Practical Skepticism or:
How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love to Doubt

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I. Introduction

§1 The Problem of Skepticism

There are many things in our daily lives we claim to know. Many of them are very simple, while some are more complex. ‘I know that the Earth is round,’ ‘I know that two plus three equals five,’ and perhaps most fundamentally, ‘I know that I exist,’ are all examples of the things we claim to know, and the list goes on immeasurably. The skeptic, to varying degrees, makes the case that we do not in fact know these things for some reason or another. The skeptic has existed as long as the ideas of the dogmatist (what Keith Lehrer, whose work is the primary motivation for this paper, calls those who claim to have knowledge) have existed to be questioned. There are different types of skeptics, which raise doubt over different sorts of beliefs. This paper will be concerned with radical skepticism\(^1\), as the radical skeptic attempts to call all of our beliefs into doubt, claiming that there is absolutely nothing which can be known with one hundred percent certainty. It will first describe the skepticism proposed by Lehrer. After that, it will address several objections to skepticism, some general and some targeted at Lehrer. Next, it will examine several epistemologies and raise criticisms showing how each fails to yield knowledge. Finally, it will conclude what, if anything, can escape the skeptic’s argument, and also argue that the truth of skepticism is not necessarily a problem.

§2 The Skeptical Hypothesis

The skeptical hypothesis is what the skeptic uses to call beliefs into doubt. The hypothesis is generally some thought experiment which, though improbable, is impossible to be

\(^1\) By “radical skepticism,” I mean that sort of skepticism that attempts to call into doubt all knowledge whatsoever, as opposed to a skepticism of just the external world. The word radical, in this case, is perfectly consistent with the pragmatism I suggest later in this paper.
proven false and simultaneously inconsistent with our normal beliefs about knowledge. There have been many variations of the skeptical hypothesis throughout the history of epistemology. There is the most famous one, Descartes’ evil demon, as well as the dream argument and a plethora of others. The skeptical hypothesis that will be used herein is the one used by Keith Lehrer in his paper, “Why Not Scepticism?” It is very similar to the demon, but instead relies upon a hypothetical race of aliens called Googols: “There are a group of creatures in another galaxy, call them Googols, whose intellectual capacity is $10^{100}$ that of men, and who amuse themselves by sending out a peculiar kind of wave that affects our brain in such a way that our beliefs about the world are mostly incorrect. This form of error infects beliefs of every kind, but most of our beliefs, though erroneous, are nevertheless very nearly correct.” Lehrer’s Googol hypothesis is different from Descartes’ demon in an important way; because it is explicitly stated that the Googols alter our beliefs only slightly so that we are very nearly correct about most things, it becomes a more easily conceivable hypothesis. It is much harder to accept that some demon is wreaking havoc on our perceptions and intuitions than it is to consider that we might be just slightly mistaken about any of our beliefs because we are frequently wrong by a relatively small margin and so infrequently completely off the mark like the demon would have us be. There are a multitude of arguments against the skeptical hypothesis itself, and those will be considered at a later point in this paper.

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2 This is an important point to remember. It is not the case that the skeptic necessarily believes the hypothesis to be true, and most would admit that it seems more than likely that the hypothesis is in fact false. It is only necessary that the hypothesis be conceivable for it to be effective.


4 Ibid, 41.

§3 What Is Knowledge?

Knowledge was traditionally defined as “justified true belief,” but due to a prominent critique of this view by Edmund Gettier, many philosophers have begun developing additional criteria for knowledge. I will examine several of the views that posit additional or different criteria, but I will also be focusing on the justification criterion. Even though the justified true belief criteria are still present in many new definitions of knowledge, this is not to say that there are no debates about what exactly qualifies as a justified true belief. The contention primarily concerns justification, specifically how much or what kind of justification is required for some true belief, \( p \), to be considered knowledge. While a specific amount of justification (42\%, for example) is rarely, if ever, set as a bar, different epistemologies have notably different standards regarding the type of acceptable justification. For an externalist, for example, we only have to be correct in our beliefs, we do not have to know that they are correct. This means that we have knowledge of the external world through our sensory perceptions if they accurately represent the world, but we need not know that they do in fact accurately represent it. Internalists change this standard by requiring a different sort of justification, recognition of one’s knowledge. For the internalist, it is not good enough that I merely see a stapler on the desk in front of me, I must have access to the fact that my sight is good at providing me with accurate depictions of the external world (for example, having sufficiently good reason to believe my perceptions). The internalist’s awareness of one’s own knowledge is many times referred to as “meta-knowledge,” since it is essentially knowing that one knows something. Contextualism is a further view of

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justification, differing from the two just mentioned, in the sense that for different contexts, it would require different levels of justification. For example, a non-medically trained person can sufficiently answer some medical question based on his recollection of reading about it, while a person sitting for an exam to earn his MD would require a much higher level of justification. These, and other epistemologies, will be looked at in greater depth below.

The core of the skeptical argument relies on the assertion that for any belief to count as knowledge, it must be fully justified. This allows no room for the possibility of error, as other theories of knowledge do. Because one of the never-changing criteria of knowledge is that a belief be true, it is inconsistent to say that we know something, while admitting to the possibility of that statement being false, or at least the possibility of it being false from the subject’s perspective. With a requirement of full justification, it prevents this possibility. Essentially what the skeptic is saying is that in order for one to claim knowledge, he must remove all doubt. Any level of justification short of one hundred percent would leave room for doubt, and that is the purpose of the skeptical hypothesis: to exploit that possibility. It is only when one is fully justified in a belief that he can rule out the possibility of Googols messing with his thoughts.

II. The Agnoiology

§4 Ignorance is Bliss

The theories that have traditionally been used to explain what we can and cannot know, varying as they may be, all have one thing in common: they are at heart, epistemologies, theories of knowledge. The view that I will defend throughout this paper is an agnoiology, a theory of ignorance. It tells us not what we can know, but rather that we cannot know at all. The agnoiology was advocated by Keith Lehrer; his ideas, with some minor modifications, are what I

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will be defending. The agnoiology is at its heart an argument for our lack of knowledge about the world. Throughout his essay, Lehrer targets all of the traditional claims of knowledge the dogmatist tries to cling to. He makes the argument against so called necessary truths, our own states of consciousness, and even the laws of logic. I then expand on his arguments to refute the apparent incorrigibility of seemings, a large hurdle that the skeptic must overcome.

One major difference, however, between the agnoiology and most contemporary skeptical arguments is its pragmatic conclusion. Instead of throwing all we think we know into doubt and letting us wallow in existential crisis, the agnoiologist tells us that it really is not a big deal that we cannot know these things. We can still hold beliefs, and beliefs can still be true, we are just unable to know for certain when they are true. The agnoiologist readily admits that he regards many of our beliefs to be probably mostly accurate in their attempts to describe the world around us. This probability is the key to the argument. This is also used as a refutation of the gut response of most dogmatists to the skeptical argument: that it is self-refuting since it is claiming to know something, namely that we know nothing. “The premises of his agnoiology must not be understood as claims to knowledge but only formulations of what he believes and hopes we shall concede. Not even the claim that conclusion follows from premiss would be taken as a claim to knowledge. His words are addressed to us in the full conviction that they are the truth but without any pretense to knowledge.”\(^{10}\) From the outset, Lehrer explains that he does not claim to know anything in his argument, or even that a valid argument will lead to a true conclusion. This is in full alignment with an agnoiology, and avoids the claim of self-refutation. He makes the argument based on what he believes to be true, while fully acknowledging the possibility that he is entirely wrong.

\(^{10}\) Ibid, 61.
§5 Against ‘Necessary Truths’

Lehrer starts his assault on knowledge with the things that the dogmatist is most secure in calling knowledge. The dogmatist claims that there are necessary truths in the world, which we are able to know simply by virtue of the impossibility of them being false. This is an argument that has been used against the skeptic repeatedly, and it seems to make sense at first glance. It is quite counterintuitive to think that anyone could not have knowledge when the belief in question is a necessary truth. Lehrer uses the example that there is a number greater that two but less than five that is prime, but any mathematical truth or any definition could be used here, such as two plus two equals four or that a bachelor is an unmarried man. What the dogmatist is mistaken about, however, is that it is not the case that one can fail to know these things, it is just impossible to believe them and be incorrect. The dogmatist in this line of argument forgets the third condition for knowledge: justification. Simply having a true belief is not sufficient for me to claim to know it. It is conceivable that I believe some necessary truth by virtue of epistemic luck or some other reason that no one would call sufficient justification for knowledge. If, for example, I believe all sentences that start with the letter $T$ to be true, one would be hard pressed to find a person that would say I am justified in believing, and therefore know, “Two plus two equals four,” as I would believe it for the same reason that I would falsely believe “Two plus two equals four hundred and sixty-seven.” In this situation, I would be correct in my first belief, but I would not know that I was correct, as I would not have complete justification for my belief.\(^\text{12}\)

This knowledge of one’s own knowledge is the type of “meta-knowledge” that was mentioned earlier in regards to the internalist criterion for justification. While the externalist is satisfied if we have a belief that accurately and reliably reflects the external world, the internalist

\(^{11}\) Ibid, 62.
\(^{12}\) Ibid, 63.
requires something more. By not requiring one to have knowledge that one’s belief is knowledge, we are allowing for the possibility that one is simply lucky in believing something that happens to be true. If one has not satisfied this meta-knowledge requirement, then it is quite conceivable that they the victim (or beneficiary, depending on how you look at it) of some extreme type of epistemic luck. Specific examples that demonstrate the necessity of some sort of meta-knowledge follow during the discussions of externalist epistemologies in section 13.

