The Skeptical Paradox and the Indispensability of Knowledge-Beliefs[*]

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Recently the following understanding of epistemological skepticism has become widely accepted: skepticism about our knowledge of the world is not a thesis to be accepted or refuted; the philosophical problem skepticism presents is nothing but a paradox to be solved, a paradox given rise to by some apparently forceful arguments for skepticism. Call this the paradox view of skepticism. The paradox view is certainly appealing, for it is difficult to imagine that any of us would seriously consider accepting skepticism even given the force of its arguments. Although this does not mean that it is a way of seeing skepticism that is in no need of justification, those who see skepticism this way usually do not try to justify their view. In this paper I will first explain why justification of the paradox view is required, and suggest that the best justification we can have is by showing that knowledge-beliefs, i.e. beliefs that we know this or that about the world, are indispensable to us. I will then argue in the remainder of this paper for the indispensability thesis.

1. Paradoxes and Obviousness

A paradox is a set of apparently inconsistent propositions all of which seem true. One way in which a paradox arises is the presentation of an apparently valid argument with true premises but a conclusion that is known to be false or obviously false — the set of apparently inconsistent propositions which form a paradox are thus the premises of the argument plus the negation of the conclusion. Zeno's argument that Achilles can never

overtake the Tortoise, for instance, presents us with a paradox in just this way. Given what we know about the world, the conclusion of Zeno's argument is obviously false; in fact, we can prove it false simply by running off and overtaking a tortoise. But all the steps in Zeno's argument leading to that false conclusion seem impeccable. Hence the paradox. Other examples of paradoxes arising in this way include the sorites paradox and the surprise examination paradox.

If skepticism presents us with a paradox, it seems that it has to be a paradox of this sort, for skepticism consists of <u>arguments</u> for the skeptical conclusion that we do not know anything about the external world. Most philosophers, I think, agree that some of the arguments for skepticism seem to be sound, for otherwise we would not have had all these troubles with skepticism in the first place. To give rise to a paradox, however, the conclusion of these skeptical arguments has to be either known to be false or obviously false. It is not enough that we believe that it is false, for it is not the case that we should see a paradox whenever we are faced with an apparently sound argument that has a conclusion we believe to be false. But it seems that no one can reasonably claim that the skeptical conclusion is <u>known</u> to be false or <u>obviously</u> false without showing that the skeptical conclusion is indeed false. Since those who see skepticism as merely posing a paradox do not even try to show that the skeptical conclusion is false, their view seems unjustified. On the other hand, since they see skepticism that way precisely because they do not think it is necessary to refute skepticism, to try to show that the skeptical conclusion is false would be an unwelcome way of justifying the paradox view.

So we must try something else. If it is a natural reading of 'obviously false' that nothing can be obviously false unless it is false, we can try to characterize how a paradox

arises in another way: an apparently sound argument poses a paradox when it is obvious to us that its conclusion is false. This is different from the earlier characterization because 'it is obvious to S that p' does not entail 'p'.[1] Obviousness thus understood is relativized to the subject, and reflects the familiar fact that what is obvious to a person may not be obvious to another. But this does not relativize paradoxes if, for there to be a paradox, it has to be obvious to all, or at least most, of us that the conclusion of an apparently sound argument is false.

So the crucial question for those who accept the paradox view is 'Is it obvious to us that the skeptical conclusion is false?'. Some may think the answer is a straightforward 'Yes'. Stewart Cohen, for one, can be taken to be expressing such an attitude against the skeptical conclusion when he remarks that "skepticism is crazy" (Cohen 2001, 96) — a view may not be considered crazy simply because it is false, but it probably would be if it is obvious to all of us that it is false. Barry Stroud, for another, may be expressing the same attitude when he remarks that "[a]lmost nobody thinks for a moment that scepticism could be correct" (Stroud 1989, 100) — not for a moment, because the incorrectness is obvious to most of us.

But it is hardly satisfying to say just that it is obvious to us that the skeptical conclusion is false. It may be obvious to us that that is obvious to us, but if someone insists, even merely for the sake of argument, that it is not obvious to us that the skeptical conclusion is false, we cannot silence him simply by saying that it is obvious to us that that is obvious to us, for he can once again deny the obviousness — the second-level one. I am not sure how it can be proved that something is obvious to us; perhaps the only way is to poll everyone, which is clearly not feasible. Instead of trying to prove that it is

obvious to us that the skeptical conclusion is false, however, we can try to explain why

something is, or what makes it, obvious to us, and see whether the explanation applies to

the present case. The concept of obviousness may be so vague that an attempt to look for

such an explanation is hopeless, but if we want to justify the paradox view, it is worth

trying to offer such an explanation. The explanation I am going to offer is, I believe, at

least plausible.

