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HOW TO DEFEAT OPPOSITION TO MOORE

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What modal relation must a fact bear to a belief in order for this belief to constitute knowledge of that fact? Externalists have proposed various answers, including some that combine externalism with contextualism. We shall find that various forms of externalism share a modal conception of “sensitivity” open to serious objections. Fortunately, the undeniable intuitive attractiveness of this conception can be explained through an easily confused but far preferable notion of “safety.” The denouement of our reflections, finally, will be to show how replacing sensitivity with safety makes it possible to defend plain Moorean common sense against the spurious advantages over it claimed by skeptical, tracking, relevant-alternative, and contextualist accounts.

A

A belief by S that p is “sensitive” iff were it not so that p, S would not believe that p. This concept is important in a line of thought developed by Dretske, Nozick, and DeRose, among others, each in his own way. It enables the following requirement.

Sensitivity In order to constitute knowledge a belief must be sensitive.

(That the subject's belief be sensitive is sometimes required rather for correct attribution to that subject of corresponding "knowledge." Although we shall take little further notice of this formulation, much of what follows could be recast in its terms.)

An "alternative" to a proposition is any incompatible possibility. (Among the truths only the contingent have alternatives, since no "possibility" can be incompatible with a necessary truth.) To "rule out" such an alternative is to know that it is not the case. The following principle of exclusion now seems plausible:

PE In order to know a fact P one must rule out (i.e., know to be false) every alternative that one knows to be incompatible with it.

That creates a problem for the sensitivity requirement. My belief that

(o) here is a hand

might constitute knowledge even though my belief that

(~h) I am not now fooled by a demon into believing incorrectly that here is a hand

is not sensitive, despite my knowing that <o> entails <~h>. But if my belief of <~h> is not sensitive, then the sensitivity requirement precludes my knowing <~h>, and precludes thereby my ruling out <h>, which, in combination with PE, precludes in turn my knowing <o>. Advocates of the "relevant alternatives" approach, relevantists, take this in stride by rejecting principle PE in its full generality. Instead they propose this:

PE-rel In order to know a fact P one must rule out every *relevant* alternative that one knows to be incompatible with it.

Thus one might know that (o) here is a hand, despite being unable to rule out the hypothetical possibility that (h) one is being fooled by a demon, etc.; or so say relevantists. Replacing PE with PE-rel enables them to reject the demand to exclude alternative <h>, if they can marginalize that alternative as irrelevant. What then is the difference between relevant and irrelevant alternatives? What makes an alternative irrelevant? No answer is generally accepted, even among relevantists, and the notion of relevance remains obscure, no published account having yet much relieved this darkness. (I do not expect relevance theorists to disagree radically with this estimate; one thinker's debilitating drawback is another's challenging open problem, to be resolved in due course.)

Here is an alternative approach.

Call a belief by S that p "safe" iff: S would believe that p only if it were so that p. (Alternatively, a belief by S that p is "safe" iff: S would not believe that p without it being the case that p; or, better, iff: as a matter of fact, though perhaps not as a matter of strict necessity, not easily would S believe that p without it being the case that p.)

Safety In order to (be said correctly to) constitute knowledge a belief must be safe (rather than sensitive).

While akin to Sensitivity, Safety has important advantages.¹

¹ Subjunctive conditionals do not contrapose, which makes safety inequivalent to sensitivity, as may be seen through counterexamples like the following.

Principle PE, for example, does not give Safety the problem we saw it give Sensitivity. Suppose the belief $\langle o \rangle$ above to be a *safe* belief, and consider the paired skeptical proposition $\langle \sim h \rangle$ that one knows to be entailed by $\langle o \rangle$. Although one's belief of $\langle \sim h \rangle$ is clearly not sensitive, it does seem quite safe. In other words, unlike sensitivity, safety is preserved under this known entailment. No belief constitutes knowledge unless safe, we may now say, while leaving ourselves free to exclude such skeptical scenarios that we know to be incompatible with something we know. If you know that p , and you know that some such scenario $\langle h \rangle$ is

First Argument.

