A
For logic, see the handwritten booklet.

definitionally
B
7. Is scepticism about the external world any more plausible than scepticism about mathematical truths?
voorspellen
Moral or the story: don't be original!!

In this essay, I will argue that scepticism about the external world is more plausible than scepticism about mathematical truths. For this, I will use Nozick's tracking theory of knowledge and the concept of nearest possible worlds. First, I will explain why Nozick's tracking theory is necessary. Then, I will explain why Descartes argued that one should be a sceptic about both the external world and about mathematical truths. Finally, I will argue that, according to Nozick's theory of knowledge, scepticism about the external world is less plausible because in the closest possible world in which there is no external world, I would be dreaming and I would not know that it does not exist. But the closest possible world in which mathematical truths would be false would be a world in which I would know that they would be false.

Nozick

The reason Nozick's theory of knowledge is necessary is because of Gettier cases. As Zagzebski argues, Gettier cases are events where something should have been false but, because of luck, it true. An example of this is the case where Henry is driving through 'fake barn country'. Unbeknownst to Henry, in this land, all the barns are fake, papier-mâché replicas of barns. However, there is one actually real barn, and when Henry looks out of his window he happens to be looking at that one real barn and comes to believe that he looks at a real barn. Intuitively, this should not be deemed knowledge, it is out of luck that Henry is looking at the one real barn. Yet, under traditional and causal accounts of knowledge, it would be considered as knowledge. Henry believes that it is the case, it is actually the case, and Henry is also justified in believing that he is looking at a barn.

Because of this, Nozick proposes a different theory, which I have simplified for the sake of argument:
S knows that p iff:
(1): S believes that p
(2): p is true
(3): If p were not true, S would not have believed that p

Met opmerkingen [MOU1]: You need to state all four conditions of Nozick's theory.
"The closest possible worlds in which there would be no external world would be worlds in which we are dreaming, something which happens to us all the time and which we have all experienced."
There's something puzzling going on here. Nozick's response to the sceptic goes like this: the closest worlds in which I don't have hands are worlds in which I have had my hands amputated. In such worlds, I don't believe I have hands. So my belief that I have hands satisfies condition 3. It's not totally clear what Nozick should say about the sentence 'there is an external world'. If the closest world in which it is false is one in which I am a unembodied soul being manipulated by a demon, then this risks undermining Nozick's response to the sceptic, because in such a world I still believe there is an external world. In any case, if I am in that predicament, I can hardly be said to be having the mundane experience of dreaming, since dreaming is a state involving the physical brain.
"However, a closest possible world where 1 + 1 = 2 would not be a world in which a demon was manipulating us but, rather, a world in which, if we put two things together, we would get three"
I assume the equation is a typo and you meant 1+1=3. But the problem is, there's no such possible world!
Nozick's theory is only partially stated, and his response to the sceptic does not appear to be well-understood.
Score: 55.

This way, he gets around the barn scenario because if Henry was not looking at a barn, we would still have believed that he was looking at a real barn. Therefore, it is not knowledge.

Descartes

Descartes argued in his meditations that one cannot be certain that the external world exists and that mathematical truths are correct--though he then later tried to prove that it did exist and that mathematical truths were correct by proving that god exists. To do this, he started radically doubting everything that he knew. One cannot be sure, he argued, that the external world exists because it is possible that I am dreaming right now. And one can even be not sure that the a priori belief in mathematical truths is correct because it could be that an evil demon is manipulating them into thinking that, for instance, 1 + 1 = 2 when it is actually 3.

It seems as if this type of thought would lead to scepticism about both the external world and about mathematical truths. However, there is a distinction here, and this can already be notices by the examples that Descartes gave in which the external world does not exist and mathematical truths are not correct. The closest possible worlds in which there would be no external world would be worlds in which we are dreaming, something which happens to us all the time and which we have all experienced. But the example he gives where mathematical truths are not correct is one in which an evil demon is manipulating us for no apparent reason. Because, and Descartes also commented on this, beliefs in mathematical truths are a priori, they do not need did not come from observation but rather from rationality, he needs a much more elaborate and weird scenario in which it would not be true and we would not know about it.

Closest possible worlds

To evaluate condition (3) of Nozick's theory of knowledge, because it is a counterfactual, one needs to use the idea of closest possible worlds (Lewis; Stalnaker). For instance, if one wants to evaluate the sentence "if kangaroos did not have tails, they would fall over", it is not necessary to hypothesise about all the possible worlds in which kangaroos do not have tails, instead it is only necessary to look at the closest possible worlds in which they do not have tails.

