

Preface to Volume 1

Just a few months ago, I finally finished my *magnum opus* - well, my Really Big Book, anyway - a tome whose creation had been consuming me for eight very full years. With my so recently having relinquished any very vital connection with *All the Power in the World*, it's now hard, for me, to engage in substantial philosophical writing. But, that's hardly the whole story. Even years before completing that book, I decided I wouldn't try to supply this collection, already on the drawing boards, with any intellectually ambitious Introduction - even if that might be much in vogue nowadays, as it just might possibly be. At all events, and for each of several individually sufficient reasons, in this large collection's many pages, one thing you won't find is any Introduction - none that's intellectually ambitious and, of course, none that's just so much perfectly pedestrian padding. (As James Carville might say, if he'd been advising me, "It's the papers, stupid!" Or, as I've given the Democrats a fair sum of cash, over the years, while nary a cent to the Real Protector of the Powerful's Privileges, maybe he'd leave out the "stupid." Or, maybe he wouldn't leave it out; I don't know.)

Though there's a fair lot of my shortish philosophical publication that's not contained anywhere in *An American Skeptic Collects His Wits*, still, this is a very sizeable collection - too big to comfortably fit between the covers of a single volume. Or, maybe in better words, there's too

much to be contained in a single volume that's comfortable for a typical human being to comfortably read, while holding the whole thing in her own two hands. Accordingly, the collection is presented as a two-volume set.

In allocating papers to the set's two Volumes, I've tried to present the material thematically, by contrast with, say, a chronological presentation. Following some such principle for allocation pretty consistently, I've been able to manage, it happily turns out, a nice balance, so far as the number of selected papers goes, for the pair of Volumes: Exactly eleven selections serve to constitute this first Volume, Volume 1, and, as well, precisely that many may be found in its complementary Volume, Volume 2.

For a rough idea as to which sorts of pieces are in each Volume - where sorts are determined by thematic topic area - you may think of Volume 1 as having the alliterative subtitle "Epistemology, Ethics, Etcetera," and you may think of Volume 2 as being subtitled, almost as alliteratively, "Metaphysics and More." As each would-be subtitle indicates, in neither Volume are the selected works very neatly compartmentalized. At any rate, they're not exhaustively covered by brief terms for topic areas, with each term's proper denotation excluding that of the other topic terms. As this isn't any big deal, I'll say no more about it.

As I've already intimated, to put the point very mildly, in neither Volume will you find any intellectually ambitious Introduction, to precede that Volume's selected offerings. Nor will you find, in any of this big collection's many pages, anything else that might be taken to be some new substantial philosophical effort, not previously published. For one thing, in each of the two Volumes, I'm leaving all of the published pieces collected therein perfectly intact, just as it first appeared in published print. (Well, very nearly so: Of course, the collection's publisher, the Oxford

University Press, may see fit to correct however many typographical errors some Oxford editors might find in the originally published material. And, of course, I'll allow them to format the papers so that the present presentations appear most pleasingly consistent. But, of course, none of that amounts to anything that's philosophically substantial.)

Just so, another thing you won't find in *An American Skeptic*, now calling the collection by it's most natural three-word name, is this: Any remarks aimed at expressing my present views - or my later views, anyway - on questions addressed in any of the collection's published papers. (For that matter, you won't find any newly penned remarks, either, on any *other* philosophical issues.) As I'm thinking, there's little point in that. Why? Here's my thinking, about that question.

On the one hand, it may very well be, I think, that some of the presented papers grab you. In such a happy event, I'm quite sure, they'll serve to stimulate enjoyably disturbing thinking on your part. If anything much happens for you with my papers, or maybe even anything at all, it's that sort of experience that you'll enjoy. Now, in such a circumstance, you'll do far better to press on with your own responsive thoughts - prompted by my strangely challenging papers - than you'd do by gazing upon more words from me. For these further words of mine, they're likely to be more mature and mellow comments, far less happily stimulating than what's forcefully grabbed you and, accordingly, what's gotten you involved in your own enjoyable philosophic thinking. Well, that's what's on one hand.

