

*Fundamentally, this skepticism denies that man is able to know or to achieve any kind of certainty about reality and truth. Some skeptics argue to this position from an analysis of human subjectivity and from the impossibility of conceiving anything except by subjective acts of consciousness.*

Back to Top Skepticism or Scepticism in the UK spelling , also known as Pyrrhonism or Pyrrhonic Skepticism after the early proponent Pyrrho of Elis , is the philosophical position that one should refrain from making truth claims, and avoid the postulation of final truths. This is not necessarily quite the same as claiming that truth is impossible which would itself be a truth claim , but is often also used to cover the position that there is no such thing as certainty in human knowledge sometimes referred to as Academic Skepticism. The term is derived from the Greek verb "skeptomai" which means "to look carefully, to reflect" , and the early Greek Skeptics were known as the Skeptikoi. In everyday usage, Skepticism refers to an attitude of doubt or incredulity, either in general or toward a particular object, or to any doubting or questioning attitude or state of mind. It is effectively the opposite of dogmatism, the idea that established beliefs are not to be disputed, doubted or diverged from. In philosophy, it can refer to: In addition, the Skeptics argued that two propositions could not rely on each other, as this would create a circular argument. Such logic, they argued, was thus an inadequate measure of truth which could create as many problems as it claimed to solve. However, they believed that truth was not necessarily unobtainable, but rather an idea which did not yet exist in a pure form. So, rather than denying the possibility of truth, the Greek Skeptics merely claimed that logicians had not yet discovered truth, and intentionally remained tentative and continued their inquiry. They also questioned accepted knowledge, and viewed dogmatism as a disease of the mind. Global Skepticism or Absolute Skepticism or Universal Skepticism argues that one does not absolutely know anything to be either true or false. Academic Global Skepticism, therefore, seems to require that absolutely nothing can be known, except for the knowledge that nothing can be known. Others try to maintain some philosophical rigor by claiming to be merely reasonably certain that Skepticism is true, while never asserting that Skepticism itself can be known to be true with absolute certainty. Local Skepticism denies that people do or can have knowledge of a particular area or subject e. Skeptics oppose Foundationalism the idea that some basic beliefs that are self-justified or beyond justification in that they argue that the belief in something does not necessarily justify an assertion of knowledge of it. It has been said of the early Skeptics that they "asserted nothing, but only opined". They pitted one dogmatic philosophy against the next in order to undermine belief in the whole philosophic enterprise, and to encourage an aversion towards what they considered arbitrary and inconsequential babble. Pyrrho of Elis , who traveled and studied as far as India, propounded the adoption of what he called "practical skepticism". He became overwhelmed by his inability to determine rationally which of the various competing schools of thought of the time was correct. Upon admitting this to himself, he finally achieved the inner peace or ataraxia that he had been seeking and which became the ultimate goal of the early Skeptikoi. However, even earlier than this, Gorgias claimed that nothing exists; or, if something does exist, then it cannot be known; or if something does exist and can be known, it cannot be communicated. Gorgias , however, is known primarily as a Sophist rather than as a philosophical skeptic. Socrates claimed that he knew one and only one thing: Thus, rather than making assertions or opinions, he set about questioning people who claimed to have knowledge, ostensibly for the purpose of learning from them. Although he never claimed that knowledge is impossible, he never claimed to have discovered any piece of knowledge whatsoever, even at his death. One of the best known of the early Greek Skeptics was Carneades c. During the 1st Century B. Towards the end of the 1st Century A. Dissent - the uncertainty of the rules of common life, and of the opinions of philosophers. Progress ad infinitum - all proof requires some further proof and so on, to infinity. Relation - all things are changed as their relations become changed, or as we look upon them from different points of view. Assumption - the truth asserted is merely a hypothesis or assumption. Circularity - the truth asserted involves a vicious circle. Later followers of Pyrrho and Carneades developed more theoretical perspectives, and Sextus Empiricus c. Sextus and his followers considered both the claims to know and not to know to be equally

dogmatic, and claimed neither. Instead, despite the apparent conflict with the goal of ataraxia, they claimed to continue searching for something that might be knowable. Sextus Empiricus listed at least ten modes of skepticism, which can be broken down into three main categories: Much of the history of early Christian philosophy is an attempt to superimpose the new religion over Greek and Roman philosophical methods which were based on Skepticism and probable knowledge. So early Christian thinkers such as St. Augustine and Boethius adapted the epistemological traditions of Greece and Rome to demonstrate that one could in fact arrive at certain knowledge at least in matters of Christian religion. After centuries of religious dogmatism throughout the Middle Ages, Skepticism again resurfaced during the late Renaissance , and particularly during the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th Century. Montaigne in particular was willing to question the conventional wisdom of the time, calling into question the whole edifice of the educational system, and the implicit assumption that university-educated philosophers were necessarily wiser than uneducated farm workers. Descartes established a methodological skepticism also known as Cartesian Skepticism in which he rejected any idea that can be doubted, and then attempted to re-establish it in order to acquire a firm foundation for genuine knowledge. His famous formulation "Cogito, ergo sum" is sometimes stated as "Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum" "I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am". Descartes also posited the "dream argument" one of the most popular skeptical hypotheses , that the fact that it is so difficult to tell whether one is dreaming or not provides preliminary evidence that the senses that we use to distinguish reality from illusion should not be fully trusted. In addition, he hypothesized the possible existence of an evil daemon or demon , which presents a complete illusion of an external world including other people to the senses, where in fact no such external world exists. David Hume , one of the British Empiricists , claimed that "A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence", which provided the basis for the maxim of Marcello Truzzi - that "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof", much later in the 20th Century. Hume argued that even the most basic beliefs about the natural world, or even in the existence of the self, cannot be conclusively established by reason, but we accept them anyway because of their basis in instinct and custom. Criticisms of Skepticism Back to Top Some critics have suggested that just because something cannot be proven e. Descartes wanted absolutely certain knowledge, but that is not the only possibility, and some would argue that well-justified knowledge is sufficient. Others have argued that Skepticism turns its own claims on their heads because a skeptic cannot be certain that Skepticism is true. Thomas Reid - , founder of the Scottish School of Common Sense, argued that, if perception and the other cognitive processes are not reliable, then the faculty of reasoning which the skeptic uses is also bound to be unreliable too. Types of Skepticism Back to Top Moral Skepticism is the belief that moral knowledge is either nonexistent or unattainable. Religious Skepticism or Theological Skepticism is Skepticism regarding faith-based claims. It does not necessarily imply either Atheism or Agnosticism. Religious skeptics question religious authority, and are not necessarily anti-religious but are those skeptical of a specific or all religious beliefs or practices. Socrates was one of the first religious skeptics, questioning the legitimacy of the beliefs of his time in the existence of the various gods, which in part led to his trial and execution. Metaphysical Skepticism is a type of local skepticism which denies any metaphysical knowledge. Scientific Skepticism or Empirical Skepticism is the questioning of the reliability of certain kinds of claims by subjecting them to a systematic investigation using the scientific method the formulation and testing of hypotheses through observation and experimentation. A scientific skeptic merely seeks likely proof before accepting any knowledge, especially in controversial areas such as health claims, environmental claims, parapsychology, the existence of unproven creatures, etc. So-called Activist Skeptics are a sub-set of scientific skeptics who aim to debunk or expose in public what they see as the truth behind specific extraordinary claims.

**Chapter 2 : The "Certainty of Faith" vs "Skepticism" – Skeptical Science**

*Like knowledge, certainty is an epistemic property of beliefs. (In a derivative way, certainty is also an epistemic property of subjects: S is certain that p just in case S's belief that p is certain.)*

