

Fallibilism and Knowing That One Is Not Dreaming

STEPHEN HETHERINGTON
The University of New South Wales
Sydney
Australia 2052

I

Descartes challenged himself to know that he was not dreaming, with the supposed price to be paid if he lacked that knowledge being his failure to have any knowledge at all of the contingent existence and features of an external world. And subsequent epistemologist after subsequent epistemologist has kept that Cartesian skeptical challenge alive. Recent non-skeptical responses to it — most notably, Robert Nozick's¹ — have focussed on whether one's not knowing that one is not dreaming really does entail one's lacking all external world knowledge.² Seemingly, Nozick is unworried by the prospect of one's never knowing that one is not dreaming. He does argue that no one ever has that knowledge, but he reassures us that this does not entail that people do not have a steady and satisfying supply of the more 'standard' sorts of external world knowledge. As I will argue in this paper, though, I see no good reason to concede in the first place that one cannot know that one is not dreaming.

1 *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1981), 197-211

2 Elsewhere, I have provided a further way of arguing that there is no such entailment: 'The Sceptic Is Absolutely Mistaken (As Is Dretske),' *Philosophical Papers* 27 (1998) 29-43.

Of course, if infallibilism about such knowledge is true, then it is true that one can never know that one is not dreaming. (As it is standardly conceived of by epistemologists,³ infallibilist justification for a belief that *p* is justification that is incompatible with the belief's being false.) But, of course, if infallibilism is true, then there is also no special difficulty posed for one's having knowledge in general by one's not knowing in particular that one is not dreaming: one would know either nothing or next to nothing anyway, regardless of one's not knowing in particular that one is not dreaming. Yet epistemologists have generally regarded the challenge of knowing that one is not dreaming as being at least somewhat pivotal or special. This suggests that, although they wish not to concede that no one can know that one is not dreaming, they wish to be fallibilists about knowledge.

It is fair to say, however, that fallibilists are yet to agree as to how best to combine a fallibilism about knowledge with a satisfying defense of the thesis that one can know that one is not dreaming. So, my aim in this paper is to suggest a further way in which a fallibilist could mount such a defense. I will show how arguments for one's not knowing that one is not dreaming depend on an infallibilist conception of such knowledge, *even when they might not have seemed to do so*. And I will show how, once infallibilism is then put aside, one could know that one is not dreaming, even when one's evidence for one's not dreaming does not entail one's not dreaming.⁴

II

Barry Stroud has given us what is probably the most elegant recent version of the Cartesian skeptical reasoning for there being no knowledge of an external world. Here is how he presents the pertinent part of that skeptical reasoning:⁵

Suppose Descartes tries to determine that he is not dreaming in order to fulfil what he sees as a necessary condition of knowing that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand. How is he to proceed? He realizes that his seeing his hand and

3 See, for example, Richard Feldman, 'Fallibilism and Knowing That One Knows,' *The Philosophical Review* 90 (1981) 266-82, at 266-7.

4 I will present a non-contextualist fallibilism about such knowledge. Stewart Cohen has responded to skepticism in a fallibilist way that is also contextualist: e.g., 'How To Be a Fallibilist,' *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988) 91-123. In a currently unpublished paper, I reject contextualist discussions of such matters.

5 *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984), 20-1

seeing and feeling a piece of paper before him and feeling the warmth of the fire — in fact his getting all the sensory experiences and all the sensory information that he is getting — is something that could be happening even if he were dreaming. To establish that he is not dreaming he would therefore need something more than just those experiences or that information alone. He would also need to know whether those experiences and that information are reliable, not merely dreamt. ... But how could a test or a circumstance or a state of affairs indicate to him that he is not dreaming *if* a condition of knowing *anything* about the world is that he know he is not dreaming? It could not. He could never fulfil the condition.

Descartes has various introspectible experiences while sitting by the fire. Seemingly, they are sensory and hence indicative of the existence of an external world, a world capable of being sensed by us. According to the Cartesian skeptic, however, those experiences of Descartes's — summed up here as its seeming to him that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand — are unable to give Descartes knowledge that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand. Why would that be so? It is because they do not even give him knowledge that he is not *dreaming* his sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand. (For short: They do not give him knowledge that he is not dreaming.) And why do they fail to give him this knowledge? In the terms used within the argument as it is presented by Stroud, Descartes's failure to know that he is not dreaming is due to the following two circumstances: (1) Descartes also needs some further, relevantly supportive, knowledge (in particular, the knowledge that it *reliably* seems to him that he is not dreaming), if he is to know that he is not dreaming; and (2) any putative case of such further knowledge, since it too would be knowledge purportedly about the external world, is knowledge only if it, too, passes that test in (1). For it is as susceptible to the dreaming possibility as was Descartes's initial putative knowledge that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand.

