

## **SCEPTICISM, CONTEMPORARY**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The problem of scepticism is one of the key topics in philosophy, both in terms of the history of the subject and the contemporary literature. This entry focuses on the contemporary discussion, which has tended to be largely concerned with the particular sceptical question of whether widespread knowledge of the world is possible.

### **GENERAL OVERVIEWS**

There are a number of introductory overviews of the sceptical debate currently available, though they can vary quite a lot in terms of what they offer and the extent to which they are up to date on the recent developments. Klein (2005) offers a very comprehensive and up to date overview of the contemporary literature on scepticism, and it also has the advantage of being freely available on-line. Klein (2002) is also fairly up to date and comprehensive, albeit not to the same degree. Pritchard (2002) offers a comprehensive and up to date survey of the contemporary literature on scepticism. Although DeRose (1999) is an introduction to an edited collection, the comprehensive nature of the volume in question means that it covers all the main issues. Williams (1999) offers a quite partisan treatment of the debate, but since he is one of the main figures working on these issues this is nevertheless a helpful contribution. Vogel (2005) offers a critical response to the problem of scepticism, to which Fumerton (2005) responds. Read together, these two articles are very useful if one wishes to get a grip on the opposing positions that are available in this respect (i.e., scepticism and anti-scepticism). Cohen (1998) is the shortest of the pieces listed here, but would still be useful if one wanted to get a very quick grasp of the main issues.

Cohen, S. (1998). 'Scepticism', *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (ed.) E. Craig, 795-6, London: Routledge.

[This is a very short introduction to the contemporary debate, and so it leaves a lot out. Still, it flags the main issues, and so would be of use to someone who wanted a very quick overview of the topic].

DeRose, K. (1999). 'Introduction: Responding to Skepticism', *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, (eds.) K. DeRose & T. Warfield, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[A very good introduction to the contemporary debate, one that also covers, unusually, semantic externalist responses to the sceptical problem, and also accords more status to scepticism-friendly treatments of the problem than is usual. Note that this is an introduction to an anthology—one of the key anthologies on the contemporary debate regarding scepticism presently available—and so proceeds for the most part by summarizing and discussing the papers collected in this anthology].

Fumerton, R. (2005). 'The Challenge of Refuting Skepticism', *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, (eds.) E. Sosa & M. Steup, 85-97, Oxford: Blackwell.

[Essentially a defence of a broadly scepticism-friendly position. Note that this article is responding to Vogel (2005), who offers a defence of the opposing, anti-sceptical, position. Reading the two articles together thus provides a good sense of what is at issue in the debate regarding scepticism].

Klein, P. (2002). 'Skepticism', *Oxford Handbook to Skepticism*, (ed.) P. Moser, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[A very good article on the contemporary literature on scepticism].

Klein, P. (2005). 'Skepticism', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (ed.) E. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism/>.

[A very comprehensive state-of-the art entry on the contemporary literature, and freely available on-line. Note that this article overlaps to a certain degree with Klein (2002), but covers more ground and is more up-to-date].

Pritchard, D. H. (2002). 'Recent Work on Radical Skepticism', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39, 215-57.

[This is the only formal survey of the recent literature on the sceptical problem, and offers a fairly comprehensive account of the main views].

Vogel, J. (2005). 'The Refutation of Skepticism', *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, (eds.) E. Sosa & M. Steup, 72-85, Oxford: Blackwell.

[Essentially a defence of an anti-sceptical stance. Note that this article is responded to by Fumerton (2005), who offers a defence of the opposing position. Reading the two articles together thus provides a good sense of what is at issue in the debate regarding scepticism].

Williams, M. (1999). 'Skepticism', *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, (eds.) J. Greco & E. Sosa, Oxford: Blackwell.

[This is a somewhat partisan introduction to the debate, but it is nonetheless a very useful account in that it offers an influential perspective on the issues, one informed from a broadly contextualist outlook on the problem].

