

Chapter 1 : Skepticism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Hamlyn rejects universal skepticism on the grounds that the existence of knowledge "cannot be rationally questioned." Therefore, when someone shows skepticism about certain claims to knowledge, what is required is that the ball be put firmly in his court.

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 sceptical 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 2 : Jordan Baker Quotes (2 quotes)

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.

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 Sceptics 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 Sceptics 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 Sceptics 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. Sceptics 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 Sceptics 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 Sceptics 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 3 : The Great Gatsby: A Secular Saint? |

Universal Skepticism seems to boldly claim certainty in the knowledge that knowledge is impossible. The obvious contradiction here is that if they really believe their own theory, it should force.

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. Skeptics 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 : Descartes' Epistemology (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

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Its beautiful prose, historical vividness, and emotional poignancy entitle *F. Such an evaluation is no petty encomium; nevertheless it is not enough. Obviously, this audacious classification must be justified by the discernible presence of the qualities which all truly great works of literature possess in some eminent way. In this essay, two essential properties of the most significant books mankind has to treasure will admit *The Great Gatsby* into the canon of Great Books. *The Great Gatsby* stands up to both of these standards. The first qualification, that of a universal human theme or question, is fulfilled in the central thematic element of the story, which is the soul-changing power of a rare, profoundly genuine romantic love. That is, the dynamic explored in this book of how the presence of love in the soul imparts a sort of redemption by providing meaning. Intentionally or not, Fitzgerald develops this theme of true romantic love in the situation most hostile to any redemptive action, so that it stands out in stark relief. Fitzgerald illustrates well the different effects of love on the human heart, showing how a romantic relationship can lead to the fulfillment of great potential. Both his side and her side of the relationship is tainted from the beginning, curtailing any significant effect love might have on him. As the story continues, Jordan and Nick draw closer to each other, but the problems inherent in what is between them remain, and ultimately cause the bond between them to be fruitless. Thus, no glimmer of hope for any deep-seated change is possible for her, because the relationship is only a strategy in her struggle for survival. Her willingness to be in some small way his, giving over her suave, pretty independence, creates a strong attraction within his sequestered, sensitive heart. A phrase began to beat in my ears with a sort of heady excitement: He has met one of the tired, someone whose reaction to the world has solidified into a demure disdain for the violent foolishness of her fellow men. This callousness to the pathetic suffering of Jay Gatsby separates Nick from her more and more as he gradually perceives the vacuous dearth of human sympathy in her that his affection cannot live down. He is unable to see Jordan in the same light, and finally realizes fully the rigidly self-centered essence of her personality. Nick, while still enamored of Jordan, has experienced an ultimately insurmountable revulsion for the very same quality that drew him to her. And so, though he leaves Jordan Baker a soul a bit sadder, a bit wiser, and much older, he has undergone no serious interior change. The relationship between Tom and Daisy Buchanan may be broken down easily into its dysfunctional and spiritually stagnant dynamics. Tom is passionately possessive of her, constantly harboring suspicion towards her interactions with almost any man she takes serious notice of, and guarding his entitlement to her loyalty with a zeal that easily becomes cruelty. This dysfunctional pattern continues unabated throughout the book, and is, if anything, strengthened by the events of the story. Romance will provide Tom with no redemptive opportunity because he is beneath any call to true, self-forgetful love. Her relationship to him is based fundamentally on a desperate need to be guided emotionally and given material security. She absolutely requires the opulent, carefree lifestyle that has formed and nurtured her. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately—”and the decision must be made by some force—”of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—”that was close at hand. He is the solution to her self-indulgent and indecisive inability to live life for herself. This pure playboy, this incorruptible criminal, this naive master-swindler who gained his vast riches through dishonest conspiracies, and yet in truth was broken by the betrayal of a world too treacherous for him to understand, carried in his heart a ridiculous, redemptive love that would make him the perfect worldly reflection of a saint. The moment of his salvation comes when, as a poor yet transcendently ambitious young soldier, he meets Daisy. Intending originally only on using her as a means to an exertion of a kind of Nietzsche will to power, he finds himself pulled into an ardent admiration of the ideal he senses in her, or perhaps more accurately, behind and beyond her. When he senses this ideal, the original desire for some unformed glory that drove him on in his youth finds a goal. The most grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed as night. He will be satisfied with nothing less than the very highest fulfillment the world can offer. Though he does not even have a clear conception of what this grand fate will*

