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Knowledge, Epistemic Possibility, and Scepticism

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by

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Chapter 3:

Contextualism and the Failure of Bold Scepticism

We now have a contextualist theory of knowledge attributions and of epistemic modal statements in front of us. I hope it has been explained and defended at least to the point that it seems a legitimate contender for acceptance, a theory that has a good chance of being right. In the present chapter, I apply the theory to the problem of scepticism. As I noted in the Introduction, sceptical arguments can be seen as presenting us with puzzles. If they are good arguments, their premises will all seem true, or at least very plausible, and their conclusion will seem clearly false. If such an argument is valid, then we are left with a puzzle: The premises of the argument together with the negation of its conclusion form an inconsistent set of propositions, all of which are initially plausible. And since <u>all</u> the propositions in the inconsistent set are initially plausible, any resolution of the puzzle which asks us to reject one member of the set simply on the ground that the other members are true will seem arbitrary and will be unsatisfying. A <u>good</u> resolution will explain why all the members of the set seem to be

true as it develops an account which avoids inconsistency. The bold sceptic, who is my target in this chapter, will urge us to resolve the puzzle by giving up our initial belief that the conclusion of the argument is false. She will ask us to accept that conclusion, where it is taken to imply that we speak falsely whenever we attribute knowledge of the external world to someone.[1] It will be my contention that contextualism provides the best resolution to the puzzle. Since the resolution contextualism supplies is the best, we have more reason to accept contextualism; and since this resolution is superior to the bold sceptic's, the sceptical arguments fail to support her

[1]Here, I simplify matters somewhat. The sceptical argument's initial conclusion is that one does not know that P, where P is chosen as an exemplary case of something one seems to know about the external world. The sceptic hopes to generalize from this conclusion to the more comprehensive thesis that we have <u>no</u>, or hardly any, such knowledge. Problems may arise for this generalizing move: Perhaps no matter what P we choose, there will be problems in making the generalization. Perhaps the sceptic will have to do a lot of work in refining the scope of the beliefs her argument is supposed to undermine. While these problems are interesting and important, they are not the subject of my present investigation. I hope to cut the sceptic off before she reaches the conclusion that I don't know that P, for any appropriate P. I assume that if she <u>can</u> get as far as showing that I can't be truly said to know that, say, I have hands, under normal circumstances, she will be able to undermine an alarming amount of my presumed knowledge of the external world.

contention.

Before examining the sceptical arguments, I want to, in the next two sections, help myself to an assumption and to explain why this assumption is proper and begs no important questions against the sceptic.

A. Relevant Factors. Many subject factors -- facts about a putative subject of knowledge and/or her surroundings -- are relevant for determining whether somebody actually knows that something is the case.[2] Most obviously, it is necessary that the subject believe the proposition in question and that the proposition be true. How confidently she holds this belief also seems clearly relevant. Epistemologists have recently argued that a surprising number of other factors may be relevant. In various cases, facts about the purported knower's surroundings and her ability to discriminate among certain alternatives are important to whether or not she knows. So, for example, if Mary has a true belief that she is seeing a barn, whether or not there

[2]Attributor factors (see Chapter 1, section B for the distinctions between subject and attributor factors) are not relevant to the question whether or not someone knows, but only to the question what it means in given circumstances to say of him "he knows," what the content of so saying is.

are fake barns in Mary's vicinity seems relevant to whether or not Mary knows, and if there are sufficiently many fake barns about, her ability to discriminate this real barn from such fakes becomes important to the question of whether or not she knows. And, of course, issues about how the subject came to believe the proposition and about the reliability of the belief-forming mechanism used are critically important.

When we attribute knowledge to someone, we believe or at least take for granted, in some sense, certain things about these relevant factors -- for example, that there is no host of indistinguishable fake barns surrounding Mary. This is shown by the fact that we would not ascribe knowledge to Mary -- in fact, we would claim that she didn't know -- if we believed that a host of fakes surrounded her. It sounds strange to say that we are taking for granted exotic things as specific as that Mary is not surrounded by fake barns, because indefinitely many such ways of filling out Mary's scenario would make us take back our judgement that she knows if they were added to the example. For instance, if we were to add the supposition that Mary, unbeknownst to her, is chronically deceived by an evil genius who causes her to hallucinate barns, but who is now, for a

short time, leaving her alone, we would probably retract our judgement that Mary knows she is seeing a barn. For each and every such supposition, are we really taking for granted that it does not obtain? Taking for granted that . . . is a slippery notion, but it does not seem terribly implausible to insist that we have no propositional attitude at all toward these specific, wild suppositions. It is perhaps more plausible to say that the relevant factors we are taking for granted are more general -- for example, that Mary's belief has a reliable source -- and that the specific sceptical suppositions are each inconsistent with some such more general relevant factor that we are taking for granted. It should be stressed that a relevant factor need not be something that an ordinary speaker would ordinarily consider before ascribing knowledge. Even the general things we seem to take for granted in ascribing knowledge are not matters we typically think about.[3] But we do not ascribe knowledge if we think that these

[3]However, we may plausibly be said to have learned that these general matters are relevant to whether or not someone knows in the course of learning the use of "know". In contrast, I believe, we have not learned that each specific hypothesis counts against knowledge; we judge that they count against knowledge when they are brought to our attention because of their relation to general factors that we have learned are relevant.

general suppositions are violated, and we recognize the significance of these factors when they are called to our attention.

Relevant factors, then, are those aspects of a putative knower's situation that a common speaker would take to be relevant to the question of whether that putative knower really does know. But we will exclude epistemic evaluative facts -- eg., that the putative knower's belief is or is not justified, that it is or is not epistemically possible from the putative knower's point of view that her belief is false, etc. These facts are not counted as relevant factors because whether or not they hold is what we want to be decided by the speakers on the basis of the information we do give them.

The basic idea is that relevant factors are those facts that one might stipulate about an imagined situation and which speakers could then use to evaluate the epistemic position of a putative knower: to tell whether or not her belief is justified, whether or not it's epistemically possible from her point of view that she's wrong, and, most importantly, whether or not she knows the proposition in question. If we were to ask speakers to judge whether or not Mary knows that she's

seeing a barn in a certain imagined situation, there are many things they will want to be told before they pass judgement. If we have not already included or implied it in our description of the case, and if they are not taking it for granted, they will, for example, surely ask whether or not Mary believes that she is seeing a barn and whether or not she is seeing a barn. We should give them these relevant pieces of information. Although most speakers wouldn't think to ask about it, we should also answer them if they were to ask whether or not Mary is under the influence of a deceiving evil genius. But if they ask, for example, whether or not Mary is justified in believing that she is seeing a barn, we should reply that that is one of the things they are to decide. Likewise, they may ask whether or not Mary knows that she is not under the influence of a deceiving demon. Again, we should not answer this question, for we want them to decide this matter on the basis of the non-evaluative information we are willing to give them. Of course, they may need quite a bit of information to decide such matters, and we will be obligated to answer the questions they have about Mary's situation, so long as our answers do not constitute an epistemic evaluation of Mary's situation. For again, we

are leaving it up to them to evaluate Mary's epistemic situation.

Likewise, in actual situations, speakers issue epistemic evaluative judgments based upon what they think are the relevant non-evaluative facts of the situation. It is these non-evaluative facts which I am calling relevant factors.

B. Semantic Scepticism. Some external world sceptics may insist that we not take for granted that these relevant factors are as we believe (or take for granted) when we assess our purported knowledge of the external world. What right have we, they ask, to assume, for example, that our external world beliefs are largely true when we try to determine whether or not they constitute knowledge? But another type of external world sceptic -- the semantic sceptic, as I shall call her -- will not be averse to letting us take these things for granted. This sceptic claims that the conditions for knowledge are too demanding for us to be truly described as knowing any 'external' facts, even though, or even if, the relevant factors are pretty much as we believe. The semantic sceptic will thus let us assume, at least for the sake of argument, that the

relevant factors are pretty much as we believe them to be. To defeat this sceptic, one need only show that we are correctly described as knowing more or less what we take ourselves to know, in the way of 'external' facts, if these assumptions are correct.

Once we have set, by stipulation, the relevant facts of our situation, the only question we have to settle is whether we fulfill the conditions for knowledge in such a situation. The issue, then, is largely a semantic matter. We have set the situation, and now we want to know whether or not we should be counted as knowing in such a situation, whether or not the truth conditions for "S knows that p" are fulfilled for some persons S and some external world propositions p. The semantic sceptic claims that the conditions for knowledge are such that, even if the relevant facts are as we believe them to be, we should not be counted as knowing anything about the external world. She seems to be treading on very thin ice here, for she must claim that we, speakers of English, consistently misapply our own word 'know' (apply it, that is, in such a way as to credit ourselves and others with knowledge that we do not have), even when this misapplication is not based on any mistake we are making about the relevant factors.

In later sections I will argue against this semantic sceptic. But what I want to point out now is that if she can be defeated, if it can be shown that we do know a lot about the external world if our assumptions about the relevant factors of out situation are correct, then various sceptical arguments fail to show that we speak falsely whenever we attribute such knowledge to someone. Defeating the semantic sceptic provides a successful defense against any such bold use of these sceptical arguments.

Many sceptical arguments have basically the same structure. The sceptic describes a situation which is very different from one we suppose ourselves to be in. We are asked to consider a sceptical hypothesis -- for example, that we are under the influence of an evil genius -- which contains a supposition which is the opposite of, or which is at least inconsistent with, some relevant factor that we are supposing to be true when we think that we know things about the external world. The sceptic constructs the hypothesis in such a way as to insure that we would not know anything about the external world if the hypothesis were actually correct.that the situation we were actually in. Or, alternatively, the sceptic may begin by picking out an

exemplary case of something we think we know about the external world, and then describing a situation in which we would not know that particular thing. The sceptic then asks us to agree that it is in some way an open question whether or not the situation she has described is our actual situation, or to agree that we cannot rule out that it is our actual situation. She may claim that we don't know that the situation she has described is not our actual situation, or (what is not quite the same claim) that maybe or possibly the situation she has described is our actual situation. The sceptic then concludes that since we cannot rule out her sceptical hypothesis, and must admit that it may be correct, or anyway that we don't know it isn't, we don't after all know the 'external' thing, or kind of thing, that we had supposed we did know. (It is of course not necessary to this argument that the sceptic should profess to believe, or ask us to believe, that her sceptical hypothesis is at all probable.)

One might well suspect that in employing this strategy, the sceptic must be helping herself to a presumption to which she is not entitled. For in opposition to the situation she describes, we have a different picture in mind of what situation we are in.

And it seems that if the situation we have in mind were the actual situation, we would know what we claim to know. Furthermore, it seems at least as plausible -- and perhaps far more plausible -- to suppose that we are actually in a situation very much like the situation we think we are in than that we are in a situation like the one the sceptic has described. Certainly the sceptic can't rule out that we are actually in exactly the type of situation we think we are in. Most sceptics, I think, would agree with this. And if we are right in thinking we would know more or less what we think we know if we were in the type of situation that we think we are in, then the sceptic has not established that we don't know. But at this point in the debate in which neither the sceptic nor the "gnostic" seems to have established her conclusion, the sceptic seems to help herself to a presumption: that -- if we cannot rule out her sceptical hypothesis, this in itself shows that we do not know, even though it is also true that she cannot rule out our hypothesis that we are in the type situation we think we are in.

What's going on here? Is the sceptic helping herself to an illegitimate presumption? She might plausibly respond to this charge by saying that she is not

presuming anything. In particular, she is presuming neither that we are in a situation like the one she has described nor that we don't know what we claim to know. On the contrary, she is asserting (a) that we don't know that we are not in a situation like the one she has described or (b) that it is possible that we are in such a situation, and is using one or the other (or both) of these assertions as a premise to show that we don't know what we claim to know. But, we might ask, what then becomes of the anti-sceptical counter-strategy of claiming that we would know if we were in a situation like the one we think we are in and that the sceptic has not established that we're not in roughly that situation? To this, the sceptic can respond that such a counter-strategy would work if it were true that we would know what we claim to know if we were in a situation like the one we take ourselves to be in. But, the response continues, that is not true. The sceptic can -- and I think must -- claim to have shown that we do not know what we claim to know even if our actual situation is like the one we think we are in and not like the one she has described. In other words, she must establish semantic scepticism if she wants to establish her bold conclusion (that we speak falsely

whenever we attribute external world knowledge to someone) at all.

Thus I will work under the assumption that our actual situation is, with respect to its relevant factors, like the one we think we are in and not like the one the sceptic has described. Once it is shown that, despite the sceptic's arguments, we are correctly described as knowing many external world propositions if the relevant factors are as we believe, a sceptical argument can be successful only to the extent that it successfully shows that the relevant factors are not as we believe them to be. If the bold sceptic objects to our procedure at this point by claiming that she need not show that the relevant factors are not as we believe, but only that they may be otherwise than we believe, then she is confused. She is trying to establish that we do not know external world propositions, not that we might not know them. If she thinks that the epistemic possibility of our being wrong counts against our knowing only if our assumptions about the relevant factors are incorrect, then, of course, she can succeed only to the extent that she establishes that these assumptions are in fact incorrect. If, on the other hand, the sceptic thinks that the epistemic possibility of our being wrong

counts against our knowing whether or not our assumptions about the relevant facts are wrong, then she should have no objection to assuming for the sake of argument that these assumptions about the relevant factors are correct, because under these assumptions she can still use her premise that it is epistemically possible from our position that we are wrong about various factors to argue that we do not know what we claim to know. That is, she can claim that even if we are in fact right about these factors, it is possible from our point of view that we are wrong about them, and if this possibility shows that we don't know what we claim to know, her argument can proceed unimpeded.

