the third-person perspective. This again suggests that dreaming is similar to the imagination but not to perception.

The second set of internal factors useful for distinguishing dreaming and wakefulness and for showing that dreaming is not an awareness of an external world, somewhat similar to the first set, has to do with our ability to direct our cognitive activity. When one is awake there is the sense of directing one's cognitive activity: one decides what to pay attention to, what to focus on, what to think about, one both directs and monitors one's thinking. But this is not the case when dreaming. It cannot be said that here one decides what to dream about, how long to dream about it, what to focus on, what to say, and what to do. In this respect, dreaming is typically passive (I leave aside the phenomenon of lucid dreams). It is true that we "do" things in dreams; we dream we are engaged in certain activities or accomplishing certain tasks. But when we are awake and recall our dream, the dream is recalled as something that in a sense just happened but in which one did not actively participate. When we recall some episode from our past, however, this is experienced as one having acted in that particular situation, having made certain decisions and borne the consequences. It is significant that only when we think that we are awake does it appear to us that we have other types of conscious processes, such as day-dreaming or dreaming, which seem very different from the processes

of perception and conceptual thought which we are currently engaged in. We then ask ourselves what these different experiences are. We do not "ask" such questions, however, when dreaming or day-dreaming, which suggests that these processes, contrary to perception and conceptual thought, are not cognitive processes.

These two broad sets of considerations provide good initial evidence that dreaming is not an awareness of an external world, but is rather something like the process of imagination. Perhaps such evidence by itself is not conclusive, but I think that the fact that our other evidence, evidence from the third-person perspective, coheres with the view of dreaming derived from our internal evidence, makes our total evidence conclusive. Such "external" evidence might include the facts that another person can observe that the dreaming subject did not perform the actions which he dreamt he did, and that the experiences the dreamer describes are not publicly accessible in the way that the experiences the perceiver describes are. This is exactly what we would expect if dreaming is indeed similar to the process of imagination but not to the process of perception.

Thus dreaming appears to be a process much more similar to the imagination than it does to perception; like experiences of the imagination, dreams are not an awareness of an external world. The similarity between dreaming and perception (wakefulness) is the result of the objects of the experiences being the same, not the processes. In perception one is aware of an external world; when dreaming one re-experiences things, in a rearranged form, which one has previously observed and which have been "stored" in memory. The two experiences differ qua processes of

consciousness, and we are able to grasp this difference and distinguish the two processes from one another.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE ARGUMENT FROM AN EVIL DEMON

Descartes thought that the skeptic's most powerful argument is the argument from an evil demon. Modern philosophers have agreed with Descartes, although some have dressed up the argument in modern garb, replacing the evil demon with evil scientists. But this is a relatively unimportant change, and I will continue to refer to the argument as the argument from an evil demon. This argument, in its strongest form, is not concerned with the type of skepticism being analyzed here, and so any replies that I give to the argument must not be taken to address the argument in its entirety. Interpreted in its strongest form, the argument from an evil demon says that given our evidence, it is just as likely the case that our perceptual experiences are caused by an external world as that an evil demon creates them. It says that the evidence we have to decide how we should describe our perceptual and other conscious experiences is compatible with a host of alternatives, among them



such alternatives as that our awareness only extends to appearances or that an evil demon creates our perceptual experiences.<sup>42</sup>

To be sure, this argument goes against our common-sense beliefs, claiming that, contrary to what we think, our belief that we can acquire knowledge of an external world is unreasonable; and in this respect, therefore, the argument argues for a skepticism similar to the type I am discussing. But this argument cannot really be seen as pointing out confusions and inconsistencies among our common-sense beliefs; rather, the argument maintains that the whole common-sense standpoint has no defense. The skeptic then simply waits for it to be shown that our evidence is in fact not compatible with such alternatives as an evil demon creating our experiences. Thus the burden of proof is placed on the non-skeptic; the non-skeptic must show that it is not the case that our evidence is compatible with a host of alternatives, among them alternatives that deny that we are aware of or have knowledge about an external world. To try to reply to the strongest interpretation of the argument from an evil demon, therefore, would require arguing directly for realism, for the theory that we are aware of and have knowledge about an external

---

<sup>42</sup>See Alvin I. Goldman, Epistemology and Cognition, 32-33.

world.<sup>43</sup> For these reasons the strongest version of the argument lies outside the province of this thesis, and consequently I will not be discussing it.

But I think there is an interpretation of the argument from an evil demon that makes it an argument attempting to point out confusions and inconsistencies in our alleged knowledge of an external world. The interpretation I have in mind is similar to the one Descartes gives to the argument.

Also, the skeptic has other arguments than just the strong interpretation of the argument from an evil demon which seek to show that a number of alternative accounts concerning our perceptual experiences are possible and cannot be ruled out. Of course, the realist denies this; he thinks that he can show that there are not other alternatives compatible with the totality of our evidence: our evidence indicates that we are aware of and have knowledge about an external world. With these other skeptical arguments, however, the skeptic hopes to show that various forms of realism cannot consistently make such a denial. These arguments maintain that various forms of realism, notwithstanding the theories' claims, lead to the result that our belief in an external world is unreasonable. Because of the similarity such arguments bear to the strong interpretation of the argument from an evil demon, and because such arguments try to demonstrate that some forms of realism are

---

<sup>43</sup>Note that one could not argue that our evidence indicates that a creature like an evil demon does not create our conscious experiences, and therefore we are aware of an external world. The strongest interpretation of the argument does not posit a simple dichotomy between an evil demon creating our experiences and our experiences being an awareness of an external world. Because of this, one must argue directly for realism.

inconsistent, I will examine these arguments in this chapter, considering whether they work against all forms of realism.<sup>44</sup>

Let us now turn our attention to the interpretation of the argument from an evil demon that seems closest to Descartes' argument. In formal terms, the argument proceeds as follows:

(1) It is possible that there exists a creature like an evil demon which has the power to manipulate our cognitive processes and make us believe what it wants.