## TEXTBOOKS

There are a number of useful textbooks available on this topic, though a general problem that they tend to face is that the nature of the current literature—which is constantly generating new proposals—means that they date very quickly. In particular, there was a significant wave of new developments on this topic which began in the late 1990s and gathered steam in the early part of the next decade but which tends to be largely overlooked by the main textbooks available. One possible exception is Williams (2001) which does manage to cover some of the more recent developments, particularly contextualism. If supplemented with more recent additional literature all of the books listed should be able to provide a good overview of the main issues and the history of scepticism, which can be very useful in gaining a deeper understanding of the contemporary debate. Hookway (1990) and Williams (2001) offer quite partisan treatments of the debate, whereas Gascoigne (2002) and Landesman (2002) instead try to give a more objective assessment of the main positions in the literature. Gascoigne

(2002) is the most accessible of the four textbooks, though they are all quite accessible (none of them is particularly inaccessible).

Gascoigne, N. (2002). *Scepticism*, Chesham: Acumen.

[An excellent overview of the literature, including a very good discussion of some of the history of scepticism and its relevance to the contemporary debate, although some key issues are omitted, such as recent contextualist responses to scepticism. Very accessible].

Hookway, C. (1990). *Scepticism*, London: Routledge.

[Part of a series which covers key topics in philosophy. Only the second part considers contemporary responses to the problem, such as in the work of Quine and Wittgenstein, and here the author takes a quite partisan line, offering his own perspective on the issues. Some of this coverage is now out of date].

Landesman, C. (2002). *Skepticism: The Central Issues*, Oxford: Blackwell.

[Offers a good historically-informed overview of the debate, but it fails to cover the most recent developments on this topic].

Williams, M. (2001). *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[Although this is meant to be a general introduction to epistemology, the main focus of the work is on the sceptical problem. The book takes a quite partisan approach, focusing on the contextualist treatment of the, but nonetheless it offers a very comprehensive overview of the issues].

## ANTHOLOGIES

The list of anthologies available on this topic seems to be continually growing, which is a strong indication of the level of interest in this area. Greco (2008) is the most current collection available. For a comprehensive survey of the main issues consult DeRose & Warfield (1999). Landesman & Meeks (2003), Luper (2003) and Sosa & Villanueva (2000) are all reliable collections of papers on the general topic of scepticism. Landesman & Meeks (2003) also includes a helpful selection of key historical texts in addition to more contemporary writings. Greco (2008) and Sosa & Villanueva (2000) both feature new material specifically commissioned for those volumes, and Luper (2003) features a mix of new articles and some previously published work. Others listed collect important examples of previously published work.

DeRose, K., & Warfield, T. (eds.). (1999). *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[Considered one of the best collections available, but it does not represent some more recent developments such as current work on contextualism. The introduction to the volume offers a comprehensive survey of the recent debate on scepticism].

Greco, J. (ed.). (2008). *The Oxford Handbook to Scepticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[This is a collection of new articles covering all the main issues in this debate, including both historical and contemporary approaches to the problem. It is extremely comprehensive and the entries are all of a very high quality, so it is set to be a key reference work in this area for a long time to come].

Landesman, C., & Meeks, R. (2003). *Philosophical Skepticism*, Oxford: Blackwell.

[Collects both historical and contemporary writings on the problem of scepticism. While offering an excellent selection of historical pieces, it is rather thin on contemporary articles on the problem].

- Luper, S. (ed.). (2003). *The Sceptics: Contemporary Essays*, Aldershot: Ashgate.  
 [This volume contains an impressive range of new articles on the topic, from many of the leading figures. Interestingly, it also reprints a couple of classic papers which have been very influential on the contemporary discussion].
- Sosa, E., & Villanueva, E. (eds.). (2000). *Philosophical Issues* (vol. 10), Oxford: Blackwell.  
 [New papers on the problem of scepticism by key figures in the literature, with each paper accompanied by a series of short commentaries. Covers some central views/issues, particularly the contextualist response to the sceptical problem].

