DAVIDSON AND SKEPTICISM:
HOW NOT TO RESPOND TO THE SKEPTIC

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Abstract

In his defense of a coherence theory of truth and knowledge, Donald Davidson insists that (i) we must take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief, and (ii) given the nature of beliefs, most of our beliefs are veridical. As result, a response to skepticism is provided. If most of our beliefs turn out to be true, global skepticism is ultimately incoherent. In this paper, I argue that, despite the many attractions that a coherence theory has, a response to skepticism is not among them. After distinguishing three forms of skepticism (global skepticism, Pyrrhonian skepticism and lottery skepticism), I argue that none of them is affected by Davidson's strategy.

1. Introduction

In his provocative defense of a coherence theory of truth and knowledge, Donald Davidson insists that (i) we must take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief, and (ii) given the nature of beliefs, most of our beliefs turn out to be veridical. By reflecting on what a belief is, Davidson notes, it becomes clear to an agent that "most of his beliefs are true, and among his beliefs, those most securely held and that cohere with the main body of his beliefs are the most apt to be true" (Davidson 1989, p. 153). Moreover, the agent interprets "sentences held true (which is not to be distinguished from attributing beliefs) according to the events and objects in the outside world that cause the sentence to be held true" (Davidson 1989, p. 150).

As an added bonus, a defiant response to skepticism is then provided. If most of our beliefs turn out to be true, any global skeptical challenge against them is ultimately incoherent. As Davidson points out:

> What stands in the way of global skepticism of the senses is, in my view, the fact that we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief. (…) Communication begins where causes converge: your utterance means what mine does if belief in its truth is systematically caused by the same events and objects. (Davidson 1989, p. 151)

As a result, if beliefs are tied to the objects that cause them, the skeptic cannot share the same beliefs about the world with the non-skeptic, but insist that such beliefs are mostly false. The idea that most of our beliefs about the world could turn out to be false, despite being caused by corresponding objects and events in the world, is untenable.

In this paper, I argue that, despite the many attractions that a coherence theory has for epistemology, a response to skepticism is not among them. After distinguishing three forms of skepticism, I argue that none of them is affected by Davidson's strategy. Either the strategy simply assumes a particular type of knowledge about the world (namely, causal knowledge), or it leaves the door still wide open for those who are not committed to the truth of underlying processes to be skeptical about such processes. After all, even if immediate causal claims regarding sense experience were true, that would still leave the truth-value of many other claims—say, regarding unobservable processes and events—undecided. In the end, we may have mostly coherent beliefs, but this is still compatible with skepticism.

2. Three Forms of Skepticism

There are different forms of skepticism. Some are more plausible than others, but less radical; others are more radical, but not nearly as plausible. I'll consider three forms of skepticism that differ in their plausibility and in how radical they are. To each form there's a corresponding typical argument that the skeptic provides as a challenge to those who claim to have the relevant knowledge about the world. (In fact, one way of individuating skeptical proposals is through the usual style of argument they provide.) I'll review these skeptical arguments in turn.

2.1. Global Skepticism

According to global skepticism, we don't have knowledge of the world, since all of our beliefs about the latter may turn out to be false. Consider, for example, the familiar brain-in-a-vat argument, which entertains the possibility that we may be brains in a vat, hooked up to a computer that generates all our sensory beliefs (Nozick 1981). In this case, although we will presumably have the same beliefs about our environment that we currently have, these beliefs wouldn't be true—the objects of these beliefs didn't cause them. To each belief about the world we may have, the skeptic will have an argument to the effect that we don't know that it is true. The argument goes as follows:

(P1) If I know that *P* (say, that I have hands), then I know that I am not a brain in a vat.
(P2) I don't know that I'm not a brain in a vat.
Therefore, I don't know that *P* (that I have hands).

The global skeptic invites us to reconsider all of our beliefs about the world. And for each belief that *P*, if knowing it entails knowledge that I am not a brain in a vat, then I don't know it.

