1. **The Skeptical Paradox**

1.1. **Reminders**

The Skeptical Paradox highlights that the following three propositions are inconsistent with each other: (1) I know that o, (2) I don’t know that not-SH, (3) If I know that o, then I know that not-SH.

- Here o is an ordinary proposition about the external world (e.g. I have hands) and SH is a skeptical hypothesis (e.g. I’m a brain in a vat.)

The Skeptical Argument resolves this paradox by rejecting the first claim, i.e.

S1. I don’t know that not-SH. (2, above)

S2. If I know that o, then I know that not-SH. (3, above)

SC. ∴ I don’t know that o. (not-1, above. a.k.a. the Skeptical Conclusion; from 2, 3)

1.2. **Three anti-skeptical strategies**

We can know that skeptical hypotheses are false (not-S1)

It is possible to know to have ordinary knowledge while not knowing that skeptical hypotheses are false (not-S2)

The Skeptical Paradox is illusory; careful analysis of (1), (2), (3) shows that they’re actually consistent.

1.3. **Relevant Alternatives: The Big Picture**

Consider the strategy in which we deny that knowledge of ordinary propositions requires knowledge of the falsity of skeptical hypotheses. (not-S2)

RA1. If one knows that o, then one only needs to know that relevant alternatives to o are false.

RA2. Skeptical hypotheses (SH) aren’t relevant alternatives to o.

not-S2. ∴ It is possible that one knows that o, even if one does not know that not-SH. (from RA1, RA2)

However, note how plausible S2 seems in the Skeptical Argument. If one wants to have a very compelling position that S2 is false, one should consider possible arguments for S2, and show that they’re wrong. There are two possible arguments for S2: the Infallibilist Argument and the Closure Argument.

2. **Semantic Contextualism**

Recall that there were three anti-skeptical strategies. One of them claimed that the Skeptical Paradox isn’t really a paradox. How does that work? Roughly, it holds that “knows” is a contextually-sensitive word, like “tall.” Here’s how the analogy works:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In ordinary contexts, I know that I have hands.</th>
<th>In contexts in which I’m compared with my other family members, I’m tall.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In skeptical contexts, I don’t know that I have hands.</td>
<td>In contexts in which I’m compared with basketball players, I’m not tall.</td>
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</table>

Just as there’s no contradiction in saying that I’m tall in one context and not tall in another, there’s no contradiction in the Skeptical Paradox: (1) I know that o (in ordinary contexts), (2) I don’t know that not-SH (in skeptical contexts); and (3) If I know that o, then I know that not-SH (in any single context.)

2.1. **The Contextualist’s Argument**

1. Semantic contextualism provides the best explanation of the following three facts:
   I. Ascriptions of knowledge to people in conversational contexts in which skeptical error- possibilities have been raised seem improper.
   II. In ‘ordinary’ conversational contexts in which no skeptical error-possibilities are in play, it seems perfectly appropriate to ascribe knowledge to people.
   III. All that may change when one moves from a non-skeptical conversational context to a skeptical context are mere conversational factors.

2. ∴ Semantic contextualism is true. (From 1,2)

2.2. **What is Semantic Contextualism?**

*Core idea:* The strength of the epistemic position that one needs to be in so as to count as knowing varies according to one’s conversational context.
What's an epistemic position? If $S$ is in a strong epistemic position with respect to proposition $p$, then $S$ has a belief as to whether $p$ is true which matches the fact as to whether $p$ is true, for all non-remote possibilities.

What makes one epistemic position stronger than another? The more remote these possibilities become, the stronger $S$'s epistemic position.

How do conversational contexts change? The introduction of a statement $q$ changes the conversational context if: (a) $q$ was previously implicit and is subsequently made explicit, and (b) $q$'s falsehood is a more remote possibility than any statement that was explicit prior to $q$'s being made explicit, i.e. $q$ is more demanding than these other statements.

- *Ex.* Consider the following to be facts about the actual world:
  
  $p =$ I'm having dinner with my brother.
  
  $q =$ The garden gate is closed.

  Presumably, it would require a bigger departure from actuality for me not to be having dinner with my brother than for the garden gate to be open. According to the preceding,

  - If I know that *I'm having dinner with my brother*, then the least remote possibility in which the I'm not having dinner with my brother is also a possibility in which I don't believe that *I'm having dinner with my brother*.
  