Let f = Water flows from the faucet
 o = The main valve is open

Then we have: (a) $f \rightarrow \sim(f \& \sim o)$
 (b) $\sim[(f \& \sim o) \rightarrow \sim f]$

Both (a) and (b) seem intuitively right and hence constitute a prima facie counterexample to the general claim that the subjunctive conditional contraposes. If the subjunctive conditional contraposes, then we have to say that if (a) above is true then the following must also be true:

(c) $(f \& \sim o) \rightarrow \sim f$

But (c) seems intuitively unacceptable (while (a) seems still intuitively acceptable).

Second Argument.

Let p = I am not wrong in thinking that I have a hand before me.

And let's imagine a normal situation, like Moore's, where, while awake, alert, etc., one holds one's hand before one. Then we have:

(a) $B(p) \rightarrow p$
 (b) $\sim[\sim p \rightarrow \sim B(p)]$

Re (a): If I were to believe that I'm not wrong in thinking I have a hand before me, then I would not be wrong in so thinking surely, given the normal situation, the good light, the open eyes, etc. In such a situation one would believe that one was not wrong in thinking one had a hand before one, only if either (i) one did not have a hand before one and did not think one did, or (ii) one *did* have a hand before one and thought one *did*—therefore, only if one was not wrong in thinking that one had a hand before one. So we do get that $B(p) \rightarrow p$. Re (b): If I were to be wrong in thinking that I have a hand before me, would I then believe that I was wrong in so thinking? No, I would never believe that I was wrong in thinking that such and such, no matter what the "such and such" might be. Indeed, what I would believe is that I was *not* wrong in thinking that I had a hand before me. So in any case it would be false that $[\sim p \rightarrow \sim B(p)]$,

necessarily incompatible with $\langle o \rangle$, you are not precluded by the safety requirement from knowledgeably excluding that scenario.

Replacing the sensitivity requirement with the safety requirement may thus enable a unary conditionals-theoretic account of knowledge in need of no distinction between relevant and irrelevant alternatives. (This counters some at least of the rationale for the relevant alternatives tack.)

B. The Skeptic Answered: Moore, Nozick, and DeRose

What follows will explore sensitivity-based opposition to plain Moorean common sense. We shall find that several of the most striking attacks on plainness rest essentially, in one way or other, on some assumed requirement of sensitivity. Replacing sensitivity with safety would in one stroke undercut all such attacks.

First some abbreviations:

- h I am a handless brain in a vat being fed experiences as if I were normally embodied and situated.
- o I now have hands.

Here now is the skeptic's "argument from ignorance" AI:

1. I do not know that not-h.
2. If 1, then c (below).
- c. I do not know that o.

and true rather than $\sim[\sim p \rightarrow \sim B(p)]$. This shows once again that the subjunctive conditional fails to contrapose.

That lays out the skeptic's stance. G.E. Moore for his part grants the skeptic premise 2, but rejects C and therefore 1. Nozick's stance is different. Like Moore, he rejects C. Like the skeptic, he affirms 1. So he must reject 2, which he does aided by his independently supported account of knowledge as tracking. Tracking is in fact not preserved by entailment, nor even by known entailment. One can perfectly well track a fact P and yet fail to track a fact Q that one knows to be entailed by P. We already have an example: I know that O (above) entails not-H; but I track the former without tracking the latter.² It is not only Nozick who rejects closure under known entailment; so does the relevantist, for whom in order to know some fact X you need not know, and often cannot know, the negation of an alternative known to be incompatible with X, so long as it is not a "relevant" alternative.

Nozick's account implies a conjunction found "abominable" (one that would of course be no less "abominable" when derived from the relevant alternatives approach): namely, that I know O without knowing not-H.³ Despite rejecting the account for that reason, DeRose draws from it a key concept for his own contextualist response to the skeptic, that of sensitivity. Again, one's belief of <p> is sensitive if, and only if, were it not so that p, one would not believe it. My belief that here before me now is a hand is a sensitive belief, since: did I *not* now have a hand before me, I would not believe that I did.⁴

To that the contextualist response now joins a second key concept, that of the "strength of one's epistemic position." One's epistemic position with respect to P is stronger the more remote are the least remote possibilities wherein one's belief as to whether p does not match the fact of that matter.⁵

² Expressions of the form '<p>' will be short for corresponding expressions of the form 'the proposition that p'. Capitalization will also be used as an alternative device equivalent to such enclosing in angle brackets.

³ Keith DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," *The Philosophical Review* 104 (1995): 1 - 52; p. 28.

