

## Phil. 3340

### Notes #1: Course Requirements, Knowledge

To discuss today:

This course: requirements, subject, guidelines

What is knowledge?

Why is knowledge important?

#### I. About this Class

Review syllabus. Some highlights:

- Who should take this class?
  - Class will contain:
    - Lots of arguments
    - Theoretical questions about knowledge (see below)
    - Controversial ideas.
  - Will not contain:
    - Directly practical knowledge
    - Touchy-feely, self-esteem-boosting material
- Course requirements. Quizzes, exams.
- Miscellaneous guidelines:
  - Come on time.
  - Come to office hours.
  - Participate.
- What should you do now?
  - Get text & reserve readings. <<http://libraries.colorado.edu/search/p?SEARCH=huemer>>
  - Read the syllabus.
  - Read the Descartes selection.

#### II. The Importance of Knowledge

- Moore's Paradox: All of the following sentences seem paradoxical:
  - "It is raining but I don't believe it."
  - "It is raining, but I have no reason to think so."
  - "It is raining, but that's not true."
  - "It is raining, but I don't know it is."
- *Are they contradictory? What's wrong with them?*
  - Answer:* • All claims are *implicit* knowledge claims. (Speaker implies that he knows what is asserted.)
  - Second half of the sentence denies what the first half *implies*.
- If this is true, then the concept of knowledge is very important.

### III. The Meaning of “Knowledge”

#### A. Different senses of “know”:

- i) Knowing a person
- ii) Knowing how to do something
- iii) Knowing that so-and-so is the case

Epistemologists focus on the third one: factual knowledge / propositional knowledge

#### B. The traditional definition of “knowledge”:

S knows that p iff: i) S (at least) believes that p,  
ii) p is true, and  
iii) S is justified in believing that p.

- The truth condition (“factivity”): The concept of knowledge is said to be “factive”: to say someone knows that so-and-so, implies that so-and-so is the case. An argument:
  1. Knowing-that implies knowing-wh---. (knowing who, knowing where, knowing whether, etc.)
  2. Knowing-wh--- implies true belief. “Does John know when the exam is?”
  3. So knowing-that implies true belief.
    - Imaginative projection and apparent exceptions
- Justification: This typically means having good evidence, or good reasons, for a belief. More generally: forming the belief in such a way that it would be very likely to be true. Example: The Gambler’s lucky guess.
- Conditions (i)-(iii) are generally recognized to be insufficient. One possible way of supplementing them:
  - iv) There are no (non-misleading) defeaters for S’s justification for p.

A defeater is a true proposition that, if added to S’s beliefs, would render S no longer justified in believing that p. (= A fact that would “defeat” S’s justification)

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### Notes #2: Cartesian Skepticism

#### I. What Is Cartesian Skepticism?

Skepticism: Roughly, any philosophical view according to which some large class of things we normally believe (a) we do not know, or (b) we are not justified in believing.

Varieties of skepticism:

- External World Skepticism: We cannot have knowledge/justified belief about any contingent truths about the external world.  
The external world: That which is independent of one's own mind.  
Contingent truths: Things that could (conceivably) have been otherwise.
- Global Skepticism: We cannot have knowledge/justified belief about anything at all.
- In this unit, we consider external world skepticism regarding justified belief. This is the view that we have no justification for (contingent) claims about the external world.

Cartesian Skepticism:

- "Cartesian" skeptical arguments involve "skeptical scenarios":
  - a) Scenario in which everything appears as it actually does, but
  - b) Your beliefs are radically mistaken.
- Examples:
  - The dream scenario
  - The deceiving God
  - The brain in a vat

#### II. The Brain in a Vat argument

1. If you know that P and P entails Q, then you can know that Q. (Premise: Closure Principle for knowledge.)
2. You can't know you're not a BIV. Argument for this:
  - a. Our sensory experiences are the only evidence we can have for claims about the external world. (Premise.)
  - b. If you were a BIV, you would have the same sort of sensory experiences as you actually have. (Premise.)
  - c. Your experiences are not evidence that you're not a BIV. (From b.)
  - d. You cannot have evidence that you're not a BIV. (From a, c.)
  - e. You can't know you're not a BIV. (From d.)
3. Therefore, you don't know (for example) that you have two hands. (From 1, 2.)  
(Implicit: Having 2 hands entails not being a BIV.)

