

Knowledge and Reality

Scepticism and the External World

Can one know that one has hands while not being in a position to know that one is not a handless brain in a vat? Why might the issue seem important?

Essential Reading

- Moore, G. E. (1939), "Proof of an External World", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 25, pp. 273-300
- Putnam, Hilary (1981), "Brains in a Vat", in his *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapter 1
- Sosa, Ernest (1999), "How to Defeat Opposition to Moore", *Noûs*, vol. 33, pp. 141-53
- Wright, Crispin (2002), "(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John McDowell", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 65, no. 2, pp. 330-48

Additional Reading

- Davidson, Donald (1975), "Thought and Talk", in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 155-70
- Nozick, Robert (1981), *Philosophical Explanations*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 197-247
- Craig, Edward (1989), "Nozick and the Sceptic: The Thumbnail Version", *Analysis*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 161-2
- Craig, Edward (1990), "Davidson and the Sceptic: The Thumbnail Version", *Analysis*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 213-4
- Hill, Christopher S. (1996), "Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Scepticism", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 567-81
- Pryor, James (2000), "The Sceptic and the Dogmatist", *Noûs*, vol. 34, pp. 517-49

Past Paper Questions

- Should philosophers try to prove the existence of external objects? (2001, 1)
- If I know that I am in Oxford, and I know that being in Oxford implies not being in New York, does it follow that I know that I am not in New York? (2002, 2)
- Can you show that you are not a brain in a vat? (2003, 1)
- Does the sceptic simply set impossibly high standards for knowledge? (2003, 2)
- "The correct analysis of propositional knowledge should reveal where arguments for radical scepticism go wrong." Discuss. (2004, 3a)
- What is the point, if any, of scepticism? (2005, 2a)
- "Scepticism is a corollary of realism." Discuss. (2005, 2b)
- If I know that I am sitting in an exam room, must I also know that I am not falsely dreaming that I am sitting in an exam room? (2007, 2b)
- "When I see a tomato before me, and on that basis judge that there is a tomato before me, the content of my judgment outruns my evidence for it." Discuss. (2007, 6)
- What reason do I have to think that perceptible things exist when I am not perceiving them? (2007, 7)
- Does semantic externalism provide a good answer to scepticism? (2008, 6)

- Can one know without being in a position to know that one knows? (2010, 1a)
- “The problem of external world scepticism has no acceptable solution.” Discuss. (2011, 3)
- Can I know that p yet be unaware that I know that p? (2012, 5)
- Can one know that one has hands while not being in a position to know that one is not a handless brain in a vat? Why might the issue seem important? (2013, 4)
- “The best responses to the problem of external world scepticism ultimately concede a lot to the sceptic.” Discuss. (2014, 2b)