So, it seems that if the semantic sceptic can be defeated, if we can establish that we know most of what we think we know under the assumption that our beliefs about the relevant factors are correct, then any bold sceptic about the external world can succeed in establishing her position only to the extent that she can show these beliefs about the relevant factors to be incorrect. But most of the relevant facts are precisely the type of thing that the external world sceptic wants to claim that no one can know about. So the external world sceptic is in danger of being placed in the very

uncomfortable position of having to show that something is true about the external world in order to argue that nobody knows anything about the external world. How can she, the sceptic, claim to know that the relevant facts are not as we believe? She might try to argue that, although she doesn't know that things are quite different from what we believe them to be, it is likely that they are, and, thus, it is likely that we don't know anything about the external world. But on what grounds could she claim that it is likely that the relevant factors are not as we believe them to be? When sceptics put forward their sceptical scenarios, complete with evil demons or whatnot, they certainly do not mean to defend them as being actual, or even as more probable than what we take to be the true scenario of our lives. The sceptic's strategy only has a prayer of working if our inability to rule out her sceptical scenario shows that we do not know even if we are actually in a situation much like the situation we believe ourselves to be in. Thus, if it can be shown that we are correctly described as knowing if the relevant facts are much as we believe them to be, then no external world sceptic will be able to effectively argue that we do not know.

Much hangs, then, on the tenability of semantic scepticism. But it seems clear -- at least to me -- that semantic scepticism is wrong. To suppose otherwise is to suppose that we consistently misapply the word 'know', say we know things that we don't, even though our misapplication is not in any way based on a false belief about the relevant factors. It seems incredible that a community of speakers might have such a common word, but the conditions under which <u>their</u> word truly applies be <u>that</u> inaccessible to them. This, in a nutshell, is the line of argumentation which I will advance against semantic scepticism (primarily in section E). But first we should look at some representative arguments that are given for external world scepticism. These arguments threaten to show that semantic scepticism is correct. Once we have the sceptical arguments laid out, and have examined the bold sceptic's attempt to resolve the puzzles generated by the sceptical arguments, we will be in a better position to evaluate the effectiveness of the anti-sceptical strategy I will begin to employ in section E.

C. <u>AI, AP, and Unger's Sceptical Argument</u>. In the Introduction, we briefly looked at Moore's treatment of

the sceptical argument I called the Simple Argument from Ignorance (SAI), which, recall, can be schematized as follows:

1S. I don't know that H is false.

2S. If I don't know that H is false, then I don't know that P.

So, C. I don't know that P.

The sceptical hypothesis of the argument Moore considered was that he was dreaming, and the proposition putatively known was that he was standing up. Recently, a very similar form of argument, which I will simply call the Argument from Ignorance (AI), has received a good deal of attention. As Moore himself points out,[4] the sceptical hypothesis he considers is compatible with the proposition he claims to know, since someone could be both dreaming and standing up. Likewise, suppose P is <u>There is a book in front of me</u>. Now consider the sceptical hypothesis that all of my sensations are being "fed" to me by an evil genius in

[4]See "Certainty," p. 245.

such a way that they are highly unreliable guides as to what is really going on. This is a sceptical hypothesis: if it were true, I would not know that P. But this hypothesis is not incompatible with P: there could be a book in front of me even if all my sensations (including my visual experiences as of seeing a book) were being fed to me by an evil genius in this way. We can revise the hypothesis to make it incompatible with P by including not-P as part of the hypothesis. Thus, There is no book in front of me, but it appears to me as if there is because an evil genius is giving me sensations as of a book is a hypothesis incompatible with P. Once we have such an incompatible H, AI can be constructed as follows:

1. I don't know that H is false, and I cannot get to know that H is false simply by inferring that it is false from P (though its falsity does, to be sure, follow from P).

2. If I know that P and I can infer not-H from P by means of what I know to be a deductively valid inference, then I can thereby get to know that not-H.

So, C. I don't know that P.

The conclusion follows from the premises because if I did know that P, then by (2), since P entails that not-H, I could get to know that H is false simply by inferring that it is false from P. But, according to (1), I could not get to know that H is false in this way. Thus, I must not know that P, if (1) and (2) are both true. Note the relation between SAI and AI. AI requires H to be incompatible with P, while SAI does not (although SAI allows H to be incompatible with P), and each of AI's premises add complications not present in the SAI premises. The basic idea of the SAI, however, is close enough to the basic idea behind AI that we may call them two versions (a simpler one and a more complex one) of the same basic argument form, and the points I want to make about these argument forms are, for the most part applicable to both forms. I will, then, address my comments to AI, but will at times make use of the simple formulation of the premises when that will expedite my exposition without distorting the issues.

The other (closely related) sceptical argument that I mentioned in the Introduction, the Argument from

Possibility (AP), asks one to accept that it is possible that P is false. It is like AI in that the sceptic will typically appeal to a sceptical hypothesis to support this epistemic possibility. Again supposing that H is incompatible with P, AP proceeds as follows:

3. It is possible that H is true.

4. If it is possible that H is true, then it is possible that not-P.

So, 5. It is possible that not-P.

6. If it is possible that not-P, then I don't know that P.

So, C. I don't know that P.

AP makes heavy use of epistemic possibilities (the possibilities expressed by sentences of the form, "It is possible that P," where the embedded P is in the indicative mood), which have been investigated in Chapter 2.

Now, AI and AP could be used by a not-so-bold contextualist sceptic to establish the conclusion that in some "high" or "philosophical" sense I do not know that P. In such a sceptic's hands, all of the occurrences of 'know' in AI and AP are to be interpreted in a cranked-up, high-powered way, and the conclusion that I don't know is not intended to be incompatible with any "low" or "ordinary" claim to know that P that I might make in a non-philosophical context. But there is nothing about these arguments that obviously requires that they be used in this way. The premises of the arguments are initially plausible even if we are not supposing contextualism to be true. Thus, a bold invariantist sceptic can make use of AI or AP, and the conclusion of her argument will be incompatible with ordinary claims to know.

It will be instructive to look at Peter Unger's case for scepticism in his book, Ignorance,[5] for while it is unclear whether AI and AP should be used to establish the bold sceptical conclusion that we speak falsely when we attribute external world knowledge to any ordinary human being or merely to establish the not-so-bold

[5]In Chapter 1, Unger gives an argument very similar to AI. The arguments I am using as models are given in Chapters 2 and 3.

conclusion that in some "high" way or sense we don't know anything about the external world, Unger is clearly after the bold conclusion. While I don't find Unger's arguments as persuasive as AI or AP, we will see that Unger appeals to the same sorts of grounds in his argument as does the bold AI or AP sceptic, and that the way Unger motivates the bold sceptical resolution of the puzzle his argument presents can be used by AI and AP sceptics as well.

Unger does not aim his arguments specifically at external world propositions, but we can adapt his arguments for this purpose, again taking P to be some exemplary case of an external world proposition which I might be said to know. Unger construes the notion of a person's being certain that something is the case in a subjective way: it is for that person to have a particular attitude toward the proposition, whether or not the person is justified in having that attitude and even if he is not reasonable in believing the proposition at all. I think that Unger is correct that 'certain' functions in such a subjective way in sentences of the form "S is certain that P." If I have an attitude of certainty toward P, then no matter how unjustified I am in having this attitude, one cannot say

that I am not certain that P, although one can say that I shouldn't be certain that P or that I don't know for certain that P. Unger gives an argument in Chapter 2 of Ignorance based the alleged rarity of this attitude of certainty. This argument is taken to show that "In the case of every human being, there is at most hardly anything which the person knows to be so" (p. 88), but does not rule out that someone might be certain of many propositions (including, I suppose, many external world propositions) and might thereby escape this sceptical argument. Unger then gives, in his Chapter 3, an argument which is supposed to establish as a necessary truth that "Nobody ever knows that anything is so" (p. 95). This later, stronger argument is based on the premise that it is a necessary condition for knowing something that it be all right for the knower to have the attitude of certainty toward the proposition known and on the claim that it is never all right for anyone to be certain that anything is so. We can combine these two arguments by using a premise to the effect that in order to know that P, one must a) have an attitude of certainty toward P and b) be justified in having this attitude, as follows:

7. If I know that P, then I justifiably have an attitude of certainty toward P.

8. If I justifiably have an attitude of certainty toward P, then I justifiably have an attitude toward P such that it is impossible that anyone should be more certain of anything than I am of P.

9. I do not justifiably have an attitude toward P such that it is impossible that anyone should be more certain of anything than I am of P.

So, C. I don't know that P.

Central to Unger's case is his theory of absolute terms, which, in our reconstruction of his argument, is used in defense of premise (8). Unger's favorite example of an absolute term is 'flat', which he sets against the relative term, 'bumpy'. The difference between the two terms can be seen by the fact that

> This surface is bumpy, but that surface is bumpier

can express a truth, while, according to Unger,

> This surface is flat, but that surface is flatter

by logical necessity cannot express a truth. Unger writes:

> To say that something is flat, is, so far as content goes, no different from saying that it is absolutely, or perfectly flat. To say that a surface is flat is to say that some things or properties which are matters of degree are not instanced in the surface to any degree at all. Thus, something which is flat is not at all bumpy, and not at all curved. Bumpiness and curvature are matters of degree. When we say of a surface that it is bumpy, or that it is curved, we use the relative terms 'bumpy' and 'curved' to talk about the surface. Thus, many absolute and relative terms go together. . .
> Semantically, we may say that our absolute terms indicate, or purport to denote, an absolute limit. This limit is approached to the extent that the relevant relative property or properties are absent in the thing to which one might sensibly apply the absolute term, or its correlative relatives. Thus, 'flat' purports to denote a limit, flatness, which more or less curved or bumpy things approach to the extent that they are not bumpy, and are not curved, and so on. (pp. 54-55)

On this account, Unger concludes that "as a matter of logical necessity, if a surface is flat at a certain time, then there never is any surface which is flatter than it is at that time" (p. 66), and that we say something false when we say that the surface of an ordinary physical object is flat.

Unger claims that 'certain' is also an absolute term. To be certain that p is to be absolutely certain; it is for p to be not at all doubtful to you. Unger concludes,

> As a matter of logical necessity, if someone is certain of something then there never is anything of which he or anyone else is more certain. . . . Thus, if it is logically possible that there be something of which any person might be more certain than he now is of a given thing, then he is not actually certain of that given thing. (p. 67)

Thus, it will be very difficult for someone to fulfill the conditions for "S is certain that p." Unger applies his results to two specific cases, concluding that "hardly anyone, if anyone at all, is certain that forty-five and fifty-six are one hundred and one" (pp. 67-68), and that very few people are certain that there are automobiles (p. 68). Unger then draws a general conclusion:

> Thinking one matter over after the next, and comparing it with <u>how</u> certain someone <u>might</u> be of his <u>own present existence</u>, the reasonable thing to conclude seems this: in the case of each human being, there is at most hardly anything of which he really is <u>certain</u>. (p. 68)

And since this attitude is <u>so</u> extreme, Unger argues that one is never justified in having it toward any proposition -- but for our purposes, we only need the claim that one is never justified in having it toward any external world proposition. Thus, premise (9).

Premise (7) is based on the claim that "S knows that p" entails "S is certain that p" (see pp. 83-87), which is strengthened in Chapter 3 of <u>Ignorance</u> to the claim

that, one must not only be certain, but it must be all right for one to be certain, that P in order for one to know that P.

D. <u>Analytic Entailments and the Bold Sceptic's Resolution</u>. Recall that our issue with the semantic sceptic is whether or not we are <u>correctly described</u> as knowing anything about the external world, whether we fulfill the requirement for knowledge, supposing that the relevant factors of our situation are as we believe them to be. As I have pointed out, the anti-sceptic can appeal to our inveterate <u>practice</u> of <u>ascribing</u> knowledge to ourselves and others of our kind as evidence that the conditions for knowledge are such that we are <u>truly</u> described as knowing many things that the external world sceptic denies we know. To what can the sceptic appeal? Unger relies heavily upon claims that certain sentences, like <u>He is certain that it's a Cadillac, but he is more certain that it's an automobile</u>, are inconsistent. In fact, Unger spends considerable space coaching those of us who are slow-of-ear to detect fairly subtle inconsistencies. He writes that we should use "devices of emphasis," which, he insists, do not change the content of what is said, but rather focus our minds on

the actual meanings of words, in order to detect these inconsistencies. Thus, if a "feeling of inconsistency" does not come over you upon encountering He is certain that it's a Cadillac, but he is more certain that it's an automobile, Unger suggests you try

> He is absolutely certain it is a Cadillac, but he's really more certain it's an automobile. (p. 85).