In the following classes, think about which premise (if any) is denied by each response to skepticism.

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### Notes #3: Easy Answers to Skepticism

#### I. Is Skepticism Self-Defeating?

- A self-defeating statement: “I know that I know nothing”.
  - Skeptic does not say that.
- “No one knows anything (not even this).”
  - This is self-defeating.
  - Global skepticism entails this.
  - Cartesian skepticism does not.
- Perhaps skeptic could not possess the concepts he uses, if skepticism were true.
  - Concept of a brain, vat, etc.
  - This would make the view self-defeating.

#### II. Is Skepticism Dishonest?

- Why don't skeptics walk in front of trucks? Perhaps skeptics are insincere.
- This fails to explain what is wrong with skeptical arguments.
- It also fails to refute them.

#### III. Moore's Proof of an External World

We all know there are external objects. But is it possible to prove this? Moore says it's easy:

1. Here is one hand. (Gesture.)
2. Here is another hand. (Gesture.)
3. Therefore, there are external objects.

Conditions required for a proof:

- i) The premises should be known to be true.
- ii) The conclusion should follow from the premises.
- iii) The argument should be non-circular.

- It seems that all these conditions are satisfied by Moore's Proof.
- Is the argument circular or question-begging?
  - The conclusion is different from the premises.
  - The conclusion is not used to support the premises.

Analogous examples:

- How to prove that there are 3 typos on a page?
  1. “Here's a typo.” (Pointing)
  2. “Here's another one.” (Pointing.)
  3. “And here's another one!” (Pointing.)
  4. “So there are at least 3 typos on this page.”

- How to prove that space aliens exist?
  - You could bring in photographs or samples of alleged alien technology.
  - Even better: How about bringing in an actual space alien?
- If these are good examples of proofs, then surely Moore's is as well.
  - Moore's proof has the same structure. So if these are non-circular, so is Moore's.
  - Moore's premises are as well known as the premises of these proofs.

#### IV. Moore's Response to Hume

Hume's argument:

1. [Hume's principles]
  - (a) No one ever has direct knowledge of the existence of a material object.
  - b) One can have indirect knowledge of x only if one can know that some thing one is directly aware of is a sign of x.
  - c) One can know that one thing is a sign of another, only if one is sometimes directly aware of both kinds of thing.)
2. If [Hume's principles], then no one knows of the existence of any material object.
3. Therefore, I do not know that this pencil exists.

Moore's argument:

1. If [Hume's principles], then no one knows of the existence of any material object.
2. But I know (for example) of the existence of this pencil.
3. So, ¬[Hume's principles].

Schematically:

Hume:

$$\begin{array}{l} p \rightarrow \neg k \\ p \\ \hline \therefore \neg k \end{array}$$

Moore:

$$\begin{array}{l} p \rightarrow \neg k \\ k \\ \hline \therefore \neg p \end{array}$$

Which is better?

- Both equally valid.
- Both equally circular or non-circular.
- Which has the more plausible premise?
  - Hume: Conjunction of three abstract, controversial philosophical theses.
  - Moore: An item of "common sense".
- Moore's point generalizes to any skeptical argument.

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### **Notes #4: A Semantic Externalist Response to Skepticism**

#### **I. The Concept of Intentionality**

Intentionality: The property of being “of” or “about” something; the property of (purportedly) representing something.

Examples: Drawings

Photographs

Words, sentences

Thoughts

Mental images

#### **II. Against Magical Theories of Reference**

Magical theories of reference: Theories according to which there are things that represent intrinsically.

