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<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/writing.html>

Skepticism: A Summary

I. Antiquity (500 BC – 200 AD)

- Greek skeptics (Pyrrho, et. al.) distinguished (metaphysically) between “being” and “appearing,” and (epistemically) distinguished between the sensing and the identity of a phenomenon.
- Greek skeptics (epistemologically) *neither affirmed nor denied to know*,¹ as they thought both claims were dogmatic, searching, instead, for anything that might be more ‘knowable.’ For Sextus Empiricus, experience was the ultimate guide in evaluating knowledge (where, in fact, the word ‘empiricism’ derives.)
- Buddhist skeptics emphasized *experiential state* of ‘enlightenment’ (involving some kind of direct experience free from the screen, or gloss, of the mind’s constant activity of analysis.) Buddhist philosophers and logicians (in the Madhyamika tradition) denied in the existence of *essences*.² Truth and existence, moreover, exist solely in the contexts and conventions of their knowledge-claims.

Overview of early Buddhist Philosophy:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_philosophy

http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Buddhist_philosophy

See additional information (skepticism in antiquity):

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_skepticism

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism-ancient/>

II. Modern and Contemporary Skepticism

- Aside from the *exclusive definition* of skepticism discussed last week, skepticism should be contrasted with *foundationalism*. Foundationalists believe argue that knowledge must have foundations, i.e., that there must exist true beliefs whose justification need not refer to other beliefs. (Consider, for example, Descartes’ ‘clear and distinct intuitions.’)

More information:

<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/courses/epist/notes/sense-data.html>

¹ Recall definition (justified, true belief)

² Recall definition (necessary properties)

- Recall (previous notes) that Berkeley, in answering to Locke, was a skeptic regarding material (but not mental) substance. Hume, on the other hand, took a far more radical turn by advancing a skeptical argument regarding the nature of *causation*. This made Hume an *external world skeptic*, since the *causal theory of perception* goes out the window. Another way of seeing the Humean position is to consider that we infer the external world based on its (causal) contact with our perceptions. But we only have contact with our perceptions.
- Aside from Descartes' dream and delusion arguments, and Hume's particularism, another form of skepticism (combining elements of Descartes and Hume) runs as follows: one cannot *prove* that perception is reliable without relying on the assumption that our senses are reliable (hence begging the question.)
- Thomas Reid's commons-sense refutation of skepticism (18th cent.) a) If the skeptic is right, then we can't trust our faculty of reasoning. Therefore, by the same token, we cannot trust the skeptic's conclusions. Moreover, if the skeptic is wrong, then we (trivially) arrive at the same conclusion (...that the skeptic is wrong ☺).
- 20th century arguments against skepticism focus carefully on logic and language use (recall Moore's logical distinctions of 'possible' and Austin's arguments. Wittgenstein viewed skepticism solely in terms of misuses of rules ('hinge propositions') we inevitably employ in language-games (whenever we use language.) **An interesting 20th cent paper topic is the Gettier Problem. See:**
<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/courses/epist/notes/gettier.html>

Exercise: Applying any of the above notions to film *The Matrix*.
Consider the summary of some of the film's philosophical issues:

<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/courses/epist/notes/matrix.html>

How would each of the above positions account for points 1.)-6.) as discussed above?
Consider the interesting points made in: "What's So Bad About Living in the Matrix?"

http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com/rl_cmp/new_phil_fr_pryor.html