**Coherentists** argue that the coherence (roughly, the mutual support) of a set of beliefs offers justification for them. Skeptical hypothesis offers no good explanation of anything. It neither supports, nor is supported by, other beliefs of ours. Our belief set is better justified if it does not include the skeptical hypothesis. So, I'm justified to think that I'm not a BIV.

## Denying P1

**Contextualism** argues that the standards for the truth of knowledge attributions vary with the context. Even though we admittedly do not know the skeptical hypothesis to be false in philosophical contexts, we can still know ordinary things in ordinary contexts, where the standard is lower.

Dretske proposes a **Tracking Account**, which asserts that knowledge is true belief that is based on experience which, in the nearest possible worlds in which the belief is false, wouldn't be there. In other words, knowledge is belief that successfully tracks truth within a certain neighbourhood of possibilities. But knowledge of ordinary facts does not require us to track remote possible worlds such as the ones described by the skeptical hypothesis.

> Painted mule pretending to be zebra case

**Fallibilism** asserts that knowledge does not require absolute certainty. The belief must be true. But it is not necessary that we eliminate every possibility of error. Since P1 suggests that knowledge of P entails knowledge of everything that is incompatible with P, it is a form of infallibilism.

## Self-Refutation

Hilary Putnam's **semantic externalism** has it that what a word means depends on causal interactions between us and the world.

> "Water" refers to H2O for Earth people, and XYZ for Twin Earth people.

So, according to Putnam, BIVs do not mean the same as we do, when we both think "I'm a BIV".

He argues that this sentence is always false, whether uttered by humans or BIVs, because

> If you are a BIV, then your sentence means that you are a B*iV*, which is false.
> If you are a human, then your sentence means that you are a BIV, which is false.

But Putnam's objection to skepticism loses power, if the skeptical hypothesis were that we have been humans all along, until very recently being converted to BIVs. In this case, our words mean as they do, because we have causally interacted with real objects. We would then be able to trying say that we are BIVs.

Also, as Anthony Brueckner points out, even if Putnam were right, each of us would still not be able to tell whether we are humans or BIVs. All we know, is that the proposition expressed by our sentence "I am a BIV" is false. But we do not know which of the two propositions our sentence expresses.

## 2.5 STS 5 Can Skepticism Be Refuted? Jonathan Vogel (YES) versus Richard Fumerton (Depends)

**Vogel**

Vogel argues that by appealing to Inference to the Best Explanation, we can defend common sense beliefs against skeptical hypotheses.

### The Skeptical Argument

Vogel takes the skeptical argument to be this.

> In order to know P, my belief that P must not be underdetermined.
>
> My belief that P is underdetermined.
>
> Therefore, I do not know that P.

For a belief P to be evidentially underdetermined is for one's evidence to be unable to non-arbitrarily favour P or its competitors.

According to Vogel, knowledge is governed by the

> Underdetermination Principle of Knowledge v1: If q is a competitor to p, then one can know p only if one can non-arbitrarily reject q.
>
> Underdetermination Principle of Knowledge v2: If q is a competitor to p, then one can know p only if p has more epistemic merit (for S) than q.

### Domestic versus Exotic Skepticisms

To legitimise his use of Inference to the Best Explanation, Vogel distinguishes between what he calls "domestic" skepticism from "exotic" skepticism.

| Domestic Skepticism | Exotic Skepticism |
|---|---|
| Embraces our principles governing what counts as knowledge and justification | Contests our principles governing what counts as knowledge and justification |
| Worrying, need be refuted | Not worrying, do not need to be refuted |
| Can be refuted | Cannot be refuted |

In particular, domestic skepticism allows Inference to the Best Explanation.

### The Refutation of Skepticism

Vogel thinks that the second premise of the skeptical argument is false: our ordinary beliefs have the epistemic advantage of explaining facts about our mental lives better.

A skeptic could simply claim that our experience is caused in a delusory manner (Minimal Skeptical Hypothesis). However, Vogel argues, this hypothesis has no explanatory power; the putative explanation it has is impoverished and ad hoc.

Alternatively, the skeptic could borrow the causal-explanatory structure of our ordinary beliefs (Real World Hypothesis, things are by and large what we take them to be) but substitute real world objects with their skeptical versions (Isomorphic Skeptical Hypothesis).

He then assesses the relative merits of the two hypotheses.