Ordinary Incredulity Even before examining the various general forms of skepticism, it is crucial that we distinguish between philosophical skepticism and ordinary incredulity because doing so will help to explain why philosophical skepticism is so intriguing. Consider an ordinary case in which we think someone fails to have knowledge. Suppose Anne claims that she knows that the bird she is looking at is a robin and that I believe that if Anne were to look more carefully, she would see that its coloration is not quite that of a robin. Its breast is too orange. Further, it seems that it flies somewhat differently than robins do, i. Thus, there are two grounds for doubting that Anne knows that it is a robin: The flight pattern of this bird is not typical of robins. This is a case of ordinary doubt because there are, in principle, two general ways that are available for removing the grounds for doubt: The alleged grounds for doubt could be shown to be false; or It could be shown that the grounds for doubt, though true, can be neutralized. In other words, Anne could show that a is false. But in order to remove grounds for doubt, it is not necessary that Anne show that the alleged grounds are false. Alternative 2 is available. It could be granted that the bird in question flies in a way that is not at all typical of robins. But suppose that on closer inspection we see that some of its tail feathers have been damaged in a way that could cause the unusual flight pattern. Because the bird has difficulty gliding and flying in a straight line, it flaps its wings much more rapidly than is typical of robins. Thus, although we can grant that b is true, we would have explained away, or neutralized, the grounds for doubt. The point here is that in this case, and in all ordinary cases of incredulity, the grounds for the doubt can, in principle, be removed. As Wittgenstein would say, doubt occurs within the context of things undoubted. If something is doubted, something else must be held fast because doubt presupposes that there are means of removing the doubt. That is, we think our general picture of the world is rightâ€”or right enoughâ€”so that it does provide us with both the grounds for doubt and the means for potentially removing the doubt. Thus, ordinary incredulity about some feature of the world occurs against a background of sequestered beliefs about the world. We are not doubting that we have any knowledge of the world. Far from it, we are presupposing that we do know some things about the world. In contrast, philosophical skepticism attempts to render doubtful every member of some class of propositions that we think falls within our ken. One member of the class is not pitted against another. The grounds for either withholding assent to the claim that we can have such knowledge or denying that we can have such knowledge are such that there is no possible way either to answer them or to neutralize them by appealing to another member of the class because the same doubt applies to each and every member of the class. Thus, philosophical doubt or philosophical skepticism, as opposed to ordinary incredulity, can not, in principle, be removed. Or so the philosophical skeptic will claim! To clarify the distinction between ordinary incredulity and philosophical doubt, let us consider two movies: *The Truman Show* and *The Matrix*. But he begins to wonder whether the world surrounding him is, in fact, what it appears to be. Some events seem to happen too regularly and many other things are just not quite as they should be. Eventually, Truman obtains convincing evidence that all his world is a stage and all the men and women are merely players. The crucial point is that even had he not developed any doubts, there is, in principle, a way to resolve them had they arisen. Such doubts, though quite general, are examples of ordinary incredulity. Contrast this with the deception depicted in *The Matrix*. See Irwin , for collections of articles on *The Matrix*. Put another way, the philosophical skeptic challenges our ordinary assumption that there is evidence available that can help us to discriminate between the real world and some counterfeit world that appears in all ways to be identical to the real world. Ordinary incredulity arises within the context of other propositions of a similar sort taken to be known, and, in principle, the doubt can be removed by discovering the truth of some further proposition of the relevant type. On the other hand, philosophical skepticism about a proposition of a certain type derives from considerations that are such that they cannot be removed by appealing to additional propositions of that typeâ€”or so the skeptic claims. These movies illustrate one other fundamental feature of the philosophical

arguments for skepticism, namely, that the debate between the skeptics and their opponents takes place within the evidentialist account of knowledge which holds that knowledge is at least true, sufficiently justified belief. The debate is over whether the grounds are such that they can make a belief sufficiently justified so that a responsible epistemic agent is entitled to assent to the proposition. A corollary of this is that strictly reliabilist or externalist responses to philosophical skepticism constitute a change of subject. A belief could be reliably produced, i. For example, consider the belief that there is a god. The three possible propositional attitudes are: Of course, there are other attitudes one could have toward *p* when not considering whether *p* is true. One could just be uninterested that *p* or be excited or depressed that *p*. But, typically, those attitudes are either ones we have when we are not considering whether *p* is true or they are attitudes that result from our believing, denying or withholding *p*. For example, I might be happy or sorry that *p* is true when I come to believe that it is true. Philosophers have differed about what that attitude is. Some take it to be something akin to being certain that *p* or guaranteeing that *p* Malcolm , 58” Others have taken it not to be a form of belief at all because, for example, they claim that one can know that *p* without believing *p* as in a case in which I might in fact remember that Queen Victoria died in but not believe that I remember it and hence might be said not to believe it Radford For the purposes of this essay we need not attempt to pin down precisely the nature of the pro-attitude toward *p* that is necessary for knowing that *p*. It is sufficient for our purposes to stipulate that assent is the pro-attitude toward *p* required to know that *p*. I will take such types of propositions to contain tokens some of which are generally thought to be known given what we ordinarily take knowledge to be. Thus, it would not be epistemically interesting if we did not know exactly what the rainfall will be on March 3 in New Brunswick, NJ, exactly ten years from now. That kind of thing a fine grained distant future state is not generally thought to be known given what we ordinarily take knowledge to be. Now, consider this meta proposition concerning the scope of our knowledge, namely: We can have knowledge of EI-type propositions. Given that there are just three stances we can have toward any proposition when considering whether it is true, we can: Assent that we can have knowledge of EI-type propositions. Assent that we cannot have knowledge of EI-type propositions. That is, deny that we can have knowledge of EI-type propositions. Withhold assent to both the proposition that we can have knowledge of EI-type propositions and withhold assent to the proposition that we cannot have such knowledge. The attitude portrayed in 2 has gone under many names. I will follow the terminology suggested by Sextus Empiricus. According to Sextus, they assented to the claim that we cannot have knowledge of what I have called EI-type propositions”although it is far from clear that this was an accurate description of their views. See the entry on ancient skepticism. Perhaps the prime example was Carneades ” BCE. What underlies this form of skepticism is assent to the proposition that we cannot know EI-type propositions because our evidence is inadequate. The primary source of Pyrrhonian Skepticism is the writing of Sextus Empiricus who lived at the end of the second century CE. The Pyrrhonians withheld assent to every non-evident proposition. That is, they withheld assent to all propositions about which genuine dispute was possible, and they took that class of propositions to include both the meta proposition that we can have knowledge of EI-type propositions and the meta proposition that we cannot have knowledge. Indeed, they sometimes classified the Epistemists and the Academic Skeptics together as dogmatists because the Epistemists assented to the proposition that we can have knowledge, while the Academic Skeptics assented to the denial of that claim. The Academic Skeptic thinks that her view can be shown to be the correct one by an argument or by arguments. The Pyrrhonian would point out that the Academic Skeptic maintains confidence in the ability of reason to settle matters”at least with regard to the extent of our knowledge of propositions in the EI-class. A possible Cartesian reply could be as simple as paraphrasing Luther: Here I stand, as a philosopher with confidence in reason, and as such I can do no other. But regardless of the adequacy of either of the responses, the point here is that the Pyrrhonians did not claim that they had a compelling argument whose conclusion was that withholding assent to non-evident propositions was the appropriate epistemic attitude to have. Although recently there has been a renewed interest in Pyrrhonism, it is fair to say that when contemporary philosophers write or speak about skepticism they usually are referring to some form of Academic Skepticism. Thus, we will now turn to that form of skepticism, and it is that form that will be the primary focus of this essay, although we will consider some aspects of Pyrrhonism later. However,

in the voice of the non-skeptical interlocutor, he replies that even though the senses have misled him, he can neutralize that purported basis for doubt by pointing out that we are able to determine when our senses are not trustworthy. Thus, this is a case of ordinary incredulity because he appeals to some knowledge of the world gained through our senses to neutralize this basis for doubt. For example, in looking at a straight stick in water, even though it appears bent, we know from past sense experiences not to accept the testimony of our senses at face value in such situations because we have learned that straight sticks look bent in water. Thus, we can neutralize the potentially knowledge-robbing proposition that my senses have deceived me on some occasions by conjoining it with another proposition to which we assent, namely, that I can distinguish between the occasions when my senses are trustworthy and those when they are not. Thus, no basis for philosophical Academic Skepticism has been located. Descartes next seriously considers dreaming. Would he still have some knowledge of the external world? Yes; because in dreams and in waking life there are some common general features. So, if he were dreaming, he would not know in particular what is going on about him at that moment, but that does not imply that he fails to have any knowledge of the external world at that moment. We have not found any reason for doubting that there are material objects in general or that they have a spatial location, or are in motion or at rest, or can exist for a long or short period of time. Again, no basis for Academic Skepticism has been established. For we can neutralize this apparent ground for doubting all of our beliefs about material objects because there are some truths about material objects and their properties that remain unchallenged in both our experiences while dreaming and our experiences while being awake. Thus, Descartes believes that he has located a basis for doubting each of his supposed former pieces of knowledge about the external world that cannot be repulsed by locating another proposition to which he is entitled. He has found a proposition that, if true, would by itself defeat the justification he has for his assenting to propositions about the external world and at this point in the Meditations which is such that 1 he does not have a way to deny it and such that 2 he has no way to neutralize its effect. That proposition can be put this way: My epistemic equipment is not reliable. It could be argued that the rest of the Meditations is designed to provide a way of showing that the Author of his being is perfect and, although he Descartes has made errors in the past, if his epistemic equipment is deployed properly and his will is constrained, error can be avoided.