This is a global form of skepticism about the world. Despite this, it's unclear how this proposal could challenge beliefs that do not depend on experience for their justification, such as beliefs about

mathematics. After all, mathematical beliefs wouldn't make (P1) true. It's not obvious that, say, if I know that there are infinitely many prime numbers, then I also know that I am not a brain in a vat. After all, my knowledge of the existence of such numbers need not depend on my experience about the world (except for the experience required to acquire the relevant concepts). And so, whether I am a brain in a vat or not, my mathematical beliefs need not be touched by this argument.

However, in a radical interpretation of the brain-in-a-vat argument, perhaps even beliefs about mathematics could be challenged. Consider a brain-in-a-vat scenario that is so radical that even mathematical beliefs would be radically different from what they currently are. Maybe the computer stimulation could change the relevant mathematical concepts, making us develop radically different mathematical beliefs. As a result, perhaps even beliefs about mathematics could be challenged.

2.2. Pyrrhonian Skepticism

According to the Pyrrhonian skeptic, skepticism is *not* a doctrine to be believed, but an attitude of investigation, a certain stance (see Sextus 1994 and Porchat 1993). In this way, Pyrrhonian skepticism differs substantially from global skepticism. But it shares with the latter the fact that the Pyrrhonian attitude can be presented in terms of certain arguments. These arguments are not used to establish beliefs that the Pyrrhoniam skeptic has—for he or she fails to have beliefs about things and events that go beyond the appearances (see, again, Sextus 1994 and Porchat 1993). Rather, these arguments are meant to show that, according to the dogmatist's standards—that is, the standards of those who believe that they have knowledge of the world beyond the appearances—such knowledge is not possible.

In order to do that, the Pyrrhonian skeptic explores a variety of underdetermination arguments. These are arguments to the effect that the same phenomena are compatible with radically different accounts of what goes on beyond the appearances. And since these arguments are equally persuasive, the Pyrrhonian skeptic cannot

choose between them. Sextus concludes that the dogmatic philosopher is too fast in his or her commitment to what happens underlying the appearances. Here is the format of such an underdetermination argument:

(P1) If the dogmatic philosopher were correct in his or her beliefs about *P*, there wouldn't be a plurality of conflicting, and equally persuasive, arguments supporting opposed conclusions about *P*.

(P2) There is such a plurality of arguments.

Therefore, the dogmatic philosopher isn't correct in his or her beliefs about *P*.

This style of argument suggests a pattern of investigation that the Pyrrhonian skeptic adopts. He or she systematically searches for opposing arguments, and by being genuinely unable to choose between them, the skeptic is led to suspend judgment. Of course, the skeptic's search is never ending, and for each topic of investigation, particular arguments are produced. But, in each case, the result is the same: suspension of judgment. In this way, the Pyrrhonian skeptic resists the temptation of asserting knowledge of the ultimate nature of things.

However, the Pyrrhonist will follow the appearances. That is, he or she will follow, in a non-dogmatic way, what *seems* to be happening. With respect to knowledge of the nature of things—whatever they may turn out to be—Pyrrhonian skepticism is very general. But the Pyrrhonist is not skeptical about the phenomena (what appears to be the case), since the latter is never assented to dogmatically.

2.3. Lottery Skepticism

As opposed to global skepticism, lottery skepticism is based on ordinary assumptions about the world, and doesn't invoke radical scenarios, such as the possibility that we are brains in a vat. As opposed to Pyrrhonian skepticism, lottery skepticism doesn't address the nature of things, but whether we can claim to know simple

events about our surroundings and us. The idea is to challenge straightforwardly ordinary knowledge claims by showing that they entail knowledge of propositions that we all ordinarily grant not to know (see Hawthorne 2004). The latter are the lottery propositions.

Here is a typical lottery argument:

(P1) If I know that I won't be able to afford a mansion in California this year, then I know that I won't win the lottery.
(P2) I don't know that I won't win the lottery.
Therefore, I don't know that I won't be able to afford a mansion in California this year.

