Introduction and Acknowledgments

In this volume I present, develop, and defend contextualist solutions to two of the stickiest problems in epistemology: the puzzles of skeptical hypotheses and of lotteries. It turns out, I argue, that, at least by ordinary standards for knowledge, we do know that skeptical hypotheses are false, and that we've lost the lottery.[1] Accounting for how it is that we know that skeptical hypotheses are false and why it seems that we don't know that they're false tells us a lot, both about what knowledge is and how knowledge attributions work.

What's Old and What's New in this Book

Readers of my papers would find four longish stretches of this book familiar, Chapter 1, most of all. Because one of the aims of the book is to respond to some of the discussion that 'Solving the Skeptical Problem' has generated, I thought it best not to make that a 'moving target'. So I departed from my usual habit of updating material as I incorporate it into this two-volume series, and have reproduced that paper, without modification (including in its notes), as my opening chapter. In the rest of the book, then, I refer to it as 'SSP', which refers to that work in both of its incarnations, citing section numbers rather than page numbers.

Chapter 6 would also be quite familiar. Though it has what I think are some nice improvements over my paper, 'Insensitivity Is Back, Baby!' (so that someone choosing which version to read should definitely choose the chapter over the paper), it is in essence the same material, and those already familiar with the paper can for most purposes safely skip reading that chapter.

The portion of Chapter 5 that accounts for when and why we tend to deny knowledge in lottery-ish situations (sections 2-13) updates, adds to, and improves material from 'Knowledge, Assertion, and Lotteries'; important parts of section 1, and then all of the chapter from section 14 on (where I actually give my solution to the lottery puzzle), are new.

Much of Chapter 3 is an updated version of 'How Can We Know that We're Not Brains in Vats?'. (Oddly, Chapter 7, whose title is close to that of that paper, *and which actually answers the question* asked by the paper's title, does not contain material from the paper of the quite similar name, and is instead new.)

The rest of the book is primarily new material, though here and there I incorporate smaller portions of material from previously published papers, usually with some updates and improvements. All told, material from the following papers has been incorporated:

---

[1] Well, at least we losers know that we've lost—and the odd winner is rational to think that they know by ordinary standards that they have lost. For reasons having little to do with epistemology that I consider in section 3 of Chapter 5, when the determination of the winner is in the future, it may be that nobody knows that they will lose.

'Solving the Skeptical Problem', *Philosophical Review* 104 (1995), 1-52.

'Knowledge, Assertion, and Lotteries', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996), 568-580.

'Responding to Skepticism', in K. DeRose and T. Warfield, (ed.), *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1-24.

'How Can We Know That We're Not Brains in Vats?', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 38 (2000), Spindel Conference Supplement, 121-148.

'Sosa, Safety, Sensitivity, and Skeptical Hypotheses', in J. Greco (ed.), *Ernest Sosa and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 22-41.

'Insensitivity Is Back, Baby!', *Philosophical Perspectives* 24 (2010), 161-187.

A Reader's Guide to the Longer Chapters

One thing readers might hope for from a book is that its chapters be of reasonable length. Since four of my chapters get rather long, I will here provide a guide by which some sections of those longer chapters can be omitted, yet the main line of thought can be ascertained.

Chapter 1: Readers uninterested in pursuing the details of the formulation of insensitivity can safely skip sections 6-8.

Chapter 4: The final section of this chapter—section 17, on the 'factivity problem'—is long and, at places, quite complicated. However, many of these complications arise only after the essence of my response to the problem has already been given. So I have marked the place where the complications set in (see note 42), and readers not interested in those complications can safely stop reading at that point. Otherwise, there's not much general help I can give for what to read and what to skip, since this chapter addresses something of a grab-bag of concerns about the contextualist approach to skepticism, and different readers will have different worries. Section 1 explains the basic shape of how I use contextualism to address skepticism, and so it expresses important background to many of my responses later in the chapter, that readers probably shouldn't skip. Sections 8-13 form something of a unit, explaining which skeptics I am addressing, and how, so individual sections from that group might not be understandable in isolation from each other. Beyond that, readers can use the section titles to hopefully find the concerns about contextualist approaches to skepticism that move them—unless what has them worried is Stephen Schiffer's objections to contextualist responses to skepticism, and mine in particular, leveled in (Schiffer 1996), to the effect that our responses involve us in implausibly attributing 'semantic blindness' to speakers, in which case the response they seek is in vol. 1, at (DeRose 2009: 174-9).

Chapter 5: Sections 1-2 and 14-22 form a nice, streamlined version of this chapter that covers the main ideas.

Chapter 7: I suggest sections 1-2, 6-12, and 23 to readers seeking a shorted version of this chapter.

Ignorance

Some years back, writing a blurb for a re-issue of Peter Unger's *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism* prompted me to (privately—well, until now) resolve that if I were to write a book in epistemology, I would shoot high and aspire to make it as good as Peter's. It has taken a long time, but this is my epistemology book (I classify Volume 1 more as philosophy of language). I can honestly profess Ignorance on whether I've realized my just-mentioned aspiration for it, and I find that whether I have done so means little to me now (perhaps because that aspiration's motivating work is done). But if any future (or present, I suppose) epistemologists are helped in their own thinking by this book half as much as I was by Unger's work, I'll be more than happy. Its title is intended as a tip of the cap to Peter. Discussions with him during my three years at NYU were very important to the development of some of the key ideas in this book, and especially in its first chapter. Thanks to Peter for that important help.

Other Acknowledgements

last problem, but often I can. Whatever you think of my writing, you can trust me that it would be far worse without her kind help, for which I am thankful. I am even more deeply grateful for her love and encouragement.