

SHATTERING A CARTESIAN SCEPTICAL DREAM

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Abstract

Scepticism about external world knowledge is frequently claimed to emerge from Descartes's dreaming argument. That argument supposedly challenges one to have some further knowledge — the knowledge that one is not dreaming that p — if one is to have even one given piece of external world knowledge that p . The possession of that further knowledge can seem especially important when the dreaming possibility is genuinely Cartesian (with one's dreaming that p being incompatible with the truth of one's accompanying belief that p). But this paper shows why that Cartesian use of that possibility is not at all challenging. It is because that putative sceptical challenge reduces to a triviality which is incompatible with the sceptic's having described some further piece of knowledge which is needed, if one is to have the knowledge that p .

I

Cartesian scepticism's famous dreaming hypothesis is intended to challenge our having any knowledge of a world external to our subjective experiences, even when these include apparently sensory experiences of such a world. Epistemological concern about the possibility of dreaming was not wholly original to Descartes.¹ Nonetheless, contemporary epistemologists have focussed upon some more or less general and historically accurate version of his challenge in particular. Descartes's conception of knowledge was infallibilist, according to which knowledge involves a kind of rational certainty: if there is even a slight rational doubt as to a belief's truth, then the belief is not knowledge. And Descartes regarded the possibility of what we might call 'coherent dreaming' — along with the phenomenological indistinguishability of such dreaming from being awake — as constituting such a doubt as to

the truth of any given external world belief. These days, though, a more general form of dreaming worry has become a canonical argument for external world scepticism. It is a more general piece of thinking, in that it is intended to apply both to infallibilist and to fallibilist conceptions of knowledge. That supposedly more widely applicable scepticism will deny that there is external world knowledge *even* if such knowledge needs to include only a good-yet-fallible kind of justification. So, this sceptic regards himself as raising *more* than just a slight rational doubt about the satisfiability of a maximally demanding conception of knowledge.² Your external world beliefs (he will say) are not knowledge, because they are not even *well-yet-fallibly* justified by way of your experiences — which are, after all, phenomenologically indistinguishable for you from dreaming ones.

Hence, the accompanying sceptical reasoning takes the following form (where p is any external world proposition, and d is the proposition that although you seem, to yourself, to be having a sensory experience as of p 's being true, you are actually in a state of dreaming):³

- D 1 $k(p) \rightarrow k(\text{not-}d)$
 2 $\text{not-}k(\text{not-}d)$
 \therefore 3 $\text{not-}k(p)$ [From 1 and 2.]⁴

I will not try to motivate all aspects of that sceptical argument D. Nor will I engage with what are currently the most widespread criticisms of it. Harkening back to contributions by Fred Dretske⁵ and by Robert Nozick,⁶ recent discussion of that form of sceptical reasoning has tended to be about such matters as whether there are *contextually varying* standards for knowing and whether knowledge is *closed* under (known) logical implication.⁷ In this paper I raise a further worry about one historically vital instance of that form of sceptical thinking. My goal is to undermine the Cartesian sceptic's challenge *qua* challenge.

II

Barry Stroud tells us that premise 1 is the key to the sceptic's challenge.⁸ If we cannot dispose of that premise, explains Stroud, then we

cannot escape the rest of the sceptic's argument: once we accept 1, we must also accept 2 — and therefore 3. So, we should think about how a sceptic could attempt to support 1. What rational motivation is there for advocating 1? And does that motivation allow 1 to be regarded as describing a condition which is at all challenging — which is *difficult* to satisfy? I answer those two questions in this section and the next, respectively.⁹

In urging 1 upon us, the sceptic is saying that you know that *p* only insofar as you have in addition — as an *extra*, or *distinct*, piece of knowledge — the knowledge that not-*d*. That requirement of distinctness is actually a significant aspect of the sceptic's thinking. It plays a crucial role in how a sceptic might well attempt to justify 1 — as follows.

