

## **Scepticism: A New Perspective**

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### **Structured Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The issue of scepticism has been presented as either a problem without a solution or a self-refuting viewpoint at worst. The irony is that all philosophical traditions target scepticism, which is prevalent and universal. Scepticism's difficulty cannot possibly profess such a trivial, contradictory, and absurd viewpoint to have concerned philosophers.

**Design / Methodology / Approach:** This research paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. The study materials are collected from various kinds of books and journals.

**Findings:** All philosophical traditions target scepticism, which is prevalent and universal. Scepticism's difficulty cannot possibly profess such a trivial, contradictory, and absurd viewpoint to have concerned philosophers. By demonstrating that the problem of scepticism is not the problem of knowledge's impossibility but rather the problem of indeterminacy, we offer scepticism as a real and acceptable philosophical problem.

**Originality / Value:** Philosophical scepticism is the denial of all forms of knowing, not only some forms of generally held knowledge. We may have some rather secure views in this regard, but they never amount to knowledge. Stronger philosophical scepticism confines this denial to particular domains, such as the outside world or moral principles. Even when knowledge as a whole is accepted, it is sometimes disputed that anyone has ever been completely certain. Few people support philosophical scepticism in the strictest sense. It is far more frequently employed as a theoretical tool to test theories in this regard. According to this perspective, it is a philosophical process that may be used to examine a theory in order to identify its flaws and either expose them or change them in order to produce a stronger version of the theory. Philosophical scepticism, on the other hand, is an approach that questions the possibility of certainty in knowledge, whereas methodological scepticism is an approach that scrutinizes all claims to knowledge with the aim of separating true from false claims. This distinction is made by some theorists.

**Paper Type:** Theoretical Research Paper.

**Key Words:** Beliefs, Cartesian, Self-Contradictory, Cognitive, Impossibility, Universe, Sceptic.

## Introduction

Scepticism is commonly understood to be the belief that all knowledge is implausible, and one who has such a belief is referred to as a sceptic. Since the term of knowledge is so nebulous and can mean different things to different people, it is important to understand how the sceptics are using it. It is extremely difficult to explain what is meant by knowledge, which is ostensibly one of the reasons sceptics doubt the existence of knowledge. Nonetheless, knowledge is typically seen as a mental state or a collection of states that are articulated in the form of notions, propositions, assertions, claims, beliefs, theories, etc. in an individual's mind or that are widely acknowledged by a group of people. Further, such mental states are expressible in some commonly understood language. Thus, in this issue, my belief that "Emeralds are green" and "Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in the world" are instances of knowledge, for the belief that "Emeralds are green" and "Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in the world" are believed by the cogniser and are expressed in English. But not all forms of beliefs of the believer are regarded as knowledge. Only those beliefs are regarded as knowledge which are true and there are sufficient evidences for their being true. Being mere true belief is not enough for its being considered as knowledge for incidentally belief may be true of the world but is true due to mere luck. Viewing knowledge as true belief may relate it to the world, but justification is necessary to provide the ground on which a particular belief can be claimed to be true belief about the world. It may be true, but unless it is justified there is no distinction between guess-work and knowledge. Belief can be singled out as knowledge in terms of justification conditions. This definition of knowledge suggests that it has a propositional nature, meaning that it may be articulated as a proposition such as, "S believes that P is such and such, P is true, and S has sufficient grounds for believing P." Knowledge is first and foremost a belief, which indicates that it exists in the mind of the believer. As a result, knowledge is thought of as real, justified belief. Under this concept, knowledge is distinguished from just held views or opinions. The propositional definition sees knowledge as consisting of a knower, the known and the knowing process and their interactions. The belief which the knower possesses is due to the result of knowing process and is about something which is not a belief-state. Thus, the belief that emeralds are green is a case of knowledge because it is a fact that emeralds are green and the knower knows that it is so. The propositional analysis of knowledge therefore tries to understand the world as it is from unbiased and external perspectives. In addition, the reality that we seek knowledge of is declared to be an objective one that is unaffected by the theories and beliefs of the knower.