Physical images don't represent intrinsically:

- The ant/Churchill example

Mental images don't represent intrinsically:

- The space alien / tree-picture example
- The random ink blot example

Words don't represent intrinsically:

- Example of monkeys pounding on typewriter
- Example of person memorizing words without understanding

Combining these points:

- We can imagine a person who has
  - a) Tree-like mental images
  - b) Mental "words" that are just like words used to describe trees in some language
  - c) A "feeling of understanding"
  - d) but yet no thoughts genuinely about trees.
- So even mental states don't intrinsically represent.

### III. The Causal Theory of Reference

For x to refer to y, there must be an appropriate (close) causal connection between x and y, or between x and some things in terms of which y can be defined.

Twin Earth:

- Chemical XYZ on Twin Earth looks, tastes, etc., exactly like water.
  1. When people on Earth say "water", they refer to H<sub>2</sub>O.
  2. When people on Twin Earth say "water", they refer to XYZ.
  3. The mental states of people on Twin Earth are intrinsically indistinguishable from those of people on Earth.
  4. Therefore, reference is not determined by intrinsic properties of mental states.

What differs between Earth and Twin Earth? The causes of their mental states.

Conclusion: Reference is determined by causal relations.

### IV. Why the BIV Scenario Is Self-Refuting

1. One cannot talk (think) about x's if one has no appropriate causal connections to x's, or to things in terms of which they can be described. (Premise - Causal Theory of Reference.)
2. The BIV has no appropriate causal connections to brains, nor to anything in terms of which they can be described. (Premise.)
3. So the BIV cannot talk (think) about brains in vats. (From 1, 2.)
4. So, if anyone entertains the BIV hypothesis, then the BIV hypothesis is false of them (they aren't a BIV). (From 3.)
5. We're entertaining the BIV hypothesis. (Premise.)
6. So we're not BIV's. (From 4, 5.)

Alternately:

7. When a non-BIV says, "I'm not a BIV," what he says is true.
8. When a BIV says, "I'm not a BIV," what he says is also true. (See why.)
9. Therefore, when anyone says, "I'm not a BIV," what he says is true. (From 7, 8.)
10. So when I say, "I'm not a BIV," what I say is true. (From 9.)
11. "I'm not a BIV" is true if and only if I'm not a BIV.
12. I'm not a BIV. (From 10, 11.)

## **V. Possible Replies**

- A. Reject the causal theory (Searle)
- B. Putnam only addresses some versions of the BIV scenario

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### Notes #5: The Relevant Alternatives Response to Skepticism

#### I. Brain in a Vat Argument, Traditional Formulation:

1. If S knows that P and P entails Q, then S knows (or is in a position to know) Q. (Closure Principle for Knowledge)
2. I don't know that I am not a BIV.
3. I don't know that I have a body. (From 1, 2.)

Dretske rejects (1).

#### II. Dretske's Account of Knowledge

"Know" is an absolute term:

- There are no degrees of knowledge.
- Also, inconclusive reasons are insufficient for knowledge.

The Lottery example: You have a ticket in a lottery, in which one of a large number of tickets is going to be selected at random as the winner. Do you know that your ticket is going to lose?

- a) If there are 100 tickets?
- b) If there are 1 million tickets?
- c) If there are 1 billion tickets?

Intuitive response: No. Conclusion: no grounds short of conclusive grounds are sufficient for knowing.

A problem with absolute terms:

- They threaten to be empty.
- Examples:
  - Maybe nothing is really flat. (Because a flat surface must have no bumps at all.)
  - Maybe no container is ever empty. (An empty container must have nothing in it.)
  - Maybe no one really knows anything. (If S knows that p, there must be no alternative possibility that S can't rule out.)

Dretske's concept of "relationally absolute" terms:

- Flat: has no bumps of the relevant kind.
- Empty: contains no relevant objects.
- S knows p: S's evidence eliminates all relevant alternatives to p.
  - "Eliminate": To eliminate an alternative, you must have evidence good enough for knowing it does not obtain.
  - "Alternatives": propositions logically incompatible with p.
  - Important: the relevant alternatives are not all the logically possible alternatives. The "relevancy set" is smaller than the "contrasting set".