Call (1) and (2), respectively, *The Further Knowledge Condition* and *The Continued Susceptibility Condition*. At least ostensibly, neither condition is infallibilist. As to *The Continued Susceptibility Condition*, there is nothing clearly infallibilist in saying that the dreaming possibility applies to all external world beliefs if to one of them. And *The Further Knowledge Condition* is also not overtly infallibilist: A need to supplement one's evidence with further evidence — even if the further evidence is knowledge of the initial evidence's being epistemically reliable — does not, of itself, entail a need for the resulting conjunction of evidence to entail the truth of the belief for which the conjunction is evidence.⁶ The

6 *The Further Knowledge Condition* does have an infallibilist instance, though.

fact that these two conditions are not overtly infallibilist is noteworthy, because it suggests that the skeptical reasoning should be perceived as being a threat not only by those who accept that knowledge needs to satisfy an infallibilist standard. It thus suggests that the skeptical threat is much more of a threat than we might have taken it to be. The threat would be to all conceptions, infallibilist and fallibilist alike, of what is required for one's knowing that one is not dreaming, because the implication would be that no one can know — *even fallibly* — that one is not dreaming. The implication would be that even if one's true belief that one is not dreaming enjoys justificatory support that satisfies some demanding yet fallibilist standard, one still needs further justificatory support for that belief if it is to be knowledge,⁷ with this further justificatory support supplementing the evidence one already has; indeed, according to The Further Knowledge Condition, one needs some further *knowledge* to provide that justificatory support for one's belief if it is to be knowledge.⁸ However, then (according to The Continued Susceptibility Condition) the same would be true of this new knowledge; and so on, *ad infinitum*, with the result being that one's belief that one is not dreaming is not knowledge after all.

Imagine Descartes's seemingly sensory evidence (for his belief that he is not dreaming) being so good as to provide all-but-infallible support for his belief. The Further Knowledge Condition entails that even this evidence is not enough. Yet for Descartes to improve it would, by hypothesis, result in his having infallibilist justificatory support for his belief.

7 For now, I ignore the Gettier problem, standardly taken to be the difficulty of deciding whether something (and if so, what) else is needed if a justified true belief is to be knowledge: Edmund Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' *Analysis* 23 (1963) 121-3. I return to this issue in section VI. (I have argued elsewhere, though, for responses to the Gettier problem that allow us to retain the principle that a belief's being true and justified via good fallibilist evidence suffices for its being knowledge: 'Actually Knowing,' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 48 (1998) 453-69; 'Knowing Failably,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 96 (1999) 565-87; 'A Fallibilist and Wholly Internalist Solution to the Gettier Problem,' *Journal of Philosophical Research* 26 (2001) 307-24.)

8 The dreaming possibility described by Descartes supposedly involves one's internal experiences being phenomenologically indistinguishable in kind from the internal experiences one has when awake. So, one needs further knowledge (in addition to the knowledge of what internal experiences one is having) with which one can distinguish between one's having a dreaming experience like that and one's having an experience as part of being awake. In what follows, when I talk of the further knowledge being expected of one by the dreaming argument, this is what — on the skeptic's behalf — I have in mind.

III

For the sake of argument, I have tried (in section II) to make the skeptical argument as *generally* threatening as possible — a challenge both to infallibilist and to fallibilist theories of knowledge. As we will see, though, it fails to be quite as significant as that. If the skeptical argument is to unsettle fallibilists about knowledge's justification component, then it has to establish one of the following two theses:

- A One cannot have even *some* justification for one's belief that one is not dreaming;
- B One cannot have *enough* justification for one's belief that one is not dreaming.

I discuss A in this section and B in the next section.

Clearly, a fallibilist should say that Descartes *can* have evidence — some real, albeit fallibilist, justification — for his belief that he is not dreaming. Let us suppose that the skeptic responds by insisting (i) that what seems, to Descartes, to be justification for his belief that he is not dreaming needs to be supplemented by some further knowledge on his part (such as his knowing that his apparent justification has been reliably gained), and (ii) that otherwise what seems, to Descartes, to be justification for his belief that he is not dreaming is no justification *at all* for that belief of his. What would be the skeptic's own justification for that insistence, though? Why would Descartes have no support at all for his belief that he is not dreaming?

The skeptic's thinking might well proceed like this:

- (1) If Descartes *were* dreaming, he would lack all justification for his belief that he is not dreaming. And (2) if Descartes lacks all justification for that belief when he *is* dreaming, then he also lacks all justification for it when he is *not* dreaming. Hence, (3) he lacks all justification for that belief, whether *or* not he is dreaming.

Premise (1) is vital to that skeptical reasoning, and the picture behind it seems to be that if Descartes is dreaming then his problem is not simply that he is mistaken in his belief that he is not dreaming. He *would* be mistaken, of course, but the epistemic problem for him (the skeptic will say) would be more serious than that. This is because the truth of Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming is fundamental to his thinking at that time being based (as he takes it to be) on sensory interaction with an external world, and because the presence of that sort of interaction is

necessary if his belief is to be at all justified.⁹ Thus, so fundamental is his belief's truth to its being based on some sensory interaction with an external world that the following is true of it:

If Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming is false (and hence if Descartes is dreaming), then none of his thinking at that time, even when it seems to be the result of his sensory interaction with an external world, is the result of that sort of interaction. (And in that event none of his thinking at that time is at all justified.)

There are other beliefs, too, that a person might have which would be fundamental for her in that way. For instance, suppose that you believe that you are reasoning at least reasonably well. If this belief were to be false, it would thereby be wholly unjustified. That is a clear case of the phenomenon I am describing,¹⁰ and Cartesian skeptics seem to view the belief that one is not dreaming as functioning analogously to that.