Lehrer then makes the case that the logical impossibility of a belief’s being false is compatible with his skepticism. “What is the force of the could which defies logical impossibility? In what sense could he have been mistaken? The answer is – he could have been mistaken in the sense that, for all he knows, what he believes is false… what he knows does not establish that what he believes is true,” and then again, “The logical impossibility of error in such matters is perfectly consistent with complete ignorance.” What he is saying here is that if one is to believe some statement that is necessarily true, $p$, one would not thereby know that $p$ is necessarily true. So, for all one knows in that scenario, even though he has plenty of reason to believe $p$ to be true he also has some reason to believe $p$ to be false. He may believe $p$, and $p$ may be true, but he does not have the knowledge to support this, to say “I know $p$ is true because it is impossible that it is false.” Until he can declare the skeptical hypothesis to be unjustified, all he can say is that “I believe $p$ is true,” and he can be mistaken about whether or not it must be true because he has not eliminated the possibility of his deception by some Googol. Only once he can eliminate the possibility of error, and also the possibility that he is simply in lucky in believing something that happens to be true, can he claim to have knowledge.

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13 Ibid, 63.
14 Ibid, 63.
§6 Our Conscious States

Another supposedly infallible source of knowledge that dogmatists claim we have is knowledge of our own conscious states. This is another argument that instinctively seems correct, but upon further investigation is just as flawed as all of the other claims to knowledge we make. The beliefs of this type that have the best chance of defeating the skeptic are those concerning our present thoughts and sensations,\(^{15}\) so that is what I shall deal with first. The argument against their incorrigibility is that it is possible to be mistaken about a sensation you are having. “Suppose it is affirmed that if a person believes he is having sensation S, a pain for example, then it is logically impossible that such a belief should be mistaken. This is not so. One might believe one is having a sensation S, a pain for example, because one is having a different sensation, S*, an itch for example, and one has mistaken S* for S.”\(^{16}\) Essentially what Lehrer argues is that it is conceivable to believe you are having one sensation when in fact you are having another. I would extend this argument to say that not only is it conceivable, but is not necessarily infrequent. Many examples could be given, and mistaking an itch for a pain is one, but maybe a more familiar example is feeling a pain when there is nothing there at all. This can happen in several different ways. The first, and the one that more people will probably experience, is preemptively feeling pain because one is expecting to be in pain. This could occur when it seems that something, or someone, is about to hit you or fall on you, but then misses or pulls back. Another common example of this is with medical work, especially dentistry. Many people have such an expectation of pain when, say, getting a cavity filled, that they will claim they feel the pain before the drill has touched their tooth\(^{17}\). Obviously in both of these situations,

\(^{15}\) Ibid, 62.
\(^{16}\) Ibid, 62.
the people involved are not actually in pain, because nothing has caused the pain, but they tend to claim that they feel pain, which shows that they are mistaken about the beliefs regarding their sensations.

Lehrer does mention one possible out for the dogmatist in regards to conscious states. He concedes that it seems impossible for someone to be mistaken when they believe that they have a belief.\textsuperscript{18} This is a strong objection to a radical form of skepticism, and it will be dealt with in depth later in section 8 of this paper.

\textbf{§7 Basic Beliefs}

Many philosophers have expressed in their epistemologies that there are certain beliefs that are \textit{de facto} justified by their very nature. The beliefs that fall in this category vary from philosopher to philosopher, but many non-skeptics accept that the category at least exists, even if they cannot agree upon its contents. Some of the top contenders for this distinguished status are our perceptions, memories, and conscious states\textsuperscript{19}

Conscious states were just dealt with above, so it would be redundant to show their fallibility again. However, it is necessary to now deal with the status of perceptions and memories, and this is where the Googols come into play in full force. As stated above, the skeptical hypothesis that I will be working with is one where a race of hyper-intelligent aliens called Googols amuse themselves by distorting our beliefs about the world. Lehrer furthers this hypothesis to include Googolplexes that manipulate the Googols’ minds,\textsuperscript{20} and so on, to show that they do not know anything either. This argument is both problematic and unnecessary. It is problematic in that it extends \textit{ad infinitum}, creating Googolplexes, Googolplexplexes, and so forth. Arguments of this nature are never good because an infinite chain is inconceivable – the

\textsuperscript{18} Lehrer, “Why Not Scepticism?” 63.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 63.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 64.
human mind just cannot process an infinite number of events or beings – and also because there would need to be a first link to start the deception. This flaw is irrelevant, however, because that entire extension of the skeptical hypothesis is irrelevant. We are not here concerned with whether a Googol can know anything, but only if humans can. It is sufficient to conceive of the Googols deceiving us, and their knowledge or lack thereof is of no consequence to ours.

The point of the skeptical hypothesis is, of course, to cast doubt on those things that we hope to claim give us some privileged form of knowledge. This is very easily done for things like our perceptions, which are quite obviously fallible even without a skeptical hypothesis. It is not uncommon for our perceptions to deceive us of their own accord, such as when we look at objects in the distance or through groggy eyes when we first wake up. But the skeptical hypothesis is all-encompassing, and takes it all down with one stroke. The Googols can affect our every thought, including those that come from perception, those we think we remember, and those about our own conscious states.

The dogmatist’s response to the sceptical hypothesis tends to be that these basic beliefs are in some sense default justified, and so the skeptical hypothesis should be rejected immediately. This is the epitome of dogmatism: accepting one thing without argument and rejecting another because it is incompatible with the first. “The reply of the dogmatist…might be that we are not only justified in those basic beliefs, we are also justified in rejecting any hypothesis, such as the sceptical one, which conflicts with those beliefs. But the sceptic may surely intercede long enough to protest that he has been ruled out by fiat.”21 Now the dogmatist may try to turn this objection back on the skeptic; that he has given no argument for the skeptical hypothesis, and his basic beliefs should not be rejected in the same manner. But the skeptic is not trying to establish the truth of the skeptical hypothesis, only the possibility. And until that

21 Ibid, 64.
possibility can be shown to be unjustified, the knowledge of basic beliefs cannot be claimed, because those beliefs are not completely justified. “Thus, before scepticism may be rejected as unjustified, some argument must be given to show that the infamous hypotheses employed by the sceptics are incorrect and the beliefs of common sense have truth on their side… it follows in a single step that we do not know those beliefs to be true because they are not completely justified. And the sceptic wins the day.”22 The dogmatist has his work cut out for him in this regard, as the skeptical hypothesis seems particularly resilient to any argument used against it. There are a few slivers of hope for knowledge that the dogmatist might claim escape the trap of the Googols, although I will attempt to show those to be flawed as well. There do not seem to be any arguments to show that the skeptical hypothesis is unjustified entirely, however.

§8 The Incorrigibility of Seemings and the Existence of Thought

I now come to what I take to be the most powerful argument against the radical form of skepticism that the agnoiology asserts. This is the only argument I have encountered that might suggest the existence of something that cannot be doubted; however I will attempt to refute it as best I can, hopefully sufficiently enough to dissuade anyone of the potency of the dogmatic objection.

The argument begins with the dogmatist asserting something along the lines of, “Fine, I accept that I can have no knowledge of the external world. My senses deceive me, I may be dreaming, and there may exist some Googols or demon fooling me. Any of those things may be true, and I cannot know if any or all of them are. But, skeptic, even if I cannot know how the world really is, I can at least know how it seems to me.” Here the dogmatist wants to claim knowledge not of any way the world actually is, but only how it appears to them. This seems

22 Ibid, 64.
very uncontroversial at first glance. Sure, one may not know that they are looking at a brown desk, but can it be argued that it does not seem to them that they are looking at a brown desk?

The gut reaction of the skeptic is to respond in the way Lehrer responds to knowledge about our conscious states, as seemings are nothing more than conscious states. Lehrer argues that it is completely conceivable that we believe we are in some conscious state when in fact we are in another. The response of the dogmatist is then, “I am not talking about knowing what conscious state I am in, and I admit that I may be mistaken about that at any given time. I am talking about the seeming of it.” So when one believes one is experiencing a sensation, S, but in fact they are experiencing a different sensation, S*, one can still claim to know that it seems to him that he is experiencing S. How then, does the skeptic respond in this case? It seems that no matter what skeptical hypothesis is offered, the dogmatist can still claim knowledge about the way that hypothesis makes things seem to him.

One response that the skeptic may offer here to combat this apparent incorrigibility of seemings is a complete denial of one’s knowledge of the existence of the self. If I cannot know that I exist, then the sentence “It seems to me that I am looking at a brown desk,” cannot be known either. There would be no “me” for the seeming to apply to. How does the skeptic achieve the denial of the self? Charles Landesman offers some strong arguments against self-knowledge towards the end of his book Skepticism: The Central Issues. He attacks the most well-known argument to show the existence of a self, Descartes’ cogito. He claims that there are two main problems with the cogito. The first he calls the transition problem, where he explores whether “I think” entails “I exist.” The second he names the problem of self-knowledge, and that is the concern of whether Descartes can know “I think.” For the transition problem, he

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recalls that Descartes has used the evil demon to eliminate knowledge of *a priori* truths such as two plus three equaling five. From there, he points out that inferences are nothing more than a type of *a priori* knowledge, and so the inference of “I think” to “I exist” is *a priori* knowledge and therefore subject to the same doubt as other types of *a priori* knowledge. If the demon is able to fool us about the truth of mathematical statements and other similar beliefs, then he is surely able to fool us about the logical inference that is made from a statement like “I think” to another statement like “I exist.” We have established earlier in this paper that the rules of logic that we normally operate under are subject to doubt, and so we cannot make Descartes’ inference under the doubt raised by the skeptical hypothesis.

So, because the skeptic has successfully argued that there is no reason to believe that there is a self that these seemings apply to, the dogmatist can no longer claim that he knows that the world seems to be a certain way to himself. The next thing the dogmatist will reply with is that even if we have destroyed this inference from a thought or a seeming to a self that experiences the thought or seeming, then is it not still the case that this thought or seeming must exist? That is the first part of the *cogito*, that there must be some thought for the demon or the Googols to deceive. If this is the case, it is then certain that there is thought. It may be impossible to know that the content of the thought is accurate in any way or who the thinker is (if there is one at all), but it can be known that there is some thought of some kind in existence.

This is where Landesman’s problem of self-knowledge comes into play. It must be shown that Descartes is not in a position to know the statement, “I think.” Landesman’s argument follows the existential criticism of skepticism that simply thinking that one is in a certain place, even if it is a false thought, is enough to necessitate the existence of the things being thought about. For example, in Descartes’ thought about sitting in a chair, wearing a robe,

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by the fire, even if none of those things are true, simply having that thought necessitates the existence of the chair, robe, and fire. He suggests that prefixing any of these thoughts with “it seems that” is a way to counter this existentialist objection to skepticism. This seems to put us right where the dogmatist wants us, so that we have to acknowledge that seemings exist.