(2) For our beliefs (including our belief in an external world) to be reasonable, we must be able to tell that we are not being deceived by an evil demon, that we are in control of our cognitive processes.

(3) We are in fact unable to tell that we are not being deceived by an evil demon.

---

(4) Therefore, our beliefs (including our belief in an external world) are unreasonable.

Since by hypothesis the evil demon has the power to manipulate all our cognitive processes, including our reasoning powers, this interpretation of the argument from an evil demon makes it an argument for a much more extensive form of skepticism

---

<sup>44</sup>I see such skeptical arguments partly as an attack on common-sense beliefs because I think that from the common-sense perspective most people are realists. But in discussing attacks the skeptic makes on realist theories, I am going a little beyond the scope of this thesis, since from the common-sense perspective it cannot be said that we have any (realist) theory of perceptual experience or of the nature of consciousness. Nevertheless, it will be fruitful to discuss some of the skeptic's attacks on realism.

than just skepticism about the external world. It seems to be something like this argument that Descartes had in mind when positing the evil genius, for Descartes wants to make intelligible not only the idea that we might not have knowledge of the external world but also the idea that we might be mistaken when concluding that " $2 + 3 = 5$ ".<sup>45</sup> Note that this argument can be viewed as an attack on common-sense beliefs because many people would admit that in some sense of "possible", an evil demon is possible. The skeptic is not here claiming that we have no evidence whatsoever for believing we are aware of an external world, but only that the admission that an evil demon is possible (in some sense of "possible") is inconsistent with claiming that our belief in an external world is reasonable.

As I remarked in Chapter Two, the skeptic's arguments have a similar pattern in that they question our ability to distinguish between two situations, one in which we (might) have knowledge and one in which we do not have knowledge, but that the arguments get progressively stronger: it becomes more and more difficult to see how we could distinguish between the two situations. The argument from an evil demon is considered to be the strongest form of this type of argument because it posits total deception. The arguments from error and from dreams, as we have discussed, run into problems both because it seems that we have some prior acquaintance with perceptual errors and dreams, such that we can distinguish them from instances of knowledge, and because it seems that it cannot be the case that we

---

<sup>45</sup>Rene Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy", Meditation I, in The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol I, 147-149.

are always making errors or always dreaming. With the argument from an evil demon, however, the skeptic claims that it might be the case that we are always deceived by an evil demon, and so this argument can avoid some of the problems that the other two faced.

To begin investigating this Cartesian interpretation of the argument from an evil demon, we should consider exactly what premise (1) means. We must ask in what sense a creature like an evil demon is possible, and whether the sense in which it is possible is such that it can be used to cast doubt on our knowledge of an external world.

It is commonly said that the sense in which an evil demon is possible is logical possibility. According to John Hospers,

[a] state-of-affairs is said to be logically possible whenever the proposition that this state-of-affairs exists is not self-contradictory, and logically impossible when the proposition is self-contradictory;

whereas "[a] state-of-affairs is empirically possible [hereafter called physically possible] when it is not contrary to the laws of nature."<sup>46</sup> It should be made clear that these definitions do not refer to what we think is self-contradictory or what we think is contrary to the laws of nature, but to what is actually self-contradictory and

---

<sup>46</sup>John Hospers, An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, 2nd edition, 170, emphasis added to the second part of the quotation.

actually contrary to the laws of nature, regardless of our current state of knowledge. The two notions of possibility are meant to be distinct from the notion of epistemic possibility.

Hospers remarks that logical possibility is often taken to be synonymous with that which is imaginable. But he says this claim is not strictly true, because there are certain things, such as a thousand-sided polygon, which are logically possible but not imaginable (at least by most people). In saying this, Hospers is viewing the imagination as necessarily working with images: most people cannot picture a thousand-sided polygon in their head; but I think this is to presuppose a too narrow view of the imagination. I see nothing wrong with saying, for instance, that I can imagine my friend getting a new job, even though I have no image or picture of what this looks like. But in any case, Hospers does say that in one sense of "conceivable" (a term which perhaps has a wider application than "imaginable"), it is permissible to say that the logically possible is the conceivable.<sup>47</sup>

How does this notion of logical possibility differ from physical possibility? Cannot one also say that the physically possible is the conceivable? The difference lies in the fact that the conceivable, understood in physical terms, is that which one can conceive of which does not contradict how the world actually works. Thus it is physically conceivable that my friend has flown by airplane to Los Angeles, even if I have no evidence that he has done so. But is it not physically conceivable that

---

<sup>47</sup>John Hospers, An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, 2nd edition, 172-173.

he has flown by airplane to the planet Mars. On the other hand, the conceivable, understood in logical terms, suspends or disregards how the world actually works, and lets our imagination run free. Thus it is logically conceivable that my friend has flown by airplane to the planet Mars.

