Phil. 270, 2/6: Nozick's Sensitivity/Tracking Theory of Knowledge

1. Nozick's Account, without the bells and whistles (mentioned at 164.3, but also skipping some already in our selection), expressed with →s: S knows that p iff

(1) p is true

(2) S believes that p

(3) not-p → not-(S believes that p) and

(4) p → S believes that p

-Here conditions (3) and (4) are as Nozick expresses them on p. 162. They are subjunctive conditionals, a.k.a. counterfactual conditionals. Where Nozick writes out condition (3) in an English sentence (at p. 159.8), he writes it as follows:

(3) If p weren't true, S wouldn't believe that p. Also possible:

(3) If p had not been true, S would not have believed that p.

-Nozick's remarks on his subjunctive condition (3): 160.6

-✓Powerpoint on Subjunctive conditionals: subjunctive vs. indicative conditionals; possible world semantics for subjunctives (also discussed by N at 160.7)

-what (3) requires in possible-worlds talk is that S not believe that p in the closest [note: these need not be close] not-p-worlds. A picture. A "band"?: how to understand "closest"

2. Applying Nozick's first three conditions

-160.3-.6: Gets Gettier case right

-160.9-161.7: "Handles nicely cases that cause difficulties for" RA? What advantage does Nozick think his theory has over RA in this "not so clear" (161.2) cases?

-Perhaps thinking his theory renders the verdict of "unclear" where it should (on one way of testing a theory against examples), while RA cannot, without cheating [relevant to what? concerns], render any verdict about these examples? Or is he thinking his theory can really decide all such cases, positively or negatively?

-Problem: Though this isn't entirely clear to me, Nozick may be claiming an advantage over the causal theory with respect to mathematical knowledge (158.7, 159.1). [Compare his comment about "a more general linkage" with what I said about CT → Reliabilism.] But it doesn't seem that the first three conditions, at least, can handle this knowledge. [Here's the basic problem: How does your theory manage to correctly divide the cases where one knows from where one doesn't know in cases of confident beliefs in necessary truths, like bits of math?] Is this supposed to be handled by condition (4)? Still, needn't S meet condition 3? Maybe 3 is supposed to be trivially true where P is necessary. Powerpoint: counterpossibles

3. Sensitivity and Insensitivity: Condition (3) is the star of Nozick's show. We can call this Nozick's "sensitivity" condition, and introduce this handy terminology:

-S's true belief that p is sensitive iff *roughly* S would not have believed that p if p had been false [i.e., iff roughly it satisfies Nozick's 3rd condition for knowledge]

-S's true belief that p is insensitive iff *roughly* S would have believed that p even if p had been false

-We could have omitted the "roughly"s, and used our terminology as a fast way to simply say that one or the other of the relevant simple conditionals is true. But following the spirit of N's own use of the terminology (see the bottom of p. 161 to the top of p. 162), it's far better to use the terms to point to an important property that our beliefs may have a) that seems important to whether or not they constitute knowledge, and b) that the simple conditionals give us a good approximation of.

-Insensitivity is an intuitively powerful knowledge-killer: "You would have believed that even if it were false!" seems a good objection to a claim to knowledge.

-However, … counter-examples!: There are cases where it seems that someone does know something, even though they would have believed it even if it had been false. Instead of taking these cases as showing that "insensitive" beliefs can constitute knowledge (as we would have to, if we didn't have that "roughly" in there), we, or at least I (at least wrt some cases), say that the cases show that simple conditional doesn't fully capture the notion of "insensitivity." Why do I do that? Because it seems like (it *feels* like) there is an important property our beliefs have that the simple insensitivity conditional comes close to capturing, but, in light of some examples, doesn't completely nail down. In these test cases, where the simple insensitivity conditional is satisfied, I not only intuit that the subject does nonetheless know that p, but also that their belief isn't really insensitive: that a particular property that often seems to kill knowledge is not present in the cases.

-Nozick's Grandmother Case and Methods: "A grandmother sees her grandson is well when he comes to visit; but if he were sick or dead, others would tell her he was well to spare her upset. Yet this does not mean she doesn't know he is well (or at least ambulatory) when she sees him" (PE, p. 259). Leads Nozick to add "methods" of belief formation to his account, yielding this souped-up version of condition 3:

> If P weren't true and S were to use M to arrive at a belief as to whether or not P is true, then S wouldn't believe P via M

-I think I can hear original (3) in a way that it's satisfied in the grandmother case, and so think this case might best be handled by instructions on how to understand the key conditionals in the relevant, "epistemic" way [18: pp. 20-22]. Cheating, priority?

-other cases: BIV-mc, BIV-nas, the lottery non-player

[-Just for the interested: If you want to get deep into the problems and supposed solutions, I try some out in the "Insensitivity" chapter of *The Appearance of Ignorance*.]

4. Condition 4

-Problem (with first 3 condtions): 161.7: tank-tank case: person in the tank brought to believe that he is in the tank. Used by N to motivate introducing his 4th condition.

-How the condition is supposed to work: photon example (162.3) and the tank-tank problem case (162.7). Powerpoint: "factuals"

-Theories of "factuals" (just my term), and how Nozick's theory fares on each:

1. They all have the same truth-value as their consequents (so true-true SCs are all true). This can follow from one way of apply the possible worlds account of SCs. No good for Nozick: his 4th condition couldn't do any work.
2. None of them are true. [They sure sound wrong!] No good for Nozick: (4) could never be satisfied where (1) and (2) hold.
3. They're sometimes true, sometimes false. This is what Nozick needs. (& the possible worlds account can be taken this way.) But it only makes it *possible* for his theory to work: He needs the right ones to be true and the right ones to be false. (See fn. 9, pp. 175-6.) But it's hard to test, because just about nobody has the intuitive reactions needed. Intuitions about factuals tend to be just that they seem weird & somehow wrong.

-Probably best for Nozick to just give his 4th condition directly in possible worlds terms, requiring that there be no too-nearby P-worlds where S disbelieves P.

5. Nozick's Theory in a Picture – and comparison with the "safety"/"double-safety" picture