However, Landesman continues his argument. “The task of identifying the inner content of thought and purging it of its reference to outer things cannot be just a matter of simple awareness; it involves first the analysis of each thought expression to identify its existential presuppositions, and second the reformulation of thought expressions in which such implications are absent. Surely this cannot be a process in which there is no room for error.”

Landesman is saying that we have to reform all of our thoughts in a manner which eliminates any existential assumptions that they contain so that we are no longer committed to the existence of the things contained in our thoughts, and that surely we can err in this process. He claims that the identification of our own thoughts is “as susceptible to error as the identification of external things.” Because we are so susceptible to errors of this type, we cannot say with certainty that any thought whatever exists.

After the discussion of these objections to self-knowledge, Landesman retreats to externalism to preserve it. “Suppose that all of those judgments about my beliefs that are sincere and made without any difficult soul searching are true. Then these judgments are reliable, perhaps super-reliable. I know nothing about the underlying mechanism that makes this possible, except that it is a reliable source of belief.”

Landesman is saying that he does not need to understand anything about the processes that lead to beliefs about himself other than

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26 Ibid, 165.
27 Ibid, 166.
28 Ibid, 166.
29 Ibid, 175.
their reliability. However it is specifically the lacking of “meta-knowledge” of this sort that subjects these ideas to skeptical doubt. I will go into further arguments against externalist theories such as this and why meta-knowledge is an important criterion later in the paper, but I will sum up my objection to this in short here. Without having access to why the processes that help us to form our beliefs are reliable, we may simply be victims of epistemic luck. That is to say, we may just be lucky that our beliefs tend to match up with the world around us, and we have no way of knowing when they do and do not.

There are likely those who may find my handling of these final types of objections unsatisfactory. They would believe that I have not sufficiently shown at least that thought might not exist, even if we cannot identify a thinker. To them I say only this: even if you are correct, and I have not raised a shred of doubt about the existence of some thought, is that really a victory for the dogmatist? Yes, he may say he has defeated the radical skeptic, technically. However, it seems to be a very hollow victory. Where do we go from the existence of thought? There is nowhere to go. We cannot build upon it because the skeptic has successfully raised doubt about everything else. We cannot infer that there is a thinker, we cannot infer that there are objects that the thought refers to, we cannot infer anything from the existence of thought. So, if you must, celebrate this shred of knowledge, but be sure to remember that it is all that you can get.

III. Some Major Objections to Lehrer and Skepticism

I will now address four powerful categories of objections to Lehrer’s agnoiology and skepticism in general. The first is a “common sense” philosophy proposed by G.E. Moore, which while not being an epistemology per se, is incompatible with skepticism. The next two, those raised by Dan Turner and James Lesher, are written in direct response to Lehrer’s “Why Not Scepticism?” as objections to his theory specifically. The last is an argument from ordinary
language philosophy and is an interesting enough objection to skepticism to warrant a direct response in the paper itself. An important idea to keep in mind when investigating some of the refutations of skepticism is brought up by Lehrer when he says: “One problem with refutations of scepticism is that they are overly plentiful and mutually inconsistent. This should create some suspicion in the minds of the philosophically wary that some theory of ignorance, an agnoiology, might sustain the contentions of scepticism.” In addition to the specific flaws I will draw out of the different objections to the skeptical argument, Lehrer makes a good point in noting that many of the solutions to skepticism are incompatible with one another, and this gives us our first basis for doubting them. I will now go into more depth with specific counterarguments to each refutation.

§9 Moorean Common Sense

I start with the common sense theory because it has been partially dealt with in the description of the agnoiology, and so I will finish it off here first. A main proponent of the common sense epistemology is G.E. Moore, who writes about it in his “Proof of an External World.” He tries to defeat the skeptic by arguing that it is in fact quite obvious that there are things that are external to our minds. His most famous argument is the one where, while raising a hand, he says “here is a hand,” and then raising the other, says “and here is another,” which he claims is proof enough of the external world. He backs up his proof by saying that it meets the three criteria of a rigorous proof: that the premises were different from the conclusion, that he knew the premises to be true, and that the conclusion logically followed from the conclusion. His assessment of the qualifications of a rigorous proof are perfectly fine, it is only his

32 Ibid, 57.
assessment of his meeting those qualifications, the second one in particular, that are subject to objection by the skeptic.

The second qualification is that he knows the premises to be true. How, then, can this argument be used against the skeptic? It is entirely question begging. He is using an argument where he assumes knowledge of external objects to prove that he knows that external objects exist. He addresses this objection at the end of his paper, and does not entirely deny it. “[I]f I had proved the propositions which I used as premises in my two proofs, then they [skeptics] would perhaps admit that I had proved the existence of external things, but, in the absence of such a proof (which, of course, I have neither given nor attempted to give), they will say that I have not given… a proof of external things.”\(^{33}\) Moore admits to not providing any justification for his premises in his argument, and without such justification, he is like the dogmatists who claim there are some special, basic beliefs that are somehow de facto justified.

Moore thinks that one can be justified without being able to fully explain one’s justification. The skeptical argument against Moore’s kind is a simple one: he must offer complete justification of his belief in the existence of his hands so that the skeptical hypothesis holds no ground to it. Until he does that, it is very simple to say that he may be mistaken about having a hand here and another here, and his perceptions are being manipulated by the Googols. He readily admits to this objection as well, although he uses the dream hypothesis instead. He comes out and tells us that he has no way to prove that he is not dreaming.\(^{34}\) Moore believes that he knows that he is not the victim of some skeptical world (like a dream) even though he is unable to prove it. However, this is problematic because it relies on our being lucky enough to live in a world where we are not subject to some form of radical deception. If we cannot know

\(^{33}\) Ibid, 58.
\(^{34}\) Ibid, 59.
that we do not live in such a world, we should not disregard the possibility of it. At best, Moore could claim, as I do, that it is quite likely that external objects exist, however it cannot be known for certain.

If Moore’s argument were to be modified slightly, it could easily become consistent with the agnoiology. The agnoiology does not exclude the possibility of the existence of external objects, and in fact both Lehrer and I would claim that it is very probable that there are external objects in the world. We can even look back on Lehrer’s “subjective probability” and say that, for Moore, the probability of external objects is a unity because he would bet that it is true that they exist in any case.35 Common sense and ignorance can align in this case, because it is common sense to believe so strongly that external objects, especially our own bodies, exist. However, we must still remain aware of our ignorance and of the possibility that the skeptical hypothesis may be the case, so we cannot know of their existence for sure.

§10 Dan Turner’s Objection

Dan Turner published a paper entitled “Why Scepticism?” which attempts to directly discredit Lehrer’s support for his skeptical hypothesis. There are two ways in which I plan to show that Turner’s argument against an agnoiology is problematic. The first will be by pointing out that his entire argument only works if we grant certain things to be true, or in other words, assume that we know these things. The second method will be a more direct refutation of his argument, on his own grounds, to show it to be insufficient against an agnoiology such as Lehrer’s even after the skeptic concedes some ground to the dogmatist. I will start by giving a brief summary of Turner’s argument against skepticism. He begins by listing the main premises of Lehrer’s argument for skepticism, which he tells us are:

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(GA)
(I) If someone \( S \) knows something (that \( p \)), then \( S \) is completely justified in believing that \( p \).
(II) No one is completely justified in believing anything.
Thus,
(III) No one knows anything.\(^{36}\)

Turner concerns himself with (II) in this argument, and Lehrer’s support for this premise. He lays out the basic argument for (II), saying that:

(Z) If the sceptical hypothesis is not shown to be unjustified, then no one is completely justified in believing anything.
(aZ) The sceptical hypothesis is not shown to be unjustified.\(^{37}\)

Turner’s next goal is to construct the support for (aZ), which he lays out as:

(A1)
(1) The sceptical hypothesis is shown to be unjustified only if there is some argument which shows it to be false.
(2) All arguments which are offered in the attempt to show the sceptical hypothesis false beg the question against it.
(3) If (2), then there are no arguments which show the sceptical hypothesis false.
Thus,
(4) There are no arguments which show the sceptical hypothesis false.
Thus,
(aZ).\(^{38}\)

From here, Turner takes sentences 1 through 4 and constructs a generalization for each one of them. From these generalizations, he constructs an argument that is so ridiculous that he thinks, by analogy, will show the argument for the skeptical hypothesis to be equally ridiculous. His argument concerns the sentence:

\( H \): ‘Every premise of every argument is false.’\(^{39}\)

He then uses an argument he claims is analogous to the one for (aZ) to prove this statement:

\(^{37}\) Ibid, 366.
\(^{39}\) Ibid, 368.
(A2)
(1a) Someone is justified in believing $H$ false only if there is some argument which shows it to be false.
(2a) All arguments which are offered in the attempt to show $H$ false are question begging.
(3a) If (2a), then there are no arguments which show $H$ false.
Thus,
(4a) There are no arguments which show $H$ false.
Thus,
(5a) No one is justified in believing $H$ false.⁴⁰

He believes that the conclusion, (5a), is obviously false, and I do not think there is much disagreement about that. And because he used a valid argument to arrive at this false conclusion, Turner argues that one of the premises must be false. Because these premises are based on the generalized forms of the premises that Turner lays out for Lehrer’s argument, he believes that by proving false one of the premises of (A2), he will, by analogy, prove false the corresponding premise in the argument for (aZ), thus defeating the agnoiology.

