

27. Skepticism review

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Descartes:

- The **Closure Argument** for skepticism:

P1 I know that: if there's a hand in front of me, then I'm not a BIV.

P2 Therefore, if I can know that there's a hand in front of me, then I can know that I'm not a BIV.

P3 But I can't know that I'm not a BIV.

C So I can't know there's a hand in front of me.

My evidence would be the same!

Gettier 1963 & Nozick 1981:

- Gettier gives cases to show that knowing p is not the same as having a justified, true belief that p .
- Nozick: "So what *is* the right theory of knowledge?" Proposes the **tracking theory**: you know p iff:
 - 1) p is true;
 - 2) You believe p ;
 - 3) (Sensitivity:) if p were false, you wouldn't believe p .
 - 4) (Adherence:) if p were true (in a slightly different way), you'd still believe p .
- The tracking theory denies **P2**.

Belief that there's a hand is sensitive;
belief that you're not a BIV is not.

Stine 1976:

- It's implausible to deny Closure (P2): *abominable conjunctions*.
- "Know" is a context-sensitive term. Knowing p requires ruling out the *relevant alternatives* to p ; what those are depends on the context.
- In skeptical contexts, P3 is true and so C follows. In non-skeptical ones, *not-C* is true (you *do* know you have a laptop), so P3 is false.

"I know it's a zebra, but I don't know it's not a mule disguised to look like a zebra."

In non-skeptical contexts, you can know *without evidence* that you're not a BIV—it's not a relevant alternative.

Lewis 1996:

- You know that p iff your evidence¹ rule out all the possibilities in which *not-p* (psst—except the ones we're properly ignoring).
- Much of epistemology turns on the rules of proper-ignoring. In most contexts, we properly ignore skeptical possibilities and know a lot.
- But the **Rule of Attention** says that any possibility you're not ignoring is also one you're not *properly* ignoring. This explains why the skeptical argument seems so compelling.

¹ Experience + memories

In contexts where asserted, P3 and C are true.

When we're ignoring skepticism, P3 and C are false.

Williamson 2000:

- Distinguish the **good case**—where things are as they appear—from the **bad case**—where they're not.
- The skeptic's right that in the bad case, for all we know we're in the good case.
- But *it doesn't follow* that in the good case, for all we know we're in the bad case.
- It only follows if we always know what our evidence is. But that "luminosity" assumption is false!

Sunrise argument.

Moore 1939:

- We *can* know that we're not BIVs—we can offer as rigorous a proof for this as we can offer for anything, including in mathematics.
- A skeptic who says otherwise owes us an explanation for the *difference* between the mathematical and the anti-skeptical proofs.