We may think of 1 as being a particular instance of a more general and fundamental piece of sceptical thinking — that which is at the core of the traditional *epistemic regress* argument.¹⁰ That ancient argument derives its claimed sceptical power from such reasoning as this:

In order to be knowledge, any particular belief that *p* needs to be supported appropriately by some *further* piece of knowledge.¹¹ (Nothing supports itself; yet nothing is knowledge without support.) That further piece of knowledge is “further,” in this constitutive sense: It is knowledge *independently* of its helping to make that belief that *p* knowledge. (If some belief that *q* is not independently knowledge, then its supporting the belief that *p* does not help to constitute the belief that *p*'s being knowledge *due* to the latter belief's being supported, as it must be, by knowledge.)

Here is how premise 1 emerges from that more general picture of what is needed for a given belief to become knowledge. The Cartesian sceptic is not saying that the knowledge that not-*d*, even if it was independently available, would *suffice* for justifying the belief that *p* enough to make this latter belief knowledge that *p*. But the sceptic is saying that your having the knowledge that not-*d* — that is, your having it as an independently supported and thereby constituted piece of knowledge — remains *necessary* to your belief that *p*'s being justified enough to be knowledge. More fully, the sceptic's claim is that there is

a need for your independently having a body *b* of knowledge (one component of *b* being the knowledge that not-*d* in particular) which is jointly sufficient to support your belief that *p*, so that (with all else being equal) that belief is knowledge that *p*. And because (by hypothesis) *p* is an external world proposition, presumably *b* includes at least some knowledge of apparently sensory experiences on your part — with the knowledge that not-*d* also being needed within *b* (says the sceptic) in order to support your belief that those are *actually* sensory experiences on your part. Thus, if you lack the required *b* — in which case, too, you lack the knowledge that not-*d* — then you lack the knowledge that *p*. And so 1 arises as a result of applying the complex regress condition which we have highlighted.

That is how a Cartesian sceptic could well seek to motivate rationally his pivotal premise 1. Significantly, he would be interpreting it as an application, to the particular case of external world knowledge, of an *independently* motivated, and sceptical, way of thinking — one which gives us regress scepticism. And this application would direct us to interpret 1 correlatively, in the following terms:

Your belief that *p*'s being knowledge would imply there being a need, not just for you to have the supporting knowledge that not-*d*, but for you to have it *independently* of having the knowledge that *p*.

A standard way of formulating that condition, of course, is to say that, by satisfying it, your epistemic support for your belief that not-*d* would be epistemically *prior* to your support for your belief that *p*.¹² In any case, we have found that it is natural to expand premise 1 in the following way, as we seek to understand the Cartesian sceptic's thinking as itself having an independent rational pedigree:

1* You know that *p* only if you also have the knowledge that not-*d*, with the latter knowledge somehow contributing *independent* epistemic support for your belief that *p*. Unless and until you have that *further* piece of knowledge, you lack the knowledge that *p*.

III

However, within philosophy, to understand all is not thereby to forgive all. In particular, to understand (as section II has sought to do) how a sceptic might try to ground premise 1 is not necessarily to accept that 1 can serve the sceptic's ends. Indeed, once we interpret 1 as 1*, we are in a position to realise why 1 does not issue any real challenge. That is because 1* is false. We will see why it is not true that unless and until you *independently* have the knowledge that not-*d*, you lack the knowledge that *p*. You cannot sensibly be challenged to need the independently constituted knowledge that not-*d*, if you are to know that *p*; or so I will argue, at least for the specific case of what I will call the *strictly* Cartesian sceptic.

