

EXTERNALISM, SKEPTICISM, AND BELIEF

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I analyze epistemological externalism and its adequacy as a response to skepticism. Externalism is defined by denial of accessibility: a subject can know if a particular condition beyond truth and belief is satisfied, even if the subject has no reflective access to the satisfaction of the condition. It hence has quick responses to skepticism. Three sorts of skepticism are differentiated and discussed: high standards skepticism, Cartesian-style skepticism, and Pyrrhonism. If we decouple high standards and Cartesian-style skepticism, a simple fallibilism is a superior response to the first and externalism is an unsatisfying response to the second. Pyrrhonism reveals what it is missing in externalism. Pyrrhonism targets belief and so redefinitions of knowledge are insufficient as a reply. Externalism assumes we have beliefs and asks what must be added to achieve knowledge, but if we look at the epistemic situation the externalist puts us in, it is not clear we would form or retain beliefs. In similar circumstances the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment. Once we are clear how Pyrrhonism actually challenges externalism it provides a direct and more revealing critique, making clear what is given up and pointing the way for further epistemological inquiry.

KEYWORDS: externalism, skepticism, pyrrhonism, epistemology

1. Introduction

Externalists in epistemology hold that some fact external to the subject can be the crucial factor in determining whether that subject knows. This is unenlightening and part of this paper will attempt to specify just what externalism is with more clarity. Roughly, however, it urges us to move away from justification in the sense of having available reasons and towards some fact about the subject and her relation to the world – stressing a causal connection or a reliable capacity to form true beliefs or a virtuous feature of one’s cognitive character.¹

Externalism can be attractive for several reasons. In response to Gettier’s refutation of the justified true belief account of knowledge externalists offer

¹ There are a wide variety of externalist epistemologies. A causal theory is presented in Alvin Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing,” *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967): 335-372. Process reliabilism is advocated in Alvin Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?” in *Justification and Knowledge*, ed. George S. Pappas (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1976), 1-23. Agent reliabilism is developed in great detail in John Greco, *Putting Sceptics in Their Place* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

theories that replace the justification condition.² The post-Gettier literature suggests this is more difficult than it may initially seem, but once justification was called into question as sufficient along with true belief to constitute knowledge, it was natural to question whether it was even necessary. Second, externalism appears to fit well with naturalism and scientific inquiries into the knowing subject. If knowledge is a matter of some fact about the subject, we can determine from the outside then we might have the beginnings of a scientific account. Finally, externalism provides a seemingly easy reply to skepticism. Skepticism often targets the justification for our beliefs, but if we can attain knowledge without justification then we can avoid the skeptical abyss.

In this paper I shall be concerned with understanding and evaluating externalism, or what I term pure externalism, in relation to skepticism. Pure externalism wishes not only to add conditions to traditional accounts of knowledge, but to supplant them. Section 2 develops a better understanding of externalism and Section 3 differentiates three sorts of skeptics: high standards skeptics, Cartesian-style skeptics, and Pyrrhonists. Sections 4, 5, and 6 discuss the relationship between externalism and each, arguing that Pyrrhonism reveals what externalism is missing. Section 7 draws conclusions about externalism and epistemology.

2. Externalism Defined

Epistemic externalism is difficult to pin down. Some feature of knowledge is identified as external rather than internal to the knowing subject. A simple internalist might hold that S knows that P if and only if (1) S believes that P, (2) P, and (3) S is justified in believing that P. A simple causal theorist holds that S knows that P if and only if (1) S believes that P, (2) P, and (3) S's belief that P is appropriately caused by P. What suffices for justification and what is an appropriate causal link is a matter for further development. Difference over the third condition separates the two, though things can become more complicated because there can be confusion regarding the external/internal nature of a condition and more conditions can be offered. Moreover, it isn't always clear whether externalists are jettisoning justification or giving a different, and in their view better, account of it.

The two simple positions agree on the first two conditions. Most also agree that belief is an internal condition and that truth is an external condition. If I believe that P then I can at least discover that I believe that P. Beliefs are not

² Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121-23.

always wholly, immediately apparent, but through reflection and prodding they can be made clear. We do talk of beliefs that a subject is not aware of, usually with phrases like “deep down” and the like. Here we are pointing to a belief reflected in the subject’s behavior in some way even though for various reasons he will disavow the belief. This does not make belief external in the relevant sense – here we think that the subject has cognitive or conscious access to the belief, but is blocked from that access.

For most propositions the truth is not something determined by the subject. It is independent. There are special cases. Self-referring beliefs may be true in virtue of their being believed and the subject can act so as to make a claim true. But generally truth outruns belief and is independent of it – merely thinking something so does not make it so.

Most externalists and internalists can agree that knowledge has both internal and external aspects, facing inwards in belief and outwards in truth. The two are separated by what is added. A usually undefined notion of justification is often taken to be the paradigm case of an internalist condition. It was this ambiguous sense of justification that Gettier refuted. A belief is justified if one is entitled to that belief, if it is believed responsibly. These are internal conditions because they refer to something about the believer, and more specifically, something the believer could *provide* as a justification. In order to be justified in this internalist sense I need not have present to mind or even easily accessible my justification or vindication of my belief. But I must be able to provide it when questioned.

Externalists de-emphasize this sort of justification that the believer can provide or develop when challenged. Rather, knowledge requires some condition be met that can be determined from a sideways on point of view. It is a fact about the subject, not an ability or reason possessed by the subject, that is essential. We must be careful here to avoid two confusions. First, the fact that must obtain for the externalist need not be external to the knower in the usual sense of external, that is outside the body. On a simple causal theory it is – we look at the causal connection between the fact and the belief. But on a simple agent reliabilism it is not external in this sense, what matters is a capacity that belongs to the agent and is part of her cognitive character. The external in externalism pertains to that which is without the conscious mind, to speak roughly, rather than outside the skin.

Second, internalists and externalists need not disagree about sideways-on facts being important to knowledge. An internalist may hold that we can determine whether a believer is justified from a sideways on point of view by

examining his abilities and behavior. Where the internalist and externalist differ is on the subjective side – for the internalist, but not the externalist, the fact that is added to true belief to constitute knowledge must be available or accessible to the subject. For the externalist the fact in question obtaining is enough on its own, whether or not the subject can state that it obtains.

The point is important. Internalists need have no animosity to appropriate causal connections, reliable belief forming mechanisms, or any of the proffered externalist conditions. The internalist only insists that in order to have knowledge based on that reliability the subject must have access to that reliability.³ In the case of vision the internalist requires that on top of my visual reliability I must also be aware that I am reliable. I need not be able to state *how* exactly that process works; to be justified I need only ascertain *that* it works. So if I can state that I am reliable then I have satisfied the internalist condition. The externalist does not require this last piece. Whether or not I can justifiably state that my belief forming process is reliable, if in fact it is reliable, I know. The subjective perspective is inessential.