If we now apply Nozick's theory of knowledge to knowledge about the external world and knowledge about mathematical truths, one would find that although we do not know that the external world exists, we do know mathematical truths. This is because, as I said before, if the external world did not exist, we would not know that it would not exist because in the closest possible worlds where the external world did not exist we would

be dreaming. However, a closest possible world where 1 + 1 = 2 would not be a world in which a demon was manipulating us but, rather, a world in which, if we put two things together, we would get three things, without a demon manipulating us. And if we would live in such a world, we would know that the 1 + 1 does not equal to two but to three. Therefore, whereas we do not know whether the external world exists, we do know mathematical truths.

In conclusion, I have showed that scepticism about the external world is more plausible than scepticism about mathematical truths. This is because it is much less probable that we would not know that 1 + 1 = 2 than that we would know, if it was, in fact, not true. And, by using the idea of closest possible worlds, I have thereby shown that we do know mathematical truths. Therefore, it is less plausible to doubt mathematical truths than the external world.

C

18. In what sense, if any, is the fact that people desire something evidence for thinking it has value? Discuss the implications of your answer for Mill's 'proof' of the Principle of Utility.

In this essay, I will argue that the fact that people desire something is not evidence for thinking it has value. Although I will agree with Mill that there is no other evidence for thinking that something has value, I will ultimately argue that even the fact that people desire something is not evidence for thinking it has value. First, I will explain the first part of Mill's 'proof' of the Principle of Utility in which he argues that the fact that people desire something is evidence for thinking it has value. Then, I will refute Moore's counterargument about the difference between the meaning of 'desirable' and 'visible'. Finally, I will argue that evolution shows that even the fact that people desire something is not evidence for thinking it has value.

Mill and Moore

In the first part of Mill's proof, he tries to prove that happiness is desirable. Although he admits that it is impossible to deductively prove, he can give an empirical proof for it. Just as how one would prove that it is cloudy outside, namely, by opening the curtains and pointing to the sky, he tries to prove that happiness is desirable. The only evidence that something is visible, is that people see it. In the same way, the only evidence that something is desirable, is that people desire it.

Moore argues that Mill is making a logical error here. He points out the difference between the meanings of the words 'desirable' and 'visible'. Whereas 'visible' means

'can be seen', 'desirable' does not mean 'can be desired' but it means '*ought* to be desired'. And so, he argues, it is unjustified to equate 'desired' with 'desirable' even if it is justified to equate 'seen' with 'visible'.

However, I argue, as Crisp does, that Moore is making a mistake here. Mill is not arguing that 'desired' means 'desirable', instead he is arguing that the *only evidence* that something is desirable is that it is desired. This, I argue, makes Mill's claim much more plausible. If we wanted to find out whether ice cream is desirable, the best way to do this would be by going around, showing people ice cream, and asking whether they want it, desire it.

An objection to this could of course be that many people desire things which are not at all desirable. Many addicts desire heroin, that does not mean that heroin is desirable. However, Mill clearly thought about this because he argues it is the *only* evidence. Furthermore, most rationally thinking people do not desire heroin, so even here the objection does not hold up empirically, this would be pretty good evidence that it is, in fact, not desirable.

Evolution

However, I argue that even the fact that people desire something is not evidence that it is desirable. To understand this, one needs to grasp why we desire what we desire. According to evolution, desires can be explained because they increase the likelihood that our genes live on.

One could object here by arguing that we desire things which do not increase the likelihood that our genes live on. For instance, someone who desires to become a priest and, because of that, becomes celibate makes it much less likely that his genes live on. And there are many other similar examples. However, all these examples can, as would most biologists claim, still be explained by the fact that they would increase the likelihood of creating offspring. For the priest example, for instance, it can be explained by the fact that humans developed a strong sense of spiritualism. It has been shown that very spiritual hunter-gatherer tribes were much more likely to survive than atheist hunter-gatherer tribes. This is because the religion and rituals helped them through harsh conditions. The strong desire for spiritualism today is then a result of the fact that it used to be important to survive.

Clearly then, humans only desire things which increase the likelihood that our genes live on or would have in the past. If this is true, it suddenly seems as if Mill is arguing that whatever increases the likelihood that genes live on is desirable. This was certainly not

what he meant and would be very arbitrary. Why would the likelihood that our genes live on matter at all in deciding the normative question of what is desirable and what is not?

In conclusion, I have argued that although I agree with Mill that there is no other evidence that something is desirable other than that it is desired, even this is not evidence for it. What we desire is determined by evolution, and this would be a completely arbitrary way to decide what is desirable.