That Cartesian sceptic is challenging you to know that not-*d* — and there is, he claims, a high price to be paid for your lacking that knowledge. That high price is your not knowing that *p*. But if we are properly to assess this sceptic's argument for that claim, we need to pay attention to the covert logical structure of the knowledge that not-*d*. We may begin by quoting Descartes's justly famous words on the content of (what we are designating as) *d*:

How often has it happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated near the fire, *whilst in reality* I was lying undressed in bed! ... But in thinking over this I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been *deceived by similar illusions*, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep that I am lost in astonishment. And my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of persuading me that I now dream.¹³

As is standardly noted, Descartes is challenging himself to eliminate a possibility. What is the *content* of that possibility, though? Descartes acknowledges that he might be ... what? He is challenging himself to know — with certainty — that he is not being *mistaken* or *de-*

ceived, even while seeming to himself not to be in that predicament (and, instead, to be sensing the world in a normal way). The possibility which he thereby regards as needing to be eliminated is that of his being-deceived-while-seeming-(in-an-apparently-sensory-way)-not-to-be. And his proposed method of elimination is epistemic: The possibility in question needs to be *known* — with certainty — not to obtain. Thus, Descartes's sceptical mode has him confronting himself with the supposed need to know that he is not in fact dreaming-*and-thereby-being-deceived*. Accordingly, his dreaming possibility is covertly a conjunction. When applied to a given epistemic subject, it reports her dreaming that *p* — where this *also* includes her being mistaken as to *p*.

Perhaps this is why the putative challenge is often presented as requiring a person to know that she is not *only* or *merely* or *simply* dreaming that *p*. It is also, I suspect, why many epistemology students find the Cartesian possibility immediately threatening. They realise that Descartes is imagining a possibility within which a given epistemic subject is cognitively 'cut off' — unwittingly, yet in the most direct way possible (by being *mistaken*) — from how the world really is in some particular respect. That epistemic estrangement being described within Descartes's dreaming possibility would be an epistemic subject's being in a state which *seems* to her to be revealing the world in some specified respect (namely, *p*'s obtaining) — even while in fact it is *not* revealing that aspect of the world to her. It *only* seems to do so. Hence, although the possibility of the epistemic subject's dreaming that *p* — that possibility *qua* possibility — does not entail her being mistaken as to *p*, that possibility has a *content* which does include the occurrence of that mistake. The existence of the possibility does not entail that in fact the epistemic subject is being mistaken as to *p*. The content of the possibility, though, entails a content according to which she is mistaken as to *p*.¹⁴

Consequently, we may represent the underlying logical structure of the main premise of the strictly Cartesian sceptic's putative challenge in this way:

$$1 \quad k(p) \rightarrow k(\text{not-}d)$$

$$\begin{aligned}
&= k(p) \rightarrow k[\text{not-}\{(\text{you seem, to yourself, to be experiencing } p \text{ as true) \& not-}p\}]^{15} \\
&= k(p) \rightarrow k[\text{not-}(\text{you seem, to yourself, to be experiencing } p \text{ as true) or not-not-}p]
\end{aligned}$$

Moreover, that last step in this process of analysing 1 can be simplified. Your seeming, to yourself, to be experiencing p as true is merely your having whatever apparently observational evidence it is that, by hypothesis, you have for p . And (as section I implicitly noted) the Cartesian sceptic about external world knowledge is not disputing your knowing what your subjectively experienced evidence is. He is certainly not asking you to know that you do *not* have that apparently observational evidence. Instead, he is asking whether, *given* your knowing that you seem, to yourself, to be experiencing p as true, you know that p . We may therefore eliminate the first disjunct (within the scope of the “ $k(\)$ ” operator in the consequent of the final step, among those ones listed above, of our expansion of “ $k(\text{not-}d)$ ”), because it is not describing something which the Cartesian sceptic is asking you to know. And once we do eliminate that disjunct, all that remains of the sceptic’s supposed challenge in 1 is this:

$$= k(p) \rightarrow k(p)$$

In effecting that reduction, of course, I am not saying that “ $k(\text{not-}d)$ ” is logically equivalent to “ $k(p)$ ” — that the two propositions as such are logically equivalent or that they mean the same in all contexts. Rather, my reasoning considers “ $k(\text{not-}d)$ ” purely insofar as it is functioning as part of the strictly Cartesian sceptic’s challenge. This sceptic, in requiring you to have the knowledge that $\text{not-}d$, while also *challenging* your ability to do so, is asking you to have whatever knowledge is both (i) minimally sufficient for knowledge that $\text{not-}d$, and (ii) not being *conceded* to you in this context of challenge. But the knowledge that p has emerged as being the most relevant knowledge which satisfies both (i) and (ii). And in contrast, (ii) is *not* satisfied by the knowledge that it is not true that you seem, to yourself, to be experiencing p as true. The latter knowledge would therefore *not* be part of what our sceptic is challenging you to have, insofar as he is challenging

you to have the knowledge that not-*d*. That is why (as we saw a moment ago), once this sceptic's using 1 as a challenge to your knowing that *p* becomes this,

= $k(p) \rightarrow k[\text{not}-(\text{you seem, to yourself, to be experiencing } p \text{ as true) or } p]$

it may be treated, *within* his dialectical context of challenging your knowing that *p*, as just this:¹⁶

= $k(p) \rightarrow k(p)$

And *that* presents no challenge at all to your knowing that *p*. It is a truth — but not a challenging one, and certainly not one with which to generate any substantive scepticism. It fails to be challenging — in precisely the sense in which, by parsing 1 as 1*, we were attempting to understand 1 *as* being challenging. For insofar as 1 articulates a strictly Cartesian sceptic's challenge, we now see, it reduces to a claim that is only trivially true. Insofar as it is true, therefore, it is not also challenging.

The diagnosis of this failing is clear: This Cartesian sceptic is not alerting us to some *further* piece of knowledge which you need if you are to know that *p*. Trivially, knowing that *p* involves knowing that *p*. Yet there cannot be a serious sceptical challenge (to your knowing that *p*) in asking you to know that not-*d*, insofar as that request — when we attempt to interpret it *as* a strictly Cartesian sceptical challenge — reduces just to your being asked to know that *p* if you are to know that *p*. This sceptic has thus not, within his challenge, described an *independently* constituted piece of knowledge whose presence would, in turn, help to constitute your belief that *p*'s being knowledge that *p*, and whose presence is needed for that purpose. Once 1's logical structure is uncovered in our attempt to understand it as presenting a strictly Cartesian challenge to your knowing that *p*, we find it describing a piece of knowledge — the knowledge that *p* (albeit concealed, originally, as a component within the knowledge that not-*d*) — whose presence is necessary, and even sufficient, for your knowing that *p*. However, it is also thereby failing to describe an *extra*, or *independent*,

piece of knowledge (considered in relation to your knowledge that p). So, 1^* is not true — and, accordingly, premise 1 does not specify a strictly Cartesian sceptical *challenge* as such.¹⁷

IV

The previous section's argument might seem to have been anticipated by Ernest Sosa¹⁸ and by James Pryor.¹⁹ But that is not quite so. As I will now show, the argument in this paper is conceptually prior to theirs.

Let us reflect again upon a strictly Cartesian sceptic's using 1 to argue that there is no knowledge that p (for any external world p). He says that you lack the required knowledge that not- d , because any such knowledge — by itself being external world knowledge — would *in turn* require you to have the knowledge that not- d . Our sceptic pounces eagerly upon this, characterising it as a form of *circularity* that thereby afflicts your otherwise gaining the knowledge that not- d . By 1 (the sceptic then infers), you would also fail to know that p .

But such circularity is not really so epistemically problematic (note Sosa and Pryor). Sosa sees that it would entail only S, while Pryor infers only P from the circularity:

- S You know that not- $d \rightarrow$ You know that not- d .²⁰
 P You know that not- $d \leftrightarrow$ For some external world p , you know that p .²¹

And neither of these entails what the sceptic claims is entailed. S does not entail your not knowing that not- d , let alone your not knowing that p . P does not entail that for no external world p do you know that p .