The idea that justification is an objective concept and epistemically prior to the world's objects sits at the core of the propositional theory of knowledge. This is what Michael Williams calls the Programme of epistemological realism which assumes that there are natural epistemological kinds and epistemological relation independent of the knowing subject." The propositional conception of knowledge is based on two separate but interrelated conditions: First, there should be a mechanism to prove that our beliefs, expressed in the form of ideas, mental images, suppositions etc. are really about of the world. This condition implies that there should be some way to establish the correspondence between a belief and of which it is a belief. This is only possible if we can know the world and its objects as they are or the real nature of the things. Secondly, negatively if we can prove that the world is not different from what we think of, as some philosophers have visualized, this will substantiate the claim that our beliefs about the world are genuinely about the world. This can be called the argument from sceptical hypothesis, for first it presupposes that the world is different from what we think of it and then puts the challenge that it cannot be ruled out. After stating and solving the first requirement, the second condition appears to be unnecessary. Yet, it differs from the previous one in that it is entirely feasible to believe that our views about the world are accurate representations of the world as it is through some correspondence, even when the relation is a result of an illusion and is, therefore, not fully justified.

### **The Received View of Scepticism**

We are unable to overcome the condition of propositional knowledge or the potential for the demon argument, no matter how hard we try. In rejecting the existence of the world and its events, scepticism appears to be effective and meaningful. Philosophers have often demonstrated the rejection of the presence of the outside world throughout the history of philosophy. However, philosophers are not as explicit in proving the non-existence of the world and its objectivity as Descartes has done, but Cartesian spirit is evident throughout the history of philosophy. In the Greek philosophy, Heraclitus' theory of flux and that no one can step into the same river twice was taken as indicative of human inability to discover any fixed immutable thing in the world. His no-permanence theory has culminated in Hume's no-self theory and Locke's definition of matter as "I do-not-know-what" and Mill's definition of matter as "combination of possible and actual sensations" Pyrronist Sextus Empiricus is famous for advocating suspension of one's judgement for no knowledge is certain and the possibility of the world being different from what it looks like cannot be ruled out. Explicit sceptical doubts were raised by some of the sophists. They are reported to have doubted

whether anything exist and have offered argument to prove that even if anything exists, we cannot know it. The phrase "all that I know is that I know nothing" from Socrates perfectly captures the academic scepticism regarding the reality of the world. The endeavor to refute the reality of the world is shown by Zeno's paradox of the impossibility of movement. Although Berkeley's immaterialism was first intended to counter scepticism, it ultimately helps Descartes in his demonstration that all things are merely ideas in the mind of a transcendent God. With a few presumptions, it is simple to understand the Kantian things-in-themselves as denying the reality of the outside world. The general attitude and prevalent view of scepticism is that it is an unsolvable problem. Hume himself concedes that scepticism "admits of no answer and produces no conviction." The Humean pessimism is expressed in some of the recent works on scepticism. Strawson echoes Humean pessimism in conceding the theoretical invulnerability of scepticism, though the problem simply ineffective in our ordinary life." Nagel says that given the objective requirement of knowledge, scepticism is the logical inevitability. This is so "because of the realist claims of objectivity of knowledge" and there is no way we can show the unintelligibility or illiteracy of the requirement of the objective knowledge. Stroud has argued that scepticism is conditionally irrefutable provided the legitimacy of justifying knowledge from an epistemically prior position is granted. But at the same time the programme is not shown to be illegitimate. Thus, Barry Stroud concludes that, "No one knows anything about the world around," for, "there is no good reason to believe anything about the world around." Williams is of the view that scepticism is the logical by-product of what he calls the programme of epistemological realism.

