# Scepticism – Lecture 2

Bernhard Salow (bs416@cam.ac.uk)                    Lent Term 2017

---

## The Closure Argument

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

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

---

(C) You don't know that you have hands.

## Rejecting Closure?

Closure: If S knows that p, and q obviously follows from p, then S can know that q.

But, weirdly, p can look easier to know than q:

| Easy | Hard |
|---|---|
| I have hands | I am not a BIV |
| I am in the lecture room | I am not in bed having a vivid dream |
| That is a Zebra | That is not a cleverly disguised mule |
| I can't afford a mansion | I won't win the lottery |
| I will lecture next Tuesday | I won't die of SADS in the meantime |

Two different intuitions: because S can deduce that q; because S needs to know that q 'before' she can know that p.

## Attempts at an Explanation

Relevant Alternatives: to know that p, you have to rule out all the *relevant* alternatives to p. Those include some, but not all, ways of p being false. "It's a cleverly disguised mule" is a relevant alternative to "it's not a cleverly disguised mule" but not to "it's a Zebra".

Problem: why not?

Fred Dretske (1970) "Epistemic Operators"

Incremental Confirmation: $E$ can raise the probability of $p$, without raising that of $q$. That a die landed 1 or 2 raises the probability that it landed 2; but it doesn't raise the probability that it landed even. Similarly, the animal looking like a Zebra raises the probability that it is one, but not that it isn't a disguised mule.

Problem: if $p$ is likely given $E$, it does follow that $q$ is likely given $E$. And surely what matters to whether you know $q$ isn't whether your evidence makes $q$ more likely than it was before, but whether it makes it likely full stop.

Assaf Sharon and Levi Spectre (forthcoming) "Evidence and the Openness of Knowledge"

## Sensitivity

Sensitivity: you can't know that p unless, had p been false, you wouldn't have believed p.

If it hadn't been a Zebra, it would have been a Giraffe - and so S wouldn't have believed that it's a Zebra.

If it hadn't not been a cleverly disguised mule, it would have been a cleverly disguised mule – and so S would still have believed (now falsely) that it's a Zebra.

Robert Nozick (1981) *Philosophical Explanations* ch.3 §1-2
An account of relevance: w is a relevant alternative to p if it might have obtained if p had been false.

## Understanding Counterfactuals

Counterfactual/Subjunctive Conditionals: "if it had been that p, it would have been that q"

Indicative Condtionals: "if it is the case that p, it is the case that q"

Lewis-Stalnaker analysis: "if it had been that p, it would have been that q" is true iff the 'closest' p-worlds are all q-worlds

This analysis of counterfactuals predicts that the belief that the animal is a Zebra can be sensitive, even though the belief that it is not a disguised mule is not:

David Lewis (1973) *Counterfactuals*

$$Z, B(Z), B(\neg DM) \xrightarrow{\neg Z} G, \neg B(Z) \qquad \xrightarrow{\neg \neg DM} \qquad DM, B(Z), B(\neg DM)$$
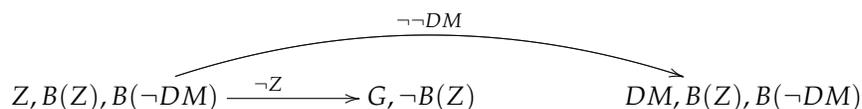
## Problems

Is sensitivity a necessary condition for knowledge?

> I left an ice cube outside in the sun a few hours ago. I know that it has melted. But if it hadn't melted (because it was in one of the very few molecular arrangements that would allow it not to melt), I would still have believed that it has melted.

Does the diagnosis capture the intuitive 'hard' vs 'easy' distinction?

> I'm in the countryside, where (unbeknownst to me) there are not only some real barns, but also lots of very convincing barn facades. However, all the real ones are red, all the fake ones green. So my belief that there is a red barn in front of me is sensitive, but my belief that there is a barn in front of me is not.

> It seems easier to know that John has a Rolex than that John has a *real* Rolex. But the worlds in which John has a Rolex and the ones in which he has a real Rolex are the same. So the two beliefs are equally sensitive.

The Problem of 'Abominable Conjunctions'

Does the response beg the question against the sceptic?

Jonathan Vogel (1987) "Tracking, Closure, and Inductive Knowledge"

Saul Kripke (2011) "Nozick on Knowledge" in his *Philosophical Troubles*; Keith DeRose (1994) "Solving the Sceptical Puzzle" *Philosophical Review*

Suggests a contextualist account instead? Gail Stine (1976) "Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure" – then, much later, Cohen, DeRose, Lewis, etc.

Keith DeRose (1994) "Solving the Sceptical Puzzle" *Philosophical Review*

Edward Craig (1989) "Nozick and the Sceptic: the Thumbnail Version" *Analysis*