**Chapter 3 : Philosophical skepticism - Wikipedia**

*The "Certainty of Faith" vs "Skepticism" This entry was posted in Critical Thinking religion Skepticism and tagged Faith on June 1, by Dave The beating heart of modern science is skepticism, or to be more precise, Scientific Skepticism.*

Many philosophers, as well as many people studying philosophy for the first time, have been struck by the seemingly indecisive nature of philosophical argumentation. For every argument there seems to be a counterargument, and for every position a counterposition. To a considerable extent, skepticism senses and applications Skepticism developed with regard to various disciplines in which people claimed to have knowledge. It was questioned, for example, whether one could gain any certain knowledge in metaphysics the philosophical study of the basic nature, structure, or elements of reality or in the sciences. In ancient times a chief form of skepticism was medical skepticism, which questioned whether one could know with certainty either the causes or cures of diseases. In the area of ethics, doubts were raised about accepting various mores and customs and about claiming any objective basis for making judgments of value. Sceptics of religion have questioned the doctrines of different traditions. Certain philosophies, like those of Kant and his Scottish contemporary David Hume, have seemed to show that no knowledge can be gained beyond the world of experience and that one cannot discover the real causes of experienced phenomena. A dominant form of skepticism the subject of this article concerns knowledge in general, questioning whether anything actually can be known with complete or adequate certainty. This type is called epistemological skepticism. Forms of skepticism can also be distinguished in terms of the motivation of the skeptic—whether he is challenging views for ideological reasons or for pragmatic or practical ones in order to attain certain psychological goals. Among the chief ideological motives have been religious or antireligious concerns. Some skeptics have challenged knowledge claims so that they could be replaced by religious claims that would have to be accepted on the basis of faith. Others have challenged religious knowledge claims in order to overthrow some orthodoxy. Kinds of skepticism can also be distinguished in terms of how restricted or how thoroughgoing they are—whether they apply only to certain areas and to certain kinds of knowledge claims or whether they are more general and universal. Ancient skepticism In the West, skeptical philosophical attitudes began to appear in ancient Greece about the 5th century bce. The Eleatic philosophers those associated with the Greek city of Elea in Italy rejected the existence of plurality and change, conceiving of reality as a static One, and they denied that reality could be described in terms of the categories of ordinary experience. On the other hand, Heraclitus and his pupil Cratylus thought that the world was in such a state of flux that no permanent, unchangeable truth about it could be found; and Xenophanes, a wandering poet and philosopher, doubted whether humans could distinguish true from false knowledge. A more developed form of skepticism appeared in some of the views attributed to Socrates and in the views of certain Sophists itinerant and generally mercenary teachers of philosophy, rhetoric, and other subjects. Socrates, as portrayed in the early dialogues of his pupil Plato, was always questioning the knowledge claims of others; in the Apology, he famously admits that all that he really knows is that he knows nothing. Another Sophist, Gorgias, advanced the skeptical-nihilist thesis that nothing exists; and, if something did exist, it could not be known; and, if it could be known, it could not be communicated. The putative father of Greek skepticism, however, was Pyrrhon of Elis c. He avoided committing himself to any views about what the world was really like and acted only according to appearances. In this way he sought happiness, or at least mental peace. Starting from the skeptical doctrines of Socrates, its leaders, Arcesilaus and Carneades, set forth a series of epistemological arguments to show that nothing could be known, challenging primarily what were then the two foremost schools, Stoicism and Epicureanism. They denied that any criteria could be found for distinguishing the true from the false; instead, only reasonable or probable standards could be established. This limited, or probabilistic, skepticism was the view of the Academy until the 1st century bce, when the Roman philosopher and orator Cicero was a student there. His *Academica* and *De natura deorum* are the main sources of modern knowledge of this movement. The other major form of ancient skepticism was Pyrrhonism, apparently developed by medical skeptics in Alexandria. Beginning with Aenesidemus 1st century bce, this movement, named after Pyrrhon,

criticized the Academic skeptics because they claimed to know too much—namely, that nothing could be known and that some things are more probable than others. The Pyrrhonian attitude is preserved in the writings of one of its last leaders, Sextus Empiricus 2nd or 3rd century ce. In his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Adversus mathematicos*, Sextus presented the tropes developed by previous Pyrrhonists. The 10 tropes attributed to Aenesidemus showed the difficulties encountered by attempts to ascertain the truth or reliability of judgments based on sense information, owing to the variability and differences of human and animal perceptions. Other arguments raised difficulties in determining whether there are any reliable criteria or standards—logical, rational, or otherwise—for judging whether anything is true or false. To settle any disagreement, a criterion seems to be required. Any purported criterion, however, would have to be based either on another criterion—thus leading to an infinite regress of criteria—or on itself, which would be circular. Sextus offered arguments to challenge any claims of dogmatic philosophers to know more than what is evident, and in so doing he presented, in one form or another, practically all of the skeptical arguments that have ever appeared in subsequent philosophy. Sextus said that his arguments were aimed at leading people to a state of ataraxia unperturbability. People who thought that they could know reality were constantly disturbed and frustrated. If they could be led to suspend judgment, however, they would find peace of mind. In this state of suspension they would neither affirm nor deny the possibility of knowledge but would remain peaceful, still waiting to see what might develop. The Pyrrhonist did not become inactive in this state of suspense but lived undogmatically according to appearances, customs, and natural inclinations. Medieval skepticism Pyrrhonism ended as a philosophical movement in the late Roman Empire, as religious concerns became paramount. In the Christian Middle Ages the main surviving form of skepticism was the Academic, as described in St. Augustine. But having overcome them through revelation, he characterized his subsequent philosophy as faith seeking understanding. In Islamic Spain, where there was more contact with ancient learning, a form of antirational skepticism developed among Muslim and Jewish theologians. The view that truth in religion is ultimately based on faith rather than on reasoning or evidence—a doctrine known as fideism—was adopted by the late medieval German cardinal and philosopher Nicolaus of Cusa, who advocated learned ignorance as a path to religious knowledge. Another line of thinking that included skeptical elements was that of the followers of William of Ockham, who explored the logical consequences of the belief that God is the origin of all knowledge. They examined puzzles about whether God could deceive humankind, regardless of the evidence, and about whether he could render all human reasoning open to doubt. Modern skepticism Modern skepticism emerged in part from Okhamite medieval views, but its main source was the rediscovery of the skeptical classics. Very little of the Pyrrhonian tradition had been known in the Middle Ages, but in the 15th century the texts of Sextus Empiricus in Greek were brought from the Byzantine Empire into Italy. Interest in Cicero was also revived, and his *Academica* and *De natura deorum* were also published in the 16th century. Later, during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the doctrinal controversies between Protestants and Roman Catholics raised fundamental epistemological issues about the bases and criteria of religious knowledge. The Reformation During the 15th century, scholars in the Florentine convent of San Marco, where the Christian reformer Girolamo Savonarola was a lecturer, examined the views of Sextus in some manuscripts on deposit there. Savonarola urged two of his monks to translate Sextus into Latin as a way of showing the vanity of all pagan philosophy. Before they could complete this task, however, Savonarola was tried and executed as a heretic. One of his disciples, Gianfrancesco Pico—the nephew of the Italian Platonist Pico della Mirandola—published *Examen Vanitatis*, the first work to employ skepticism as a means of challenging the whole of philosophy. It was also the first work to discuss Sextus in Latin for a European audience. Skeptical arguments were central to the 16th-century debate between Erasmus and Martin Luther. Using Academic skeptical materials, Erasmus insisted that the issues in dispute could not be resolved and that one should therefore suspend judgment and remain within the Roman Catholic church. Luther insisted, on the other hand, that true and certain religious knowledge could and must be gained through conscience. This new concern with skepticism was given a general philosophical formulation in the 16th century by Michel de Montaigne and his cousin Francisco Sanches. Montaigne recommended living according to nature and custom and accepting whatever God reveals, and Sanches advocated recognizing that nothing can be known and then trying to gain

what limited information one can through empirical scientific means. His followers in France—Pierre Charron, J. Camus, and La Mothe Le Vayer, among others—further popularized his views. In the efforts to refute or mitigate this new skepticism appeared. A Christian Epicurean, Pierre Gassendi, himself originally a skeptic, and Marin Mersenne, one of the most influential figures in the intellectual revolution of the times, while retaining epistemological doubts about knowledge of reality, nevertheless recognized that science provided useful and important information about the world. The constructive skepticisms of Gassendi and Mersenne, and later of members of the Royal Society of England such as Bishop John Wilkins and Joseph Glanvill, developed the attitude of Sanches into a hypothetical, empirical interpretation of the new science. Using this criterion, one could then establish a number of truths: Thus Descartes, starting from skepticism, claimed to have found a new basis for certitude and for knowledge of reality. Throughout the 17th century, skeptical critics—Mersenne, Gassendi, the reviver of Academic philosophy Simon Foucher, and Pierre-Daniel Huet, one of the most learned men of the age—sought to show that Descartes had not succeeded, and that, if he sincerely followed his skeptical method, his new system could only lead to complete skepticism. Nicolas Malebranche, the developer of occasionalism the view that all interaction between mind and body is mediated by God, revised the Cartesian system to meet skeptical attacks only to find his efforts challenged by the new skeptical criticisms of Foucher and by the contention of Antoine Arnauld that Malebranchism led to a most dangerous Pyrrhonism. They admitted that there might not be sufficient evidence to support knowledge claims extending beyond immediate experience. But this did not actually require that everything be doubted; by using standards of common sense, an adequate basis for many beliefs could be found. Lacking rational answers to complete skepticism, humans must turn to God for help in overcoming doubt. The culmination of 17th-century skepticism appears in the writings of Pierre Bayle, especially in his monumental *Dictionnaire historique et critique*—Bayle, a superb dialectician, challenged philosophical, scientific, and theological theories, both ancient and modern, showing that they all led to perplexities, paradoxes, and contradictions. He argued that the theories of Descartes, Malebranche, Benedict de Spinoza, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, when skeptically analyzed, cast in doubt all beliefs about the world, even the belief that the world exists. Bayle skillfully employed skeptical arguments about such things as sense information, human judgments, logical explanations, and the criteria of knowledge in order to undermine confidence in human intellectual activity in all areas. He suggested that humans should abandon rational activity and turn blindly to faith and revelation; they can therefore only follow their conscience without any criterion for determining true faith. Bayle showed that the various conceptions of religious knowledge were so implausible that even the most heretical views, such as Manichaeism known for its cosmic dualism of good and evil and atheism, made more sense. Although Bayle indicated in later works that he did hold some positive views, he presented no answers to his skepticism. There is still much scholarly debate as to what his actual position was. The Irish bishop George Berkeley, an empiricist and idealist, fought skeptical doubts by identifying appearance and reality and offering a spiritualistic metaphysics. He was immediately seen as just another skeptic, however, since he effectively denied the existence of a world beyond experience. Combining empirical and skeptical arguments, Hume asserted that neither inductive nor deductive evidence can establish the truth of any matter of fact. Knowledge can consist of intuitively obvious matters or demonstrable relations of ideas but not of anything beyond experience; the mind can discover no necessary connections within experience nor any root causes of experience. Beliefs about the world are based not upon reason or evidence, nor even upon appeal to the uniformity of nature, but only on habit and custom see induction, problem of. Beliefs cannot be justified. Belief that there is an external world, a self, and a God is common, but there is no adequate evidence for it; and although it is natural to hold these convictions, they are inconsistent and epistemologically dubious. Before he goes mad with doubts, however, Nature brings him back to common sense, to unjustifiable beliefs. The religious context of skepticism from Montaigne to Bayle had thus been removed, and humanity was left with only its natural beliefs, which might be meaningless or valueless. Courtesy of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery The French Enlightenment philosophers, the philosophes, built upon their skeptical readings of Locke and Bayle and on their interpretation of Berkeley as a radical skeptic. While they produced vast amounts of new knowledge, they also placed alongside this a skepticism