be, he yearns for it, tasting transcendent hints in his adolescent dreams. No substitutes or compromises are acceptable to him. This is evidenced in the contemptuous reference made to his unsatisfactory experience of academic drudgery and, alternately, licentious frivolity. Neither intellectual self-satisfaction nor indulgence of base passions can sate his desire for the ineffable self-actualization of which he has had the first inklings. He falls in with a wealthy ex-pioneer, Dan Cody, and learns from him a bold self-confidence and crafty, practical resourcefulness. In this stage of his development, with his massive drive still unformed, still seeking some object to exert its energy upon, he meets Daisy, a child of untouchable, opulent elite. He steps out of the possible paradise of his own dreams to pour his whole self into this woman. Thus his love has taken him out of himself and caused him to seek fulfillment in another, and the truly tragic yet ultimately glorious process of his redemption in the power of this love has begun. The world soon thwarts this love, as Gatsby is sent off to aid heroically in the senseless slaughter of the First World War, but it is the enduring purity of what he holds for Daisy in his heart that raises him into his worldly sanctity. She struggles briefly with her loyalty to Gatsby, and then submits to the promise of wealth and security that Tom Buchanan offers. Now though this may seem like the mere foolishness of a love-struck young man, it is much more. For Gatsby dedicates everything to his beloved. The ill-gotten gains he accrues are only for the sake of obtaining Daisy, because he believes that he can win her back if he can establish himself as part of the coterie she trusts. He has no interest in wealth or life itself unless he gains the love of Daisy. His life is dedicated to the winning of his beloved, and he has ordered everything in himself and his life to this goal. The fact that Daisy is simply not worth this sort of devotion, and is patently unable to return his love does make his absolute dedication in a certain sense ridiculous. He is, in some way, utterly unconscious of himself, focused with single-minded ardor upon personal union with Daisy. He has no anger against her when she betrays his trust at the outset of the story or when she does it again in a more hurtful way near the end of the book. Though this may be from one perspective very foolish, it is also evidence that Gatsby has been preserved by his love in a sort of innocence, free from resentment, from petty lust or real greed. For he could simply revel in his massive fortune, seeking fulfillment in hedonistic abandon or the thrill of power that money can bring. Yet Gatsby, though he throws parties incredibly large and lavish, though he could have anything with his money, seeks only Daisy. He walks into his vast riches with startling suddenness, but possesses them with a truly inspiring ease, spending with generous abandon on others, unconsciously remaining free of the power of his possessions. Thus he has avoided resentment, lust, greed, and other vices by directing his heart toward the woman he loves. The only true desire of his heart is his beloved. In addition, Gatsby truly believes that Daisy is profoundly miserable in her marriage, which is in fact completely true, and believes he is rescuing her. Thus, he sincerely attempts to attain a better life for her. Further, though Gatsby intends to leave Tom without a wife, with a the proverbial flea in his ear, he has no vindictive intentions, no desire to harm Tom except the unavoidable unpleasantness of losing a wife he did not seem to deeply value anyway. Both its presentation of a truly timeless theme and the furthering of the discussion of that theme cause this story to merit such an exulted place. The story of Jay Gatsby brings these and other universal themes into a modern context, exploring the profound tension between the modern world and our fundamentally spiritual needs as human beings.

Chapter 5 : skepticism | Christian Forums

(initial capital letter) the doctrines or opinions of philosophical Skeptics; universal doubt. Explore www.nxgvision.com Contemporary Examples. of skepticism.