The point is that since I cannot rule out the possibility that I may win the lottery (as long as I buy a ticket!), I cannot rule out the possibility that I may be able to afford a mansion in California. Similarly, since I don't know that I won't have a heart attack in the next month or so, I don't know that I'll be able to teach a course this fall.

Lottery skepticism challenges common, everyday beliefs, and it does that in a very natural way. But this skepticism is limited to this type of beliefs—that is, beliefs whose knowledge entail knowledge of lottery propositions. Even though the latter propositions are extremely unlikely (in the sense that it's highly improbable that the events they describe actually happen), these propositions (and the events they describe) are still possible. And unless we could rule out lottery propositions (by ruling out the corresponding events), we can't claim to know many ordinary things we think we know.

Lottery skepticism is not a global form of skepticism. It's unclear, for instance, how ordinary beliefs about mathematics could be seriously challenged by lottery arguments, since knowledge of mathematics doesn't in general entail knowledge of lottery propositions. In most cases, mathematical knowledge is not even relevant to a lottery proposition. However, in certain cases, we can use some mathematical knowledge to assess how unlikely lottery propositions are, and thus show that such propositions are still possible (despite being so improbable). In this sort of cases, rather than undermining

mathematical beliefs, lottery arguments seem to presuppose them. In either situation, however, mathematical beliefs are not challenged.

But even granting the range of each of these forms of skepticism, how effective are they to challenge our beliefs? In what follows, I'll discuss how Davidson mounts an interesting attack against skepticism, and I'll examine how successful the attack is, focusing on the three types of skeptical moves just discussed.

3. Davidson's Strategy Against Skepticism

According to Davidson, with a proper understanding of the interrelationship between belief, truth, and meaning, it's possible to articulate an account of knowledge in which skeptical challenges can be resisted (see Davidson 1989 and 1990). Davidson initially calls his proposal a "coherence theory," because, on his view, "all that counts as evidence or justification for a belief must come from the same totality of belief to which it belongs" (Davidson 1989, p. 153).[1] However, as opposed to earlier forms of coherentism, Davidson insists that reality and truth are *not* constructs of thought (1990, p. 155), and he adopts instead a thoroughly realist view about meaning, truth, and knowledge. As he insists:

> Given a correct epistemology, we can be realists in all departments. We can accept objective truth conditions as the key to meaning, a realist view of truth, and we can insist that knowledge is of an objective world independent of our thought or language. (Davidson 1989, p. 138)

Of course, the skeptic may grant Davidson that knowledge is indeed of an "objective world independent of our thought or language." The question is whether we have any such knowledge in the first place. To ensure that we do, Davidson articulates two interrelated moves.

3.1. First Move: Beliefs and Their Causes

The first move consists in examining the conditions in which our beliefs emerge *as beliefs*. Davidson insists that beliefs are caused by the objects of those beliefs, and so any skepticism about such beliefs cannot get off the ground. In Davidson's own words (in a passage that I quoted partially above):

> What stands in the way of global skepticism of the senses is, in my view, the fact that we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief. And what we, as interpreters, must take them to be is what they in fact are. Communication begins where causes converge: your utterance means what mine does if belief in its truth is systematically caused by the same events and objects. (Davidson 1989, p. 151; see also footnote 7 on p. 151.)

In other words, by connecting the cause of a belief with the object of that belief, Davidson is in a position to challenge those forms of skepticism that presuppose that we may have beliefs that have no connection with their objects—and, in this way, have beliefs that are mostly false.

Moreover, when we interpret what a speaker says, particularly in cases of radical interpretation, and we try to make sense of the meaning of the speaker's utterances, we don't have another option but to take the beliefs under interpretation to be true. The fact that skeptics and non-skeptics can communicate about the same objects is an indication that they share the same beliefs about these objects. And so, the skeptic is not in a position to raise doubts about these beliefs. This leads to Davidson's second move.