The inconsistency that one now senses supports the claim that if someone is actually certain of something, then it is impossible that anyone be more certain of anything than he is of it. And the certainty requirement for knowledge is supported by the apparent inconsistency of

> He really knows that it is raining, but he isn't absolutely certain of it. (p. 85)

Now I am not convinced that none of the "devices of emphasis" that Unger uses alters the content of what is said,[6] and I have my doubts about whether He is certain that it's a Cadillac, but he is more certain that it's an automobile is inconsistent. But I think I have a bit of the feeling Unger is after when I consider the

[6]On this point, see B.L. Blose's "The 'Really' of Emphasis and the 'Really' of Restriction." In particular, the 'absolutely' which precedes the 'certain' in each of the above two indented sentences, seems to me to alter the content of what is said: It seems to me, in Blose's terms, a "restricting" use of 'absolutely'.

unadorned He knows that it is raining, but he isn't certain of it. Of course, as we have seen in Chapter 2, one must be careful of such feelings, since one can get very much the same feeling in considering sentences that are definitely not genuinely inconsistent, like the Moorean sentence It is raining, but I don't know that it is.[7] Unger's arguments rest heavily upon the supposition that his examples are genuine inconsistencies and that the entailments he employs in his argument are therefore also genuine.

Likewise, AI and AP, at least in the hands of the semantic sceptic, seem to rest heavily upon supposing that certain entailments are built into our language. Premise (6) of AP, it seems, would have to be supported by the seeming inconsistency of sentences of the form, "I know that P, but it is possible that not-P." This certainly has the sound of a contradiction, at least to my ear, and, as I argued in Part III of Chapter 2, it is quite plausible to suppose that it is a genuine inconsistency.

[7]See section III.A of Chapter 2 for an explanation of the distinction between genuine and merely apparent inconsistencies, and for an explanation of the importance of that distinction.

Premise (4) of AP and premise (2) of AI are instances of what have been called "closure principles". Recently, scepticism has been characterized by various writers as depending upon something like[8] the thesis that knowledge is closed under logical entailment: that is, the thesis that for any person S and any propositions P and Q, if S knows that P, and P entails Q, then S knows that Q.[9] Something like this general principle is behind premise (2) of AI. A similar closure principle for epistemic possibility is behind premise (4) of AP: for any person S and any propositions P and Q, if P is epistemically possible for S, and P entails Q, then Q is epistemically possible for S. Counter-examples are easy to find to the two closure principles as I have just given them. For example, it

[8]As we will see below, various complications have to be dealt with. Still, something in this vicinity is plausibly thought to be behind scepticism.

[9]Robert Nozick's diagnosis of scepticism in Philosophical Explanations, for example, characterizes the crucial mistake of "the skeptic" as being the "short step" the sceptic takes from our failure to know that the sceptical hypotheses do not obtain to our failing to know various other things, and writes that "In taking the 'short step' the skeptic assumes that if S knows that p and he knows that 'p entails q' then he also knows that q" (p. 204). In "Epistemic Operators" (see pp. 1011-1012), Dretske gives closure a very large role indeed in accounting for the lure of scepticism, alleging at one point that "Almost all skeptical objections trade on it" (p. 1011).

seems that one could know the conjunction of the axioms of a formal system without knowing all of the theorems entailed by the conjunction of those axioms, and one might have to admit that it's possible that a given proposition is false when that proposition, unbeknownst to you, happens to be a theorem of the system, but not have to admit that it's possible that the conjunction of the system's axioms is false, even though the falsity of the theorem in fact entails the falsity of the conjunction of the axioms.[10] Restrictions, therefore, are needed for these closure principles to be plausible. The restriction that is most commonly put on the closure principle for knowledge has it that knowledge is closed under logical entailment that is known (or is evident) to the knower.[11] A similar restriction could be put on the closure principle for epistemic possibility. In my

[10]Such counter-examples to the thesis that knowledge is closed under entailment are old news, and were, I believe, first noticed by Dretske in his 1970 paper, "Epistemic Operators". In fact, the axiom/theorem counter-example to the closure of knowledge that I recite in the text is Dretske's (see p. 1010). That a similar counter-example could be given to the thesis that epistemic possibility is closed under entailment was, to the best of my knowledge, first pointed out by James Van Cleve in his 1979 paper, "Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle," pp. 64-65.

[11]See the quotation from Nozick in footnote 9 above.

presentation of AI, premise (2) is an instance of a general closure principle that includes a further restriction: I built into the antecedent not only that I know that P entails not-H, but also that I infer not-H from P. (One might know that one proposition entails another, but believe the second on a completely different basis, having never inferred it from the first. If this has happened, you may fail to know the second, even if you know the first.) It might take a lot of tinkering to get the general closure principles exactly right. In the meantime, the sceptic might plausibly claim that some form of closure is built into our talk about what is known and what is possible, even though it is difficult to state the general principle in an exceptionless way.[12] Regardless of how the general rule is finally formulated, the instances of closure upon which the sceptic depends seem quite compelling.

[12]Nozick makes basically this same point. He writes, "We would be ill-advised, however, to quibble over the details of P [the closure principle]. Although these details are difficult to get straight, it will continue to appear that something like P is correct" (Philosophical Explanations, p. 205). Nozick goes on to argue, against this appearance, that the sceptic's use of closure is incorrect. See Anthony Brueckner's "Why Nozick Is a Sceptic," where Brueckner claims that Nozick's closure-denying anti-sceptical strategy commits Nozick himself to some fairly strong sceptical conclusions.

Sentences like, "I don't know that I'm not just a brain in a vat, but, still, I know that I have hands" and, "It's possible that I'm just a brain in a vat, but it's impossible that I don't have hands" seem very paradoxical, despite several contemporary efforts to explain away their paradoxical appearance. I will not myself pursue the popular anti-sceptical strategy of denying the legitimacy of the sceptic's use of closure, for I think the sceptic is in a fairly good position to claim that some form of closure which supports his arguments is built into our language.[13]

We should note that while restrictions may have to be put on the closure principles which weaken them in a certain respect, there may be other respects in which the principles can be strengthened. In particular, if we find premise (2S) plausible even when the proponent of SAI does not make her sceptical hypothesis incompatible with the proposition purportedly known, then we might think that if S is to know that P, then S must know that not-Q for any Q (but here restrictions

[13]See Anthony Brueckner's "Skepticism and Epistemic Closure" for arguments that the denial of knowledge closure principles "is not a fruitful anti-skeptical project" (p. 112). I feel that denying the sceptic's use of closure for epistemic possibility is equally fruitless.

must be added) such that if Q were true, S would not know that P. Thus, the range of Q's that must be known not to obtain may be broadened so as to include not only propositions that are incompatible with P, but also others which are incompatible with S's knowing that P, although they are not incompatible with P. Those that are incompatible with P will then be seen as a special case of those that are incompatible with S's knowing that P.[14]

Thus, while the anti-sceptic would have us concentrate on our tendency to describe ourselves as knowing a lot about the external world in his argument that we are correctly described as knowing, the sceptic will direct our attention to certain entailments which, she claims, are recognized in our language and which encode very strict requirements for knowledge -- so strict that we are not correctly described as knowing anything about the external world. Some of these requirements are: If it's possible that you are wrong, then you don't know (premise 3); if you don't know something entailed by what you claim to know, then you

[14]Stroud discusses this stronger closure principle in The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, pp. 25-30.

don't know what you claim to know (premise 2);[15] and if you know something, you must be justified in being as certain as possible about that thing (premises 7 and 8). These entailments seem to encode sceptical invariantist requirements for knowledge. Of course, the sceptic needs more than just these entailments; each argument also employs what we may call a "base premise". AI requires the premise that I don't know the sceptical hypotheses to be false and could not get to know that they are false by inferring their falsity from my common sense "knowledge" of the external world (premise 1). AP requires the premise that the sceptical hypotheses are epistemically possible (premise 3). And Unger requires the premise that, for any external world proposition, I do not justifiably have an attitude of absolute certainty toward that proposition, an attitude such that it is impossible that anyone should be more certain of anything than I am of it (Premise 9). But the base premises of AI and AP, at least, each seem to me to be very plausible, and the sceptic would, I think, receive a lot of support from native speakers of English for

[15]As I noted earlier, some restrictions must be placed on this "closure principle." Still, even properly restricted, it will require one to know an unnerving range of propositions entailed by what one claims to know in order to know what one claims to know.

each of them. And many will be able to work up some enthusiasm for Unger's thought that we can't justifiably be as certain that there are automobiles as each of us is of his/her own present existence.

Armed with the chosen entailments, the sceptic can then try to explain away our tendency to ascribe knowledge to subjects who do not live up to the very strict requirements for knowledge which the entailments encode. Unger suggests that when you (falsely) claim to know things such as that there are elephants, you get across the true point that "you are in an intellectual (or 'epistemic') position with respect to the matter of whether there are elephants which is such that, for practical purposes, it makes no difference whether you know there are elephants or whether you are in that intellectual position with respect to the matter that you actually are in" (Ignorance, p. 52). This explains why you might falsely claim to know and falsely believe that you know, and why these false claims and beliefs, in general, do no harm. In fact, Unger suggests that generally, the point one intends to (and does) get across, is the true point that one is close enough to knowing for present purposes. He uses our talk about vacuums as analogy for our talk about knowledge, and

writes:

> Someone in a peanut factory may declare that vacuums have been established in certain cans. He will not be understood to believe, or to intend to convey the idea that, those cans are as empty as can be. Rather, his intended and presumably accepted point will be that the interior of those cans, surrounding the nuts, is in each case near enough to being a vacuum for the purposes at hand. (Ignorance, pp. 51-52)

Thus, Unger claims that the idea the factory worker intends to and does get across is the true idea that something which is close enough for present purposes to being a perfect vacuum has been established in the cans. But, Unger claims, the factory worker gets this true point across by saying something false: That vacuums have been established in the cans, which, according to Unger, would entail that perfect vacuums have been established. In a similar manner, Unger claims that when one claims to know that there are elephants, one's intention will generally be to get across the true point that one is close enough for present purposes to the epistemic position of knowing that there are elephants, but that one gets this true point across by saying something false: that one knows that there are elephants.

The bold sceptic who makes use of AI or AP rather than of Unger's own sceptical argument can rely upon a

similar account of our tendency to ascribe knowledge to subjects. In general, I think, almost any bold sceptic will rely on such an account, according to which we ascribe knowledge when a subject is close enough to knowing, for all intents and purposes, or perhaps for present intents and purposes. Stroud seeks to defend the bold sceptic along roughly these lines,[16] claiming that on the sceptic's conception, we operate under certain "practical constraints" (p. 75) in our everyday uses of 'know':

> The standards or procedures we follow in everyday life find their sources in the exigencies of action and in the general conditions under which actions must be performed. . . . .There is no general answer to the question of how certain we should be before we act, or what possibilities of failure we should be sure to eliminate before doing something. It will vary from case to case, and in each case it will depend on how serious it would be if the act failed, how important it is for it to succeed by a certain time, how it fares in competition on these and other grounds with alternative actions which might be performed instead, and so on. This holds just as much for the action of saying something, or saying that you know something, or ruling out certain possibilities before saying that you know something, as for other kinds of action. There is no general answer to the question of which possibilities we should rule out before we assert something or say we know it to be true. (pp. 65-66)

[16]See The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, pp. 55-82.

Thus, on the sceptic's conception, the standards for ascribing knowledge that we employ in everyday use depend upon "one's aims and interests at the moment" (p. 65). According to the contextualist theory I defended in Chapter 1, these varying standards reflect a corresponding variation in the truth conditions for attributions of knowledge. But on Stroud's sceptic's conception, when we ascribe knowledge in everyday situations, we are typically saying something literally false, although "the exigencies of action" justify these false attributions. The sceptic sees herself, on the other hand, as taking a more "detached" view, and as engaged in the theoretical, rather than practical, task of determining whether or not it's true that we know. Stroud writes:

> The doubts or possibilities considered by the philosopher investigating human knowledge are not put forward as relevant to such practical questions as whether to assert something or say that you know it or to raise an objection to what someone else has said. They are thought relevant only to the question of whether one knows something -- whether it is true that one knows -- and not whether it is appropriate or reasonable to say that one knows. (p. 66)

The bold sceptic is asking us to accept an account according to which we systematically attribute knowledge falsely. This account violates the presumption, which I tried to motivate in section I.D of Chapter 2, that what

we all would typically or appropriately say in describing a case is a true description of it. Stroud writes that while "normally, we believe, the conditions of reasonable utterance coincide with the conditions of truth" (p. 58), if the sceptic's conception of everyday attributions of knowledge is "intelligible", then we cannot infer that the bold sceptic is wrong simply from facts about when we say we "know" in everyday life.

Stroud emphasizes that he is defending the "mere possibility" that the sceptic might be correct in claiming that our everyday knowledge attributions are false, despite the facts about when we assert knowledge. But why should we think this to be a serious possibility? Consider what your reaction would be to someone who claimed that the word 'physician' actually means "a person who has a medical degree and can cure any conceivable illness in less than two minutes," and that, therefore, although these false assertions are usually warranted by the "the exigencies of action," whenever we assert that anyone is a physician, or the like, we are saying something false. Such a person could try to account for our uses of 'physician' by saying that we call people physicians when they are close enough, in the relevant ways and for all practical

purposes, to being physicians. Stroud claims, on behalf of the bold sceptic, that

> As long as it is even intelligible to suppose that there is a logical gap between the fulfillment of the conditions for appropriately making and assessing assertions of knowledge on the one hand, and the fulfillment of the conditions for the truth of those assertions on the other, evidence from usage or from our practice will not establish a conclusion about the conditions of knowledge. (p. 64)

One could make an analogous defense of the strange theory about the meaning of 'physician':

> As long as it is even intelligible to suppose that there is a logical gap between the fulfillment of the conditions for appropriately making and assessing physician-assertions on the one hand, and the fulfillment of the conditions for the truth of those assertions on the other, evidence from usage or from our practice will not establish a conclusion about the conditions of being a physician.