Now, here's what's on the other hand: Unlikely though it may be, it just might happen, I fearfully allow, that my presented papers *don't* grab you - not even some very few among the twenty-two selected for the whole two-volume set. What's to be done in such a very different circumstance? Well, it's most unlikely that there's anything *I* can do to improve matters much. Do

you think that, though I've entirely failed to light your fire, with all the very many presented attempts you've already seen me make toward such an end - well, somehow or other, I'll suddenly change things, very much for the better, by my heaping yet more words on you? Hardly likely, I'd say: Look, in such a sad circumstance as this, you'll be a (sort of) reader - a rather rare (sort of) reader, I hope - who's quite *disinclined* to respond, in any very enjoyably active way, to the (sort of) sentences that a writer like *me* is so deeply disposed to produce. Let's face it; for happily active philosophical reading, I'm not your guy. Astonishing though the thought is, you'll likely do better by perusing the works of other contemporary philosophical writers. ("It's the papers, stupid!")

But, hey; let's be a little optimistic. You're a reasonably well-educated reader, I'm thinking, though you're not so very deeply steeped in recent philosophy as are most mainstream academic philosophers. So, as is then most likely, you'll be thinking that, since this collection comprises just so many papers produced by a worker in core analytic philosophy and, to boot, such a one as holds a very reputable academic post, these constituent papers are likely to be quite like those in each of just so many pretty similar collections - pretty much all of them published by academic presses (just as this present collection so obviously is.) And, most likely, your related further thoughts will be a lot like these imminently upcoming ideas, even if they're not nearly so specific or detailed as what's coming right after my next colon: Except for a very few hundred other analytically-oriented metaphysicians, or epistemologists, or philosophers of language, and so on, well, there's scarcely anyone who'll find much enjoyable reading in anything even remotely like most such academical essays. Well, as you may be somewhat surprised to learn, I agree with this thinking of yours. (There's not absolute and complete agreement here, mind you. But, of course, that rarely happens among us opinionated human beings. More to the realistic point, there's agreement on the whole.)

In fact, on the whole, I may have an ever dimmer view of the situation than you do. “Well, what’s so optimistic about *that?*” you should now be thinking.

Nothing; nothing at all. But, as I’ll remind you, the general situation isn’t an all-encompassing situation. Happily for me - and for you, too, I imagine - this collection’s papers were written by a very different sort of analytic metaphysician, and analytic epistemologist, and so on. Just so, the collection contains papers that, with almost every one of them, go smack against the grain of all the widely boring writing that you’re so accustomed to dreading: In matters epistemological, I’m a radical skeptic, gosh-darned-it - leastways, most of the time I am. In matters metaphysical, I’m a self-styled nihilistic philosopher - very often, at least, that’s my happily radical view. And so it goes. In the words of that delightfully wise cultural critic, Steve Martin, I’m a wild and crazy guy - not absolutely always, mind you, but - very much of the time, that’s me.

For most browsers in any big Borders, say, or in any large Barnes and Noble store, just take a look at, say, “A Defense of Skepticism” (Paper number 1, in this Volume) and “Skepticism and Nihilism” (Paper number 4, in the Volume.) Right there, you’ll find far more enjoyable stimulation, I’m sure, than in any of the dozens upon dozens of mainstream collections that, quite understandably, indeed, you won’t give even so much as a two-minute lookover.

Equally, this holds true with most viewers of, say, Web-pages of Amazon.com. Or, to give such Web-surfing folks equal space here, I’ll say this: In Volume 2 of *An American Skeptic Collects His Wits*, they’ll find quite a lot to enjoy in, say, just the readily readable short selection “I Do Not Exist” (Paper number 2, in that Volume) and, directly after that, in the same Second Volume, the short essay’s more thoroughly exploratory companion, “Why There Are No People.” Just in those two pieces, they’ll find *far* more, to really enjoy, than in the whole of most any of the aforesaid

analytically-oriented essay collections. I say *far* more to enjoy, and I mean just that. (Heck, if the difference was anything *much less* than that, most sensible book-buyers oughtn't give this present collection, either, so much as a two-minute lookover.)

Well, that's more than enough of such confident but self-serving comparisons. By this point, you've gotten my point, I'm sure. ("It's the papers, stupid!")

Now, even though it's just a rhetorical device, I'll again ask this question: Is there reason for you to be optimistic here, about what you'll find here, in this voluminous two-volume collection? Of course, you won't be at all surprised at the answer I provide: *Heck, yeah!* You'll become very happily embroiled, I'll bet you a quarter, in lots that's in *An American Skeptic Collects His Wits*.