3.2. Second Move: Beliefs are Veridical

By considering the nature of beliefs, Davidson insists, it becomes clear that beliefs are mostly veridical. In particular, those beliefs that cohere with the body of beliefs that an epistemic agent has are

not open to a skeptical challenge, given that these beliefs are more likely to be true. As Davidson notes:

> The agent has only to reflect on what a belief is to appreciate that most of his basic beliefs are true, and among his beliefs, those most securely held and that cohere with the main body of his beliefs are the most apt to be true. (Davidson 1989, p. 153)

The skeptic is then left in an awkward predicament, since it's not reasonable to ask for *additional* justification that the beliefs an agent has are true.

> The question "How do I know my beliefs are generally true?" thus answers itself, simply because beliefs are by nature generally true. Rephrased or expanded, the question becomes, "How can I tell whether my beliefs, which are by nature generally true, are generally true?" (Davidson 1989, p. 153)

In the end, the skeptic's challenge is beside the point.

In brief, Davidson's anti-skeptical strategy consists in pointing out that the skeptic cannot consistently claim that our beliefs can *all* be false. This is incoherent, since beliefs by nature are generally true. Even though Davidson grants that *each* belief individually may be false, it's not possible to maintain that *all* beliefs can be false (as the skeptic insists), due to the veridical nature of beliefs. In fact, Davidson emphasizes:

> I think the independence of belief and truth requires only that *each* of our beliefs may be false. But of course a coherence theory cannot allow that all of them can be wrong. (Davidson 1989, p. 140)

For Davidson, as long as a given belief coheres with a body of beliefs, it's likely to be true. In his own words:

> I urge that a correct understanding of the speech, beliefs, desires, intentions, and other propositional attitudes of a person leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs must be true, and so

> there is a legitimate presumption that any one of them, if it coheres with most of the rest, is true. (Davidson 1989, p. 146)

And since most of a person's beliefs must be true, it's pointless for the skeptic to request for further reassurance as to how we can know whether a person's beliefs are true.

4. Resisting Davidson's Anti-skeptical Strategy

4.1. The Overall Problems with Davidson's Anti-Skeptical Strategy

There are two main problems with Davidson's strategy. First, it assumes the existence of a causal connection between the objects of belief and the beliefs themselves. As Davidson himself admits, there may not be such a causal connection between every belief and its "corresponding" object, since some beliefs are false. However, Davidson insists, as long as a given belief is coherent (that is, consistent) with a consistent body of beliefs, this is a test of the belief's truth. In other words, Davidson's strategy tries to link beliefs and the objects that cause such beliefs, respecting the coherence of the body of beliefs that an agent has.

(A) The first problem, however, is that if we adopt, as Davidson does, classical first-order logic, this view is incoherent. Davidson grants that (i) each belief can be false (Davidson 1989, p. 140; I'll call this claim the *fallibility of beliefs*). He also insists that (ii) it's not the case that *all* beliefs can be false (Davidson 1989, p. 140; I'll call this claim *anti-skepticism about beliefs*). However, given (i), it is incoherent to insist that (ii). After all, the *negation* of (ii) follows from (i) in classical logic; that is, the claim that "*each* belief can be false" entails the statement "*all* beliefs can be false". Without loss of generality, suppose that the body of beliefs that a human agent has is finite, and that each such beliefs—in particular, the basic ones—can be expressed by a proposition of the form Pa. (The idea here is that, roughly speaking, 'a' denotes the object that causes the belief that Pa.) Using a truth predicate, and adopting a classical

first-order modal logic, the fallibility of beliefs, (i), can then be expressed as:

(i) $\Diamond\neg T\langle Pa\rangle \wedge \Diamond\neg T\langle Pb\rangle \wedge \ldots \wedge \Diamond\neg T\langle Pn\rangle$.