The reason an evil demon is thought to be only logically possible is that given what we think the laws of nature are, the existence of an evil demon manipulating our conscious processes and creating our perceptual experiences is inconsistent with these laws. Thus to say that an evil demon is physically possible, the skeptic would already have to be assuming that our alleged knowledge of how the external world works is incorrect.

The question we must now ask is whether the fact that an evil demon is logically possible can lead us to doubt our knowledge. Is premise (2) of the argument correct when it claims that for our beliefs to be reasonable, we must be able to tell that we are not being deceived by an evil demon? I hold that it is incorrect, and I hold this because I do not think that the fact that a state-of-affairs is logically possible carries the ontological implications necessary to make us doubt that what we believe that we have discovered to be the case is the case.

It will be helpful here to consider an analogy with the ontological argument for the existence of God. Very roughly, the ontological argument goes as follows: it is logically possible (conceivable) for there to exist an entity such that no greater entity can be conceived; if this entity did not exist but were only possible, it would not be the greatest entity of which we can conceive; therefore such an entity must

exist (and this entity is what we mean by "God"). This argument has been criticized for its claim that God is logically possible (that the concept is not self-contradictory), for its move from the possibility of an entity to the actuality of an entity, and especially for how it treats existence as a predicate that adds "greatness" or "perfection" to an entity. Kant certainly criticized the argument for these reasons.

But Kant gave an even more fundamental criticism to the argument, the criticism that nothing follows ontologically, existentially, from the fact that a concept or proposition is not self-contradictory. We can neither establish the ontological actuality or potentiality of some entity from the fact that we can conceive of it without self-contradiction.<sup>48</sup> In Kant's words "the fact that a concept does not contradict itself by no means proves the possibility of its object," to which Kant adds the footnote:

[a] concept is always possible if it is not self-contradictory. This is the logical criterion of possibility, and by it the object of the concept is distinguishable from the nihil negativum. But it may none the less be an empty concept, unless the objective reality of the synthesis through which the concept is generated has been specifically proved; and such proof...rests on principles of possible experience, and not on the principle of analysis (the law of contradiction). This is a

---

<sup>48</sup>Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B620-B631 (A592-603), trans. Norman Kemp Smith, 500-507.



warning against arguing directly from the logical possibility of concepts to the real [ontological] possibility of things.<sup>49</sup>

Although I do not agree with Kant's theory of the categories or his view of the principles of possible experience, I think the basic claim he is making here is correct. Concepts and propositions are mental phenomena, they are products of the mind with no existence apart from the mind. They are a means we use to grasp and to be aware of the world around us. But our conceptual processes can operate somewhat apart from our perceptual experiences; we can think of things that we are not perceiving or have never perceived, we can think of things that are the opposite of what we are currently perceiving, etc. Our only evidence for what can actually or potentially exist, however, comes from our perceptual experiences. The mere fact that a concept or proposition is not self-contradictory does nothing to show that the content of the concept or proposition exists or might exist outside of our mind. In order for a concept or proposition to have such an implication, it must bear the appropriate relation to perceptual experience--it must be formed by processing what we have apprehended in perception, and not by rearranging perceptual (or conceptual) material.

Since perceptual experience provides our only evidence for what does or might exist, we must acquire some empirical evidence to indicate that the object of

---

<sup>49</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B624 (A596), trans. Norman Kemp Smith, 503; see also B267-B270 (A220-A222).

a concept, or the state-of-affairs described by a proposition, does (or might) exist outside of our mind in order to say that the object, or state-of-affairs, is ontologically actual (or possible). Without this empirical evidence, the only ontological implication that follows from the fact that a concept or proposition is not self-contradictory is that the concept or proposition can be thought of or entertained without a contradiction being apparent.

How does this apply to the issue of distinguishing between our alleged knowledge of the world and an evil demon deceiving us? Recall that I have been assuming throughout the thesis that we have some reasons, some evidence, for thinking that we have knowledge of an external world. And this I take to mean that we have some empirical evidence which supports this common-sense position. The common-sense claim that we have knowledge of an external world makes a claim about what actually is the case, supported by empirical evidence. Consider now the case of an evil demon. The sense in which a creature like an evil demon is possible, as we have already concluded, is logical possibility. Since I think that Kant is correct when he says that without some empirical evidence no ontological implications follow from the fact that a concept or proposition is not self-contradictory (apart from the fact that the concept or proposition could be entertained without a contradiction being apparent), and since no empirical evidence has been specified which indicates that there might be an evil demon, the logical possibility of an evil demon carries no ontological implications. For this reason, premise (2) is false. We have no grounds to say that we must be able to distinguish

our alleged knowledge about the external world--by assumption knowledge supported by some empirical evidence and therefore making ontological claims as to what is or is not the case--from situations that are not, so far as we know, ontologically actual or possible.

We can admit that from the common-sense standpoint a creature like an evil demon is logically possible, yet hold that since we have some reasons for thinking that we are aware of and have knowledge about an external world, more is required to make us doubt our knowledge than just demonstrating the logical possibility of an evil demon deceiving us. What we need is some evidence to think such a creature might exist. Thus the common-sense belief that we have knowledge of an external world is consistent with the claim that an evil demon is logically possible. The logical possibility of an evil demon existing is not sufficient to point out confusions and inconsistencies in our alleged knowledge of an external world, because this alleged knowledge has a different ontological status than the possibility of a creature like an evil demon existing.