### PRECURSORS TO THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

For a clear understanding of the contemporary discussion, it is useful to consult some of the foundational works from the relatively recent philosophical landscape. Of the immediate precursors to the contemporary literature on scepticism, works by Austin, Lewis, Moore and Wittgenstein have arguably had the most influence. Annis (1978), Austin (1961), Cavell (1979), Clark (1972), Lewis (1979) and Wittgenstein (1969) have had a lot of influence on contextualist responses to the problem of scepticism. Moore (1939) has had a great deal of influence on commonsense—or ‘neo-Moorean’—responses to the sceptical problem. Putnam (1981) is the classic text when it comes to exploring the potential anti-sceptical implications of semantic externalism.

- Annis, D. (1978). ‘A Contextual Theory of Epistemic Justification’, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, 213-219.  
 [A very influential paper in contemporary epistemology which clearly sets out a contextualist account of justification, one that has important ramifications for our understanding of the sceptical problem].
- Austin, J. L. (1961). ‘Other Minds’, reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, (eds.) J. O. Urmson & G. J. Warnock, 44-84, Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
 [A number of Austin’s writings have relevance to the problem of scepticism, but this is the piece that has had the most impact on the current debate. It has been particularly influential on relevant alternatives and contextualist approaches].
- Cavell, S. (1979). *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Scepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
 [This book draws on work by Austin and Wittgenstein to offer a distinctive approach to the problem of scepticism. See especially part two].
- Clark, T. (1972). ‘The Legacy of Skepticism’, *The Journal of Philosophy* 69, 754-69.  
 [This paper has been influential on relevant alternatives—and, to a certain extent, contextualist—responses to the sceptical problem].
- Lewis, D. (1979). ‘Scorekeeping in a Language Game’, *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8, 339-59.  
 [Lewis here prefigures his contextualist response to the sceptical problem, which he developed more fully in much later work. By this time, however, others had already begun using the ideas set out in this paper to develop their own contextualist responses to the sceptical problem].
- Moore, G. E. (1939). ‘Proof of an External World’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25; reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, London: Allen & Unwin (1959).  
 [Outlines Moore’s famous commonsense proof that there is an external world, which was meant to be a decisive strike against scepticism].
- Putnam, H. (1981). ‘Brains in a Vat’, from his *Reason Truth and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[A key discussion of how semantic externalism can have ramifications for certain sceptical hypotheses, potentially making them necessarily false].

Wittgenstein, L. (1969). *On Certainty*, (eds.) G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, (tr.) D. Paul & G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

[Although a number of Wittgenstein's writings are relevant to the sceptical problem, it is this text—which is essentially his final notebooks—which has been most influential on the contemporary discussion].

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCEPTICAL ARGUMENTS

There has been a fair amount of discussion regarding how best to understand the sceptical problem. The key issue is what the relationship is between formulations of the sceptical problem that essentially trade on the closure principle and those formulations which essentially trade on an underdetermination principle. Brueckner (1994) makes the seminal contribution to this debate, and also offers the clearest statement of what the closure and underdetermination principles are, and their relevance to the sceptical problem. In this work, Brueckner argues that it is in fact the underdetermination-based sceptical problem that poses the more pressing challenge (in that the closure-based sceptical argument already implicitly trades on the underdetermination principle, while the underdetermination-based sceptical argument does not trade on the closure principle). This proposal is critically explored in Cohen (1998), Vogel (2004) and Pritchard (2005). Yalçin (1992) offers an interesting perspective on how an underdetermination principle underpins the sceptical challenge.

Brueckner, A. (1994). 'The Structure of the Skeptical Argument', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54, 827-35.

[This is the seminal contribution to this issue, which highlights the role that closure and underdetermination principles play in the sceptical argument. Controversially, it argues that it is the underdetermination principle which is more central to the sceptical argument, and not the closure principle as many suppose].

Cohen, S. (1998). 'Two Kinds of Skeptical Argument', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58, 143-59.

[This is an important critical response to Brueckner (1994) which argues that, *contra* Brueckner, there is no important logical difference between underdetermination-based and closure-based sceptical arguments].