⁴ DeRose often works with a stronger "insensitivity" idea than the Nozickian one (or the one I am using). His stronger understanding is this: that if it were not so that p, one *would* believe that p anyhow. The weaker one is this: that it is false that if it were not so that p, one *would not* believe that p. (It seems to me that the stronger entails the weaker, but not conversely. However, DeRose does not distinguish these steadily, and tells me that he is inclined to think them equivalent.) I don't think this affects the dialectic to follow in any fundamental way.

⁵ "An important component of being in a strong epistemic position with respect to P is to have one's belief as to whether P is true match the fact of the matter as to whether P is true, not only in the actual world, but also at the worlds sufficiently close to the actual world. That is, one's belief should not only be true, but should be non-accidentally true, where this requires one's belief as to whether P is true to match the fact of the matter at nearby worlds. The further away one can get from the actual world, while still having it be the case that one's belief matches the fact at worlds that far away and closer, the stronger a position one is in with respect to P." *Ibid.*, p. 34.

These two concepts enable a distinctive response to argument AI. It is not enough, we are told, just to select some consistent stance on the three propositions involved: thus the Moorean stance, or the skeptic's, or Nozick's or that of relevant alternatives. Whatever stance one selects, a proper treatment of the paradox will require one to explain also why the argument is as plausible as it is.⁶ In particular, one will need to explain why it is that the skeptic's premise 1 is so plausible. This requirement the Mooreans have not met. Nor has Nozick properly explained the appeal of his rejected premise, premise 2, which one can reject only at the cost of denying the closure of knowledge under known entailment (and deduction).

DeRose meets that explanatory requirement through his new contextualism, according to which S is correctly attributed knowledge that o only if S's belief of O is strong enough by the operative standards. And how strong is "strong enough"? What sets the threshold in any given context? One crucial consideration is a certain salience in that context of some proposition H which one must knowledgeably rule out in order to know O. In a context with H thus salient, S can be said correctly to "know" O only if S would avoid belief/fact mismatch re O up to and including the least remote possibilities where H (and not just not-O) is the case. But in the skeptic's scenario H, S would go wrong both in believing not-H and in believing O.⁷

Compatibly, it may still be true to say in *ordinary* contexts that one "knows" O: there one is at least free of any skeptical challenge. In such contexts more relaxed standards allow one an epistemic position strong enough to render true the claim to "know" O. For it is now required only that one avoid belief/fact mismatch strongly enough to make one's belief sensitive: i.e., one that would be right in any possibility up to and including the least remote possibilities in which O was false.

Recall the skeptic's "argument from ignorance" AI:

⁶ Here and in his general framing of the skeptic's puzzle, DeRose acknowledges Stewart Cohen; see, e.g., Cohen's "How to be a Fallibilist," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): 91-123.

⁷ According to the "Rule of Sensitivity," restricted so as to make it most directly relevant to the skeptical paradox: "When it is asserted that some subject S knows (or does not know) some proposition P, the standards for knowledge (the standards for how good an epistemic position one must be in to count as knowing) tend to be raised, if need be, to such a level as to require S's belief in that particular P to be sensitive for it to count as knowledge." And this will also affect the standards for the evaluation of suitably related more ordinary propositions: "Where the P involved is to the effect that a skeptical hypothesis does not obtain, then this rule dictates that the standards will be raised to a quite high level, for, as we've seen, one must be in a stronger epistemic position with respect to a proposition stating that a skeptical hypothesis is false—relative to other, more ordinary, propositions—before a belief in such a proposition can be sensitive." (P. 36.)

1. I do not know that not-h.
2. If 1, then c (below).
- c. I do not know that o.

Three main positions have been adopted here:

Skeptic:	1, 2, c
Nozick, et al.:	1, ~c, ~2
Moore:	2, ~c, ~1

(Where Nozick represents those who deny closure under known entailment, which, again, includes those who opt for “relevant alternatives.”) DeRose has something interestingly fresh to say about this dialectic by in effect distinguishing whether an argument is sound in itself, as an abstract argument, from whether it would be sound to endorse it.⁸ An argument might be endorsed in any of at least three ways: (a) by public affirmation, (b) by conscious and occurrent thought, and (c) by implicit belief. DeRose’s contextualism implies that Moore’s argument could not correctly be endorsed at least in ways a and b, and perhaps not in way c either. However, this does not affect the soundness of the argument when unendorsed.

