

## Skepticism, Contextualism, and Semantic Self-Knowledge

### I. Skepticism

Skeptical problems can be perspicuously represented as sets of individually plausible but mutually inconsistent epistemic claims. For instance, the problem of the external world can be represented as the problem of resolving the following inconsistency:

Closure (External World):

(A1) I know that I have hands.

(A2) If I know that p, and I know that p entails q, then I can know that q by deducing q from p.

(A3) I cannot know that I am not a handless brain-in-a-vat (“BIV”).<sup>1</sup>

Or, if we reject closure principle (A2), then we could represent the problem of the external world as the problem of resolving one or more of the following apparent inconsistencies:

Defeasibility (External World):

(B1) I know that, at the present moment (t1), I have hands.

(B2) I might come at some future time (t2) to acquire good evidence that I had not had hands at t1.

(B3) Were I to acquire such evidence at t2, then at t2 I could not know (even if I continued to believe) that I had had hands at t1.

(B4) If S knows that p, and S continues to have all of her current evidence for p and continues to believe that p on the basis of this evidence, then S cannot lose her knowledge that p *merely* by acquiring new evidence.<sup>2</sup>

Fallibility (External World):

(C1) I know that I have hands.

(C2) If S knows that p, then S can't be wrong about p.

(C3) The way in which I formed my beliefs that I have hands is not a perfectly reliable way of forming beliefs; any belief so formed can be wrong.<sup>3</sup>

Underdetermination (External World):

(D1) I know that I have hands.

(D2) My belief that I have hands is underdetermined by my evidence.

(D3) If S's belief that p is underdetermined by her evidence, then, for all S knows, not-p.<sup>4</sup>

Which of the preceding sets of statements we use to represent the problem of the external world will depend upon which of the general principles (A2), (B4), (C2), or (D3) we accept.

Similarly, the problem of other minds can be represented as the problem of resolving analogous inconsistencies. Thus, the Closure version of the problem of other minds would be the problem of resolving the following inconsistency:

Closure (Other Minds):

(X1) I know that John is in pain.

(X2) If I know that John is in pain, then I know that he's not *merely* exhibiting pain-behavior (without really being in pain).

(X3) I don't know that John isn't *merely* exhibiting pain-behavior.

We can also construct Defeasibility, Fallibility, and Underdetermination versions of the problem of other minds. Similarly, we can construct Closure, Defeasibility, Fallibility, and Underdetermination versions of the problem of the past, the problem of unobservables, the problem of induction, and so on. Each of the familiar skeptical problems comes in at least these four kinds, each kind employing a different general epistemic principle. Thus, skeptical problems vary along two dimensions: (1) which body of ordinary

knowledge claims is called into question by the puzzle (e.g., claims to knowledge of the external world, other minds, the past, unobservables), and (2) which general epistemic principle is used to generate the problem (e.g. closure, indefeasibility).<sup>5</sup>

## II. Contextualist Solutions to Skepticism

In recent years, several epistemologists have attempted to solve the Closure version of the problem of the external world by claiming that “know” is context-sensitive in its semantics: the truth-conditions of a sentence employing the word “know” depend upon features of the context in which that sentence is used (affirmed, denied, entertained, etc.).<sup>6</sup> Such “contextualist” solutions to the Closure version of the problem of the external world can obviously be generalized to the Closure version of the other skeptical problems. And, as I have argued elsewhere<sup>7</sup>, there is a particular contextualist account of “S knows that p” that generates a unified contextualist solution to all four versions of each skeptical problem.

Contextualist solutions to skeptical problems seem to possess at least the following three virtues: First, they do not require the denial of any member of the apparently inconsistent set in question; this is a virtue since each member of the set is plausible when considered by itself. Second, they explain why it is that each member of the set is plausible when considered by itself: each is plausible because, in the context in which it is typically entertained, it is *true*, and so, when we entertain it, we also recognize its truth (though we fail to recognize that its truth is relative to that particular context). And finally, these proposed solutions explain why it is that we were puzzled in the first place: we found each member of the apparently inconsistent set plausible when considered by itself, and yet the set is inconsistent.