Yet if, according to the skeptic, Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming is one that lacks all justificatory support if it is false, then the skeptic is telling us (conversely) that if there is even *some* justification present for Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming, then his belief is *true*. That is, my present hypothesis (on the skeptic's behalf) is that if Descartes's belief is false then it lacks all justificatory support; and that skeptical hypothesis is equivalent to the thesis if Descartes's belief has even *some* justificatory support then it is also a *true* belief. And what does this show about the skeptic's conception of the justification whose presence she is denying? It shows us that the skeptic's conception of the justification in question is *infallibilist*, since infallibilist justification for a belief is justification that entails the belief's truth. (I understand infallible knowledge as being knowledge whose justification component is infallibilist.) So, we are considering the hypothesis that the skeptic is denying that Descartes's belief is at all justified, in part because if his belief were false then it would lack all justificatory support; however, this hypothesis implies that the skeptic is really relying upon an *infallibilist* conception of the justificatory support that she is denying is at all possible for

9 This would be most clearly true of *externalist* elements in Descartes's supposed justification for his belief that he is not dreaming. For instance, the skeptic's idea could be that if Descartes is dreaming, then his belief that he is not dreaming is being formed too unreliably to be at all justified — regardless of whether he also has some introspectible experiences that would otherwise provide some internalist justificatory support for his belief.

10 Or, if that example is not sufficiently uncontroversial, suppose that you have a false belief that at least some of your present beliefs are at least somewhat justified. If this belief is false, then it is also wholly unjustified.

Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming. She is in effect *equating* justificatory support with infallibilist justificatory support, thereby denying that there can be lesser degrees of it.

And in that case the skeptic would not be issuing a challenge that need concern fallibilists (and fallibilism, remember, is what I am seeking to explicate in this paper). Perhaps contrary to how she regards herself, I am saying that the skeptic would not be denying that there can be even some of what a fallibilist claims is possible — namely, *fallibilist* justificatory support for Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming. Instead (and maybe covertly), she would be doing nothing more than denying that there can be even some of what a fallibilist *agrees* is not possible — namely, *infallibilist* justificatory support for Descartes's belief. The skeptical argument would be showing that there can be no fallible knowledge that one is not dreaming, only in the sense of the skeptical argument's *presupposing* that one's knowledge that one is not dreaming would have to be *infallible*. Hence, after all, the skeptical argument would *not* really be showing that one cannot have fallible knowledge that one is not dreaming.

IV

Section III shows that if the skeptic's argument is to be anything more than just an expression of a *prior* and unremitting *infallibilism* about knowledge, she needs to concede that Descartes can have at least some fallibilist justification for his belief that he is not dreaming. And once she does make that concession, her aim would then be to show that, even so, Descartes still lacks *enough* justification to satisfy fallibilists about knowledge — in this case, fallibilists about the justification component of Descartes's knowledge that he is not dreaming. Debate over exactly how much justification fallibilists should in general expect to be present if a person is to have knowledge would be fruitless at this point of my discussion. So, I will argue that, *no matter how much* fallibilist justification a fallibilist would expect there to be present, the skeptic's thinking remains unconvincing.¹¹ At any rate, it continues to be fundamentally

11 My discussion will be sufficiently general, therefore, to apply to what might seem to be significantly varied skeptical ways of thinking. For example, a skeptic could argue that Descartes's fundamental epistemic failing is that he lacks enough fallibilist justification to render his belief that he is not dreaming the *best explanation* of his apparently sensory data; and that skeptical way of thinking is not overtly infallibilist. However, insofar as being-the-best-explanation-of-that-data would be a justifi-

infallibilist in its commitments; and it is therefore unconvincing for anyone who is not *already* an infallibilist. (And most epistemologists are not.)

To see why the skeptical reasoning is so unconvincing to anyone who is not already an infallibilist, I will begin by outlining a likely reconstruction of that reasoning. In particular, I will suggest (as follows) how the skeptic might naturally argue that no matter how much evidence Descartes has for his belief that he is not dreaming, it is still not enough *even* by fallibilist standards — no matter what specific fallibilist standard is being applied to the situation:

In believing that he is not dreaming, Descartes is relying on the same evidence as he would have if he *were* dreaming. That evidence is its seeming to him (in a seemingly sensory way) that he is not dreaming. So, if he were dreaming, he could never notice, while using that evidence, that he is dreaming. (He could not notice the difference, since none would be revealed to him.)¹² Even if he were dreaming, therefore, he could not be led rationally by his evidence to believe that he is dreaming.

That skeptical reasoning is meant to reveal a problem with the *kind*, not simply the amount, of fallibilist evidence that Descartes is purportedly using when he seems, to himself, to be sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand, and when he seems, to himself, not to be dreaming that experience. His seemingly sensory evidence would be incapable, no matter how much of it there is, of accurately *discriminating* his dreaming from his not dreaming — if only because his seemingly sensory evidence could never rationally suggest to him that he is dreaming rather than not dreaming, en route to his rationally deciding which of those states he is in. It would always point Descartes towards his believing that he is not dreaming, never towards his believing that he is dreaming.

And the skeptic's point here should not simply be that Descartes is therefore relying on a kind of evidence that is bound to mislead, at least sometimes, in this world or in some others. It is indeed bound to mislead in at least one world, because in no world will it point Descartes towards realizing that he is dreaming; and because nonetheless, as even the non-skeptic will assure us, Descartes's dreaming is a possible state of affairs — one that is realized in at least one possible world. Nevertheless,

catory feature of Descartes's belief, my analysis will imply that even this skeptic's underlying commitments are infallibilist.

