nothing but sophistry and illusion. Are you convinced by Hume's reasoning? If not, how would you go about arguing against him?

2. Do you understand Hume's argument against justifying our belief that the future will resemble the past? Note that (1) the foundation of reasoning regarding matters of fact is the idea of causation, (2) the foundation of reasoning concerning causation is experience, and (3) the foundation of all conditions regarding trust in experience is the principle of the uniformity of nature (for example, bread will continue to nourish us in the future as it has in the past and the sun will rise tomorrow because it always has in the past). But why should we accept (3) the uniformity of nature? There is no contradiction in supporting its opposite (for example, that bread will cease to nourish us or that the sun will not rise tomorrow). We cannot reason that it will continue to do so because it has always done so in the past, for that is begging the question. It seems that the foundation of (3) is our trust in causation of which (3) is supposed to be the foundation. Do you see the circularity? Can you find anything wrong in Hume's reasoning?

III.22 An Argument Against Skepticism

JOHN HOSPERS

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Study Questions

1. What are the three senses of “know” that Hospers describes? Which is the most important philosophically?
2. What are the three conditions for propositional knowledge?
3. Why is it important to have good evidence before one can rightly be said to know?
4. What are the weak and strong senses of knowledge?
5. How does this distinction bear on the claims of skepticism?

I. REQUIREMENTS FOR KNOWING

The word “know” is slippery. It is not always used in the same way. Here are some of its principal uses:

[Senses of “know”]

1. Sometimes when we talk about knowing, we are referring to acquaintance of some kind. For example, “Do you know Richard Smith?” means approximately the same as “Are you acquainted with Richard Smith? (have you met him? etc.).”

2. Sometimes we speak of knowing how: Do you know how to ride a horse, do you know how to use a soldering iron? We even use a colloquial noun, “know-how,” in talking about this. Knowing how is an ability— we know how to ride a horse if we have the ability to ride a horse, and the test of whether we have the ability is whether in the appropriate situation we can perform the activity in question.

3. But by far the most frequent use of the word “know”—and the one with which we shall be primarily concerned—is the propositional sense: “I know that...” where the word “that” is followed by a proposition: “I know that I am now reading a book,” “I know that I am an American citizen,” and so on. There is some relation between this last sense of “know” and the earlier ones. We cannot be acquainted with Smith without knowing some things about him (without knowing that certain propositions about him are true), and it is difficult to see how one can know how to swim without knowing some true propositions about swimming, concerning what one must do with your arms and legs when in the water. (But the dog knows how to swim, though presumably he knows no propositions about swimming.)

[Conditions for knowing that] Now, what is required for us to know in this third and most important sense? Taking the letter p to stand for any proposition, what requirements must be met in order for one to assert truly that he knows p? There are, after all, many people who claim to know something when they don't; so how can one separate the rightful claims to know from the mistaken ones?

a. p must be true.

b. The moment you have some reason to believe that a proposition is not true, this immediately negates a person's claim to know it. You can't know p if p isn't true. If I say, “I know p, but p is not true,” my statement is self-contradictory, for part of what is involved in knowing p is that p is true. Similarly, if I say, “He knows p, but p is not true,” this too is self-contradictory. It may be that I thought I knew p but if p is false, I didn't really know it. I only thought I did. If I nevertheless claim to know p while admitting that p is false, my hearer may rightly conclude that I have not yet learned how to use the word “know.” This is already implicit in our previous discussion, for what is it that you know about p when you know p? You know that p is true, of course; the very formulation gives away the case: Knowing p is knowing that p is true.

But the truth-requirement, though necessary, is not sufficient. There are plenty of true assertions, for example in nuclear physics, that you and I do not know to be true unless we happen to be specialists in that area. But the fact that they are true does not imply that we know them to be true...

b. Not only must p be true. We must believe that p is true. This may be called the “subjective requirement.” We must have a certain attitude toward p—not merely that of wondering or speculating about p, but positively believing that p is true. “I know that p is true, but I don't believe that it is” would not only be a very peculiar thing to say, it would entitle our listeners to conclude that we had not learned in what circumstances to use the word “know.” There may be numerous statements that you believe but do not know to be true, but there can be none which you know to be true but don’t believe.

since believing is a part (a defining characteristic) of knowing.