It would be helpful to consider the case of Zeno's paradox, for it seems that most

of us do think that it is obvious that the conclusion of Zeno's argument is false. So the

question is: what makes this obvious to us? I said above that <u>given what we know about

the world</u>, Zeno's conclusion is obviously false; now we should reformulate the point

according to our revised characterization of how a paradox arises: given what we know

about the world, it is <u>obvious to us</u> that Zeno's conclusion is false. It is not easy to

specify what knowledge is required for making this obvious to us. It may be our

knowledge of what happened in numerous cases of the same kind, or our knowledge,

rudimentary or advanced, of some natural laws of motion. In any case, such knowledge is

only necessary but not sufficient for making it obvious to us that Zeno's conclusion is

false. The knowledge has to be related to the conclusion in some way to make it obvious

to us that it is false. Again, they can be related in more than one way. The knowledge

may logically entail the falsity of the conclusion or be overwhelmingly strong evidence

against the conclusion, or they may be related in still some other ways. We can leave the

details open by putting it this way: <u>in the light of</u> some of the things we know about the

world, it is obvious to us that Zeno's conclusion is false.

For those who see skepticism as a real threat to human knowledge, this way of

explaining obviousness is unacceptable, for it simply assumes that we have knowledge of the world — as far as the obviousness of the falsity of the skeptical conclusion is concerned, the explanation blatantly begs the question against skepticism. But again, for those who accept the paradox view, it would be an unwelcome way of justifying their view to try to show that we do know this or that about the world. A way out of this quandary is to reformulate the suggested explanation one more time: in the light of some of the things we believe we know about the world, it is obvious to us that Zeno's conclusion is false.

What is true of Zeno's conclusion can be generalized to other cases of obviousness. There may be cases in which something is obvious to us in the light of some other things that are obvious to us but are not believed to be known by us, but these cases cannot be explanatorily basic because the obviousness of these other things needs to be explained. Why can't, some may ask, something be obvious to us simply in the light of some of the things which we believe, or strongly believe, about the world, but which we do not believe we know? To answer this question let me stretch a little the metaphor of light: only something brighter than a would-be belief that p can shed enough light on p to make it obvious to us; and beliefs are not, while putative knowledge or what is obvious to us is, brighter than would-be beliefs. What the above explanation of obviousness implies is, then, that nothing can be obvious to us unless we believe we know something about the world.

Admittedly this is a very rough explanation, and I do not claim to have given a satisfactory account of obviousness. But I think if there is a satisfactory account of obviousness, it has to incorporate this rough explanation that I have just given. We can

test the acceptability of this explanation against some other examples than Zeno's

conclusion; it will, I believe, easily pass the tests. Instead of doing more tests, however, I

would like to support the explanation with the following general consideration: in

different domains one would find more or less things obvious, but in a domain in which

one does not believe one knows anything at all, one would not find anything in that

domain obvious. Nothing about electrical appliances, for instance, is obvious to a

primitive tribal person who does not believe he knows anything about electrical

appliances, not even that they have to be turned on to work.

Does this explanation apply to the obviousness of the falsity of the skeptical

conclusion? To say that the skeptical conclusion is false is in effect to say that we have

knowledge of the world; so the question is: are there things we believe we know in the

light of which it is obvious to us that we have knowledge of the world? The answer

cannot be that since we believe we know things about the world, it is obvious to us that

we have knowledge of the world, for what we believe to be the case may not be obvious

to us to be the case.

I think there are two ways of giving an affirmative answer to the question. First,

we do not believe that we know only one or two things about the world; we believe that

we know a lot. Let us refer to our belief that we know that p as our 'knowledge-belief

that p'. Since we have numerous knowledge-beliefs about the world, the sheer amount of

them makes it obvious to us that we have knowledge of the world.[2] Second, some of our

knowledge-beliefs are about our epistemic situations and cognitive abilities, and these

knowledge-beliefs, when combined with some other beliefs or knowledge-beliefs that we

have under certain circumstances, would make it obvious to us that we know this or that

about the world under those circumstances. For example, I believe (1) I know that when I see a human hand under normal circumstances I know that it is a human hand; (2) if a person believes, under normal circumstances, that he sees something from a very close distance, then he does see it; (3) I am looking at my hands right now when I am typing these words; and (4) I know that I have normal eyesight and that nothing has happened that would affect my vision now. (1)-(4) make it obvious to me that I know that I have hands.[3] Now if it is obvious to me that I know that I have hands, then it is also obvious to me that I have knowledge of the world — that the skeptical conclusion is false.

　　This is not, however, the end of the story. Yes, in the light of our knowledge-beliefs about the world it is obvious to us that the skeptical conclusion is false, but why should we keep that 'light' if we agree that arguments for skepticism are so forceful or even convincing? Why don't we give up all our knowledge-beliefs and keep only our beliefs about the world? Giving up all our knowledge-beliefs about the world does not amount to being a skeptic, for it may simply be a matter of not believing that we know anything rather than believing that we do not know anything. This seems a reasonable option, doesn't it?