Pritchard, D. H. (2005). 'The Structure of Sceptical Arguments', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55, 37-52.

[Offers a critical discussion of the literature on this topic, and Brueckner (1994) and Cohen (1998) in particular].

Vogel, J. (2004). 'Varieties of Skepticism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 68, 1-37.

[Offers an excellent taxonomy and discussion of the different ways in which the sceptical argument can be formulated].

Yalçin, Ü. (1992). 'Skeptical Arguments from Underdetermination', *Philosophical Studies* 68, 1-34.

[An important exploration of the role of underdetermination principles in the sceptical argument].

## TRANSCENDENTALISM AND NATURALISM

For the most part, the contemporary literature on scepticism has avoided appeal to transcendental arguments, despite the fact that such arguments have been relatively popular historically. The two main exceptions to this are Davidson (1983) and McDowell (1995).

Davidson offers a broadly transcendental argument for the claim that belief, as he puts it, is “in its nature veridical”; McDowell argues that we cannot even make sense of our thoughts representing the world except on the supposition that (*contra* the sceptic) thought directly engages with the world, and he concludes that the very idea of a ‘veil of perception’ whereby we only experience the world indirectly should be dismissed as simply incoherent. Strawson (1985) also falls into this general category, in that he argues on broadly Humean grounds for the incoherence of scepticism. Stern (1999) is an edited collection of contemporary papers on transcendental arguments, while Stern (2000) offers a recent perspective on this topic.

Davidson, D. (1983). ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, *Kant oder Hegel?*, (ed.) D. Henrich, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

[In this paper, Davidson famously argues that it follows from the nature of belief that one’s beliefs must be generally true. Hence he concludes that those sceptical arguments which presuppose the possibility that most of one’s beliefs could be false should be rejected. Although Davidson discusses this idea in a number of works, it is in this paper that the potential anti-sceptical implications of this thesis are made most explicit].

McDowell, J. (1995). ‘Knowledge and the Internal’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (4), 877-893.

[This paper is important in terms of McDowell’s contribution to the debate regarding scepticism in that it offers the most recent statement of his view—*viz.*, that we cannot even make sense of our thoughts representing the world except on the supposition that, *contra* the sceptic, thought directly engages with the world. It is also the statement of his position that is most accessible to those familiar with the contemporary epistemological literature].

Strawson, P. F. (1985). *Scepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*, London: Methuen.

[This influential discussion of the sceptical problem makes essential appeal to the idea that we are inevitably committed to regarding scepticism as incoherent].

Stern, R. (ed.) (1999). *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[This is the key contemporary collection of articles on transcendental arguments, including transcendental responses to the sceptical problem].

Stern, R. (2000). *Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism: Answering the Question of Justification*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[An important recent book on transcendental responses to the sceptical problem].

## WITTGENSTEINIAN APPROACHES

Inspired mostly by *On Certainty* (1969), a number of commentators have tried to offer a distinctive approach to the sceptical problem, one that trades on the idea that there are certain ‘bedrock’ or ‘hinge’ commitments that we are compelled to have. The thought is that recognising this fact, and its implications for the way we think of the epistemological project, has important implications for how we think of the sceptical problem. Williams (1991) is the key text in this regard, in that it offers a comprehensive discussion of the sceptical problem from this perspective, one that offers a broadly contextualist response to the sceptical problem. Williams (1991), McGinn (1989) and Stroll (1994) discuss the Wittgensteinian response to the sceptical problem in light of Moore’s (1939) commonsense response. Wright (2004) has been one of the key figures who has argued for a Wittgenstein-inspired response to the sceptical problem which is explicitly anti-contextualist. Davies (2004) and Wright (2004) respond to one another as part of a symposium on this particular rendering of the Wittgensteinian position. Pritchard (2009) offers a useful survey of the various

Wittgensteinian positions available and discusses the influence of these views on the contemporary debate regarding scepticism. McManus (2004) is an important recent collection of articles on Wittgensteinian treatments of scepticism.