Another way one could look at this reply to the Cartesian interpretation of the argument from an evil demon is as saying that premise (3) is false; we are able to tell that our knowledge has a different ontological status than the possibility of an evil demon existing, which implies that we do not have to rule out an evil demon's existence in order for our beliefs about an external world to be reasonable.

To be sure, the assumptions made in this reply to the Cartesian interpretation of the argument from an evil demon are controversial. Many would disagree both

with the broadly Kantian view of the relationship between concepts and empirical evidence that I have endorsed, and with the resulting implications for the notion of logical possibility. There is of course a vast literature and debate on the nature of possibility and possible worlds, which I cannot even begin to discuss. But I do think that this Kantian view is plausible and defensible; I realize, however, that many would reject it, and therefore would reject my reply that the Cartesian interpretation of the argument does not demonstrate any inconsistencies in our common-sense beliefs.

At the beginning of this chapter I said that the strongest interpretation of the argument from an evil demon lies outside the scope of this thesis; that argument directly challenges the realist to present grounds or evidence showing that it is not just as likely the case that an evil demon creates our perceptual experiences, for instance, as that an external world causes them. I also said that the skeptic has other arguments purporting to show that various forms of realism, notwithstanding the theories' claims, cannot defend our belief in an external world. I will now examine such arguments. We will see that the skeptic might be right that some forms of realism cannot show the reasonableness of our belief in an external world, but we will also see that some forms of realism are not susceptible to the skeptic's arguments.

Two prominent forms of realism which I think are worth discussing are the sense-data and adverbial theories of awareness and perceptual experience. I can give only a very rough outline of these two theories, but that should be sufficient for our

purposes, because the skeptic's attack on the theories, by which he hopes to show that they lead to skepticism about the external world, is a very general attack, unconcerned with the nuances of the theories.

The sense-data theory holds that awareness is primarily not awareness of an external world but of an "inner", mental object, a sense datum, which is thought of as a sort of intermediary between the subject and the external object. The sense-data theory also believes, however, that in another sense we can be aware of an external world. One explanation it might give of this awareness is that when a sense datum which we are presently aware of bears an appropriate causal relation to an external object, then we can be said to be aware of that object. Another explanation it might give to how we can be aware of an external object is that when a sense datum which we are presently aware of sufficiently resembles an external object, then we can be said to be aware of that object.<sup>50</sup> Because the theory maintains that the primary object of awareness is not an external object, but that in a sense we can nevertheless be aware of external objects, it is classified as a form of indirect realism. We are directly aware of sense data and indirectly aware of external objects.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup>There seems to be no reason why the two approaches could not be combined: we are aware of an external object when a sense datum which we are presently aware of is both caused by and resembles an external object.

<sup>51</sup>For a basic discussion of theories of perception, including direct and indirect realism, see Jonathan Dancy, An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, chapters 10 and 11. As Dancy notes (144), the terms "direct" and "indirect", used to qualify types of awareness, are notoriously slippery, and rarely does anyone try to define precisely what is meant by them. I will not try to define the terms here, hoping that everyone roughly understands their meaning.

Of course many criticisms and objections have been and could be raised against the sense-data theory of awareness, including the question of what exactly is meant by a "mental object". But I am here concerned not with criticizing the theory but with trying to delineate it (and the adverbial theory) only in the most general terms.

The adverbial theory of awareness does away with trying to analyze consciousness in terms of subject and object. It sees conscious experience as a modification of the actions of consciousness--thus the designation "adverbial theory of awareness". This theory holds that in perception we are not aware of an intermediary, a sense datum, or an appearance; we are appeared to. To see a circular, white object is to be appeared to circularly and whitely;

in saying "He is appeared to white," or "He senses whitely," we are not committed to saying that there is a thing--an appearance--of which the word "white," in its sensible use, designates a property. We are saying, rather, that there is a certain state or process--that of being appeared to, or sensing, or experiencing--and we are using the adjective "white," or the adverb "whitely," to describe more specifically the way in which that process occurs.<sup>52</sup>

The analysis the adverbial theory gives to our awareness of external objects is as follows: if our conscious processes, the way we are appeared to, bear an appropriate causal relation to an external object, then we are aware of that object. Thus the

---

<sup>52</sup>Roderick M. Chisholm, Theory of Knowledge, 96.

adverbial theory, like the sense-data theory, should be classified as a form of indirect realism. Observe that since the adverbial theory denies that an appearance is an object or thing, it could not give an analysis of awareness in terms of resemblance--there do not exist two things which can be meaningfully said to resemble each other.

Given but a most general outline, these are two prominent forms of indirect realism. Let us now consider why the skeptic believes that these theories lead to skepticism about the external world.