If contextualist solutions to skepticism enjoy all these virtues, then there is considerable reason to accept them. But such solutions have been subjected to two kinds of attack in recent years:

- (a) Some philosophers have argued that contextualist solutions do not enjoy all these virtues, and
- (b) some philosophers have argued that, even if contextualist solutions do enjoy all these virtues, nonetheless these virtues are overshadowed by irremediable drawbacks.

Since criticisms of the first kind have been amply addressed elsewhere<sup>8</sup>, I shall here confine myself to addressing a criticism of the second kind. Specifically, I am interested in responding to a line of criticism first levelled by Stephen Schiffer, and subsequently developed by Thomas Hofweber and Patrick Rysiew.

Schiffer 1996 argues that contextualist solutions to skepticism rest on an implausible “error theory” concerning our semantic self-knowledge. Although Schiffer explicitly directs his attack against extant contextualist solutions to Closure, his arguments can be used equally well, *mutatis mutandis*, against contextualist solutions of any of the skeptical puzzles mentioned. Hofweber 1999 and Rysiew 2001 have developed different versions of this attack against contextualist solutions to skepticism. In what follows, I will defend contextualist solutions against this line of attack.<sup>9</sup>

### III. An Elaboration of Schiffer’s Objection to Contextualist Solutions

According to Schiffer, the problem with contextualist solutions is that they render it inexplicable how we could have been puzzled in the first place by the epistemological puzzles listed above. Here’s why: On the contextualist solution, skeptical puzzles arise because “people uttering certain knowledge sentences in certain contexts systematically confound the propositions that their utterances express with the propositions they would express by uttering those sentences in certain other contexts.”<sup>10</sup> We are troubled by skeptical arguments because we mistakenly believe the skeptic’s denial of knowledge to be incompatible with our ordinary attributions of knowledge. The skeptic and the ordinary knowledge attributor are making claims that only *appear* to be incompatible, though they are not really so. These claims appear to be incompatible because one appears to be the negation of the other. But they are not really incompatible because each claim contains some semantically context-sensitive element, and the semantic value of this element is not constant across the contexts in which the apparently incompatible claims are made. Schiffer envisions three ways for the contextualist to flesh out this claim about the semantics of knowledge attributions. The contextualist can claim that knowledge attributions contain a hidden indexical, or that the verb “to know” is itself indexical, or that the verb “to know” is vague. But, according to Schiffer, it doesn’t matter which of these accounts the contextualist prefers. For no matter which of these accounts she picks, she cannot plausibly claim that speakers systematically confound the propositions that their utterances express with the propositions they would express by uttering those sentences in certain other contexts.

To illustrate this point, suppose that the contextualist regards the verb “to know” as indexical. In that case, the contextualist is committed to regarding skeptical puzzles as involving the sort of confusion exhibited in the following situation, described by DeRose:

Two people who think they are in the same room but are in fact in different rooms [and] are talking to each other over an intercom [will] mean something different by “this room” when one claims “Frank is not in this room” and the other insists “Frank is in this room – I can see him!”<sup>11</sup>

Each of these people wrongly thinks that she is claiming something incompatible with what the other is claiming. But their claims are not really incompatible, because, unbeknownst to them, they use the phrase “this room” to refer to different rooms. If one of the parties to that apparent dispute finds out that the two of them are not in the same room, then she can be expected to realize that what she was claiming was not incompatible with what the other was claiming, for she can be expected to realize that the room to which she was referring is not the same as the room to which the other was referring. Of course, she may find out that the two of them are not in the same room, but still fail to realize that there is no incompatibility here. But this could only be because she was distracted, or inattentive, or linguistically incompetent. So there are three possible ways to explain the appearance of disagreement about Frank:

- (A) Ignorance of some semantically relevant matter of non-semantic fact (that the two disputants are in different rooms),
- (B) Distraction or inattention,
- (C) Linguistic incompetence.

Now, the apparent dispute about Frank is a case in which speakers are uttering sentences that contain an indexical phrase, and they mistakenly believe themselves to be thereby making incompatible claims. But we can design examples in which an apparent dispute results from the use of sentences containing hidden indexicals, or from the use of sentences containing vague terms. Here’s an example of each:

Two people who think they are in the same city but are in fact in different cities and are talking to each other over the phone will mean something different by “it is raining” when one claims “it’s not raining” and the other insists “it is raining – I can feel the drops on my head!”