The Isomorphic Skeptical Hypothesis, according to Vogel, has no explanatory advantage (e.g. does not deepen our understanding of anything), but lacks simplicity, and thereby suffers explanatory disadvantage, because it has to make do with pseudo-shapes and pseudo-locations instead of genuine ones.

> E.g. While it is metaphysically impossible for two distinct objects to share the same location, it is metaphysically possible for them to share the same pseudo-location. But then the Isomorphic Skeptical Hypothesis would have to postulate additional empirical regularities to the effect that two objects are contingently impossible to share the same pseudo-location within the simulated world.

The key to his argument is this:

Some relations between properties are necessary.

One cannot substitute one property for another in one's hypothesis and assume that the explanatory structure has not changed.

The skeptic has no reason to think that the property in the Isomorphic Skeptical Hypothesis can play the same role as in the Real World Hypothesis.

**Fumerton**

If we agree with the skeptic that the requirement for our having knowledge is that we have justification that eliminates the possibility of error, then the skeptic starts in a very strong position.

This difficulty arises mainly from the fact that the skeptical scenario is designed exactly so that any justification I have for an ordinary belief is exactly the same kind of justification for the skeptical alternative scenario.

But most epistemologists have abandoned this strong conception of knowledge and justification. Instead, a better way to evaluate the skeptical argument is to put it on equal grounds with ordinary beliefs, as Vogel did.

### Underdetermination

Fumerton reformulates Vogel's underdetermination principle of knowledge in terms of justification.

> Underdetermination Principle of Justification v1: If q is a competitor to p, then there is justification for one to believe p only if one can non-arbitrarily reject q.

> Underdetermination Principle of Justification v2: If q is a competitor to p, then there is justification for S to believe p only if p has more epistemic merit for S than q.

Fumerton reminds us here that the necessary condition for justification might be a non-arbitrary way to reject the disjunction of all q.

Since the likelihood of the disjunction of highly unlikely propositions might be high, the non-skeptic potentially faces a bigger challenge than often anticipated.

Fumerton asserts that taking skepticism seriously amounts to meeting her on the level playing field, not assuming that the skeptic has the burden to prove we have no knowledge. As a result, we should not assume that ordinary, common sense beliefs are innocent until proven guilty, or skeptical scenarios are guilty until proven innocent.

### Choosing from Among Competitors

Fumerton adopts a version of foundationalism which restricts base propositions to the phenomenal. Roughly, this means that those beliefs that do not require justification are propositions about how things appear to one.

He thinks that assuming his version of foundationalism is unharmful to the debate with Vogel, because Vogel positions his argument from the best explanation to be neutral between competing views on justificatory structure.

He proceeds to ask how one could move from justification for propositions about appearance to justification for common sense beliefs about the world.

Two conditions for this to work: (1) evidence of S must make p epistemically probable, (2) S must be aware of the fact that her evidence makes p probable.

Inferential Internalism: knowing about external world requires (a) that we have evidence making P probable, and (b) that we are justified to believe that this evidence makes P probable

The crucial implication of Inferential Internalism is that we would need to seek justification for the belief that our evidence supports the proposition P.

### Epistemic Probability

Fumerton thinks that the above support relation between evidence E and the proposition P is constituted by the probability connection existing between E and P.

"If there is a solution to skepticism, it involves the ability to know a priori epistemic probability claims."

Since, it is extremely hard to justify such a priori knowledge, skepticism is a daunting threat.

Fumerton's inferential internalism implies that inference to the best explanation also depends on our having a justified belief that one explanation being the best makes it more probable.

### *The Underdetermined Challenge of Skepticism*

Of course, we might still ask the conditional question: *assuming* certain forms of reasoning are legitimate, can we choose the common sense over various skeptical hypotheses?

Allowing which principles of reasoning to be unconditionally true then determines how challenging the response to skepticism becomes.

Our prospect of responding to the skeptic also depends on what we take external world propositions to assert. If we take them to assert thick, substantive properties, then our common sense beliefs are undermined by science itself. If we take them to assert merely relational properties, then skepticism becomes increasingly easier to refute at the cost of the external world propositions being increasingly vacuous.

In sum, Fumerton challenges any response to skepticism to come up with an answer for the following questions.

1. How can we have direct knowledge of what makes what probable.

2. How can we identify what body of evidence enables us to know that skeptical hypotheses are false.

In particular, Fumerton thinks that Vogel has not shown that inference to the best explanation successfully meets the challenges of skepticism.