- The “no” and “all” words indicate the absoluteness.
- But the “relevant” kinds are context-dependent.

What determines the relevant alternatives?

One important factor: When a possibility is too remote to be relevant.

- This is a matter of “the kind of possibilities that actually exist in the objective situation.” (549)
- I.e., if something is objectively impossible, it is irrelevant.

The Siberian Grebe Example:

- The bird watcher sees a Gadwall duck and correctly identifies it as such.
- Siberian Grebes are a species that look just like Gadwall ducks from the water.
- Does the bird watcher know it is a Gadwall...
  - a. If there are actually Siberian Grebes in the vicinity?
  - b. If there are no Siberian Grebes around, but they could have easily flown to the area?
  - c. If the Siberian Grebes are all restricted to Siberia?
  - d. If Siberian Grebes are purely imaginary?
- Dretske says: No in (a) and (b), yes in (c) and (d).

The Zebra Example: (from a different paper by Dretske)

- You see some zebras in the zoo. (a) Do you know they’re zebras? (b) Do you know they’re not cleverly disguised mules?
- Dretske says: Yes to (a). No to (b). Cleverly disguised mules are not a relevant alternative.
- Why no to (b)?
  - No evidence against disguised-mule hypothesis.
  - The evidence for their being zebras doesn’t count against their being disguised mules.

### III. The Problem with Skepticism

- The skeptic’s alternatives are not relevant. They aren’t real possibilities.
- The Closure Principle is false. This follows from the RA account of knowledge:
  1. Suppose  $i$  is an irrelevant alternative to  $p$ .
  2. I can know that  $p$  even though my evidence doesn’t eliminate  $i$ . (From 1, def. of “irrelevant alternative”.)
  3. So I can know that  $p$  even though I can’t know that  $\neg i$ . (From 2 + def. of “elimination”.)
  4.  $p$  entails  $\neg i$ . (From 1, def. of “alternative”.)
  5. So Closure Pr. is false. (From 3, 4.)

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### Notes #6: Klein's Response to Skepticism

#### I. The Skeptical Argument

1. If S is justified in believing that p and p entails q, then S is justified in believing q. (Closure Principle for justification)
2. I'm not justified in believing I'm not a BIV.
3. I'm not justified in believing I have a body. (From 1, 2.)

#### II. The Skeptic's Dilemma

##### A. Skeptic must answer Dretske's "counter-examples"

Recall the Zebra-in-the-zoo case.

Here's a response:

• Two reasons for believing Closure Principle:

a) If  $e \vdash p$  and  $p \vdash q$ , then  $e \vdash q$ . Dretske refutes this.

- "The evidence you had for thinking them zebras has been effectively neutralized, since it does not count toward their not being mules cleverly disguised to look like zebras." (Dretske)

- General point: e can raise the probability of p, without raising the probability of every logical consequence of p.

b) If  $e \vdash p$  and  $p \vdash q$ , then  $e \vdash q$ . Dretske doesn't explain why this wouldn't be so.

- If p is justified, and p entails q, then p itself provides justification for q.

• Skeptic can defend (1) by appeal to (b).

##### B. But if the skeptic uses the defense in (A), then premise (2) "virtually begs the question"

• Virtually begging the question: The defect an argument has when one of the premises could not be justified unless one already had independent justification for the conclusion.

• In order to show that  $\neg J(\neg BIV)$ , skeptic must show that there is no available route to justifying this proposition. (Recall meaning of "justified in believing.")

• According to the defense (b) of the Closure Principle, the belief that I have a body would be such a route.

•  $\therefore$  Skeptic must rule out  $J(I \text{ have a body})$ , in order to establish  $\neg J(\neg BIV)$ .

•  $\therefore$  Skeptic's argument cannot succeed unless he already has an independent argument for his conclusion.

Conclusion: Either skeptic's first premise is unjustified, or skeptic's second premise virtually begs the question.