The clearest way to state the difference between externalists and internalists, then, is via an accessibility condition. Internalists, but not externalists, require that a feature beyond truth and belief be accessible to the subject in order for the subject to know. Externalists, but not internalists, allow that a condition beyond truth and belief may be inaccessible to the subject, or that the accessibility of that condition is immaterial to the fact of the matter about knowledge. Accessibility means that the subject has the ability to justifiably state that the condition is met. To evaluate externalism, then, we thus look to situations in which the condition is met but the subject lacks access to this, as such cases provide contrasts between externalism and internalism.

There is a sizable middle ground between the two pure positions – an epistemologist may require both sorts of conditions and so be a hybrid theorist. Ernest Sosa presents a theory of this kind: animal knowledge is externalist, reliably produced true belief. But to be properly called knowledge the subject must gain an epistemic perspective and attain reflective knowledge that takes on an internalist character.⁴ Susan Haack makes similar moves.⁵ Robert Fogelin's discussion of the

³ See Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in his *Science, Perception and Reality* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991), 127-196 (esp. §37) for an example of a view that is both concerned with reliability and qualifies as internalist.

⁴ Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵ Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995).

Gettier problem provides a subtle analysis of justification is encompassing both epistemic responsibility and proper grounding, which have internalist and externalist characters, respectively.⁶

Hybrid theories are not my concern here. They seek to *retain* the traditional valuation of justification and *add* externalist insights to deal with problems such as skepticism and Gettier. Whether they succeed is another matter. Here I wish to examine externalist accounts that *reject* the traditional valuation of justification and *replace* it with an externalist condition. These positions are pure externalist: they declare that accessible justification is not only insufficient for knowledge but also unnecessary. Instead, a feature of the agent, environment, or their relation must be fulfilled and it is unnecessary that this fulfillment be accessible to the conscious subject. The question of whether or not externalists reject justification or redefine is a distinction without a difference. In short, it is a battle over a word, and while perhaps the game is worth the candle, playing it isn't necessary to evaluate externalism. For the purposes of this paper when I speak of justification, I mean something that meets the internalist accessibility condition.

Accessibility is not equivalent to transparency or the iteration of knowledge, the principle that if S knows that P then S knows that S knows P. It is tempting to define externalism as a denial of this principle, but we must be careful. The same analysis of knowledge the externalist introduces in terms of a first order knowledge also applies to the second order knowledge. So one can have second order knowledge if one believes one knows, one knows, and the external condition is met. Transparency can hold, even if we are not aware that the external condition is met for either belief.⁷

There is something regarding transparency that the externalist is denying. This is just accessibility. We don't have the sort of access to our epistemic situation that we might like. But this is not a denial of transparency because transparency is a fact about our epistemic situation. The externalist's commitment is deeper – we

⁶ Robert Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷ A denial of transparency better captures some sorts of contextualism. When we query whether or not S knows that S knows that P the context may change such that the original justification no longer suffices. This could be because we have raised what Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections* calls the level of scrutiny or because we have changed what Michael Williams calls the angle of scrutiny (see Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Michael Williams, "The Agrippan Argument and Two Forms of Skepticism," in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121-145).

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are not simply removed from our epistemic situation when engaging in philosophical reflection, we are always disengaged from it in that our access to it is inessential. We can know and know that we know, but be unable to ascertain that we meet the conditions. Our epistemic state is not fractured, rather we, as inquiring agents giving and asking for reasons, can become fractured from our epistemic state.

3. Three Types of Skepticism

Epistemologists are concerned with skepticism because it provides a challenge and methodological tool. Even if the skeptical conclusion seems incredible, the arguments can appear powerful and we gain by understanding and refuting or diffusing them. While we sometimes speak in terms of “the skeptic,” in reality there are a variety of skepticisms that pose quite different challenges. Here three deserve differentiation: high standards skepticism, Cartesian-style skepticism, and Pyrrhonism.

High standards skepticism imposes a high standard for knowledge and then argues it cannot be met. It is motivated by underdetermination problems. If I claim to know that the Red Sox won last night an underdetermination problem might be produced by pointing out that my only evidence is that I read it in the newspaper and it is possible that the newspaper is mistaken. Mistakes, after all, do happen. So do I really know? Perhaps not.

I am not absolutely certain of the challenged claim. I have all sorts of evidence that I am right and little reason to think that I am wrong: the newspaper is reputable and has not been wrong in the past, no one has mentioned the error, etc. Though my current evidence may have some lack, there are obvious and mundane ways to improve my evidence (phone the team, check other papers etc.), even if absolute certainty is unachievable. The high standards skeptic cleaves to this point – by bringing to light ways in which I might be wrong, despite my strong epistemic position, the skeptic argues I don’t really know anything. There have been high standards skeptics. Peter Unger once argued that ‘know’ like ‘flat’ is an absolute term and thus we do not know unless we are absolutely certain (just as nothing is really flat unless it is absolutely flat). Since we are never absolutely certain, we never know anything.⁸ Robert Fogelin uses high standards skepticism as part of his neo-Pyrrhonism. For Fogelin reflection on various potential defeaters raises the level of scrutiny. So if I am in my office, I know that I may exit through the door. But upon reflection I wonder if some mischievous pranksters have

⁸ Peter Unger, *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1975).

bricked up the door. Maybe I don't know. I can go check. But once I return the same problem arises. Even when I open the door perhaps I am still deceived by a clever replica of a vacant corridor. Fogelin isn't a high standards skeptic because this isn't the end of his skeptical story, but it is an important part of his argument.⁹

The high standards skeptic allows that we often possess very good evidence, but maintains that knowledge requires such strong evidence that it is never attained. Yet, we are still left with a myriad of epistemic distinctions and ordinary practice and inquiry isn't threatened.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the challenge is real—to vindicate knowledge we seem to either have to establish infallibility or develop a theory of knowledge that countenances fallibility. The former is unlikely to be successful. The later can be tricky.

A second sort of skepticism is Cartesian-style skepticism. When speaking of Cartesian-style skepticism I include a family of problems beyond Descartes' problem of the external world – including skepticism about other minds and skepticism about the past – that exploit a similar strategy. Each works as follows: a set of safe claims and a set of target claims are identified and it is the task of the anti-skeptic to bridge the gap between the two. The problem is that the gap is not easily bridged because, as the various skeptical scenarios show, the evidence in the safe claims underdetermines the target claims. In the problem of the external world we are given a set of safe claims, those about our appearances, and seek the target claims, those about the external world, but seemingly cannot bridge the gap because our appearances underdetermine the nature of the external world. Once the pattern is recognized, the problems proliferate.¹¹ If the safe zone includes only the current contents of our mind we seemingly do not know that anything beyond solipsism of the present moment. If the safe zone includes past events and the target zone is the course of the future we need to establish the uniformity of nature, but can do so only through the sort of argument we are trying to validate.

There have been no Cartesian-style skeptics. Descartes maintained that he had a solution and that the doubts he engendered were meant to be *once* gone

⁹ Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections*. Such reflections and variance in levels of scrutiny lead us to the epistemological project of a theory of justification. When this project fails, we suspend judgment and arrive at neo-Pyrrhonism.