The prevalent and accepted perception of scepticism is thus an issue without a fix. This is a really weird and illogical attitude. A problem that doesn't have a remedy is most obviously not a problem, or isn't even a real problem. Even if there were a problem, there would be no point in trying to solve it as it is inherently unsolvable. This is one reason why scepticism has historically been dismissed as illogical, pointless, or at most a minor issue and never treated seriously. The spirit of the received view is best echoed in Kant's observation about the problem of scepticism. Kant says "it remains a scandal to philosophy... that the existence of things outside us...must be accepted merely on faith and that if anyone thinks good to doubt our knowledge of the world, we are unable to counter by any satisfactory proof." Heidegger further substantiates the received view by saying, "the 'scandal of philosophy' is not that this proof is yet to be given but such proofs are expected and attempted again and again."

Consequently, we have scepticism, which at its best is an intractable issue and at its worst is a position that contradicts itself. According to both accounts, the issue is unimportant and ought to be resolved. This is the general perspective of scepticism, which we refer to as the "accepted view of scepticism" because of its long history and widespread acceptance in both philosophical and non-philosophical circles. It is common for sceptics to be mocked or dismissed for possessing such absurd beliefs. We are familiar of the story of Jonathan Swift's not opening the door to his friend Berkeley, to prove that if Berkeley is correct in propounding the material object consists of ideas only, he can come through the locked idea-door. There is thus the famous story of Dr. Jonathan kicking the stone to prove that there exist material objects contrary to Berkelian scepticism. Moore's attempt to prove that the world exists and is real by raising his hand and saying "here is an object exists..." is again a scoff against Cartesian sceptic." If still sceptics are serious of themselves, they simply are to be ignored because their assumptions and implications do not make any difference to day-to-day life. The problem of scepticism is of innocuous character and does not present any threat to our common sensical understanding of the world. The so-called linguistic analysis and logical positivist's claim that they have dismissed scepticism as "linguistic puzzles" or "pointless philosophical games" arising out of the willful violation, misunderstanding and distortion of the linguistic conventions and meaningful discourses. Scepticism is treated as a pseudo or a silly problem in the history of philosophy.

On the other hand, the unexpected aspect of scepticism is that it continues to be an issue. It has appeared and returned in various forms across all philosophical eras and schools. The force of scepticism, however concealed, permeates all philosophical systems. The pursuit of knowledge goes hand in hand with the pursuit of skepticism's solutions, and it has traditionally been viewed as the invisible foe that must be vanquished before any useful solutions are proposed. Descartes was most troubled by scepticism, so he focused all of his philosophical efforts on figuring out how to prevent the devil's nefarious creation. Kant was said to be arouse from his dogmatic slumber by Hume's sceptical studies. No self-contradictory and unsolvable problem can survive the time and great mind for such a long time. The problem of scepticism is still a persistent problem to be taken seriously. Therefore, there must be something wrong somewhere in the received view of scepticism. What then is the real issue involved in scepticism?

## The Normativity of Scepticism

It's intriguing to learn how scepticism has managed to hold such an odd and paradoxical position. Sceptics' obsession with the unjustified claim that knowledge construction must begin at the very beginning and that knowledge cannot exist before the formation of such a technique is one factor in the emergence of such a stance. Their adage appears to be: Method first, knowledge second. The sceptic implies the cogniser is intellectually a perfect and omnipotent entity to know the world as it is or to avoid the sceptical hypotheses, which is a mistaken assumption about the cognitive and logical capacities of humans. Sceptic undercuts the cogniser's cognitive capabilities and limits by idealizing the cogniser. In fact, the cognisers have a number of cognitive limitations. For example, cognisers have limited information processing ability, finite memory storage capacity, subjected to mal-observation and hallucination, vulnerable to logical fallacies and error in reasoning. Often, they intentionally and fallaciously argue to safeguard their interests. Their cognitive mechanism is constrained by the time and energy available. The human cognition is socially and culturally embedded and posited. Therefore, the sceptics are highly unreasonable to expect to rule out the sceptical possibility once and for all to gain knowledge. Once the fallibility of the cogniser is accepted, it is unfair to expect certainty or unreasonable to expect him to rule out the sceptical hypothesis once and for all.