Still, since this theory seems to violate our use of 'physician', and has nothing to recommend it, most of us would be inclined to dismiss it out of hand. Why should we take the semantic sceptic's theory about the meaning of 'know' any more seriously? Does it have anything to recommend it? According to Stroud, the philosophical sceptic can appeal to "the ease with which we all acknowledge, when presented with the case, that Descartes ought to know that he is not dreaming if he is to know that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of

paper in his hand" (p. 71). More generally, the sceptic appeals to our tendency to recognize that we must know that certain sceptical hypotheses do not obtain in order to know what we claim to know, our tendency to recognize that the instances of the closure principle on which versions of AI depend are true. Even more generally, I would say, the sceptic can appeal to various entailments that seem to be built into our concepts of knowledge and possibility. I think, in fact, that we would not (and should not) even begin to take the bold sceptic seriously if she did not have her analytic entailments to appeal to. She would deserve no more consideration than a proponent of the strange theory about the meaning of 'physician'.

But if the entailments a given sceptic appeals to do seem to be built into the language, then such a sceptic can plausibly claim to have identified the best resolution of the puzzle generated by the sceptical argument she uses, because she can admit these entailments while making some sense out of our practices of ascribing knowledge to people who don't live up to her high standards. Thus, she can, to some extent, explain why the conclusion of the sceptical argument can be true despite seeming false. In order to have a

plausible claim to a better resolution, the bold sceptic's opponent must either be able to acknowledge the entailments to which the sceptic appeals while denying the sceptic's conclusion, or else argue that the entailments are not actually built into the language.

In the following section (section E), I argue that the bold sceptic's resolution of the puzzles, by involving us in systematic falsehood, exacts too high a price -- so high that even if there were no better resolution, we should not conclude that the bold sceptic is right in claiming that we speak falsely whenever we attribute any knowledge of the external world to an ordinary human being, but rather that the word 'know' has broken down in such a way that when we utter these attributions we are saying something that is neither true nor false. In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that contextualism accounts for the sceptic's entailments and provides us with a better resolution of the puzzles. Even if one does not agree with my conclusion in section E that the price of the bold sceptic's resolution is so high that the hypothesis of a breakdown of the word 'know' would be preferable to bold scepticism, I hope that my argument there will at least show that the price of the sceptic's resolution is high

enough to warrant our declaring the contextualist resolution a clear winner over the sceptic's resolution.

E. Paradigm Cases and Airplane Spotters. Some presumption that the way in which we would all describe a case would in fact be a true description of it seems to me to be an indispensable tool of conceptual analysis. As I have noted, the bold sceptic goes against this presumption in urging a theory according to which we speak falsely whenever (or almost whenever) we attribute any knowledge to anyone. What I have not emphasized is how blatantly the bold sceptic violates the presumption: She violates it about as blatantly as would a proponent of the strange theory about the meaning of 'physician'. If a theory can account for our use of a given term in a wide range of cases, we might think it plausible to hang on to this theory even if it has the result that our use of the term involves us in uttering falsehoods in a relatively small range of cases. But the bold sceptic would have us systematically and almost universally using 'know' to assert falsehoods. According to this sceptic whenever (or almost whenever) we utter a sentence of the form "S knows that P," we say something false. But not only

does this sceptic have us speaking falsely in ascribing knowledge where almost any speaker would ascribe knowledge, she also would have us speaking truths in some cases by the use of sentences that none of us would honestly utter, for, according to the bold sceptic, whenever (or almost whenever) we utter a sentence of the form "S does not know that P," we say something true. While the premises of AI and AP, by which the sceptic might support this contention, all seem initially plausible, they are also all questionable, and many of them (or at least close relatives of many of them) have been subjected to sharp questioning in recent literature. Thus, there seems to be plenty of room for the thought that since almost any normal speaker of English would, if he knew the relevant facts, describe me as knowing that there's a book in front of me, I am correctly described as knowing that there's a book in front of me, and could only be falsely described as not knowing that there's a book in front of me. How could the conditions for our word 'know' be such that I am not correctly described as knowing that there's a book in front of me if almost any normal speaker of English would, if he knew the relevant facts, so describe me? This general line of thought, obviously resembles a

"paradigm case argument," seems to me to be the most conclusive line of objection against the bold sceptic, and in what follows I will defend it.

Earlier in this century, what have been called "paradigm case arguments" were quite popular in English-speaking philosophy. As Unger characterizes these arguments, they are based on claims about how certain words, those that are somehow "close to our experience," are learned, and proceed roughly as follows:

> Now the first idea here seems to be this: In order to understand these terms, you must learn them, or learn their meanings. And, the second idea is then this: In order to learn that, one must become acquainted with, or experience, or somehow be connected with some paradigm cases, some things or situations in the world to which the terms actually do apply. The upshot of these two ideas together is that in order to understand these terms one must somehow be connected with these paradigm cases. Accordingly one's very understanding of the terms guarantees the existence of such cases; it ensures the correct application of the understood terms. (Ignorance, p. 71)

Stroud construes these arguments quite differently. As Stroud describes a paradigm case argument, it is not based on how we come to learn or understand terms, but

> starts from the premiss that each of a pair of expressions S and not-S is meaningfully applied on different occasions and reaches the conclusion that both S and not-S must sometimes apply truly to such occasions. (p. 74)

I don't want to rest my case against the bold sceptic on a thesis about how language is acquired or how certain words are learned. Nor do I claim that our taking certain situations to be paradigm cases of someone knowing something guarantees that all, or most, or even some, of these actually are cases of knowing; I want to leave it open that if the relevant facts of these situations were not what we take them to be, then what we take to be paradigm cases of knowing might not be cases of knowing at all. What I do want to take from the paradigm case arguments is the modest insight that how we describe cases, particularly what we take to be central or paradigm cases for the application of a term, places restrictions on which semantical theories regarding the term can be correct. The correctness of a semantical theory regarding a term seems at least partly to consist in facts about what types of objects or situations the speakers of the language would take to be cases to which the term applies. Thus, a theory according to which speakers of English consistently and systematically misapply the term 'know' has little or no chance of being true.

Consider the contrast of contextualism and sceptical invariantism. While contextualism has a tendency to

make most of our knowledge attributions true, sceptical invariantism would have the result that we are always (or at least almost always) saying something false when we say something of the form "S knows that p." Even if we are not mistaken about any relevant facts, then, sceptical invariantism would have us consistently misdescribing people's epistemic states as states of knowledge, even when the states are what we take to be central or paradigm cases of knowledge. This seems to run afoul of the sensible idea that the meaning of a term in a language cannot be so inaccessible to the speakers of the language that they consistently misapply the term, even in what they would take to be paradigm applications of it. It seems that part of what the English word 'know' corresponding to one theory rather than to another would consist in would be speakers applying the word to cases in accordance with the first rather than the second theory. That we regularly apply the term 'know' to cases to which it does not truly apply if invariantism is correct counts towards and is partly constitutive of invariantism being a false theory about the English term 'know'. Or so I would claim.

In advancing this kind of idea, one usually has to be very careful about just what the paradigms are: the

situations or objects as they actually are or as we believe them to be. Suppose, to borrow an example,[17] there is a group of objects which we all take to be paradigm cats. Suppose also that, while we believe these objects to be animals, they are in fact robots. Now, should we claim that a semantical thesis about the word 'cat', in order to be correct, should take adequate account of what these objects actually are, perhaps ruling out being an animal as a necessary condition for being a cat, or that it should take such account of what we believe these objects to be, perhaps ruling out being a robot as a necessary condition for being a cat? This is a tricky matter. My own inclination is to think that both what the objects are and what we believe them to be are critically important to the issue of what it would take for a semantical theory about 'cat' to be correct and that if the gap between them is too wide, it may be indeterminate which theory is correct and the truth values of many or perhaps all of our 'cat' assertions may be correspondingly indeterminate.

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[17]The example, of course, is Hilary Putnam's; see "It Ain't Necessarily So." See also Unger's insightful discussion of this and related cases in Chapter 5 of Philosophical Relativity.

But for our purposes, we don't have to worry about this tricky matter. In our supposed situation involving the "cats", we are mistaken about a fact that we would deem very relevant to whether or not something is a cat: we mistakenly believe that the objects are animals, while in fact they are robots. This mistake creates an important difference between the objects as they actually are and as we believe them to be. And this difference is what gives rise to the tricky issue. But this is where our assumption from section B comes into play. In our debate with the semantic sceptic, we are assuming that we do not make any such systematic mistake as to the facts that we would deem relevant to whether or not we know what we think we know about the external world. Thus, we are assuming that there is no such difference in what we take to be paradigm cases of knowledge between these situations as they actually are and as we believe them to be. If in evaluating semantical theories we take seriously what speakers take to be paradigm cases of knowing, then the data concerning what these situations actually are like and the data concerning what these situations are believed by us to be like are speaking with one voice, according to our assumption of section B. This, I take it, places

a very strong restriction on what semantical theories of 'know' can be correct.

If we assume that we are not in general making relevant mistakes when we apply the term 'know', then our actual uses of 'know' can be given the same weight in evaluating semantic theories that can be given to our reactions to stipulated, imaginary situations. And it seems to be an absolutely indispensable tool of conceptual analysis that we can take our reactions to stipulated imaginary cases as providing a criterion for whether or not a certain semantical theory is correct. If there is a theory according to which being an F is a necessary condition for something's counting as a G, but we can describe a case in which it seems clear to us that a certain non-F should count as a G, this seems to show that the theory is false. This tool may lead us astray if we are mistaken about the nature of the things we actually call G's.[18] If, in our supposed situation with the cats, we were to ask ourselves: "Suppose there were a creature that looked, felt, etc. just like a cat, but was in fact a robot. Would this creature be a cat?", we would probably answer, "No". But some would

[18]Unger does a good job of motivating this idea through a series of cases he considers in Chapter 5 of Philosophical Relativity.

have it that we would be giving the wrong answer here, because, as we are supposing, all of the things we call cats are robots, and so our term 'cat' would, unbeknownst to us, apply to robots and not to animals. This is a close call. Maybe if we are making a mistake about the relevant facts about the actual things or situations to which we think a term applies, then the meaning of that term is in an important sense not what we think it is. But nothing like this, we are assuming, is going on with our use of 'know'. To take away our reactions to stipulated cases when no such mistakes infect our actual use of a term is, I think, to a large degree, to take away the enterprise of doing semantics altogether.

Stroud attempts to motivate the bold sceptic's conception of everyday knowledge attributions and to defend this conception from "paradigm case arguments" by means of a story about airplane spotters that he borrows from Thompson Clarke, which, Stroud says, can serve as an analogy for how the sceptic construes our situation with respect to knowledge.[19] Stroud tells the story as

[19]See The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, pp. 67-76, and 80-81, and Clarke's "The Legacy of Skepticism." Although the story originates with Clarke, I am here interested only in Stroud's use of it.

follows:

> Suppose that in wartime people must be trained to identify aircraft and they are given a quick, uncomplicated course on the distinguishing features of different planes and how to recognize them. They learn from their manuals, for example, that if a plane has features x, y, and w it is an E, and if it has x, y, and z it is an F. . . . Suppose that there are in fact some other airplanes, Gs say, which also have features x, y, and z. The trainees were never told about them because it would have made the recognition of Fs too difficult; it is almost impossible to distinguish an F from a G from the ground. The policy of simplifying the whole operation by not mentioning Gs in the training manual might be justified by the fact that there are not many of them, or that they are only reconnaissance planes, or that in some other ways they are not as directly dangerous as Fs. (p. 67)

In this situation, Stroud claims, airplane spotters will often be warranted in asserting that they see an F. We will be able to distinguish warranted assertions by the spotters that an F is flying overhead from unwarranted assertions to the same effect that careless spotters might make after finding planes with only features x and y. And there will be a real distinction between the planes that careful spotters call F's and those they say are not F's. But, Stroud writes, once we are told about the G's, "we immediately see that even the most careful airplane-spotter does not know that a plane he sees is an F even though he knows that it has x, y, and z" (p. 68). We see that the distinction marked by the careful

spotter's use of 'F', though real enough, is not the difference between an F and a non-F.

I agree with Stroud that the careful spotter does not know that the plane he sees in an F, but I don't think this provides much of a defense for the bold sceptic. Stroud writes:

> I think the sceptical philosopher sees our position in everyday life as analogous to that of the airplane-spotters. There might be very good reasons why we do not normally eliminate or even consider countless possibilities which nevertheless strictly speaking must be known not to obtain if we are to know the sorts of things we claim to know. (p. 69)

But we must notice an important potential disanalogy between the airplane spotter's and our everyday knowledge claims: The airplane spotter is mistaken about an important fact that he would take to be relevant to the issue of whether or not various planes are F's and whether or not he knows that they are F's. As Stroud writes,

> If we explained the situation to the spotter himself (which admittedly would not help the war effort) he too would agree that he did not know whether the plane was an F or a G. (p. 70)

Stroud's spotter is obviously taking for granted something that we know to be false: That the manual's claim, <u>if a plane has features x, y, and z, it is an F</u>, is correct, that there are no planes in the area that

have features x, y, and z but are not F's, or some such thing. And he is basing his claim to know that the plane is an F on <u>some</u> such false supposition. When it is pointed out to him that there are occasional G's with features x, y, and z, and he can see that his supposition is false, then, of course, he admits what we have known all along: That he does not know and never has known that there is an F flying overhead.