Davies, M. (2004). 'Epistemic Entitlement, Warrant Transmission and Easy Knowledge', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 78 (supp. vol.), 213-45.

[This is a response to Wright (2004), and thereby offers a different perspective on the particular kind of Wittgenstein-inspired response to scepticism put forward by Wright].

McGinn, M. (1989). *Sense and Certainty: A Dissolution of Scepticism*, Oxford: Blackwell.

[This is a classic discussion of the Wittgensteinian response to scepticism. Arguably, it offers an anti-sceptical position which is closest to what Wittgenstein had in mind in *On Certainty*].

McManus, D. (ed.) (2004). *Wittgenstein and Scepticism*, London: Routledge.

[A recent collection of articles on Wittgenstein's contribution to the problem of scepticism, with many of the leading contemporary figures in this regard represented].

Pritchard, D. H. (2009). 'Wittgenstein on Scepticism', *The Oxford Handbook to Wittgenstein*, (eds.) M. McGinn & O. Kuusela, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[Offers a survey of Wittgensteinian responses to the sceptical problem, along with a discussion of their relative merits].

Stroll, A. (1994). *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[An influential discussion of Wittgenstein's treatment of the sceptical problem which also explicitly considers Wittgenstein's position in light of Moore's (1925; 1939; 1959) commonsense anti-sceptical position].

Williams, M. (1991). *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, Oxford Blackwell.

[A tremendously influential book on the contemporary literature on radical scepticism, this offers an extremely comprehensive response to the sceptical problem from a Wittgensteinian perspective. In particular, this book offers one of the first fully-developed contextualist treatments of the sceptical problem].

Wright, C. (2004). 'Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free)?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 78 (supp. vol.), 167-212.

[Wright surveys one key aspect of his general response to the sceptical problem, which is the idea that as regards our belief in certain propositions—'hinge' propositions, broadly speaking—our warrant for believing them is in an important sense unearned, and so gained by default].

## **SCEPTICISM AND EXTERNALISM**

A popular idea in the contemporary literature has been that the sceptical problem in some way essentially trades on epistemic internalist intuitions about knowledge, intuitions that should be rejected once one has opted for an externalist epistemology. Sosa (1994), Hill (1996) and Greco (2000) offer three treatments of the problem cast along this general line, where each opt for a broadly reliabilist response to the sceptical problem. Stroud (1994) offers a critical response to Sosa (1994) from an internalist perspective. Williamson (2000) offers a distinctive line on this topic, claiming that the sceptical problem presupposes an outdated internalist account of evidence. Once this presupposition is rejected, argues Williamson, the sceptical argument is completely blocked. Most recently, Pritchard (2005) has argued that while epistemic externalism does offer a way of responding to the main formulation of the sceptical argument, it cannot adequately deal with a distinct version of the sceptical argument which essentially trades on internalist intuitions.

- Greco, J. (2000). *Putting Sceptics in Their Place: The Nature of Sceptical Arguments and their Role in Philosophical Inquiry*, New York: Cambridge University Press.  
[An historically-oriented discussion of the problem of scepticism which offers an externalist response that is set within a form of virtue reliabilism].
- Hill, C. (1996). 'Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Scepticism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56, 567-581.  
[Offers a very straightforward presentation of a reliabilist response to the sceptical problem].
- Pritchard, D. H. (2005). 'Scepticism, Epistemic Luck, and Epistemic Angst', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83, 185-206.  
[Argues that while a certain form of epistemic externalism can deal with the core version of the sceptical argument, it leaves a different kind of sceptical argument—one that essentially trades on internalist intuitions—untouched].
- Sosa, E. (1994). 'Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (suppl. vol.) 68, 263-290.  
[Offers a sophisticated discussion of the nature of the sceptical problem and the resources available to the epistemic externalist to answer that problem. This paper is responded to by Stroud (1994)].
- Stroud, B. (1994). 'Scepticism, 'Externalism', and the Goal of Epistemology', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (supplementary vol.) 68, 290-307.  
[A spirited attack on the externalist response to the sceptical problem, and Sosa (1994) in particular].
- Williamson, T. (2000). 'Scepticism and Evidence', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60, 613-28.  
[Argues that the sceptical problem essentially trades on an implausible internalist account of evidence].