¹⁰ See, for example, chapter one of Michael Williams, *Groundless Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). Interestingly, Unger suggests something along these lines: one of his conclusions is that we should develop epistemic concepts other than knowledge.

¹¹ In this general account of Cartesian skepticism I am roughly following Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, 75-77 and Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), ch.2.

through in order to clearly apprehend the truth.¹² For Descartes skepticism is insulated and methodological, a project of pure inquiry. He creates skeptical problems in order to discern the correct method of inquiry and to purify our minds of confusion and error. This holds for most philosophers. There is no actual skeptic but rather a skeptical demon on the shoulder of the philosopher. The problem is that this demon does not seem to go away.

Though it may seem similar to high standards skepticism, Cartesian-style skepticism presents underdetermination problems of a different sort. An underdetermination problem functions by pointing out that one cannot rule out a possibility with the evidence one has. We usually have quite good evidence and could get more. In Cartesian-style scenarios, however, the defeater introduced is universal, producing a universal underdetermination problem. The shortcoming pointed out concerns one's evidence as a *whole*, not some definite lack within the evidence. This point is easy to miss, largely because Descartes introduces his investigations in terms of the quest for certainty. But even if we reject this quest, Cartesian-style skepticism remains. The quest for certainty clarifies our epistemic situation by showing us what the safe zone is, but once we have taken this step we are left without any way to say that one statement about the target zone is more likely than another.

Pyrrhonism as exemplified in the works of Sextus Empiricus is a third sort of skepticism. Pyrrhonism flourished in antiquity and had a notable revival in the early modern period. Sextus divides philosophers into three groups: those who claim to have discovered the truth, those who deny that the truth can be discovered, and those who are still looking. The first two groups are dogmatists and negative dogmatists respectively because they lay down the law as to the nature of things – claiming that they have apprehended it or that it is inapprehensible – whereas the Pyrrhonists are continuing inquiry while at present suspending judgment.¹³ Pyrrhonism is

an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquility.¹⁴

¹² Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. III, trans. John Cottingham, Dugland Stoothoff, and Robert Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 228.

¹³ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. and trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), I: 1-7.

¹⁴ Sextus, *Outlines*, I: 8.

They “oppose what appears to what appears, or what is thought of to what is thought of, or crosswise” as well as present things to present things or present things to past or future things.¹⁵ The skeptic acts as a doctor curing the disease of dogmatism, using a toolkit of skeptical arguments to induce suspension of judgment.

The skeptic uses several sets of modes, or general strategies, to construct oppositions. Sextus presents the ten modes of Aenesidemus (or the “older sceptics”), the five modes of Agrippa (or the “more recent sceptics”)¹⁶, the two modes, and the eight modes related to causal explanations. The ten and five are the most important – the two are a condensed version of the five and the eight specifically target causal explanations and are not used elsewhere.

The ten modes are a variety of strategies to produce oppositions related to appearances.¹⁷ In the first mode Sextus contrasts human and animal appearances, arguing that it is likely the animals have different appearances than we do. The question is always: whose appearances should decide how things are by nature? By bringing out conflicts, or likely conflicts, in appearances the skeptic hopes to induce suspension of judgment.

While the ten are awkward and cumbersome the five are simple and devastating: dispute, infinite regress, relativity, hypothesis, and reciprocity.¹⁸ The modes of regress, hypothesis, and reciprocity form what has been called Agrippa’s trilemma. Given any claim it seems proper that the claimant have some justification for or account of the claim in question. When presented with a justification one can thereby come to question that claim. As the process continues either the dogmatist will begin on an infinite regress, assert a justification that is not itself justified and is hence a mere hypothesis, or circle back on himself. When determining what to count as proper justification for a claim it seems one of these options must be vindicated, yet none seems particularly promising.

It is important to locate the trilemma within the five modes. Dispute and relativity give life to the trilemma in that they create the sorts of problems that would require further justification and cause trouble for theories of justification.¹⁹

¹⁵ Sextus, *Outlines*, I: 31-34.

¹⁶ Sextus does not attribute the five to Agrippa, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Robert Drew Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), IX: 88.

¹⁷ Sextus, *Outlines*, I: 36-37.

¹⁸ Sextus, *Outlines*, I: 165-169.

¹⁹ Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections* classifies dispute and relativity as the challenging modes and the trilemma as the dialectical modes and R.J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), ch. 10 calls the trilemma the formal modes and the others the material modes.

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Moreover, each mode is a tool used whenever appropriate – there is no one skeptical argument. Dispute is powerful because it calls what may seem obvious into question. Regress can be used to force a dogmatist to establish some end to grounding. Relativity suggests that something that is asserted only has power relative to a particular situation or circumstances and is the natural place to incorporate the Ten Modes. Hypothesis challenges dogmatists when they attempt to simply baldly assert a grounding that is itself open to question. And reciprocity challenges forms of argument that are self-sealing or are claimed to be self-vindicating in some way.

Pyrrhonism differs from modern forms of skepticism in a number of ways. First, modern skepticism is based on particular arguments whereas Pyrrhonism is not an argument but a method of constructing arguments in context. Second, Pyrrhonism is meant to be livable whereas Cartesian-style skepticism is confined to the study. The Pyrrhonist has no beliefs as to how things are by nature and yet reports that he is able to live by criteria of action. The Pyrrhonist's doubts do not fade in life; rather he finds that beliefs as to how things are by nature are not required. He simply acts naturally, without such beliefs.

Third, modern skepticism is an antecedent skepticism. It is conceptually prior to other inquiry. Responding to the skeptic through epistemology, then, is a project that is conceptually prior to all other inquiry. Pyrrhonism claims no special place for epistemology. It is consequent to other inquiry. The Pyrrhonist starts out inquiring and is led to suspension of judgment. He may turn to epistemology because of problems that arise, but finds that epistemologists are of little help and is led to suspension of judgment.

Finally, modern skepticism is knowledge-focused. It allows that we have all sorts of beliefs only aims to show that these beliefs do not amount to knowledge. The high standards skeptic allows we have all sorts of great reasons for our beliefs but insists they can never be good enough. There is no pressure to abandon our beliefs. Cartesian-style skepticism begins with our beliefs and abstracts from life in order to challenge them all at once. There is no real suggestion that we should stop believing, rather we are led into an epistemological paradigm in which securing knowledge appears impossible. Pyrrhonism targets belief. The Pyrrhonist reports that he stops having beliefs about how things are by nature by practicing his skeptical ability. The background question is not "What do I really know?" but "What ought I believe?"

4. High Standards Skepticism and Externalism

The externalist makes quick work of high standards skepticism. It relies on the premise that in order to know one must have justification that can be dialectically marshaled to eliminate all possible defeaters. The externalist rejects this premise. If the implausible scenario doesn't hold and if the external conditions are met then I know even if I can't disprove the proffered defeater. That defeater is eliminated, so to speak, by the external condition.