Two people will mean something different by “flat” when one claims “Unlike Colorado, Nebraska is flat” and the other insists “Nebraska isn’t flat – when I lay my golfball on the ground in Omaha, it starts to roll!”

In the first of these cases, each person wrongly thinks that she is claiming something incompatible with what the other is claiming. But their claims are not really incompatible. If one of the parties to that

apparent dispute finds out that the two of them are not in the same city, then she can be expected to realize that what she was claiming was not incompatible with what the other was claiming. Of course, she may find out that the two of them are not in the same city, but still fail to realize that there is no incompatibility here. But this could only be because she was distracted, or inattentive, or linguistically incompetent. So, in the first of the cases described above, (A), (B), and (C) are the only three possible ways to explain the appearance of disagreement.

In the second of the cases described above, there is a fourth option: it could be that the parties to the apparent disputes are employing different criteria for flatness, and that each has something at stake in employing the particular criteria that she employs, rather than the criteria that the other employs. In such a case, each party can reasonably engage in the dispute even if she is attentive, linguistically competent, and aware of all the semantically relevant facts. Reasonable disagreements of this sort are common among parties applying vague terms. Thus, we sometimes reasonably disagree about which people are *wealthy*, which nations are *industrialized*, or which financial institutions are *secure*. Such disagreements can typically be explained not by appeal to any version of (A), (B), or (C), but rather by appeal to (D) the employment of different criteria of application for the term in question.

Now, according to contextualist solutions, the apparent incompatibility among the sets of statements in skeptical puzzles is of the same sort as the apparent incompatibility between the two claims made about Frank, the rain, or Nebraska. But in the latter cases, semantic context-sensitivity alone is insufficient to explain the appearance of incompatibility: we need also to appeal to some version of (A), (B), (C), or (D). If the appeal to semantic context-sensitivity is insufficient to explain the appearance of incompatibility in the cases just described, then it cannot be sufficient to explain the appearance of incompatibility in the case of a skeptical puzzle. Just as our explanation needs to appeal to some version of (A), (B), (C), or (D) in the former, then it must also appeal to some such factor in the latter. But can the contextualist plausibly offer such an explanation of the appearance of incompatibility in skeptical puzzles? We who find them puzzling do so even when we are undistracted and attentive, and even if we are masters of the relevant portions of our language. This rules out (B) and (C).

What about (D)? Might we be unwittingly employing varying criteria of application for the term “knowledge” when we are confronted with skeptical puzzles?<sup>12</sup> Let’s grant, at least for the sake of

argument, that people do typically employ different criteria of application for the term “knowledge” in different contexts. Is this what generates the skeptical puzzles? Are we tacitly employing one set of criteria of application when we assent to ordinary knowledge attributions, and a different set of criteria when we find the skeptic’s argument compelling? We can answer this question by appeal to the following test: For any predicate “F”, when two parties disagree about whether or not that predicate applies to a particular thing x, and their disagreement results from their employment of different criteria of application for “F”, then either (i) “F” is ambiguous, (ii) “F” is confused, i.e. has criteria of application that issue conflicting verdicts about particular cases, (iii) “F” is vague, i.e. has criteria of application that do not issue clear verdicts in every case, or (iv) “F” is contested, i.e. there is some dispute as to what are the correct criteria of F-ness.<sup>13</sup> Can the contextualist be understood as claiming that skeptical puzzles are generated by one of these four versions of (D)? Let’s examine each version.

Could the skeptical puzzle result from the ambiguity of “know”, as per version (i)? If it did, then there’s no reason why the considerations to be adduced in defense of skepticism (e.g., A3) and the considerations to be adduced against skepticism (e.g., A1) could not be consistently accepted at the same time. The conflict between the two sets of considerations would be *merely* apparent, like the conflict between the conjuncts in the conjunction “there is no bank (i.e., financial institution) in this town, but there is a (river) bank in this town.” It may be odd to assert this conjunction, but it is not inconsistent. The contextualist, however, is committed to claiming that, when we accept the considerations that seem to favor skepticism, then at that moment we cannot consistently accept the considerations that seem to refute skepticism. We cannot, according to the contextualist, consistently accept A1 and A3 at the same time. Each set of considerations is plausible (because true) in some context, but there is no context in which both are plausible, or true. But there is no explanation of this fact if the “ambiguity” version of (D) is right. Therefore, the contextualist cannot accept the ambiguity version of (D).

