

-Stine on RA and skepticism

-As we saw last time, at around 251-253, Stine presents what I called her blunt, initial response to the skeptic....

-But at 254.1, “some qualifications” and nuance start creeping in: We hear that “In truth, in some sense skepticism is unanswerable” (254.2), and we can see a proto-contextualism at work: “It is an essential characteristic of our concept of knowledge that tighter criteria are appropriate in different contexts” (254.3), followed immediately by what sounds like a skeptic-friendly application of this contextualism: “It is one thing in a street encounter, another in a classroom, another in a law court – and who is to say it cannot be another in a philosophical discussion?” (254.4). But Stine then turns against the skeptic: While skeptics are “play[ing] on” (254.7) on an essential feature of our concept of knowledge, and they “rightly” have an “entering wedge,” the standards they are trying to install are “perverse” (254.6)!

-What we have is a basic contextualist answer to skepticism: We do know by ordinary standards; we don’t know by the standards the skeptic is trying to get us to accept. The skeptic is right by the standards they are promoting, but is wrong that this shows we’ve been mistaken in our ordinary claims to “know”, “if they hold that others are wrong in any way - i.e., are sloppy, speaking only loosely, or whatever - when they say we know a great deal” (254.7). Stine adds to this basic contextualist stance her own opinion (not essential to the contextualist treatment of skepticism) about the nature of the skeptic’s standards: they are perverse. We should not accept them. Turn a deaf ear, still, I suppose – but while realizing that “in some sense” the skeptic is right and “unanswerable.”

-Note how talk of RA doesn’t appear in this exposition of Stine’s basic contextualist position. To add it in: For Stine, the perversity of the skeptic’s standards for knowledge are a matter of their allowing perverse and usually irrelevant alternatives to count as relevant.

-What then becomes of **Closure**?

-Stine proposes that we can maintain closure from within a Relevant Alternatives theory of knowledge if we “hold the set of relevant alternatives constant from beginning to end of the deductive closure argument” (pp. 255-6).

-Stine’s point holds for contextualist accounts of knowledge attributions generally: If we’re operating with a contextualist theory, we should hold the content of “knows” constant. To switch standards midway is to “commit some logical sin akin to equivocation” (p. 256.5). Closure can then be maintained at any given standard for knowledge.

-What then becomes of the skeptical argument (AI)? Stine pioneers the contextualist Moorean account, of a type followed by Cohen, Lewis, and KDR, on which

-a) we know that O by ordinary standards for knowledge, but closure is maintained because by those same ordinary standards we also know that not-H

-b) the skeptic’s bringing H up pushes us toward* the very high (perhaps “extreme”, “perverse”) standards for knowledge according to which we don’t know that O – but closure is maintained here, too, for at these high standards, we also don’t know that not-H

-c) (b) explains why the skeptic is as persuasive as they are, and the skeptic may* end up speaking truthfully when they conclude that we 'don't know' that O. But since their "success" (insofar as they do succeed) is achieved by raising the standards for 'knows', they are wrong if they then go on to conclude that others, speaking in non-skeptical contexts, are wrong (speaking or thinking falsely) when they claim to 'know' this or that. -*at these points, we remain open about the skeptic's level of success in installing the standards they are pushing for

-On Stine's initial, blunt stance, it's a bit of a mystery why AI can be persuasive. If "know" contains set rules by which skeptical hypotheses are simply irrelevant, wouldn't the skeptic's claims just strike us as simply mistaken? But if those hypotheses can be relevant, and can be made relevant by (extreme, but still allowable) uses of maneuvers common to non-philosophical uses of "know", it starts to become understandable how the skeptic strikes us as perhaps even boldly right.

-Stine on evidence and knowledge_o that skeptical hypotheses are false

-But what's up with that knowledge-by-ordinary standards that H is false (second half of (a))?

-the notion of evidence plays a large role in Stine's thought from the beginning of this piece—in a way that I haven't brought out yet. She seems conflicted about this key issue: Do we know [by ordinary standards: in the way Stine thinks we do "know" this] by means of evidence that skeptical hypotheses are false?

-early on, as I noted, Stine says that we don't have "particular evidence" against skeptical hypotheses (251.9). But what does she mean by this? Do we not have any evidence against them at all? And might we come to know_o that they are false via this (non-particular?) evidence?