If somebody knows something to be so, then it is all right for the person to be absolutely certain that it is so. It is never all right for anyone to be absolutely certain that anything is so. Therefore, nobody ever knows that anything is so. He is diametrically opposed to any forms of a dogmatic attitude in regards to the knower and is determined to show that one cannot be certain about anything. It is far more compelling to believe that one can in fact know certain things about reality. This defeater is used to diminish the claim of global skepticism, thereby yielding with a more positive, epistemic outlook. One cannot know about other people or oneself, about the external world or ones experiences, about complicated matters, or even about the simplest mathematical provisions. This contrasts with the view of dogmatism, which maintains certain things are known to be true. The argument is as follows: If somebody knows something to be true, then it is all right for the person to be absolutely certain that it is so. But it is never all right for anyone to be absolutely certain about anything. Therefore, nobody ever knows anything is so. One should never under any circumstances have the attitude of absolute certainty. This next expression in its logical form is more precise in representing his assertions for semantic range, soundness, and validity. This argument will be interacted with greater specificity later in the paper. In other words, he attempted to dismiss knowledge in its entirety, whereas I propose to offer a new account of knowledge to the epistemic community, with a considerate revision. To him knowing and being certain are equivalent in nature. This comparison indicates a strong sense of knowing, where knowing a proposition to be true is, to be certain that it is true. In challenging the certainty one may have in regards to a particular proposition, he raises questions about everyday ordinary talk of knowing, for I Thanks to Dr. Doug Geivett and Dr. Tim Pickavance with their help and insightful comments regarding my understanding of these important concepts. In support of this he explains how some words can be ambiguous, having either a consistent or an inconsistent meaning. Once a consistent interpretation is found then the meaning can be appreciated. There may be many ad hoc explanations of this fact. Considering that he has allowed room for error in his interpretation for the ad hoc explanation of his examples above, one could assume both. An Argument For Skepticism, ed. Moreover, Unger needs to give the reader a clear definition of exactly what he thinks knowledge is. In other words, before he attacks a conception of what a dogmatist might count as an instance of knowledge, it would be helpful if he were to give us a working model of knowledge insofar as it shows the necessary components of knowledge. Because certainty entails dogmatism, being absolutely certain, is wrong in any sense. The second part is aimed at showing this attitude to be wrongly dogmatic even in matters that may appear to be quite simple and certain. Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses: I think the difference between the two are that Unger believes that he has more sophisticated thought experiments to map onto the strong doubt that once Pyrrho had, and like Pyrrho, he agrees that the epistemic credibility that the dogmatist thinks he has, must be systematically dismantled. This, he claims, is how certainty entails dogmatism. He then uses illustration to imply that there is an indirect sense of certainty. There is a dogmatic resistance to any possibility of new evidence that would conflict with S knowing that P is before him; or that nothing new will happen. The necessary condition of being certain is that you are not at all doubtful. The next concept of certainty implies that S, in his severely dogmatic attitude, is such that even if there were the possibility of potential defeaters to obtain, he would not even allow it to conflict with his present understanding of the inkbottle being before him. This asserts a wrongly dogmatic attitude even when things seem quite simple and certain. This type of mindset displays that certainty involves dogmatism. The conclusion to this dogmatic attitude is that if S is certain that P, then it follows that S is not at all open to considering any new experience or information as relevant to his thinking in the matter of whether p. An illustration from G. Moore claims that if he really knows that he is not naked, then he is not dogmatic when claiming to be certain that he is not naked. This is because according to Moore, he knew those things. His example was that he was not naked, so he was justified in being absolutely certain of it. Moore claims that one