"I know p" implies "I believe p," and "He knows p" implies "He believes p," for believing is a defining characteristic of knowing. But believing is a part (a defining characteristic) of knowing. Hence, knowing is a part (defining characteristic) of believing.

There is no contradiction whatever in saying, "He believes p (that is, believes it to be true), but p is not true." Indeed, we say things of this kind all the time: "He believes that people are persecuting him, but of course it isn’t true."...

We have now discussed two requirements for knowing, an "objective" one (p must be true) and a "subjective" one (you must believe p). Are these sufficient? Can you be said to know something if you believe it and if what you believe is true? If so, we can simply define knowledge as true belief, and that will be the end of the matter.

Unfortunately, however, the situation is not so simple. Truthfully one must believe p. A proposition may be true, and you may believe it to be true, and yet you may not know it to be true. Suppose you believe that there are sentient beings on Mars, and suppose that in the course of your discovery of extraterrestrial life you have landed there, your belief turns out to be true. The statement was true at the time you uttered it, and you also believed it at the time you uttered it—but did you know it to be true at the time you uttered it? Certainly not, we would be inclined to say; you were not in a position to know it. It was a lucky guess. Even if you had some evidence that it was true, you didn’t know it was true at the time you said it. Some further condition, therefore, is required to prevent a holdover from passing as knowledge. c. You must have evidence for p (reason to believe p). When you guessed which sides of the coin would be heads, you had no reason to believe that your guesses would be correct, so you did not know it. But after you watched all the tosses and carefully observed which way the coin tossed each time, then you knew. You had the evidence of your senses—as well as of people around you, and photographs if you wished to take them—that this throw was heads, that one tails, and so on. Similarly, when you predict on the basis of tonight’s red sunset that tomorrow’s weather will be fair, you don’t yet know that your prediction will be borne out by the facts; you have some reason (perhaps) to believe it, but you cannot be sure. But tomorrow when you go outdoors and see for yourself what the weather is like, you do know for sure; when tomorrow comes you have the full evidence before you, which you do not yet have tonight. Tomorrow "the evidence is in;" tonight, it is not knowledge but only an "educated guess."

[Problem] This, then, is our third requirement—evidence. Believe this and this principle begins to break down. How much evidence must there be? "Some evidence" won’t suffice as an answer: there may be some evidence that tomorrow will be sunny, but you don’t yet know it. How about "all the evidence that is available?" But this won’t do either; all the evidence that is available (and since there are an infinite number of angles, who could?), and even if we have looked at it steadily for half an hour, we have not done so for a hundred hours, or a million; and yet it would seem (if the evidence had been exposed to us this way, as we shall see) that if one observation provides evidence, a thousand observations should provide more evidence—and when could the accumulation of evidence end?...

How about "enough evidence to give us good reason to believe it?" But how much evidence is this? I may have known someone for years and found him to be scrupulously honest during all that time; by virtually any criterion, this would constitute good evidence that he will be honest the next time—and yet he may not be; suppose that the next time he steals someone’s wallet. I had good reason to believe that he would remain honest, but nevertheless I didn’t know that he would remain honest, for it was not true. We are all familiar with cases in which someone had good reason to believe a proposition that nevertheless turned out to be false.

What then is sufficient? We are now tempted to say, "Complete evidence—all the evidence there could ever be—the words, everything." But if we say this, let us notice that there are very few propositions whose truth we can claim to know. Most of those propositions that in daily life we claim to know without the slightest hesitation we would not know according to this criterion. For example, we say, "I know that if I were to let go of this pencil, it would fall," and we don’t have the slightest hesitation about it; but although we may have excellent evidence (pencils and other objects have always fallen when let go), we don’t have complete evidence, for we have not yet observed the outcome of letting go of this pencil. To take an even more obvious case, we say, "I know that there is a book before me now," but we have not engaged in every possible observation that would be relevant to determining the truth of this statement: We haven’t examined the book as an object (the one we take to be a book) from all angles (and since there are an infinite number of angles, who could?), and even if we have looked at it steadily for half an hour, we have not done so for a hundred hours, or a million; and yet it would seem (if the evidence had been exposed to us this way, as we shall see) that if one observation provides evidence, a thousand observations should provide more evidence—and when could the accumulation of evidence end?...

