

Leuven 2007

# **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

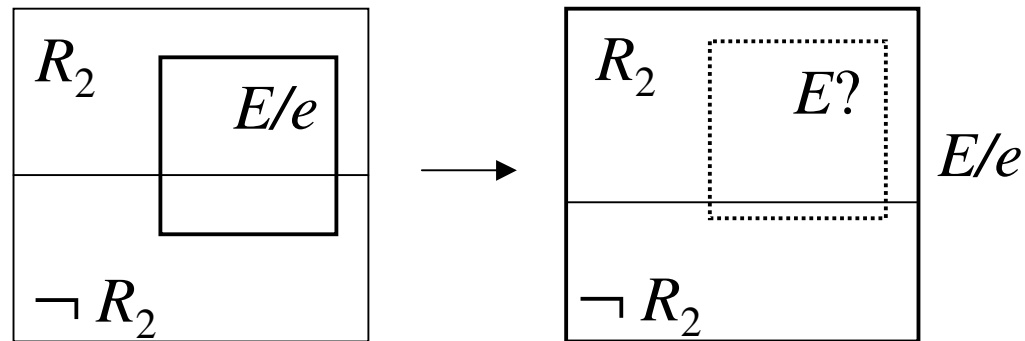
## ① Technical issues

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  $s(R_2| E/e) \geq Pr(R_2| E/e)$  and  $S(R_1| E') \geq Pr(R_1| E')$ .
- 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.

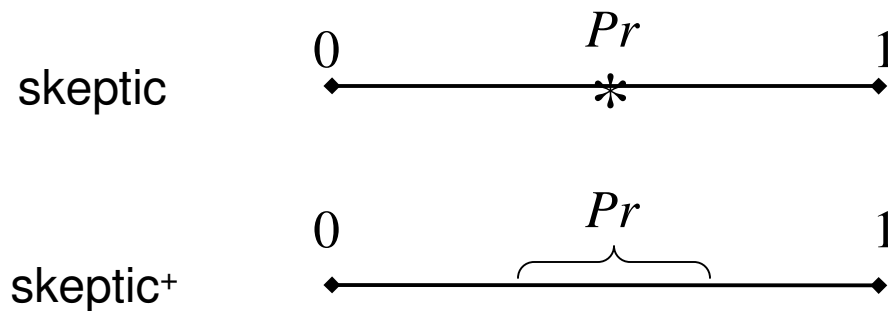
$$Pr (E \rightarrow H | E) \leq Pr (E \rightarrow H)$$

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.

## ② Formalisation

We may object to the specific formalisation of the skeptic in terms of probability functions.



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

## ② 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.

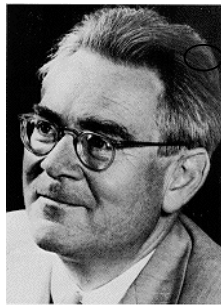


*Foundations? It is  
“probability all  
the way down”*

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

### ③ 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.