about whether one could ever establish knowledge of an external reality. Perhaps the most skeptical of the philosophes was the great French mathematician Condorcet (1743–1794), who held that mathematics, physics, and moral philosophies were all merely probable. He also raised the possibility that the mental faculties by which people judge their knowledge might change over time, and hence that what is judged true today might not be judged true tomorrow. Such disastrous assumptions, he urged, should be abandoned for commonsensical principles that have to be believed. This provided neither a theoretical basis for belief nor a refutation of skeptical arguments. Kant saw that Hume had posed a most fundamental challenge to all human knowledge claims.

**Chapter 4 : Skepticism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)**

*Wittgenstein on Scepticism and Certainty* Written by AC Grayling. Wittgenstein's 'On Certainty' (hereafter OC) is a collection of provisional notes, recording a journey not an arrival.

In the ancient world there were two main skeptical traditions. Academic skepticism took the dogmatic position that knowledge was not possible; Pyrrhonian skeptics refused to take a dogmatic position on any issue—including skepticism. Radical skepticism ends in the paradoxical claim that one cannot know anything—including that one cannot know about knowing anything. Skepticism can be classified according to its scope. Local skepticism involves being skeptical about particular areas of knowledge, e. Skepticism can also be classified according to its method. In the Western tradition there are two basic approaches to skepticism. Agrippan skepticism focuses on the process of justification rather than the possibility of doubt. According to this view there are three ways in which one might attempt to justify a claim but none of them are adequate: Philosophical skepticism is distinguished from methodological skepticism in that philosophical skepticism is an approach that questions the possibility of certainty in knowledge, whereas methodological skepticism is an approach that subjects all knowledge claims to scrutiny with the goal of sorting out true from false claims. Schools[ edit ] Philosophical skepticism begins with the claim that the skeptic currently does not have knowledge. Some adherents maintain that knowledge is, in theory, possible. It could be argued that Socrates held that view. He appears to have thought that if people continue to ask questions they might eventually come to have knowledge; but that they did not have it yet. Some skeptics have gone further and claimed that true knowledge is impossible, for example the Academic school in Ancient Greece well after the time of Carneades. A third skeptical approach would be neither to accept nor reject the possibility of knowledge. Skepticism can be either about everything or about particular areas. Academic global skepticism has great difficulty in supporting this claim while maintaining philosophical rigor, since it seems to require that nothing can be known—except for the knowledge that nothing can be known, though in its probabilistic form it can use and support the notion of weight of evidence. As for using probabilistic arguments to defend skepticism, in a sense this enlarges or increases skepticism, while the defence of empiricism by Empiricus weakens skepticism and strengthens dogmatism by alleging that sensory appearances are beyond doubt. Much later, Kant would re-define "dogmatism" to make indirect realism about the external world seem objectionable. While many Hellenists, outside of Empiricus, would maintain that everyone who is not skeptical about everything is a dogmatist, this position would seem too extreme for most later philosophers. Nevertheless, A Pyrrhonian global skeptic labors under no such modern constraint, since he only alleged that he, personally, did not know anything and made no statement about the possibility of knowledge. Local skeptics deny that people do or can have knowledge of a particular area. They may be skeptical about the possibility of one form of knowledge without doubting other forms. Different kinds of local skepticism may emerge, depending on the area. A person may doubt the truth value of different types of journalism, for example, depending on the types of media they trust. Skeptics argue that the belief in something does not necessarily justify an assertion of knowledge of it. In this, skeptics oppose dogmatic foundationalism, which states that there have to be some basic positions that are self-justified or beyond justification, without reference to others. The skeptical response to this can take several approaches. First, claiming that "basic positions" must exist amounts to the logical fallacy of argument from ignorance combined with the slippery slope. Foundationalists have used the same trilemma as a justification for demanding the validity of basic beliefs. This skeptical approach is rarely taken to its pyrrhonian extreme by most practitioners. Several modifications have arisen over the years, including the following [1]: Fictionalism would not claim to have knowledge but will adhere to conclusions on some criterion such as utility, aesthetics, or other personal criteria without claiming that any conclusion is actually "true". Philosophical fideism as opposed to religious Fideism would assert the truth of some propositions, but does so without asserting certainty. Some forms of pragmatism would accept utility as a provisional guide to truth but not necessarily a universal decision-maker. There are two different categories of epistemological skepticism, which can be referred to as mitigated and

unmitigated skepticism. The two forms are contrasting but are still true forms of skepticism. Mitigated skepticism does not accept "strong" or "strict" knowledge claims but does, however, approve specific weaker ones. These weaker claims can be assigned the title of "virtual knowledge", but must be to justified belief. Unmitigated skepticism rejects both claims of virtual knowledge and strong knowledge. Pierre Le Morvan has distinguished between three broad philosophical approaches to skepticism. The second he calls the "Bypass Approach" according to which skepticism is bypassed as a central concern of epistemology. Le Morvan advocates a third approach—he dubs it the "Health Approach"—that explores when skepticism is healthy and when it is not, or when it is virtuous and when it is vicious. Skeptical hypotheses[ edit ] A skeptical hypothesis is a hypothetical situation which can be used in an argument for skepticism about a particular claim or class of claims. Usually the hypothesis posits the existence of a deceptive power that deceives our senses and undermines the justification of knowledge otherwise accepted as justified. Skeptical hypotheses have received much attention in modern Western philosophy. At the end of the first Meditation Descartes writes: It supposes that one might be a disembodied brain kept alive in a vat, and fed false sensory signals, by a mad scientist. The " dream argument " of Descartes and Zhuangzi supposes reality to be indistinguishable from a dream. The five minute hypothesis or omphalos hypothesis or Last Thursdayism suggests that the world was created recently together with records and traces indicating a greater age. The simulated reality hypothesis or " Matrix hypothesis " suggest that everyone, or even the entire universe, might be inside a computer simulation or virtual reality. History of Western skepticism[ edit ] Ancient Greek skepticism[ edit ] Pyrrho. The Western tradition of systematic skepticism goes back at least as far as Pyrrho of Elis b. However, "The 5th century sophists develop forms of debate which are ancestors of skeptical argumentation. They take pride in arguing in a persuasive fashion for both sides of an issue. First, how are pragmata ethical matters, affairs, topics by nature? Secondly, what attitude should we adopt towards them? Thirdly, what will be the outcome for those who have this attitude? Therefore, neither our sense-perceptions nor our doxai views, theories, beliefs tell us the truth or lie; so we certainly should not rely on them. Rather, we should be adoxastous without views , aklineis uninclined toward this side or that , and akradantous unwavering in our refusal to choose , saying about every single one that it no more is than it is not or it both is and is not or it neither is nor is not. Pyrrhonists are not "skeptics" in the modern, common sense of the term, meaning prone to disbelief. The idea was to produce in the student a state of indifference towards ideas about non-evident matters. Since no one can observe or otherwise experience causation, external world its "externality" , ultimate purpose of the universe or life, justice, divinity, soul, etc. The Pyrrhonists pointed out that, despite claims that such notions were necessary, some people ignorant of them get by just fine before learning about them. They further noted that science does not require belief and that faith in intelligible realities is different from pragmatic convention for the sake of experiment. For each intuitive notion e. They added that consensus indicates neither truth nor even probability. The Roman politician and philosopher, Cicero , also seems to have been a supporter of the probabilistic position attributed to the Middle Academy, even if the return to a more dogmatic orientation of that school was already beginning to take place. What is useful to one animal is harmful to another. Each human has a different assortment of preferences, abilities and interests. Each sense gives a different impression of the same object. There is no reason to think one is sane while others are insane—the opposite could be true. Cultures disagree regarding beauty, truth, goodness, religion, life and justice. There is no consistency in perception. His examples were that the color purple will show different tints depending on the lighting, a person looks different between noon and sunset, and a very heavy rock on land is lighter when in water The senses can be shown to be deceptive. From a distance, the square tower looks round and the sun looks small Things that strengthen in moderation will weaken when taken in excess, like wine and food. When a thing is rare, it surprises people. When a thing is common, it does not surprise people. Inter-relations among things are of course relative, and by themselves are unknowable. In the centuries to come, the words Academician and Pyrrhonist would often be used to mean generally skeptic, often ignoring historical changes and distinctions between denial of knowledge and avoidance of belief, between degree of belief and absolute belief, and between possibility and probability. The common anti-skeptical argument is that if one knows nothing, one cannot know that one knows nothing, and so may know something after all. It is worth noting