II. STRONG AND WEAK SENSES OF "KNOW"

[Disputes About Knowing] In daily life we say we know—not just believe or suspect; but know—that heavier-than-air objects fall, that snow is white, that we can read and write, and countless other things. If someone denies this, and no fact cited by the one disputant suffices to convince the other, we may well suspect that there is a verbal issue involved: In this case, that they are operating on two different meanings of "know," because they construe the third requirement—the evidence requirement—differently.

[Case 2] Suppose I say, "There is a bookcase in my office," and someone challenges this as...
Now the difference in the criterion of knowing between the two disputants begins to emerge. According to me, I did know \( p \) in the first case because my belief was based on excellent evidence and was true. According to my opponent, I did not know \( p \) in the first case because my evidence was still less than complete—I wasn’t in the room seeing or touching the bookcase when I made the statement. It seems, then, that I am operating with a less demanding definition of ‘know that’ than he. I am using ‘know’ in the weak sense, in which I have a propositional attitude which I believe to have good reason for believing it and it is true. But he is using ‘know’ in a more demanding sense: He is using it in the strong sense, which requires that in order to know a propositional attitude to be true, I must believe it, and I must have absolutely conclusive evidence in favor of it.

[Exemplars] Let us contrast these two cases:

Suppose that after a routine medical examination the excited doctor reports to me that the X-ray photographs show my heart has no heart. I should tell him to get a new machine. I should be inclined to say that the fact that I have a heart is one of the few things that I can count on as absolutely certain. But if I said it, I think he’d say I didn’t know it. Furthermore, how could my blood circulate if I didn’t have one? Suppose that later on I suffer a severe injury and undergo a surgery operation. Afterwards the catastrophe sages solemnly declare that they searched my chest cavity and found no heart, and that they made incisions and looked about in other likely places but found it not. They are convinced that I am without a heart. They are unable to understand how circulation can occur or what accounts for the thumping in my chest. They are argumentative and suspiciously sincere, and they have clear photographs of my interior spaces. What would be my attitude? Would it be to insist that they were all mistaken? I think not, I believe that I should eventually accept their testimony and the evidence of the photographs. I should consider to be false what I now regard as an absolute certainty. [When I say I know I have a heart, I know it in the weak sense.]
III. ARGUMENT AGAINST SKEPTICISM

[Skepticism] But the philosopher is apt to be more concerned with knowing "in" the strong sense. He wants to inquire whether there are any propositions that we can know without the shadow of a doubt will never be proven false, or even rendered dubious to the smallest degree. "You can say," he will argue, "and I admit that it would be good English usage to say, that you know that you have a heart and that the sun is more than 90 million miles from the earth. But you don't know until you have absolutely conclusive evidence, and you must admit that the evidence you have, while very strong, is not conclusive. So I shall say, using "know" in the strong sense, that you do not know these propositions. I want then to ask what propositions can be known in the strong sense, the sense that puts the proposition forever past the possibility of doubt.

And on this point many philosophers have been quite skeptical; they have granted few if any propositions whose truth we could know in the strong sense. ... Such a person is a skeptic. We claim (he says) to know many things about the world, but in fact none of these propositions can be known for certain. What are we to say of the skeptic's position?

[Criticism] Let us first note that in the phrase "know for certain" the "for certain" is redundant—how can we know except for certain? If it is less than certain, how can it be knowledge? We do, however, use the word "certain" ambiguously: (1) Sometimes we say "I am certain," which just means that I have a feeling of certainty about it—"I feel certain that I locked the door of the apartment—and of course the feeling of certainty is no guarantee that the statement is true. People have very strong feelings of certainty about many propositions that they have no evidence for at all, particularly if they want to believe them or are conned by believing them. The phrase "feeling certain," then, refers simply to a psychological state, whose existence in no way guarantees that what the person feels certain about is true. But (2) sometimes when we say "I am certain" we mean that it is certain—in other words, that we do know the proposition in question to be true. This, of course, is the sense of "certain" that is of interest to philosophers (the first sense is of more interest to psychiatrists in dealing with patients). Thus we could reformulate our question, "Is anything certain?" or "Are any propositions certain?"

