

Disbelieving the sceptic without proving him wrong

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Draft
comments welcome

1 Framing the question

x is a sceptic $\Leftrightarrow x$ believes that noone ever knows something

The sceptical question: “How do you know that you know something?”

Proposed strategy: Dodge the question by justifying our preexisting belief that the sceptic is wrong.

Dilemma: Either we find a hidden contradiction in what the sceptic presents as possible or else we simply declare our psychological inability to believe him.

Solution: View scepticism as an epistemic: we do not have to convince those among us who are already infected with the sceptical virus; instead, we have to prevent the sceptical disease from propagating, i.e. to detain the sceptics among us of convincing others.

2 Choosing the framework

Two interpretations of “a way the actual world could have been (given what we know about it)”:

- **referential interpretation:** any non-contradictory scenario
- **attributive interpretation:** a possible world which we could take ourselves to inhabit

‘Moore’s paradox’: “ p , but I do not believe that p ”

Definition 2.1 w is a doxastic alternative for a at t iff a cannot (indeed should not) rule out the actuality of w given what he believes at t about the world he takes to be actual

1. Suppose $B_a(p \wedge \neg B_a p)$.
2. Then there is a doxastic alternative w for a in @, the actual world, such that $p \wedge \neg B_a p$ is true in w .
3. Suppose @ is a doxastic alternative for a in w .
4. Then @’s being actual is compatible with all a believes in w .

5. If @ is actual, $B_a p$.
6. In w , however, $\neg B_a p$, so @ is not compatible with everything a believes in w .
7. So @ is not a doxastic alternative for a in w .
8. But @ is a doxastic alternative for a in @.
9. So w and @ differ.
10. So either p or $\neg B_a p$ is false.

3 How do you know you are not a brain in a vat

- (1) “If I were a brain in a vat, I wouldn’t take the actual world for what I actually take it to be, namely possibly actual.”

Proposition 3.1 *If you were dreaming now, you would not believe you were dreaming. If you were a brain in a vat, you would not believe you were a brain in a vat.*

1. Suppose I am a brain in a vat, but I do not believe that I am a brain in a vat.
2. Because I do not believe that I am a brain in a vat, the world w where I am one is not among my doxastic alternatives.
3. If I would believe in w that I am a brain in a vat, w would be among my doxastic alternatives.
4. So I do not believe in w that I am a brain in a vat.
5. So what I suppose to be the actual world would not be among my doxastic alternatives in w .
6. But @ is among my doxastic alternatives in w .
7. So @ is not what I suppose to be the actual world, i.e. a world where I am a brain in a vat.
8. So I am not a brain in a vat.

4 How do you know you are not a zombie

Definition 4.1 *a is your zombie iff a is a creature physically indistinguishable from you but lacking all phenomenal experiences you take yourself to have.*

- (2) If “tail” would mean “leg”, horses would have four tails.
- (3) If “tail” means “leg”, horses have four tails.
- (4) If I were a zombie, I would believe I am not a zombie.
- (5) If I am a zombie, I believe that I am not a zombie.