12 Recall note 8's point about phenomenological indistinguishability.

that there exists this guarantee of Descartes's being misled, in this world or in at least one other, should not be all that the skeptic is saying. If her point were just this one, then she would again be relying on an infallibilism about knowledge. She would be denying Descartes knowledge of not dreaming, on the ground that its seeming, to him, that he is not dreaming would mislead him in at least one possible world — which is to say that the skeptic would be denying Descartes the knowledge that he is not dreaming, simply because of the fact that his seemingly sensory evidence does not *entail* the truth of his belief that he is not dreaming.¹³

If the skeptic is to avoid being nothing more than an infallibilist about one's knowing that one is not dreaming (and thus is to be issuing a challenge that strikes at the heart even of fallibilism), therefore, how *should* she reason? Should she say, for example, that Descartes's evidence is bound to mislead him, not simply in at least one possible world, but in at least one *relevant* or *similar* or *close* possible world? What would be her criterion of relevance or similarity or closeness between worlds, though? The obvious criterion for her to be using is that of Descartes's *having the introspectible evidence he has in this world*. After all, the skeptic is arguing that Descartes fails to know that he is not dreaming, *even given* the introspectible evidence he has.¹⁴ Thus, for this skeptic's immediate purposes, a world would be relevant or similar or close to this one if and only if it is a world where Descartes seems, to himself, not to be dreaming (and where he seems, to himself, to be sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand). Then the above skeptical reasoning would tell us that (i) in all or most of those worlds Descartes will be led by this evidence (of his seeming, to himself, not to be dreaming) to believe that he is not dreaming, but that (ii) in at least one of even *those* worlds Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming will be false. In any such world, therefore,

13 Because the skeptic will deny that the non-skeptic can non-question-beggingly assume here that Descartes's dreaming is *empirically* possible, the skeptic should not be saying that the failing is one that happens in at least one *empirically* possible world, rather than just at least one possible world. This is why the skeptic has to rely here on an accusation only of the evidence's not *entailing* the belief's truth (as against its not *nominally* necessitating the belief's truth, for example).

14 Some skeptics might argue that Descartes fails to know that he is not dreaming, even given his introspectible evidence *plus* his having various other epistemic features. But this would not alter the analysis I am about to present. For those skeptics will still be saying that, given the extent to which Descartes remains dependent on his introspectible evidence, he falls prey to the dreaming possibility, thereby failing to know that he is not dreaming — *no matter what* epistemic help those other epistemic features would otherwise give him.

Descartes will fail to know that he is not dreaming; and hence (the skeptic will conclude), given the *relevance* or *similarity* or *closeness* to this world of any such world, this epistemic failure by Descartes is not simply a failure in relation to an infallibilist standard.

That reconstruction of the skeptic's reasoning coheres well with the reasoning I attributed to the skeptic a few paragraphs ago. The latter relied upon some particular subjunctive conditionals being claimed by the skeptic to be true, and the usual semantic analysis of such conditionals is in terms of relevant or similar or close possible worlds. So, here is a simple version of the skeptic's reasoning:¹⁵

If Descartes were to be dreaming, he would fail to know that he is not dreaming. But things seem to him now (when he seems, to himself, to be sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand) just as they would seem to him if he were not dreaming. So, he also fails to know now that he is not dreaming.

This skeptical reasoning calls upon some subjunctive conditionals; and, again, let us accept that such conditionals are to be semantically analyzed not in terms of all possible worlds, but only in terms of relevant or similar or close ones. Is the skeptic's argument therefore managing to avoid relying simply upon an infallibilism about knowledge (because an infallibilism *would* call upon all possible worlds, rather than only upon relevant or similar or close ones)? The answer is 'No': The skeptic's reasoning, even when apparently directing us only towards a smaller range of possible worlds (specifically, the relevant or similar or close ones), remains concealedly infallibilist, as the following considerations show.

First, the skeptic is asking us to reflect on whether Descartes would continue to believe that he is not dreaming, even in at least one relevant or similar or close world — those worlds, I have argued, being the ones where he has the same evidence as he has here (namely, its seeming to him that he is not dreaming). However, this is equivalent to asking us to reflect on the existence of possible worlds *simpliciter* where it seems, to Descartes, that he is not dreaming and where he believes, on the basis of that evidence, that he is not dreaming. And in at least one such world, insists the skeptic, Descartes's belief is false and hence not knowledge;

15 Different Cartesian skeptics about one's knowing that one is not dreaming might suggest alternative distillations of their thinking. I see this one as an instance of a way of reasoning that underlies, or is implied by, all others that might be suggested by various Cartesian skeptics, particularly given its use of the idea of phenomenological indistinguishability.

and so his belief is not knowledge even in *this* world (concludes the skeptic). The skeptic's reasoning thereby relies on the existence of at least one possible world — from among all possible worlds — where the following is true:

Descartes seems, to himself, not to be dreaming. On the basis of that evidence, he believes that he is not dreaming. And his belief is false.

Any such world is therefore one where Descartes has the same belief as he has here, along with the same evidence for that belief — yet where his belief is false. Thus, even to ask only whether there is at least one *relevant or similar or close* possible world where Descartes believes that he is not dreaming, yet where he is dreaming, is — given the skeptic's apparent *criterion* of relevance or similarity or closeness for this case — still equivalent to asking whether there is at least one possible world *simpliciter* where Descartes, by using the same evidence as here, has a false belief that he is not dreaming. So, the skeptic's attempt to direct us towards a *smaller* — a supposedly more realistic — range of possible worlds collapses back into a claim about *all* possible worlds. There is at least one world, says the skeptic, where the evidence Descartes uses here leads him to believe, mistakenly, that he is not dreaming. In short, the skeptic's accusation becomes, once more, simply that Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming is, even if knowledge, *not infallible* knowledge: The truth of his belief is not *entailed* by his evidence.