Similarly, we should, of course, admit to the bold sceptic that <u>if</u> we <u>are</u> being systematically deceived by certain kinds of evil geniuses, or the like, then we do not have the external world knowledge we claim to have. But this does not establish the bold sceptic's conclusion unless she can argue that we <u>are</u> being so deceived. As I've argued in Part A, the bold sceptic must show that we are not correctly described as knowing <u>even if we aren't mistaken about what we take to be the relevant factors</u>. It is this semantic scepticism that I find incredible, and here the story of the airplane spotters does not help at all. We find the strange theory about the meaning of 'physician' incredible because it has us all systematically making false applications of the word "physician," even though we are <u>not</u> mistaken about any facts we would take to be

relevant to the issue of whether or not someone is a physician. It would do no good for a proponent of this strange theory to tell us a story in which a "physician spotter" describes a person as being a physician because the putative physician presents himself as having a medical degree, although in fact this putative physician is lying and, moreover, knows no medicine. We know that the physician spotter would be saying something false, and, of course, the spotter himself would admit as much when he was let in on the relevant facts, if he were a native speaker of English. But this story does nothing to make plausible the view that we are all wrong whenever we describe a person as being a physician even when we aren't making any such mistake.

I conclude that semantic scepticism, according to which we systemically make false knowledge attributions even when these false attributions are not based on mistakes we are making about relevant factors, is incorrect, and I see nothing in Stroud's reflections to mitigate the force of this conclusion. How we tend to describe cases in accordance with the various beliefs we have about the relevant situations provides a crushing blow to such a theory.

What, then, becomes of the sceptical arguments? The sceptic would certainly be right if she claimed that what entailments are recognized in a language are, in addition to how we describe cases, also crucial for determining which semantic theories are correct. And the sceptic might be right that all the entailments she needs to fuel one of her arguments are actually built into our language. We cannot pre-judge this issue against the sceptic. Even if many of what we take to be paradigm cases of knowing are cases of people knowing external world propositions so that no correct semantic theory of our epistemic talk can have it that the conditions for knowledge are too stringent for anyone to ever know anything about the external world, it might nevertheless be the case that entailments built into our language encode requirements for knowledge that are that stringent. But this wouldn't help the sceptic's case; it would not show that we say something false whenever we claim that someone knows something about the external world. It would rather show that our word 'know' has broken down (or was a broken word from the beginning of its life in the language, perhaps) in such a way that when say that any of us "knows" anything, or anything "external", we are saying something that is neither true

nor false.

To illustrate this, imagine that you are from another planet and are studying the English language. Suppose that you have figured out the whole language except for how English speakers describe cases of knowledge and epistemic possibility. After some narrowing down, you have determined that there are two competing theories about such talk that could be correct. You know that very many of what English speakers take to be paradigm cases of knowing are cases of someone "knowing" something about the external world. And suppose that you know that such attributions of knowledge are typically not based on a mistake the speaker is making about factors that she would take to be relevant to the question of whether or not the case before her is one of knowledge. While the first theory has the speakers speaking the truth in most of these cases, a consequence of the second theory would be that in all such cases, when an English speaker attributes knowledge about the external world to someone, she is saying something false. According to the second theory, English speakers consistently and systematically misapply the word 'know', even to what they take to be paradigm cases of knowledge, and even though their misapplication is not

based on any mistake about the relevant facts. This, I take it, would count as a huge blow against the second theory. But now suppose you discover that the English language actually does have built into it certain analytic entailments that encode very strict requirements for knowledge, so strict that it is never true to say that someone knows something about the external world. And suppose that, of the two theories, only the second respects these entailments. Now, you and a planet-mate observe an English speaker named Jane say, "Tom knows that there is a pencil in the drawer." You know that all the beliefs on which Jane bases this knowledge attribution are true: there is a pencil in the drawer, Tom does believe that there is, his belief was formed in a reliable manner, etc. And you know that there is no surprising relevant fact about Tom's situation such that, if Jane knew it, she would not have attributed this knowledge to Tom. Furthermore, Jane is not being idiosyncratic here. Almost <u>any</u> speaker of English would treat this as a clear case of knowledge. Your planet-mate, who is just beginning to study English, asks you whether what Jane said was true or false. How do you answer? It seems clear to me that it would <u>not</u> be correct to tell your planet-mate that Jane

said something false. The best answer would seem to be that the English word 'know' is a mess: the data about what types of situations are typically described as cases of knowing encode one set of (relatively easy) requirements for knowledge, and the data about what entailments are built into the language encode a very different (and much more stringent) set of requirements, and it is therefore indeterminate whether Jane said something true or false. The next best alternative, it seems to me, is to say that Jane said something true. To answer that she said something false seems to me the worst answer one could give.

What is behind this judgement that Jane did not say something false? I think it is the conviction that an absolutely essential part of our semantic understanding of the verb 'know' is our understanding of what kinds of cases count as cases of knowledge. What analytic entailments are recognized in our talk of knowledge may also be crucial -- perhaps even essential -- to our semantic understanding of such talk, but no theory could possibly be correct if it respected only these entailments but not our firm beliefs about what cases count as cases of knowledge. This methodological conviction seems very sensible to me, and it, if

correct, spells the doom of the sceptical arguments we have looked at: even if these arguments were as strong as they could possibly be, they would not show that we don't know, they would at most show that our concept of knowledge is radically confused in such a way that it is indeterminate whether or not we know.

The semantic sceptic, then, has a very difficult task in front of her. She must first establish the analytic entailments needed to run one of her arguments. I am inclined, there, to agree with her that the entailments of AI and AP (premises (2), (4), and (6)) do hold. Establishing these entailments then sets her base premise against the anti-sceptic's claim that we do indeed know this or that. The sceptic must then, secondly, make out that her base premise is on firm enough ground to withstand the Moorean maneuver of granting the entailment premises but reversing the argument and claiming that it is the better part of wisdom, given the entailments, to deny the base premise of the sceptic's argument rather than admit its conclusion. And it does not seem to me very implausible for the anti-sceptic to claim that it would do less violence to our practices to accept that we do know the sceptical hypotheses to be false, and that it is not

possible from our point of view that they are true, than to accept that we do not know anything about the external world. But even if all goes well in these two onerous tasks, and the sceptic does successfully establish these two points, nevertheless, if my arguments have been correct, she will not have established that we are correctly described as not knowing anything about the external world. She will rather have shown that 'know' has suicidal tendencies, congenital or acquired, and that therefore we cannot be correctly described either as knowing or as not knowing.

F. Preventing the Break-Down: The Contextualist Strategy. At this point, another eminently sensible methodological conviction should compel us not to conclude that 'know' is in this way a semantic wreck if we can easily avoid this conclusion. So far I have stressed that contextualism has the advantage over sceptical invariantism of making most of our knowledge attributions true (provided that they are not based on mistakes about relevant factors). But it seems that contextualism can -- and will, if it is properly developed -- also respect the analytic entailments to which the semantic sceptic draws our attention. If so,

then we are not left with a choice between an invariantist semantics for 'know' which favors the sceptic by respecting the analytic entailments on which the sceptic relies, but which does not respect the truth of our descriptions of cases and a contextualist semantics which respects the truth values of our descriptions of cases but fails to respect the sceptic's favorite analytic entailments. Rather, a properly developed contextualism can acknowledge both the truth of our descriptions (provided that they are not based on mistakes about relevant factors) and the entailments. If so, the diagnosis of breakdown can easily be avoided, and contextualism, I think, should be adopted in preference to the thesis that 'know' is a semantic wreck.

Many will disagree with my conclusion in Part E that it is better to claim that the word 'know' is, in effect, useless for true or false assertion than to accept the bold sceptic's resolution of the puzzles. That disagreement does not affect this chapter's main line of argument, however. All I need is that the consequence of the bold sceptic's proposed resolution of the puzzles -- that we speak falsely whenever we attribute external world knowledge to someone, even in

what we would take to be paradigm cases of knowledge, and even when we are not mistaken about any relevant factors -- counts as a substantial strike against that resolution. If contextualism can avoid this substantial disadvantage while providing a resolution of the puzzles that accommodates the entailments to which the sceptic appeals, then this resolution will be a clear winner over the bold sceptic's resolution.

G. Stine and the Closure of Knowledge. So, let us see how contextualism can accommodate the entailments alleged by AI and AP, in their premises (2), (4), and (6). (I will say something about Unger's "entailment" premises, (7) and (8), later, in section L.) We will begin with (2), AI's closure principle for knowledge, since it is the "sceptical" premise which has received the most attention lately, and because Gail Stine has laid the groundwork for our account of all the "entailment" premises in her discussion of (2). In "Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure," Stine argues that one form of contextualism, a contextualist version of the Relevant Alternatives View

(RA),[20] is not inconsistent with the closure principle for knowledge, and, in fact, supports it.[21] A contextualist need not hold to RA to accept this result; it seems to be generalizable to contextualism in general, as we will see. It will be most efficient to present Stine's defense of closure, made within RA, first and then to convert this defense to the form of contextualism with which I have been working.

Recall that, according to RA, as Stine writes, "a claim to know that p is properly made in the context of a limited number of competing alternatives to p; to be justified in claiming to know p (or simply to know p) it is sufficient to be able to rule out alternatives relevant to that context" (p. 249). The truth conditions of a given utterance of "S knows that p" depend in part, according to RA, on what the range of relevant alternatives is. Recall the zebra/painted mule case, which Stine borrows from Dretske. Stine presents it as follows:

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[20]See Chapter 1, Part B, for the relation of RA to contextualism. I say that Stine is discussing a contextualist version of RA because she is clearly allowing subject factors to influence what the range of relevant alternatives is.

[21]Stine writes, "In fact, proper attention to the idea of relevant alternatives tends to confirm the principle" (p. 249).

> For example, I know that the striped animal I see in the zoo is a zebra. I know this despite the fact that I have no particular evidence that it is not a mule painted to look like a zebra (I have not looked for a paint can, tried paint remover on the animal, etc.). In this context -- under normal circumstances, in zoos of integrity, etc. -- that an animal on display has been deliberately disguised to fool trusting zoo goers is just not a relevant hypothesis, one that I need trouble myself about rejecting. (pp. 251-252)

Since the animal's being a cleverly painted mule is not a relevant alternative, one need not be able to rule that hypothesis out in order to know that the animal is a zebra. Dretske uses this idea to attack the closure of knowledge. He argues that since (a) one would know that the animal is a zebra, and (b) one would not know that the animal was not a cleverly painted mule, closure fails because the animal's being a zebra entails that it is not a cleverly painted mule. Stine's insightful response is to claim that if we hold the range of relevant alternatives constant when we evaluate the two sentences, "I know that it's a zebra" and "I know that it's not a cleverly painted mule", as we must do if we are to avoid committing "some logical sin akin to equivocation" (p. 256), closure will not fail. An analogy may help here. Consider the following argument:

> My pencil is in this room.
> My pen is in the same room as is my pencil.
> Therefore, my pen is in this room.

This inference form is perfectly valid, despite the fact that I could truly assert the premises but falsely assert the conclusion if I walk from one room to another between asserting the first premise and asserting the conclusion. Since the location of the utterer affects the truth conditions of sentences containing indexical references to "this room," we should hold the location of the utterer constant in evaluating the inference form for validity.[22] Similarly, if the range of relevant alternatives affects the truth conditions of knowledge attributions, as it does according to RA, we should hold that range constant in evaluating whether or not closure holds.

Stine's claim is that if the range of relevant alternatives is held constant, then, for any given range, if one can truly claim to know that the animals are zebras at that range, then one could also truly claim to know that they are not mules painted to look like zebras at that range, and if, at another range, one truly says that one doesn't know that they are not mules painted to look like zebras, then at that range, one can

[22]Compare this with my claim in the last paragraph of Part I.B of Chapter 2, where I claim that we should hold the room of assertion constant in checking "B is wholly in this room" and "B is not wholly in this room" for consistency.

also truly say that one doesn't know that they're zebras. The reason one is less likely to say that one knows they're not mules painted to look like zebras than that one knows they're zebras is that the former claim often (but not always) has the effect of so enlarging the range of relevant alternatives as to make the claim false. Stine suggests that "Perhaps the mere utterance" of the sentence about the painted mules "is enough to make us loosen up our notion of what counts as a relevant alternative" (p. 256). Once the range of relevant alternatives is enlarged, we not only hesitate to say that we know that the animals are not painted mules, we <u>also</u> hesitate to claim to know that they are zebras. Here Stine seems to be clearly right. She goes on to urge, however, that in more ordinary circumstances, where the painted mule hypothesis is not relevant, we can correctly claim to know both that the animal is a zebra <u>and</u> that it is not a painted mule. This may seem counter-intuitive. It initially seems that there is <u>no</u> good sense in which one knows that the animal is not a painted mule without having some particular evidence to that effect. And in general, when the sceptic has chosen her sceptical hypothesis well, it will often seem that there is no good sense in

which we know the hypothesis to be false. Stine claims that "Normally, in saying that one knows that p, one presupposes (in some sense) that not-p is a relevant alternative; hence one does not know that p unless one has evidence to rule out not-p," but goes on to argue that this presupposition is "a pragmatic, not a semantic presupposition" and that it "falls in the category of those which Grice labels 'cancellable'" (p. 255). Thus, I presuppose the relevance of the painted mule hypothesis in claiming to know that the animal is not a painted mule, but this is only a pragmatic, cancellable presupposition. And when I believe a given true proposition, and its negation is <u>not</u> relevant, Stine writes, "then I know it -- obviously, without needing to provide evidence" (p. 258). The problem is that although Stine claims that the presupposition is cancellable, she does not give any examples in which the presupposition <u>is</u> cancelled. It would help a great deal to be given an example in which it would be natural to claim to know that the animals are not painted mules despite having no particular evidence to that effect, or an example in which it would seem that one can truly claim to know that one is not being deceived by an evil genius. Without such an example of the presupposition

being cancelled, one might well suspect that it (the relevance of the negation of the purportedly known proposition) is not just a cancellable, pragmatic presupposition, but is rather an inviolable rule of claiming to know.

