Scepticism

We can’t have justified beliefs with justified high confidence about the external world, the unobserved, the future, other minds.

Sceptical Scenarios

A scenario which is
- coherent
- incompatible with most or all of our beliefs (about the domain)
- such that we would have the same experiences and beliefs in this scenario as we actually do

Examples: dreaming (maybe?), evil demons, brains-in-vats

Uncontroversial that, if the scenario obtains, we don’t know very much.
More interesting: even if the scenario doesn’t obtain, does it still threaten our knowledge?

Does it matter?

“It doesn’t matter whether SS is true, as long as my experiences will continue to be just as systematic as they’ve always been.”
- Do we care only about experiences?
- Why think regularities will persist if SS is true?

Fallibilism

“Maybe I can’t rule out SSs, so don’t know very much. Still, SSs are highly improbable – and that’s enough.”
- Why think they are highly improbable?
- If high probability is good enough for everything else, why shouldn’t it be good enough for knowledge?

Fallibilism: don’t need to rule out all error possibilities in order to know. The sceptic is right that we fail, but only because she holds us to unreasonable standards.
**A Problem in Epistemology**

What are the standards for knowledge? Do sceptical scenarios show that we don’t meet them?

Complication: isn’t the fact that we couldn’t possibly meet some standard a reason to think that it’s not a standard for ‘knowledge’, as we ordinarily think of it/should be thinking of it?

And I think we may safely challenge any philosopher to bring forward any argument in favour [...] of the proposition that we do not know it, [...] which does not at some point, rest upon some premiss which is, beyond comparison, less certain than is the proposition which it is designed to attack.

Comparison: the free will debate

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**The Closure Argument**

(1) You can’t know that you’re not a handless BIV.

(2) If you can know that you have hands, you can know that you’re not a handless BIV.

(C) You can’t know that you have hands.

**How to respond?**

Ideally, a response should

- Say which premise is false.
- Sketch a positive account of knowledge that explains why this premise is false.
- Explain why the false premise seems plausible.

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**The Road Ahead**

What we’ll cover in the next few weeks:

- Attempts at denying (2): sensitivity, incremental confirmation
- Attempts at denying (1): externalism about evidence, dogmatism
- Can the Sceptic win?

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Conceptual analysis vs conceptual engineering; cf. Sally Haslanger 1999 ‘What knowledge is and what it ought to be’
G.E. Moore 1918 ‘Some Judgements of Perception’, p.228
Tom Kelly 2005 ‘Moorean Facts and Belief Revision: Can the Sceptic Win?’ vs Susanna Rinard 2014 ‘Can Philosophy Overturn Common Sense?’