that such an argument only succeeds against the complete denial of the possibility of knowledge. Considering dogmatic the claims both to know and not to know, Sextus and his followers claimed neither. Instead, despite the apparent conflict with the goal of ataraxia, they claimed to continue searching for something that might be knowable. Empiricus, as the most systematic author of the works by Hellenistic sceptics which have survived, noted that there are at least ten modes of skepticism. These modes may be broken down into three categories: Subjectively, both the powers of the senses and of reasoning may vary among different people. And since knowledge is a product of one or the other, and since neither are reliable, knowledge would seem to be in trouble. For instance, a color-blind person sees the world quite differently from everyone else. Moreover, one cannot even give preference on the basis of the power of reason, i. Secondly, the personality of the individual might also influence what they observe, since it is argued preferences are based on sense-impressions, differences in preferences can be attributed to differences in the way that people are affected by the object. This is manifest when our senses "disagree" with each other: In that case, our other senses defeat the impressions of sight. But one may also be lacking enough powers of sense to understand the world in its entirety: Given that our senses can be shown to be unreliable by appealing to other senses, and so our senses may be incomplete relative to some more perfect sense that one lacks, then it follows that all of our senses may be unreliable. But it is entirely possible that things in the world really are exactly as they appear to be to those in unnatural states i. The positions, distances, and places of objects would seem to affect how they are perceived by the person: Because they are different features, to believe the object has both properties at the same time is to believe it has two contradictory properties.

**Chapter 5 : Wittgenstein on Scepticism and Certainty | A.C. Grayling**

*Methodological skepticism - This form of skepticism employs skepticism in its attempt to gain knowledge but is not skeptical in its conclusion. In this approach, the skeptic uses doubt to weed out all the ideas that are not certain and sure.*

But it is not difficult to see an intended destination for the journey, nor is there anything obscure about the territory being travelled. Yet OC has some surprising and unexpected features. In all his earlier work he explicitly premised the claim that philosophy is a spurious enterprise, arising from misunderstandings about language. In OC he takes a central, traditional philosophical problem—the problem of scepticism and knowledge—and tries to formulate a refutation of scepticism, and a characterisation of knowledge and its justification. In order to evaluate the ideas it contains I shall therefore take OC at face value—as an unfinished enquiry, the ideas in which nevertheless strongly indicate the finished theses it works towards—and proceed as follows. First, there are two main themes in OC, which are, at the least, not comfortably consistent with each other. One is a reply to scepticism, and as such contributes recognisably to the theory of knowledge. Indeed it is a reinvention almost from scratch of views familiar, and usually more fully argued, elsewhere in philosophy, of a broadly foundationalist stamp. In this respect it carries forward, or unfolds, themes already suggested in the *Philosophical Investigations* henceforth PI. Alongside the first theme—or more accurately, wrapped round it as a vine about a tree—is the other, not comfortably consistent, theme, a relativistic one which undermines the claims constituting the first theme. My exegetical task is effected by suitably anatomising OC. The view I shall call OC1 and which constitutes a version of a foundationalist refutation of scepticism, and therefore a contribution to the theory of knowledge, has two components, the first of which is that scepticism is answered by appeal to the fact that beliefs inhere in a system, and the second of which is that this system of beliefs rests on foundations which give those beliefs their content. The truth of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference WR. It may be for example that all enquiry on our part is set so as to exempt certain propositions from doubt, if they are ever formulated. But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which our arguments have their life. I have a world picture. Is it true or false? Above all it is the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting WR. The questions that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges upon which those turn. Here are some passages exemplary of the second component of OC1: And now if I were to say "It is my unshakeable conviction that etc. But in the entire system of our language-games it belongs to the foundations. The assumption, one might say, forms the basis of action, and therefore, naturally, of thought. That is just what their being "fundamental" is. The justification for the foundations is thus effected by a "transcendental argument": A clever encapsulation of the transcendental argument is given at And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house. Here are some exemplary passages: When language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change. The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. And the bank of the river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited. The difficulty is to realise the groundlessness of our believing. On the other hand a language-game does change with time. But what men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. Relativism is the view that truth and knowledge are not absolute or invariable, but dependent upon viewpoint, circumstances or historical conditions. What is true for me might not be true for you; what counts as knowledge from one viewpoint might not do so from another; what is true at one time is false at another. Paragraph 97 arguably shows that the relativism implicit in this aspect of OC is of a classic or standard type. Its presence in OC is entirely consistent with its presence elsewhere in the later writings: What was left open in those earlier relativistic remarks was the degree of strength of the relativism to which Wittgenstein was

committed. OC2 constitutes a claim that the framework within which claims to knowledge and challenges of doubt equally make sense is such that its change can reverse what counted as either. That is classically strong relativism. At one level, OC1 and OC2 can of course be so interpreted as to make them consistent. One can postulate foundations that are historically and in other ways parochial to the discourse under consideration, consisting in beliefs and principles which are basic in the OC1 sense for a given discourse, and not justified independently of it; but which are not immutable or absolute but as vulnerable to change, even if more slowly and circumstantially, as any of the ordinary beliefs comprehended in the framework. But a relativistic foundationalism renders OC1 superficial as a response to scepticism, because so construed it does not begin to meet the really serious problem scepticism poses, and of which Wittgenstein is perfectly aware see e. To see what that is, one must retrace some steps. Let us simplify the model we are working with. A sceptic challenges us to justify a particular empirical belief, for example that there is a book on the table here before us. We respond, exploiting the same resource for doing so as OC does, by saying in effect that these circumstances are such and those words mean such that this is tantamount to a paradigmatic circumstance for using those words in these circumstances—that is, for claiming that there is a book on the table. And at this level of sceptical challenge, that has to be enough: But now the sceptic mutates; he becomes a different and bigger monster. He is no longer interested in hearing what we have to say about the book on the table, but in what we have to say about the framework, the system of beliefs. What justifies our acceptance of the framework, or more weakly our employment of it? What if there were another framework, or other frameworks, in which different assumptions led to different outcomes with these words and these circumstances? The sceptic, in other words, has adopted the habiliments of relativism. Relativism, indeed, is the ultimate form of scepticism, because it challenges us to justify, as a whole, the scheme within which mundane judgments get their content and have their life. The answer which says: One might end by responding with in this emergency: It would seem that for the argument of OC1 to work as a refutation of scepticism, this stronger recourse is required. There are good reasons for thinking that the assumptions constitutive of the framework have to be undischageable. These reasons are drawn from seeing how the notion of alternative frameworks collapses under direct pressure, the terminus of the argument being that anything recognisable as a framework has to be identical in fundamental respects with the framework from which it is so recognised. The argument is adapted from a familiar one offered by Davidson, who writes of "conceptual schemes" rather than frameworks, and individuates them as sets of intertranslatable languages. The argument, familiarly enough, is as follows. The relativist proposal is that there can be languages which we might not be able to recognise as such—which, that is, we cannot translate. But how do you recognise a language as such if you cannot translate it? The problem can be stated in terms of what the only plausible candidate for a criterion of languagehood can be, namely, translatability into a familiar idiom. Since the cognitive foundations of the scheme have to be shared for these more entertaining differences to be possible, the conclusion is that conceptual relativism is incoherent. Davidson takes this to mean that the very idea of a framework is empty because it implies what the argument denies, namely, the possibility of real conceptual diversity. Underlying such arguments, very interestingly, is an implicit commitment to the controversial view that possibility is an epistemic notion, that is, that possibility is conceivability. Something is a possible state of affairs a possible past fact, a possible language or scheme only if it is constructible from actual states of affairs from what we know, from the language we speak. The intended contrast is this: But on the idea that possibility is an epistemic notion, denoting graspability in thought or translatability into a familiar idiom, the number of possible worlds other than the actual world is limited by accessibility relations between them and it. But where there are such relations, the idea of a world being in some strong sense different from this one loses its grip. Standard ways of defining possible worlds involve redistributing truth-values over the propositions constituting the world-book of the actual, or increasing their number by adding other propositions consistent with them. But to do this is to redescribe this world, not—except by courtesy of the phrase—to create new worlds. These considerations rule out relativism. They therefore rule out OC2. But as the text of OC was left to us, Wittgenstein was developing arguments for both, so the next question is: It is to say: In PI this seemed to offer a form of foundationalism in which the basis—the given, that which justifies itself by being what it is—is practice: Does this do, as a