The lesson, if any, is that we are wrong to rely so much on justification in epistemology. The high standards skeptic demonstrates that our justification just can't ever be good enough. So maybe justification ought to be looked on with a wary eye. Since the skeptical conclusion is implausible and absolute certainty is unattainable we ought to adopt an externalism that doesn't let this skeptic get his argument off the ground.²⁰

But do we really need externalism for this point? The high standards skeptic claims that we can never be absolutely certain and thus can't know. The externalist replies by jettisoning the justification requirement. But surely this is more than is necessary to respond to *this* skeptic. We can just be fallibilists. Knowledge requires justification but our justification need not strictly or logically eliminate all possible defeaters. Rather it need only rationally eliminate them. It is possible to be both justified and incorrect. My door could be bricked over even though I am justified in believing it isn't. Do I know it is not? That depends on the fact of the matter. If it is then I am justified in believing that it isn't but I don't know because my belief isn't true.

We do have intuitions that the high standards skeptic exploits that suggest simple fallibilism doesn't work. The skeptic can dwell on a possibility in order to make it appear salient or relevant and hence lead me to disclaim knowledge. What is going on here, I think, is that we are actively considering the possibility that our justified belief is false and disclaim knowledge because we question the truth condition. But just because we can become confused about the sort of justification we need by idle philosophical musings does not mean that such a confused state is correct. We have infallibilist intuitions at times, but these are misguided.

An infallibilist may point out that it is odd to say that "I know but I might be wrong." And indeed it is odd. If I know then I can't be wrong because if I'm

²⁰ If we accept the high standards skeptic's view of justification, Gettier problems disappear. Gettier cases exploit a gap between truth and justification just like high standards skeptical scenarios do. They then posit that the belief just so happens to be true as well. But if justification requires absolute certainty, the JTB account is not challenged by Gettier cases – they are just instances in which the believer has good reason but is not justified.

wrong then my belief isn't true and that condition isn't met. But if I'm right and justified, though my justification doesn't absolutely ensure that I am right, then I'm lucky, in a sense, and know. We are fallibilist about justification, not knowledge. If one knows then one can't be wrong. But this point comes from the truth condition, not the justification condition. A fallibilist holds that one can attain the sort of justification needed for knowledge and yet be wrong and so not know. But one can properly claim to know and be wrong. There is no paradoxical assertion that one can both know and be wrong. Knowledge is factive.

It also seems odd to say "I'm justified in believing P but P is false." But this is odd a different way. The situation itself isn't perplexing – there may be a good many things I'm justified in believing but am wrong about. What is perplexing is not the state of affairs but my *saying of* such a state of affairs that it obtains. In saying this I'm both asserting and disclaiming entitlement. I can be justified in believing falsehoods. But I'm not entitled to believe things I say are false, and yet that is what I have done. The statement is odd in the same way "It's raining but I don't believe it is" is odd.²¹

As Austin argued, claiming knowledge is like "taking a plunge."²² It is like promising – one stakes oneself to a matter of fact that is beyond one's control. I cannot be fully certain that my beliefs are true, yet I can properly claim to know them. In doing so I am staking myself to the claims, and depend on the absence of bad luck in how things are. If indeed I know, I cannot be wrong, but in order to know, I need not be absolutely certain that I am correct. Infallibilist intuitions are the product of the truth condition and once we are clear about this, a sensible fallibilism suffices to reply to the high standards skeptic.

5. Cartesian-style Skepticism and Externalism

Externalism, then, isn't necessary for a straightforward answer to high standards skepticism. Cartesian-style skepticism, however, is a different matter. The two can appear similar, but there are key differences. The high standards skeptic relies on a specific lack in our epistemic situation to challenge our knowledge. The Cartesian-style skeptic maneuvers us into a position where our epistemic situation as a whole is undermined. Given the safe zone of a moment's appearances there seems to be no way to move to the target zone of knowledge of the external world, other minds, the course of the future, or the existence of the past.

²¹ G.E. Moore, "Moore's Paradox," in *G. E. Moore: Selected Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 207-212.

²² J.L. Austin, "Other Minds," in *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd ed., ed. J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 76-116.

Interestingly, the externalist's response to the Cartesian-style skeptic is the same as his response to the high standards skeptic. I wonder if I know there is an external world. The skeptic points out that all I really have is appearances, mediated access to the external world – if there is even such a world at all. How can I show that these appearances are a good guide to reality? Any evidence I could marshal is also based on my appearances. Once inside the safe zone there is no basis for an inference to a target zone – everything is subject to the same questioning. Reflecting I come to doubt whether I have a body or a brain, as these are external in the relevant sense as well. My supposed epistemic situation is reduced to nothing – either I have no basis for belief in and beliefs about the world or I define it in terms of appearances.

The externalist responds by saying that I am confused about knowledge. In order to have knowledge of the external world I don't need justification of the sort challenged by the skeptic. Rather I need a true belief coupled with an external factor, such as a reliable belief forming mechanism. So I know there is an external world if, in fact, there is an external world and my belief was caused by a reliable belief forming mechanism. I needn't be able to show that I'm correct or that the relevant belief forming mechanism is reliable. The externalist's point is that *if* these conditions are met then I know. This refutation does not engage the skeptic heads-on. The externalist doesn't reject the limitations of our evidence or the skeptic's claim that from our evidence we cannot show that there is an external world that we know a good many things about. Instead the externalist tells us that the skeptic is wrong to focus on arguments.

This works, so far as it goes. The response seems to be that we can forget about the skeptic because for all we can tell we might know. The skeptic is making the same point: for all we can tell we don't know. Such a response is bound to be somewhat unsatisfying. It *does* rescue "knowledge" from the skeptic (if the skeptic is wrong) but only by forfeiting grasp of our knowledge. This isn't what we are after when we engage in inquiry, and certainly isn't what we are after in doing epistemology. We want to be able to *show* that the skeptic is wrong, but the externalist gives us assurances that *if* the skeptic is wrong then we know a great deal.²³

²³ Dissatisfaction with the pure externalist response and its conditional nature is widespread; see, for example: Barry Stroud, "Understanding Human Knowledge in General," in *Knowledge and Scepticism*, ed. Marjorie Clay and Keith Lehrer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 31-50, Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections*, and Laurence Bonjour, "The Indispensability of Internalism," *Philosophical Topics* 29 (2001): 47-66.

If this response to Cartesian-style skepticism is so unsatisfying, then why can it appear attractive? The answer is a conflation of high standards and Cartesian-style skepticism. The scenarios posited by both seem fantastic and so are treated together. But they are quite different. High standards skepticism challenges a definite lack in our epistemic situation while Cartesian style skepticism challenges our epistemic situation as a whole. They may both seem fantastic, but we can show that high standards scenarios are extremely unlikely but cannot do so for Cartesian-style scenarios. A simple fallibilism suffices to turn aside the high standards skeptic, but does not work for Cartesian-style skepticism because it calls everything into question.

The confusion is created by scenarios like the brain in the vat that can be viewed in both ways. Suppose there is a group of brilliant, deranged neuroscientists who have developed the ability to place brains in a vat of fluid and feed them input to mimic reality. If there were such a group how do you know that you weren't kidnapped last night in your sleep and are now just a brain in a vat? And how do you know there isn't really such a group?