Given the apparent obstacle of the cognitive limitations and the sceptical threat, the real problem scepticism poses, is then to explain how we nevertheless know what we believe about the world around us to be true. The problem is to give some kind of explanation or account of how our belief about the world is possible assuming that it is possible. It is a fact that we doubt some facts about the history, but we do not doubt all the documents relating to the Indian independence movement. We don't consistently doubt that our friends are lying about their mental states and conclude from that that they do not exist. Not only that an ordinary of language has a good understanding of language and as a matter of fact, there is no much problem in interpersonal communication. We understand others well except in paradigmatic cases. We hardly have any doubt that the world existed and entertain any thought-experiment that it came into existence just five minutes before with all its complexities. The world-view projected in different sciences are instrumentally helpful in predicting and explaining various phenomena in the world. On the basis of findings of such sciences and common sense, we are able to retain some of our beliefs about the world as true and some others are rejected as false.

The task to explain how our communication and interpersonal relationships are feasible, how we are able to distinguish between true and erroneous views, and how meaning is communicated among the members of a society, whether there is any scepticism engaged in these concerns. We have many different and varied ideas at a given time. For instance, we hold the notions that all people are mortal and that the planet continues to revolve around the sun. Both at the individual and communal levels,  $2 + 2 = 4$ , etc. Out of the stock of beliefs some of them are accepted as true and some others are rejected as unacceptable. For example, the belief that the earth is flat once assumed as a true belief is now unaccepted and  $2 + 2 = 4$  is retained. Expressing the problem in a different way is to explain how and on what basis some of our beliefs are justified and accepted as true and some others are rejected. The problem of belief-transition can be defined as involving the question of when, how and why the proceeding from a given belief states to the wider set is possible or how we acquire, modify and eliminate our belief on the basis of the given set of beliefs. The problem of scepticism so stated is a problem related to the issue of the validation or justification of belief-transition. The issue of validity is concerned with the question: What beliefs should be transitioned from the given set of beliefs and how best? The matter is to define the rule of transition of offering necessary and sufficient condition of transition. The task of such norm for belief transition is twofold first task is to eliminate transitioned beliefs which are not considered to be valid transition, second, to bring out the legitimate transition or in prescribing how a belief should be justified and prohibiting the unwarranted justification or beliefs.

The goal of Cartesian "scepticism" is to demonstrate that we cannot establish a normative rule by examining the facts of the outside world, the facts of the cognizer's thinking, or the exterior behaviour of the cognizer. The Cartesian dream argument will not hold water if it attempts to prove that there is no outside world or other minds since it is impossible to know something for sure or to completely rule out a skeptic's hypothesis. At best the incorrigibility of our beliefs can be implied from the possibility that our beliefs are incompatible with the facts in the world. S is dreaming of P does not imply that "not -P", for one may dream that it is raining and it may in fact be raining. In fact, the fact that I am dreaming now is a fact about the world that makes sense only when there is a non-dreamt world. The thought-experiments themselves hold the reality of a cap or supercomputer etc. But the point the dream hypothesis tries to prove is that if one's belief that it is raining is the result of one's dreaming, then its truth is in certain way, accidental and there is no logical way to differentiate the true beliefs

from false ones. Even the Gettier's paradox can be interpreted to show that our beliefs are justified or unjustified for reason other than the required correspondence with the fact, even if it is admitted that our beliefs are true and justified about the world. What is sceptical about here is that there is no normative ground to accept one belief rather than the other beliefs as true and justified or our base beliefs cannot help us to determinate the projected beliefs or the same given beliefs can support two opposite even contradictory belief systems. Thus, what the new scepticism tries to show is not the impossibility of knowledge, rather than the indeterminacy in belief- transitions.

