

Knowledge as Meta-knowledge

I know that I am conscious, and I could not conceivably be wrong about this. I also know that I my chair will not sprout wings and fly away, but I could conceivably be wrong about this, and a skeptic can therefore reasonably say that I *don't* know this. Whenever I could conceivably be wrong, the skeptic can reasonably say that I don't know.

There is an easy way to deal with this. I may or may not 'know' that my chair will not sprout wings and fly away. But I know with certainty that I have good grounds for believing this. I have knowledge of various conscious states of mine. I also know that, lest those various states be utter anomalies, continuities of various different kinds of must exist outside of my consciousness. And I know, given this information, no anomalies result from the supposition that my chair will continue to be a chair, whereas many anomalies result from the supposition that my chair will sprout wings and fly away.

Do I *know* that my chair won't sprout wings and fly away? I know that it would be needlessly anomaly-generative to believe so, and I know that it to be utterly anomaly-eliminative to believe that my chair will continue to be chair for at least the next few minutes. Setting aside limiting-cases, such as my knowledge that I am conscious, what we refer to as knowing that X is really knowledge that, given data that we incontrovertibly have, it would be needlessly anomaly-generative to believe otherwise. In other words, what we typically refer to knowing X is the case is really meta-knowledge to the effect that granting X eliminates mysteries and denying it creates them.

Whether such meta-knowledge amounts to 'knowing X' is a purely verbal question. The answer to that question is 'no' if we take 'knowing X' to mean that the available is logically incompatible with X's being the case. The answer is 'yes' if we take 'knowing X' to mean that that available data is compatible with an anomaly-free world where X is the case and incompatible with one where it isn't. The skeptic is right if we go with the first interpretation and wrong if we go with the second. This we know. The mind-world relation denoted by the term 'know' is useless, as both a source of knowledge and an object of study, if we go with the first interpretation and useful in both respects if we go with the second. This we also know. Consequently, the skeptic, if correct, is correct only with respect a mind-world relation that has nothing to do with the mind-world relation on which we acquire and organize information, and the skeptic's position, if correct, only concerns some arcane matter of semantics and has nothing to do with epistemology proper.