Both theories maintain that the relationship that makes a certain sense datum or a certain way of being appeared to an awareness of an external world is a relationship external to the mental state or process itself. As we saw, in the case of the sense-data theory, the relationship might be one of causality or resemblance; in the case of the adverbial theory, the only possible relationship is a causal one. But in either case, what the skeptic asks is how we determine that such a relationship does in fact hold. For instance, to determine that a sense datum resembles an external object, would we not have to compare the sense datum to the object, implying that we must "step outside" of our mental states to determine whether they resemble external objects? And is this not impossible? Or to determine that the way we are being appeared to is caused by an external object, would we not have to directly observe the object itself and decide if it is in fact the cause of how we are being appeared to? And is this not impossible? According to each theory, what we can (directly) be aware of or experience is not the object itself

but only that which it causes, be it a sense datum or the way in which we are appeared to. How then can we determine whether our mental states or processes bear this or that (or any) relationship to an external object?<sup>53</sup>

The general difficulty for the two theories can be put this way. Resemblance and causality are both not specifically cognitive relationships, in the way that direct awareness is thought to be. Two physical objects can bear a relationship of resemblance or causality to one another. So if the claim is that what makes a certain conscious experience an indirect awareness of an external object is a non-cognitive relationship (be it resemblance or causality) between the experience and the external object, then the question arises of how we establish that such a relationship holds. What is our cognitive access to the relationship? The skeptic thinks that by the theories' own lights, we have no such access. Although it might be the case that most of our experiences are caused by external objects or resemble external objects, the skeptic claims that for all we know our experiences might never be caused by or resemble external objects; for all we know, they might even be created by an evil demon. Because the two theories restrict what we are directly

---

<sup>53</sup>Of course these criticisms of our ability to discover a relationship of resemblance or causality between our mental states (or processes) and external objects are not new. See, for example, John Hospers, An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, 2nd edition, 501-502, for a standard presentation of the criticisms.



aware of to the mental, in one case conceived of as an object, in the other case as a process, it seems we cannot get knowledge of an external, non-mental world.<sup>54</sup>

Proponents of the sense-data theory or the adverbial theory could of course attempt to answer this skeptical argument, but we can see that the argument has a certain force--it seems quite persuasive.<sup>55</sup> However, I will not here examine possible replies that proponents of the two theories could give to the skeptic; for I think that forms of direct realism, which hold that the primary object of awareness is an external object, are more plausible than forms of indirect realism. I shall try to delineate very roughly one such form of direct realism, a form that I think can avoid the skeptic's argument given above. But one should keep in mind that if I am wrong, and indirect forms of realism are better and more easily defended than direct forms, there is still the possibility that skepticism about the external world can be

---

<sup>54</sup>Goldman puts the problem as follows. "The difficulty of knowing about an abstract entity may be assigned to the mind-object relation.... The problem is: how can the mind get access to an abstract entity?" More specifically, the problem for our knowledge of an external world is: "[i]f the mind has direct acquaintance only with its own content, how can beliefs be reliably formed about physical objects?" Alvin I. Goldman, Epistemology and Cognition, 31. Stroud makes a similar observation: "my puzzlement extends well beyond Moore. Many philosophers appear to hold some such thesis [the thesis that we directly apprehend only mental phenomena] while also believing that they know things about the world around them." Barry Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, 105-106.

<sup>55</sup>Jonathan Dancy, however, seems to think that such an argument is not very persuasive; see An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology, 165. Nevertheless, he believes that attempts to define precisely what "indirect awareness" means, whether by defining it in terms of a causal or a resemblance relation, show the problematic nature of indirect realism (166-168).

avoided, because proponents of the sense-data and adverbial theories might be able to reply to the skeptic's argument.

For our purposes, the principal difference between a direct realist's theory of awareness and perceptual experience, and the sense-data and adverbial theories, is that a direct realist's theory does not analyze perception or any other conscious process in terms of mental states. On the view of the sense-data and adverbial theories, we have a common mental state between various different types of conscious processes, and these states are differentiated by their causal origin (or by their resemblance relations to external objects). Dreams, for instance, differ from perceptions because the former are not caused by external objects but the latter are. Conscious experiences themselves are not relational in character; they are states.<sup>56</sup> The problem the skeptic then raises is how we can ever establish that a conscious experience bears an appropriate causal relation to something to which we have no direct access. Direct realism, however, avoids this problem by analyzing awareness as the interaction of a subject and an external object, as a relationship between subject and external object. Consciousness is inherently relational. For the direct realist, there is no need to look for an external relationship, such as resemblance or causality, that "ties" a mental state to an external object and thereby allows us to be

---

<sup>56</sup>It is not obvious (to me) that an adverbial theory must so analyze conscious experience, but this seems to be Chisholm's view, for he says "that "white"...refers...to the way in which one is appeared to--whether or not an object appears", which seems to make conscious processes essentially non-relational; see Roderick M. Chisholm, Theory of Knowledge, 96.

(indirectly) aware of the external world, because the perceptual experience is itself that relationship.

Other processes of consciousness, such as those of the memory or the imagination, are also relational in character, but they are different processes than perception, and in fact parasitic on perception for their content. In memory, for example, we experience memories as an awareness of objects or situations that we have perceived (and conceptualized) in the past--this is why we identify the memory as a memory. In imagination, we experience our imagining of objects, situations, or whole stories, as something we have created, but created from things that we have perceived (and conceptualized) before. The content of each process is ultimately derived from our perception (and conceptualization) of an external world, which makes each process a type of relationship between subject and external world; the way this content can be "used", however, differs for each process.