Read in a high standards way we treat this like the imaginary pranksters who brick up doors. Such a thing has not been known to happen, I would have heard the scientists, and the technology required is implausible. The scenario is fantastic in the sense of unlikely. Sure, I can't achieve absolute certainty on the matter just as I can't be absolutely certain that some pranksters haven't just bricked over my door. But I don't need absolute certainty to be justified.

But the brain in the vat scenario can also be treated as a Cartesian-style scenario – we posit that the scientists in question can control everything, including memories of the past and future appearances. If the scenario is read to challenge all of this then we have a universal defeater and are dealing with Cartesian-style skepticism. Whereas the possibility of the pranksters exploits a local lack in my epistemic situation, the possibility of these scientists can challenge my epistemic situation globally.

We must not forget just how radical such scenarios really are. It is not just the possibility that we are in the Matrix – after all it is somewhat fortuitous that Neo looks remarkably like Keanu Reeves both while in the Matrix and after he is “unplugged” from it. At an extreme there is no reason to believe we have a body or a brain or there are such things as vats. Brain in a vat and Matrix scenarios lead us down the road to Cartesian-style skepticism by telling a story that appears incredibly implausible. But as we travel down the skeptical rabbit hole we find ourselves with a different sort of doubt because everything has been called into question. The skepticism in play isolates a safe zone using the universal defeater

and then exploits our lack of warrant for any inference to the target zone once we are forced to retreat.

If we treat high standards and Cartesian-style scenarios as similar then we will seek a unified solution. If we want a unified solution a simple fallibilism about justification won't do because it can't deal with Cartesian-style scenarios. But externalism can because it discards accessible justification. And it offers a response to the high standards skeptic as well. We conclude that externalism offers a plausible response to skepticism sans phrase.

But once we decouple high standards and Cartesian-style skepticism things are less satisfying. Externalism is more than necessary for a response to high standards skepticism. Fallibilism does the same work without jettisoning justification – which seems right since we have great justification, just not the sort of justification that is absurdly demanded. And focusing on externalism's response to the Cartesian-style skeptic we are left unsatisfied, not because it doesn't work but because it works too well, abandoning the field entirely to the skeptic only to declare victory on different ground and thereby detaching us, as conscious beings who give reasons and arguments, from our newly reconstructed epistemic situation in which we do end up, we hope, knowing a great many things.

Nonetheless we have reached a sort of impasse. The pure externalist "refutes" the Cartesian-style skeptic by changing the conversation. We are left somewhat unsatisfied and the skeptic is unimpressed, but the externalist can retort that we are just clinging to an old, unproductive paradigm. We find in this impasse the well-rehearsed clash between externalists and internalists. Externalists offer an analysis of knowledge and internalists insist that something is missing, citing the somewhat lame response to Cartesian-style skepticism. The externalist responds by rejecting the felt need for something more, noting that internalists don't have this something more ready to hand and so it is either externalism or skepticism, and externalism seems much more sensible. The debate degenerates into internalists accusing externalist of abandoning justification in the sense of responsibility and the externalist retorting that of course this is what they are doing. The charge is simply that externalists are not internalists, but we knew that much already. The skeptical arguments are avoided by externalism, but in a way that leaves something wanting. We are left with little engagement, instead noting two different projects, each pursuing a different sort of epistemological inquiry.

6. Pyrrhonism and Externalism

Is there anything more to be said on the matter? Can we discern exactly what is deficient about externalism in a way that engages it? Pyrrhonism provides

answers. Agrippa's five modes can be used to construct a trilemma relating to justification. When we ask for a justification we set off on a chain of justifications that ends in hypothesis, circularity, or infinite regress. Traditional epistemologists attempt to vindicate one of these modes. A pure externalist, perhaps noting the dim track record of traditional epistemology, instead holds that justification of this sort is inessential, depriving the modes of their power. As with the responses above, this response is quick. The externalist simply refuses to engage because he isn't in the game of giving reasons for beliefs as a way to vindicate them from skeptical attack. His game is to discard that felt need. The same impasse emerges – the Pyrrhonist demands reasons for the epistemic standing needed for knowledge while the externalist rejects this presupposition. The externalist doesn't try to vindicate one of the modes in the standard way, instead asserting that, for example, brute, inaccessible reliability suffices. As accessibility isn't necessary, the demand for reasons on the part of the Pyrrhonist falls on deaf ears.

Sextus, however, can be and has been used to make a more direct critique of externalism.²⁴ Externalism, in fact, is not wholly foreign to ancient philosophy.²⁵ Sextus provides an opposition:

For if we were to imagine some people looking for gold in a dark room containing many valuables, it will happen that each of them, seizing one of the objects lying in the room, will believe he has taken hold of the gold, yet none of them will be sure that he has encountered the gold – even if it turns out he absolutely has encountered it. And so, too, into this universe, as into a large house, a crowd of philosophers has passed on the search for the truth, and the person who seizes it probably does not trust that he was on target.²⁶

Later he likens inquirers to archers firing at a target in the dark. Perhaps one has hit the target, but no one is in a position to responsibly claim to have done so. As such it seems that each archer would suspend judgment as to whether he hit the target.²⁷ The externalist puts us in positions like those looking for gold and the archers. In such cases if someone proclaimed success we would find something

²⁴ Ernest Sosa, "How to Resolve the Pyrrhonian Problematic: A Lesson From Descartes," *Philosophical Studies* 85 (1997): 229-249.

²⁵ Jonathan Barnes, *The Toils of Scepticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 132ff. reads Galen's epistemology as akin to externalism and Julia Annas, "Stoic Epistemology," in *Companions to Ancient Thought: Epistemology*, ed. Stephen Everson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 184-203 reconstructs Stoic response to Academic critique of the cognitive impression as externalist.

²⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, ed. and trans. Richard Bett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), II: 52.

²⁷ Sextus, *Against the Logicians*, II: 325.

deficient and lacking. In the same way there is something lacking from externalist knowledge, a sort of epistemic responsibility or perspective on one's epistemic situation. The Pyrrhonian analogies, if apt, illustrate how externalist knowledge is deficient.

John Greco responds to this critique using a version of agent reliabilism.²⁸ He reconstructs what he calls the Pyrrhonist's reasoning as follows:

1. Knowledge is success for which the agent deserves credit.
2. True belief without a perspective is relevantly like grasping gold in the dark: it is mere lucky success for which the agent does not deserve credit.