is not at all dogmatic in having just such an absolutely negative position or attitude, and avoids the pain of being called dogmatic. However, even in this new circumstantial illustration, Unger still maintains the position that there is still an attitude of dogmatism such that, Moore will not allow anything at all to count as evidence against his present view in the matter. Unger needs to support his claim more, of how Moore is at fault with this present tense reasoning. Sextus answers by declaring that the skeptic accepts the world of sense experience undogmatically. It seems to the skeptic that he sees certain things, has certain feelings, and so on, but he does not know whether such is really the case. He suspends judgment about all that is not immediately evident to him. First is the example of the government poison disguised as an inkbottle. He considers one to have a dogmatic attitude in this thought experiment because all of the possible defeaters that could cast some doubt upon that scenario of perception. Next there is an example of the circular object resembling an inkbottle. This is what it sounds like to me. If we have to doubt every scenario that we are in, then how can we be productive in our epistemic thought life? How can Unger himself do this and be consistent with his making progress in the very paper he writes? It just seems that with this extreme outlook of trying to avoid any account of a dogmatic state of mind in regards to possible experiences, there is no reasonable epistemic 7 Ibid. How then can we make any sense of talking about our experiences at all? He then illustrates examples of imagined sequences of experience that might help the reader to appreciate the wrongness of this dogmatic attitude. If this were to be true, then our experiences from more than just moments ago would be rendered false. With this example of time, one should have the attitude, that should it occur one will be not quite so certain after all. Next concerns verbal matters of immediate experience and logical necessity. If the error could be purely verbal, where words could have different possible meanings, then this would cast doubt again on having instances of knowing. He reminds the reader that once again a voice in your head could deceive you on every notion of your ability to think that you exist. Unger should have spent more time in exhausting his account of the claim to existence that Descartes raises. This is especially crucial because this one claim that Descartes makes could be the only defeater necessary to show that one can indeed know at least one thing to be absolutely true, namely that he exists as a thinking thing. Furthermore, it is very possible that one can be dogmatic about that one thing and attempt to build a foundation in the field of epistemology from it. Now that a version of skepticism⁹ has been presented, this next section will show what is at stake for knowledge. Dogmatism is problematic because of possible defeaters to having instances of knowledge. Certainty always involves at least some dogmatism, but nobody ever knows anything about anything. Therefore, dogmatism is the opposite of skepticism, and the necessary presence of dogmatism means that skepticism is true. What seems like Unger is doing at this point is formulating a two-horned dilemma for the reader. If on the 9 For a more detailed account of various skeptical arguments that have been employed and their responses to them, see Brueckner in his, *Essays on Skepticism*. As a result, Unger is showing us that with the dilemma that we have to give up dogmatism and certainty, and thus knowledge all together. It seems to follow from his perspective that certainty is a necessary condition for knowledge¹⁰, so by attacking certainty he discards knowledge all together. Keeping with the concerns above, I will develop a model in the next section that allows one to successfully pass through the horns of the dilemma while resisting both problematic concerns that Unger proposes. I find that the opposite is true because he lacks clarity in sections where there should be a more exhaustive account. He is also inconsistent with how he offers his argument, shifting from absolute and relative terms. Peter Unger for clarification on what he claims an instance of knowledge is. This has an undertone to it that implies that if we could understand a radical skepticism about the existence of our surrounding reality, then we must already know a great deal about reality. This sounds circular in nature and deters from the credibility of his argument of universal skepticism. It would then seem that instead of a global type of skepticism, he would be left with some sort of partial skepticism. I find it very problematic that Unger decides when and when not to use statements that assert the downgrade of the meaning of words. His argument throughout the essay seems to rely on ordinary language. He tells us that we use this common sense language approach to describe certain claims about reality. He then lacks consistency throughout his paper because he can use terms in matters of degree as the main part of his argument for skepticism. He says that there is no matter of relativity here and that certainty is an absolute term. Can one be very confident in a

matter without being certain? Can one be justified in using any relative scale in weighing the credibility of an absolute term? Furthermore, does Unger have the right to suggest when one can or cannot use relative terms without making a really clear distinction on how to do that and 12 Ibid. This idea just mentioned should concern the reader and it seems to lead into the area of the philosophy of language. Maybe he needs to spend more time in this section of defending the premise that there is an analytic connection between being knowing and being certain, before moving to the next premise of his argument. I found myself wanting more clarity in this section before buying into the understanding that having knowledge is the same as ones being certain. Then from deduction one could begin to construct a theory of knowledge. Therefore, 13 one could be more intellectually honest about claiming to have instances of knowledge with a present tense stance, until further notice of a potential defeater. Strongly in disagreement with a particular proposition have multiple defeaters 2. Disagree or find a proposition problematic has only 1 defeater 3. Neither agree nor disagree; undecided or agnostic to a proposition 4. So, any proposition that I consider might indeed is fallible.

To persist in universal skepticism in the face of a million contradicting facts of life bespeaks either insanity or stubbornness of mind. When the inconsistency between life and theory cannot be harmonized, it will not do to deny life, because that would be ridiculous; the theory must be abandoned as essentially faulty.