　　We must answer 'No' to this question if we are to justify the paradox view of skepticism. I think the best way of supporting such an answer is to show that it is not an option at all for us to give up all our knowledge-beliefs, for if it was an option, it would be difficult to see how it could be shown to be <u>unreasonable</u> given that we are not able to refute the forceful arguments for skepticism. In what follows I will offer several arguments for the thesis that knowledge-beliefs about the world ('knowledge-beliefs' for short hereafter) are indispensable to us. If my arguments establish the thesis, the paradox

view can be considered justified.

The indispensability thesis I will argue for is only a conditional one. There was a time in the past at which human beings did not have any knowledge-beliefs, and there might be a time in the future at which human beings will no longer have any knowledge-beliefs. The conditional indispensability thesis I will argue for is this: as long as we have the concept of knowledge and employ the concept in the ways in which we employ it in leading our lives, we must have many knowledge-beliefs. Although my arguments will center on the role the concept of knowledge plays in our lives, I will not attempt to define or analyze the concept (which is, by the way, hopeless), for my arguments do not in any way turn on such a definition or analysis. What is important here is the fact that people do have the concept of knowledge; and I assume, reasonably I believe, that we can tell whether a person has a competent grasp of the concept simply by observing his behavior and understanding and communicating with him.

2. The Examiner Situation and the Inquirer Situation

Bernard Williams has pointed out that philosophers who are interested in problems concerning human knowledge usually concentrate on a situation which he calls the examiner situation (Williams 1970, 146-147; Williams 1972, 2-3). It is the situation in which one examines whether, or determines that, someone else who claims to know that p really knows it. The question to be answered in the examiner situation is 'Does A know that p?'. But there is another situation in which the concept of knowledge is employed, which Williams considers to be the standard situation. It is the situation in which one wants to know whether p, or to know something about a certain thing, by looking for or

asking a reliable informant.[4] The typical question to be answered in such a situation is 'Who knows whether p?' or 'Does A know whether p?'. Williams does not give a name to this second situation; let us call it the inquirer situation. These two are the standard situations in which we acquire as well as employ the concept of knowledge, and in both situations we have to have knowledge-beliefs.

Let us distinguish between two kinds of knowledge-beliefs. There are knowledge-beliefs concerning one's own knowledge of the world, which can be expressed by sentences of the form 'I believe I know that p'. We can call them first-personal knowledge-beliefs. And there are knowledge-beliefs concerning others' knowledge of the world, which can be expressed by sentences of the form 'I believe A knows that p'. We can call them other-personal knowledge-beliefs.[5] It is clear that a person who finds himself in the inquirer situation is a person who is ready to have other-personal knowledge-beliefs. The inquirer situation shows that, as Williams puts it, "we are interested in knowledge because we are interested in finding helpful knowers" (Williams 1993, 211). Indeed, the inquirer situation makes sense only to a person who already has other-personal knowledge-beliefs, and who therefore finds it sensible to acquire, or is ready to have, some more such beliefs under certain circumstances.[6]

Other-personal knowledge-beliefs may not be required in the examiner situation, but it seems that anyone who is in the examiner situation has to have first-personal knowledge-beliefs. In the examiner situation one looks for "conditions sufficient for giving an affirmative answer to the question 'Does A know that p?'", and, as Williams observes, "[i]n actual life, one very natural implication of asking that question is that the speaker himself knows that p, and is asking whether A does" (Williams 1972, 2).[7] That

is, under normal circumstances, if the speaker is to understand himself as an examiner of another person's putative knowledge that p, he has to at least <u>believe</u> that he knows that p if he does not in fact know it.

It can thus be argued that since anyone who has the concept of knowledge has to acquire the concept, as well as employ it, in the inquirer and the examiner situations, anyone who has the concept of knowledge must have knowledge-beliefs. Unfortunately, this argument is not conclusive because the following possibility has not been ruled out: a person had acquired the concept of knowledge by finding himself in the inquirer and the examiner situations, but later on gave up all his knowledge-beliefs (let's say he is a philosopher who is very impressed with the arguments for skepticism). After that he has never found himself in the inquirer situation again, for now he does not believe that there are any knowers from whom he can acquire knowledge of the world. He may still find himself in the examiner situation, but it is now a peculiar kind of examiner situation (which can be called the <u>philosophical</u> examiner situation), for in such a situation the 'examiner' does not believe that he knows anything about that which he examines others — he is an 'examiner' who does not know the model answers, and from whom you can only get a failing grade.

If this is possible, we have to look for some other aspects of the employment of the concept of knowledge which can help establish the indispensability of knowledge-beliefs.