Therefore,

3. True belief without a perspective does not qualify as knowledge.

Greco rejects the second premise, holding instead that absent a perspective an agent still deserves credit if he believes the truth because of intellectual virtues he possesses, which on his analysis are reliable belief forming processes intrinsic to an agent's cognitive character. Such an agent is lucky in the way a talented athlete is lucky to have natural gifts, but not lucky in the deployment of those intellectual virtues and still deserves credit. A talented basketball player is lucky to have the natural talent he does, but when he makes a three point shot we do not say he was lucky; rather we view it as a creditable deployment of his shooting ability. The point is not just that he scores – after all I could happen to hit the same shot despite my inability – it is that he made a good, rather than lucky, shot. Luck and credit can co-exist, luck in the possession of naturally virtuous abilities and credit in deployment of those abilities. So in the gold example, the grasper isn't like someone who just so happens to pick out the gold. Rather she has an intrinsic ability to grasp the gold, so to speak, and lacks only a reflective perspective on this ability. As an *agent* reliabilism, the feature that produces the true belief is part of one's cognitive character and hence not external to the agent. It is external only in the sense of this paper – its virtuosity is not reflectively accessible.²⁹

The impasse returns. The Pyrrhonist, with the internalist, asks that in order for an epistemic agent to have credit sufficient to attain knowledge there must be some accessible justification. Greco argues that the exercise of reliable faculties

²⁸ John Greco, "Virtue, Luck and the Pyrrhonian Problematic," *Philosophical Studies* 130 (2006): 9-34.

²⁹ This eliminates counterexamples like Mr. Truetemp (Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000)) and perhaps the reliable clairvoyant (Laurence Bonjour, "Externalist Theories of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980): 53-73), depending upon how the agent is defined

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can deserve credit despite luck, while the Pyrrhonist and internalist counter that this won't be the right kind of credit. We end up back with a bare assertion that responsibility is required and the externalist bare denial of this.

The way out of this impasse is to pay careful attention to the actual Pyrrhonist. Above the Pyrrhonist is presented as engaged in the project of discerning necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, and so it is to be expected that those arguments lead back to the impasse. But Greco's framing is foreign to Pyrrhonism. The Pyrrhonist has no analysis of knowledge and doesn't attach himself to premises. The Pyrrhonist would be in trouble if he held premises at all, not just faulty ones. The Pyrrhonist merely engages in inquiry as naturally led to, using his intellectual faculties and the positions of others. Greco's reasoning captures views held by hybrid epistemologists like Sosa and internalists like Bonjour, and these seem to be his real targets. That is fine, but we must be clear when thinking about Pyrrhonism that they aren't parties to this particular debate and don't approach externalism from it.

Pyrrhonism operates within the process of inquiry, not as a separate, abstract epistemological enterprise. This highlights an oddity about externalism – when conducting inquiry we look for reasons and the externalist seems to simply quit playing that game while declaring victory. Even so, there are interesting questions about reasons and accounts that remain if we accept pure externalism. When we engage in inquiry – whether it be formal academic inquiry or everyday inquiry into a claim – we give accounts and ask for reasons and if we become confused look for help, ways to decide disputes or clarify issues. The externalist, however, provides an epistemology that deems account giving of this sort unnecessary. The externalist appears to be pulling a fast one – abstracting epistemology from the practice of inquiry, defining problems away, and then proclaiming that he has answered the skeptic and rescued inquiry. Much, however, has been lost in this supposed rescue.

Imagine a biology conference at which a presenter makes a claim to know. Challenged the presenter chides the questioner: knowledge does not require an account or such justification. We are interested in gaining biological knowledge and he need not justify or explain – obviously the questioner has not been following trends in epistemology. Rather certain external factors must be met and, though he cannot show that they are, if they are he knows. Such a presenter would not be very impressive. Inquiry is concerned with giving accounts. The pure externalist may have isolated an interesting concept but this does not invalidate the importance of justification and epistemic responsibility. A

Pyrrhonist is unimpressed with the move, as is one who is engaged in critical inquiry.

An externalist might allow that accounts and justifications are quite nice and he does not mean to disparage them – rather he is engaged in a particular project regarding knowledge and refuting skepticism. Ordinary reason and account giving can go on, buffeted by an externalist account of knowledge in the background that keeps the skeptics at bay. Whenever we run out of reasons we can just make our externalist move. This is a neat trick, though we should be wary of how easily it can be used.

Pyrrhonism, however, does not fall prey to this response. Against the skeptic the externalist urges that grasp of the known is not necessary. This may suffice against negative dogmatism, denial of knowledge, because it undermines the rationale for the skeptical conclusion. But it is equivalent to where the Pyrrhonist, who draws no such conclusion about knowledge, finds himself. We have a conditional and cannot ascertain the truth of the antecedent. The negative dogmatist claims that this shows we do not know, the externalist asserts that our grasp of the truth of antecedent is immaterial to the fact of the matter about knowledge. The Pyrrhonist is candid here and suspends judgment.³⁰ The difference between the externalist and Pyrrhonist is their reaction to the situation the externalist posits – one in which we lack accessible justification for a candidate belief but may, or may not, arrive at such a belief virtuously. The externalist believes, pinning his epistemic status on the fact of the matter inaccessible to him while the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment.

Suspension of judgment is the absence of belief, not a denial of knowledge. Pyrrhonism targets belief, not knowledge, at least in part because to target knowledge and force their conclusions on others they would need a definition of knowledge that they could use to deny other's this standing. This is where externalism is able to slip other forms of skepticism, by finding what is being exploited by the skeptic and then jettisoning that in favor of something else that is not targeted. We are left feeling that we have lost something – because we have – but skepticism is diffused and the externalist provides something else. Pyrrhonism, properly understood, avoids this move because it begins in the process of inquiry and reports that through arguments Pyrrhonists end up suspending judgment. It doesn't strike them that dogmatists are entitled to their beliefs, but they are not in

³⁰ For a similar, brief argument see Robert Fogelin, "The Skeptics Are Coming! The Skeptics Are Coming!" in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 161-173.

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the business of telling them they ought to be Pyrrhonists. All they can rely on is their natural epistemic practices.

The force of Pyrrhonism on this point is that we tend to share these practices. On reflection, the pure externalist is only entitled to the claim that so far as we can tell we know. By making a crucial condition of knowledge entirely inaccessible to the knower we are left wondering on reflection whether or not the condition is met. Now we may on occasion know that it is, but in these cases externalism isn't doing the work. When we do not have access the externalist claims that we still know if the condition is met, but the Pyrrhonist replies that in such cases she is led to the suspension of judgment. If we have no idea whether the condition is met it is unclear why we would continue to believe.

But isn't this just the same point the internalist makes, demanding responsibility? The externalist response here is just to rebuff the demand, looking to reliability and disposing of the felt need. The internalist and Pyrrhonist are making similar points, but there is one crucial difference. The Pyrrhonist is not engaged of a project of defining knowledge and isn't telling the externalist that knowledge requires responsibility and so reliability alone is insufficient. Rather her point is that if she puts herself in the situation that externalist deems sufficient for knowledge but without any sort of accessible justification she finds that she suspends judgment. And she is inclined to think that most people sincerely engaged in inquiry will do so as well in such a position, at least once it is made clear to them.

The difference between pure externalism and Pyrrhonism is that the pure externalist tries to avoid the epistemic importance of responsible belief altogether while the Pyrrhonist naturally finds herself suspending judgment when there is no reason to believe. Externalists tend to assume that the subject believes in the cases they are interested in. But if we look at them closely, this is not trivial. If we have no reason to believe one way or another it is quite natural to suspend belief, at least when this is made explicit.