Second, we may suppose the evidence Descartes is using to be *good* evidence. For a start, its seeming to Descartes, as it does here, that he is not dreaming *is* evidence for his belief that he is not dreaming; from section III, even our skeptic has to concede this if he is to be providing an argument by which fallibilist epistemologists should feel threatened. Moreover, the current dialectic allows us to suppose that not only is its seeming to Descartes that he is not dreaming *evidence* that he is not dreaming, but that this is *good* (albeit fallibilist) evidence on Descartes's part for his not dreaming. The dialectic allows this, we should bear in mind, because our skeptic was being hypothesized at the beginning of this section as claiming that even if there is good (and fallibilist) evidence present Descartes's belief is nevertheless not knowledge.

Third, though, the conjunction of the previous two considerations entails that unless there is an *independent* reason to regard a true belief based on good fallibilist evidence as not being fallible knowledge, the worlds to which we are being directed by the skeptic reveal nothing more *than* the fallibility of Descartes's knowledge that he is not dreaming. And in this setting there is no independent reason to regard a true belief based on good fallibilist evidence as not being fallible knowledge; the skeptical argument *is* the only putative reason we have before us with which to

reach that conclusion.¹⁶ I infer, therefore, that the skeptic's argument shows nothing more than the fallibility of knowledge such as that which we are discussing (specifically, Descartes's knowledge that he is not dreaming). Recall that on the standard epistemological conception of fallibility, a piece of knowledge is fallible when its justification component does not entail the truth of its belief component.¹⁷ However, that is equivalent to this formulation:

A piece of knowledge is fallible when, even if the epistemic subject were to have the same belief on the basis of the same evidence, it would not thereby follow that the belief is true.

And this, we have seen just now, is all that the skeptic has shown about epistemic subjects. Even if Descartes were to have, on the basis of the same introspectible evidence as he has here, the belief that he is not dreaming, it would not follow that his belief is true. Even among the relevant or similar or close worlds, his belief will be false in at least one of them. After all, even if he were dreaming, it would seem to him that he is not dreaming, and he would be led by that appearance to believe that he is not dreaming. He would have the same evidence and, as a result, the same belief; yet the belief could be false, even in that circumstance. In other words, if Descartes could have a true belief that he is not dreaming, and if he could do so on the basis of its seeming to him that he is not dreaming, then all that the skeptic has shown — unless, of course, infallibilism is true — is that Descartes would know *only fallibly* that he is not dreaming.

Accordingly, to alert us to the dreaming possibility is to alert us merely to one of the many possible situations that collectively constitute what is, if Descartes does know that he is not dreaming, the *fallibility* of that knowing. At any rate, that is how a fallibilist may — and thus should — interpret the case. The skeptic is merely portraying — although in a

16 Again, the Gettier problem is being ignored until section VI. Epistemologists generally treat skeptical challenges and the Gettier problem as being quite separate issues, with proposed solutions to the one not being tested against the other. (Nevertheless, it is not so clear that this particular application of epistemological methodology is so warranted. See, for instance, Richard Kirkham, 'Does the Gettier Problem Rest On a Mistake?' *Mind* 93 (1984) 501-13, and my 'Gettieristic Scepticism,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996) 83-97.)

17 Recall too that, as I am using these terms, the knowledge is fallible when its justification component is fallibilist — that is, when the justification is compatible with the falsity of the belief which is the knowledge in question.

particularly vivid way — the fallibility of how Descartes knows, if and when he does, that he is not dreaming. And, as ever, no fallibilist about knowledge should be perturbed by that. Naturally, if infallibilism can be shown on independent grounds to be true — to be such that knowledge is incapable of being fallible — then fallibilists should concede the fight. But that is a skeptical project for another day. We have found, in sections III and IV, that the Cartesian skeptical argument *depends* on infallibilism; it should not be used as *support* for infallibilism.

V

It would be especially pointless for a skeptic to object in the following way to my fallibilist picture:¹⁸

I agree that it *seems* to Descartes that he is not dreaming. But he needs to *know* that he is not dreaming,¹⁹ and perhaps it *merely* seems to him that he is not dreaming. Therefore, if he is to know that he is not dreaming, he needs to know that it does not merely seem to him that he is not dreaming. (This is some further knowledge he needs to have.)

Its *merely* seeming, to Descartes, that he is not dreaming amounts to (1) his seeming, to himself, not to be dreaming, even while (2) in fact dreaming. Thus, Descartes's knowing that he is not merely seeming, to himself, not to be dreaming is his knowing that not-[(1)-and-(2)]. Equally, it is his knowing that [not-(1) or not-(2)]. So, it is his knowing that this disjunction is true of him:

D I am not seeming, to myself, not to be dreaming, or I am not dreaming.

But the skeptic cannot meaningfully require Descartes to know that D (as a necessary condition of his knowing that he is not dreaming). She does not deny that Descartes knows that he seems, to himself, not to be dreaming. That is, the skeptic does not deny that Descartes knows D's first disjunct to be false of him. This entails, however, that requiring

18 Another version of the ensuing argument appears in my *Good Knowledge, Bad Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2001), 37-40.