Sosa and Pryor notice that the sceptic's reasoning depends upon adopting a particular interpretation of " \rightarrow ." Sceptics confront us with a supposed need for some temporally *antecedent* knowledge. For example (according to Cartesian sceptics), any external world knowledge that p needs to be *preceded* by the knowledge that not- d . The sceptic is saying that you have no knowledge that p (for an external world p) if you have no prior knowledge that not- d ; yet you have no prior knowl-

edge that not-*d* if you have no *prior-to-prior* knowledge that not-*d*, so to speak. (Remember that the prior knowledge that not-*d* would be external world knowledge.) But now this need cannot ever be assuaged. If you are to have prior-to-prior knowledge that not-*d*, then you need *prior-to-prior-to-prior* knowledge that not-*d*, for which you need *prior-to-prior-to-prior-to-prior* knowledge that not-*d*; and so on, *ad infinitum*. Thus, you lack the knowledge that not-*d* which was initially being required. Hence, you also lack that initially sought knowledge that *p*.

That is why sceptics traditionally make much of the putative significance of epistemic *priority*: knowledge that not-*d* is claimed to be epistemically *prior* to knowledge that *p* (for any correlative external world *p*). And it is why non-sceptics so often do battle with this step in the sceptical reasoning — trying to deny sceptics the conceptual right to think about knowledge in terms that accord the concept of epistemic priority such centrality and power.²² But now this paper's significance becomes more apparent (as we see how, in one respect, it goes beyond Sosa's and Pryor's anti-sceptical thoughts). For it reveals the strictly Cartesian sceptic stumbling irretrievably — and doing so even *prior* to seeking to enmesh us with the concept of epistemic priority. This is because what he is more fundamentally relying upon is the presumption that in his supposed challenge the “→” within 1 is flanked by *different* items of knowledge. That is why (in section II) I highlighted 1* when seeking to motivate 1. The sceptic's need to isolate a *further* — a *different* — piece of knowledge, which is required if you are to know that *p*, is conceptually prior to his imposing a requirement of epistemic priority upon these two pieces of knowledge. This sceptic is in no position to motivate his interpretation of “→” as involving epistemic priority, if he cannot be calling upon two distinct items of knowledge within his sceptical thinking in the first place (with one of them then being claimed to be epistemically prior to the other). And what section III's analysis has shown is that the “→” in the sceptic's would-be challenge *cannot* really be flanked by different items of knowledge, at least as they are used within the context of that would-be challenge. The sceptic presents the argument so as to give an appearance of calling upon different items of knowledge; then he proceeds to claim that one of them is epistemically prior to the other. We have found, though, that — as used by our strictly Cartesian sceptic

— they are *not* really different at all. This sceptic's attempt to do epistemic damage via the concept of epistemic priority therefore founders — even before the question of epistemic priority arises, properly speaking.²³

V

Classic — strict — Cartesian scepticism will continue thriving within epistemology only if we persist in being deceived by what is, in effect, a sceptical illusion. By directing our attention to 1, this Cartesian sceptic *seems* to be articulating some further knowledge — some independently describable and constitutable knowledge — which, he claims, you require if you are to know that *p* (for an external world *p*). However, if sections III and IV are correct, then that putative sceptical challenge to your knowing that *p* is not *really* asking you to have any knowledge which could ever have been independently constituted as being such knowledge — that is, knowledge which you can sensibly be expected to have, independently of your knowing that *p*. For within the context of the claimed challenge to your knowing that *p*, your having that supposedly extra knowledge — the knowledge that *not-d* — would amount to nothing *beyond* your knowing that *p*. In that setting, it is not really asking you to have any extra knowledge at all. It only seems to be doing so.

In that way, then, strictly Cartesian scepticism's having been taken seriously by philosophers has relied upon their not having recognised that it presents us with what is only an *illusory* appearance of posing a genuine epistemic challenge. There is an illusion, in that you are not really — even though you are apparently — being asked to have an independently constitutable (and justificatorily relevant) piece of knowledge.