Could the skeptical puzzle result from the fact that “know” is a confused predicate, as per version (ii)? This is Schiffer’s own suggestion. I do not intend to argue against it here: for now we need only notice that the contextualist is committed to rejecting it. And since we are presently considering (D) as a way of spelling out the contextualism, we can reject Schiffer’s suggestion.

Could the skeptical puzzle result from the employment of different precisifications of the vague term “know”, as per version (iii)? If it did, then the dispute between the skeptic and the anti-skeptic would be like the dispute as to whether, say, a particular man is bald or not. To the extent that both parties to the latter dispute are making plausible claims, the man about whom they’re talking would be a borderline case of baldness. If he were a central case of baldness, or a central case of non-baldness, then one or the other party would be making an implausible claim. Similarly, since both the skeptic and the anti-skeptic are making plausible claims, the cases in dispute between them could only be *borderline* cases of knowledge. But recall that the skeptic is committed to attacking central cases of knowledge, for only by attacking those can her attack generalize beyond the selected case. So contextualism cannot be spelled out by appeal to version (iii) of (D).

Could the skeptical puzzle result from the fact that the skeptic and the anti-skeptic employ competing criteria, or conceptions, of knowledge, as per version (iv)? Notice that, if the skeptic’s conception of knowledge *competes* with the anti-skeptic’s conception – i.e., if this is not merely a case of ambiguity -- then there must be something that makes one of those conceptions *correct*. That is, there must be some factual basis for the correctness of one conception. In that case, the disagreement between the skeptic and the anti-skeptic is to be settled by appeal to that factual basis. But contextualism denies that this disagreement can be settled by appeal to any factual basis, so version (iv) of (D) cannot be a version of contextualism. In sum then, the contextualist cannot attempt to explain skeptical puzzles by appeal to any version of (D).

This leaves the contextualist with (A). The contextualist must then offer the following explanation of our puzzlement: when confronted with the skeptical puzzle, we are partly ignorant of the content of our epistemic claims, and this is because we are unaware of some fact that constitutively determines the content of our own epistemic claims. On Schiffer’s view, such an explanation is patently implausible, since we cannot be plausibly thought to suffer from such ignorance. Thus, for Schiffer, contextualist solutions cannot plausibly explain what they are obliged to explain.

#### IV. Assessment of Schiffer's Objection

Is Schiffer correct in claiming that it is patently implausible for the contextualist to claim that we are ignorant about the content of our own epistemic claims? As Hofweber points out, there are familiar actual cases in which we are ignorant about the content of our own claims. For instance, when we claim that the car is moving at 60 mph, we are – usually unbeknownst to ourselves -- claiming that the car stands in a certain relation to a frame of reference. When we claim that August is a summer month, we are – again sometimes unbeknownst to ourselves – claiming that August is a summer month *in the Northern hemisphere*. These are among the many cases in which, for Hofweber, a speaker's ignorance about the real nature of the thing that she's talking about makes her ignorant about the content of her own claim. Perhaps the contextualist can appeal to such cases in order to rebut Schiffer's objection.

But there is an important difference between the cases of semantic ignorance that Hofweber describes and the cases of semantic ignorance to which the contextualist solution is committed. In the cases that Hofweber describes, the content of our claims is partly fixed by the real, and possibly unknown, nature of the phenomena that we're talking about. Our semantic ignorance in those cases results from our ignorance of the real nature of the non-semantic phenomena. But the contextualist does not want to say that our semantic ignorance about our own knowledge attributions results from our ignorance of the real nature of knowledge. Rather, it's supposed to result from our ignorance about the way in which the content of those attributions depends upon contextual factors. And the contextual factors upon which it depends are all features of the attributor's thought or talk.<sup>14</sup> So the contextualist is committed to claiming that knowledge attributors are perplexed by skeptical puzzles because they are ignorant of features of their own thought or talk. And this is what Schiffer finds implausible.