### **SCEPTICISM AND THE CLOSURE PRINCIPLE FOR KNOWLEDGE**

One influential contemporary response to the sceptical problem has been to argue that this problem essentially trades on a closure principle for knowledge, a principle that can legitimately be rejected. This approach to the sceptical problem was pioneered by Dretske (1981) and Nozick (1981). A very useful early collection of articles on Nozick's epistemology, many of which focus on this aspect of his view, is Luper-Foy (1987). Key critical responses to this anti-sceptical line are offered by Stine (1976) and Klein (1995). More recently, Wright (2004) has argued that we should distinguish the closure principle from a distinct, but closely related, epistemic principle that he calls the transmission principle. It is this second principle, argues Wright, that should be rejected. Davies (2004) responds to Wright (2004), though takes a broadly similar line. Dretske & Hawthorne (2005) is a recent symposium on whether closure should be rejected.

- Davies, M. (2004). 'Epistemic Entitlement, Warrant Transmission and Easy Knowledge', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 78 (supp. vol.), 213-45.  
[This is a response to Wright (2004), but nonetheless takes the same basic line of maintaining that it is the transmission principle that the sceptical argument trades upon, rather than the closure principle, and that it is the transmission principle that should be rejected].
- Dretske, F. (1970). 'Epistemic Operators', *Journal of Philosophy*, 67, 1007-1023.

[One of the main texts in which the case for the rejection of the closure principle is made, and what the anti-sceptical implications of rejecting this principle are. See also Nozick (1981)].

Dretske, F., & Hawthorne, J. (2005). 'Is Knowledge Closed Under Known Entailment?', *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, (eds.) E. Sosa & M. Steup, 13-26, Oxford: Blackwell.

[This is a symposium between Dretske and Hawthorne, with Dretske making the case against closure and Hawthorne making the case for. This is the most recent defence of the rejection of the closure principle by Dretske].

Klein, P. (1995). 'Skepticism and Closure: Why the Evil Genius Argument Fails', *Philosophical Topics* 23, 213-36.

[One of the main works which is critical of the anti-sceptical rejection of the closure principle. This paper argues that in fact one can use the closure principle to answer the sceptical problem].

Luper-Foy, S. (ed.). (1987). *The Possibility of Knowledge*, Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield.

[An anthology of new papers on Nozick's epistemology as it appears in Nozick (1981). Many of these papers focus on Nozick's rejection of the closure principle and the putative anti-sceptical implications of this move].

Nozick, R. (1981). *Philosophical Explanations*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[One of the main texts in which the case for the rejection of the closure principle is made, and what the anti-sceptical implications of rejecting this principle are. See also Dretske (1970; 1981)].

Stine, G. C. (1976). 'Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure', *Philosophical Studies* 29, 249-61.

[A key attack on Dretske (1970). Argues that Dretske's argument for the rejection of the closure principle fails to go through. Many have seen in this paper an embryonic version of epistemological contextualism].

Wright, C. (2004). 'Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free)?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 78 (supp. vol.), 167-212.

[Argues that it is the transmission principle which the sceptical argument trades upon, rather than the closure principle, and that it is the transmission principle that should be rejected. Davies (2004) offers a response, albeit one that takes the same basic line in this regard].

## CONTEXTUALISM

The main wave of fully-fledged contextualist responses to the sceptical problem includes Cohen (1999), DeRose (1995), Lewis (1996) and Williams (1991), though note that there are some important differences between Williams' view and the views presented by the other three authors (in particular, his contextualism is meant to be the product of a certain kind of diagnosis of the source of scepticism, rather than offering a self-standing response to the sceptical problem). Unger (1984) also argues for a form of contextualism, but claims that this view actually accentuates rather than resolves the sceptical problem. More recently, Neta (2003) has argued for a contextualist response to the sceptical problem which proceeds by offering a contextualist account of evidence. For an overview of the main issues, see Rysiew (2006), which is comprehensive, freely accessible and very up-to-date. Hawthorne (2004) offers a new perspective on this debate by putting forward a proposal where the context-sensitivity in question is specifically relative to the subject's context.