Having sufficiently described Turner’s method, I will now turn to some refutations of it. First, arguing from the skeptical perspective, Turner’s argument relies on the truth of certain rules of inference, analogy, and logic, which Lehrer would argue that we cannot actually claim to know. In fact, Lehrer uses an argument similar to this in his own article to refute the idea that we know certain necessary truths because of the logical impossibility of their falsehood: “It is not the logical impossibility of error by itself that guarantees knowledge but only knowledge of the logical impossibility. If we know that it is logically impossibly that certain of our beliefs are mistaken, then, no doubt, we know that those beliefs are true. But this if is the noose that strangles the dogmatist.”⁴¹ With a skepticism as radical as the one that Lehrer is defending, even the rules of logic that we normally think of as impenetrable are subject to doubt, and so we cannot claim to know them without first showing the skeptical hypothesis to be false. In such a

⁴⁰ Ibid, 368.
skeptical world, we could not be certain, given the sentences that, (1) All men are mortal and (2) Socrates is a man that Socrates was in fact mortal. Of course, we believe that these two statements are true, and we believe that they entail the statement that Socrates was in fact mortal, but we can only be said to know this if we know that the two premises are true and we know that a logically valid argument with true premises will entail a true conclusion, which the radical skeptic would claim, rightfully so, that we do not. This is similar to the dilemma that Descartes faces when trying to refute his evil demon; since the demon can trick Descartes into believing that certain logical beliefs are true, when in fact they are not.

Of course, Lehrer himself gives arguments and we could make the same allegation against him that I have just made against Turner. However, he makes clear at the beginning of “Why Not Scepticism?” that it is possible for the skeptic to make arguments based on beliefs that he holds, regardless of the fact that he does not know them to be true. “For, in saying why he says what he does, must he not fall back on the claim that he knows various things to be true which support his conclusion? Again the answer is negative. The sceptic is not prevented by his agnoiology from believing most of the same things that we believe.” So, now that I have defended the skeptical argument from the claims of reliance on knowledge of logical truths and rules, I will make another refutation against Turner’s argument, working inside the same rules of logic that he uses. I would argue that the analogy Turner uses in an attempt to discredit the skeptic’s argument does not actually show what he wants it to show. He constructs a reasonably similar argument, at least in form, which preserves the validity that Lehrer’s argument had. However, he argues on the basis of soundness that Lehrer’s skeptical argument is problematic in the same way the argument for $H$ is problematic. This would be similar to comparing the following two arguments:

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42 Ibid, 60.
(I) (A) I am in Hempstead.

(B) Hempstead is in New York.

Thus,

(C) I am in New York

(II) (A) I am in Schenectady.

(B) Schenectady is on Mars.

Thus,

(C) I am on Mars.

Each of these arguments is logically valid because they have the same form, namely *A is B, B is C, and therefore A is C*. In addition, the first argument is sound, because I am in fact in Hempstead, Hempstead is in fact in New York, and therefore I am in New York. The second argument is not sound however, because not only am I not in Schenectady, Schenectady is not on Mars, and I am quite confident that I am not on Mars. Arguing that because the second one is absurd and of the same form as the first, so then the first must also be absurd is incorrect.

Lehrer’s argument is valid, like Turner’s, but it is sound while Turner’s is not. Consider *H*: “Every premise of every argument is false.” Note that included in “every premise of every argument” are all the premises of the argument for *H*. The nature of *H* makes it impossible to present a good argument for it, because it requires that the premises of the argument supporting its truth be false, which makes it an unsound argument. More simply put: because Turner’s argument results in the conclusion that the sentence “Every premise of every argument is false,” it makes the premises of his own argument false, and therefore unable to support his conclusion. This argument is inherently self-refuting and paradoxical. Lehrer’s conclusion, that no one is completely justified in believing the skeptical hypothesis false, is not self-refuting like the
argument for $H$ is. Disregarding the self-refuting nature of Turner’s argument for $H$, we can see how one of his premises is the weak link in the argument. It could be argued that (2a) of Turner’s argument (A2) is the premise that makes it unsound. It is not true that “all arguments which are offered in the attempt to show $H$ false are question begging,”⁴³ because the only argument needed to show $H$ false is any argument that has $H$ as a premise, regardless of the conclusion. Such an argument would not beg the question like an argument that tries to specifically prove $\neg H$ as its conclusion, and so (2a) is false, and Turner’s argument unsound. This lack of soundness does not transfer by analogy to Lehrer’s argument, since it makes no claims about every premise of every argument, and so it is safe from harm from Turner.

§11 James Lesher’s Objection

James Lesher wrote a short paper entitled “Lehrer’s Sceptical Hypothesis” in which he attempts to refute an important premise of Lehrer’s argument for his agnoiology. He starts by expressing what he believes to be an outline of Lehrer’s argument:

(1) For any proposition ‘p’, we know that $p$ only if we are completely justified in believing $p$.
(2) An hypothesis can be framed which, if true, would render our beliefs more often mistaken than correct (the “Sceptical Hypothesis”).
(3) No hypothesis should be rejected as unjustified without argument against it.
(4) There are no arguments against the Sceptical Hypothesis.
(5) The Sceptical Hypothesis should not be rejected as unjustified.
(6) We are completely justified in believing $p$ only if those hypotheses which conflict with the belief are unjustified.
(7) The Sceptical Hypothesis conflicts with our belief that $p$.
(8) We are never completely justified in believing $p$.
(9) We never know $p$.⁴⁴

Lesher’s argument focuses on premise (6), which he believes is false, resulting in the argument being unsound. If this is the case, then there is a possibility that we can have knowledge, because the skeptic’s argument against it fails. Lesher attempts to clarify what is meant by

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premise (6), coming to the conclusion that it must mean that any potentially refuting hypothesis be shown to be without any foundation whatsoever, not just unsupported by the evidence in front of us\textsuperscript{45} in order for the skeptical hypothesis to hold any ground against knowledge claims.

Lesher then goes on to claim that even with this definition of what is meant by complete justification in (6), we can reject it as false. Because Lehrer does not give any reasons supporting the truth of premise (6), and because it is not self-evident such as “if a belief is true, then those which with it conflicts are false,”\textsuperscript{46} then we have no reason to accept (6). Lesher then goes on to give a Gettier-style example of how he believes one can be completely justified in believing a belief when it is in fact false. The argument goes that if a man believes that Mr. Nogot owns a Ford because he has seen Nogot in the Ford, he has seen a certificate of ownership, Nogot has assured him that he owns a Ford, etc., then we would say he is completely justified in believing that Nogot owns a Ford, even though some tricksters have deceived Nogot into believing that he owns a Ford when he does not by forging evidence and the like.\textsuperscript{47} The belief that Nogot owns a Ford is a false belief, but Lesher argues that one would be completely justified in believing it despite its falsity.

Lesher’s problem here is that he is mistaken about what complete justification is. We cannot be completely justified in believing something that is false. Complete justification requires the exclusion of the possibility of being mistaken, which itself requires the truth of the belief. In the case that Lesher uses, as is the case with all Gettier-type problems, Nogot’s friend is not completely justified in believing that Nogot owns a Ford because he is basing his belief on a false premise. Nogot has been tricked into believing that the Ford was his and has been given a false certificate of ownership. Neither of these premises can serve as complete justification for

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 300.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 300.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 301
the belief that Nogot owns a Ford. With this definition of complete justification, we can see that the skeptical argument advanced by Lehrer, most importantly premise (6), stands up to Lesher’s criticisms. Lesher has not shown that it is possible to be completely justified in one’s false belief. Additionally, the requirement of excluding the possibility of being mistaken means that if we cannot rule out the skeptical hypothesis, then we cannot ever be completely justified in knowing that \( p \) because we retain the possibility of the Googols deceiving us into believing that it is the case that \( p \), when in fact it is not the case. Lehrer’s conclusion that we can never know \( p \) stands.

§12 Ordinary Language Philosophy: Do We Need 100% Justification?

One might wonder, in connection with the arguments in the previous sections, whether knowledge actually requires complete justification. One way of arguing that it does not is via the ordinary language philosophy. Those who subscribe to the school of ordinary language philosophy have a very different argument against the skeptic, but one that is somewhat related to the objection that Lesher raised. The basic premise of ordinary language philosophy is that many of the philosophical problems we are faced with are not genuine problems at all, but merely misappropriations, misuses, and misunderstandings about the definition of the words in our language. Such arguments claim that we have taken a word, such as knowledge in this case, and have used it in a manner inconsistent with the way we use it in everyday life, and in such a manner that it creates some philosophical quandary that really does not exist.

In his book *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Barry Stroud devotes a chapter to ordinary language objections to the skeptic.\(^{48}\) In short, the argument goes that the skeptic has put too great a requirement on knowledge by claiming the need for complete justification, and

\(^{48}\) It is important to note here that in his book, Stroud merely describes this view, but does not hold it himself.
that in the everyday sense of knowledge and even in the scientific or legal senses with higher standards, no one ever suggests we need such incredible levels of justification. He uses an analogy to a strange announcement that is broadcast over New York City to illustrate his point:

Suppose someone makes the quite startling announcement that there are no physicians in the city of New York. That certainly seems to go against something we all thought we knew to be true… When we ask how the remarkable discovery was made, and how long this deplorable state of affairs obtained, suppose we find that the bearer of the startling news says it is true because…what he means by ‘physician’ is a person who has a medical degree and can cure any conceivable illness in less than two minutes.49

Clearly there is no one in New York that fits this impossible description (or if there is, he certainly needs a new marketing manager). We would not expect anyone to meet this new and strange definition of physician, but we would be content with knowing that there were still the many people in New York that fit our ordinary definition of physician. Stroud is claiming here that the skeptic is much like the person who made the strange announcement about physicians. When the skeptic tells us that we cannot have any of the sorts of knowledge that we normally think we have, there is an initial reaction of shock. However, when the skeptic clarifies his statement and tells us that he only means that we can never have complete, one hundred percent justification for anything, then most people will go back to being content that we can still have the type of knowledge that we ordinarily think we have. Stroud argues that of course we do not have complete justification for much, if anything at all, but that that is not a requirement for knowledge in daily life. “We do not insist that the dream-possibility must always be known not to obtain in order to know things in everyday or scientific life. When we find that Descartes’s sceptical reasoning does insist on that requirement, we will find that his sceptical conclusion does not contradict anything we thought we knew at the outset.”50 Stroud argues that not only

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50 Ibid, 41.
does the skeptical argument not contradict with anything we ordinarily claim, but that it is such an absurd requirement that it is actually an uninteresting argument to entertain.  