In this framework, anti-skepticism about beliefs, (ii), can also be formulated:

(ii) $\neg\Diamond \; \forall x\neg T\langle Px\rangle$

It's then clear that the *negation* of (ii) follows from (i), in a classical first-order modal logic. And so, the coherentist who adopts such a logic, tries to avoid skepticism with (ii), but who also wants to maintain the fallibility of beliefs, (i), is left with an incoherent view.

It might be responded that the inference from (i) to the negation of (ii) is in fact invalid, and Davidson would recognize that invalidity, since it's crucial for his coherence theory that we take into account the *meaning* of our beliefs. Consider the following counter-example.[2] In a conference, it is possible that each speaker speaks longer than the average time of the speakers. But, clearly, it is not possible that *every* speaker speaks longer than the average time of the speakers. Thus, the inference from (i) to the negation of (ii) fails.

The problem, however, is that it's not clear that we have here a counter-example to the inference in question. Note that the predicate "to speak longer than the average time of the speakers" can only be defined by considering *all* the speakers—in terms of which "the average time of the speakers" is characterized. As a result, the beliefs under consideration (namely, $Pa,\ldots,Pn$) are logically *dependent* of each other. However, a crucial assumption of classical first-order logic is that all predicates are logically *independent* of each other. Hence, the proposed "counter-example" doesn't violate the inference above, since it doesn't make premise (i) true, given that (i) assumes, with classical logic, the *independence* of the various predicates involved.

One way of making Davidson's view coherent at this point would be to give up classical first-order logic, by abandoning the

assumption of logical independence of predicates. However, given Davidson's well-known commitment to classical logic, this move would simply yield a different tension in the system. Alternatively, one could keep classical logic and introduce meaning postulates to express the interrelationships between the various predicates. But this would introduce yet another tension into the system, since the move seems to bring a commitment to a way of introducing meanings that is foreign to Davidson's view. Furthermore, it's also difficult to see how Davidson could even express the compatibility between (i) and (ii), given his well-known rejection of modal idioms. After all, the statement that "each of our beliefs *may be* false, but it's not the case that all of them *can be* wrong" is clearly a modal discourse. As a result, in each case, difficulties arise.

(B) The second problem emerges from the fact that, in general, there's no way of guaranteeing that any particular belief is actually caused by the objects that that belief is taken to be about. In fact, given that each particular belief can be false, each particular belief *Pa* can be caused by some object *other than* the one that is taken to cause *Pa*. This is an immediate consequence of the fallibility of beliefs. But this cannot be consistently maintained with an anti-skeptical attitude about beliefs. On its own, this sort of fallibility *supports* skepticism. In fact, to insist that beliefs are *mostly* veridical is still compatible with skepticism. Given that it's not possible to guarantee that each particular belief is true, skepticism about beliefs is still open.

The coherentist may complain that it's indeed true that we cannot guarantee that each particular belief is true. But those beliefs that cohere (i.e. are consistent) with a body of beliefs are true—or, at least, are likely to be so. Even here, however, there is trouble. After all, consistency with a body of beliefs is not sufficient for truth, as Davidson wouldn't deny. For example, it's consistent with Sherlock Holmes' stories that Holmes lived in London. But of course, it isn't true—about the world—that he lived there. It is also consistent with Newtonian mechanics that objects can move faster than the speed of light. But, again, given relativity theory, this claim about the speed of objects is not true. Since Davidson takes coherence to be "nothing but consistency" (Davidson 1990,

p. 155), it's hard to see how results such as these can be avoided. With a more robust notion of coherence, one that entails the empirical adequacy of a coherent system, these counterexamples can be resisted. But this is not the notion of coherence that Davidson accepts, and so the problem stands.

4.2. The Global Skeptic's Response

The global skeptic does seem to challenge the reliability of all our beliefs—particularly those that come from the senses. It questions whether our beliefs can all be true. So, it looks as though Davidson's target in his refutation of skepticism is this form of skepticism. But does Davidson's response succeed?

