

1. Background

1.1. *Neo-Moorean Response to Skepticism*

NM1. If I know that *o*, then I know that *not-h_S*.

NM2. I know that *o*.

NM3. ∴ I know that *not-h_S*.

1.2. *NM2 relies on an externalist epistemology*

Specifically, it relies on a *safety-based* epistemology: my belief that *o* could not easily have been false. It is externalist because the safety of my beliefs is something that depends on facts external to me:

- The environment is such that it's a very remote possibility that I'm a brain in a vat, deceived by a demon, etc., even if I *can't know* or *can't justifiably believe* that this possibility is remote.

The remoteness of this possibility is a *contingent* feature of the environment: it's *possible* that I am a brain in a vat. However, I fail to know that *o* *only* if that possibility is *non-remote*. Hence, in order to refute the Neo-Moorean, the skeptic cannot only prove that *h_S* is possible, but must further show that *h_S* is a *non-remote* possibility.

The Neo-Moorean's case thus rests on ascertaining contingent relationships between our environment and our beliefs. However, that sounds more like empirical science (neuroscience or psychology) and less like epistemology.

2. The Understanding Argument

2.1. *The Main Argument*

U1. If *philosophical* understanding of human knowledge in some domain *D* is possible, then it is possible to know a fact in *D* without knowing any other facts in *D*.

U2. It is impossible to know a fact in a domain *D* without knowing any other facts in *D*.

U3. ∴ Philosophical understanding of human knowledge is impossible.

Typical candidates for *D*: the external world, other minds, and induction.

Stroud sometimes frames U2 as the impossibility of explaining how *any* knowledge of *D* is possible.

If this argument is sound, then non-philosophical understanding—especially scientific understanding—of knowledge is still possible.

2.2. *The 'Domain Argument' for U2*

D1. If *S*'s knowledge of *D* is because of her knowledge of some other domain *E*, then *S* can infer from her knowledge of *E* to her knowledge of *D*.

D2. If *S* can infer from her knowledge of *E* to her knowledge of *D*, then *S*'s knowledge of *E* already contains knowledge of *D*.

D3. ∴ If *S*'s knowledge of *D* is because of her knowledge of *E*, then *S*'s knowledge of *D* is because of her knowledge of *D*.

D4. If *S*'s knowledge of *D* is because of her knowledge of *D*, then it is impossible to know a fact in a domain *D* without knowing any other facts in *D*.

U2. ∴ It is impossible to know a fact in a domain *D* without knowing any other facts in *D*.

3. Internalism and epistemic principles

3.1. *Why internalists reject U2*

1. People can have knowledge of epistemic principles, e.g. *S* knows that: if *S* knows that *it visually appears to S that o*, then *S*'s knowledge of the external world is possible, and

2. Epistemic principles are not part of the external world.

3. People can have knowledge of appearances, e.g. *S* knows that *it visually appears to S that o*.

4. Visual appearances are not part of the external world.

~U2. ∴ It is possible to know a fact about the external world without knowing any further facts about the external world. (From 1-4)

3.2. *Problems with the internalist argument*

1. If *S* knows that an epistemic principle EP1 is true, then there is another epistemic principle EP2 such that *S* knows that *EP2 justifies EP1*

2. But this then require a third epistemic principle *S* knows that *EP3 justifies EP2*, etc.

3. ∴ People cannot have knowledge of epistemic principles.

- Moreover, even if, e.g. EP2 somehow halted the regress (e.g. if EP2 is known *a priori*), we could not have a philosophical understanding of our knowledge of EP2: it would be impossible to have knowledge of any fact about EP2 without already having knowledge of EP2 (or some other *a priori* principle).

4. Externalism and understanding

4.1. *Why externalists reject U2*

1. It is possible to have knowledge about *D* while *being in a set of conditions* that are part of *D*, yet not *knowing* whether one is in those conditions. (Core Externalist Idea)
 - Ex. it is possible to have safe beliefs, where safety is about a relationship between one's beliefs and the external world, without knowing that one's beliefs are safe.
 2. ∴ It is possible that *S's* knowledge of some fact in *D* is not because of *S's* knowledge of anything.
- ~U2. It is possible to know a fact about the external world without knowing any further facts about the external world.

Stroud doesn't actually challenge this argument. Rather, he points out that this only works if externalists also give up the goal of a philosophical understanding of human knowledge in general.

4.2. *Stroud vs. externalism*

1. If externalism is true, then, at best,
 - a. We discover some theory *T*, which implies that *in conditions C*, *beliefs that o could not easily be false*;
 - b. *T* is true; and
 - c. We believe that *T* while in conditions *C*.
 (In this case, if externalism is true, we also know that *T*.)
2. If a-c are satisfied, then either we have no reasons for believing that *T* or our reasons are circular.
3. If we have no reasons for believing that *T* or only circular reasons for believing that *T*, then we have no good reasons for believing that *T*.
4. If we have no good reasons for *T's* explanation of how knowledge about *D* is possible, then philosophical understanding of human knowledge in domain *D* is impossible.
5. ∴ If externalism is true, then philosophical understanding of human knowledge of the external world is impossible. (From 1-4)