3. Knowledge-Exercising

In employing the concept of knowledge, we do not only make knowledge-claims or

examine one's as well as others' knowledge-claims, we also do a lot of practical things with the concept, many of which require knowledge-beliefs. In the inquirer situation our purpose can be quite straightforwardly taken to be practical, namely, the acquisition of knowledge from others who are knowers; but the practicality of the concept of knowledge goes far beyond that. The practical aspect of the employment of the concept of knowledge that I want to focus on can be put generally as follows: we have some actions, thoughts, feelings and emotions, or interactions with one another which are essentially motivated, structured, or explained in terms of knowledge-beliefs. Since these actions, thoughts, feelings and emotions, or human interactions can be regarded as the <u>exercising</u> of what we believe to be our or others' knowledge of the world, let us call the phenomenon in question <u>knowledge-exercising</u>. Knowledge-exercising is, as I will try to show, pervasive in human life and constitutive of what it is to lead a human life.[8]

Knowledge-exercising obviously requires the concept of knowledge, but it is worth emphasizing that it does not require knowledge of the world. What is necessary (besides the concept of knowledge) is not knowledge, but knowledge-beliefs. Of course, for the person who exercises what he <u>believes</u> to be his knowledge of the world, what he exercises is knowledge. But if his knowledge-belief is false, which it may well be, then surely what he exercises cannot be knowledge. In any case, since knowledge-exercising requires knowledge-beliefs, if we show that knowledge-exercising is a constitutive aspect of leading a human life, and hence is indispensable to everyone who is leading such a life, we will thereby show that knowledge-beliefs are indispensable in the same sense as well.

In an attempt to answer the question 'What good is knowledge?', Fred Dretske remarks that "a person who doesn't know, but nonetheless has a true belief, exhibits a

hesitation, a lack of confidence, characteristic of people who don't know. Such people

are less prepared to <u>act</u>, less prepared to <u>use</u> the truths in their possession" (Dretske 1989,

94-95). There Dretske's aim is to show, within the framework of what he calls a

'Reliability Theory of Knowledge', why we <u>need</u> knowledge rather than mere truth. But

as far as the effect on action is concerned, he is quick to concede that knowledge-beliefs,

rather than knowledge, are sufficient to make the difference.[9] It is a general fact about

knowledge-exercising that knowledge-beliefs can affect how we act. Knowledge-

exercising is, however, far more sophisticated and complex than just a matter of being

motivated to act unhesitatingly by one's knowledge-beliefs.

Let us look at some concrete and mundane examples of knowledge-exercising to

get a better sense of what it is:

(1) I have just written a check of five hundred dollars, and I believe there is at least that

amount in my bank account. But I still check the balance of my account because it is

important to me that I <u>know</u> that there is at least five hundred dollars. — I check it in

order to get what I take to be knowledge instead of a mere belief.

(2) I <u>know</u> that my son's birthday is May 20th, and that is why I have arranged a birthday

party for him on that day; I feel very much offended when someone questions me whether

I really know my son's birthday. — I am very sure that I know, rather than merely

believe, that that is my son's birthday; and I take it that if I do not even know my son's

birthday, I should be considered a bad father.

(3) I hold myself accountable for what happened because I <u>knew</u> beforehand that this was

going to happen and did not try to prevent it from happening even though I <u>knew</u> that

there were several ways to do so. — I certainly would have felt differently if I had

considered myself as merely believing, but not knowing, all that.

(4) Jane is the only person who <u>knows</u> the thing I want to <u>know</u>, and this is what keeps my interest in talking with her. — If I did not take her to have the knowledge I want, or if I did not want to get the knowledge from her even if she has it, I would be happy to terminate my conversation with her immediately.

(5) I accept what Tom told me as evidence of what has happened because it is clear to me that what he said is not merely what he believes to be the case, but what he <u>knows</u>. — I will not accept as evidence what I do not take to be knowledge.

(6) Suppose P. F. Strawson told me that he believed the <u>Critique of Pure Reason</u> was written by Shakespeare; I am sure that I would take him to be merely joking because I know, and know that he knows, that the <u>Critique of Pure Reason</u> was written by Kant. — If I did not consider what I have as knowledge, I might be able to take what Strawson said more seriously, and might even have the intention to go to the library and check whether the first <u>Critique</u> was really written by Shakespeare.

In the above examples of knowledge-exercising, the actions, thoughts, feelings and emotions, or human interactions are impossible without the knowledge-beliefs involved; nor can they be understood or explained properly unless they are understood or explained in terms of those knowledge-beliefs. This is what makes them cases of knowledge-exercising. I am not sure whether systematic classification can be given of these and other examples of knowledge-exercising, but we do not need systematic classification to see that we can very easily find similar examples in our lives. The leading of a human life is full of situations in which one is exercising (what one takes to be) one's knowledge of the world, so many so that it is doubtful whether it could still be a

human life that one is leading if it is deprived of all these situations and the possibility of them. And if we consider also the fact that knowledge-exercising has all kinds of interrelations with other (constitutive or not) aspects of leading a human life, it should be all the more clear that it is part of what it is to lead a human life.[10]

In giving the above examples I might have represented knowledge-exercising in such a way that it looks more reflective in nature than it actually is. In fact, in most cases of knowledge-exercising we just think, act, feel, or interacts with others without reflecting on whether we have the knowledge concerned. What makes them cases of knowledge-exercising is, first, that we would not have the actions, thoughts, feelings and emotions, or human interactions if we did not have the knowledge-beliefs; and second, if we <u>do</u> reflect on our situations, we will understand our thoughts, actions, etc. in terms of our knowledge-beliefs.

