Between Recklessness and Despair
Comments on Igor Douven

Jan-Willem Romeijn
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Groningen
Overview

1. Some technical issues
2. Reservations towards formalisation
3. The use of skepticism
Technical issues

The argument employs a kind of bootstrap method: evidence $E'$ is used to boost sensory reliability ($R_1$), and evidence $E/e$ is used to boost IBE ($R_2$).

• But how strong are the arguments for the experts being intertwined in this way? E.g., why $s(R_2 \mid E/e) \geq Pr(R_2 \mid E/e)$ and $S(R_1 \mid E') \geq Pr(R_1 \mid E')$.

• Can the interdependence between experts be made explicit by having the respective panels rely on the other panel for $R_1$ and $R_2$?
1 Technical issues

There may be more standard ways of dealing with the ambivalent evidence statements $E/e$.

A more elaborate possible worlds semantics, like the one above, may make explicit how this evidence functions.
1 Technical issues

Weatherson recently argued that a Bayesian can never confirm the evidential relations that are needed to argue against the skeptic.

\[ Pr \left( E \rightarrow H \mid E \right) \leq Pr \left( E \rightarrow H \right) \]

yet \( E \rightarrow H \) is akin to inference to the best explanation

For Weatherson this casts doubt on Bayesianism. It is unclear whether the expert functions of Douven are beset by the same problem.
We may object to the specific formalisation of the sceptic in terms of probability functions.

For example, perhaps the sceptic is better modelled by assigning a whole range of probability functions to her.
Formalisation

Here Douven may be able to fall back on the response given in the paper: the Bayesian scheme plays the role of a logic.

- Any skeptic can eventually be captured in some formal scheme.

- If the skeptic must adopt progressively outlandish schemes to avoid anti-sceptical arguments, her position gets marginalised.
3 The use of skepticism

Many stagings of the skeptic in philosophy were aimed at an investigation of the nature of knowledge.

Can the paper of Douven be read as an argument for the claim that knowledge is essentially uncertain, or even probabilistic?

Foundations? It is “probability all the way down”
The use of skepticism

Atkinson and Peijnenburg recently discussed how Reichenbach argued against the quest for certainty.

“All we have is an elastic net of probability relations, floating in open space”

Bayesian epistemology may be a similar departure from the foundationalism of logical empiricism.