Take the chicken sexer. Here the person is able to reliably discern the sex of a baby chick. If asked how she is able to do this the chicken sexer often replies that she sees the difference. But the best evidence suggests that they actually rely on olfactory cues. Pointing to the phenomenon the pure externalist argues that knowledge does not require any justification. In the imagined scenario, however, a crucial piece of information has been left out: whether or not the chicken sexer is privy to her reliability. If she is then she has accessible justification and the case does not motivate pure externalism. In order to work for the pure externalist we must imagine that the chicken sexer has no idea she is reliable, e.g. one just

starting out but who is already reliable. Faced with a baby chick is it natural to think that she would believe the sex of the chick? No, it is much more natural to imagine her suspending judgment. We might force her to answer or introduce some cognitive defect that leads to a belief, but then we are departing from normal circumstances. The natural result is the suspension of judgment. Actual chicken sexers don't suspend judgment because they believe they are reliable, even if they are unclear as to the exact mechanism.

Consider blindsight. In these cases subjects who are blind are able to reliably discriminate shapes and colors. They have no reason to think that they can do this, but nonetheless have this ability. The pure externalist submits that they know. But again the problem is with belief. As Robert Brandom points out, in cases of blindsight the subject does not generally believe that there is, say, a red square in front of him or her and the tester must *force* him or her to guess.³¹ To get around this we might introduce a superblindsighted person, someone who is both reliable and also has an overwhelming urge to believe even though there is no accessible reason for his belief. This would be an example for the pure externalist, but such cases are contrived and odd. There are no superblindsighted people and in order to imagine one we introduce some cognitive defect that compels belief. But it is a *defect* that leads to belief, an unnatural sub-personal mechanism forces belief. The natural response is to suspend judgment.

These cases are tricky because they trade on *our* perspective. The person in question is reliable and we have good reason to believe this. From our perspective the reports naturally lead us to belief and knowledge. But the crucial aspect of the cases is that our perspective and the subject's perspective differ a great deal. The subject does not have any reason to believe she is reliable. This is what seems to motivate pure externalism. But if we clearly distinguish the perspectives and ask ourselves what each will naturally believe, the flaw in pure externalism is apparent.

The proper lesson of the Pyrrhonian analogies is that one might very well have grasped the gold, hit the target, or discerned the truth but since one doesn't have good reason to believe this suspension of judgment is natural. Even if we grant the pure externalist's analysis of knowledge, belief is the problem. Externalists tend to assume belief and then look for things to add to get knowledge. This is how it can maneuver around skepticism. From a Pyrrhonian perspective the issue is not whether abstractly we might credit the grasper of gold, archer, or person with a belief who happen to be reliability, though they have no

³¹ Robert B. Brandom, "Insights and Blindspots of Reliabilism," in *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 102-105.

reason to believe this. The question is whether or not we would claim to have grasped the gold, or if we would claim to have hit the target, or if we would form or retain beliefs once our epistemic situation is made clear. The analogies are illustrations of our epistemic situation as the externalist describes it, at least in the parts where the externalism does the anti-skeptical work. In the mouth of the Pyrrhonist they aren't meant to show that externalist's are missing something in their definition of knowledge or leave us lacking accessible justification. We already knew the latter and the former doesn't produce an enlightening debate. Rather they are meant to suggest that the natural response as a subject in such a situation is to, like the skeptic, suspend judgment.

What of Greco's argument? A basketball player is lucky to have athletic talents, but when he makes a three pointer after exercising those talents in appropriate circumstances we credit him with a virtuous performance. By analogy we may be lucky to have reliable intellectual faculties, but when we exercise them in appropriate circumstances we deserve credit for our virtuous epistemic performance. But in the basketball example we also can tell he scored and that he has athletic virtues. We can state that, in fact, his athletic abilities are quite good and were exercised successfully on this occasion. So can he – he has a reflective perspective on his performance. He, and we, can confidently state that it was a good shot and take and give credit for the shot because of our understanding of the situation.

The position the externalist places us in is quite different. We don't have a clear idea that our intellectual faculties are reliable and that they were exercised successfully. If we had a clear idea of this then the internalist would be satisfied. And we would also have a ready answer to the skeptic. But this is just what the externalist is doing without. We must be careful about shifting perspectives on this point – when *we* argue about externalism we posit that the belief is true and that the external condition is met. As such, we have the perspective internalists and hybrid epistemologists require. But it is better to put ourselves in the shoes of the posited agent.

To return to the basketball analogy, we are in a position where we can't really tell if the shots go in and aren't sure whether or not the shooter has athletic talents. The shooter has no clue either and there is no need to take the shot. Should he be shooting? Probably not, as it would be irresponsible to shoot and proclaim that it went in. In the same way, lacking a sense of whether or not my archery skills are developed, I shouldn't be proclaiming that my shots hit the mark. And while if I possess a gold-finding ability I deserve some credit for grasping the gold, I ought not go around proclaiming I've grasped the gold absent

any perspective on my ability. In the same way, absent a perspective on my intellectual faculties, I shouldn't assert their virtuosity and form or retain beliefs on their basis.

The issue is not the abstract question of whether the shooter or believer deserves some sort of credit but rather whether as such a shooter or believer we would and should shoot or continue to believe. I engage in inquiry and find myself entertaining various beliefs and want to discern what I ought to believe. I don't have a perspective on my epistemic situation, that is, whether or not the processes I can use to arrive at belief are in fact virtuous. The externalist tells me this is no problem – they are *my* belief forming processes and so if I trust them and if they turn out to be virtuous then I know. That is all well and good, but why should I place trust in those faculties? It doesn't help that they are my faculties here. I may have an ability to arrive at what turns out to be the truth, but if I don't have any sense of whether or not this is the case, I'm led to suspension of judgment.

Within the Five Modes the externalist vindicates hypothesis, in a way, by allowing that particular beliefs gain positive epistemic status because of a property that may be inaccessible to the subject. The Pyrrhonist, I've argued, can stress that for the subject this is still a mere hypothesis. But we should also be wary about how easy the externalist's move is. We can't tell which belief forming processes are virtuous and hence it is possible, and quite probably, that different inquirers will deem different processes virtuous. This leads to dispute about which processes deserve the privilege. Even if I think that whomever has cleaved onto virtuous belief forming processes deserves some credit, there is a good deal of dispute over which processes these are. Deciding disputes about differing externalist criteria of truth would mean further inquiry and account giving, but this is just the sort of process the externalist deems unnecessary. Left, then, in the epistemic situation the externalist describes, suspension of judgment is natural.

Contemporary epistemology tends to assume a subject with a set of beliefs beyond skeptical threat – skepticism only threatens knowledge, and this is how the Pyrrhonian analogies have been transposed. But actual Pyrrhonism opens a new dimension. As we engage in inquiry generally and epistemology in particular, what are we led to believe? Pyrrhonism relies only on natural epistemic pressures on belief, not a particular theory of knowledge. Its power derives from the natural progression of rational inquiry, and vis-à-vis the externalist the point is that in the epistemic situation as *they* describe it we tend to suspend judgment. If we assume belief and see the task of epistemology as moving from belief to knowledge, Greco's move can seem attractive because I do deserve credit, in some sense, for

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virtues that I possess even if I am lucky, in another sense, to possess them. But this isn't the point of the Pyrrhonian opposition.