  - If I know that *the garden gate is closed*, then the least remote possibility in which I'm not having dinner with my brother and the garden gate is open is also a possibility in which I don't believe that the garden gate is closed.

2.3. **Explaining the Facts**

**Explanation of Fact I:** If a skeptical hypothesis is made explicit, then it raises the epistemic standards. It's now the most remote possibility in the context, and furthermore, if we were brains in vats, we wouldn't believe that we're brains in vats. So, our beliefs don't track with the relevant facts, and we don't know that we're not brains in vats.

**Explanation of Fact II:** By contrast, if a skeptical hypothesis is an implicit statement in this context. In the least remote possibility in which I'm not eating dinner with my brother (e.g. because he cancels), I'm still not a brain in a vat. Furthermore, there is no possibility less remote than this in which I falsely believe that I'm not a brain in a vat. So, in all the relevant possible worlds, my beliefs as to whether I'm a brain in a vat track with the facts. So, I know that I'm not a brain in a vat.

**Explanation of Fact III:** What's the difference between contextualist treatment of I and II? Just that certain things are made explicit. Thus, the contextualist shows that mere changes in conversational contexts can affect whether you know something or not.

### 3. Problems with Semantic Contextualism

3.1. **Semantic contextualism concedes too much to the skeptic**

1. Even if contextualism is true, there is no way to tell whether:
   a. The skeptic's standards are high and invariant, and everyday standards merely reflect loose talk, i.e. if skepticism is true; or
   b. Epistemic standards are context-sensitive, and we thereby do have knowledge in everyday contexts, i.e. if contextualism is true.
2. If there is no way to tell whether skepticism or contextualism is true, then we don't know whether we know anything.
3. If we don't whether we know anything, then skepticism is true.
4. ∴ Even if contextualism is true, skepticism is true. (From 1-3)
3.2. **Semantic contextualism does not explain Fact 1**

1. If contextualism is true, then we know that skeptical hypotheses are false in everyday contexts only if they are implicit.
2. If we know that skeptical hypotheses are false in everyday contexts, then this knowledge is acquired empirically.
3. If knowledge that $p$ can only be acquired by leaving $p$ implicit, then knowledge that $p$ is not acquired empirically.
4. ∴ Contextualism is not true. (From 1-3)

3.3. **Semantic contextualism is unnecessary**

1. If contextualism is true, then in ordinary contexts we know ordinary propositions.
2. If, in ordinary contexts, we know ordinary propositions, then the Skeptical Paradox can be resolved without any additional contextualist assumptions, i.e. semantic contextualism is unnecessary for resolving the Skeptical Paradox.
3. ∴ Even if semantic contextualism is true, then it’s unnecessary for resolving the Skeptical Paradox. (From 1-3)

4. **Neo-Wittgensteinian Epistemology**

4.1. **General Template**

1. A **hinge proposition** is any statement that does not require empirical support, cannot be coherently doubted, and that is presupposed by knowledge of ordinary propositions.
2. The denials of skeptical hypotheses are hinge propositions.
3. ∴ The denial of skeptical hypotheses does not require evidential support and cannot be coherently doubted.

**Main challenge:** How are hinge propositions possible?

4.2. **Wright**

1. If I’m warranted in believing things purely through reflection, then I’m warranted in believing that I’m not dreaming.
2. Skeptics are warranted in believing things purely through reflection (including that if they know that $a$, then they know that they’re not dreaming).
3. Skeptics are warranted in believing that they’re not dreaming.
4. If skeptics are warranted in believing that they’re not dreaming, then the proposition I’m not dreaming does not require empirical support, cannot be coherently doubted, and is presupposed by knowledge of ordinary propositions, i.e. is a hinge proposition.
4. ∴ I’m not dreaming is a hinge proposition.

**Question:** How does knowledge of ordinary propositions support knowledge that skeptical hypotheses are false? See Neo-Mooreanism.