This is how the direct realist would analyze any process of consciousness; either it is a process that gives us an awareness of an external world, like perception, or it is a process that makes use of this content in some way, as the memory and the imagination do. This applies to the phenomena of dreaming and hallucinating as well. For the direct realist, we must consider all our evidence and then decide whether these two phenomena should be analyzed as a type of awareness, like perception, or as a separate type of conscious process, whose content is derived from our perceptual and conceptual experiences, like the imagination (it is of course in the second way that we commonsensibly analyze

them). As we saw when discussing dreams in Chapter Four, neither analysis leads to skepticism. If we cannot differentiate dreams and hallucinations from perceptions, then for the direct realist our evidence indicates that they are all products of the same type of process, namely, one that gives us awareness of an external world. And if we can differentiate dreams and hallucinations from perceptions, saying that the former are like the products of the imagination, then our evidence indicates that we do have some non-cognitive processes, but the skeptic cannot consistently claim that we are unable to distinguish between those processes and perception.

Therefore the direct realist does not face the same type of problem that the indirect realist does. The indirect realist's problem is that if he cannot establish a relationship between mental states and an external world, he is unable to say whether we are ever (indirectly) aware of an external world. The direct realist rather faces the other problem. If he is unable to tell that dreams and hallucinations are not an awareness of an external world (recall that the skeptic claims they are phenomenologically similar to perceptions), then the direct realist is unable to say whether we are ever not aware of an external world (except when asleep and not dreaming). Of course this situation also seems puzzling (although it is not a puzzle that leads to skepticism, as in the case of indirect realism), but it seems puzzling only because we all commonsensibly believe that we are able to distinguish dreams and hallucinations from perceptions, and are able to know that dreams and hallucinations are not an awareness of an external world.

So I conclude that although the skeptic's argument that we cannot determine if there is a connection between our mental states and external objects might work against some forms of indirect realism, it will not work against (some forms of) direct realism.

But this is not yet the end of the skeptic's arguments. He also thinks he can bring forth considerations that show that direct realism is a naive and untenable theory, so that even if some forms of direct realism can avoid the argument discussed above, these forms of realism are vulnerable on other grounds. I shall consider two such considerations that the skeptic puts forward: (i) the facts of perceptual relativity, and (ii) the claim that illusions share a common experiential component with perceptions, requiring illusions to be analyzed as mental states rather than as relational phenomena, as the direct realist would analyze them.

The argument from relativity usually goes something like this. We are often aware of objects in what seems to be a contradictory fashion. For instance, when one hand is cold and the other hot, the cold one will perceive warm water as hot, and the hot one will perceive warm water as cold; or when a person is sick something will taste sweet to him, but when he is healthy it will taste sour. The objects themselves, however, do not change: the water does not change from cold to hot--and it cannot be both cold and hot; the piece of food does not go from sweet to sour--and it cannot be both sweet and sour. Since our perception of the object varies but the object itself does not change, it seems that we are not directly aware

of the object. And since a direct realist says beforehand that we are directly aware of the object, it seems he is unable to explain the facts of perceptual relativity.

This reasoning presupposes a particular view of what it means, for a direct realist, to be aware of an external object. The direct realist is interpreted as saying that the object is present to or "in" the mind, or at least that the "form" of the object is "in" the mind. From this metaphorical characterization, it is concluded that there is no basis for our perception of an object to vary apart from the fact that the object itself changes or has changed. If the object is understood (almost literally) to be "in" the mind, what other basis could there be for variations in our perception of it? But since we do in fact observe that our perception can vary when the object itself does not change, the conclusion is drawn that direct realism cannot explain the facts of perceptual relativity.

But I think this is to presuppose a very implausible form of direct realism. A direct realist should hold that awareness is a real relationship between subject and external object, the perceiver and the perceived. As such, both the subject and the object are essential members of the relationship--the same awareness could not continue if the external object or the subject changed in certain ways. Such a form of direct realism does not try to locate awareness in the subject, as a mental state. It holds that awareness is awareness of something, that awareness is a relationship between two things.

When direct realism is construed in these general terms, there is no reason to think that it could not explain perceptual relativity: a subject's perception or

awareness of an external object can change even though the object itself does not change, because the subject can change even though the object itself has not changed, thereby altering the relationship of awareness which holds between the subject and the external object. (I implicitly relied on this view in my analysis of illusions in Chapter Three.)<sup>57</sup>

The other type of consideration that purports to show that direct realism is a naive and untenable theory is the alleged fact that illusions share a common experiential component with perceptions, requiring that we analyze an illusion as a mental state rather than as a relational phenomenon.<sup>58</sup>

It is true that we do not consider illusions to be a separate process of consciousness but rather an instance of the process of perception. But of course this fact alone does not imply that illusions are mental states. Such a conclusion is drawn, however, from the way in which illusions are often described and analyzed. It is often said, for instance, that most of the time perception yields veridical experiences, but that in rare cases it yields non-veridical experiences, namely, illusions. And then the following analysis is given: veridical perceptions and illusions are the same type of mental state; what differentiates veridical perceptions

---

<sup>57</sup>Of course I have given only a very general framework in which a realist could analyze perceptual relativity. A complete account would still have to be worked out, and other related issues would also have to be addressed. David Kelley tries to provide a detailed account of perceptual relativity from a direct realist's perspective in The Evidence of the Senses, chapter 3.

<sup>58</sup>Although I have already discussed illusions in Chapter Three, we will here be looking at the phenomenon from a different perspective.

from illusions is that the first are appropriately caused by (or resemble) an external object while the second are not. If both experiences were an awareness of an external world, as the direct realist claims--since he admits that illusions are an instance of the process of perception and that a perceptual experience is a relationship between a subject and an external object--how can the veridicality of the one and the non-veridicality of the other be explained? It seems that a direct realist is unable to give a satisfactory explanation of the difference between normal perceptions and illusions.