Cohen, S. (1999). 'Contextualism, Skepticism, and the Structure of Reasons', *Philosophical*

*Perspectives* 13, 57-90.

[Offers a very thorough account of Cohen's contextualist epistemology and its implications for the sceptical problem].

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

[This is the key statement of DeRose's contextualist account of knowledge and of its implications for the sceptical problem].

Hawthorne, J. (2004). *Knowledge and Lotteries*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[Offers an important defence of a kind of subject contextualism which has different implications for the sceptical problem than other forms of contextualism].

Lewis, D. (1996). 'Elusive Knowledge', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, 549-67. [The developed statement of Lewis's contextualist response to the problem of scepticism].

Neta, R. (2003). 'Contextualism and the Problem of the External World', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63, 1-31.

[Offers a contextualist response to the problem of scepticism which makes appeal to a contextualist account of evidence].

Rysiew, P. (2006). 'Epistemic Contextualism', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (ed.) E. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contextualism-epistemology/>.

[A very useful and comprehensive overview of the current literature on contextualism in epistemology].

Unger, P. (1984). *Philosophical Relativity*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[Argues for a form of contextualism in epistemology, but claims that this brand of contextualist actually accentuates the sceptical problem rather than resolves it].

Williams, M. (1991). *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, Oxford Blackwell.

[A tremendously influential book on the contemporary literature on radical scepticism, this offers a contextualist response to the sceptical problem from a Wittgensteinian perspective].

## NEO-MOOREANISM

Neo-Mooreans try to offer a broadly commonsense response to the sceptical problem, one that involves as little revisionism as possible. The key text in this regard is Sosa (1999), in which he argues that once we realise the centrality of the safety principle to knowledge then it begins to become plausible to suppose that could know the denials of sceptical hypotheses, *contra* the sceptic. This general line is developed in Pritchard (2005). Black (2002) argues that even if one regards the sensitivity principle as central to knowledge, one can still resist the sceptical claim that we are unable to know the denials of sceptical hypotheses. Pryor (2000) argues that simply in virtue of having certain experiences one can be justified in believing propositions about one's immediate environment, such as that one has a hand, and he extracts a neo-Moorean moral from this point. Greco (2003) offers a neo-Moorean response to the sceptical problem that is explicitly informed by virtue epistemology. Pritchard (2008) offers a new defence of neo-Mooreanism which makes use of epistemological disjunctivism.

Black, T. (2002). 'A Moorean Response to Brain-In-A-Vat Scepticism', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80, 148-63.

[Argues that our beliefs in the denials of sceptical hypotheses can satisfy the sensitivity principle after all, contrary to what many claim. On this basis the author argues for a neo-Moorean response to the sceptical problem that makes use of this principle].

Greco, J. (2003). 'How to Reid Moore', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52, 544-563.

[Argues for a neo-Moorean response to the sceptical problem which is explicitly informed by virtue epistemology].

Pritchard, D. H. (2005). *Epistemic Luck*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[A comprehensive defence of the neo-Moorean response to scepticism which tries to motivate the anti-sceptical use of the safety principle by showing that such a principle is required in one's theory of knowledge in order to eliminate knowledge-undermining epistemic luck].

Pritchard, D. H. (2008). 'McDowellian Neo-Mooreanism', *New Essays on Disjunctivism*, (eds.) A. Haddock & F. Macpherson, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[Offers a new defence of neo-Mooreanism which makes use of epistemological disjunctivism].

Pryor, J. (2000). 'The Sceptic and the Dogmatist', *Noûs* 34, 517-49.

[Argues for a view with neo-Moorean ramifications on which simply having certain experiences justifies you in believing propositions about your immediate environment, such as that you have a hand].