The externalist provides a particular conception of our epistemic situation in which we have knowledge without a perspective, without accessible justifications for some of the things we know. The internalist argues that something is wanting in this definition of knowledge and the Cartesian-style skeptic argues that such a person doesn't know. The impasse develops because the externalist just says, "So what?" making the point that the internalist and skeptic don't have so much of an argument as a bald accusation. Pyrrhonism – actual Pyrrhonism – returns the favor: as we put ourselves in the situation of the subject possessing externalist knowledge the reply is "So what?" as it is entirely unclear why we would continue to believe in such a situation. In doing so it engages externalism from a different and more revealing angle.

7. Conclusion

This paper has defined externalism and then analyzed it in terms of skepticism. Externalism denies accessibility and thereby has quick responses to skepticism. I have argued, however, that externalism is a disappointing and misguided response. Once we decouple high standards and Cartesian-style skepticism externalism is unnecessary to respond to the first and unsatisfying as a response to the second. Exactly what is deficient about externalism becomes clear when it is analyzed as a reply to Pyrrhonism. The externalist changes the terrain when confronted with a skeptic by adopting a definition of knowledge that rejects the need for the sorts of reasons the skeptic demands. But with the Pyrrhonist this does not work – the Pyrrhonist pushes us to abandon belief and cannot be avoided in this way. And when we are clear about the position the externalist puts us in, suspension of judgment is a natural response.

But what of those who don't suspend judgment, who have vast theories about the nature of things immune to inquiry? Belief can float free from justification. It need not be defended, and that is why modern epistemology concerns itself with what status or property mere belief must have to be knowledge. People who believe independent of inquiry seem to resist Pyrrhonism because they don't suspend judgment. They retain belief, proclaiming to have hit the target, and the externalist affords them knowledge if, in fact, they have hit the target.

But what of it? Pyrrhonism isn't for everyone and the Pyrrhonist has no interest in making people suspend judgment. Pyrrhonism is for "men of talent"

and for those who engage in inquiry.³² It doesn't target the practices of people going about daily business. Pyrrhonism emerges from the practice of inquiry. If belief isn't responsive to reason and argument, then there is little more to say on the matter. Proclaiming your belief immune to reason is not a refutation of skepticism. A Pyrrhonist can note that such people behave differently – they cling to hypotheses at points and do not respond to argument, often leading to undecidable disputes amongst themselves. There is no need to, or point in, showing that such people are wrong. What could such a showing look like? Reasons have given out. Should he believe? We think not, insofar as we are in a project of inquiry that is rational and critical. But we can't force him to adhere to such a project.

And perhaps this is where externalism is leading, acceptance of belief beyond reason coupled with a move to privilege some beliefs over others based on what are presumed, but cannot be shown, to be epistemic virtues. If so, there is an interesting historical parallel.

Pyrrhonism enjoyed a long-running revival in the early-modern period that has been described in great detail in the work of Richard Popkin.³³ In this period some used Pyrrhonism as a *defense* of religious faith.³⁴ The discussion above should make clear why this was an attractive option. Pyrrhonism is a leveler; it leads us to suspension of judgment by undermining the pretensions of critical rational inquiry. In an intellectual climate, like post-reformation religious argument, that is prone to seemingly unending disputes, Pyrrhonism is an attractive (and humane) response. With the field leveled, faith, scripture, an inner light, or tradition can swoop in and save belief. Such a position is not Pyrrhonist because belief remains. But Pyrrhonism can be used as a powerful tool within this sort of fideism.

In ways this position resembles the externalism discussed in this paper. Accessible justification is rejected and instead belief is grounded beyond critical inquiry, in epistemic virtues that cannot be defended. We may choose our source of belief (tradition, faith, science, whim, etc.) and privilege it with our externalism. While externalism cast in this light is by no means skepticism, it need

³² Sextus, *Outlines*, I: 12.

³³ E.g. Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁴ For an example of how this can work, see Michel de Montaigne, "Apology for Raimond de Sebonde," in *The Essays*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt, trans. Charles Cotton (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952), 208-293.

not oppose the Pyrrhonist. It only adds a layer. Belief is retained, knowledge is rescued, but the loss is our access to our epistemic situation as active inquirers.

This is not a refutation of externalism or a vindication of internalism. Rather I hope to show through Pyrrhonism why externalism seems insufficient and what it is giving up. The impasse between externalists and Cartesian-style skeptics develops because the skeptic targets the justification condition for knowledge that the externalist rejects, leaving the two talking past each other because they are working in different epistemological paradigms. The same impasse develops between internalists and externalists. Pyrrhonism brings a new perspective to externalism because it comes at epistemology from another angle. From the perspective of the Pyrrhonist, the question for externalism is this: as inquirers if we place ourselves in the epistemic situation the externalist posits, would and should we continue to believe? The Pyrrhonian analogies coupled with careful analysis of the position of the subject in externalism's conception of our epistemic situation suggest that we ought not to continue to believe and that as inquirers we won't. But maybe not, the Pyrrhonist isn't in the game of forcing us not to believe – all he needs for a powerful skeptical challenge is a natural tendency to suspend judgment in such a situation, and this I've argued he has. Some will go on believing no matter what and can use externalist epistemology as a buttress.

The question, then, is if we are externalists and continue to believe, what are we giving up about inquiry? What follows from this and are we willing to accept those consequences? And if we find ourselves suspending judgment when placed in the externalist's view of our epistemic situation, the terrain in epistemology shifts in interesting ways. Instead of debating conditions for knowledge we can ask what would need to be added in order for us to naturally believe, to be struck that we ought to believe. If we retain belief, when and why do we do so? What can be added to an externalist account to explain how we ought to behave epistemically? When are we entitled by default or justified based on a status rather than a claim? There is much room for development here, whether it is in hybrid epistemologies or in diffusions of skepticism through default entitlements.³⁵ But if we take Pyrrhonism seriously the questions ought to be approached through an analysis of the process of inquiry and epistemic practices related to belief. The questions would be how we do and can better go about inquiry, when we are led to belief through inquiry, and when suspension of judgment might be appropriate. The Pyrrhonian challenge isn't to be met in

³⁵ Ernest Sosa, Susan Haack, and Robert Fogelin all present versions of the former, Michael Williams has advocated approaches to skepticism based on default entitlements.

abstract musings about conditions of knowledge but by working to produce an understanding of our epistemic situation in which belief naturally follows from inquiry and can be defended.

That task is beyond the scope of this paper – here I hope to have shown how we should understand epistemological externalism in relation to skepticism, demonstrated how Pyrrhonism targets externalism in a way that shows why we are unsatisfied with it, and suggest how we might proceed in epistemological inquiry in reaction to the Pyrrhonian challenge.