19 Equivalently: He needs to know that he is not *just* dreaming. For instance, he needs to know that he is not *just* dreaming there being a world around him, if he is to know that there is such a world.

Descartes to know that D is true of him is really only her requiring him to know that D's *second* disjunct is true of him. Yet it would be either incoherent or trivial on the skeptic's part for her to be asking Descartes to have *that* knowledge as a necessary condition of his knowing that he is not dreaming — for the truth of D's second disjunct *is* Descartes's not dreaming. There is incoherence, first of all, if D's second disjunct is required to be known *prior* to its being known, because it is incoherent to think — let alone to demand — that something can be known before it is known.²⁰ On the other hand, there is triviality if D's second disjunct is required to be known as *part* of its being known, because trivially anything is known if it is known. So, the skeptic's apparent challenge would itself be either incoherent or trivial — as a challenge asking Descartes to do anything *more* than to do what, clearly, he can do (which is to know that he seems, to himself, not to be dreaming). D's second disjunct is what distinguishes Descartes's (i) merely seeming, to himself, not to be dreaming (on the present interpretation of 'merely') from (ii) his seeming, to himself, not to be dreaming; however, D's second disjunct contributes no meaningful challenge. In effect, the skeptic's proposed challenge would fade away, really just allowing that it seems to Descartes that he is not dreaming — and incapable of challenging Descartes meaningfully to know that it does not *merely* seem to him that he is not dreaming. Therefore, the skeptic's proposed dramatic — and seemingly significant — use of the idea of Descartes's *merely* seeming, to himself, not to be dreaming is itself *merely* seemingly threatening.

In *Meditation I*, when introducing his skeptical scenarios (not only the possibility of his dreaming, but also the evil genius possibility), Descartes does indeed present these as being possibilities within which he is *mistaken*. (For instance, he would be mistaken as to his surroundings, even as to their existence, with the mistake being part of his merely dreaming or part of his being deceived by an evil genius.) But this section's argument has shown that no skeptical challenge should build that detail into its description of the possibility which an epistemic subject is being required to know does not obtain. Undoubtedly, the inclusion of that detail — as the skeptic challenges a person to know that

20 My point here is not (contrary to what a skeptic might gratefully claim) that it is *impossible* to know that *p* before knowing that *p*. Obviously, that state of affairs is impossible; but so unilluminatingly impossible is it that the skeptic's requiring one to bring it about is incoherent on her part. (Bear in mind that she is purportedly demanding that one have some illuminating *further* knowledge if one is to know that *p*.)

he is not *just* dreaming the existence or nature of the external world, say — makes the challenge more dramatic, more psychologically pressing, seemingly more dangerous and important. Nevertheless, including that detail is also a sleight of hand on the skeptic's part, for the kind of reason described in the preceding few paragraphs. We should not continue to be deceived by that sort of sleight of hand on the part of Descartes the epistemological magician (the evil genius?).

For instance, we may maintain our epistemic equanimity even at the prospect of Descartes's evil genius possibility. In order to know that $2 + 3 = 5$, need you know that no evil genius is deceiving you into *falsely* believing that $2 + 3 = 5$? No doubt, it seems to you that $2 + 3 = 5$, and no doubt your belief that $2 + 3 = 5$ is based on what seems to you to be internally coherent mathematical evidence (perhaps along with evidence seemingly deriving from strong external institutional authorities). 'But,' asks the Cartesian skeptic, 'might it *merely* seem to you in that way that $2 + 3 = 5$? In particular, could an evil genius be deceiving you in that respect? Surely you need to know that it does not merely seem to you that $2 + 3 = 5$, if you are to know that $2 + 3 = 5$.' There is no good challenge contained in that skeptical questioning, though. Your knowing that it does not merely seem to you that $2 + 3 = 5$ is your knowing the truth of this disjunction about yourself:

E It does not seem, to me, that $2 + 3 = 5$, or $2 + 3 = 5$.²¹

And because, I will assume, you can know that it seems to you that $2 + 3 = 5$, the supposed challenge reduces to requiring you to know that $2 + 3 = 5$ — *as an extra hurdle in the way of* your knowing that $2 + 3 = 5$! But that is a chimera of a challenge: Nothing can be known before it is known, and any requirement that this occur is incoherent (rather than significantly unsatisfiable); trivially, too, anything is known if it is known, and any requirement that this occur is empty. So, on either interpretation of the supposed challenge, there is no real challenge here.

21 The reasoning here is the same, *mutatis mutandis*, as earlier in this section. Its merely seeming to you that $2 + 3 = 5$ is (1) its seeming to you that $2 + 3 = 5$, along with (2) the fact that $2 + 3 \neq 5$. Therefore, your knowing that it does not merely seem to you that $2 + 3 = 5$ is your knowing that not-[(1) and (2)] — your knowing that [not-(1) or not-(2)]. That is, it is your knowing that [It does not seem to you that $2 + 3 = 5$, or $2 + 3 = 5$]. In short, it is your knowing that E.