There is another kind of case that might seem to provide comfort for the contextualist though. Suppose that you falsely believe the words "adjure" and "implore" to be synonyms.<sup>15</sup> Then you might say "I adjure you to go to the market" when what you really want to say is "I implore you to go to the market". In this case, what you've said is that you adjure your listener to go to the market. But you don't know that that's what you've said, for you don't know what "adjure" means. Here is a case in which you don't know what you've said: you don't know the meaning of the sentence that you've uttered. Can the contextualist appeal to such cases to provide a model for the semantic self-ignorance that she attributes to us?

Rysiew claims that she cannot. Here is what he says:

The contextualist wants to tie what the sentences we utter mean *very* closely to what we mean in uttering them: remember, the contextualist holds that changes in the content of knowledge-attributing sentences track changes in ‘context’; and both Cohen and DeRose conceive of context in terms of the purposes, intentions, beliefs, and so forth, of the *speaker*. But this just means that the independently plausible idea that we can be wrong about what *the sentences we utter* mean becomes, on the contextualist view, the manifestly *implausible* claim that we’re actually systematically mistaken about what we (knowledge attributors) mean in uttering knowledge-attributing sentences. It seems to me that the contextualist thus tries to save our pedestrian knowledge of such matters as whether we have hands against the sceptic’s attacks by giving up on the idea that we know what our communicative intentions are. But this is simply to trade one form of scepticism for another: epistemically speaking, we gain the world but lose our minds.<sup>16</sup>

Are Rysiew and Schiffer right to claim that, on the contextualist solution, knowledge attributors are systematically mistaken about their own communicative intentions?

Recall the comical dispute described above about whether or not Frank is in “this room”. Are the parties to that dispute mistaken about their own communicative intentions? In one sense, they are: each mistakenly believes her communicative intentions to be directed at a content that is incompatible with the content at which the other’s communicative intentions are directed. But in another sense, they are not mistaken about their own communicative intentions: each knows that she means to assert that *Frank is (/is not) in this room*. So each knows *something* about her own communicative intentions, but she doesn’t know *the whole truth* about her own communicative intentions. Specifically, she doesn’t know what inferential relation her own intended content bears to the other’s intended content. And, if they mistakenly believe themselves to be in the same room, then this is just what we should expect: each will mistakenly believe her own intended content to be incompatible with the other’s intended content. Here is a situation then, in which ignorance about a matter of non-semantic fact (here, the fact that the two of them are in different rooms) results in a partial ignorance about one’s own communicative intentions – specifically, about the relation that one’s own communicative intentions bear to someone else’s. Under such circumstances, such partial ignorance about one’s own communicative intentions is not just possible, but to be expected.

Now, can this plausibly be assimilated to a disagreement between a skeptic (who affirms A2 and A3 above, and so denies A1) and a Moorean anti-skeptic (who affirms A1 and A2, and so denies A3)? The skeptic knows that he means to assert that he doesn’t know that he has hands. And the Moorean knows that he means to assert the content that he does know that he has hands. Of course, these contents cannot be plausibly thought to be incompatible if the pronoun refers to different people, so let’s let the Moorean and

the skeptic merge into one person. This person is tempted by Mooreanism (and so finds A1 plausible) but is also tempted by skepticism (and so finds A3 plausible), and can't make up his mind. In finding A1 plausible, he is inclined to claim that he knows that he has hands. In finding A3 plausible, he is inclined to claim that he doesn't know that he has hands. So what knowledge must the contextualist deny such a person? The contextualist can grant that, when he is inclined to claim that he knows that he has hands, he knows that he is so inclined, and when he is inclined to claim that he doesn't know that he has hands, he knows that he is so inclined. What the contextualist must deny him is the knowledge that the content of the former semantic inclination is not incompatible with the content of the latter semantic inclination. But why is it implausible to deny him this knowledge? Why is it any more implausible to claim that this person is unaware of the compatibility of the contents of his semantic inclinations than to claim that the parties to the "Frank is in this room" dispute are unaware of the compatibility of the contents of their semantic intentions?