somewhat fudging way out of the problem? I think not, because the PI turned-spade thesis is considerably weakened in OC by the degree of relativism OC2 constitutes. Of course there are relativistic noises in PI: But these relativities could be reducibleâ€”nothing implies that we cannot gain entry to the alien forms of life, that is, that we can find ways of translating lionese remarks and Chinese expressions upon doing so. Reducible synchronic relativities look very like familiar cultural differences, and hence are superficially relative only. But the idea that the foundations of sense are themselves merely relativeâ€”that the bed and banks are in constant process of erosionâ€”implies a greater insecurity. A different way of calibrating thermometers on his view changes the meaning of "temperature". If the bed and banks of discourse were shifting over time, meanings would change with them. But we would be in the position of a speech community whose meanings are shifting without our realising the fact, because agreements remain. The rules change, but we all keep observing them in common as they do so. The whole community is in the dilemma of the solitary would-be language user, who cannot tell the difference between following the same rule again, and only thinking he is doing so. A different and better way out of the problem is to suppose that Wittgenstein might have developed his conflicting lines to the point where the conflict became intolerableâ€”I would say: And then he just might have preferred the strong anti-relativist argument available in the line he was himself taking in OC1 on the grounds of sense. For in that aspect of his discussion he in effect reinvented the strategy, as noted, of employing a transcendental argument to show that sceptical challenge is defeated by appeals to the framework. Why not therefore see that the transcendental argument militates equally against relativism? But if one does not supplement the response to scepticism OC1 by some such strategy, the exercise in OC is at best partial, at worst self-defeating, with the self-defeat stemming from acceptance of OC2. As OC stands, it stands defeated in just this way, for it only deals with scepticism at the lower, less threatening level, and fails to recognise that scepticism in its strongest form is, precisely, relativism.

**Chapter 6 : Skepticism - By Branch / Doctrine - The Basics of Philosophy**

*Philosophical skepticism is distinguished from methodological skepticism in that philosophical skepticism is an approach that questions the possibility of certainty in knowledge, whereas methodological skepticism is an approach that subjects all knowledge claims to scrutiny with the goal of sorting out true from false claims.*

Kinds of certainty There are various kinds of certainty. A belief is psychologically certain when the subject who has it is supremely convinced of its truth. Certainty in this sense is similar to incorrigibility, which is the property a belief has of being such that the subject is incapable of giving it up. But psychological certainty is not the same thing as incorrigibility. A belief can be certain in this sense without being incorrigible; this may happen, for example, when the subject receives a very compelling bit of counterevidence to the previously certain belief and gives it up for that reason. Moreover, a belief can be incorrigible without being psychologically certain. For example, a mother may be incapable of giving up the belief that her son did not commit a gruesome murder, and yet, compatible with that inextinguishable belief, she may be tortured by doubt. A second kind of certainty is epistemic. Roughly characterized, a belief is certain in this sense when it has the highest possible epistemic status. Epistemic certainty is often accompanied by psychological certainty, but it need not be. It is possible that a subject may have a belief that enjoys the highest possible epistemic status and yet be unaware that it does. In such a case, the subject may feel less than the full confidence that her epistemic position warrants. I will say more below about the analysis of epistemic certainty and its relation to psychological certainty. Some philosophers also make use of the notion of moral certainty see Markie Thus characterized, moral certainty appears to be epistemic in nature, though it is a lesser status than epistemic certainty. Understood in this way, it does not appear to be a species of knowledge, given that a belief can be morally certain and yet false contra Markie , p. Rather, on this view, for a belief to be morally certain is for it to be subjectively rational to a high degree. Although all three kinds of certainty are philosophically interesting, it is epistemic certainty that has traditionally been of central importance. In what follows, then, I shall focus mainly on this kind of certainty. Conceptions of certainty There have been many different conceptions of certainty. Each of them captures some central part of our intuitive understanding of certainty, but, as we shall see, none of them is free from problems. Certainty is often explicated in terms of indubitability. This has been done in a variety of ways. Descartes then concludes that the proposition that he himself exists is true whenever he considers it. However, even if Descartes took this view of the certainty of the cogito, he did not accept the general claim that certainty is grounded in indubitability. Matters are complicated, however, by the fact that Descartes also says in the Third Meditation that certainty depends on knowing that God exists and is not a deceiver. Ludwig Wittgenstein also seems to connect certainty with indubitability. This is, of course, compatible with their being false. In general, every indubitability account of certainty will face a similar problem. The problem may be posed as a dilemma: If she does not have good reasons for being unable to doubt the belief, the type of certainty in question can be only psychological, not epistemic, in nature. On the other hand, if the subject does have good reasons for being unable to doubt the belief, the belief may be epistemically certain. A second problem for indubitability accounts of certainty is that, in one sense, even beliefs that are epistemically certain can be reasonably doubted. As with knowing that p, being certain that p entails that it is true that p. Certainty is, however, significantly stronger than lesser forms of knowledge. In cases where the subject knows without being certain that p, it is actually true that p, though it could have been false. But, where the subject is certain that p, it does not merely turn out to be true that p—in some sense it could not have been otherwise. The difficulty for this conception of certainty is specifying the precise sense in which the belief could not have been false. What is meant cannot be what is called metaphysical or broadly logical impossibility. Although some of the paradigmatically certain beliefs are necessarily true in this sense, many others are not. For example, though I am certain of the truth of the cogito, it is not necessarily true in the metaphysical sense that I exist. That is, it is possible that I might not have existed. But this opens up two further problems for this conception of certainty. That is to say, the belief would be certain, not in virtue of the fact that it is guaranteed to be true, but rather in virtue of its relation to

the grounds that make that guarantee possible. This would be so because the grounds would provide a deeper explanation for the certainty of the belief than would the fact that the belief is guaranteed to be true. The second problem is very similar to one that arises for philosophers attempting to provide an account of fallibilistic knowledge *i*. Alternatively, the subject knows that *p* on the basis of some justification *j*, but *j* does not entail the truth that *p* see, *e*. The problem with the standard account, in either version, is that it does not allow for fallibilistic knowledge of necessary truths. Our attempt to account for certainty encounters the opposite problem: If the belief is necessarily true, it cannot be false—even when the subject has come to hold the belief for a very bad reason say, as the result of guessing or wishful thinking. And, given that the beliefs are necessarily true, even these bad grounds for holding the belief will entail or guarantee that it is true. Although epistemologists will disagree about what the appropriate conception of probability is, here is a crude example of how probability may figure in a fallibilistic epistemology. A basic historical reliabilist will say that a belief is justified just in case it has been produced by a process that has yielded a preponderance of true beliefs. That is to say, *j* must be certain for the subject before it can make anything else certain. But, if we are to explain the certainty that *p* by appeal to the certainty that *j*, we fall into a vicious regress. The only way to stop it is to allow that some beliefs may have an intrinsic probability of 1 see Russell, *p*. It is, however, difficult to see how intrinsic probability of this sort is possible barring, of course, a subjectivist account of probability, which could, in any case, capture only psychological certainty. There are various ways to understand what it means for a belief to be credible or justified in the highest degree. It could mean simply that the belief in question is justified as highly as any belief the subject happens to hold. But, in cases where the subject does not have any beliefs that are highly justified, this will imply that even a belief with relatively low justification is epistemically certain. Perhaps we could say instead that a belief is justified to the highest degree when it is justified as highly as any belief that anyone happens to hold. But this, too, leaves open the possibility that a belief with relatively low justification is epistemically certain: Perhaps, then, we should say that a belief is justified in the highest degree when it has the highest level of justification possible. But even this account is unsatisfactory. Suppose that global skepticism is necessarily true: It would then be intuitively correct to say that every belief falls far short of certainty, though this would not be permitted by the account of certainty under consideration. We may of course doubt that skepticism of this strong variety is correct; nevertheless, it should not be simply ruled out as a matter of definition. Roderick Chisholm offers a variation on the above approach. According to his first definition of certainty where *h*, *S*, and *t* are variables for propositions, subjects, and times, respectively: Clause ii then says that those beliefs of the subject are certain which are at the highest levels of justification for her. However, this still leaves open the following possibility: Perhaps for this reason, Chisholm later offered a different definition of certainty: But the second definition appears to be more successful in requiring that *p* be justified to a significant degree. Now, believing that *p* must not only be more justified for the subject than withholding *p*, it must also be more justified than withholding with respect to any other proposition. There are many propositions that we are capable of entertaining—*e*. It so happens that we find ourselves in a position of total ignorance with respect to some propositions. But that need not have been the case. We could have ended up in a world where there is a moderate amount of evidence either for or against every proposition. Because they both relativize certainty to a particular subject, they make possible the following situation. Two subjects each believe that *p*, and in each case the belief is justified to degree *n*. For the first subject, the belief counts as certain because none of her other beliefs have a higher level of justification. But, for the second subject, the belief in question is not certain because she does have another belief that is slightly more justified. If certainty really is grounded in epistemic justification, though, this should not be possible. If a given justification makes a belief certain for one subject, it should do so for everyone. There is another approach that Chisholm might take. According to particularism, his favored method in epistemology, we should use particular instances of knowledge and justification as our guide in formulating an epistemology Chisholm and, *pp*. By contrast, methodism begins with criteria for knowledge and justification and then attempts to ascertain whether, on these criteria, we actually have any knowledge or justified beliefs. Adapting this approach to our present concern, the suggestion is that we formulate an account of certainty in light of paradigmatic instances of beliefs held with certainty.