The view that there are no valid moral principles at all, or that we cannot know whether there are any. Morality is not dependent on society but only on the individual. Anything is okay as long as one lives by own principles hypocrisy, inconsistency can be embraced. Reduces social coordination to power struggle. Ethics must be grounded in culture. Rests on 2 premises: Empirical observation of that diversity exists among cultures in moral principle and practice. A response to ethnocentrism: All moral principles derive their validity from cultural acceptance. It follows there are no universal principles valid for all cultures and peoples. There is no independent basis for criticizing the morality n. Any actual morality is as valid as every other, and more valid that ideal moralities since they have no adherents. Reformers are wrong since they oppose cultural standards. Civil disobedience is morally wrong so long as the society agrees on the relevant law. Laws have no basis - particular subcultures may not agree with certain laws. Conflicting prescriptions - which of the ethics of the groups to which one belongs should one follow? How do you choose? The degree of cultural relativism evident in our species is enormous, but nonetheless, some argue there are moral universals concept of murder, incest, restitution, reciprocity, mutual obligations between parents and children. But if the dependency thesis is true none of these could be thus shown to have any objective basis. In a weak sense, it must at least be true that the application of principles depends on the setting, the particular cultural situation. In strong sense, all principles must be held to be cultural inventions. Also, there can be no impartial standard from which to judge. We can reason and think of possible situations to make a case for one system over the other. Moral Objectivism Holds that moral principles are valid rules of action that should generally be adhered to, but may be overridden by other moral principles in cases of conflict. Not the same as moral absolutism, the idea that there exists just one moral principle and it must never be violated. Proposes that there exist at least one, or a set, of minimal moral principles that are binding on all rational beings. It it can show this, it can refute ethical relativism. It is morally wrong to torture people for fun. Do not kill innocent people. Do not cause unnecessary pain or suffering. Do not cheat or steal. Keep your promises and contracts. Do not deprive another person of his or her freedom. Do justice to others, treating like cases similarly, and different ones differently. Tell the truth Help other people, at least when the cost to oneself is minimal. Do good wherever feasible, at least when the cost to oneself is minimal. In cases where these principles are violated it makes more sense to look for an explanation ignorance, perversion, irrationality than to suppose that the exception should make us question the principle. These principles are not arbitrary as the relativist holds, because we can give reasons why they are necessary to social cohesion and human flourishing, in the face of diverse human goods. These may but need not be based on a common human nature - a set of needs and interests. Those principles that meet essential needs and promote the most significant interests of humans in optimal ways can be said to be objectively valid moral principles.

Chapter 7 : Descartes Skepticism in his Meditations - Morocco World News

1. Philosophical Skepticism vs. 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.

All philosophers admit that man has these experiences, considered as subjective states and that man is subjectively convinced that these experiences reveal to him an objectively existing outside world. There is, however, according to philosophers and would-be philosophers, a vast difference between these experiences as such and the interpretations man makes of them. Whether the physical world as real actually corresponds to the world as perceived is the fundamental epistemological question. Again, philosophers admit spontaneous convictions as subjective facts. But they contend that these convictions, as interpretations of reality, must be validated. There is good reason for this concern. Many spontaneous convictions have been proved to be wrong, such as the conviction that the sun moves around the earth or that the earth is flat. The belief that gases, fluids and solids were bodies consisting of homogeneous material is now known to be false. Instead they are chemical compounds of very divergent elements united in definite quantities and so forth. The bent stick in the water is another example of a spontaneous conviction which raises doubt about true knowledge.

A Statement of the Problem The general problem of knowledge, then, can be stated this way: Have our spontaneous convictions a rational foundation, so that they are based on impressions derived from reality and actually give us knowledge of reality as it is in itself? Universal Skepticism Universal skepticism denies the possibility of achieving certitude. Knowledge as such is not possible. Other skeptics may not argue from an absolutist position but may argue that we can only have probable knowledge, which means we would never know whether a proposition was really true or false. Skeptics present the following arguments to justify their case: Our experience itself shows this fact. We may see a thing when in fact we do not see it. We may make a judgment that something is the case when in fact it is not. The quest for truth is in vain. We must remain in ignorance, or at least in doubt. We cannot know whether this is a fact, but as long as it is possible, we have to remain skeptical. But then we must also have proof or evidence that the proof or evidence is reliable. And then we must have proof for this proof. And so on we go endlessly. But this cannot be so; we cannot go on endlessly. There must be some solid ground upon which evidence and proof must rest. The skeptic, however, says there cannot be such a starting-point and, therefore, we cannot achieve certitude. Such is the dilemma of the true skeptic. He continually contradicts himself. A real skeptic has only one choice: The second he opens his mouth, he declares as true certain facts: He exists; He has certain knowledge of the doctrine of skepticism he holds; He knows other people must exist to listen to him; and He knows they must have minds which may be influenced by his doctrine of skepticism. The genuine skeptic, then, cannot speak at all without contradicting himself. There are only two positions that can be held in regard to certitude. Either we can know truth or we cannot know truth. If we can know truth, then we can enter into an investigation of what constitutes truth and how we may attain it. If we cannot know truth, then we stop, all conversation ends, and we are forever condemned to ignorance or complete doubt about everything. This philosophy cannot be lived in the real world. This should be enough to show that skepticism is both a theoretical and practical impossibility. He is dead wrong. Used correctly, our senses and our intellect are infallible. When we are deceived, it is because we make a rash judgment without waiting for adequate evidence, or we use our senses or our intellect for purposes the senses and the intellect were not meant to serve, or we fail to make, particularly in the case of our senses, allowances for organic defects, or we fail to consider the conditions under which our senses or our intellect should operate. Our faculties of sense and intellect do not deceive us, but we frequently misuse them. Our eyes are not deceiving us at all. The stick indeed appears to be bent. Our judgment is simply wrong because we have not considered all the facts of the matter, that is, we are making a judgment based on incomplete evidence. I now put my hand in the water and touch the stick. I find out that the stick is not really bent at all. Why, then, does it appear bent? Eventually I find out the effect that light has in water and determine that the stick only appears bent because of this effect. My intellect can now make a