The parties in the "Frank" dispute are unaware of the compatibility of the contents of their semantic intentions because there is some non-semantic fact about their context – i.e., the fact that they are in different rooms – of which they are unaware. Is there some non-semantic fact about their context of which the skeptic and the Moorean may also be unaware? It may seem implausible to say that there is: after all, the parties to the "Frank" dispute are different people, whereas the skeptic and the Moorean are conflicting personae in one and the same person – maybe even one and the same person time-slice. Therefore, the skeptic's context of utterance can differ from the Moorean's context of utterance solely in respect of features internal to that single person's psychology – all the features external to her psychology are the same across the two contexts. For the skeptic and the Moorean to be ignorant of some such contextual fact is for that single person to be ignorant of the semantically relevant feature of her own psychology. (Different contextualists will identify different features of the attributor's psychology as relevant in determining the truth-conditions of the attribution, but all current contextualists will identify *some* feature of her psychology as relevant.) Is it implausible for the contextualist to attribute to us this form of semantic self-ignorance?

## V. What Kind of Semantic Self-Knowledge Must We (and Do We) Have?

In a moment, we'll test the plausibility of the contextualist's attribution of self-ignorance. But let's first consider why it matters that we have semantic self-knowledge. Shoemaker 1988 argues that it is a necessary condition of engaging in (at least minimally rational) cooperation or deliberation that a person know, for the most part, what beliefs, desires, and intentions she has: without such self-knowledge, she cannot reliably inform another person about her own interests and expectations, nor can she form rational plans on the basis of those interests and expectations. This general point about the need for self-knowledge has a corollary for the case of semantic self-knowledge. It is a necessary condition of engaging in (at least minimally rational) cooperation or deliberation *of certain kinds* that a person know, for the most part, what she means by her utterances: without such semantic self-knowledge, a person cannot reliably explain to others what it is that she meant, nor can she form rational plans about what to say next given what she's already said. Semantic self-knowledge is thus a necessary condition of rational participation in conversation, what I'll call "conversational rationality". In so far as conversational rationality matters, so does semantic self-knowledge.

Now, even if man is a rational animal, he is not a *perfectly* rational animal. Our cooperative endeavors, deliberations, and conversations needn't be perfectly rational, and that's a good thing, since they seldom are so. We need to have some minimal level of rationality to stay alive, and so we need to some substantial degree of self-knowledge. But we needn't, and don't, have complete and infallible access to our own minds. To illustrate this general point, we needn't appeal to theoretically controversial cases. We can appeal to an example as plain as this one:

Jones is a philosophy professor. He is considerably exercised by the problem of free will, and spends a lot of time talking about it with others. When he talks about the problem with his colleagues, he is chiefly interested in finding a solution to the problem. On those occasions, he raises objections to the half-baked thoughts that his interlocutors offer, with the intention of collectively refining these thoughts into an adequate account of free will. When he talks about the problem of free will with his students, he is arrogant and condescending. On those occasions, he raises objections to the half-baked thoughts that his students offer, with the intention of making his students appear stupid and making himself appear clever by comparison. When Jones receives his course evaluations, he finds that his students complain of his

arrogance and condescension. He refuses to believe that his students have legitimate grounds for complaint. Instead, he explains his students' complaints by saying that "they can't stand to have their ideas criticized". He supports this explanation by pointing out that, when he raises objections to his colleagues' half-baked ideas, *they* never complain of his arrogance or condescension. And yet, in Jones's view, his behavior towards his students is no more arrogant or condescending than his behavior towards his colleagues: in both cases, he raises objections to their half-baked ideas, with the sole aim of trying to solve the problem of free will.

In this case, Jones acts with one set of intentions towards his colleagues and with a different set of intentions towards his students, but he is unaware of the difference between his intentions across the two cases. Not that he is entirely unaware of his intentions in either case: in each case, he is aware that he intends to raise objections to the ideas offered by his interlocutors. But this similarity in his intentions across the two cases masks a deep difference, and Jones is not aware of the difference. This is not a case in which Jones is unaware of a difference that obtains across his *semantic* intentions in the two cases. Rather, it is a case in which he's unaware of a difference that obtains across his *perlocutionary* intentions in the two cases, i.e., his intention to achieve a certain effect by performing the speech acts that he performs. This ignorance on Jones's part results in his responding irrationally to his students' complaints, but it does not prevent him from engaging altogether in cooperation, deliberation, or conversation.