The unutterable soundness of Moore’s argument is subtly interesting and quite similar to the unutterable truth of “I am silent.” It may enable a fascinatingly attractive position on the skeptical paradox. According to DeRose’s contextualism, the Moorean combination (2, ~c, ~1) may be the abstractly sound argument, as compared with its rival arguments favored respectively by Nozick and the skeptic; but it can remain so only at the cost of being unuttered and unthought.⁹

Moore’s position may hence be correct but unendorsable. If one must take a position on the paradox, one of the three laid out as the skeptic’s, Nozick’s, and Moore’s,

⁸ His approach is fresh in appealing to threshold-setting within a dimension of *strength*, which distinguishes him from Stewart Cohen, who uses rather degree of *justification* as his dimension of relevant epistemic interest. (Cohen returns to these issues in the present volume.)

⁹ DeRose speaks of the components of AI as “propositions,” presumably indexical propositions, which can be truth-evaluated relative to various standards. It is in some such way that one would understand the abstract soundness of an argument such as Moore’s: ~C, 2; therefore, ~1.

then the right option is rather the skeptic's. For DeRose it is only the skeptic's position that is ever endorsable, in whatever context, inasmuch as the very endorsing of that position so changes the context as to make its endorsement correct.¹⁰

C. There's A Better Way

1. Sensitivity Not Necessary for Knowledge

The "sensitivity" of a belief that *p*—that were it not so that *p* one would not believe it—was rejected earlier as a necessary condition for the truth of the assertion that one "knows" *P*. What follows will support that rejection by showing how the sensitivity requirement runs against simple and striking counterexamples.

Suppose first we have two propositions as follows: (a) that *p*, and (b) that I do not believe incorrectly (falsely) that *p*. Surely no-one minimally rational and attentive who believes both of these will normally know either without knowing the other. Yet even in cases where one's belief of (a) is sensitive, one's belief of (b) could never be sensitive. After all, even if (b) were false, one would still

¹⁰ Although it remains a bit unclear whether, for the contextualism under review, Moore's argument is unendorsable even through implicit belief, the general lines of the position staked out are at least vaguely discernible. There is one other issue on which the position is not quite clear and distinct, however, namely whether we are definitely to affirm that the Moorean combination is a sound argument. I do not find an unambiguous verdict on this. Is the sort of indirect endorsement that would be involved in such an affirmation to be countenanced by this new contextualism? In *saying* that Moore's combination (2, ~c, and ~1) constitutes a sound argument, we are at least indirectly highlighting proposition 1. And having done that, it seems no more correct to say that the Moorean argument is sound than it would be to give the argument itself affirmatively in speech or in thought.

That may make the skeptic's paradox even more deeply paradoxical than might at first appear, from the perspective of our new contextualism. We dimly see that an argument might be sound even though it could never be identified directly so as to attribute its soundness to it. Its soundness could perhaps be attributed to it were it identified only quite indirectly, perhaps as the argument laid out on such and such a page of Moore's Philosophical Papers, or in some such way. As soon as the argument is identified more directly in terms of its actual content, however, soundness may no longer be attributed correctly to it. (How "directly" may the argument be specified compatibly with thinking or calling it sound? That is an interesting issue that threatens to enmesh us in controversies of content externalism in philosophy of language and mind.)

believe it anyhow. Still it is quite implausible that the assertion that I know (b) could never be true, not even in the many situations where the assertion that I know (a) *would* be true.¹¹

Second counterexample. On my way to the elevator I release a trash bag down the chute from my high rise condo. Presumably I know my bag will soon be in the basement. But what if, having been released, it still (incredibly) were not to arrive there? That presumably would be because it had been snagged somehow in the chute on the way down (an incredibly rare occurrence), or some such happenstance. But none such could affect my predictive belief as I release it, so I would still predict that the bag would soon arrive in the basement. My belief seems not to be sensitive, therefore, but constitutes knowledge anyhow, and can correctly be said to do so.¹²

Thirdly, sensitivity is doubtful as a condition for our being correctly said to have knowledge of any apodictically necessary truth *A*, given how hard it would be to make sense of the supposition that not-*A*. This problem leads Nozick himself to abandon the requirement of sensitivity for such truths.