correct judgment, one without error: Again, a judgment can be in error for a number of reasons. We may judge rashly. We may not wait to test conclusions. We may not know all the facts of a situation. We allow our emotions to cloud our judgment. We may not properly evaluate the evidence sent to us by our external senses. But the fact still remains: Our senses and our intellect do not deceive us. Any deception is in the judgment we make. It is our fault, not that of our senses or our intellect. Universal skepticism fails to make its case. There is certainly no evidence that we are. And, furthermore, why should such a Power give us such complex sense-organs and such a powerful intellect if all that Power wanted to do was fool us? Besides, our senses and our intellect serve us quite well in our everyday lives. Farmers are certain that nature is constant and they plant their crops in spring and summer, only to harvest them in the fall, and this goes on year in and year out with very little deviation. Just on practical principles alone, universal skepticism fails to make its case. This, of course, is ridiculous. There are certain primary truths, self-evident truths, which even the skeptic must accept because to deny them is to end up in self-contradiction. The skeptic must accept his own existence or he must simply shut up, crawl away, and forever remain silent. The primary truths, which will be discussed later, are self-evident truths which cannot be proved because they contain within themselves the proof of their own truth. These truths are the solid ground upon which all knowledge rests. There is no need for an endless series of proofs. A Realistic Theory of Knowledge A realistic theory of knowledge squares with what our common sense, critically examined, tells us. Our minds are capable of obtaining truth with certitude. A real, material, physical, objective, world exists outside of our minds, a world we do not make or construct. And we can obtain knowledge about this world. Our minds are capable of recognizing certain self-evident truths which we can assert with absolute certitude. We can build upon them to attain a body of knowledge that is certainly true. The mind can investigate, looking for evidence, and make judgments about the world of external reality. Physical, external objects are presented directly in some form to our consciousness in sense-perception. The objects are presented directly to our minds through the medium of the senses, and the object itself is immediately the object which is perceived. Properly used, our senses are infallible. Our senses are properly used when, and only when, the following requirements are observed: A sense must be employed upon its proper object. The object of the eye is color. The object of the ear is sound. The object of the taste buds is flavor. The object of the olfactory senses is odor. A sense organ must be sound and not defective. A person who is deaf will not hear sound. A person who is color-blind will not see certain colors in a normal way. The medium in which the sense organ is used must be suitable to the sense organ. Human beings do not normally smell objects while under water. Human beings do not normally see color in complete darkness. Human ears, for instance, normally have a limited range for perceiving sound. Dogs are capable of hearing sounds above the normal human range. The sense organ must be given sufficient time for its normal function.

Chapter 8 : Philosophical skepticism - Wikipedia

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.

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*. In *The Truman Show*, Truman Burbank 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

type” 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 9 : epistemology - Is Universal Skepticism self-defeating? - Philosophy Stack Exchange

Philosophical skepticism (UK spelling: scepticism; from Greek ἵψῆσις-ἵψῆσις, skepsis, "inquiry") is a philosophical school of thought that questions the possibility of certainty in knowledge. Sceptic philosophers from different historical periods adopted different principles and arguments, but their ideology can be generalized as either (1) the.

