

On the Non-Conflict of Perception and Skepticism

One argument that often comes up in discussions I've had about philosophy is the imagined conflict of skeptics accepting their perceptions as reality without evidence, while refusing to accept many other things without evidence, such as the existence of higher beings. However, this is a misunderstanding, and no conflict exists in reality. The exact reason is too complicated to explain in brief discourse, and so I'm writing this paper to be a reference whenever this question comes up. Of course, the opinions herein are my own, and are not necessarily representative of other skeptics or agnostics.

First, I must propose that one predicate is true, and no evidence is required as proof for it: I think, therefore I am. This predicate is often misunderstood and so needs further explanation. It is not making the bold claim that you, as a thinking being, must exist within this greater universe; it is merely the claim that, because you are capable of thought, you know that you exist within some context (whether real, imagined or otherwise). Furthermore, this predicate is *only true of yourself*. I cannot use it to prove to you that I exist, for you cannot know that I think. I can experience my own consciousness and thought process, but you cannot, so while either of us can know that ourself exists with no further evidence, we cannot with this predicate alone know that the other exists. In fact, this predicate is true because it is self-referential. We define existence in a broad sense, and anything capable of an action (in this case, thinking) must exist. The predicate is only important because it highlights the fact that the only action you can truly know to be happening is your own thought process.

An extension to this predicate is the this more controversial claim: I perceive it, therefore it exists. Again, this requires further explanation, as it sounds bold. I am not contending that my perceptions are giving me a true window into a real universe, I am merely stating that, because my perceptions are fairly consistent, I can define what I perceive (and everything it can affect and that can affect it) as a universe. Furthermore, since I can affect the surroundings presented by my perceptions, I can make the claim that I exist within this universe. Importantly, at no point have I claimed that the universe I perceive is a "true", single universe; I merely claim that it is the context within which I operate. Because I usually operate in this same context (dreams aside), I choose to accept it as reality. However, I do not claim that it is a singular, true, shared reality, or that you and I experience reality in the same way. The solipsist interpretation that this entire universe is my own delusion is possible, as is the conventional wisdom that we are all beings within a single, shared universe.

The most important and notable conclusion is this: Whether the universe of my perceptions is a true reality, a solipsist delusion, the matrix or anything else is *completely irrelevant*. Everything I know, everything I purport to be true, everything I believe and everything I understand is also limited to the confines of the universe of my perceptions. Because this is such a universal truth, I do not

preface the phrase "I know" with the cumbersome disclaimer "Within the framework of the universe my perceptions provides me, be it reality or otherwise, ...". I assume that it is understood that I operate within a limited scope, and so any claims I make are also limited in this way.

In short, I do not believe that my perceptions offer me a true reality, I merely operate within the framework of the reality my perceptions provide me.

- Gregor Richards