Although this particularist approach probably is the way in which most philosophers think of certainty, it faces several difficulties. One is that the epistemology of the a priori is far from clear. Given that we do not, apparently, causally interact with necessary truths, it is hard to see how our minds can have access to them. A second difficulty has to do with knowledge of our own mental states—sometimes referred to as knowledge by acquaintance. But those aspects we cannot know merely by being conscious of them are part of our conscious experience in just the same way as those aspects we are supposed to be able to know; the difficulty is specifying a principled difference between the two. Much more could be said about the first two problems, but they lie beyond the scope of this article. It is not clear, at the outset, that we are warranted in taking them to be paradigmatic instances of a genuine epistemological kind. He explicates this in the following way: There are two major difficulties facing a view of this sort. First, it is not clear how one belief is supposed to reduce the warrant for another. Suppose that I correctly believe that I have a headache and that my belief is, in an intuitive sense, absolutely certain.

**Chapter 7 : Skepticism, certainty, and formal truth | Philosophy and NKS**

*Skepticism: Skepticism, in Western philosophy, the attitude of doubting knowledge claims set forth in various areas. Skeptics have challenged the adequacy or reliability of these claims by asking what principles they are based upon or what they actually establish.*

Philosophical skepticism is opposed to philosophical dogmatism, which maintains that a certain set of positive statements are authoritative, absolutely certain, and true. Philosophical skepticism emerged early in ancient Greek philosophy. For example, the Sophist Gorgias BCE claimed that nothing exists or if something exists, it cannot be known, or if something does exist and can be known, it cannot be communicated. Gorgias, however, is known primarily as a Sophist rather than as a philosophical skeptic. Little is known of Pyrrho or his followers. Nor is much known about two other important figures in ancient skepticism: The first group of philosophical skeptics are known as Pyrrhonists, the latter are known as the Academics. Neither the Pyrrhonists nor the Academics seem to have advocated the kind of extreme denialism Gorgias maintained. The distinction between Pyrrhonists and Academic skeptics is not without controversy, but it serves our purpose here. Other Sophists can also be seen as philosophical skeptics. When applied to moral rules, this view is known as moral relativism, a type of philosophical skepticism that denies there are any absolute moral values. In its most extreme form, moral relativism is the view that the morality of an act depends on what one believes about the morality of the act. If one believes an act is moral, then that act is moral for you. If one believes an act is immoral, then that act is immoral for you. Finding a philosopher who defends extreme moral relativism may take a lifetime or two, however. If the reader knows of any, please let me know. Extreme moral relativism is self-refuting. If the same act can be moral and immoral, moral language is pointless. The ancient skeptics did not all agree on even the most fundamental matters, such as whether certainty and knowledge are possible. Some believed that they knew certainty was not possible; others claimed that they did not know whether knowledge is possible. The position that one knows that knowledge is impossible seems to be self-refuting. Most ancient skeptics do not seem to have believed that simply because one cannot be absolutely certain about anything, one should therefore suspend judgment on all things. Such a view would be self-refuting. For, according to the principle itself one should not accept it, but suspend judgment on it. Suspending judgment on claims should be reserved for those claims one knows nothing about, or can know nothing about, and for those claims for which the evidence is proportionate on opposing sides. It may be true that nothing is absolutely certain, but it is not true that all claims are equally probable. Socrates BCE, for many the model critical thinker and skeptical inquirer, claimed that the only thing he knew was that he knew nothing. This did not stop him from making inquiries about everything, however. He frequently said "Skepton," meaning we must investigate this. The Pyrrhonists inquired into the truth of matters, even if most of the time that meant that they sought contrary arguments to dogmatic positions held by other philosophers, such as the Stoics or Epicureans. On those issues where argument and counterargument equaled one another, the Pyrrhonists held that we should suspend judgment. They apparently found that such a stance fit well with their desired goal of peace of mind ataraxia. Both forms of ancient skepticism were revived during the Renaissance with the availability of long-lost works, such as the writings of Sextus Empiricus ca. As in ancient times, some "modern" philosophers rejected the arguments of the skeptics, e. Others, such as John Locke, accepted the skeptical arguments, but did not despair of gaining useful knowledge. The advancements of modern science in the seventeenth century were made possible because of the rise of empiricism, the belief that all knowledge is based on sense experience and exists in degrees of probability. Contemporary philosophical skepticism is a complex topic and will not be discussed here. See the entry on this topic in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. What is sometimes called scientific skepticism will be discussed below. Sense experience varies from person to person, moment to moment. His view might be called sensory skepticism, the philosophical position that we cannot have absolute certainty about anything that is based solely on sense experience. Throughout the history of philosophy, arguments demonstrating the unreliability of sense experience have flourished, especially among philosophical dogmatists who looked elsewhere for

absolute certainty. One common argument is that what appears to us via the senses cannot be a reliable guide as to what is really beyond those appearances. Throughout the history of philosophy, sensory skeptics have argued that we perceive only things as they appear to us and cannot know what, if anything, causes those appearances. Thus, if there is sense knowledge, it is always personal, immediate, and mutable. Any inferences from appearances are subject to error, and we are without a method to know whether the inferences or judgments we make are correct. As noted already, these arguments did not prevent Academic skeptics from putting forth a defense of probabilism with regard to empirical knowledge. Nor has sensory skepticism hindered dogmatists from seeking absolute truth elsewhere, namely in reason or logic. Philosophical skepticism did not originate as a guide for practical living, but as an antidote to philosophical dogmatism. The earliest philosophical skeptics did not allow vicious dogs to bite them on the ground that their senses might be deceiving them, however. Dog bites hurt and honey tastes sweet. What the skeptics deny is that beyond the appearances of the biting dog there is a "dog essence" or that the experience of sweetness when tasting honey justifies inferring that "sweetness" is part of the essence of honey. Skeptics deny that it is justifiable to infer from subjective experience indubitable propositions about a reality beyond those appearances. Any inference to "objective reality," a reality that transcends immediate experience, should be couched in probabilistic language at best. Nevertheless, ancient skepticism was considered a guide for living by its advocates. Their goal was to achieve a state of being completely unperturbed. Denying appearances would not serve such a goal. Absolute certainty is not needed, according to skeptics, either for science or for daily living. Science can do quite well even if limited to appearances and to probabilities. We can find guides for daily living, including moral principles, without needing absolute certainty. We can figure out what principles are likely to lead us to what we desire: Many philosophical skeptics of the Greco-Roman period advocated a very conservative lifestyle, maintaining that nature and custom know best. Any criterion used to judge the truth of a claim can be challenged because a further criterion is needed by which to judge the present criterion, and so on ad infinitum. This argument did not deter philosophers such as Plato and Descartes from claiming to have found an absolutely impeccable criterion of truth. He thought he found such a criterion in the notion of the "clear and distinct perception. Many Academic skeptics, however, accept that there are absolutely certain claims, but that these are matters of logic or definition, and have nothing to do with establishing the certainty of any claim that goes beyond immediate perception. A theological skeptic raises doubts regarding the possibility of knowledge about any gods. A theological skeptic may be an atheist, but the two positions are distinct. A theological skeptic may be a theist or an agnostic. The theological skeptic maintains that we cannot know for certain whether any gods exist. Such a view does not entail the notion that we should be atheists. Some theological skeptics will defend atheism on the grounds that there is much more support for the probability that a god does not exist than for the probability that a god does exist. A theist might disagree and think the probability is greater for theism, or he might admit that belief in a god is not based on probabilities at all, but is an act of pure faith. Such a position is known as fideism and it was the position of one of the most renowned proponents of scientific skepticism see below, Martin Gardner. An agnostic, as distinguished from a theological skeptic, would hold that neither theism nor atheism is more probable than the other. Theological skepticism is based on beliefs about the nature of supernatural claims and the nature of the human mind. Supernatural claims, it is said, transcend the limits of human knowledge. It is for this reason that some skeptics assert that revelation from a god is necessary. Skeptics may be atheists and be completely unaware of the arguments of theological skepticism, however. A skeptic may be an atheist simply because he or she perceives little, if any, evidence for the belief in a god. Some scientific skeptics e. One of the most important figures in the history of skepticism is David Hume, whose skeptical argument against belief in miracles is still considered by many skeptics to be the best single argument in the history of skepticism. In fact, Hume hoped his argument would serve as "an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion. Miraculous claims assert that a violation of the laws of nature has occurred. Laws of nature are based on uniform experience. Experience is our guide in avoiding the vicious dog and must be our guide in judging the miraculous event. To accept an event as miraculous is to accept that experience is not a reliable guide. However, it is our only guide in such matters, unless we abandon reason and believe on pure faith. As he so eloquently and succinctly puts

it: A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. It seems that it would apply to things such as homeopathy , channeling , astral projection , levitation , past life regression , psychic surgery , map dowsing , and other things that require us to abandon uniform experience as a guide. Claims about ESP , however, would not be covered by the argument, unless advocates maintain that ESP occurs outside the realm of the laws of nature. In addition to fighting dogmatism, skeptics of all types have traditionally been critical of those who are gullible and credulous; thus, many skeptics have devoted themselves to debunking irrational traditional beliefs and superstitions. Even so, philosophical skeptics can be quite gullible. Most of what we know about ancient philosophical skepticism comes from Sextus Empiricus who believed, among other things, that some animals bypass fertilization in reproduction and originate in fire, fermented wine, mud, slime, donkeys, cabbage, fruit, and putrefied animals. The principle of contradiction, that a statement is either true or false but not both, is accepted by many skeptics as true but empirically empty. That is, such a truth reveals nothing about the world of experience. In addition to formal truths, such as the principle of contradiction or the principle of identity , most skeptics would probably accept that there are semantic truths, i. But the statement is a matter of convention, not discovery.

