

Nothing said here should convince someone who has given up ordinary beliefs that they constitute knowledge... This is the usual case with philosophical treatments of skepticism: they are better at prevention than at cure. If a refutation of skepticism is supposed to reason one out of the hole, then skepticism is irrefutable. (Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, p. 27)

1. The argument

- I. If it's rational to accept external world skepticism, then it's rational to accept skepticism about the past.
- II. If it's rational to accept skepticism about the past, then it's rational to accept the argument from skepticism about the past to skepticism about complex reasoning.
- III. It is not rational to accept the argument from skepticism about the past to complex reasoning skepticism.

SUBCONCLUSION: It's not rational to accept external world skepticism.

- IV. It's not rational to suspend belief about external world skepticism.
- V. If it's neither rational to suspend belief in nor accept external world skepticism, then rationality requires believing that skepticism is false.
- VI. Therefore, rationality requires believing that skepticism is false.

2. External world skepticism to skepticism about the past

None of our evidence supports the external world more than being a brain in a vat.

None of our evidence supports the real past any more than the creation of the world 5 minutes ago with false records.

3. Skepticism about the past to skepticism about complex reasoning

When using a complex argument, one relies on memory about the results of the earlier stages of the argument.

4. Irrationality of accepting the argument for skepticism about complex reasoning

That argument is itself a complex argument. So if you accept its conclusion, you must think that your reason for doing so is irrational; and that itself is irrational.

5. Irrationality of suspending belief about external-world skepticism

A skeptic might accept the subconclusion, and say that acceptance and rejection of skepticism are both irrational; hence one should suspend belief. But taking this stand relies on complex reasoning, about which the skeptic suspends judgment. Taking a stand but suspending judgment about whether that stand is rational is irrational.

6. No dilemmas

Could this be a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” situation? That is, could it be that it’s irrational to *accept* skepticism, irrational to *suspend belief* about skepticism, and also irrational to *reject* skepticism? No, according to Rinard: rationality is supposed to be something we can use, and thus must always allow some sort of attitude in any given case.