2. Better Safe Than Sensitive

These problems for sensitivity do not affect our “safety.” A belief is sensitive iff had it been false, *S* would not have held it, whereas a belief is *safe* iff *S* would not have held it without it being true. For short: *S*'s belief *B*(*p*) is sensitive iff $\sim p \rightarrow \sim B(p)$, whereas *S*'s belief is safe iff $B(p) \rightarrow p$. These are not equivalent, since subjunctive conditionals do not contrapose.¹³

¹¹ See my “Postscript to “Proper Functionalism and Virtue Epistemology,” in *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology*, ed. by Jonathan Kvanvig (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), pp. 271-81. Can anyone find that consequence acceptable? In fact, DeRose is well aware of this problem, and waves it aside for future consideration, proposing in the meantime an ad hoc stopgap. This problem is also in Jonathan Vogel’s “Tracking, Closure, and Inductive Knowledge,” in S. Luper-Foy, ed., *The Possibility of Knowledge* (Rowman&Littlefield, 1987). Compare moreover: (c) *p*, and (d) if I’m not mistaken, *p*. Even when one tracks and thereby can know that *p*, one could never track the likes of (d), for the reason, precisely, that belief of (d) could not be sensitive. This sort of counterexample, unlike the one to follow, strikes me as conclusive.

¹² This sort of problem is also presented by Vogel, *op.cit.*, and is endorsed by Stewart Cohen in his “Contextualist Solutions to Epistemological Problems: Skepticism, Gettier, and the Lottery,” forthcoming in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.

¹³ If water now flowed from your kitchen faucet, it would *not* then be the case that water so flowed while your main valve was closed. But the contrapositive of this true conditional is clearly false.

DeRose gives a persuasive defense of the sensitivity idea common to the various forms of sensitivity-based opposition to Moore: namely, the skeptical, tracking, relevant-alternative, and contextualist approaches that share some form of commitment to that requirement. This idea supports the skeptic's correctness in affirming the first premise of AI. Ordinary claims to know can apparently be sustained only by distinguishing ordinary contexts in which such claims are made from contexts where the skeptic asserts his distinctive premise in the course of giving argument AI. With this difference in context comes a difference in standards, and because of this difference, it is incorrect to say in a skeptic's context that one knows O, correct though it may remain to say it in an ordinary context.

That response to the skeptic faces a problem. Nozick and DeRose argue that sensitivity is necessary for correct attributions of knowledge. The requirement that a belief must be sensitive if it is to be (correctly characterizable as) "knowledge" is found to be broadly *prima facie* plausible: in many cases it is found intuitively that the failure of a belief to be (correctly characterizable as) "knowledge" may be explained through the fact that the belief would remain in place even if false (in circumstances determined by the context of attribution). The problem for this way of arguing is that an alternative explanation is equally adequate for undisputed cases (undisputed, for example, between the Moorean who rejects the skeptic's distinctive premise 1 and the contextualist who is willing to affirm it). According to this alternative explanation, it is safety that (correct attribution of) "knowledge" requires, a requirement violated in the ordinary cases cited, wherein the subject fails to know. One fails to know in those cases, it is now said, because one's belief is not safe. Suppose this generalizes to all uncontentious cases adduced by the contextualist to favor his sensitivity requirement. Suppose in all such cases the condition required could just as well be safety as sensitivity. And suppose, moreover, that the problems for sensitivity briefly noted do not affect safety, as I have claimed. If so, then one cannot differentially support sensitivity as the right requirement, in support of the skeptic's main premise.

Here is the striking result: if we opt for safety as the right requirement then a Moorean stance is defensible, and we avoid skepticism.¹⁴ That is to say, one does satisfy the requirement that one's belief of not-H be safe: after all, not easily would one believe that not-H (that one was not so radically deceived) without it being true (which is not to say that not possibly could one believe that not-H without it being true). In the actual world, and for quite a distance away from the actual world, up to quite remote possible worlds, our belief that we are not radically deceived matches the fact as to whether we are or are not radically deceived.¹⁵

D. A Moorean Stance Defended

One last job will complete our defense of the Moorean stance. Recall the compelling requirement that a fully adequate treatment of the paradox explain to us why the component of the paradox rejected by that treatment seems so plausible. We might try to meet this requirement by explaining how the skeptic is guaranteed to be right in affirming his distinctive premise (while we are pleasantly surprised that we can still ordinarily "know" that we have hands, etc.). This is the approach of the contextualism just reviewed.