While distinguishing rigorous knowledge scientia and lesser grades of conviction persuasio, Descartes writes: I distinguish the two as follows: But since I see that you are still stuck fast in the doubts which I put forward in the First Meditation, and which I thought I had very carefully removed in the succeeding Meditations, I shall now expound for a second time the basis on which it seems to me that all human certainty can be founded. First of all, as soon as we think that we correctly perceive something, we are spontaneously convinced that it is true. Now if this conviction is so firm that it is impossible for us ever to have any reason for doubting what we are convinced of, then there are no further questions for us to ask: Replies 2, AT 7: As my certainty increases, my doubt decreases; conversely, as my doubt increases, my certainty decreases. It has also a distinctively epistemic character, involving a kind of rational insight. Yet they raise questions about the extent to which his account is continuous with other analyses of knowledge. Prima facie, his characterizations imply a justified belief analysis of knowledge "or in language closer to his own and where justification is construed in terms of unshakability, an unshakable conviction analysis. Many will balk at the suggestion. It might therefore seem clear, whatever else is the case, that Descartes conceives of knowledge as advancing truth. Thus construed, to establish a proposition just is to perceive it with certainty; the result of having established it" i. Truth is a consequence of knowledge, rather than its precondition. What is it to us that someone may make out that the perception whose truth we are so firmly convinced of may appear false to God or an angel, so that it is, absolutely speaking, false? On a quite different reading of this passage, Descartes is clarifying that the analysis of knowledge is neutral not about truth, but about absolute truth: Harry Frankfurt defended such an interpretation in his influential work, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*. Yet, in a follow-up paper he retracted the view: I now think, however, that it was a mistake on my part to suggest that Descartes entertained a coherence conception of truth. The fact is that there is no textual evidence to support that suggestion; on the contrary, whenever Descartes gives an explicit account of truth he explains it unequivocally as correspondence with reality. A definitive interpretation of these issues has yet to gain general acceptance in the literature. What is clear is that the brand of knowledge Descartes seeks requires, at least, unshakably certain conviction. Arguably, this preoccupation with having the right kind of certainty "including its being available to introspection" is linked with his commitment to an internalist conception of knowledge. For he holds that ideas are, strictly speaking, the only objects of immediate perception, or conscious awareness. More on the directness or immediacy of perception in Section 5. This assumption is tantamount to requiring that justification come in the form of ideas. An important consequence of this kind of interpretation "namely, a traditional representationalist reading of Descartes" is that rigorous philosophical inquiry must proceed via an inside-to-out strategy. This strategy is assiduously followed in the *Meditations*, and it endures as a hallmark of many early modern epistemologies. Philosophical inquiry is, properly understood, an investigation of ideas. The methodical strategy of the *Meditations* has the effect of forcing readers to adopt this mode of inquiry. He wants knowledge that is utterly indefeasible. Sceptical doubts count as defeaters. This indefeasibility requirement implies more than mere stability. A would-be knower could achieve stability simply by never reflecting on reasons for doubt. But this would result in mere undoubtedness, not indubitability. Before jumping to this conclusion, we should put the indefeasibility requirement into context. Descartes is a contextualist in the sense that he allows that different standards of justification are appropriate to different contexts. This is not merely to say the obvious: This example is potentially misleading, in that Descartes appears loath to count mere empirical evidence as knowledge-worthy justification. But upon ramping up the standard to what he finds minimally acceptable, the standard admits of context dependent variation. For Descartes, clarity contrasts with obscurity, and distinctness contrasts with confusion. But he regularly characterizes defeasible judgments at this level of certainty using terminology e. In the context of inquiry at

