

Epistemology: A guide

1. *The best case for skepticism about the external world?* (Stroud, “The Problem of the External World”)

- Can we really know anything about the world outside our own minds?

Barry Stroud aims to understand the attraction of skepticism about the external world, why knowledge of the external world based on sense experience poses a philosophical problem.

首先说明两个公理：

1. knowledge = knowledge of the truth

——知识指对“真理”的认识，即“正确地认识”

2. something can be possible without being real or actual

——有一些现实中不存在的事是有可能发生的（“存在”与“可能”不等价）

For instance, it's possible for winged horses to exist, even though none actually do. Likewise for wizards, dragons, phlogiston, the luminiferous ether, etc.

设想以下场景：

在一个寒冷的夜晚，笛卡尔在他的书房里工作，坐在离舒适的火堆几英尺的地方。他暂时不确定他的叙述应该如何进行，他休息了一下，把注意力转移到火堆上。

他看到它五颜六色的火焰在闪烁；他听到它噼里啪啦的响声；他感觉到它散发的热量；他闻到木头燃烧的香味。鉴于这一切，笛卡尔当然相信他在火的附近。

但这些感觉经验是否能使他知道他在火附近？

Imagine Descartes at work in his study on a cold night, sitting a few feet from a comforting fire. Unsure for the moment how his narrative should best proceed, he takes a break and turns his attention to the fire. He sees its colorful flames flitting and flickering; he hears it crackling and popping; he feels its heat emanating; he smells the fragrant wood burning. In light of all this, Descartes of course believes he's near a fire. But do these sense experiences enable him to know he's near a fire?

我们很难想象笛卡尔的感觉(sense)使他处于一个更有利的位置来获得对外部世界的知识。因此，如果我们对“这些感觉经验是否能使他知道他在火附近？”这一问题的回答是否定的，那么我们没有理由认为我们可能通过感觉获取外部世界的任何知识。

但是，如何断定笛卡尔不是在梦中呢？在一个完全现实的梦中，情形可能完全相同（perfectly realistic dream）。在梦中也能有这样的感觉，因此可能无法通过拥有这些感觉断定笛卡尔是清醒的还是在梦中。

然而，“在梦中”和“在火附近”是不兼容的，换言之，因此笛卡尔为了断定他在火附近，必须排除在梦中的可能性。

同时，“在梦中”这种可能性之所以能够威胁到笛卡尔认为他在火附近的论断，仅仅是因为它有可能是真的

Notice that, on this way of thinking, in order for the dream-possibility to potentially threaten Descartes's knowledge of the fire, he doesn't need to know, or even so much as believe, that it is actually true. No, the dream-possibility threatens simply because Descartes recognizes that it is possibly true, and that if it were actually true, he wouldn't know that he's near a fire.

- 首先，我们能不能通过感官的经验来排除“在梦中”的可能性？

——不能，因为正如前文所说，在梦中也能有类似于在现实中的感觉

Could Descartes ever come to know that the dream-possibility is false? Sense experience itself won't enable such knowledge because, as we've already said, any sense experience is perfectly compatible with the dream-possibility.

- 那么有没有可能通过一些测试使他知道他正在做梦呢？

——不能，因为为了达成这一点，他需要知道他不是正在做一个关于这种测试的梦

But isn't there some test he could perform to determine whether he is merely dreaming? Unfortunately not, because in order for him to learn from the test, he'd need to know that he wasn't merely dreaming that he was performing the test!

- 因此我们实际上得出了一个论证：

1. 如果笛卡尔不知道他在火附近，那么我们就永远不知道关于外部世界的任何事情。(前提)
2. 笛卡尔不知道他在火堆附近。(前提)
3. 所以我们永远不知道关于外部世界的任何事情。(结论)

1. If Descartes doesn't know that he's near a fire, then we never know anything about the external world.
(Premise)

2. Descartes doesn't know that he's near a fire. (Premise)

3. So we never know anything about the external world. (From 1 and 2)

Stroud认为前提1是合理的，因此我们只需要考察前提2，我们通过以下论证来证明前提2也是对的：

a. 笛卡尔知道“在梦中”的可能性与“他知道自己在火附近”的可能性是不兼容的

b. 如果笛卡尔知道某种可能性与“他知道某个命题”不兼容，那么，为了让他知道这个命题是真的，他必须知道上述的这种可能性是假的

c. 因此为了让笛卡尔知道“自己在火附近”，他必须知道“在梦中”的可能性是假的（根据a和b）

d. 然而，笛卡尔不可能知道“在梦中”的可能性是假的

e. 所以，笛卡尔不可能知道“他在火附近”（根据c和d）

a. Descartes knows that the dream-possibility is incompatible with his knowing that he's near a fire.
(Premise)

b. If Descartes knows that a possibility is incompatible with his knowing some specific claim, then in order for him to know the specific claim, he must know that the possibility in question is false. (Premise)

c. So in order for Descartes to know that he's near a fire, he must know that the dream-possibility is false.
(From a and b)

d. But Descartes couldn't know that the dream-possibility is false.
(Premise)

e. So Descartes doesn't know that he's near a fire. (From c and d)

e和2实际上是等价的。这样，我们就得出了“我们永远不知道关于外部世界的任何事情”这一结论。

- 要反驳这一结论，我们只能再去寻找前提中的错误。
- Stroud认为c是假的，而c是根据a和b得出的，这就要求我们拒绝a和b之中的一个。而a显然是正确的，这就要求我们拒绝b
- 然而，拒绝b是困难的，因为b是我们通常评价一个论断是否正确的标准：

考虑一个观鸟者，我们问她：“你正看观察的是什么呢？”

她说：“这是一只goldfinch。”

“为什么你这么认为？”

“因为它是黄色的。”

“可是canary也是黄色的，为什么你不认为这是一只canary呢？”

Consider for instance a bird watcher who judges a certain bird to be a goldfinch. We ask her why she thinks it's a goldfinch. "Because it's yellow," she says.

"But for all you've said," we respond, "it's possible that it's a canary – canaries are yellow too." We don't think she knows it's a goldfinch, because she knows very well that canaries aren't goldfinches, and yet she doesn't know it's not a canary. She must rule out this relevant possibility, the canary-possibility, in order to know it's a goldfinch.

因此，我们需要考虑以下两种情形是否相同：

1. 笛卡尔必须排除“在梦中”的可能性才能知道他在火附近
2. 观鸟者必须排除这是一只canary的可能性才能知道这是一只goldfinch

上述两者相同吗？如果不同，为什么不同？

The question then becomes whether the dream-possibility is in all relevant respects similar to the canary-possibility, so that when we insist that the bird watcher must rule out the canary-possibility, we thereby commit ourselves to insisting that Descartes must rule out the dream-possibility. Does Descartes have to rule out the dreampossibility in order to know there's a fire nearby, as the bird watcher must rule out the canary-possibility in order to know that she's looking at a goldfinch? If not, why not? Each subject knows the possibility in question is incompatible with his or her knowing the claim in question. So what could be the difference?

如果我们对上述两者的差异性有合理的回应，那么，这将对解决“外部世界是否存在”的怀疑论论断有很大帮助。