-Stine seems to have some kind of eye on global (not her term) skeptical hypotheses (not her term), extremely "perverse" though they be: see the mention of the "evil genius" at 254.6). But the bulk of her attention is spent on the more "local" painted mules hypothesis.

-She takes what has become the standard Contextualist Moorean line: "I do know that it is not a mule painted to look like a zebra" (258.6). By this, I take it, she means that she knows it by ordinary standards. But how does she know it – by evidence or not? Though she seriously considers the "possible alternative view" on which ~CPM is known_o by evidence (258.8-259.5), her favored account is what immediately follows her declaration of knowledge: she knows it without need of evidence:

I do not need evidence for such a proposition. The evidence picture of knowledge has been carried too far. I would say that I do not have evidence that it is a zebra, either. I simply see that it is one. But that is perhaps another matter. The point I want to make here is simply that if the negation of a proposition is not a relevant alternative, then I know it - obviously, without needing to provide evidence - and so obviously that it is odd, misleading even, to give utterance to my knowledge. (258.7)

-For Stine, we **can appear** not to know that skeptical hypotheses are false because "to say that [someone] knows that p does normally presuppose that not-p is a relevant alternative." This

would imply that an attempt to say “I know that’s not a CPM” would tend to backfire: it would tend to create a (perverse?) conversational situation where the animal’s being a CPM is a relevant alternative, and since that can’t be ruled out, the claim to “knowledge” would go false. (If Stine were to expand her principle to the claim that saying either that someone does know *or saying that they don’t know* that p tends to presuppose that not-p is a relevant alternative, then she could also use this account to say how the skeptic’s claim that “You don’t know that it isn’t a cpm” would tend to go true.)

-Stine continues that “This is, however, a pragmatic, not a semantic presupposition....Thus, the presupposition falls in the category of those which Grice labels ‘cancellable’” (255.8). I don’t know if we want to get into all that terminology. Suffice it to say, we do know that not-H by ordinary standards; we know this without any need of evidence; and, most importantly, ***the reason we seem not to know it is that a claim to the effect that we do “know” it tends to create a context where that claim goes false*** (and an admission that one “doesn’t know” it tends to go true, for parallel reasons – though here we’re going a bit beyond Stine).

-Following Stine, there is something of a split among CM-eans (the “Stine crowd”), with Lewis seeming to follow Stine in saying we know_o that skeptical hypotheses are false by taking it for granted that they are false, with no need for evidence, but Cohen and KDR saying we know *a priori* that not-H where H is a “global” skeptical hypothesis (like BIV), but that we know the likes of “that animal is not a cleverly painted mule” on the basis of empirical evidence which seems insufficient for knowledge, but in fact gives us knowledge-by-ordinary-standards.

Reading 18: “Solving the Skeptical Problem”

Objective: to “defeat” the “bold skeptic”

-the “bold skeptic” is one who claims/concludes that our ordinary claims to (and ordinary thoughts to the effect that we have) “knowledge” are wrong: pp. 5.7-6.1.

-When presented with the possibility of contextualism, the skeptic may opt to remain a bold skeptic, and can plausibly take AI to establish bold skepticism, if its premises are not just true, but “boldly true”: true when evaluated even at ordinary standards for knowledge. [2 types of bold skeptic: invariantist, contextualist] I, like other contextualists, follow Stine in accepting the bold truth of premise 2: It is true at any standard for knowledge, just keep the standard constant. It’s premise 1 that I think will fail to be boldly true. But it can seem to be boldly true, as I admit (highlighted part) below:

The contextualist strategy is important because AI initially seems to threaten the truth of our ordinary claims—it threatens to boldly show that we’ve been wrong all along in thinking and saying that we know this and that. For it doesn’t seem as if it’s just in some “high” or “philosophical” sense that AI’s premises are true: They seem true in the ordinary sense of ‘know’. In fact, **one is initially tempted to say that there’s *no* good sense in which I know that I’m not a BIV** or in which I can know I have hands if I don’t know that I’m not a BIV. How (and whether) to avoid the bold skeptical result is puzzle enough. (18: pp. 5-6)

-“defeat”: by explaining how the skeptical argument has the power it has in such a way that renders it unthreatening to the truth of our ordinary claims to “know,” we seek to show how the best “enlightened Moorean choice” [recall 15, pp. 46-49] we can make is for our “Contextualist Moorean” solution, over the other solutions, including that of the “bold skeptic.”