I think, however, that a direct realist can give a satisfactory explanation of illusions, while still maintaining that they are not a separate process of consciousness nor a mental state, but an instance of the process of perception. A direct realist should claim that it is a mistake to analyze perceptual experiences in terms of veridicality or non-veridicality.<sup>59</sup> The distinction of veridical and non-veridical applies to propositions and not to experiences; our perceptual experiences are not propositional in nature. It takes a further process of consciousness to identify in conceptual terms the content of our experiences. And here of course we can be fooled, we can misidentify things or make mistaken judgements.<sup>60</sup> When we have

---

<sup>59</sup>See J.L. Austin, Sense and Sensibilia, 11, where he says that "though the phrase "deceived by our senses" is a common metaphor, it is a metaphor.... In fact, of course, our senses are dumb...our senses do not tell us anything, true or false."

<sup>60</sup>J.L. Austin gives a brief but interesting list of some of the different sorts of mistakes that are identified by common sense; see Sense and Sensibilia, 11-14.



just come inside on a cold winter day, and run some warm water over our hands, for example, the water will appear hot, and so we might make a mistaken judgement and say that it is hot. The difficulty we are having, which can lead to the mistaken judgement, is of subsuming a particular concrete, the water running over our hands, under the right concept. Is the water warm or hot? The reason we are having this difficulty is that we acquire a concept by noting similarities and differences among objects (and situations) which we have perceived in a specific context. We acquire the concepts of hot and cold water, for instance, after many instances of immersing our hands in water of different temperatures and noting the difference; and this takes place (for the most part) when our hands are at a normal bodily temperature.

When our hands are at a different temperature, however, when they are very cold, the way in which we perceive or detect the temperature of water X, which is at fifty degrees celsius, is different than the way in which we do so when our hands are at a normal bodily temperature. Moreover, the way in which we detect the temperature of water X when our hands are cold is similar to the way in which we detect (say) the temperature of water Y, which is at seventy degrees celsius, when our hands are at a normal bodily temperature.

It is this fact that can create the illusion of the water "appearing" hot and that can explain why we are unable to apply--at least precisely--our concepts of hot and cold. When our hands are cold, the temperature of water X is detected in the way

in which we normally detect the temperature of water Y, creating some confusion.<sup>61</sup>

Since we formed the concepts of hot and cold in the context of a normal bodily temperature and by the way in which we detect temperature in that context, if our bodily temperature changes significantly we may be unable to successfully apply the concepts (and may actually apply the wrong concept). But there is nothing non-veridical about our perception of the water's temperature when our hands are cold. As we saw when discussing perceptual relativity, just because the way in which we detect a feature of the external world--the way in which we are aware of the external world--varies, this does not mean we are no longer aware of the world. If our normal context were that of the temperature of our hands being ten degrees celsius lower than it actually is, for instance, we would still be able to detect similarities and differences between different temperatures of water and thus still be able to form the concepts of hot and cold.

Furthermore, the fact that there are similarities and differences in the way in which we perceive or detect features of the external world does not imply that consciousness must be analyzed in terms of mental states. There can of course be similarities and differences between relationships just as there can be between objects or states. Thus there is no inconsistency in saying that both normal perceptions and illusions are a relationship of awareness between a subject and an external object.

---

<sup>61</sup>See also David Kelley, The Evidence of the Senses, 234-235.

So the general conclusion is this. An illusory perception is on par with a normal perception: both are the awareness of some aspect of the external world. The reason that we call the first one illusory is that the perception occurs in a new, different context than the context in which we normally detect a feature X of the external world and in which we have formed a concept for that feature, leading us, in the new context, to apply the wrong concept and thus to make a mistaken judgement. Therefore the realist can admit that illusions are not a separate process of consciousness but an instance of the process of perception, yet still maintain that perceptions and illusions are not to be analyzed as mental states; both are a relationship of awareness between the subject and the external world. The contrast or divergence between the two occurs at the conceptual level of consciousness; it is the result of conceptualization.

I conclude therefore that it is not the case that direct realism is necessarily naive, inconsistent, or untenable. Of course there have been naive forms of direct realism, but naive direct realism should not be equated with direct realism. Observe also that if the skeptic's arguments against indirect forms of realism, such as the sense-data and adverbial theories, really are successful, this means that a complete (realist) answer to the skeptic, one that defends our belief that we are aware of and have knowledge of an external world, and therefore addresses the strong interpretation of the argument from an evil demon, would have to argue for a form of direct realism.

I have now argued that a Cartesian interpretation of the argument from an evil demon does not succeed in pointing out any inconsistencies in our common-sense beliefs or in making us doubt our knowledge. I have also argued that arguments the skeptic uses to show that various forms of realism, contrary to the theories' claims, lead to skepticism about the external world do not work against some forms of direct realism. As we saw, this had the consequence that if the indirect realist cannot in fact answer the skeptic's arguments, then a reply to the strong interpretation of the argument from an evil demon would have to argue for direct realism.