Just as Jones might suffer from such ignorance of his perlocutionary intentions, so too might he suffer from ignorance of his illocutionary intentions, or syntactic intentions, or (if Jones aspires to poetry) his phonetic intentions. In each case, although he recognizes a similarity in the relevant set of intentions across two cases, he might fail to recognize a difference masked by that similarity. And just as a psychotherapist might help Jones to gain knowledge of his own perlocutionary intentions, so too, a grammarian might help him to gain knowledge of his own syntactic intentions, and a phonetically sensitive listener might help Jones gain knowledge of his own phonetic intentions. And so too, I claim, a contextualist can help us to gain knowledge of our own semantic intentions. Just as some facts about our perlocutionary intentions are harder to know than others are, so too, some facts about our semantic intentions harder to know than others are. Contextualists have obscured this fact, and thereby encouraged Schiffer's criticism, by comparing skeptical puzzles to such simple cases of apparent disagreement as the

one about whether or not Frank is in “this room”. Skeptical puzzles pose challenges to our powers of semantic self-knowledge that are not posed by such simple cases of apparent disagreement.

The best test of the contextualist’s semantic hypothesis is to check whether the contextualist, like the psychotherapist, can get us to notice the semantic differences that she claims to obtain. And here, the failure of any particular version of contextualism does not tell against contextualism generally, any more than the failure of a particular therapeutic attempt tells against that therapeutic method generally. What the contextualist needs to do is to develop a version of contextualism that helps us to appreciate the semantically relevant difference between the context in which Moorean anti-skepticism is false and the context in which it is true, and thereby frees us from puzzlement. So long as the epistemological puzzles listed above remain puzzling, the contextualist has not offered an adequate solution to skepticism. Elsewhere, I have attempted to develop such a solution by appeal to an evidentiary analysis of knowledge and the semantic context-sensitivity of attributions of evidence.<sup>17</sup> But I haven’t the space here to go into that. For now, my conclusion is just this: the Schiffer-Hofweber-Rysiew objection, on its own, does not tell against the contextualist’s ability to offer an adequate solution to skeptical puzzles.<sup>18</sup>

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> This puzzle is developed in something close to this form in Unger 1975.
- <sup>2</sup> The problem of “knowing less by knowing more” is developed and discussed in Harman 1973, Ginet 1980. It should not be confused with the problem captured in what Malcolm 1950 calls “the verification argument”, i.e., the problem that one can allegedly never be certain of any empirical claim because one can never verify all of its infinitely many empirical consequences.
- <sup>3</sup> This is a generalization of the lottery puzzle, which was discovered by Kyburg 1961, and has been widely discussed since.
- <sup>4</sup> Recent discussions of the role of underdetermination considerations in motivating skepticism include Yalcin 1992, Brueckner 1994, Cohen 1998.
- <sup>5</sup> Perhaps we can think of skeptical problems as varying along a third dimension as well: which term of epistemic appraisal is employed in generating the problem (e.g., “knowledge”, “justification”, “evidence”, “warrant”).
- <sup>6</sup> Lewis 1979, Cohen 1988, DeRose 1995, Lewis 1996, Rieber 1998, and Neta 2003.
- <sup>7</sup> See Neta 2002.
- <sup>8</sup> See Feldman 1999, Sosa 2000, Klein 2000, and Kornblith 2000.
- <sup>9</sup> Cohen 1999 also rebuts Schiffer’s attack, but I shall not consider Cohen’s rebuttal here.
- <sup>10</sup> Schiffer 1996, 325.
- <sup>11</sup> DeRose 1992, 920.
- <sup>12</sup> Fogelin 1994 explains our tendency to withdraw our knowledge attributions under skeptical pressure by appeal to a version of (D).
- <sup>13</sup> Thanks to Mark Criley for suggesting to me this four-fold classification of versions of (D).
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. DeRose 1992 and Heller 1999 for this interpretation of contextualism.
- <sup>15</sup> I regret to say that the people responsible for the Microsoft Word Thesaurus believe this!
- <sup>16</sup> Rysiew 2001.
- <sup>17</sup> See Neta 2002 and Neta 2003.

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