### **Scepticism in the New Forms**

Three modern sceptical theories—rule-following scepticism, the new riddle of induction, and under-determination of theories—developed by Kripke, Goodman, and Quine, respectively, have all contributed to the normative interpretation of scepticism. Kripke's rule-following scepticism typifies this scepticism. The scepticism raised in the context of rules and their applications is known as rule-following scepticism. Language usage is one of society's norms and conventions. Language is governed by rules since it is a totally symbolic activity. We can only comprehend other people's rule-governed behaviour through observation. Observation has limitations in the sense the intentions, desires are not observable and therefore, we need to read the intentions of others in their actions. Since man is a free being capable of invoking his own rules and obey them, one cannot be sure of whether rule governed behaviour of man is indicative of any regularity or not. Kripke poses the problem of rule-following scepticism by hypothesizing another rule just like our arithmetical rule of addition with one important difference. The difference being that the other rule which he calls quus function is different from the plus function in some unobserved cases while it is identical to the plus function on all observed cases. Kripke demonstrates that any rule governed behaviour of an individual in the act of adding numbers is equally a rule governed behaviour of the act of adding numbers using quus function. By generalizing from this, Kripke is in a position to claim that any rule governed behaviour of a person can be interpreted in more than one way since the behaviour fits many competing rules similar to quus.

Therefore, even if one has behaved in the past in a certain manner that may not be sufficient ground to believe that he would behave in the similar manner in future. That is to say, all the facts put together about an individual cannot give us any certainty that he would behave in the same manner in future. There does not seem to be any fact which would justify the rule in



such a manner that it ensures the future course of actions. Nelson Goodman, another name in the contemporary philosophy seems to pose the spirit of normative nature of scepticism in his celebrated philosophical puzzle called the new riddle of induction. Goodman poses a riddle or paradox by arguing that the same evidence statement gives equal inductive support to two contradictory or incompatible predicates or hypotheses, i.e., the projections of predicates or adaptation of hypotheses may disagree or conflict for the unexamined instances of the wider universe. Goodman calls this paradox as "the new riddle of induction."

The new puzzle of induction claims that it is feasible to imagine a system of predicates that is competitive with our own, in which case our conclusion that all inspected emeralds possess greenness will be comparable to our conclusion that all studied emeralds currently contain non-greenness. The conclusion that the remaining emeralds have greenness is incompatible with the conclusion that they also have non-greenness based on these observations. Both the hypotheses have as much inductive support for both hypotheses as both of them have equal numbers of positive instances in favour of them and no negative instances against them up to now. However, the future projection or predicates about the wider universe of discourse will be inconsistent with the inference that remaining emeralds possess non-greenness. There is no logical compulsion to exclude the unwarranted projections like blue and include the lawful projection green for the adaptation of the hypotheses that "all emeralds will be green" from the evidence statements that "all emeralds examined before a certain time is green." Goodman argues that this is possible if we can imagine a predicate such as 'grue' which is to be understood as applying to a thing at a given time  $t$  if and only if either the thing is then green and the time is prior to time  $t$ , or the thing is then blue and the time not prior to.

This new kind of sceptical issue, which takes the form of under determination of theories, was put forth by Quine, another notable figure in contemporary philosophy. According to the theory under determination principle, theories that are logically contradictory can still account for all potential evidence. While not contradicting one another, it is possible for two theories to have an empirical equal. Picking one hypothesis over another that is in competition is not an easy task. Leading to an issue with scepticism. Because there isn't a strong connection between theory and observation, under determination of the theory becomes a problem. However, the observational sentence itself may be infested with many controversies. For instance, an issue that is related to the observation sentence is the indeterminacy of reference. In other words, the ontological relativity of such observational sentences does not allow us to fix the reference. This in turn has serious implication for

translation whether one considers word to word translation or sentence translation within a language or across the languages. We see that this theory selection problem is conceptually related to quiz and grew problems. Theories are made up of a group of connected notions. And similar to how rules and their applications are related, so is the relationship between theory and its application or observation. Quine's three indeterminacies are effectively the normative dilemma of scepticism, even though he never directly states this, even in his later works.

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