Faced with the brain-in-a-vat argument, Davidson presumably would deny the coherence of the skeptic's scenario. It's simply not possible to entertain the possibility of a massive mistake in our beliefs, given that the latter are mostly veridical. In response, the global skeptic would insist that whether such beliefs are veridical or not is precisely the issue that the brain-in-a-vat argument raises. Thus, to presuppose that beliefs are mostly true is to assume the point in question, and the move fails as a response to global skepticism.

Davidson could retort that he hasn't *presupposed* that beliefs are veridical. This claim was the result of an argument to the effect that the conditions of possibility of communication—indeed the conditions to understand another speaker—require that the speaker's beliefs be mostly true. The skeptic would be unmoved. Davidson's argument about the functioning of language and the way in which communication among speakers emerges does presuppose that beliefs are true. In fact, his examination of radical interpretation—roughly, the process that allows us to interpret meaningful discourse, whether foreign or domestic—can only get off the ground if the interpreter makes belief attributions to speakers as being mostly true. The method is, of course, perfectly reasonable. But if it is used as a response to skepticism, the method ends up assuming the point in question, since it takes most beliefs to be

true. Thus, as a response to the brain-in-a-vat scenario, the method fails.

Note that the global skeptic doesn't have to *establish* that the brain-in-a-vat scenario *is true*. The crucial premise in the brain-in-a-vat argument is the second, (P2), namely, that we don't know that we are not brains in a vat. And given the dialectics of the debate, this premise cannot be properly refuted with the remark that most beliefs are true. The remark does preclude the possibility of the brain-in-a-vat scenario, but it does by begging the question.

But let's grant for the sake of argument that Davidson's response to global skepticism succeeds for beliefs about empirical matters. Even then, the success of the response would be limited. Given that Davidson's strategy applies to beliefs that are *caused* by the objects of those beliefs, the proposal cannot accommodate beliefs about non-empirical matters, such as mathematical beliefs. After all, mathematical objects do not *cause* mathematical beliefs, in any interesting sense of causality. Some Platonists may claim that mathematical beliefs are "caused" by mathematical objects, but since there is no *causal* connection between the objects and their corresponding beliefs, this sense of "causality" is metaphorical at best.[3] Hence, Davidson's strategy is rather limited in scope. And since the brain-in-a-vat argument, on one interpretation, could be used to challenge the reliability of mathematical beliefs, Davidson's possible success regarding empirical matters wouldn't carry over to the mathematical case. Skepticism would stand still.

4.3. The Pyrrhonian Skeptic's Response

The Pyrrhonian skeptic will be clearly unimpressed by Davidson's challenge. Besides the points raised above by the global skeptic and in the discussion of the overall problems with Davidson's anti-skeptical strategy, the Pyrrhonian skeptic would insist that the theoretical assumptions made by Davidson to set up his case, invoking the method of radical interpretation, are also problematic. An equally compelling argument with the opposite conclusion could be made, and as a result, the Pyrrhonian skeptic, being unable to decide between such arguments, would suspend judgment.

For example, it's not clear that, in cases of radical interpretation, the interpreter needs to assume that those who are being interpreted adopt classical logic. After all, it's possible that the logical beliefs of the speakers in question are substantially different from those of the interpreter—including the fact that the former may include genuinely inconsistent beliefs. This situation is ruled out by fiat by Davidson's method, which excludes the possibility of properly interpreting radically different, and inconsistent, belief systems. As a result, how can we make sense of the early formulation of the calculus, which introduced inconsistent notions, and the beliefs of the Azande, who seem to have held inconsistent beliefs (see da Costa, Bueno, and French [1998])? A method that doesn't assume the consistency of the body of beliefs under interpretation is called for.