As I have argued in Chapter 1, the contextualist should not tie the content of a given knowledge attribution to the range of alternatives that are relevant; rather, the contextualist should say that knowledge attributions have varying "strengths" and that the content of a given attribution is defined by how good a position one must be in to count on the given occasion as knowing. Stine's basic strategy for validating closure can be adapted to this more general contextualist theory, as I will attempt to show in the next section. But the problem mentioned above remains. It is a general problem that contextualists who want to uphold closure must face. If we want to say that in some "weak" sense we know sceptical hypotheses to be false, we are in danger of being committed to the existence of a range of epistemic facts -- that we know this and that and the other sceptical hypothesis to be false in a "weak" sense of 'know' -- which we can never truly assert, because the mere asserting that one knows

a sceptical hypothesis to be false raises the knowledge claim thus made to a strength at which it is false, a strength at which the sceptical hypothesis is <u>not</u> known to be false. I would find any such commitment embarrassing. We need examples in which a claim to know that a sceptical hypothesis does not obtain is made and it seems plausible that the claim is relatively "weak" and, therefore, true. I will give such examples in section J. First, however, I will adapt Stine's defense of closure to the more general form of contextualism with which I am working.

H. <u>Sensitivity, Strength, Sceptical Hypotheses, and the Closure of Knowledge</u>. We will make use of Nozick's idea of the sensitivity of a belief that P to the truth/falsity of P. Following Nozick very closely, let us say that,

> where M rigidly designates the method by which S has come to believe that P, S's belief that P is sensitive to the truth of P (or, as I will put it for short, is sensitive) if and only if:
> (1) If P weren't true and S were to use M to arrive at a belief whether (or not) P, then S wouldn't believe, via M, that P, <u>and</u>
> (2) If P were true and S were to use M to arrive at a belief whether (or not) P, then S would believe, via M, that P.[23]

[23]Compare this with Nozick's analysis of <u>S knows, via M, that P</u> (<u>Philosophical Explanations</u>, p. 179). The conditions I give correspond to conditions (3) and (4)

We get interesting results when we apply this notion to the zebra/painted mule case. Suppose I am at a zoo, everything is normal, I correctly judge that some animals I see are zebras, and I believe that the animals are not mules cleverly painted to look just like zebras. My belief that the animals are zebras is sensitive. It seems that if (as I have done) I were to look at the animals to see if they were zebras, but they weren't zebras, they would in all probability be some other animals which I could distinguish from zebras. Thus, I would not believe that they are zebras. So condition (1) is fulfilled. Likewise, the subjunctive conditional, (2), seems to be true. But my belief that the animals are not mules cleverly painted to look just like zebras is <u>not</u> sensitive. For that belief, condition (1) fails: if the animals <u>were</u> mules cleverly painted to look just like zebras, and I were to form my belief in as I actually do, simply by looking and seeing (without use of paint remover, etc.), I would, as I do, believe that they were <u>not</u> painted mules. Like most sceptical hypotheses, the proposition that the animals

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of this Nozickean analysis. Basically, on Nozick's analysis of knowledge, S knows that P if and only if S has a true, sensitive belief that P.

are mules cleverly painted to look just like zebras is chosen precisely because one's belief that it false is <u>insensitive</u>. Likewise, my belief that I am not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that I have hands is insensitive, while my belief that I have hands, is, it seems, sensitive.

RA theorists have made use of a concept very close to sensitivity by their unexplained employment of the notion of "ruling out" alternatives. An RA theorist will say that, in normal conversational circumstances, I can truly be said to know that there is a chair in front of me because I can rule out all of the alternatives to there being a chair there that are relevant in such normal contexts (eg., that there is a table there). But, they will say, in extraordinary circumstances in which, for example, the alternative that <u>I am merely hallucinating that there is a chair in front of me</u> is relevant, I cannot truly be said to know that there is a chair in front of me, because I cannot rule out that bizarre alternative. Why is it said that I can <u>rule out</u> the table alternative but not the hallucination alternative? Because, it seems, the RA theorists' unexplained notion of <u>ruling out</u> requires sensitivity: One can "rule out" an alternative only if one's belief

that it does not obtain is sensitive.

I have said that a sceptical hypothesis is usually chosen precisely because one's belief that it does not obtain is not sensitive. It is this lack of sensitivity which makes us feel that we are not in a very strong position to know that the sceptical hypotheses do not obtain. On the other hand, we feel that we are in a strong position to know various things incompatible with the sceptical hypotheses, for example, that some animals are zebras or that one has hands, since our beliefs in these things are sensitive. Thus, we may be tempted to say that we are in a stronger position to know that, say, we have hands, than we are in to know that we're not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that we have hands. But the sceptic rightly points out that we can be in no stronger a position to know what we claim to know than we are in to know that the sceptical hypotheses do not obtain.

The best method for determining relative strengths of positions to know is by the use of comparative conditionals of the form

If I know this, then I know that

or

If I don't know that, then I don't know this.

When such conditionals, which compare how good a position one is in to know each of two things, are true, this shows that one is in a better (or as good a) position to know that than one is in to know this. The sceptic points out that the following conditionals seem to be true:

> If I don't know that I am not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that I have hands (and can't know it just by inferring it from my belief that I have hands), then I don't know that I have hands.
>
> If I know that I have hands, then I know that I am not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that I have hands (or could know this by inferring it from my belief that I have hands).

The truth of these conditionals shows that I can be in no better position to know that I have hands than I am in to know that I am not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that I have hands.

The upshot of all this is the following. You cannot conclude that you are in a stronger position to know one thing than you are in to know another simply from the fact that your belief in the first is sensitive while your belief in the second is not. Rather, we can see that some of our beliefs must be stronger than others (we must be in a stronger position to know some things we believe than we are in to know others) in order for them to be sensitive: In particular, beliefs that

sceptical hypotheses do not obtain must be very strong before they can be sensitive. This is shown by the fact that my belief that I have hands is sensitive while my belief that I am not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that I have hands, which is at least as strong as the former belief (I am in at least as strong a position to know the latter as I am in to know the former), is not sensitive.

We are now in a position to adapt Stine's defense of closure. The contextualist will claim that the content of a given knowledge attribution depends, in part, upon its strength: upon how good or strong a position one must be in to count as knowing. Thus, when we check to see whether or not closure holds, we must keep the strength of the relevant knowledge attributions constant. The contextualist can then account for the instances of closure to which the sceptic appeals by claiming that any conditional which represents a good instance of closure, like

> If I know that I've got hands, then I know (or can know by inferring it) that I am not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that I've got hands,

is true at whatever strength it is uttered, provided only that the strength is held constant from antecedent to consequent. Thus, at any strength of attribution

which is low enough to allow one to truly claim to know that one has hands, it is also true to claim that one knows (or can know by inferring it) that one is not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that one has hands. And if there is any strength of attribution high enough that at it one does not know that one is not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that one has hands, then at that strength, one also does not know that one has hands. To accept this, the contextualist must hold that one cannot be in a better position to know that one has hands than one is in to know that one is not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that one has hands. But that just seems true: it is what is behind the intuitive correctness of the conditional indented above and it is also behind the correctness of the thought that it could be no wiser to bet one's immortal soul on one's having hands than on one's not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that one has hands. We are more hesitant to make the individual claim that we know that we're not being deceived by an evil genius than we are to make the individual claim that we know that we've got hands, not because we are in a worse position to know the former than we are in to

know the latter, but because a claim to know the former invites a "stronger" reading than does a claim to know the latter. And it is never correct, as almost anyone can sense, to claim to know that one has hands <u>in conjunction with</u> (in the same breath as), or immediately following, a concession that one does not know that one is not being deceived by an evil genius into falsely believing that one has hands.

I. <u>The Contextualist Resolution of AI</u>. It is now clear how the contextualist will resolve the puzzle generated by AI. (For simplicity of exposition, I will here use the simpler, SAI formulation of the argument.) When a proper sceptical hypothesis and putatively known proposition are inserted into the 'H' and 'P' spots, respectively, why do the following three propositions all seem to be true?

1S. I don't know that H is false.

2S. If I don't know that H is false, then I don't know that P.

Not-C. I know that P.

The contextualist answer with respect to (2S) is simple enough: It seems true because it <u>is</u> true, at whatever strength it is asserted.

How, then, can both (1S) and (Not-C) seem to be true? To account for the seeming truth of (1S), we continue our project of adapting Stine's remarks. Stine seems to have thought that one's disinclination to claim to know that the animals in the zoo are not painted mules is due to a lack of evidence to that effect. (Her reply is that we only need evidence if the animals' being painted mules is a relevant alternative.) But the <u>general</u> problem with claiming to know that sceptical hypotheses are false is not a lack of evidence, but a lack of sensitivity. One's belief that a sceptical hypothesis is false doesn't seem to be sensitive to truth/falsity of the hypothesis: If the hypothesis were true, it seems, we would still believe that it was false. In the zebra/painted mule case, in which one hasn't looked into the question of whether or not the animals are cleverly painted mules, one senses that one's belief that they're not cleverly painted mules is not sensitive to the truth of this proposition, but one also realizes that if one had used a more thorough method and had done a little checking one could have been in a stronger position in

which one's belief that they're not cleverly painted mules would be a sensitive belief (a belief one wouldn't hold if it were false). Thus, in the zebra/painted mule case, the lack of sensitivity surfaces as a lack of evidence. But when the sceptical hypothesis involves an evil genius, we cannot readily imagine being in a position to form a sensitive belief that the hypothesis does not obtain, and the belief's lack of sensitivity does not manifest itself as a feeling that one doesn't have sufficient evidence, but in the feeling that one could <u>never</u> be in a position to know that the hypothesis does not obtain.

So, while Stine holds that when one claims to know that P it is usually, but not always, the case that not-P is to be considered a relevant alternative, and this is why we will be hesitant to claim to know that P when we don't have any evidence to show that not-P, we shall convert these points as follows. When one claims to know that P, it is <u>usually</u>, but not always, the case that one is claiming to be in a strong enough position with respect to P that one's belief that P is sensitive to the truth of P. When one claims to know something like that some animals in the zoo are zebras, one doesn't have to be in a very strong position in order

for one's belief that they're zebras to be sensitive. But one must be in a much stronger position with respect to a belief that they're not painted mules in order for <u>that</u> belief to be sensitive. Thus, a claim to know that a sceptical hypothesis does not obtain will typically invite a "stronger" reading than will a claim to know such a thing as that some animals in plain sight are zebras. This goes a long way toward explaining why (1S) and (Not-C) can both <u>seem</u> to be true, despite the fact that at any given strength they cannot both be true: We tend to read them at different strengths.

But <u>is</u> (1S), as asserted by the sceptic, true? And is (C), as asserted by the sceptic, therefore also true? The answer the contextualist gives here will depend upon exactly what he thinks governs the strength of knowledge attributions. Taking P to be <u>Those animals are zebras</u> and H to be <u>Those animals are mules cleverly painted to look just like zebras</u>, let's suppose that a sceptic presents AI in the second person, trying to convince an interlocutor -- call him Frank -- that he (Frank) does not know that the animals are zebras, and to make things interesting, let's suppose that Frank continues to insist that he knows both that the animals are zebras

and that they're not painted mules. One option[24] the contextualist might choose is that a speaker's intentions set the strength of her knowledge attribution. Since the sceptic and Frank seem to be intending different strengths, the verdict a contextualist who thinks that speakers' intentions determine strength will naturally reach is that (a) the sceptic is saying something true both in claiming that Frank doesn't know that the animals aren't cleverly painted mules and in claiming that Frank doesn't know that they're zebras, and (b) Frank is also saying something true both in claiming to know the animals are zebras and in claiming to know that they're not painted mules. On this version of contextualism, the big mistake being made by the sceptic and by Frank is that of thinking that their claims conflict.

As I indicated in Chapter 1, I prefer forms of contextualism according to which more objective factors -- what's been said so far in the conversation, how important it is that one be right, etc. -- determine the strength of knowledge attributions. One way in which their strength might be altered is by means of what

[24]Though not a good one, I think. See footnote 5 of Chapter 1.