We can see even more clearly the pervasiveness and importance of knowledge-exercising when we consider the role of memory in leading a human life. No one can lead a human life without taking himself to remember things in the past at all, for in almost all our actions and interactions with others we have to draw on or exercise what we remember, or, what we believe we remember.[11] Let us call this phenomenon <u>memory-exercising</u>, and call the beliefs involved <u>memory-beliefs</u>. What should be noted here is that memory is conceptually linked to knowledge. The conceptual link is not just that in most cases a person's knowledge is kept in the form of part of his memories, but also that what we remember is automatically knowledge. No one can remember that <u>p</u> without knowing that <u>p</u>;[12] or at least this is the standard use of the word 'remember', if we concede that the word can sometimes be used loosely in utterances like 'I know this did

not happen, but this is how I remember it' and (in reporting my dream last night) 'I

remembered that I was walking on the moon'. G. E. Moore, who is well-known for being

extremely careful about English usage, puts the point unequivocally as follows:

> [I]f, in the sentence 'We never know for certain anything that we
>
> remember', the word 'remember' were being used in accordance with
>
> ordinary English usage, the proposition expressed by this sentence would,
>
> I think, be a self-contradictory one. We ordinarily so use the word
>
> 'remember' that <u>part</u> of what is asserted by expressions of the form 'I
>
> remember that <u>p</u>' is 'I know for certain that <u>p</u>'. (Moore 1959, 214)

The point is, of course, not only about the English words 'remember' and 'know', but

about the relation between the concept of memory and the concept of knowledge. Given

that there is such a conceptual link, we should consider memory-belief a form of

knowledge-belief and memory-exercising a form of knowledge-exercising.[13]

Because of its pervasiveness and importance to our thoughts and actions,

knowledge-exercising is a constitutive aspect of human life as we understand it. And

since knowledge-exercising requires knowledge-beliefs, it follows that anyone who is

leading a human life must have knowledge-beliefs. But perhaps some may insist that a

human life without knowledge-exercising is still possible, even though it is presumably

extremely difficult to lead such a life, and even though in leading such a life one is kept

out of a whole dimension of thoughts, actions, feelings and emotions, as well as human

interactions and relationships, a dimension which is essential to the lives of all other

human beings.[14] I confess that I have not proved that a human life without knowledge-

exercising is impossible; proofs are rare in philosophy. What I can do to make an even

stronger case for the indispensability of knowledge-beliefs is to supplement the above

arguments with an argument along a different line.

4. Knowledge-Beliefs and Massive Agreement

Let us consider the following question: what must a person be capable of doing if he is to

count as having the concept of knowledge as well as leading a human life? It is obvious,

I think, that he must be capable of understanding others' knowledge-claims and ascribing

knowledge-beliefs to others; and more specifically, when others are engaging in

knowledge-exercising, he must be capable of understanding them as engaging in

knowledge-exercising, that is, understanding or explaining their thoughts and actions in

terms of their knowledge-beliefs about the world.

Prima facie a person who has the concept of knowledge can understand others'

knowledge-claims and ascribe knowledge-beliefs to them even though he himself does

not have any knowledge-beliefs. I will try to show that this cannot be the case. I will

focus on the ascription of knowledge-beliefs, though it should be noted that the ascription

of knowledge-beliefs to others and the understanding of their knowledge-claims are

actually two faces of the same coin. If it can be shown that no one can understand others

as having knowledge-beliefs unless he himself also has some knowledge-beliefs, and if

anyone who has the concept of knowledge must be capable of ascribing knowledge-

beliefs to others who do have knowledge-beliefs, it follows that anyone who has the

concept of knowledge must have knowledge-beliefs.

The argument I have in mind is based on some of the central ideas in Donald

Davidson's theory of interpretation.[15] As Davidson convincingly argues in his writings,

we have to agree on many different things about the world if we are to be intelligible to

one another. Wittgenstein seems to be making a comparable point when he remarks that

"[i]f language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in

definitions but also … in judgments" (Wittgenstein 1958, Part I §241). Since

understanding and communication require massive agreement, in ascribing intelligible

beliefs to others, we have no choice but to ascribe to them mostly true beliefs; true, of

course, by our lights, which means that we have no choice but to ascribe to them mostly

our own beliefs. Thus, in our ascriptions of beliefs to others we, in most cases, reveal the

beliefs we ourselves have. Here I do not have space to defend Davidson's ideas; what I

am going to do is to simply draw on these ideas to argue for the indispensability of

knowledge-beliefs.[16] I don't think this renders my argument a hostage to fortune. On the

contrary, I think my argument can be considered to be supported by Davidson's very

forceful arguments for his ideas. (And even if my argument is appealing only to those

who are sympathetic to Davidson's ideas, I believe it is still worth developing.)