I am not saying that there could never be a genuine sceptical challenge to our having external world knowledge. But no such challenge could take the strictly Cartesian shape I have discussed here. If we wish to experience genuine sceptical danger, we must seek it elsewhere.

Keywords

Scepticism, Cartesian doubts, knowledge, epistemic priority, sceptical challenge.

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Resumo

Freqüentemente, argumenta-se que o ceticismo sobre o mundo exterior surge do argumento do sonho, de Descartes. Supõe-se que esse argumento nos desafia a ter algum conhecimento mais — o conhecimento de que não estamos sonhando que p — se devemos ter qualquer conhecimento, em relação o mundo exterior, de que p . Ter esse outro conhecimento pode parecer especialmente importante quando a possibilidade de estarmos sonhando é genuinamente cartesiana (sendo que estarmos sonhando que p seria incompatível com a verdade das crenças que também temos de que p). Mas esse artigo mostra por que o uso cartesiano dessa possibilidade não é de forma alguma desafiador. É porque aquele suposto desafio cético se reduz a uma trivialidade que é incompatível com o fato de ter o cético descrito algum outro conhecimento que é necessário, se devemos ter o conhecimento de que p .

Palavras-chave

Ceticismo, dúvidas cartesianas, conhecimento, prioridade epistêmica, desafio cético.

Notes

¹ Notably, the Stoics and the Academics had done battle over this issue. On that debate, see Julia Annas, “Stoic Epistemology,” in Stephen Everson (ed.), *Principia* 8 (1), Florianópolis, June 2004, pp. 103–117.

Epistemology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), at pp. 192–3, 195–8.

² As to whether he is correct in that self-assessment, see my “Fallibilism and Knowing That One Is Not Dreaming,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 32 (2002), 83–102.

³ There is more to *d* than this, as we will discover in section III. We will need to decide whether *d* is consistent with *p*'s being true.

⁴ I am using the “*k*()” operator to denote, with systematic ambiguity, both infallibilist and fallibilist knowledge. That is, I am discussing both knowledge which does, and knowledge which does not, entail having conclusive justification in support of *p*'s being true. (And I will argue that the dreaming possibility, when used as Descartes uses it, does not succeed in denying us *either* of those forms of knowledge.)

⁵ “Epistemic Operators,” *Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970), 1007–23.

⁶ *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 197–211.

⁷ For one collection of responses to scepticism, in which such topics are prominently featured, see Keith DeRose and Ted Warfield (eds.), *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸ *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 23–4.

⁹ Elsewhere, I have argued directly for *1*'s falsity: *Good Knowledge, Bad Knowledge: On Two Dogmas of Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), ch. 2.

¹⁰ I have gestured (although only briefly) at this link previously: *Knowledge Puzzles: An Introduction to Epistemology* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 144–5.

¹¹ And if this is true of *each* belief, then *no* belief is knowledge (infers the regress sceptic).

¹² One form this condition is sometimes viewed as taking is that of requiring you to have the knowledge that not-*d* before you can have the knowledge that *p*. That would be a temporal instantiation of the independence condition I have described. However, it is not the only possible way of interpreting *1*'s requirement. The more general phenomenon of constitutive independence, rather than the narrower one of temporal priority as such, is what matters for the sceptic's underlying purpose. (In section IV, I return to this point.)

¹³ “Meditation I,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, (trans.) Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), vol. I, at pp. 145–6 (my emphases).

¹⁴ Might we adopt, instead, a weaker interpretation of the dreaming possibility — one which lacks this inclusion, within the dreaming possibility's (non-modal) content, of the epistemic subject's being mistaken as to p ? (For instance, d would entail only the unreliability-in-information, not the falsity-in-content, of your belief that p .) Many contemporary epistemologists, it seems, do indeed interpret the dreaming possibility in that way, talking correlatively (and more generally) of Cartesian scepticism. But the classic Cartesian challenge remains Descartes's in particular — which, as we have now seen, is not this weaker one. In this paper, I will not discuss the weaker interpretation of d .