Beyond what's in this Volume's reprinted papers, and beyond the Volume's Index, and, of course, beyond this happily humorous Preface, I'll supply you, in what's between the book's front cover and its back, little more than four lists: First, there's the (Table of) Contents for this very Volume, that is, for Volume 1 of *An American Skeptic Collects His Wits*. Second, there's the (Table of) Contents for this Volume's companion in the collection, that is, for Volume 2 of *An American Skeptic Collects His Wits*. Third, there's a lulu of a list, quickly called *Provenance of Papers*, that provides, in chronological order, quite full bibliographic information, for each of the twenty-two items reprinted in this entire two-volume collection. As with the two Contents lists, this list, too, will appear, identically the same, in both Volumes. Not obvious to sheer inspection, still, you'll soon see how very useful this list can be - especially for me! Anyway, and unlike the Volume's first three lists, its fourth will appear only in this very Volume itself, and not in its companion Volume. Why? Well, this is a list of just those works cited in this very Volume's eleven papers - a group of works that might overlap greatly with those cited in the companion Volume, but that certainly won't

exactly coincide with the group of works cited in Volume 2.

About this last list, I'll say nothing more. By contrast, with the next few paragraphs, you'll come to know more than enough, and more than you want, about the how serviceable are the other three lists provided in this Volume. ("It's the papers, stupid!")

Even while this little prefatory production's meant to comprise mostly prose that's remarkably entertaining, it's also meant to serve certain more serious purposes. While those purposes are pretty serious, there's nothing very profound, let me tell you, in any of that: Indeed, far from concerning anything that's deeply philosophical, the points the Preface has yet to cover lie along such sensibly superficial lines as these: Beyond making some serious use of the lists lately mentioned, including what may be some legally necessary use, I'll supply you, in this Preface, with a smidgeon of authorial autobiography, and also a bit of practical advice for prospective readers. And, to top all that off - what the heck - I'll provide some blatant advertising for much other published work of mine, specifically, for all my self-standing book-length philosophical productions.

First, the smidgeon of authorial autobiography: Though I'd never have guessed it when first I wrote philosophy for publication, it's turned out that I'm more of a book-writer than a paper-writer - though, as I trust this collection makes plain, I've been a pretty considerable paper-writer, too. In retrospect, insofar as it's been papers that I've been writing, many of them turned out to be studies for books, or ancestors of books, or something of the kind. But, even so, many haven't ever been anything much like that and, most likely, they never will be. This is reflected, pretty well, I think, in what's been selected for appearance in *An American Skeptic Collects His Wits*: While eight of this whole collection's papers may be rightly regarded as seeds of longer and later published works, almost twice that number, fully fourteen selections, can't be regarded as being, in that way, anything

like so seminal. So, for your hard-earned money - or for your institutional library's money - I've given you a nice mix here, I think. It's sort of a happy sampler, I'll suggest, with quite a nice variety of Ungerian offerings. ("It's the papers, stupid!")

From that bit of authorial storytelling, I segue to remark on the chronological list that, briefly, I call *Provenance of Papers*: My Provenance list, as I've noted, supplies bibliographic information for each of the original publications represented in *An American Skeptic Collects His Wits* - all those in Volume 1 of the collection and, as well, all those in Volume 2. I'm not sure how useful that may be for you. But, for me, it certainly serves a very useful purpose: In one fell swoop, I hereby thank all the relevant entities duly associated with each and every one of the twenty-two pieces listed therein, including the past and present editors of the various volumes and journals listed, their past and present publishers, and even whatever conglomerates may have, at one time or another, acquired rights regarding reprinting of the listed pieces. And, as instructed by one of these publishers, both for the one paper first appearing in *Synthese*, and for the two first appearing in *Philosophical Studies*, I'll now give my thanks by adding these very words, specifically wanted by that outfit: with kind permission of Kluwer Academic Publishers. So, that's it, guys, or corporations, or whatever "you" may be - you're all thanked now, every last one of you - especially you sticklers at Kluwer Academic Publishers. All of you - and not just the Kluwer guys - should feel very much appreciated, by me, who does very much appreciate, in fact, your kind cooperation in the present project. Indeed, I ask that you take full notice of this fact: Not only do I thank all you folks, but - doubling everything up - I thank you all twice over: I thank you here, in this collection's First Volume, and I thank you, again, in the Second Volume of the set. For as happens with this most relevant part of my prefatory writing, the Provenance of Papers list also appears, in its entirety, in *both* Volumes of *An American Skeptic*.