The argument can be put in quite a simple way: since understanding requires

massive agreement, and since most (if not all) human beings have a large number of

knowledge-beliefs, anyone who does not have <u>any</u> knowledge-beliefs cannot be in

massive agreement with most human beings, and hence cannot understand them.

Conversely, the fact that a human being does understand most other human beings

implies that he at least has some knowledge-beliefs.[17] Given that the requirement of

massive agreement for understanding does not exclude the possibility of disagreement,

there is no need, nor is it plausible, to argue that we can never judge others' knowledge-

beliefs to be false.

If this argument is to work, it has to be shown not only that most of us have knowledge-beliefs about the world, but also that most of us have a huge number of them. Apparently the claim that most of us have a huge number of knowledge-beliefs cannot be practically verified, at least not by counting how many knowledge-beliefs each of us actually has. We do not, however, have to practically verified the claim to see that it is true. What I am going to do is to, first, show that we have much more knowledge-beliefs than it may appear; and second, give some good reasons for thinking that a human being <u>must</u> have a huge number of knowledge-beliefs <u>if he has any</u>, which implies that each of us who does have knowledge-beliefs has a huge number of them.

To begin with, Bernard Williams has pointed out that "the most straightforward or elementary expression of my belief that <u>p</u>, is the assertion that <u>p</u>, not the assertion 'I believe that <u>p</u>'" (Williams 1970, 137). Now it is important to see that the most straightforward expression of my belief that I <u>know</u> that <u>p</u> is also the assertion that <u>p</u>,[18] while the most straightforward expression of my belief that I <u>merely believe</u> that <u>p</u> is the assertion 'I believe that <u>p</u>' or 'I merely believe that <u>p</u>'. This is why it is odd, if not outright paradoxical, to make an assertion of the form '<u>p</u>, but I don't know that <u>p</u>'.[19] Because of this we cannot tell whether a person has a large number of knowledge-beliefs simply on the basis of the number of sincere knowledge-assertions (i.e. assertions beginning with 'I know that …') that he makes or is disposed to make — his knowledge-beliefs certainly outnumber his knowledge-assertions.

My next point is related specifically to knowledge-exercising. The range of a person's engagement in knowledge-exercising is much wider than it may appear because knowledge is opposed not to belief, but to <u>mere</u> belief. Knowledge is of course different

from belief, but it must at least be belief; what it cannot be is mere belief. When a person

is acting on his belief about the world, it may or may not be a case of knowledge-

exercising, depending on whether the person is taking his belief to be knowledge. It may

not be clear even to the person himself whether he takes his belief to be knowledge if he

simply acts on his belief. But if he is self-conscious and reflective enough, and if his

choice is not between taking his belief as a belief (which it obviously is) and taking it as

knowledge, but between taking his belief as a mere belief and taking it as knowledge,

then more often than not he would take it as knowledge, particularly when he has what he

takes to be good reasons for the belief and when the belief is to motivate him to act. This

is because a belief taken to be a mere belief by the person himself who has the belief

usually cannot motivate him to act or cause him to have any thoughts or feelings; and in

living a human life he has to act, to think, and to feel most of the time.

Unlike other kinds of beliefs about the world, such as beliefs about the colors of

things and beliefs about people's behavior, knowledge-beliefs are not restricted to any

specific kinds of things in the world. Strictly speaking, knowledge-beliefs are not beliefs

about the world, for the direct object of one's knowledge-belief is the putative knowledge

one believes one has rather than the thing that one believes one knows; but it is clear that

knowledge-beliefs can be taken to be <u>indirectly</u> about things in the world. And what

should be noted here is that knowledge-beliefs can be indirectly about whatever that can

be the objects of beliefs about the world. To put it another way, whatever we believe

about the world <u>can be</u> taken by us, rightly or wrongly, to be something that we know.[20]

So even though knowledge-beliefs are in a sense only one kind of belief, this is not good

reason at all for thinking that the number of knowledge-beliefs we have cannot be as large

19

as is needed for them to be essential to our massive agreement.

Indeed, the fact that our knowledge-beliefs are about so many different kinds of things in the world is a very good reason for thinking that the number of knowledge-beliefs we have must be very large. We have knowledge-beliefs partly because we understand the world as having uniformities or regularities, and the uniformities or regularities we understand the world as having are in part manifested in the ways we classify things in the world into different kinds. Accordingly, when we have a knowledge-belief about something of a certain kind, the uniformity or regularity we understand the world to have as far as that kind of thing is concerned allows us in most cases to have many other knowledge-beliefs about things of the same kind. Take the example of colors of things. If a person believes he knows what the color of a particular lemon is, there will be circumstances in which he believes he knows what the color of other particular lemons is, and circumstances in which he believes he knows what the colors of other fruits are, and circumstances in which he believes he knows what the colors of other small size objects are, and so on. Thus, if a person has any knowledge-beliefs about colors of things, he will have a large number of them; and the same is true of his knowledge-beliefs about many other kinds of things in the world.