**Chapter 8 : Certainty (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)**

*Skepticism (or Scepticism in the UK spelling), also known as Pyrrhonism or Pyrrhonic Skepticism after the early proponent Pyrrho of Elis, is the philosophical position that one should refrain from making truth claims, and avoid the postulation of final truths.*

Am I being a bit too simplistic? For example, do you truly believe that the sun will rise tomorrow morning? You have a high degree of confidence that it will do exactly that because of your experience from every previous day. It has indeed consistently risen and moved across the sky, so you can be highly confident that it will do the same tomorrow. Do you believe that there really is a country called Bhutan? If you have had a previous experience of me telling you things that were you true, in would be valid for you to not believe, but if I generally told you things that you later verified to be true, then you would probably believe me. It is of course a reasonable thing to do, I may not personally comprehend the precise physics behind some technology, but I can have an appropriate degree of confidence in it. So where does Religion fit in? Because such belief itself is not actually true at all, it survives by tapping into our normal human mode of operating in which we accept specific things as true as a short cut to enable us to function. When all around you tell you it is true and warmly assure you it is true, it is quite natural for you to follow that cue and go along with it. Religion goes a bit further to preserve itself. It gets even more complex There is no one true version of a specific belief, instead each and every human has different degrees of confidence with the various aspects of the belief they adhere to. For some it is simply a social club, a place to meet friends and the price they pay is polite toleration of the boring religious bits, for others there is some truth, and if asked would confirm that they embrace some sub-set of the official beliefs. Perhaps there is a god and Jesus spoke to him, but virgin birth or walking on water â€ nah. The Tragedy of belief. Where things go horribly wrong is when humans fully embrace a belief as literal truth, and just accept it all without questioning any of it. I have a book that tells me it is true, so it is true, and I know the book is true because it tells me it is true, and also everybody around me says it is true. I know that some of those around me do not fully embrace all the truth, and so I am better than them. Those who do not embrace the truth, are wicked and evil. This is not a rational position, but is instead is a deeply emotional one, and usually no amount of rationality can penetrate it. If you robustly debunk the daft claims made, the inner thought is one in which such arguments are dismissed as wrong, and perhaps deemed to be a test of faith. It is easy to be fooled It is frighteningly easy to be fooled into thinking that something is true, especially if it appears to make sense, and you also think that you have personally verified it. Everybody around you tells you it is so, and you have also personally seen it happen, so are you still sure? It appears to be insane to suggest that it is not true, but I can assure you that the belief is false, the sun will not rise tomorrow morning. The belief that it will rise is an illusion, the actual reality is that earth rotates.

**Chapter 9 : Certainty: A Refutation of Scepticism**

*Skepticism is thereby defeated, according to Descartes. No matter how many skeptical challenges are raised—indeed, even if things are much worse than the most extravagant skeptic ever claimed—there is at least one fragment of genuine human knowledge: my perfect certainty of my own existence.*

Starting with Doubt For a more complete formal presentation of this foundational experience, we must turn to the *Meditationes de prima Philosophia* (Meditations on First Philosophy), in which Descartes offered to contemporary theologians his proofs of the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. This explicit concern for religious matters does not reflect any loss of interest in pursuing the goals of science. By sharply distinguishing mind from body, Descartes hoped to preserve a distinct arena for the church while securing the freedom of scientists to develop mechanistic accounts of physical phenomena. In this way, he supposed it possible to satisfy the requirements of Christian doctrine, but discourage the interference of the church in scientific matters and promote further observational exploration of the material world. The arrangement of the *Meditations*, Descartes emphasized, is not the order of reasons; that is, it makes no effort to proceed from the metaphysical foundations of reality to the dependent existence of lesser beings, as Spinoza would later try to do. Instead, this book follows the order of thoughts; that is, it traces the epistemological progress an individual thinker might follow in establishing knowledge at a level of perfect certainty. Thus, these are truly *Meditations*: If any particular truth about the world can survive this extreme skeptical challenge, then it must be truly indubitable and therefore a perfectly certain foundation for knowledge. The First Meditation, then, is an extended exercise in learning to doubt everything that I believe, considered at three distinct levels: Perceptual Illusion First, Descartes noted that the testimony of the senses with respect to any particular judgment about the external world may turn out to be mistaken. Things are not always just as they seem at first glance or at first hearing, etc. But then, Descartes argues, it is prudent never wholly to trust in the truth of what we perceive. In ordinary life, of course, we adjust for mistaken perceptions by reference to correct perceptions. But since we cannot be sure at first which cases are veridical and which are not, it is possible if not always feasible to doubt any particular bit of apparent sensory knowledge. The Dream Problem Second, Descartes raised a more systematic method for doubting the legitimacy of all sensory perception. Since my most vivid dreams are internally indistinguishable from waking experience, he argued, it is possible that everything I now "perceive" to be part of the physical world outside me is in fact nothing more than a fanciful fabrication of my own imagination. On this supposition, it is possible to doubt that any physical thing really exists, that there is an external world at all. Severe as it is, this level of doubt is not utterly comprehensive, since the truths of mathematics and the content of simple natures remain unaffected. Even if there is no material world and thus, even in my dreams two plus three makes five and red looks red to me. In order to doubt the veracity of such fundamental beliefs, I must extend the method of doubting even more hyperbolically. A Deceiving God Finally, then, Descartes raises even more comprehensive doubts by inviting us to consider a radical hypothesis derived from one of our most treasured traditional beliefs. What if as religion teaches there is an omnipotent God, but that deity devotes its full attention to deceiving me? The problem here is not merely that I might be forced by God to believe what something which is in fact false. Descartes means to raise the far more devastating possibility that whenever I believe anything, even if it has always been true up until now, a truly omnipotent deceiver could at that very moment choose to change the world so as to render my belief false. On this supposition, it seems possible to doubt the truth of absolutely anything I might come to believe. Although the hypothesis of a deceiving God best serves the logical structure of the *Meditations* as a whole, Descartes offered two alternative versions of the hypothetical doubt for the benefit of those who might take offense at even a counter-factual suggestion of impiety. It may seem more palatable to the devout to consider the possibility that I systematically deceive myself or that there is some evil demon who perpetually tortures me with my own error. The point in each case is that it is possible for every belief I entertain to be false. Remember that the point of the entire exercise is to out-do the skeptics at their own game, to raise the broadest possible grounds for doubt, so that whatever we come to believe in the face of

such challenges will indeed be that which cannot be doubted. It is worthwhile to pause here, wallowing in the depths of Cartesian doubt at the end of the First Meditation, the better to appreciate the escape he offers at the outset of Meditation Two. Remember that I am committed to suspending judgment with respect to anything about which I can conceive any doubt, and my doubts are extensive. I mistrust every report of my senses, I regard the material world as nothing more than a dream, and I suppose that an omnipotent god renders false each proposition that I am even inclined to believe. Since everything therefore seems to be dubitable, does it follow that I can be certain of nothing at all? Descartes claimed that one thing emerges as true even under the strict conditions imposed by the otherwise universal doubt: *I* This truth neither derives from sensory information nor depends upon the reality of an external world, and I would have to exist even if I were systematically deceived. For even an omnipotent god could not cause it to be true, at one and the same time, both that I am deceived and that I do not exist. If I am deceived, then at least I am. Skepticism is thereby defeated, according to Descartes. From this starting-point, Descartes supposed, it is possible to achieve indubitable knowledge of many other propositions as well. *I Am a Thinking Thing* An initial consequence may be drawn directly from the intuitive certainty of the cogito itself. If I know that I am, Descartes argued, I must also know what I am; an understanding of my true nature must be contained implicitly in the content of my awareness. What then, is this "I" that doubts, that may be deceived, that thinks? Since I became certain of my existence while entertaining serious doubts about sensory information and the existence of a material world, none of the apparent features of my human body can have been crucial for my understanding of myself. But all that is left is my thought itself, so Descartes concluded that "sum res cogitans" "I am a thing that thinks". What I really am is a mind [Lat. So completely am I identified with my conscious awareness, Descartes claimed, that if I were to stop thinking altogether, it would follow that I no longer existed at all. At this point, nothing else about human nature can be determined with such perfect certainty. In ordinary life, my experience of bodies may appear to be more vivid than self-consciousness, but Descartes argued that sensory appearances actually provide no reliable knowledge of the external world. If I hold a piece of beeswax while approaching the fire, all of the qualities it presents to my senses change dramatically while the wax itself remains. *I* It follows that the impressions of sense are unreliable guides even to the nature of bodies.