Nozick and Stine: Prospects and Problems

-Nozick fails to explain away the power of the intuitively powerful claim he rejects, AI's second premise: 18, pp. 28-29; leaving us "with little reason to follow Nozick in choosing to take an implausible stand precisely where he has rather than someplace else" (18: p. 29.2). Nozick on this matter is now more nicely presented (with substantiating passages in the notes) at pp. 203-204 of *The Appearance of Ignorance*:

To quickly review Nozick's own treatment of AI and my complaints about it: Nozick denies AI's second premise. He admits the plausibility of what he's denying. In fact, he likens the closure principle on which this premise could be based, in terms of its "intuitive appeal," to a steamroller.² But following the positive explanatory methodology I ascribed to him above, he denies it because his account of knowledge rules that it is false.³ So, to now ask the question that vexes negative explainers like me: What then leads us so very badly astray about closure and AI's second premise? It's here that Nozick offers nothing, simply leaving that explanatory task to "further exploration."⁴ As I complained in SSP (Section 1.9), this leaves us with little reason to follow Nozick in denying just the piece of the puzzle he chooses to deny.

2. "Uncovering difficulties in the details of particular formulations of [closure principle] P will not weaken the principle's intuitive appeal; such quibbling will seem at best like a wasp attacking a steamroller, at worst like an effort in bad faith to avoid being pulled along by the skeptic's argument" (Nozick 1981: 206).

3. "Principle P is wrong, however, and not merely in detail. Knowledge is not closed under known logical implication. S knows that p when S has a true belief that p, and S wouldn't have a false belief that p (condition 3) and S would have a true belief that p (condition 4). Neither of these latter two conditions is closed under known logical implication" (Nozick 1981: 206).

4. "Thus, if our notion of knowledge was as strong as we naturally tend to think (namely, closed under known logical implication) then the skeptic would be right. (But why do we naturally think this? Further exploration and explanation is needed of the intuitive roots of the natural assumption that knowledge is closed under known logical implication)" (Nozick 1981: 242).

-On the other hand, as we've discussed more than once, Nozick does provide a wonderfully effective explanation of the intuitive power of AI's first premise—what I call in 18 the "Subjunctive Conditionals Account." I try to convey the power of this account esp. in sect. 8 (pp. 23.9-27.2) of 18

-By contrast, Stine provides an attractive account of how closure and a sensible, positive stance toward AI's second premise can be maintained in an account that rejects bold skepticism, as we saw last time....

-But Stine's account, made from within the RA theory, doesn't have a satisfying account of the intuitive power of AI's first premise. Why is that premise so plausible? The skeptic somehow makes H a relevant alternative, or at least pushes toward making it such. But why would that block "knowledge" of O? RA's answer comes down to: we can't rule out or eliminate H, or can't discriminate O from H, or etc. But does that really explain things?: See 18, pp. 16-17.5 for a negative answer. We need SCA. Once we see the power of SCA, we can see that it's the kind of account Stine was striving toward (in her use of, e.g., "particular evidence.")

-Stine & Nozick: the strength of each corresponds to the weakness of the other. Maybe there's some way of putting them together! We need a solution that explains the intuitive power of both of AI's premises (& also the plausibility of our ordinary claims to knowledge)

Double safety: S knows that p iff (1) p is true (2) S believes that p, and (3) there is no world that is too close to the actual world in which S's belief as to whether or not p is the case fails to match the fact of the matter

*****key-but-tricky part: SSP's account of why insensitive beliefs seem not to be instances of knowledge**, based on a contextualist "double-safety" account of knowledge and the "Rule of Sensitivity" (36.3; put in terms of possible worlds at 36.7-37.2): When Al's first premise (I don't know that I'm not a BIV) is presented, by the Rule of Sensitivity, the sphere of epistemically relevant worlds is expanded to include the nearest worlds in which I am a BIV. In those nearest BIV-worlds, now made relevant, I am a BIV but falsely think I am not one, so I don't count as knowing that I'm not a BIV at the standards for knowledge that have just been installed. I also don't count as knowing that I have hands at those newly installed standards, for in those nearest BIV worlds, now made relevant, I'm mistaken about whether I have hands: I don't have any, but (because I'm a BIV or the relevant kind) I believe that I do. So the skeptic has installed standards I don't satisfy for both I'm not a BIV and I have hands. Here's how this goes down, on one pass, at pp. 37-38 of SSP:

In utilizing Al to attack our putative knowledge of 0, the skeptic instinctively chooses her skeptical hypothesis, H, so that it will have these two features: (1) We will be in at least as strong a position to know that not-H as we're in to know that 0, but (2) Any belief we might have to the effect that not-H will be an insensitive belief (a belief we would hold even if not-H were false—that is, even if H were true). Given feature (2), the skeptic's assertion that we don't know that not-H, by the Rule of Sensitivity, drives the standards for knowledge up to such a point as to make that assertion true. By the Rule of Sensitivity, recall, the standards for knowledge are raised to such a level as to require our belief that not-H to be sensitive before it can count as knowledge. Since our belief that not-H isn't sensitive (feature (2)), the standards are driven up to such a level that we don't count as knowing that not-H. And since we're in no stronger an epistemic position with respect to 0 than we're in with respect to not-H (feature (1)), then, at the high standards put in place by the skeptic's assertion of Al's first premise, we also fail to know that 0. At these high standards, the skeptic truthfully asserts her second premise (which, recall, is also true at lower standards), and then truthfully asserts Al's conclusion that we don't know that 0.³⁵ This accounts for the persuasiveness of Al. But since, on this account, the skeptic gets to truthfully state her conclusion only by raising the standards for knowledge, Al doesn't threaten the truth of our ordinary claims to know the very Os our knowledge of which the skeptic attacks. For the fact that the skeptic can install very high standards that we don't live up to has no tendency to show that we don't satisfy the more relaxed standards that are in place in more ordinary conversations and debates.

-compare with Nozick's account: both utilize SCA, but differ over why SCA's generalization holds; on Nozick's account, you simply don't know that ~BIV. On the SSP account, you don't know that ~BIV by the very standards that an admission that you don't "know" that tend to put into place.

-as on the RA account, we can say that on the SSP account certain (outlandish) and usually-irrelevant possibilities are made (or push toward being made) relevant. But the crucial difference is in how this kills knowledge of O: at this point, the SSP account doesn't appeal to

anything like that *we can't rule out* these possibilities, or *can't discern* that they don't obtain, or etc. (all based on phrases of epistemic appraisal that seem pretty close to saying that we don't know that the possibilities don't obtain). Rather, in the closest worlds where these possibilities obtain, this is what's going on: We (still) believe that they are false. In short, the SSP account is able to use SCA where the Relevant Alternativist appeals to something like "ruling out."

The resulting contextualist solution to the skeptical puzzle:

-what it says about 1, 2, and $\sim C$:

-2 is boldly true, true at any particular standard for knowledge but hold the standards constant!: the Stine attitude toward closure

-1 is true at the skeptic's high standards: this accounts for its plausibility (how?). But it's false at ordinary standards for knowledge: we do know_o that $\sim BIV$

- $\sim C$: false at the skeptic's high standards (so C is true there), but true (we do know!) at ordinary standards: recall the basic contextualist strategy

How this solution compares with the "straightforward" (non-contextualist) non-skeptical solutions

-For a "straightforward" (non-contextualist) solution, a satisfying solution will take the form of picking which of the three plausible claims (the skeptic's premises and the denial of her conclusion) to deny (so far, that's just making a Moorean choice), but also explaining why this false claim seems so plausible to us – one "explains away" the plausibility of the claim

-but middle of p. 42: straightforward solvers (as we saw in the case of Nozick) tend to just deny a premise w/o accounting for its plausibility

-the exception being certain presentations of bold skepticism. So we look at: the SSP Contextualist Solution vs. the "bold skeptical" solution

-bold skeptic's problem: p. 44.1 – 45.1

-skeptic could "fix" it.... 45.1 – 46.5

-but then we're left with no reason to accept her solution over the contextualist solution, and in fact good reason to accept the contextualist solution: sect. 16

Next time: Readings 19-21, Final exam questions distributed