(Surely, in the very bright light of all this clearly expressed appreciation, good fellows, all your lawyers should find useful work to do elsewhere - someplace far from me and my family.)

That said and done, I'll make some comments on two other lists I'm providing, each also appearing in both of the collection's two Volumes. These are the (Table of) Contents for Volume 1 and, complementing that, the (Table of) Contents for Volume 2: In each of these two (Tables of) Contents, I've grouped a Volume's eleven reprinted papers - including a self-styled paper wholly composed of Book Symposium material - into four numbered Parts. Just so, the First Volume has four numbered Parts, numbered from 1 through 4, and, equally, the Second Volume has four numbered Parts, also numbered from 1 through 4. For your happy perusal, I've quite delightfully labeled each of these eight (two times four) Parts. With so many as six of the Parts, all told, in the Part's well-chosen title, there's cleverly embedded the title of one of my five already-existing, self-standing, solely-authored books. In each instance, there are several good reasons for doing that. But, for my money, the most operative reason is always this: All five of these self-standing works - the volumes with the cleverly embedded titles - they're all currently (2006) available for purchase. And, what's more, they're all readily available, for purchase, from this present collection's worldwide publisher, the Oxford University Press. ("It's the papers, stupid!")

Now, think about this, for a minute: If you like what's in any given one of these six Parts, or even just some of what's there, then there's a good chance, I'll bet, that you'll like the book whose title is embedded in that Part's title. Makes sense; doesn't it?

OK. So, then what?

Here's where I offer sound advice to prospective readers: In your "institutional" library - using that word for want of another that's better - you should, I'll suggest, go have a gander at the

book (pretend there's just one) whose embedded title helped provide the title for the Part that contains the shorter writing, or shorter writings, that you've just so greatly enjoyed. As I just said, and as makes perfect sense, there's a good chance you'll then like what you see *there* - in the self-standing book whose embedded title is presently most salient. And, if you *do* like what you see - well, then, you should (try to) take that self-standing book home with you - along with both Volumes of *An American Skeptic* - providing, of course, that it's perfectly legal for you to do all that. After some several days of actively living with all these legally borrowed books, it may very well happen, I'll just venture to guess, that you'll *still* like the philosophical productions that you've been perusing. Now, if you're enthralled with one of these books - or, as I hope, with many more than one - well, then you'll be happy that I've bothered to include, in this breezy Preface, some slickly effective advertisements for my writing. Anyway, at least by my lights, it's high time we encounter my Preface's main advertising section. ("It's the papers, stupid!")

Except for the very poorest among us, it's quite easy to permanently acquire, perfectly legally, a copy of any of my books, leastways any of them that's available as a paperback. For, among other convenient sources for the books I've authored, each is very readily available through the OUP's *Web-page*, whose address is, at the time of this prefatory writing, this Web-address: <http://www.oup.com> Now, once you're on this main OUP Web-page, you'll then have to search around there, it's true, to get onto a page where one of my books is featured, or where there's featured more than one - and this may involve rather a bit more clicking. But, for most decently well-educated Americans not yet on Medicare, that's a piece of cake. Or, as we perennial dieters prefer to say, it's a stroll in the park. ("It's the papers, stupid!")

Heck, if you're reading these words just a few years after I wrote them, you may easily be able to feast, for years and years, on a veritable banquet of my published philosophical food for thought, the whole shebang priced pretty reasonably: With a dozen or so well-placed clicks, you'll be able to acquire, for your private use and enjoyment, something that's far nicer than just some several philosophy books I've sent into the world. Very easily, but not very expensively, you'll be able to acquire a *complete **matched** set* of the books that feature nothing but Peter Unger's philosophical writing! (Well, if you acquire all the books within just a few years of my writing this sentence, your set will be as complete as then can be. Beyond that, well, who knows what more the still further future may bring?) Each of the seven volumes, I've certainly specified to the OUP - by now, maybe specified it some seven times over - each should be precisely the same trim size as all the others: the same height - I'm measuring that at some 24 centimeters, as near as I can tell; and the same width, too - I'm measuring *that* at some 16 centimeters, with my same cheap cloth tape. (Of course, the books won't have the same thickness, even as some will be longer works while others will be shorter volumes. But, of course, that's perfectly irrelevant to any presently sensible point.) What's more, the paper cover of each book should look, most especially right where there's the book's spine, just so nicely like all the other books look. {Right now, it's true, in early 2005, my thirty-year old, my *Ignorance*, has a distinctly smaller trim size than that. But, by the time you're ready to buy a matched set of my paperback works, that should all be correctly changed. Still, you've now been forewarned, very clearly, of a (barely?) possible even long-term danger.} (Of course, even spinally presented, the books won't look precisely alike. Far from that, thank goodness! Not only will some books be thicker than others, but, often much more conspicuous, the title of any one book will look very different from the titles of (at least most of) the others. What do you want, for goodness sakes,

that each book's *title* should look the same? That would be perfectly absurd!)