In his special context, with the raised standards, the skeptic's main premise turns out to be true. However, one need not explain plausibility in terms of truth. Many false things are plausible and we can explain why they are plausible without having to consider them true. We are said to face illusions at every turn, from the humble perceptual and cognitive illusions of interest to psychologists to the more momentous illusions alleged by Freud and Marx. In all such cases illusion may be said to explain plausibility. (One might however prefer to view illusion as misbegotten plausibility, so that the plausibility is constitutive of the illusion, which therefore cannot explain it

¹⁴ I mean that *we* in our reflection and in our discussions in journal and seminar, avoid skepticism; we can say right here and now that we do know various things, and not just that we say "I know" correctly in various contexts not now our own.

¹⁵ This sort of externalist move has been widely regarded as unacceptably circular, mistakenly, as I argue in "Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 68 (1994): 268-90, and in "Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles," *Journal of Philosophy* 94(1997): 410-30.

really; still, in all such cases of illusion it may be explained why something strikes us as plausible despite being false.)

Consider, moreover, the need to explain how the skeptic's premise—that one does not know oneself not to be radically misled, etc.—is as plausible as it is. That requirement must be balanced by an equally relevant and stringent requirement: namely, that one explain how that premise is as implausible as it is.¹⁶ To many of us it just does not seem so uniformly plausible that one cannot be said correctly to know that one is not at this very moment being fed experiences while envatted. So the explanatory requirement is in fact rather more complex than might seem at first. And given the distribution of intuitions here, the contextualist and the Nozickian, et al., still owe us an explanation.

Interestingly, our distinction between sensitivity and safety may help us meet the more complex explanatory demand, compatibly with the Moorean stance, which I adopt as my own. My preferred explanation may be sketched as follows.

- a. It is safety that is required for knowledge (and for its correct attribution), not sensitivity. It is required that $B(p) \rightarrow p$, and not that $\sim p \rightarrow \sim B(p)$.¹⁷
- b. Take our belief that we are not radically deceived as in a skeptical scenario such as H. Since that belief *is* safe, the skeptic cannot argue for his distinctive premise by alleging that here we violate the safety requirement.
- c. Safety and sensitivity, being mutual contrapositives, are easily confused, so it is

¹⁶ Informal polling of my classes has revealed (of course defeasibly) that those who find it false outnumber those who find it true, and quite a few prefer to suspend judgment. At every stage people spread out in some such patters of three-way agreement-failure.

¹⁷ This is actually a first approximation that will need to be qualified. A closer approximation that preserves the spirit of safety and the opposition to sensitivity may be found in my "How Must Knowledge Be Modally Related to What is Known?" in the festschrift for Sydney Shoemaker forthcoming in Philosophical Issues. (I should emphasize that I use the arrow merely as an abbreviatory device. So 'p→q' abbreviates the likes of 'As a matter of fact, though perhaps not as a matter of strict necessity, it would not be so that p, without it being so that q'; etc.; or, perhaps better: 'As a matter of fact, though perhaps not as a matter of strict necessity, not easily would it have been so that p without it being so that q'.)

easy to confuse the correct requirement of safety (for knowledge and its correct attribution) with a requirement of sensitivity. It is easy to overlook that subjunctive conditionals do not contrapose.

- d. Those who find the skeptic's distinctive premise plausible on the basis of sensitivity considerations may thus be confusing sensitivity with safety, and may on that basis assess as correct affirmations of that premise. After all, the requirement of safety is well supported by the sorts of considerations adduced generally by the sensitivity-based opposition to Moore. Sensitivity being so similar to safety, so easy to confuse, it is no surprise that one would find sensitivity so plausible, enough to mislead one into assessing as correct affirmations of that premise.
- e. The plausibility of the skeptic's premise is thus explained compatibly with its falsity, which fits the stance of the Moorean. Once that premise (premise 1 of AI) is thus rejected, finally, two other things are then avoidable: first, one can avoid "abominable" conjunctions and still preserve our ordinary knowledge; second, in doing so one can avoid both the semantic ascent and the contextualist turn favored by many recent treatments of the paradox.¹⁸

Thus may a Moorean epistemology defend itself against "sensitivity-based" objections, whether wielded by the skeptic, by the Nozickian et al., or by the contextualist. These three alternatives to a plain Moorean stance all require that in order to constitute knowledge a belief must first be "sensitive." We reject that requirement, and thereby support our preferred Moorean alternative.