David Lewis calls "rules of accommodation": rules according to which the "conversational score" (in the case of epistemic possibilities and knowledge attributions, the relevant component of the "conversational score" is the range of relevant alternatives) tends to adjust so as to make what is said true. Lewis gives the following example:

> The commonsensical epistemologist says: "I <u>know</u> the cat is in the carton -- there he is before my eyes -- I just <u>can't</u> be wrong about that!" The sceptic replies: "You might be the victim of a deceiving demon." Thereby he brings into consideration possibilities hitherto ignored, else what he says would be false. The boundary [between relevant and irrelevant alternatives] shifts outward so that what he says is true. Once the boundary is shifted, the commonsensical epistemologist must concede defeat. And yet he was not in any way wrong when he laid claim to infallible knowledge. What he said was true with respect to the score as it then was.[25]

The reason the "commonsensical epistemologist" must concede defeat and cannot just re-assert his claim to know, relying upon a rule of accommodation to re-adjust the "conversational score" so as to make his claim true, according to Lewis, is that "for some reason, I know not what, the boundary readily shifts outward if what is

[25]Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game," p. 355.

said requires it, but does not so readily shift inward if what is said requires that."[26]

This view of Lewis's can easily be adjusted to our purposes by replacing his notion of the boundary between relevant and irrelevant alternatives with our notion of strength as the component of the "conversational score" relevant to knowledge attributions. Thus, a contextualist can claim that when the sceptic says that Frank does not know that the animals are not painted mules, the strength of knowledge attributions is thereby raised so as to make the sceptic's denial of it true. At this point, Frank can only falsely claim to know that the animals are zebras, because knowledge attributions are strengthened more readily than they are weakened.

Another possible account of strength changing would make use of the principle, which I've already hinted at, that as a general rule, an assertion that S knows (or doesn't know) that P implies a strength high enough to require S's belief that P to be sensitive in order for

[26]Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game," p. 355. Lewis immediately adds: "Because of the asymmetry, we may think that what is true with respect to the outward-shifted boundary must be somehow more true than what is true with respect to the original boundary. I see no reason to respect this impression. Let us hope, by all means, that the advance toward truth is irreversible. That is no reason to think that just any change that resists reversal is an advance toward truth."

it to count as knowledge. When P is a statement to the effect that a sceptical hypothesis does not obtain, this general rule will demand that the strength requirement be raised to quite a high level, since, as I've already claimed, beliefs that sceptical hypotheses do not obtain generally must be very strong in order to be sensitive. Given this account, we can say that when the sceptic says to Frank, "You don't know that they're not mules cleverly painted to look just like zebras," the strength requirements for knowledge attributions rise to a level high enough to make the sceptic's denial true, since Frank is <u>not</u> in a position which is strong enough for his belief that the animals are not painted mules to be sensitive. The contextualist can then, like Lewis, claim that strengths are raised more readily than they are lowered, so that when Frank then insists, "I <u>know</u> that they're zebras," he is saying something false, because the strength of this assertion has been raised to a level at which he cannot truly claim to know either that the animals are not painted mules or that they're zebras.

While Lewis's account sneaks sensitivity in through the back door -- it is a lack of sensitivity which seems to be behind the thought that one cannot "rule out" the

sceptical hypothesis -- this second account puts it right up front. This second account has the advantage that it can handle the following type of case. Suppose that, in a given conversation, the strength requirements for knowledge are fairly low. Suddenly, someone claims to know that a certain sceptical hypothesis does not obtain. Here, it can seem that the claim being made is stronger than the previous claims of the conversation, and that the making of the claim changes the "conversational score". But we cannot account for the raising of the strength requirements by means of a rule of accommodation: Increasing the strength requirement could in no way help to make the person's claim to know true. In short, if we think that claims to know as well as denials of knowledge can raise the standards that are in place for knowledge attributions, we should not think that rules of accommodation can account for all such changes of strength, since a rise in standards can never be needed to make a positive knowledge claim true. Lewis's account, on the other hand, has the advantage that he fits rules of accommodation into a wide-ranging account of a variety of conversational phenomena.[27] A complete theory of standard-changing may well have to

[27]See "Scorekeeping in a Language Game."

make room for accounts of both of the types we have looked at: Perhaps the standards, other things being equal and within certain limits, tend to adjust so as to make what is said true, and so as to require sensitivity for the knowledge attributions and denials that are made in the conversation.

At any rate, both accounts have so far been applied to our situation involving Frank and the sceptic in a sceptic-friendly way, according to which the sceptic ends up truly claiming that Frank doesn't know and Frank ends up falsely claiming to know. Both accounts could be modified so as to be unfriendly to the sceptic. The contextualist could claim that when the sceptic proclaims that Frank doesn't know that the animals aren't painted mules, this raises the standards for knowledge attributions only if Frank lets the sceptic get away with raising them.[28] But since Frank does not let the sceptic get away with raising the standards, but rather continues to insist at a lower level that he knows, the standards are not successfully raised, and Frank ends up speaking the truth while the sceptic ends up saying what is false.

[28]This modification is loosely based on a remark Lewis makes on p. 352 of "Scorekeeping in a Language Game."

But even on the (perhaps more plausible) sceptic-friendly contextualist treatment of AI, our resolution will provide no comfort for the bold sceptic who claims that we speak falsely whenever we claim to know anything about the external world. That a clever sceptic can raise the standards in place for knowledge attributions so as to make it false to claim to know this or that external world proposition does not show that we speak falsely when we claim to know such propositions in circumstances in which the standards are lower. The contextualist can accept the entailment embodied in premise 2 of AI, and can account for the attractiveness of AI's base premise (premise 1) -- and will perhaps even accept that the sceptic truly asserts it -- without having to accept the costly consequence of the bold sceptic's resolution of the puzzle generated by AI.

J. Low-Strength Claims to Know that Sceptical Hypotheses Do Not Obtain. A loose end remains to be tied. It is a consequence of the contextualist resolution of AI that if the strength requirement for knowledge is held down to the usual level at which we truly claim to know various things, then at that strength, we can also truly claim to know that this or

that sceptical hypothesis does not obtain, despite the fact that our belief that it doesn't obtain is not sensitive. The problem is that in most cases it seems that we cannot truly claim to know that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain. We have tried to account for this by means of a strength-governing principle according to which such claims to know typically have the effect of raising the standards for knowledge to a level at which the claims are false. But, as I've admitted, I would find it an embarrassment if we could never claim to know such things. Of course, the sceptical hypothesis that the animals in the zoo are cleverly painted mules is such that one could get into a position to be able to truly claim to know that it does not obtain by means of certain investigations. But one would thereby make one's belief that it does not obtain sensitive. We need cases in which one truly attributes knowledge of P to S despite the fact that S's belief that P is not sensitive.

Fortunately, I think there are such cases. As I have claimed, one can be in a relatively strong position to know that a sceptical hypothesis does not obtain despite the fact that one's belief that it doesn't obtain is insensitive -- at least as strong a position as one is

in to know many things that one would not hesitate to claim to know. In some situations, however, there may be unfortunate people who are not in a very strong position to know that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain, or still more unfortunate people who don't even believe that it doesn't obtain. In such a situation, it seems that you can compare oneself to these poor people by saying that, as opposed to them, you know that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain, and your knowledge claim remains at a fairly low strength and is, therefore, true.

Suppose, for instance, that someone at a state institution makes the mistake of giving to the unstable occupants of the institution copies of Descartes' Meditations. Many of the inmates are unnerved by the suggestion that they may be victims of an evil genius. The ones most drastically affected by the experience are kept together in a certain ward in which, for most of the day, they do such things as stare at their hands, saying, "It sure seems as if I have hands, but maybe I'm being deceived by the evil genius. I wish there were some way I could find out." You've heard of this ward, and have come to see it for yourself. A psychiatrist is giving you a tour. At one point he says, "So you see,

none of the patients in this ward knows whether or not they're being deceived by an evil genius." He might go on to say, "So they don't even know whether or not they've got hands." These remarks do not have the same flavor as a philosophical sceptic's claims that none of us can know whether or not we're being deceived by an evil genius and so none of us can know whether or not we've got hands. The psychiatrist, it seems, is not just saying that the patients do not know these things in some high, strong sense, but rather that they don't know them even at the lower strength at which the rest of us do know such things. Given these special circumstances, his remark that the patients do not know that they aren't being deceived by an evil genius does not have the effect of raising the standards for knowledge to a level high enough to require that one have a sensitive belief that one is not being deceived in order to count as knowing that one is not being deceived. Suppose that you point to a man in the room who you take for a patient, but who is really a member of the institution's staff, and say, "That patient looks pretty normal. Is he really that far gone?" If the psychiatrist answers, "Oh, no. He knows perfectly well that he's not being deceived by an evil genius. He's

not a patient -- he's a member of our staff," it seems to me that this knowledge attribution remains relatively low in strength, and is, therefore, true.

We can also consider a patient who was not put into the ward because he was not as drastically affected by reading Descartes. This patient continues to believe that he has hands, and believes that he is not being deceived by an evil genius, but is rather uncertain of these things. Reading Descartes has caused him to be somewhat doubtful of them. As he gradually recovers, he might say such things as, "I <u>think</u> I'm not being deceived," then, "I'm pretty sure I'm not being deceived," and then, "Finally! I <u>know</u> I'm not being deceived. What an absurd idea! Thank God I'm normal again!" This, it seems to me, would be a relatively low-strength and true claim to know something one does not sensitively believe.

A similar example can be cooked up for the zebra/painted mule case. Suppose a group of friends is going to the zoo and Frank has devised a practical joke that he and the other members of the party plan to play on Jane and Ted. The other members of the party will try to get Jane and Ted to falsely believe that the zebras are painted mules. When the party gets to the

zebra cage, people around Jane and Ted start to say things like, "What a great paint job! I would never have guessed that they're just painted mules," and, "When I first heard of this scam, I never dreamed that the zoo would be able to get away with it so easily." At one point, Jane catches someone snickering, and has to be let in on the joke, but Ted is taken in by it. Frank arrives late, and someone pulls him aside to tell him of the situation, saying, "Jane knows they're not painted mules. Sorry, we had to tell her. But Ted really believes that they're painted mules. He went for it, hook, line, and sinker." Jane, like everyone else, has not made any special attempts to determine that the animals are not painted mules, so like everyone else's, her belief that they're not painted mules is not sensitive. Yet here it seems that the knowledge that the animals are (of course) not painted mules may be truly attributed to her. Given the special circumstances, the sentence "Jane knows they're not painted mules" does not have the effect of raising the strength requirements to a level at which Jane must have a sensitive belief that they're not painted mules in order to be truly said to know that they're not.

So, it seems, there are cases in which one can be truly said to know something that one does not sensitively believe, and the embarrassment is avoided. One might wonder how much of an embarrassment it would be to the contextualist account if one could never truly claim to know that a sceptical hypothesis does not obtain (when one's belief that it doesn't obtain is not sensitive). The main point of the contextualist account of closure in its treatment of AI is that at the strength at which one knows that P, one also knows that not-H. Perhaps it would not be so bad if it were impossible ever to truly assert the fact that one knows that not-H at this relatively low strength simply by saying, "I know that not-H." But if one, like me, would be worried by this impossibility, cases like the ones I have just presented above may remove this worry.

K. The Contextualist Resolution of AP. In Chapter 2, we arrived at the following contextualist analysis of epistemic modal statements:

> "It is possible that P" is true if and only if, relative to the contextually relevant standards for knowledge, (1) no member of the contextually relevant community knows that not-P and (2) there is no contextually relevant way by which members of the contextually relevant community can come to know that not-P.

Given this analysis, and also given the side-constraint that the speaker is a member of the relevant community, our contextualist resolution of AI can be very straightforwardly extended to resolve AP as well. The contextualist can easily account for the two intuitively plausible "entailment" premises to which the sceptic appeals,

> 4. If it is possible that H is true, then it is possible that not-P,

and

> 6. If it is possible that not-P, then I don't know that P.

Given that the speaker is a member of the relevant community, no one could ever truly deny (6): on our contextualist analysis, the antecedent entails the consequent in any speaker's mouth on any occasion. (4) is likewise validated. Since one can be in no better position to know that P than one is in to know that not-H (provided that the sceptic has chosen her H well), then, at any given strength, if the antecedent of (4) is true, and the members of the relevant community (presumably the speaker and the sceptic), therefore, don't know that not-H and there are no relevant ways for them to come to know it at that strength, then, at that

strength, they don't know that P and could not in a relevant way come to know that P at that strength, and, thus, not-P is epistemically possible.

Having accommodated the AP's entailments, the contextualist must next account for the attractiveness of AP's base premise,

3. It is possible that H is true.

As we saw in section I, the contextualist can choose from among several options with regard to the issue of what controls the standards for knowledge. Let us here examine only a sceptic-friendly treatment of AP, according to which the sceptic successfully raises the standards to a high level at which very little is known, and at which, therefore, very much is epistemically possible. As with AI's base premise, the contextualist will claim that the sceptic's assertion of (3) raises the standards for knowledge to a level at which the premise is true. And again, there are a couple of general rules to which the contextualist can appeal. Recall from section I that the contextualist accounts for the attractiveness of AI's base premise by means of a general rule according to which an assertion that S knows (or doesn't know) that P usually raises (if need be) the strength requirement for knowledge attributions

to a level high enough to require S's belief that P to be sensitive in order for it to count as knowledge. Since, on our analysis of epistemic possibility, what is epistemically possible is entirely a matter of what is known or could be known, it is natural to extend this general rule by adding the following: An assertion that P is possible usually raises (if need be) the standards for knowledge to a level high as to require a member of the community's belief that not-P to be sensitive in order for it to count as knowledge. Thus, when the sceptic asserts that H is possible, the standards for knowledge are raised to a very high level -- high enough to require one's belief that not-H to be sensitive in order for it to count as knowledge. If the sceptic has chosen her H wisely, one's belief that not-H will not be sensitive (and cannot be made sensitive in a relevant way). Thus, the members of the relevant community will not know (and cannot come to know in a relevant way), at the high level to which the standards have been raised, that not-H. Thus, at that level, H is epistemically possible, and the sceptic is speaking the truth when she asserts (3).