¹⁵ Alternatively, it might be suggested, we should parse “ $k(\text{not-}d)$ ” like this:

$k[\text{not-}\{(\text{you seem, to yourself, to be experiencing } p \text{ as true) } \& \text{ (you are dreaming that } p) \& \text{ not-}p\}]$

But this would obscure the strictly Cartesian sceptic's point. The possibility of your dreaming that p is relevant to the sceptical challenge only insofar as it is at least a *prima facie* threat to your knowing that p . And (as we are analysing it, taking our cue from Descartes's words) this *prima facie* threat would obtain only insofar as (i) your dreaming that p includes your seeming, to yourself, to be experiencing p as true, even while (ii) p is false (with your therefore being *mistaken* in thinking that p is true). So (on the strictly Cartesian interpretation of the dreaming possibility), the dreaming as such is even a *prima facie* threat only because of those two other conjuncts within d , the ones that would be true *because* of your dreaming in the way envisaged by Descartes. Once we make their respective roles explicit, as my parsing does, we have no further need to mention the dreaming as such.

¹⁶ The preceding remarks also show why, in my analysis of 1, I am not relying upon an assumption of knowledge's being closed under known entailment. (As was noted in section I, much contemporary epistemological discussion of scepticism treats that assumption as being pivotal to sceptical thinking.)

¹⁷ I have used a similar argument in some other writings, although without noticing the importance of this sceptic's requiring an *independent* or *further* piece of knowledge as support: *Good Knowledge, Bad Knowledge*, pp. 37–40; “Fallibilism and Knowing That One Is Not Dreaming,” at pp. 95–7; “The Grue Possibility as a Sceptical Possibility?,” *Philosophia* 29 (2002), 253–60.

¹⁸ “Beyond Scepticism, to the Best of our Knowledge,” *Mind* 97 (1988), 153–88.

¹⁹ “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist,” *Noûs* 24 (2000), 517–49.

²⁰ S follows in this way (where T reports your passing a test for not dreaming): $k(\sim d) \rightarrow k(T)$; but knowledge that T is external world knowledge; so, by 1, $k(T) \rightarrow k(\sim d)$; hence, by the transitivity of “ \rightarrow ,” $k(\sim d) \rightarrow k(\sim d)$. (This reasoning is adapting, not quoting, Sosa’s.)

²¹ P follows in this way: $k(\sim d) \rightarrow k(T)$; but knowledge that T is external world knowledge; so, by 1, $k(T) \rightarrow k(\sim d)$; hence, $k(\sim d) \leftrightarrow k(T)$; therefore, for some external world knowledge q , $k(\sim d) \leftrightarrow k(q)$. (This reasoning is adapting, not quoting, Pryor’s.)

²² For example, Pryor himself (*ibid.*, pp. 532–41) responds to the external world sceptic by fashioning a concept of *immediate* justification or knowledge. Such justification or knowledge does not rely upon the existence of any epistemically prior justification or knowledge — including therefore any particular cases of justification or knowledge claimed by a Cartesian sceptic to be epistemically prior to any external world knowledge.

²³ So, the following objection would be irrelevant:

If the sceptic is only really asking you to know that p prior to knowing that p , then he wins — because no one can know that p prior to knowing that p . Far from establishing a sceptical failing, therefore, this paper’s argument actually aids the sceptic’s cause.

But again (and as presaged in note 12), my argument has not been about epistemic priority as such. Rather, it concerns epistemic *independence* — specifically, the sceptic’s claim to be describing a *further* or *different* piece of knowledge which you need if you are to know that p . Your needing that further piece of knowledge *earlier* than the knowledge that p would itself be a logically posterior requirement on the sceptic’s part. You require that further piece of knowledge (if the sceptic is right), *regardless* of whether or not you are to have it earlier than, or temporally prior to, having the knowledge that p . The general need for that further piece of knowledge is a logically prior component of the sceptic’s challenge — logically prior, that is, to the putative (and more standardly noticed) epistemic priority component.