While the lined-up spines certainly won't look *precisely* alike, then, still and all, they'll look plenty pretty enough: Each book's spine will have, as its visually dominant feature, the same clean white background as will be gracing all its companion volumes. And, with all seven books having the very same trim size, there'll be a clean white line formed not only by the bottoms of these seven books - to be placed, I'd recommend, on a clean white shelf - but, quite as well, there'll be a clean white line formed by the *tops* of the books, as well. Think about *that*, for a minute. Very clean, very slick, very nice - almost perfectly exquisite will be that avidly awaited paperback matched set of Ungeriana. Heck, with such a nice slick look as that, I'll bet even your interior designer will give you a big thumbs up. Indeed, with a few friendly words from you - no doubt, by then a most happily satisfied customer - he (or she) might order his (or her) very own set, to grace his (or her) own den, or study or, just maybe, grand foyer. ("It's the papers, stupid!")

As I'm vividly imagining, by this point you've had quite enough of what's fast becoming a Preface both crassly and crudely commercial. So, with a more public-spirited remark, I'll now call it quits: Even if you never buy any of my works, please do return *all* your borrowed library books, *whomever* may have written them. It's the right thing to do; and, you'll feel better for it. Heck, it's about as easy as eating a hotdog, and it's nowhere near as fattening.

New York

P. K. U.

April 2005

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Provenance of Papers Reprinted in
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A Chronological List

“An Analysis of Factual Knowledge,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXV (1968): 157-170. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“A Defense of Skepticism,” *The Philosophical Review*, LXXX (1971): 198-219. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“An Argument for Skepticism,” *Philosophic Exchange*, vol.1, no.5 (1974): 131-155. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“Two Types of Scepticism,” *Philosophical Studies*, 25 (1974): 77-96. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“The Uniqueness in Causation,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1977): 177-188. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“Impotence and Causal Determinism,” *Philosophical Studies*, 31 (1977): 289-305. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“There Are No Ordinary Things,” *Synthese*, 41 (1979): 117-154. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“I Do Not Exist,” pp.235-251 in *Perception and Identity*, G. F. MacDonald ed., London: The Macmillan Press, 1979. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“Why There Are No People,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, IV (1979): 177-222. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“Skepticism and Nihilism,” *Nous*, 14 (1980): 517-545. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“The Problem of the Many,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, V (1980): 411-467. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“Toward A Psychology of Common Sense,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 19 (1982): 117-129. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“The Causal Theory of Reference,” *Philosophical Studies*, 43 (1983): 1-45. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“Minimizing Arbitrariness: Toward a Metaphysics of Infinitely Many Isolated Concrete Worlds,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, IX (1984): 29-51. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“The Cone Model of Knowledge,” *Philosophical Topics*, XIV (1986): 125-178. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“Book Symposium on *Identity, Consciousness and Value*,” *Precis of the Book*, Reply to Sydney Shoemaker, Reply to Peter Strawson, Reply to Richard Swinburne, Reply to Stephen White, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LII (1992): 133-137 and 159-176. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“Contextual Analysis in Ethics,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LV (1995): 1-26. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“The Mystery of the Physical and the Matter of Qualities,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XXII (1999), 75-99. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“Book Symposium on *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence*,” *Precis of the Book*, Reply to Fred Feldman, Reply to Brad Hooker, Reply to Thomas Pogge, Reply to Peter Singer, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LIX (1999): 173-175 and 203-216. Reprinted in Volume 1.

“The Survival of the Sentient,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, 14 (2000): 325-348. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“Free Will and Scientiphicalism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65 (2002): 1-25. Reprinted in Volume 2.

“The Mental Problems of the Many,” *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, Volume I (2004): 195-222. Reprinted in Volume 2.