However, there's not doubt that Davidson's method of radical interpretation is also eminently reasonable. It's a natural option to try to interpret meaningful discourse. Thus, it's hard to see how the Pyrrhonian skeptic could choose between such alternatives: Davidson's method and the inconsistency-tolerant one. The Pyrrhonist would then end up suspending judgment. This would support the underdetermination argument formulated by the Pyrrhonian skeptic, and Davidson's response wouldn't once again get off the ground.

4.4. The Lottery Skeptic's Response

The lottery skeptic has the advantage of not introducing radically implausible scenarios for consideration (such as brains in a vat) as the global skeptic does. But similarly to the two forms of skepticism just discussed, the lottery skeptic wouldn't be impressed by Davidson's challenge.

Note that lottery skepticism is not a global form of skepticism in the sense that *all* beliefs are challenged. Lottery skepticism is, in a sense, local. It focuses only on beliefs whose knowledge entails the knowledge of lottery propositions. These are propositions that, under common assumptions about the world, we grant that we don't know—such as (P2) in the lottery skeptical argument. After all,

despite the fact that such propositions are extremely improbable, they are still possible to be true. For instance, I may indeed win the lottery in the next few months (as long as I play it!).

As a result, the lottery skeptic doesn't claim to have established general skepticism about knowledge. The goal here is *not* to conclude that *all* of our beliefs may be false. So, it's still compatible with lottery skepticism that many of our beliefs are true, as Davidson insists. Thus, even if Davidson were right in his point that not all our beliefs could be false, this wouldn't be enough to undermine lottery skepticism. Once again, Davidson's response doesn't succeed.

5. Conclusion

For the reasons discussed above, I don't think that Davidson provided a compelling case against skepticism with his "coherence theory" of knowledge. In a sense, Davidson acknowledges the point. As he notes, instead of trying to refute the skeptic, his theory provides a reason for the skeptic to "get lost." After all, if the approach to meaning and knowledge offered by Davidson is right, then skepticism cannot get off the ground (see Davidson 1990, p. 157; see also p. 154). As discussed above, I don't think this assessment is correct. There is much leeway for the skeptic—in any of the three sorts discussed above—to resist Davidson's moves. As a result, the skeptic still stands.[4]

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Resumo

Em sua defesa de uma teoria da coerência da verdade e do conhecimento, Donald Davidson insiste que (i) temos que considerar os objetos de uma crença como as causas dessa crença, e (ii) dada a natureza das crenças, a maioria de nossas crenças são verídicas. Em conseqüência, é fornecida uma resposta ao ceticismo. Se a maioria de nossas crenças mostra-se verdadeira, o ceticismo global é, ao fim das contas, incoerente. Neste artigo, argumento que, apesar dos muitos atrativos que tem uma

teoria da coerência, uma resposta ao ceticismo não se encontra entre e-
les. Depois de discutir três formas de ceticismo (global, pirrônico e ceti-
cismo de loteria), argumento que nenhuma delas é afetada pela estraté-
gia de Davidson.

Palavras-chave

Davidson, ceticismo, teoria da coerência, conhecimento, pirronismo.

Notes

[1] On Davidson's view, "coherence is nothing but consistency" (Davidson 1990, p. 155). Usually, however, coherence theorists insist—correctly in my view—that consistency is just *one* condition for coherence. Explanatory power, empirical adequacy, and logical interconnection between beliefs are other conditions that need to be met for a system of beliefs to be coherent (see BonJour 1985). I'll return to this point below.

[2] I owe this example to Dagfinn Føllesdal.

[3] Leaving causal talk aside, Davidson could claim that mathematical beliefs—as long as they are consistent with other (mathematical) beliefs—would be true. But this would fly on the face of mathematical practice. On the one hand, consistency is not enough for truth, since more than consistency is required for acceptance of a mathematical belief as true: one needs to *prove* the belief. On the other hand, consistency is sometimes too strong, since in some cases, we know that we cannot establish that certain mathematical theories (such as Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory) are consistent unless we assume principles whose consistency is more questionable than the consistency of the theories under discussion.

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