Alternatively, or perhaps in addition to the above account, the contextualist can appeal to a rule of

accommodation: When the sceptic asserts (3), the standards for knowledge are raised (if need be) in order to make the assertion true.

Continuing our sceptic-friendly treatment of AP, the contextualist can say that after the sceptic then applies her entailment premises, she truly asserts her conclusions, first, that

5. It is possible that not-P,

and then that

C. I don't know that P.

But while the sceptic, at least on our sceptic-friendly treatment, truly asserts (C), she does so at a very high level of strength requirements, and her conclusion does nothing to show that one cannot be truly said to know that P at lower, more ordinary levels. Thus, the contextualist has again accepted the sceptic's entailment premises, has accounted for the attractiveness of the sceptic's base premise (and even, at least on the sceptic-friendly treatment, has accepted that the sceptic truly asserts the base premise), without having to accept the conclusion of the sceptical argument in any way that would entail that we speak falsely, in ordinary conversation, when we attribute knowledge to people. The contextualist avoids this

costly aspect of the bold sceptic's resolution without having to deny any of the sceptic's intuitive entailments, and without having to take an intuitively incorrect stand on the base premise. Again, the contextualist seems to have a clearly superior resolution to the puzzle generated by the sceptical argument.

L. Knowing and Being Certain: A Suggestion. I have concentrated on AI and AP more than on Unger's sceptical argument (which we extracted from his book Ignorance). This is largely because I find the other arguments more persuasive than Unger's. My biggest problem with Unger's argument involves his "absolute" account of certainty. Sentences of the form

> He is certain of this, but he is even more certain of that,

do not "bruise my ear"[29] in the least, and Unger does not succeed in altering them by means of his "devices of emphasis" so that they do bruise my ear without also seeming, at least to me, to alter the content of the

[29] I take this apt phrase from B.L. Blose's "The 'Really' of Emphasis and the 'Really' of Restriction."

original sentence.[30] Thus, I do not believe that the bold sceptic can successfully base her position on Unger's argument.

But, following a suggestion in Unger's later book, Philosophical Relativity,[31] I will briefly note how a contextualist might handle the issue of how knowledge and subjective certainty are related. In our reconstruction of Unger's argument, this connection is drawn in premise (7):

> 7. If I know that P, then I justifiably have an attitude of certainty toward P.

Let us, for the sake of simplicity, not concern ourselves here with the matter that Unger raises in Chapter 3 of Ignorance of whether or not it must be all right for one to be certain that P in order for one to know that P, and just concentrate on the claim of Unger's Chapter 2 that

> If S knows that P, then S is certain that P.

This is a plausible "entailment" premise: Sentences like

[30]His base premise (9) also seems highly questionable: It seems that I might be maximally certain of some propositions (including, perhaps, some external world propositions), and perhaps even justifiably so. But I am not now in a position to make a contribution to the already extensive body of literature on this topic of absolute certainty.

[31]See especially p. 38.

> He knows that his father is in Minnesota, but he isn't certain of it

or

> I'm not certain that he's six feet tall, but I know that he is

do sound inconsistent, at least to my ear, and this is something that the contextualist may wish to account for.

Very briefly, I think that the contextualist with respect to knowledge attributions may well wish to extend his contextualism to cover attributions of subjective certainty as well. Thus, how certain S must be of P in order for the sentence "S is certain that P" to be true will be said to vary with context. This variation, it seems, can be tied to the variation in truth conditions for knowledge attributions in such a way that a sentence of the form

> S knows that P, but S is not certain that P

could never be true. If S is not certain enough for "S is certain that P" to be truly assertable in a given context, then S is not certain enough, in that context, to count as knowing that P, either.

I find this plausible, but only put it forward as a tentative hypothesis. I do not feel as certain about this extension of contextualism as I feel about our

contextualist treatments of knowledge attributions and statement of epistemic possibility. Part of the reason for this is that the latter treatments provide what seem to me to be the best resolutions of the puzzles AI and AP press upon us, but since Unger's sceptical argument does not seem as persuasive as AI and AP, I think a contextualist rejoinder to argument is not needed: one can simply reject his early "absolute" account of subjective certainty. Of course, a contextualist account of attributions of subjective certainty may be the best alternative to Unger's, but Unger's account does not seem to me to be plausible enough to demand that we come up with a better one before rejecting his.

M. Unger's Relativity Thesis and Our Presumption. So I don't think that bold scepticism can be successfully based upon any of the sceptical arguments we have been dealing with. But we must also consider the thesis that Unger puts forward in his book (which was written well after Ignorance), Philosophical Relativity. In this later book, Unger claims that there are two equally matched candidates for the correct semantic theory of

'know': a sceptical invariantist[32] account, according to which knowledge attributions are never or almost never true, and a contextualist account, according to which most of them are true. And he argues that "there is no objectively right answer" (p. 5) to the question of which semantical theory is correct, and therefore no objectively right answer to the question whether our knowledge attributions are true.

Unger's case is built largely upon the claim that the two theories are equally matched, and much of his argument for his relativity thesis consists of balancing the relative advantages of the two theories against each other. In particular, Unger claims that on both theories, someone who says "S knows that P" gets his listener to focus on the thought that S is in a good enough epistemic position with respect to P, for the contextually relevant intents and purposes. The difference is that, according to the sceptical invariantist, the speaker achieves this feat by (falsely) asserting a sentence which means that S is in a maximally good epistemic position with respect to P --

[32]What I am here calling 'sceptical invariantism', Unger, in Philosophical Relativity, simply calls 'invariantism'. See the second to the last paragraph of Chapter 1, section A of this dissertation.

Unger puts this in terms of S's being able to rule out all possible alternatives to P -- while on the contextualist account, the speaker achieves the same feat by means of (often truly) asserting a sentence which means what he wishes to convey: that S is close enough to being in this position with respect to P, for the contextually relevant intents and purposes --S is able to rule out the contextually relevant alternatives. Unger argues that both theories explain how we come to focus on the contextually relevant thought, and both explanations employ the same amount of complexity. The only difference is that the two theories put the complexity in different places. The contextualist employs a more complex semantics than does the invariantist, since the truth conditions of "S knows that P" vary from context to context according to contextualism in a way that they do not vary according to invariantism. But the invariantist must employ a more complex psychological account of how the sentence gets one to focus upon the relevant thought (call this the "pragmatics" of the theory), because on the invariantist account, this thought is quite different in content from the (false) sentence by hearing which one comes to focus on it.

My preference for contextualism over sceptical invariantism is based, as this chapter has made clear, upon the fact that sceptical invariantism has the result that almost all of our knowledge attributions are false. An important criterion for a successful semantic theory is that it account for how we use the terms in question. As Unger seems to construe things, this requirement is met when the theory provides an explanation of why we use the terms in question when we do, and it is not much of a mark against the plausibility of such an explanation that it has us using the terms almost exclusively to assert falsehoods. Thus, contextualism and sceptical invariantism are seen as having equal claims to being correct. In this chapter, and indeed throughout this dissertation,[33] I have been pushing a different, and I think more traditional picture, according to which a theory, to account for our use of a term, ought to presume that we use the term to speak mostly truths. As many of Unger's examples in Philosophical Relativity show us,[34] things can get very

[33]See especially section E of the present chapter and section I.D of Chapter 2.

[34]See especially Chapter 5 of Philosophical Relativity. See also pp. 68-69 of Chapter 4, where Unger discusses a case in which we have recently "discovered the following widespread, systematic illusion: The things we have been calling flat are

tricky when we are making mistakes about facts that we would take to be relevant to the issue of whether or not a term applies. But when no such mistake is being made, I have argued, it is important that a semantic theory respect the truths of at least most of our uses of a term. The presumption that a theory should do this, I have claimed, is an indispensable tool of conceptual analysis. It is difficult to imagine how we could even begin to discern the truth conditions of sentences containing a certain term if we did not accept a strong presumption that what we would all say in describing a case (in which no such mistake is being made) is a true description. After all, what else is there to go on?

Well, there are the entailments which are built into the language. But, as I've attempted to show, while the entailments to which the sceptic points <u>seem</u> to favor

surrounded by a substance or a force field that gives them the appearance of having comparatively little surface irregularity. As well, the forces get these objects to meet our needs concerning so-called flat things: When they are horizontal, objects do not roll off them; little friction or resistance, however, is met when we try to slide objects across them, and so on. For all of this, when we break through the appearances, we find these force-infused items to have significantly more in the way of bumps and crevices than very many objects form which we have withheld 'flat'." Here, our mistake in the amount of surface irregularity in the items counts, I would say, as a mistake concerning a matter we would deem to be relevant to the issue of whether or not the items are flat.

sceptical invariantism, they are in fact neutral, because the contextualist can accommodate them. Contextualism, properly developed, validates these entailments.[35]

Let us return one last time to the crazy semantic theory about 'physician' according to which the term means "a person who has a medical degree and can cure any conceivable illness in less than two minutes." A proponent of this theory can provide an explanation of how we in fact use this term. She can say that we use the term "loosely" and apply it to people who do not live up to the analytic requirements of physicianhood. By using the term in this way, we are able, by false assertions to the effect that various people are physicians, to get our listeners to focus upon true thoughts about the skills and vocation of these people. How do we reject this crazy theory? We could, I suppose try to argue that it requires a fairly complex

[35]In his review of <u>Philosophical Relativity</u>, Brueckner, relating the advantages of invariantism, writes, "In particular, speakers' intuitions concerning the correct use of 'know' seem to conform to the closure principle for knowledge asserted by the invariantist yet denied by the contextualist" (p. 512). <u>If</u> invariantism, but not contextualism, upheld closure, I would take this to be a very important advantage of invariantism. But, as I've argued, contextualism can equally well uphold closure.

pragmatics, according to which our attention is focussed upon these true thoughts by the use of assertions which are quite different in content, and that it does not compensate for this complex pragmatics by proposing a semantics which is sufficiently simpler than its competitors. Perhaps a more commonsensical theory will have an equally simple, or nearly as simple, semantics without the complex pragmatics of the crazy theory, and will therefore eke out a victory over the crazy theory in the contest for the simplest explanation of our linguistic behavior.

But this, it seems to me, is to be far too kind to the crazy theory. Even if it turns out to be every bit as simple as its competitors in its over-all explanation of how we use 'physician', it does not come close to being a plausible theory. It should be rejected because it has us using the term 'physician' almost exclusively to utter falsehoods, even when we are not basing our use of it on any false beliefs about relevant facts. The bold sceptic asks us to accept a similar result. As I've claimed, the only reason she should be taken any more seriously than a proponent of the crazy theory about 'physician' is that there are arguments which threaten to show that her position is correct. Once we

see that contextualism is able to resolve those arguments, however, we should accept contextualism as superior to the bold sceptic's sceptical invariantism.

Unger, it should be pointed out, seems to allow that contextualism's capacity to credit our attributions of knowledge with truth counts as <u>something</u> of an advantage it has over sceptical invariantism. He tries to balance this advantage against an advantage of sceptical invariantism: namely, that according to it, the conditions of knowledge are, as one would suppose they were, independent of our current interests. But here, we should recall the discussion of Chapter 1, section C. The contextualist can agree with the intuitively powerful claim that whether or not S knows that P depends entirely upon S's epistemic position with respect to P, and not at all upon our current interests, etc. (it depends upon subject factors, not attributor factors). Our current interests and other attributor factors only have an effect upon the truth conditions of the sentence "S knows that P". As I have admitted, insofar as we believe that our current interests do not affect the truth conditions of knowledge attributions, contextualism goes against this belief and invariantism will be seen as having an advantage over contextualism

in this respect. But, as I claimed in Chapter 1, this advantage is not that substantial, given that the contextualist can accommodate the much more powerful intuition that knowledge is independent of such factors as our current interests. The remaining advantage that sceptical invariantism retains does not seem to come close to matching contextualism's advantage of allowing that, on the whole, we speak truly when our attributions of knowledge are not based on factual mistakes.

N. Conclusions. I conclude that contextualism is superior to sceptical invariantism and, therefore, also superior to Unger's relativity thesis. And since it provides the best resolution of the puzzles generated by the sceptical arguments, we should not accept the bold sceptic's resolution of those puzzles. Thus, the sceptical arguments do not support the bold sceptic's contention that we speak falsely whenever we attribute external world knowledge to someone. In fact, the best resolution of those arguments has the result that our everyday knowledge attributions are largely true, provided, of course, that the relevant factors are pretty much as we believe them to be. No doubt, we do not know much about the external world if we are being

deceived by an evil genius. But, then, we aren't, as, in the usual sense (at an everyday strength), we all know perfectly well.

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