I will argue against Stroud’s claims on two fronts. The first is, if one hundred percent justification is too much to ask of anyone to be able to claim knowledge, then what is an acceptable level of justification? Is it ninety percent? Fifty-one percent? Just an inkling of suspicion? I invite a dogmatist to provide some level of justification that is adequate to amount to knowledge short of one hundred percent. It seems very difficult to pin down such a number. Maybe the dogmatist wants to suggest that different knowledge claims require different levels of justification, depending on their importance and other factors, similar to the contextualist epistemology. But again, there is no specific answer for any type of knowledge, and I still do not know when I am justified enough in some belief to call it knowledge. Any number that the dogmatist might suggest would seem to be nothing more than an arbitrary response to the skeptic.

The dogmatist may come back by saying that the one hundred percent mark set by the skeptic is just as arbitrary a number as any other bar that may have been set. He could also respond by means of an analogy to an acorn. Surely it is not only when it is fully developed that we begin to call it a tree, but there is no definite time during its development where we say “now it is a tree, but yesterday it was an acorn.” Just as there is no specific point where the acorn has decidedly become a tree, the ordinary language philosopher argues that there is no specific point where a belief becomes decidedly “justified enough” to constitute knowledge. However, in each example, the ordinary language philosopher believes we can recognize the difference between the former and the latter. This is where the more powerful of my responses to the ordinary language philosopher comes in. Firstly, one hundred percent is much less arbitrary than any

\[51\] Ibid, 41.
other level of justification that may be set, as it is complete justification and it eliminates the possibility of being mistaken in one’s belief. Aside from that, there are reasons why it is important that we attain this high standard of justification in order to avoid Gettier type problems of mistaken beliefs. To see this, consider Lesher’s claim that we can be completely justified in believing something that is false. In the Gettier style cases, the subject (usually Smith) appears to be completely justified in believing something that then turns out to be false. Alex Ehrlich and AJ Durwin call this “apparent justification.” When we have apparent justification, we actually do not have complete justification for our beliefs, but rather some level below that. It may be a quite high level of justification, and in the relevant examples it often seems to be that this is the case. However, these cases show us how problematic accepting a belief as “knowledge” which lacks complete justification can be. It shows us that maybe the ordinary language philosopher is wrong in saying that the skeptic is using the word knowledge in an inappropriate sense, and perhaps it is the general public that is using the word incorrectly. To have knowledge is to be certain of something; it is not to be mostly certain, almost certain, or somewhat confident. Lacking certainty, we are relegated to a form of probably belief, which may serve us well enough, but cannot constitute knowledge. Stroud has an example where a plane-spotter in wartime is trained to distinguish a plane of type E, which has characteristics x, y, and w, from a plane of type F, which has characteristics x, y, and z. However, the plane-spotter is unaware of the existence of a plane of type G, which has the same three characteristics as type F planes. Just as the plane spotter could not be said to know in the initial case which plane he sees when he has only observed x and y, it is now the case that even when he sees x, y, and z he cannot know that the plane he sees is an F plane (since it may be a G plane instead). It may be

53 Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, 67-68.
the case that for practical purposes it does not matter if he sees a plane of type F or G, but he still
cannot be said to know which of those two he is seeing at a given point. Knowledge in the
ordinary sense is problematic because it can lead to beliefs that are undetectably false. Even
though they are undetectable, and because of this some might argue unimportant, these beliefs
are still false, and the truth of a belief is arguably the most widely accepted criterion for
knowledge. Ordinary usage of a word does not decide its definition. In this case specifically,
ordinary usage of the word knowledge, does not decide what is actually knowledge. The plane
spotter, unaware of G planes, would commonly say he knows that he sees an F plane, however
he is clearly mistaken. He cannot know that he is looking at an F plane, even if he is in fact
seeing an F plane, because it could just as easily have been a G plane and he has no way to tell
the difference. Ordinary usage of the word knowledge, then, is mistaken and we can see that we
do actually need one hundred percent justification.

**IV. Some Theories of Knowledge and Their Problems**

Now that I have sufficiently explained the agnoiology and the major direct responses to
it, I will turn to some epistemologies that attempt to describe how we can achieve knowledge in
general. They are therefore not direct refutations of skepticism or the agnoiology, but they are
inconsistent with both. If any one of them is correct, and any subject is ever in the position of
satisfying the criteria of that theory, then this would refute the skeptic. Thus, to complete my
case for skepticism, I need to show that the most well developed theories of knowledge do not
refute skepticism. This list is by no means fully inclusive, but contains several theories that
attempt to explain how we are able to have knowledge. Namely, they are the safety theory,
causal theory, reliabilism, Descartes’ theory of knowledge, coherentism, and contextualism. The
first three I group together as externalist theories, while the next two are internalist.
Contextualism I will treat on its own, because instead of showing its problems like I will for the other theories, I will show how it is actually quite compatible with the agnoiology. For each, there will be a formulation of the argument in favor of the theory followed by my criticisms of why it does not meet the challenge of the skeptic. I will have to show that a given theory fails in one of two ways: either:

(1) The criteria for knowledge the theory proposes is insufficient to actually yield knowledge.
OR
(2) The criteria proposed would be sufficient to yield knowledge, however it is currently unreachable.

§13 Externalist Theories

Externalist epistemologies all rely on our beliefs satisfying some external criterion or another. The criterion itself will vary from theory to theory, however the important shared characteristic is that one need not know that the relevant criterion is satisfied as long as it is in fact satisfied. One way I will attack these types of theories is to show that it is not satisfactory that the external criterion obtains without our knowledge of it obtaining. Lacking this meta-knowledge, one runs the risk of falling victim to epistemic luck.

The most damaging kind of luck for externalism is what Duncan Pritchard refers to as reflective luck. “It is a matter of luck, given what the agent is able to know by reflection alone, that she has knowledge of what she truly believes.”\(^{54}\) What is meant by this is that the subject is unable to know reflectively if the externalist criterion were actually the case. If the criterion were merely that my belief accurately described the external world, then whenever it did accurately describe the world I would have knowledge, regardless of my awareness of its accuracy. Because I am unaware of my belief’s accuracy at representing the world, it seems that I am simply lucky enough to exist in a world where my belief does accurately describe the world.

instead of one where it does not. It would seem in a case such as this that I do not actually have knowledge. I will specifically apply this problem of reflective luck to each of the theories when appropriate in order to show how they are subject to it and therefore inadequate at refuting the skeptic.

A. Safety Theory of Knowledge

Ernest Sosa’s “How to Defeat Opposition to Moore” attempts to give some epistemic grounds to the Moorean argument of common sense knowledge. His view is called the safety theory of knowledge, as it requires any beliefs that we wish to claim to know to be “safe.” It is best explained in relation to the sensitivity theory of knowledge. I will not be directly addressing the sensitivity theory in this paper as Sosa does a good job of discrediting it while advancing the safety theory.

It has been held by philosophers such as Robert Nozick, Frederick Dretske, and Keith DeRose that in order to constitute knowledge, a belief must be “sensitive.” This meant that $S$ knows that $p$ provided that were $p$ not true, then $S$ would not believe that $p$. This would be symbolically represented as $\neg p \rightarrow \neg B(p)$ where $\neg$ is a negation, $p$ is some statement, $\rightarrow$ is a subjunctive conditional, and $B(p)$ is “$S$ believes that $p$.” The problem with the sensitivity criterion for Sosa is that it does not handle the principle of exclusion very well in regards to skepticism. The principle of exclusion states that in order for one to know that $p$, one must know that any alternative incompatible with the truth of that $p$ is false. If we have a statement, such as “here is a hand,” then we must be able to rule out any inconsistent alternatives. It is clear, according to Sosa, that “here is a hand” is a sensitive belief. If it were not the case that “here is a hand,” I would certainly not believe that statement. However, the belief that “I am not now

fooled by a demon into believing that here is a hand,” is very much not sensitive. If that belief were false, and there was a demon (or Googol) fooling me into thinking “here is a hand,” then I would likely still believe that there were not such a demon by the very nature of the evil demon. That sensitivity does not transfer through valid inference is Sosa’s major problem with the sensitivity requirement as a whole. It is strange to think that we could know something, p, because it is sensitive, and also know that the truth of p implies the truth of something else, q, yet not be able to know that q is true because it is not a sensitive belief.

Sosa believes replacing the sensitivity requirement with his safety requirement would fix this problem. He argues that safety, unlike sensitivity, does transfer through entailment, so that any belief entailed by a safe belief is safe as well. His definition of a safe belief is as follows: “Call a belief by S that p ‘safe’ [if and only if]: S would believe that p only if it were so that p.” Symbolizing this criterion in the same manner as with the sensitivity criterion, we get B(p) → p. Going back to the example of “here is a hand” and “I am not now fooled by a demon,” Sosa argues that because the former is a safe belief, and the latter is entailed by it, then the latter is also a safe belief. The safety theory essentially suggests that we are safe in our belief when the negation of it is only the case in a world so far from our own that it is irrelevant. For example, the belief “I am not now fooled by a demon,” is safe because the world in which I am in fact fooled by a demon is so distant from ours that it should not be seen as relevant to the justification of my belief. This allows us to exclude the possibility of our living in some skeptical world, and to be able to have Moorean common sense knowledge.

If the belief that the skeptical hypothesis is not the case is safe, as Sosa asserts that it is, then it would seem we have a solution to skepticism and a path to true knowledge. However, it

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56 Ibid, 142.
57 Ibid, 142.
does not quite seem that safety is a good requirement for any belief. The safety criterion leaves the believer very much vulnerable to an objection from reflective luck. If he only believes something when it is the case that it is true, then it is very possible that he is the recipient of some sort of luck. Either he is lucky enough to live in a world that is not in fact a skeptical one, or it is possible he is receiving help from the helpful demon. Unlike Descartes’ famous evil demon, the helpful demon makes it so our thoughts are always correct. However, instead of manipulating our thoughts, the helpful demon manipulates the world to match our thoughts. For example, if one were at a casino playing roulette and believed that the ball would land on the 00 that he had bet on, the helpful demon would make it so that the ball did land on the 00 space and the gambler’s belief was correct. If the helpful demon exists, then it is obviously the case that one would only believe something if it were true, because there would be no nearby worlds where his beliefs were false. This would render every belief safe. However, it would not seem right to claim that one has knowledge in this situation, since the world is being changed to match his beliefs.