VI

A skeptic might think (as follows) that I have overlooked another way in which the dreaming possibility could ground a skeptical result, one that even *fallibilists* should heed:

As epistemologists are well aware, Gettier showed that a true belief is not knowledge in virtue simply of being supported by internally accessible (and good yet fallibilist) evidence, say.²² So, even if Descartes has a true belief that he is not dreaming, and even though its seeming to him that he is not dreaming is internally accessible evidence which, although good, still does not entail his belief's truth, he is in effect within a Gettier case anyway. And hence his belief is not knowledge.

It is true that Gettier cases are situations where a person has a true belief based on good although fallibilist internally accessible evidence. But it is also true that they are situations where, as standardly viewed by epistemologists, the person's belief *clearly* fails to be knowledge. And that is not true of Descartes's belief that he is not dreaming: Even if that belief of his is not knowledge, this is not *clearly* true in the eyes of epistemologists in general. Consequently, even if the skeptic were to try building on Gettier's work in the way suggested, she would still need to *argue*, rather than just assume, that Descartes (in spite of having a true belief based on internally accessible and good yet fallibilist evidence) does not know that he is not dreaming. If we were to come to decide that there is a lack of knowledge on Descartes's part, perhaps we could come to see the situation as being a Gettier case too. But precisely because this progression would be needed, the situation's being a Gettier case is certainly not a datum for us. And so the proposed objection fails.

It also fails by overstating the import of Gettier cases in the first place. Gettier cases do not show that no true belief based on internally accessible and fallibilist evidence is knowledge. At most, what Gettier showed is that in *not all* situations containing a true belief based on internally accessible and good yet fallibilist evidence is that belief knowledge. And although subsequent epistemologists have thought of many Gettier cases, and although these extend the range of situations where, it seems, a belief is not knowledge even if true and based on internally accessible and good yet fallibilist evidence, all of this hardly amounts to a proof that no belief with those features is knowledge in virtue of having those features. At most, those many Gettier cases collectively show that beliefs with those features *and* with some pertinent similarity to the problematic

22 Plantinga, for one, argues that this is what Gettier cases show: *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press 1993), 32-7.

beliefs inside Gettier cases fail to be knowledge (in spite of having those features). But the skeptic would still owe us a substantial argument to show that Descartes's situation — a normal situation, except for someone's asking himself whether he knows that he is not dreaming — has any such pertinent similarity to standard Gettier cases. Gettier's argument, if it shows that not all true beliefs based on internally accessible and good yet fallibilist evidence are knowledge, should indeed make us somewhat cautious about which true beliefs based on such evidence we classify as being knowledge. But he has not therefore provided a conclusive reason to decide that no such beliefs are knowledge — or, *a fortiori*, to decide that no such beliefs are knowledge unless they satisfy the skeptic's epistemic standard in particular. He has not even provided a conclusive reason to decide that no such beliefs are knowledge *in virtue of* having those features (i.e., being true and supported by good yet fallibilist internally accessible evidence). A belief could be knowledge in virtue of some feature F even if not all beliefs with F are knowledge. All that would follow from not all beliefs with F being knowledge would be that a belief's being F does not entail its being knowledge. But a belief could *be* knowledge in virtue of being F even if its being F does not *entail* its being knowledge. After all, it is an epistemological given that in each Gettier case there is something quite odd about the epistemic subject's circumstances, something that supposedly prevents his belief from being knowledge — whereas Descartes's situation, again, is supposedly more normal than that. The only definite oddity within his situation is his wondering whether he could be dreaming. This thought of his is actually part of his internally accessible and good yet fallibilist evidence as a whole. And although we must admit that it contributes to his evidence's being fallibilist, this is all that we need interpret it as doing. It does not prevent his evidence's being *good* yet fallibilist, for a start. Of course, it should make him aware that the rest of his evidence for his not dreaming is fallibilist at best; nevertheless, even having this awareness would not entail that the evidence cannot be good yet fallibilist. But we are already accepting that Descartes's evidence is fallibilist; we need not accept that *ipso facto* it is inadequate for knowledge. If infallibilism is true, then that evidence is indeed inadequate.²³ But its being fallibilist does not entail that infallibilism is true.

23 Because Descartes himself was an infallibilist about knowledge, *he* should accept — as he did — that his evidence is inadequate if his belief that he is not dreaming is to be knowledge. However, this does not entail that fallibilists need interpret his epistemic situation in that way.

VII

If it is possible to know that one is not dreaming, then one or both of The Further Knowledge Condition and The Continued Susceptibility Condition is false.²⁴ I will end this paper by describing, a touch programmatically, some grounds on which a fallibilist might reject The Further Knowledge Condition.

Those grounds are part of what I call a *gradualist* fallibilism about knowledge, my favored conception of fallibilism about knowledge.²⁵ A gradualist fallibilist accepts that there can be *grades* of fallibility, even in one's knowing that *p*. That is, one's knowledge that *p* can be more, or it can be less, fallible. And if all else is equal, then it is the justification within one's knowledge that *p* which determines the grade of fallibility of one's knowledge that *p*. Specifically, if one's justified true belief that *p* is fallible knowledge that *p*, then (other things still being equal) it is more, or it is less, fallible knowledge that *p*, in inverse relation to how much justification one has for one's belief that *p*:

Other things being equal, if one has better fallibilist justification for the true belief that *p*, then one's knowledge that *p* is less fallible, while if one has poorer fallibilist justification for the true belief that *p*, then one's knowledge that *p* is more fallible. (One's having better evidence for *p*, say, might well probabilify one's belief that *p* to a higher degree — in which case, all else being equal, one's knowledge that *p* would be correlatively less fallible than it would have been if one's evidence had probabilified one's belief that *p* to a lesser degree.)