play in the Meditations, Descartes insists on indefeasibility. Better to have a standard that excludes some truths, than one that justifies some falsehoods. Descartes maintains that though atheists are quite capable of impressive knowledge, including in mathematics, they are incapable of the indefeasible brand of knowledge he seeks: But I maintain that this awareness [cognitionem] of his is not true knowledge [scientiam], since no act of awareness [cognitio] that can be rendered doubtful seems fit to be called knowledge [scientia]. Now since we are supposing that this individual is an atheist, he cannot be certain that he is not being deceived on matters which seem to him to be very evident as I fully explained. Distinguish particularist and methodist responses to the question. The particularist is apt to trust our prima facie intuitions regarding particular knowledge claims. These intuitions may then be used to help identify more general epistemic principles. The methodist, in contrast, is apt to distrust our prima facie intuitions. The preference is instead to begin with general principles about proper method. The methodical principles may then be used to arrive at settled, reflective judgments concerning particular knowledge claims. Famously, Descartes is in the methodist camp. Were we to rely on our prima facie intuitions, we might suppose it obvious that the earth is unmoved, or that ordinary objects as tables and chairs are just as just as they seem. Yet, newly emerging mechanist doctrines of the 17th century imply that these suppositions are false. Such cases underscore the unreliability of our prima facie intuitions and the need for a method by which to distinguish truth and falsity. But such pre-reflective judgments may be ill-grounded, even when true. The dialectic of the First Meditation features a confrontation between particularism and methodism, with methodism emerging the victor. In response and at each level of the dialectic, Descartes invokes his own methodical principles to show that the prima facie obviousness of such particular claims is insufficient to meet the burden of proof. Knowledge of the nature of reality derives from ideas of the intellect, not the senses. An important part of metaphysical inquiry therefore involves learning to think with the intellect. The Fifth Meditation meditator remarks “having applied Cartesian methodology, thereby discovering innate truths within: Elsewhere Descartes adds, of innate truths: All geometrical truths are of this sort” not just the most obvious ones, but all the others, however abstruse they may appear. Hence, according to Plato, Socrates asks a slave boy about the elements of geometry and thereby makes the boy able to dig out certain truths from his own mind which he had not previously recognized were there, thus attempting to establish the doctrine of reminiscence. Our knowledge of God is of this sort. This storehouse includes ideas in mathematics, logic, and metaphysics. Interestingly, Descartes holds that even our sensory ideas involve innate content. On his understanding of the new mechanical physics, bodies have no real properties resembling our sensory ideas of colors, sounds, tastes, and the like, thus implying that the content of such ideas draws from the mind itself. But if even these sensory ideas count as innate, how then are we to characterize the doctrine of innateness? Importantly, the formation of these sensory ideas “unlike purely intellectual concepts” depends on sensory stimulation. This characterization allows that both intellectual and sensory concepts draw on native resources, though not to the same extent. Relatively little attention is given to his doctrines of innateness, or, more generally, his ontology of thought. On the internalism-externalism distinction, see Alston and Plantinga For a partly externalist interpretation of Descartes, see Della Rocca For a stability interpretation of Descartes, see Bennett On the indefeasibility of Knowledge, see Newman and Nelson On contextualism in Descartes, see Newman On the methodism-particularism distinction, see Chisholm and Sosa On analysis and synthesis, see Smith Foundationalism and Doubt Of his own methodology, Descartes writes: Throughout my writings I have made it clear that my method imitates that of the architect. When an architect wants to build a house which is stable on ground where there is a sandy topsoil over underlying rock, or clay, or some other firm base, he begins by digging out a set of trenches from which he removes the sand, and anything resting on or mixed in with the sand, so that he can lay his foundations on firm soil. In the same way, I began by taking everything that was doubtful and throwing it out, like sand Replies 7, AT 7: His method of doubt is intended to complement foundationalism. The two methods are supposed to work in cooperation, as conveyed in the above quotation. Such an edifice owes its structural integrity to two kinds of features: A system of justified beliefs might be organized by two analogous features: Euclid begins with a foundation of first principles “definitions, postulates, and axioms or common notions” on which he then bases a superstructure of further propositions.

Those long chains composed of very simple and easy reasoning, which geometers customarily use to arrive at their most difficult demonstrations, had given me occasion to suppose that all the things which can fall under human knowledge are interconnected in the same way. Discourse 2, AT 6: It would be misleading to characterize the arguments of the Meditations as unfolding straightforwardly according to geometric method. Though the component finds no analogue in the method of the geometers, Descartes appears to hold that this component is needed in metaphysical inquiry. In contrast, metaphysical inquiry might have first principles that conflict with the senses: The difference is that the primary notions which are presupposed for the demonstration of geometrical truths are readily accepted by anyone, since they accord with the use of our senses. Hence there is no difficulty there, except in the proper deduction of the consequences, which can be done even by the less attentive, provided they remember what has gone before. Admittedly, they are by their nature as evident as, or even more evident than, the primary notions which the geometers study; but they conflict with many preconceived opinions derived from the senses which we have got into the habit of holding from our earliest years, and so only those who really concentrate and meditate and withdraw their minds from corporeal things, so far as possible, will achieve perfect knowledge of them. Such mistakes in the laying of the foundations weaken the entire edifice.