We can also see how reflective luck applies to safety in a skeptical world. The safety theorist requires that in all nearby worlds, p is not false in order for it to be safe. The safety theorist tends to quickly rule out the skeptic by saying that his skeptical world is not a nearby world. How does the safety theorist know this? If we knew we did not live in a skeptical world, and that no nearby world was a skeptical world, there would not be this problem of skepticism. However, we cannot know this, and that is why we must not claim knowledge. In order to have knowledge as the safety theorist wants us to, we must be able to rule out that our real world is not actually a skeptical word. If we cannot do this, then we are in no position to know if any of

our beliefs are true in nearby worlds. If we do live in a non-skeptical world, we are unable to
determine this by reflection alone because it would seem identical to a non-skeptical world. We
fall victim to reflective luck yet again. While Sosa did a good job in explaining why the
sensitivity requirement was insufficient for knowledge, his own replacement of that requirement
seems to do a worse job at it. Safety is simply an unachievable criterion.

B. Causal Theory of Knowledge

In his “A Causal Theory of Knowing,” Alvin Goldman establishes what he believes to be
an appropriate criterion for knowledge in addition to the belief being both true and justified. For
Goldman, whatever it is that makes some fact, $p$, true must also cause one’s belief that $p$ is true.
So the fact that $p$ must be causally related to a person’s belief that $p$. This solves the Gettier-
style objections to justified true belief as knowledge because in those examples, the thing that
causally Smith’s belief is never the same as what causes his belief to be true. In the example that
Goldman uses $q$ is “Jones owns a Ford,” and $p$ is “Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in
Barcelona.” Goldman would argue that if Jones does in fact own a Ford, and Smith knows that
Jones owns a Ford, then Smith has knowledge of $p$. If, however, Smith mistakenly believes that
Jones owns a Ford, but Brown is in Barcelona for some reason, then Smith would not know that
$p$ because the thing that makes it true is Brown living in Barcelona and the thing that makes
Smith believe it is his belief that Jones owns a Ford. In this case, there is no causal connection,
and therefore no knowledge. Other Gettier problems can be examined with similar results. In
the case of Jones and Smith going for a job, the boss tells Smith that Jones will get the job and
Smith sees that Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Because of these things, Smith forms the
belief, “The man with ten coins in his pocket will get the job.” Unbeknownst to himself

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60 Ibid, 144.
however, Smith has ten coins in his pocket, and Smith ends up getting the job.\footnote{Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” 142-43.} Again, we have a situation where there is no causal connection in Smith’s supposed “knowledge.” The thing that causes Smith to believe \textit{that} \textit{p} (the man with ten coins will get the job) is being told that Jones will get the job and seeing that Jones has ten coins. What makes \textit{that} \textit{p} true, however, is that Smith has ten coins and that Smith got the job. This fails the causal theorist’s criteria for knowledge.

Goldman offers several different cases which he believes provide a causal connection from a fact to one’s belief of that fact, and I will describe each and offer the skeptical objections to each. The first, and simplest, is sensory perception. If we see, hear, touch, taste, or smell something, we have a causal connection to the belief that that thing exists.\footnote{Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing,” 145.} Goldman’s example is that if we see a vase across the room, we can say that we know that there is a vase there. The presence of the vase both causes the vase to be there and causes our belief that there is a vase, so we can claim to have knowledge. If that causal process, perception, were absent, we would not claim that a person knows something.

The problem for Goldman’s theory lies in his rejection of the need for \textit{S} to \textit{know} \textit{that he knows } \textit{p}.\footnote{Ibid, 152.} In his specific case, Goldman is saying that it is only necessary that there is in fact a causal chain between \textit{p} and one’s belief that \textit{p}, but that one does not have to know that this chain obtains. We come back to the skeptical hypothesis. It is conceivable that \textit{S} did not see a vase or drop a book on his foot, but was merely deceived into believing so by the Googols. If this were the case, then it would not be the existence of the object that caused \textit{S} to believe that it was there, but rather the mind games of the Googols. There is then no connection between what makes him believe there is a vase and there actually being a vase. Goldman does not deny this.
Suppose that, although a vase is directly in front of $S$, a laser photograph is interposed between it and $S$, thereby blocking it from $S$’s view. The photograph, however, is one of a vase... and when it is illuminated by... a laser, it looks to $S$ exactly like a real vase... $S$ forms the belief that there is a vase in front of him. Here we would deny that $S$ sees that there is a vase in front of him, for his view of the real vase is completely blocked, so that it has no causal role in the formation of his belief.\(^{64}\)

In such a case, Goldman would agree that one does not know of the vase’s existence because one’s belief in it is not caused in any way by the vase itself. The observer is in no position to know whether his belief is caused by a real vase or by some convincing projection of a vase. If he were to see the two side by side, he would likely believe that he saw one vase on the left and one vase on the right. Goldman would say here that the observer has knowledge of the one on the left (because it is a real vase) but not of the one on the right (because it is a picture). Much like the plane-spotter discussed previously, the vase-observer is a victim of reflective luck. He has no way of telling whether he is looking at a real vase or an image of one, and so in the case where he is looking at the real vase, he is lucky that the causal connection obtains and that he has a true belief. Similarly, then, whenever we are forming a belief, we are in a sense lucky when it is caused by the world around us and not by some Googol. This is why his theory fails, because it allows room for such lucky situations to count as knowledge. Without knowing that we are not in a skeptical world, we cannot know when causal chains are present, and we cannot eliminate the risk of reflective luck without this knowledge. Meta-knowledge of this sort is a requirement that Goldman is wrong in rejecting.\(^{65}\)

\(^{64}\) Ibid, 145.
\(^{65}\) It should be noted here that Goldman’s paper also discusses three other sources of knowledge: memory, inference, and testimony. In short, memory beliefs are causally linked to those things that formed the initial perceptual beliefs, inferential beliefs are caused by perceptual beliefs in conjunction with relevant background beliefs (usually memory beliefs) and testimonial beliefs are quite similar to inferential beliefs. These do not warrant further discussion on their own because they are all subject to the same objection of luck as perceptual beliefs, as well as all relying on our perceptual beliefs being knowledge-yielding.
In fact, one of Goldman’s own cases highlights the difficulty that the causal theory has with epistemic luck. In his lava example, it is conceivable that a volcano erupted, someone removed all the lava, and another person, unaware of the original lava, puts new lava there. If I see this new lava, unaware of these previous events, I would infer that a volcano had erupted in the area. This would not be knowledge because there would be no causal connection, but no one would be able to know that. As I have argued above, knowledge of the causal chain obtaining is necessary to knowledge even though Goldman rejects it as a requirement. Without it, we are reliant upon being lucky in the sense that the chains do actually obtain, and being correct in a belief by virtue of luck is not enough to yield knowledge.

C. Reliabilism

The final externalist epistemology that I will investigate is called reliabilism. Unlike the previous theories, there are two types of reliabilism I will deal with. The first is a simple reliabilism, where the criterion of the reliability of cognitive processes is put forth as necessary for knowledge. The second is a version called agent reliabilism, which attempts recover from some of the counterarguments made against simple reliabilism.

i. Alvin Goldman’s Reliabilism

In his essay entitled “Reliabilism: What Is Justified Belief?” Alvin Goldman attempts to give us a proper definition of justification, which would in turn give us a proper criterion for determining if one has knowledge. According to Goldman’s reliabilism, the justification of a belief depends on the reliability of the process that caused it, and the more likely a process is to produce true beliefs, the more reliable it will be considered.\(^66\) This means certain processes that we generally think of as providing us with true beliefs most of the time, such as our senses, are very reliable. Therefore the beliefs generated by those processes will be justified, while beliefs

\(^{66}\) Ibid, 311.
formed through unreliable processes, such as guessing, will not be. It is certainly possible that I can, on a whim, utter the sentence, “I believe that $p$, and have $p$, whatever it may be, end up being true, but very few would say that I knew that $p$, because I had no justification. There are more unreliable processes in addition to simply guessing, and it is possible that they cause us to forgo knowledge that we could have otherwise obtained in a reliable manner. Goldman’s example of Humperdink, who learns logic from an untrustworthy logician appropriately named Elmer Fraud, believing that any disjunction of at least 40 disjuncts is probably true at Mr. Fraud’s word, comes across a 40-disjunct-long proposition containing a necessary truth$^{67}$ as one of the disjuncts.$^{68}$ According to our rules of logic, any disjunction only requires the truth of at least one disjunct in order to be true, so its containing a necessary truth necessitates the truth of the entire proposition. If Humperdink were to believe this proposition for that reason, then Goldman would certainly say that he knew it to be true. However, because his belief of the proposition’s truth comes from what Fraud told him, his belief is fueled by an unreliable process and therefore does not constitute a justified belief or knowledge.

Much like the causal theory of knowledge, reliabilism does not sufficiently answer the skeptic. It certainly can help us form beliefs that have greater subjective probabilities, however it cannot carry us to that threshold of one hundred percent justification that we need to obtain knowledge. In addition to this, there are reasons to critique reliabilism’s criterion of justification being simply originating from a reliable source. There are cases where beliefs arise from a very reliable process, and yet we would not consider the believer to have knowledge. Keith Lehrer’s Truetemp example is arguably the best of these refutations.

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$^{67}$ Goldman uses the phrase “I exist” as the necessarily true disjunction. I am replacing this with a more general statement because I have argued that “I exist” specifically is not a necessary truth, if there are any at all.