The holistic character of belief can give further support to the idea that if we have any knowledge-beliefs, we will have a huge number of them. Although a very strict holism may be controversial, which holds that the content of a belief changes whenever there is some change in the belief-system of which it is a member, it is undeniable that a person cannot have a particular belief without having many other related beliefs. And with respect to knowledge-beliefs there are two points we should note. First, a

knowledge-belief usually requires many other related knowledge-beliefs. I cannot

believe, for example, that I know that the Critique of Pure Reason was written by Kant

unless I believe also that I know that there is such a book, that the person Kant existed,

that a book, or at least a philosophy book, has to be written by a person, etc. Second, as

we have seen in the discussion of knowledge-exercising, beliefs which are not themselves

knowledge-beliefs sometimes also require knowledge-beliefs in the sense of being caused

or explained by them.

It should be added that all the above points are applicable also to memory-beliefs.

If we consider the fact that memory-belief is a form of knowledge-belief, we should see

even more clearly that the number of knowledge-beliefs we have must be very large, so

large so that no one can understand and communicate with us without sharing some of

our knowledge-beliefs. Even if a person was able not to engage in knowledge-exercising

at all or find himself ever in the inquirer or examiner situation, he would still be, as it

were, locked in the human community of shared knowledge-beliefs by his understanding

of what other human beings say and think — but he will not feel being locked or trapped

unless he has already been thinking like a fly in a bottle.

5. What about Those Skeptics?

We are justified in seeing skepticism as merely posing a paradox because we cannot help

having knowledge-beliefs about the world, in the light of which the skeptical conclusion

is obviously false to us. But what about those philosophers who claim, or are considered,

to be skeptics? How can it be obvious to them that the skeptical conclusion is false?

Well, in most philosophical discussions 'the skeptic' does not refer to real people — 'the

skeptic' is skepticism personified. Let us, however, assume that there are real people who

sincerely claim to believe that the skeptical conclusion is true. If it is not obvious to these

'skeptics' that the skeptical conclusion is false, it is not because they do not have

knowledge-beliefs about the world, but because they are somehow insensitive or even

blind to the light their knowledge-beliefs shed on the falsity of the skeptical conclusion.

Such insensitivity or blindness calls for some explanation, but it is no place here to try to

explain it.[21] Let me end with making this reassuring point: since knowledge-beliefs are

indispensable to us, none of us can be a skeptic without being inconsistent; this should

give us an extra motivation for seeing skepticism as merely posing a paradox.

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Notes

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[1] 'It is obvious to S that p' may be equivalent to 'S believes that it is obvious that p', but I prefer the former expression because it captures the phenomenology of obviousness better. It should be noted that 'It is obvious to S that p' is not equivalent to 'S believes that it is obvious to S that p', for S does not have to see the obviousness as being relativized to S in order to see the obviousness.

[2] An anonymous reviewer points out that we could have a large number of trivial knowledge-beliefs, such as those about tautologies, or even an infinite number of them produced by a simple generator (e.g. 'I believe that if I know that p, I know that $(p \vee q)$' generates an infinite number of knowledge-beliefs on the basis of just one knowledge-belief). This should not, however, trivialize the point I am making here. For one thing, I am speaking of knowledge-beliefs about the external world, and knowledge-beliefs about tautologies therefore do not count; for another, the point is about the numerous knowledge-beliefs we actually have, and most of them are not empty of informational content or produced by some simple generator.

[3] (1)-(4) are actually my knowledge-beliefs and beliefs, and the point here is merely that they make it obvious to me that I know that I have hands. The point cannot be challenged by questioning (1)-(4).

[4] For an interesting exposition of the idea of knower as reliable informant, see Craig (1990).

[5] Some philosophers may like to call them 'third-personal knowledge-beliefs', but 'other-personal' is actually more precise than 'third-personal' because 'A' can be 'you' instead of 'he', 'she', or 'they'.

[6] Some theories in epistemology rely on a sharp distinction between the first-personal and the third-personal (or other-personal) perspectives, such as Robert Fogelin's (Fogelin 1994) conception of justified belief and some forms of contextualism about knowledge-attributions (see, for example, DeRose (1995) and Lewis (1996)). My distinction between first-personal knowledge-beliefs and other-personal knowledge-beliefs, however, is not a clear-cut one. It seems that in most cases if I believe that A knows that p (rather than merely that A knows whether p), I will as a result believe that I know that p. In other words, an other-personal knowledge-belief will usually give rise to a corresponding first-personal knowledge-belief. This is because we treat (those whom we believe to be) knowers as our <u>sources of knowledge</u>. On the other hand, sometimes it is mostly because I already believe I know that p that I take others to know that p as well. In other words, a first-personal knowledge-belief can encourage a corresponding other-personal knowledge-belief. This is true typically of cases in which the knowledge-beliefs are about something (believed to be) straightforwardly observable, such as a tree in the garden or a pencil on the table. In these cases, I believe I know that p simply because (I believe) I am straightforwardly seeing that p. And when I take others to be seeing what I am seeing in the same circumstances, I take them to know what I myself know. I would

like to thank an anonymous reviewer for urging me to clarify this point.