"I can well understand," one might argue, "how you could question some statements, even most statements. But if you carry on this merry game until you have covered all statements, you are simply mistaken, and I think I can show you why. You may see someone in a fog or in a bad light and not know (you can be certain) whether he has a right hand. But do you know that you have a right hand? There it is! Suppose I now raise my hand and say, 'Here is a hand.' Now you say to me, 'I doubt that there's a hand.' But what evidence do you want? What does your doubt consist of? You don't believe your eyes, perhaps? Very well, then come upon and touch the hand. You still aren't satisfied? Then keep on looking at it steadily and touching it, photograph it, call in other people for testimony if you like. If after all this you still say it isn't a hand, what more do you want? Under these circumstances it is certain that it is a certain, that you do know it! I can understand your doubt when there is some condition left unfulfilled, some test left uncompleted. At the beginning, perhaps you doubted that if you tried to touch my hand you would find anything there to touch, but then you did touch, and so you resolved the doubt. You resolved further doubts by calling in other people and so on. You performed all the relevant tests, and they turned out favorably. So now, at the end of the process, what is it that you doubt? Oh, I know what you say: 'I still doubt that that's a hand.' But isn't this saying 'I don't know an empty formula? I can no longer attach any content to that so-called doubt, for there is nothing left to doubt; you yourself cannot specify any further test that, if performed, would resolve your doubt. 'Doubt' now becomes an empty word. You are not doubting now that it you raised your hand to touch mine, you would touch it, or that if Smith and others were brought in, they would also testify that this is a hand—we've already gone through all that. So what is it specifically that you doubt? What possible test is there the negative result of which you fear? I submit that there isn't any. You are confusing a situation in which doubt is understandable (before you made the test) with the later situation in which it isn't, for it has all been dispelled. ...

But your so-called doubt becomes meaningless when the test is performed. I mean the test when the tests have been carried out and their results are all favorable. Suppose a physician examines a patient and says, 'It's probable that you have an inflamed appendix.' Here one can still doubt, for the sign may be misleading. So the physician operates on the patient, finds an inflamed appendix and removes it, and the patient recovers. Now what would be the sense of the physician's saying, 'It's probable that he had an inflamed appendix?' If seeing it and removing it made it only probable, what would make it certain? Or are you driving along and you hear a rapid regular thumping sound and you say, 'It's probable that I have a flat tire.' So far you're right; it's only probable—the thumping might be caused by something else. So you go out and have a look, and there is your tire, flat. You find a nail embedded in it, change the tire, and then re-

sume your ride with no more thumping. Are you now going to say, 'It's merely probable that the car had a flat tire?' But if given all those conditions it would be merely probable, what in the world would make it certain? Can you describe to me the circumstances in which you would say it's certain? If you can't, then the phrase 'being certain' has no meaning as you are using it. You are simply using it in such a special way that it has no application at all, and there is no reason at all why anyone else should follow your usage. In daily life we have a convenient and useful distinction between the application of the words 'probable' and 'certain.' We say applicability is probable before the operation, but when the physician has the patient's appendix visible before him on the operating table, now it's certain—that's just the kind of situation in which we apply the word 'certain,' as opposed to 'probable.' Now you, for some reason, are so fond of the word 'probable' that you want to use it for everything—you use it to describe both the prospective and the prospective, and the word 'certain' is left without any application at all. But this is nothing but a verbal manipulation on your part. You have changed nothing; you have only taken, as it were, two bottles with different contents, and instead of labeling them differently (probable and 'certain'), as the case of the dog, you put the same label (probable') on both of them! What possible advantage is there in this? It's just verbal contrariness. And since you have pre-empted the word 'probable' to cover both the situations, we now have a different pair of words to mark the perfectly obvious distinction between the situation before the operation and the situation during the surgery—the same difference we previously marked by the words 'probable' and 'certain' until you used the word 'probable' to apply to both of them. What gain is there in this verbal manipulation of yours?"
For Further Reflection

1. Do you think that Hopers' conditions for knowing are adequate? Do you see how they differ from Descartes, who would only allow absolute certainty to count as knowledge? Who is right?

2. Is Hopers' correct in saying that the skeptic holds up an unrealistic standard (too strong a sense) of knowledge?

3. In Hopers' sense of knowledge can we ever "know that we know"? Or can we be justified only in believing that we know? If this is so, then should the focus of discussion be on the adequacy of justified belief?