Suppose a person, whom we shall name Mr. Truetemp, undergoes brain surgery by an experimental surgeon who invents a small device which is both a very accurate thermometer and...capable of generating thoughts. The device...acts as a sensor to transmit information about the temperature to the computational system in his brain...causing him to think of the temperature...Assume that the tempucomp is very reliable, and so all his thoughts are correct temperature thoughts.\textsuperscript{69}

Obviously, since it the tempucomp always provides Truetemp with the correct temperature information, it is a reliable process. If he is aware of its presence and of its function, then his beliefs surely fit the criteria of Goldman. However, if Truetemp is unaware of the tempucomp’s presence, and he simply has these strange thoughts about the temperature that are always correct, then it would be quite difficult to claim that he has any sort of knowledge. The process is no less reliable than it was when he was aware of it, but he now seems to be lacking something that is necessary for his justification. He has these thoughts but does not understand where they come from or that they are accurate, so how can he possibly know what the temperature is when the tempucomp puts the thought in his head? Another case often brought up in regards to reliabilism is the helpful demon, as mentioned earlier in the discussion of the Safety Theory. In both of these cases it seems that the beliefs in question cannot be said to be known by the believers, and so we can see a flaw in the reliabilist criterion of knowledge. Reliabilism does seem to be on to something, as can be seen by the fact that we would say beliefs caused by unreliable processes are generally less likely to be true than those generated through reliable ones. However, just as with causal connections, no reliable process will be able to overcome the skeptical hypothesis and grant us complete justification for any of our beliefs.

Although the Truetemp example is generally the first place an anti-reliabilist will go to make his point, it is not without objection. In fact, there is a rather strong objection to the Truetemp counterexample that is raised by James Beebe, and it is important enough to discuss in

\textsuperscript{69} Lehrer, “A Critique of Externalism,” 326.
detail here. He argues from a very scientific perspective on the idea of a Truetemp scenario, citing examples of actual “new perceptual faculties (NPFs)” such as cochlear implants and constructive eye surgery to restore sight. He claims that in these cases, there is an immediate experience of shock and confusion, which is followed by a long period of adjustment to the NPF, which he calls NPF development, before it contributes to forming beliefs. He lists the criteria that one must meet to have satisfied NPF development, and claims that if one fails to meet any one of these criteria, he will be unable to form any noninferential beliefs through the use of the NPF. This list includes things such as the initial shock and confusion, that the subject must learn that the NPF carries information about distal objects, and the need for extensive training to use some NPF reliably. He also points out that in the Truetemp example certain important details are left out. These are namely time and the reorganization of Truetemp’s neural circuitry. According to Beebe, it is important for the counterexample to be effective that it take place immediately after the installation of the tempucomp (doxatemp in Beebe’s paper) because if we were instead considering Truetemp’s beliefs years after the device had been implanted, the relevant beliefs would have the same status as those produced by any of his other senses. It would also be important for the scientists who implanted the tempucomp in Truetemp to have somehow reorganized all the neural circuitry relevant to the tempucomp’s function and to Truetemp’s formation of beliefs using it which did not require the need for NPF development. Beebe argues that because he has expanded on the underdescribed thought experiment, there are now two possible scenarios. Either Truetemp will go through the shock of NPF development, during which time no beliefs would be produced at all, or he will have had his neural circuitry

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71 Ibid, 311.
72 Ibid, 319-20.
73 Ibid, 311.
reorganized to allow the tempucomp to function, in which case Beebe believes that Truetemp may have knowledge in the reliabilist sense.

There is a major difference between the average NPF recipient and Mr. Truetemp that Beebe fails to consider, however. That difference is foreknowledge of the procedure. Any person receiving constructive surgery on their eyes or a cochlear implant in their ears would know ahead of time that they were going to receive this procedure, and would expect the necessary development period afterward. Mr. Truetemp, on the other hand, having been kidnapped, operated on, and given an amnesia-inducing drug\textsuperscript{74}, would not have any foreknowledge of this procedure and would simply wake up with strange thoughts about the temperature going through his mind. Because he did not experience the procedure or any of the development that would follow if the scientists had not reorganized his brain to acquire beliefs from the tempucomp while forgoing the normal adjustment time, he would, from his perspective, simply have unexplainable but nevertheless correct beliefs about the temperature. Even after Beebe’s expansion of the thought experiment, he still seems to be lacking knowledge.

If the defense of Truetemp against Beebe is unsatisfactory, there are other routes that can be taken to defeat reliabilism. As mentioned earlier, the helpful demon is one such route. Another is the clairvoyance problem. Matthias Steup describes this in his book \textit{An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology}.

Suppose Norman enjoys the power of perfectly reliable clairvoyance with respect to the whereabouts of the president… Furthermore, his clairvoyance normally results in beliefs about the president’s whereabouts only if Norman deliberately uses this power. Suppose Norman doesn’t know that he has this power, and thus he never uses it. On a rare occasion, he spontaneously comes to believe…that the president is in New York… [A]ccording to a news report… the president is

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 308.
supposed to be…in the White House that morning. (As a matter of fact, the meetings were canceled and the president is indeed in New York that morning.)\textsuperscript{75}

In this case, Norman’s belief is certainly produced by a reliable process, and we also avoid the messy NPF development present in Beebe’s account of the Truetemp case. However, it still seems that Norman lacks knowledge of the president’s location that morning. He has no reason to believe this spontaneous thought of his is true, and he in fact has reason to believe it is false. However, he does hold a belief produced by a reliable process, and that belief is true, but since he is missing an understanding of that belief’s truth, he is also lacking knowledge of the president’s location.

\textit{ii. John Greco’s Reliabilism}

John Greco attempts to counter some of the shortcomings of simple reliabilism by developing what he calls an “agent reliabilism.” He believes this epistemology, which combines most of the tenets of reliabilism with some components of virtue epistemology (in that the believer’s intellectual faculties are relevant to the justification of the beliefs produced), can counter objections such as the strange and fleeting processes (Mr. Truetemp’s tempucomp). To do this, he adds an additional requirement to knowledge, further than reliable processes giving us our beliefs. The believer in question must be of an appropriate intellectual character. He claims that any process, no matter how reliable, that is not a part of the believer’s intellectual character and is not stable cannot give us any sort of knowledge. By this, Greco means that “it is those [reliable] processes that have their bases in the stable and successful dispositions of the believer that are relevant for knowledge and justification.”\textsuperscript{76} For instance, an agent reliabilist would say that one has knowledge when he sees something (in adequate lighting) because sight is one of


\textsuperscript{76} Greco, “Agent Reliabilism,” 287.
those processes that is both a part of our intellectual character (since we all have it and expect to have it) and is stable (since we always have it, barring unfortunate defects or accidents). On the other hand, this excludes the strange and fleeting processes such as the helpful demon or the tempucomp from giving us knowledge. This eliminates the tempucomp on the grounds that it is strange, since it is not a part of the person’s intellectual character, and the helpful demon on the grounds that it is fleeting, since it may alter a single belief or any random combination of beliefs at various intervals. It even handles the clairvoyance objection fairly well, because although it would not be a strange faculty since it is a part of Norman’s intellectual character, Greco would consider it fleeting because it is a “kind of thing a person can adopt on a whim or engage in an irregular fashion.”

The argument for agent reliabilism is a good deal stronger than Goldman’s simple reliabilism, and it does a good job recovering from the skeptical objections raised to the simpler theory by discarding the processes that they use to defeat the simple reliabilist. However, it is not itself immune to criticism. Goldman himself points out some weaknesses in the argument presented by Greco. “Greco doesn’t adequately explain what is meant by a ‘strange’ process. Is it simply an unusual or unfamiliar process? Strange or unfamiliar to whom? If one didn’t know much about bats or dolphins, echolocation would be an unfamiliar and strange process.” To extrapolate on that idea, it seems that all of the processes through which we gather our data are strange or unfamiliar to us at some point. It is only after prolonged study of them that we begin to understand them and they cease to be strange. Now, this at first may sound like a good idea; maybe we should be wary of strange new processes until we establish their reliability. But how long would this take? When do we no longer consider a new process to be strange and rather to

77 Ibid, 287.
be an acceptable, reliable, knowledge-yielding process? And if all new processes are by
definition strange and can therefore not bring us to knowledge, why would we ever pursue these
new processes? It seems that when a new process, such as the magnifying ability of a
microscope, is developed, it should be deemed as unable to provide knowledge, and therefore no
one would continue with its use to establish its reliability. These are the questions that Greco
leaves unanswered, and without answers to these, we must exclude the possibility of any new
process, no matter how reliable it is, yielding knowledge. It appears problematic to say that there
is knowledge to be sought, but it must be done in only the ways we currently understand and not
in any others. Goldman’s argument that it is conceivable that one gains some new reliable
process for forming beliefs and very shortly after loses it due to some medical condition such as
a stroke\textsuperscript{79} is a good example of why we should, at least in some cases, allow for fleeting
processes to give us reliable beliefs. Greco’s agent reliabilism is defeated by its inherent
problem of disallowing new reliable processes to yield knowledge because they would
necessarily be strange to us.

\textbf{§14 Internalist Theories}

Internalist theories of knowledge require the meta-knowledge that has been plaguing the
externalist theories. For an internalist to have complete justification, he must be able to
understand that his belief is true and justified, and why it is the case. Lacking this, he could be
the victim of some sort of epistemic luck, as I have said before in regards to several externalist
theories. What I will attempt to show when discussing internalist theories is not that their
requirement of meta-knowledge for us to be completely justified is insufficient, because that
would contradict my use of it as an argument against the externalist, but it is that although meta-
knowledge would be sufficient, it is unobtainable.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
A. Cartesian Theory of Knowledge

In his Meditations, Descartes set out to destroy the skeptic once and for all so that we could build our base of knowledge on solid, indubitable grounds. To do this, he entertains several skeptical hypotheses, determining their strength, until deciding on the evil demon as the most powerful skeptical argument. As I have stated previously, the evil demon is quite similar to the Googol hypothesis that Lehrer uses in its scope. After he attempts to establish that he knows he is a thinking thing, he then, in the Third Meditation, tries to discover the reason why he knows this, so that he may apply it to other things. “Certainly in this first knowledge there is nothing that assures me of its truth, excepting the clear and distinct perception of that which I state… accordingly it seems to me that already I can establish as a general rule that all things which I perceive very clearly and distinctly are true.” This is the criterion of meta-knowledge that Descartes establishes for himself: if an idea is clear and distinct, then it can be known that it is true. The typical response to Descartes (which is a fair criticism of his arguments) is that he has trapped himself in a vicious circle. He believes that a clear and distinct idea is true because it has been given to him by God, and he believes that God exists because he has a clear and distinct idea of God. As these beg the question of one another, this is where most rest their case against Descartes. I wish to counter him in a different way: if granted that any idea that is clear and distinct is true, allowing us to have an understanding of when a belief is true and thus allowing us to know it, by the internalist sense, how do I know when my idea is in fact clear and distinct? Surely the only response to that question a Cartesian could provide is that one knows when an idea is clear and distinct when one has a clear and distinct perception of the idea’s clearness and distinctness. But the question could be asked yet again, with the same answer provided, ad

There is no end to the chain of meta-knowledge, and so nothing is ever completely justified. If it were possible for the human mind to conceive of an infinite chain, or if the chain were not actually infinite, then the internalist would have a possible route to knowledge. However, as it stands, the road the internalist must travel down never ends, with knowledge forever just over the horizon.

