

Steven Luper-Foy's "The Epistemic Predicament: Knowledge, Nozickian Tracking, and Scepticism"

I. Objections to Nozick's Account of Knowledge

- a. **Causal Theories of Methods:** *S*'s forming the belief that there is a hammer in front of *S* involves "the chain of events usually involved in visual perception, including the stimulation of *S*'s retinas by light from the hammer, nerve impulses, brain activity, etc." (p. 29).
 - i. "Suppose that although *S* took a drug that produces hallucinations of hammers, *S* now sees a real hammer and believes that *p*: There is a hammer in front of *S*. Intuitively, *S* does not know that *p*. ... [But given a causal theory of methods,] *S* knows that *p* according to Nozick's conditions. Condition (3) in particular is met since if there were no hammer, *S* would not believe there was *via M*; rather *S* would believe it, if at all, via some sequence of events involving hallucinated percepts" (p. 29).
- b. **Phenomenalist Interpretations of Methods**, which individuates belief-forming methods "solely in terms of *S*'s percepts, *S*'s belief(s), and relations among these two" (p. 29).
 - i. "Knowledge-yielding mechanisms that do not involve percepts cannot be interpreted phenomenally" (p. 29).
 - ii. "...suppose Flip is not in ordinary circumstances. Though he is unaware of it, Jessica is watching his coin tosses, and is flipping on the lights whenever the result is heads, and off whenever the result is tails. Now he *does* meet Nozick's conditions without knowing. Condition (3) is met because if the lights were out, Flip would believe they were out, not on, via the coin toss method. Condition (4) is met since if the lights were on, he would believe that they were on via the coin toss method" (p. 31).

II. Normal and Rigged Circumstances

- a. "In Situation (I), Sue Seesit arrives at the belief that t : A table is in front of her. She does so by the normal visual process, and visual stimulation is the only information relevant to her belief. ... In Situation (II), as in (I), Sue again believes that t through the visual process. However, her pal has built a trap door under the table so that every so often the table drops out of sight into the basement, and when it does, a device projects a table hologram where the real table would have been. Still, Sue has not spotted the hologram. In fact, her mental condition is precisely as it would be in Situation (I). In Situation (II), Sue does not know that t " (p. 33).

III. A Causal Indicator Analysis of Empirical Knowledge: "A belief that S has not inferred from another is ... noninferentially known if and only if a causal chain that meets certain reliability conditions joins it to an event or state of affairs that guarantees its truth" (p. 34).

- a. A sequence of events F causes (or sustains) S 's belief that p
- b. $(\exists E)[E \text{ is a stage of } F \ \& \ (\forall S)(E \text{ is a stage of a sequence that causes } S \text{ to believe } p \rightarrow p)]$
 - i. $(\forall E)[E \text{ is a stage of } F \text{ only if } (E \text{ occurs} \rightarrow p)]$
- c. $(\forall E)(E \text{ is a stage of } F \text{ only if } E \text{ is a reliable indicator that } p)$
- d. $(\forall E)(E \text{ is a stage of } F \text{ only if } (E \text{ occurs} \rightarrow p))$, i.e., only if E is a conclusive indicator that p .
- e. (c) applies in normal circumstances, while (d) applies in rigged circumstances.

IV. Skeptical Arguments

- a. Skeptical arguments rely on one of the following premises:

CH: If S were to arrive at the belief that p in circumstances C through process P and S failed to know that p [because her belief that p is accidentally correct in C], and if in different circumstances C' in which p is also true S arrived at the belief that p through the same process P , then S would not know that p in C' either [because her belief that p would be accidentally correct in C'].

CH': If *S* were to arrive at the belief that *p* in circumstances *C* through process *P* and *S* failed to know that *p* [because her belief that *p* is accidentally correct in *C*], and if in different circumstances *C'* *S* arrived at the belief that *p* through the same process *P*, then [for some reason] *S* would not know that *p* in *C'* either.

- b. Both CH and CH' are false. Thus, skeptical arguments are unsound.

V. **Given the Causal Indicator Analysis of Empirical Knowledge, Knowledge is Closed**

- a. "The principle we need is

CRI: (*ri* is a reliable indicator that *h* & *h* entails *p*) entails *ri* is a reliable indicator that *p*.

To see that CRI holds, recall that *ri* is a reliable indicator that *h* only if: for most persons *S'* at most times *t'*, if, at *t'*, *S'* relied on an *ri*-type event in order to decide whether an *h*-type situation holds, usually one *would* hold. But since *h* entails *p*, *that* an *h*-type situation holds entails a *p*-type one holds ... Hence a *p*-type situation will hold *whenever* an *h*-type one does. So if *S'*, at *t'*, relied on an *ri*-type event in order to decide whether a *p*-type situation holds, usually one *would*" (p. 48).

- b. How do we know that $\sim sk$? "To deduce a consequence such as *not-sk* when we know that *h* is to believe it because of a sequence *F* such that for each possible *F* occurs-world, either that consequent is true in it, or else it is a world that is remote. ... Another way to express the sense in which we know that *not-sk* upon deducing it from *h* is this: our account says that given the origin of our belief that *not-sk* ..., the possibility that *sk* is an irrelevant alternative" (p. 48).