III.8 Truth, Rationality, and Cognitive Relativism

To say that what is, is not, or that what is not is, is false; but to say that what is, is, and what is not, is not, is true. (Aristotle 384–322 B.C.)

Man is the measure of all things,
Both of things that are,
Man is the measure that they are,
And of the things that are not,
Man is the measure that they are not.

(Protagoras the Sophist, 5th century B.C.)

In the 1990s a professor, call him D, from the English department at a major university, gave a talk on political biases in university curriculum, arguing that curricula are oppressive to women and minorities. After the speech, a philosopher came up to D and pointed out that he, D, had contradicted himself in his speech. The English professor responded, saying, "So, what's wrong with that? Look young man, I'm sure you know more logic than I do, but I know more about politics than you do! I know that it's a philosophical instrument for the oppression of minorities."

"Two diametrically opposed views on truth exist in contemporary culture, especially, among intellectuals in academia. One position, call it "cognitive realism," accepts one or another version of the correspondence theory of truth and holds the classical view that some things exist independently of whether anyone thinks about them. Some propositions are true whether or not anyone believes them. There are mind-independent facts, and they exist whether or not anyone believes them. Examples of this are the propositions "2 + 2 = 4" and "the solar system has more than one planet," and "pigs can't fly."

The other position, which is called "cognitive relativism," or "anti-realism," holds that there are no mind-independent facts or truth. Cognitive relativists generally combine anti-realism with a pragmatic notion of truth. A pragmatic theory of truth defines truth in terms of usefulness or workability. The proposition "2 + 2 = 4" is part of a human mathe-

matical invention and the proposition that "the solar system has more than one planet" can be analyzed into specific concepts, which are human inventions: "The idea of a "planet," a "sun," a "system," and "more." Similarly, "pigs can't fly" depends on the way we divide up reality. A culture might not have a concept of "pig" or "fly," or it might have several "pig-concepts" or "fly-concepts." We invent reality via our conceptual-linguistic systems. Many cognitive relativists would not go so far as our English professor (D) who believes even the laws of logic are inventions, for they might agree that there are formal constraints on what can be intelligibly said to be within a system of thought and that contradictions are formal criteria of exclusion. But other intellectuals would bite the bullet, as it were, and deny that contradictions need be false. The classic expression of the pragmatic theory of truth is given by William James in his second reading:

The realists trace their lineage back to Plato, who distinguished reality from appearance, and Aristotle, who (see the earlier quotation) defined truth as a correspondence between statements and facts. In our readings, Bertrand Russell explains and defends the correspondence theory of truth and Margarita Levin accepts it along with realism in her critique of cognitive relativism.

The new cognitive relativists can trace their roots back to Protagoras, who said "Man is the measure of all things"—that is, what we think is true is so. Their beliefs are also reminiscent of Berkeley's Idealism (see Reading III.20), with the important difference that they reject Idealism, as well as Berkeley's God. They agree with Berkeley, against Locke, that we cannot build a bridge from our conceptual schemes to the world itself, but they reject a God's-eye perspective wherein reality is unified ideally. Instead, we have many worlds, many realities, many perspectives. In the words of Nietzsche, who is quoted approvingly:

Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, conceptions, and hypothetical constructs—from a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people.

In our third reading, Richard Rorty identifies his version of this anti-realism with the pragmatism of the American philosophers William James (1842–1910)—Reading III.24—and John Dewey (1859–1952). Rorty characterizes it as a civilized ethnocentrism, one which chooses social solidarity over objectivity and rejects the notion that truth is the correspondence between our ideas and an independent reality. There is no privileged perspective and no unifying reality, so there is no absolute knowledge, no Truth (with a capital "T"). These ideas must be deconstructed. What is left is our ways of justifying our beliefs, "warranted assertibility," as Dewey would say. So the division between truth and opinion collapses and truth becomes what our peers will let us get away with. For a fuller defense of Rorty's epistemological pragmatism you should see his Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979), where he develops his thesis that truth, rather than being a correspondence between our ideas and the world, is what we agree on, what is better to believe. In the present section, "Diamantling Truth: Solidarity versus Objectivity," Rorty applies his thesis to the idea that science seeks to secure objectivity, arguing that science, objectivity, and truth need to be replaced or reinterpreted by more pragmatic, ethnocentric notions.