**B. Coherentism**

Another internalist view is called coherentism. For the coherentist, in order for one to be completely justified in one’s beliefs, one’s beliefs must be coherent with one another. According to Jonathan Dancy, coherence requires that the set of one’s beliefs be both consistent and mutually explanatory. This means that the beliefs must not contradict each other, lest they be inconsistent, and they must be able to explain and be explained by all other beliefs in the set, lest they not be mutually explanatory. If this is the case of coherentism, it seems to be off to a good start. Dancy is quick to inform us that these properties apply to the entire set, not to the individual members, so they must meet both these criteria in conjunction with all the other beliefs in the set. A coherentist then believes that the more coherent some belief set is, the more justified it will be, and that if the addition of some belief makes a set of beliefs more coherent, then that belief is justified.

While coherence is certainly a good quality for any justified belief or set of beliefs to have, it is not alone strong enough to be justification for any set of beliefs. The objection used against Descartes and most other internalist theories does not do quite so well here, but there is another powerful objection to be made against the coherentist. It is quite conceivable that one has some set of beliefs where each and every belief is false, yet the set remains coherent. None

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82 Ibid, 239.
of these false beliefs may contradict one another, and they may all explain the rest of the set very well, however that does not change their falsity. It would be wrong to say that someone is completely justified in their set of beliefs about, for example, a fairy world, no matter how coherent it was because it would simply not be the case that such a fairy world exists. Likewise, it is possible that in the set of beliefs one normally has about the world around us, there is quite a high level of coherence. However, if there is some race of Googols deceiving us, then our belief set does about as much good as the belief set about the fairy world, since all of our beliefs (or at least very many of them) would be false. Coherence does not give one reason to believe any of the beliefs in a set are true, only that they work well in conjunction with one another. So coherence may be necessary for justification and knowledge, however it is not at all sufficient.

§15 Contextualism

I will be taking a different route when discussing the contextualist theory advanced by David Annis in his “A Contextual Theory of Epistemic Justification.” Instead of showing how this theory is somehow deficient or faulty, I argue that it is in fact quite a good theory and, with a few adjustments, is perfectly consistent with the agnoiology. First, an explanation of its major tenets.

Annis presents contextualism as a solution to the ongoing debate between foundationalism and coherentism, two of the primary theories of justification. Foundationalism believes that there are certain basic beliefs that need no justification, or are in some sense default justified, that are then used to provide justification for all of our other beliefs. Coherentism, on the other hand, believes that because there are no such foundational beliefs, the key to justification is for a belief to be coherent with the rest of our web of beliefs about the world. Annis believes he has a solution to this contention with contextualism, which sets the
justification requirement for knowledge some proposition $h$ at different levels depending on a factor he calls the “issue-context.” There are two main components to determining the issue-context: the level of being correct in one’s belief about $h$, and what degree of information we would expect someone to have about the topic. The more critical the consequences of accepting $h$ when it is false or rejecting it when it is true, the higher the standard of justification.

Likewise, the more we would expect a person to know about the subject, the higher the standard is. The example used by Annis is Jones recalling that he read somewhere that polio is caused by a virus. As a layperson, this is quite adequate, but as a candidate for his M.D., we would expect him to have much more justification for that belief. His other major point is that in order to be justified in believing $h$, one must be able to counter the relevant, legitimate objections to $h$. He suggests that there are two categories of objections: “(A) that $S$ is not in a position to know that $h$ or (B) that $h$ is false.” If $S$ is able to meet all current objections of these types raised by the relevant objector group, or those who are in a similar issue-context, then a person is said to be justified enough to know that $h$.

As one would expect, the skeptic would make objections of sort (A), because he believes that no one is ever in a position to know that $h$. The skeptic himself is not in a position to assert that $h$ is false, so he will not raise any objections of type (B). The skeptical hypothesis would here be used to cast doubt on $S$’s position to know that $h$. However, Annis preempts this objection by saying that we must have a real doubt. He does not explicitly say that the skeptical hypothesis is not a real doubt, but it was clearly a target when he claimed that the only things that

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84 Ibid, 295.
85 Ibid, 295.
86 Ibid, 294.
could give rise to doubt are unexpected phenomena or results that break with expectations.\textsuperscript{87} Here is where the adjustment must be made to make contextualism compatible with the agnoiology. Annis is incorrect in using this definition. It is not necessary that whatever is giving rise to doubt be some observable phenomena or result. The mere conceivability of something is enough to make us doubt something. Because one can conceive of the skeptical hypothesis, one must be wary of it. It is the same with any idea whatsoever. Certainly some observed phenomena raises an even stronger doubt than does the possibility of its existence, but the possibility alone is surely enough to give rise to legitimate doubt. It is only once something has been ruled out as completely impossible that we can cease to question its implications on what we claim to know, and the skeptical hypothesis has clearly not been shown to be impossible.

Once we allow for the skeptical hypothesis to be considered a legitimate doubt for the contextualist to counter, it again removes the possibility of knowledge because it eliminates our ability to be completely justified in believing \( h \). However, this is where contextualism can be helpful. Contextualism works exceptionally well with the idea of subjective probabilities in decision making. It does not follow from our inability to have complete justification that we cannot have any amount of justification whatever, and contextualism will help us determine what an adequate amount of justification to hold a belief with a reasonable amount of confidence would be. The result of the agnoiology is that we can hold most of the beliefs that we normally call knowledge, just with something less that complete justification. The contextualist theory helps us determine about how justified we are in believing something, and we can use that level of justification to assign a belief a probability. We cannot reach the realm of knowledge, as Annis would have us do, because we cannot surmount that final obstacle of the skeptical hypothesis, but we can determine ourselves to have relatively high levels of justification for

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 294.
certain beliefs given our epistemic position and the importance of the belief, just as Annis
describes in his paper. I clearly have a high level of justification for my belief that the sun will
rise tomorrow, since I have seen it happen every day for my entire life. However, this same
information would not be a high level of justification if it were to be used in a scholarly article
on astrophysics. In neither case do I have knowledge, but I am much more justified in believing
it for that simple reason when I am an ordinary person who is not a specialist in astrophysics than
I would be if I believed it for the same simple reason but were writing as an authority on the
subject.

V. Conclusion

§16 The Skeptic Prevails

Aside from the possible, miniscule exception mentioned above about the existence of
thought, the skeptic seems to have successfully raised some sort of doubt about all of the
knowledge that most people typically claim to have. I have shown the flaws in the kinds of
beliefs that dogmatists cling to when faced with a skeptical challenge, and none have survived
the test of the Googol hypothesis. We cannot trust our senses, necessary truths and basic beliefs
are subject to doubt, it is quite possible that we are mistaken about our conscious states, and
logic may not even operate in the ways we tend to think it does. The Googols are capable of
deceiving us about anything and everything, and until we have a way to exclude them from the
realm of possibility, we must accept that. Many different theories have been advanced about
how we can come to have knowledge, but none of them hold up to the scrutiny of the skeptical
hypothesis. We must then, for the time being, stop using epistemologies to try to gain
knowledge we cannot have, and instead accept an agnoiology. We must for now accept our own
ignorance of the world and of ourselves, and we may someday find reason to believe that the skeptical hypothesis is unjustified, but that day has not yet come.

§17 Consequences of the Agnoiology: Probable Belief in Place of Knowledge

The victory of the skeptic does not carry the severe consequences that many associate with it. It is not the end of scientific inquiry and it is not the end of everyday life. We can still function essentially as we always have, with the exception that we must stop claiming to know anything. Instead, we must express our beliefs through subjective probabilities. I cannot say that I know there is a stapler in front of me, but rather that, given all the information available to me, I believe strongly enough that there is a stapler in front of me. The probability that there is some object in front of me is much higher for me, believing as I do that I am perceiving it with my senses, than it would be for my friend who I am on the phone with, who must base his belief on my relation of what I believe my senses show me. This is what is meant by subjective probabilities. This is how we are able to function in our day to day activities: by making choices based on the probabilities we judge the actions to have. I believe with a near one hundred percent probability that when I stand up from this chair, the ground will support me and gravity will hold me down. I believe with less probability that when I throw this ball of paper, it will make it into the trash can. But our decision making is not hindered by the fact that nothing can be objectively certain, because it will be certain enough for each of us as individuals.\footnote{Ibid, 66-67.} This way of thinking is actually better for us, especially with science in mind.

We can instead regard practical action and scientific inquiry as aiming at the satisfaction of objectives appropriate to each sphere. We change our beliefs to better satisfy those objectives. Thus, we may, while remaining sceptics, contend that our beliefs… are rational even though we agree that such beliefs are not so completely justified as to constitute knowledge… None can be exempted from
evaluation on the grounds that it is known to be true… Such are the fruits of agnoiology.\textsuperscript{89}

The agnoiology actually enhances the scientific method. Striving to improve science means always trying to find flaws in what we think we know. That is how we moved from a flat earth to a round one, from a geocentric model to a heliocentric one, from stories of being made of mud to evolution. The hallmark of science is to never be satisfied with what we think we know. Scientists are prepared to throw away even the most widely accepted theories if they find evidence that elevates some other theory to a higher level of justification. Thus, not only should the agnoiology not be feared or reluctantly accepted, it should be embraced as a mode of thought that will allow us to progress even more because we will never be satisfied with what we think we know.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 67.
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