Sosa, E. (1999). 'How to Defeat Opposition to Moore', *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, 141-54.

[An influential defence of a neo-Moorean response to the sceptical problem which makes use of the safety principle].

## THE NEW SCEPTICS

While inevitably the main focus in the contemporary literature is on trying to resolve the sceptical problem, there are quite a few key figures who maintain that the sceptical problem is intractable, or at least harder to resolve than others claim. Fogelin (1994) looks to ancient Pyrrhonian scepticism for support for this thesis, while Fumerton (1995) considers some broadly metaepistemological considerations. There are similarities between Fumerton's approach and that put forward by Stroud (1984), who argues that once we understand the kind of generality we require of an account of knowledge we realise that the sceptical problem is in a sense inescapable (in that we have to deny something obvious in order to evade it). Unger (1975) argues that knowledge requires absolute certainty and that absolute certainty in turn requires infallibility and thus that scepticism quickly follows. In more recent work, Unger (1984) has argued for a contextualist account along the general lines as that discussed above, but still sees such a view as lending support to scepticism rather than anti-scepticism. Nagel (1986) treats the sceptical problem as arising out of our natural intellectual desire to adopt what he calls a 'view from nowhere'. In more recent work, Pritchard (2008) has argued that we should construe the sceptical argument not as trying to deprive us of knowledge, but rather as trying to deprive us of a particularly valuable epistemic standing which essentially involves cognitive achievement. With the sceptical argument so understood, however, Pritchard claims that we lack the resources to respond to it.

Fogelin, R. (1994). *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[Building on the ancient Pyrrhonian sceptical tradition, Fogelin offers a scepticism-friendly account of knowledge].

Fumerton, R. (1995). *Metaepistemology and Skepticism*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

[Argues on broadly metaepistemological grounds that the sceptical problem is much more difficult to respond to than many, particularly epistemic externalists, suppose].

Nagel, T. (1986). *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[Argues that the sceptical problem is a result of our natural intellectual inclination to

- adopt a kind of ‘God’s eye view’, and thus that it is in a sense inescapable].
- Pritchard, D. H. (2008). ‘Radical Scepticism, Epistemic Luck and Epistemic Value’, *Proceedings and Addresses of the Aristotelian Society (suppl. vol.)* 82, 19-41.  
[Argues that the sceptical argument is best thought of as targeting a particularly valuable kind of epistemic standing which essentially involves cognitive achievement, but that with the problem so construed it is not clear that we have the resources to respond to it].
- Stroud, B. (1984). *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
[Argues that the sceptical problem, properly formulated, is a paradox, in the sense that it trades on platitudes that we would all otherwise accept. As a result, Stroud contends that any response to scepticism will inevitably put one in the absurd position of denying something which is apparently obviously true].
- Unger, P. (1975). *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
[Argues for a kind of infallibilism about knowledge which has direct sceptical implications].
- Unger, P. (1984). *Philosophical Relativity*, Oxford: Blackwell.  
[Argues for a form of contextualism about knowledge, albeit one which, according to Unger, accentuates rather than resolves the sceptical problem].

### **EMERGING TOPICS: CONTRASTIVISM AND DISAGREEMENT**

There are two key emerging topics in the contemporary debate regarding radical scepticism. The first, argued for by Schaffer (2005), offers a contrastivist account of knowledge according to which all knowledge is to be understood as relative to a contrast class, a view which, it is claimed, undermines the sceptical challenge. The second, due to Frances (2005), offers new grounds for scepticism by reflecting on the epistemology of disagreement, particularly among experts.

- Frances, B. (2005). *Scepticism Comes Alive*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
[Presents a new argument for radical scepticism which proceeds by appeal to the epistemology of disagreement].
- Schaffer, J. (2005). ‘Contrastive Knowledge’, *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, (eds.) T. Gendler & J. Hawthorne, Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
[Argues that all knowledge should be understood contrastively, and that so construed the sceptical problem does not arise].