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### Notes #7: A Direct Realist Response to Skepticism

#### I. Review of Dretske's and Klein's responses

- Skeptic says: "BIV Hypothesis is an alternative to Real World Hypothesis. You can't rule out BIVH. So you don't know RWH."
- Dretske: "I can't rule out BIVH, but I still know RWH. BIVH is irrelevant (because not objectively possible)."
- Klein: "Maybe you can defend the closure principle, but then your claim that I can't rule out BIVH begs the question."

#### II. What Is Wrong with these Responses

The courtroom case

S is on trial for murder. The prosecution offers as evidence the fact that S's blood was found at the scene of the crime along with the victim's blood. They suggest that S got cut while stabbing the victim. The defense offers an alternative hypothesis: S is innocent, and the blood was planted at the crime scene by the police, seeking to frame S.

Dretske: For all we know, the defense is correct, and S was framed by the police. But anyway, we still know S is guilty.

Klein: Either Dretske is right, or the defense attorney's argument just begs the question.

The scientific case

Physicist A supports the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum mechanics. Physicist B supports Bohm's Interpretation. Both interpretations explain all the same data, but they are incompatible with each other.

Dretske: I don't know whether Bohm's theory is right. But I know the Copenhagen theory is right.

Klein: Dretske is right, or Physicist B is begging the question.

#### III. A Reformulation of the Argument & the DR Response

1. If E is some evidence and  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are competing explanations of E, then S is justified in believing  $H_1$  on the basis of E only if S has independent grounds for rejecting  $H_2$ . (Preference Principle)
2. The BIV Hypothesis and the Real World Hypothesis are competing explanations of our sensory experience.
3. So in order to believe RWH on the basis of our sensory experience, we must have independent grounds for rejecting BIVH. (From 1, 2.)
4. We have no such grounds.
5. Therefore, we are not justified in believing RWH on the basis of our sensory experience. (From 3, 4.)

6. Facts about sensory experience are the only justification we might have for RWH.
7. So we're not justified in believing RWH. (From 5, 6.)

Notes:

- This argument escapes Klein's and Dretske's responses, as it should.
- But it assumes indirect realism.
- (6) is false. We might be foundationally justified in believing RWH, or we might be justified in believing RWH on the basis of facts about the physical world.
- (4) may be false. Facts about the physical world (of which we're directly aware) might be grounds for preferring RWH over BIVH.

#### IV. Objections

(i) Does the DR theory imply that perceptual beliefs are indefeasible?

No. See concept of "prima facie justification": perceptual beliefs are "presumed innocent until proven guilty," i.e., justified as long as there are no positive grounds for doubt.

(ii) Does the DR response 'beg the question'?

Two kinds of responses to skepticism:

- Aggressive response: positive argument, addressed to skeptic, that we have knowledge of the external world.
  - We have not provided one of these.
- Defensive response: response to skeptic's argument that we don't have knowledge of the external world.
  - We have provided one of these.

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### Notes #8: Review, unit 1

#### Know these terms/concepts:

Knowledge (traditional def.)  
Moore's 'paradox'  
& Moore's solution  
Skepticism  
External world vs. global  
Cartesian  
Intentionality  
"Magical" theory  
Causal theory  
Absolute terms, relationally absolute terms  
Relevant alternatives  
Closure principle  
Virtually begging the question  
Preference principle

#### Know these people's positions:

Descartes  
Moore  
Putnam  
Dretske  
Klein  
Huemer

#### Know these examples & what they're supposed to support:

Twin Earth  
Alien tree-picture example (Putnam)  
The zebras in the zoo  
Siberian Grebes  
Courtroom & scientific cases (Huemer)

#### Know these arguments (their assumptions & conclusions):

Infinite regress argument for skepticism  
BIV argument  
traditional formulation  
Huemer's formulation  
Dretske's response  
Klein's response  
Huemer's response  
Moore's Proof  
& 3 conditions for a proof  
Moore's general response to skepticism  
& why his argument is better than Hume's  
Putnam's argument against BIV hypothesis  
Klein's defense of closure  
- the two ways/reasons Closure might be true  
- & which one is involved in the defense  
- & why skeptical argument would virtually beg the question