[7] In fact, in Williams (1970), Williams characterizes the examiner situation this way: "the situation in which I know that p is true, this other man has asserted that p is true, and I ask the question whether this other man really knows it, or merely believes it" (146).

[8] The concept of a human life is vague, but I think it is clear that a human life as I understand it here is more than the biological life of a human being, that it should include most of the things that a human being does which are made possible at least by his having a human mind that functions properly and by his being a member of some sort of human community. Incidentally, this idea that knowledge-exercising is a constitutive aspect of leading a human life is inspired in part by the following remark of Wittgenstein's: "My life shews that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on. — I tell a friend e.g. "Take that chair over there", "Shut the door", etc. etc." (Wittgenstein 1969, §7).

[9] As he continues, "This, though, is a disadvantage that can easily be remedied without conferring knowledge. Let the believer be as certain as those who know. We can imagine, if we like, that the mere believer thinks … that he knows" (95). In any case, even with this refinement Dretske's point still seems a bit crude, for even if a person does not believe that he knows that p, he may not be hesitant to act on his belief that p if that belief is strong enough.

[10] It may be helpful to give some other examples of what I believe to be the constitutive aspects of leading a human life: thinking, and in various modes; having beliefs about various things; desiring various things; intending to act and usually acting accordingly;

remembering what happened to oneself and others; exercising knowledge of one's own thoughts and experiences (or, as philosophers usually call it, self-knowledge); exercising knowledge of the (external) world; exercising knowledge of others' thoughts and experiences (or, other minds); identifying and re-identifying various kinds of objects; identifying and re-identifying persons, including oneself; communicating (not necessarily by speaking a language) with others; engaging in different interpersonal relationships; having feelings and emotions; and reacting to others' actions, feelings, and emotions. Admittedly some of these examples are controversial, but this is not the place to argue for them.

[11] There are reported cases in which some people had lost most of their long-term memories and still managed to live relatively normal human lives, though with extreme difficulty. But they presumably could not live even such lives if they completely lost their memories, long-term or short-term.

[12] I am, sure enough, talking about conscious rather than subconscious or unconscious memory. But if one can subconsciously or unconsciously know something, that is, knowing it without being aware that one knows it, then perhaps we can say that even in the case of subconscious or unconscious memory, memory implies knowledge.

[13] For a more detailed treatment of the point and related issues, see Norman Malcolm's lectures on memory in Malcolm (1963).

[14] Pyrrhonism is interpreted by some as advocating a way of life consisting in 'living by appearances'. It seems that there can be a Pyrrhonian response to what I have said about knowledge-exercising, which is that in order to engage in knowledge-exercising, we do

not have to have knowledge-beliefs — appearances of having knowledge will do. What is suggested is, in other words, that we can have the thoughts, actions, etc. as we have in knowledge-exercising even if we do not have knowledge-beliefs, provided that we have instead beliefs to the effect that it <u>appears to us</u> that we know things about the world. But this suggestion does not seem to me plausible. Remember that the Pyrrhonian skeptic tries to live a life without beliefs about the world. Now if a person was able to live such a life, it must be the result of some intellectual effort; such a person thus not only lived without beliefs about the world, he should also be aware of his lacking those beliefs. Accordingly, it should never appear to such a person that he believed something about the world. In that case, it should also never appear to him that he knew something about the world, for knowledge requires belief. A Pyrrhonian life without beliefs is incompatible with a life with appearances of knowledge, but without the Pyrrhonian motivation there is no reason why one should try to live a life with appearances of knowledge (but without knowledge-beliefs).

[15] See the essays collected in Davidson (1984).

[16] In Wong (1999) I give an exposition and defense of Davidson's thesis that understanding and communication require massive agreement.

[17] A similar argument can be given for the thesis that beliefs about the external world are indispensable to us; see Wong (2003).

[18] I may express my belief that I know that p by the assertion 'I know that p' when, for example, I am questioned whether I really know that p.

[19] This is comparable to the Moore-paradoxical assertion 'p, but I do not believe that p'.

[20] This certainly does not mean that whatever we believe about the world <u>is</u> taken by us to be something that we know. Even if we may sometimes believe that we know that <u>p</u> simply because we (justifiably or strongly) believe that <u>p</u>, we cannot always do this as long as we understand 'belief' and 'knowledge' as two different concepts.

[21] I discuss the issue in Wong (2002).

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