Of course all we really need in order to explain the plausibility of the skeptic's premise is that it clearly enough follow from something plausible enough. And the sensitivity requirement may perhaps fulfill that role well enough independently of whether it is confused

with a safety requirement. But that would still leave the question of why sensitivity is so plausible if it is just false. And here there might still be a role for safety if it can function as a plausible enough requirement, one both true and defensible through reflection, and one that appeals to us simply through our ability to discern the true from the false in such a priori matters. Compatibly with that, some of us may be misled into accepting the requirement of sensitivity because it is so easily confused with the correct requirement, that of safety, thus succumbing to cognitive illusion.¹⁹

E. Objections and Replies

Objection 1

We have before us an explanation for why it is that people find it as plausible as they do that we do not know ourselves to be free of such skeptical scenarios as that of the evil demon and that of the envatted brain. But how would we explain the extent to which people find it plausible to think that we do not know ordinary things such as that one has hands, once exposed to the skeptic's reasoning? Does the contextualist have an advantage in that regard?

Reply

¹⁸ A turn found problematic in my "Contextualism and Skepticism," forthcoming in [Philosophical Issues](#).

¹⁹ I need hardly say how much this work owes to writings of Fred Dretske, Robert Nozick, and Keith DeRose. Portions of it were read at the Conference on Methods meeting of May, 1998, where Richard Feldman and Jonathan Vogel commented, and at the SOFIA meeting of June 1998, where Hilary Kornblith, Keith Lehrer, and James Tomberlin did so. (And the present paper overlaps in part my contribution to the proceedings of that conference.) David Sosa was helpful both editorially and philosophically, as was discussion in both my seminar and my dissertation group at Brown, and in the Gibbons/Unger seminar at NYU. Thank you all!

If people are persuaded that a belief can amount to knowledge only if sensitive, and they are also persuaded that whatever follows obviously from the known must itself be known, then it is not surprising that they may puzzle over how they can possibly know that they have hands if they do not know that they are not handlessly envatted, etc. Moreover, I do not see why our new contextualist should enjoy any advantage here, since he does accept that what follows obviously from the known must itself be known. So the new contextualist in fact grants us what we need for our explanation.

Objection 2

Doesn't the requirement of safety share with the requirement of sensitivity the drawback that it makes knowledge not closed under deduction? Could one not then know that p , deduce that q from one's premise that p , and yet not know thereby that q ?

Reply

Yes, in fact this is one reason why our account of safety is only at best a first approximation. Here now is a closer approximation (or an initial sketch of one). What is required for a belief to be safe is not just that it would be held only if true, but rather that it be based on a reliable indication. What counts as such an indication? Indications are deliverances, as when you ostensibly perceive, or remember, or deduce something or other. A *deliverance* in the product sense is a proposition, i.e., what is delivered; in the process sense it is the delivering. A proposition is thus delivered to you when something inclines you to believe it, as in the ostensible perception, memory, or sound conclusion. Such a deliverance is an indication if and only if it would occur only if the delivered proposition were true. Again, a belief is safe if and only if it is based on a reliable indication. And it is this more complex safety that is

required for knowledge, not the simpler one that I offered for comparison with the Nozick/DeRose sensitivity. Of course, that sensitivity requirement is itself also a first approximation, and Nozick has recourse to his “methods” in his fuller account. So there is no disadvantage in respect of complexity for safety as compared with sensitivity.²⁰

²⁰ Actually, this second approximation is close but itself needs further improvement. This and related issues are taken up further in my “How Must Knowledge Be Modally Related to What is Known,” *op. cit.* For example, I favor requiring for one’s belief to be knowledge that it be based on an indication, where an indication is in the way specified a reliable or itself “safe” delivering. (But in addition the delivering must be fundamentally through the exercise of an intellectual virtue. Thus the source that yields the deliverance must be virtuous, i.e., in a reliable or trustworthy way a source of truth; and moreover, if it is a source that is based on a more fundamental source, then the most fundamental source involved must be thus virtuous. Thus if I normally infer from something’s being a sea-creature that it is a mammal, and it is this that underlies my inference from something’s being a whale to its being a mammal, then the latter source, despite being virtuous, is not a source of knowledge or apt belief.)