This conception of fallible knowledge accepts that there are different grades of fallibility, not only for a person's knowledge as a whole, say ('He is a less fallible authority on rabbits than she is'), but also for a particular piece of her knowledge. Two people can each know fallibly that there is a rabbit in front of them; yet one of those two pieces of knowledge might be less fallible than the other, as one of the two people has better eyesight than the other one does, for example, or as one of the two knows more about what it is to be a rabbit.

And here is how a gradualist fallibilist may describe what she should regard as being the falsity of The Further Knowledge Condition. According to that condition, one's belief that one is not dreaming is not knowledge unless one has some further justificatory support for it — regardless of how much justificatory support one already has for it. But according

24 These were the conditions identified in section II as sufficing, if true, to show that one cannot know that one is not dreaming.

25 I have developed this conception much more fully in *Good Knowledge, Bad Knowledge*.

to gradualist fallibilism, fallible knowledge of one's not dreaming need not be as absolutist as that. In principle (a fallibilist should say), one can know less, *or* one can know more, fallibly that one is not dreaming. And one way for such knowledge to be more fallible than it might have been is for one not to know that one's introspectible evidence for one's not dreaming is reliable, say. In section II, we saw Stroud presenting the skeptic as demanding that one also know that one is reliably seeming, to oneself, not to be dreaming, if one is to know that one is not dreaming. A gradualist fallibilist's reply to that hypothesized demand should be that this further knowledge is merely optional, not necessary, for the existence of the knowledge that one is not dreaming. The extra knowledge is optional, as evidence helping one to know that one is not dreaming, in this sense:

It *could* be part of one's knowing that one is not dreaming. And if it were, then the latter knowledge would be *less* fallible, all else being equal, than if the further knowledge had not been present as part of the supporting justification. However, in general one's knowledge need not be less fallible than it is, even in order to be fallible knowledge as such. For — trivially — it can be knowledge which is as fallible as it is, however fallible that is, without being knowledge which is less fallible than that. All that is required is that the knowledge that one is not dreaming be knowledge in virtue of satisfying a pertinent minimum standard (for being fallible knowledge that one is not dreaming). In general there is no *specific* further piece of knowledge which one needs to have as evidence if that minimum fallibilist standard is to be satisfied. Clearly, having any further relevant piece of knowledge (including, of course, the knowledge that one's evidence is reliable) would lessen one's fallibility in the particular case. Nonetheless, it would not remove the fallibility in one's knowing that one is not dreaming; nor need it do so, however, if that fallible knowledge is to be present.

Thus, one can know more, or one can know less, fallibly that one is not dreaming, depending, for example, on how internally coherent one's introspectible evidence is and on how congruent it is with one's introspectible evidence from earlier times; and when a skeptic requires one to know that one's introspectible evidence is reliable, all that she is doing — according to gradualist fallibilism (even if not according to the skeptic) — is describing one among the many possible pieces of knowledge with which one could lessen the fallibility of one's fallible knowledge that one is not dreaming.

Nor is that point restricted to one's knowing that one is not dreaming. Gradualist fallibilism applies in that way *throughout* a person's body of fallible knowledge.²⁶ For instance, just as Descartes could know more, or

26 This includes the person's meta-knowledge. Such knowledge, too, need not be infallibilist, as Feldman has explained in some detail: 'Fallibilism and Knowing That

he could know less, fallibly that he is not dreaming, he could know more, or he could know less, fallibly that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand. The skeptic tells us that Descartes's knowing that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand depends on his knowing that he is not dreaming; a gradualist fallibilist may say, instead, that the latter knowledge can contribute to the former knowledge, in part by lessening the former's fallibility, without having been essential to the former's very existence. If Descartes does know that he is not dreaming (and if all else is equal), then his knowledge of sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand is that much less fallible. But the former knowledge's being absent would not entail the absence of the latter knowledge. Instead, the latter knowledge would simply be that much more fallible.

There is a further detail, too, to bear in mind. The contribution being made, by Descartes's knowing that he is not dreaming, to the grade of fallibility of his knowledge that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand is also affected by the extent to which the contributing knowledge — constituting part of the supporting justification for the latter knowledge — is *itself* fallible. Accordingly, one way for Descartes to lessen the fallibility of his knowledge that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand is for him also to know that he is not dreaming — so long as the latter knowledge is less (rather than more) fallible *itself*. Insofar as his knowledge that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand is based on his knowing that he is not dreaming, anything that makes the latter knowledge less fallible thereby contributes to lessening the fallibility of the former knowledge, too. Descartes does not need to know that he is not dreaming, if he is to know that he is sitting by the fire with a piece of paper in his hand; nevertheless, if he does have both pieces of knowledge, and if the latter knowledge is based at least in part on the former knowledge, then (other things being equal) the latter knowledge is *less* fallible insofar as the former knowledge is less fallible itself. The grade of fallibility of one piece of knowledge can affect the grade of fallibility of another piece of knowledge. We should see this as a feature, not a failing, of fallible knowledge.²⁷

Received: September, 2000

Revised: August, 2001

One Knows.' So, gradualist fallibilism can model, for instance, Descartes's knowing more, or his knowing less, fallibly that he knows that he is not dreaming.

27 I am grateful for the anonymous referees' thoughtful and useful comments on this paper.