

## Chapter 7, Scepticism

### Philosophical vs Ordinary Scepticism

1. **Phil. Scepticism** ends only when a belief = true beyond any **conceivable doubt**

e.g. Doubting whether we can rely on our sense impressions from wherever they come  
NB. The 'undercutting defeater'.  
I cannot know I'm not a product of an evil genius

**Answers:**

- a) Either accept the **circularity** of the argument that sense impressions exist because I have sense impressions of them
- or b) **Solipsism:**

Problems:

- (i) **Wittgenstein's private language argument**
- (ii) **Goes beyond the evidence** – assumes its own falsity by believing a proposition about the world is true

or c) **Agnostic position:**

Problem = you **can only know what's in your mind now** – justification for memories = circular – reality of the past to prove reality of the past

2. **Descartes' method**

- a) **Certainty = own existence as a thinking/doubting thing**
- b) **Clear and distinct ideas** – indubitable
- c) **God must exist:**
  - (i) **Ontological argument**
  - (ii) **The lesser cannot give rise to the greater/** the imperfect to the perfect
- d) Therefore the possibility of the **external world:**
  - (i) **God would not deceive us** – only a limited imperfect being would do this
  - (ii) **Causation** = a clear and distinct idea therefore sense impressions, which are not of our own making, are caused by something
  - (iii) God created us so that if we **use our faculties correctly** we can avoid making mistakes

3. **Ordinary doubt:**

– if we can't accept the God assumption

- a) **More modest claim** – closer to the way we ordinarily use the verb 'to know'  
i.e. **true not beyond any conceivable doubt**  
– possibility = we may be shown to be wrong in thinking something to be true
- b) **Science** – predictive success – tested through observation and experiment  
– but still depends on perception and all manner of thing could produce the same regularities
- c) **Sceptics' argument for dreams and hallucinations**  
– itself **assumes the same contrasting reality** to distinguish between dreams and reality i.e. assumes the very thing they are denying – otherwise the dream/hallucination is the reality

## Chapter 7, Scepticism continued

– therefore our claims that our impressions are untrue would be meaningless without the possibility of correcting our mistaken beliefs about the outside world

- d) **Egocentric predicament** = what we are left with i.e. each confined to our own perceptual world – what we believe to be the external world might = just what's in our minds

### 4. Doubt and the search for knowledge

Is knowledge just what our culture accepts as knowledge?

We need some explanation to justify our claims to knowledge

We need the sceptic's strong sense of 'to know'

i.e. Does this mean that 'to know' we must 'know that we know'?

Or is it enough just to concede the possibility that refuting evidence could arise, but not believe that it will?

#### a) **Forms of knowledge:**

- (i) **Intuitive**
- (ii) **Demonstrative**
- (iii) **Direct**
- (iv) **Indirect**
- (v) **Generalisations**

#### b) **In strong sense** – we would have to exclude most of what we claim to know

– but this means it has very little application

– if certainty = only possible when all the evidence is in it has virtually no application at all

### 5. Postmodernism:

#### a) To accept something = false = to accept an **alternative account as true**

i.e. we need to know some things in the strong sense to have doubts about other things

#### b) We argue something is true when it **coheres with the rest of our beliefs**

#### c) But this means most of anybody's beliefs about anything must be true (Davidson)