4.3. **Williams’ Inferential Contextualism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities with Semantic Contextualism</th>
<th>Differences with Semantic Contextualism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which error-possibilities are salient is a contextual matter.</td>
<td>Contexts are individuated not by conversational features (what’s explicit/implicit), but by the inferential structure of that context (what is taken as a premise/ “methodological necessity”/hinge proposition, what counts as a good explanation, which inferences are relevant, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closure Principle is true in a single context; apparent violations equivocate between contexts.</td>
<td>Skeptical contexts don’t have higher standards than ordinary contexts; simply different standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skeptic is right in her context; ordinary people are also right in theirs.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Recent Work on Skepticism, Part 2
1. If skepticism is true, then only statements about immediate experience (it seems to me that \( p \)) can justify statements about the external world (\( p \)).
2. If only statements about immediate experience (it seems to me that \( p \)) can justify statements about the external world (\( p \)), then *epistemological realism* is true, i.e. there is only a single, fundamental, and context-independent inferential structure for knowledge.
3. There are multiple context-dependent inferential structures for different kinds of knowledge, none of which is more fundamental than another.
4. \( \therefore \) Skepticism is not true.

5. **Neo-Moorean Responses to Skepticism**

   5.1. **General Template**
   1. If I know that \( o \), then I know that not-SH.
   2. I know that \( o \) (not-SC)
   3. \( \therefore \) I know that not-SH.

5.2. **Safety/Anti-Luck Epistemology**

   How can one affirm not-SC without begging the question against the skeptic?

   Pritchard invokes the *Safety Principle*: \( S \) knows that \( p \) if \( S \)'s true belief that \( p \) could not easily have been false.
   - The only possibilities in which \( S \)'s belief that \( p \) is false are remote possibilities.
   This is compatible with the Closure Principle: if my belief that \( p \) could not easily have been false, and \( p \) entails \( q \), then my belief that \( q \) could not easily have been false.

   Safety accounts only treat non-remote possibilities as relevant alternatives. It thus has decided advantages over sensitivity accounts (see above).

   Safety accounts also do not have to capitulate anything to the skeptic, e.g. that the skeptic is correct in her own, high-standards contexts. It thus has decided advantages over semantic contextualism (see above).

5.3. **Diagnosing skepticism's appeal**

   Why do skeptical arguments seem so compelling if they can be refuted by such a simple or 'flat-footed' rebuttal as the Neo-Moorean's argument?

   Pritchard suggests that semantic contextualism should be revised: instead of being a theory about how standards for knowledge change from context to context, it is better construed as a theory about how standards for making *correct assertions* about knowledge change across contexts. The skeptic exploits these “assertion maneuvers” to make it *seem* as if standards of knowledge are changing.

6. **Epistemological Externalism and the New Skeptics**

   6.1. **Unger's Infallibilism**
   Just as careful reflection on concepts such as flatness and emptiness reveal that nothing is, strictly speaking, flat or empty, so too does careful reflection on knowledge reveal that nothing is, strictly speaking known, because we will always fail to know that some skeptical hypotheses are false.
   6.2. **Nagel and the view from nowhere**
   1. If knowledge of the external world is possible, then we need some way of knowing that is completely free of human subjectivity.
   2. No way of knowing is free of human subjectivity.
   3. \( \therefore \) Knowledge of the external world is not possible.
   6.3. **Stroud and understanding**
   1. If it is impossible to understand our cognitive relation to the external world, then skepticism is true.
   2. It is impossible to understand our cognitive relation to the external world.
   3. \( \therefore \) Skepticism is true.
6.4. **Internalism versus externalism?**

1. If internalism is true, then there is some substantive necessary condition of knowledge (typically a kind of justification) that a person can know by reflection alone.
2. If knowledge that skeptical hypotheses are true has some substantive necessary condition that a person can know by reflection alone, then neither semantic contextualism nor neo-Mooreanism is true.
3. ∴ If internalism is true, then neither semantic contextualism nor neo-Mooreanism is true.
4. If there is some substantive necessary condition of knowledge (typically a kind of justification) that a person can know by reflection alone, then the Closure Principle is true.
5. If the Closure Principle is true, then sensitivity accounts are false.
6. ∴ If internalism is true, then sensitivity accounts are false.

6.5. **Do externalists cheat in resolving the Skeptical Paradox?**

1. We cannot know that our beliefs are safe/sensitive by reflection alone.
2. If we cannot know that our beliefs are safe/sensitive by reflection alone, then even if we know because our beliefs are safe/sensitive, we do not know that we know.
3. ∴ Even if externalism solves “lower-level” skeptical problems, there are “higher-level” or “meta-epistemological” problems that only internalism solves.