As I said at the start of the chapter, my replies to the argument from an evil demon should not be taken as replies to the strong version of the argument. It is worth noting, however, that the strong version of the argument, which maintains that other alternatives are compatible with our evidence than just the realist's position that we have knowledge about an external world, including the alternative that an evil demon creates our perceptual experiences, is not so much an argument--though of course the skeptic puts forward reasons to think our evidence is compatible with a host of alternatives--as a statement of the skeptic's conclusion: for all the realist has said, it is equally likely that we are aware of and have knowledge about an external world as that an evil demon creates our perceptual experiences.

## CONCLUSION

We have now come to the end of our survey of the skeptic's arguments. Throughout the course of the thesis I have endeavoured to interpret the skeptic's arguments in the light of the type of skepticism being investigated. This created no problems for the arguments from error and from dreams, because those arguments are indeed intended by the skeptic to demonstrate that there exist deep confusions and inconsistencies in our alleged knowledge of the external world, thereby invalidating that knowledge. I have shown that the arguments do not reveal such confusions or inconsistencies.

As we saw, however, the strongest form of the argument from an evil demon does not address the type of skepticism with which I was herein concerned, and so I gave no reply to it. But insofar as the argument from an evil demon is used to demonstrate confusions and inconsistencies in our common-sense beliefs about the external world, I have argued that it fails to achieve its purpose. Furthermore, I also discussed why arguments the skeptic puts forward to show that some forms of

realism lead to skepticism about the external world do not work against all forms of realism, in particular against some forms of direct realism, and that contrary to what the skeptic claims, direct realism is not necessarily a naive theory.

The interesting task would now be to try to work out a defense of realism which provides reasons for thinking that we are aware of and have knowledge about an external world, something I assumed to be true throughout the thesis unless and until the skeptic was able to demonstrate that this alleged knowledge is actually confused and inconsistent. Such a defense would make it possible to answer the strong version of the argument from an evil demon.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alston, William P. "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology". In Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge, ed. William P. Alston. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Alston, William P. "Justification and Knowledge". In Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge, ed. William P. Alston. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Alston, William P. "Two Types of Foundationalism". In Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge, ed. William P. Alston. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Austin, J.L. "Other Minds." In Philosophical Papers, 2nd edition, eds. J.O. Urmsom and G.J. Warnock. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Austin, J.L. Sense and Sensibilia, ed. G.J. Warnock. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- Bonjour, Laurence. "Nozick, Externalism, and Skepticism." In The Possibility of Knowledge, ed. Steven Luper-Foy. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987.
- Bonjour, Laurence. The Structure of Empirical Knowledge. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

- Chisholm, Roderick M. Theory of Knowledge. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- Cohen, Stewart. "How To Be a Fallibilist." Philosophical Perspectives, 2, Epistemology (1988): 91-123.
- Dancy, Jonathan. An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985.
- Descartes, Rene. "Meditations on First Philosophy." In The Philosophical Works of Descartes (in two volumes), volume I, eds. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross. New York: Dover Publications, 1931.
- Flew, Anthony., ed. A Dictionary of Philosophy, 2nd edition. London: Pan Books, 1984.
- Furmerton, Richard A. "Nozick's Epistemology." In The Possibility of Knowledge, ed. Steven Luper-Foy. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987.
- Goldman, Alvin I. "Nozick on Knowledge: Finding the Right Connection." In The Possibility of Knowledge, ed. Steven Luper-Foy. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987.
- Goldman, Alvin I. Epistemology and Cognition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Groarke, Leo. Greek Scepticism: Anti-Realist Trends in Ancient Thought. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990.



- Hirst, R.J. The Problems of Perception. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959.
- Hospers, John. An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, 2nd edition. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967.
- Hume, David. "A Treatise on Human Nature" (selections). In The Philosophy of David Hume, ed. V.C. Chappell. New York: Random House, 1963.
- Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.
- Kelley, David. The Evidence of the Senses. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986.
- Klein, Peter. "On Behalf of the Skeptic." In The Possibility of Knowledge, ed. Steven Luper-Foy. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987.
- Klein, Peter. Certainty: A Refutation of Scepticism. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1981.
- Luper-Foy, Steven. "The Possibility of Skepticism." In The Possibility of Knowledge, ed. Steven Luper-Foy. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987.
- Moore, G.E. "Proof of an External World." In Philosophical Papers, ed. G.E. Moore. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959.

- Moore, G.E. "The Refutation of Idealism." In Philosophical Studies, ed. G.E. Moore. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922.
- Nozick, Robert. Philosophical Explanations. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Peikoff, Leonard. "Maybe You're Wrong." The Objectivist Forum 2 (April 1981): 8-12.
- Peikoff, Leonard. "The Analytic-Synthetic Dichotomy." In Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, ed. Ayn Rand. Scarborough: New American Library of Canada, 1979.
- Putnam, Hilary. Reason, Truth and History. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Rand, Ayn. "The Metaphysical Versus the Man-Made." In Philosophy: Who Needs It, ed. Leonard Peikoff. New York: New American Library, 1982.
- Rand, Ayn. Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology. Scarborough: New American Library of Canada, 1979.
- Rescher, Nicholas. Scepticism: A Critical Reappraisal. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.
- Shatz, David. "Nozick's Conception of Skepticism." In The Possibility of Knowledge, ed. Steven Luper-Foy. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987.

Slote, Michael A. Reason and Scepticism. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970.

Stroud, Barry. The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

Theobald, D.W. "Errors and Mistakes." Dialogue (Canada) 18: 556-565.

Williams, Bernard. Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry. Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978.

Yolton, John W. Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984.