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# Epistemic contextualism: a normative approach

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# Declaration

I hereby declare that the present thesis is entirely my own work, except where otherwise indicated by means of quotation, reference and acknowledgement. The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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# Acknowledgements

This thesis has its origins in two short papers, one written while an undergraduate at the University of St Andrews, the other while a Masters student, also at St Andrews. Both papers defended a view much like the one defended here, albeit with a little less care and attention to detail. My first attempt to work the view out in more detail formed the basis of my Masters thesis, and I owe a great debt to Jessica Brown, who supervised my Masters thesis, for detailed and insightful criticisms of several drafts. Without her input, I doubt the project would have got off the ground. This is the second attempt. I hope that this time I've got it right.

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## Abstract

I develop and argue for a version of epistemic contextualism - the view that the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions depend upon and vary with the context in which they are uttered - that emphasises the roles played by both the practical interests of those in the context and the epistemic practices of the community of which they are part in determining the truth-values of their 'knowledge' ascriptions (the 'basic contextualist thesis'). My favoured way of putting it is that the truth of a 'knowledge' ascription of the form 'S knows that p' requires that the subject of the ascription can rule out the relevant alternatives in which not-p, where the relevant alternatives are the ones that those in the ascriber's context have a reason to consider. What alternatives those in the context have a reason to consider depends on their practical situation and on what alternatives are generally considered relevant within their community. I call this 'interests contextualism'.

The thesis splits into three parts. First, I deal with what I call 'linguistic objections', which purport to show that there's no linguistic evidence that the expression 'knows' is context-sensitive (Hawthorne 2004; Stanley 2005a), and objections concerning the way 'knows' behaves in intra- and inter-contextual disagreement reports (Cappelen & Hawthorne 2009; MacFarlane 2005). I argue that there are a number of ways in which contextualists can deal with these objections. Consequently, they provide no reason to reject contextualism.

Second, there are a number of ways of going beyond the basic contextualist thesis, and I argue that the best way is along the lines indicated above, viz. interests contextualism. In the process I articulate a number of desiderata for a contextualist account of the features of context that are responsible for contextual variation in the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions. I argue that, unlike its main rival - which I call 'conversational contextualism' (Blome-Tillmann 2009a; Cohen 1999; DeRose 2009; Lewis 1996) - interests contextualism can satisfy all of the desiderata. Consequently, interests contextualism is preferable to conversational contextualism.

Third, I argue that there is good reason to prefer interests contextualism to its noncontextualist rivals, strict invariantism (Brown 2006; Hazlett 2009; Pritchard 2010; Rysiew 2001), sensitive invariantism (Fantl & McGrath 2009; Hawthorne 2004; Stanley

2005a) and relativism (MacFarlane 2005; Richard 2004). The objections dealt with in the first part are meant to provide the main reason to prefer a sort of relativism to interests contextualism. Consequently, the upshot of the first part is that relativism is off the table. The considerations that tell in favour of interests contextualism and against sensitive invariantism are of two types. First, I argue that interests contextualism can deal with a wider range of cases than sensitive invariantism. Second, I argue that the influential account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions developed in Edward Craig (1990) tells against sensitive invariantism and in favour of interests contextualism. I also argue that the second consideration tells against strict invariantism as much as sensitive invariantism. Consequently, I conclude that interests contextualism is preferable to all of its rivals.

## Introduction

Chapter one of the present thesis serves as an extensive and detailed introduction to both the philosophical background in which I am working and the contributions I make to the current literature, so I shall keep my remarks in this introductory section rather brief and very superficial. This thesis is a defence of a version of epistemic contextualism, which is, roughly, the view that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on and vary with the context in which they are uttered. The view is not new, although the version I defend is, and it has a number of defenders in the contemporary literature. It also has a (far greater) number of detractors. Duncan Pritchard has summed up the current situation rather nicely:<sup>1</sup>

“The attributer contextualist bandwagon has in recent years started to wane in popularity. The difficulties with the view have been slowly mounting, forcing some increasingly ad hoc responses, and, worse, the application of this programme to the big questions in philosophy, especially scepticism, has started to look suspect. In short, the attributer contextualist research programme has started to look like it is *degenerating*” (Pritchard’s emphasis) (Pritchard 2006).

Split this critique into two parts. The first part is that the responses epistemic contextualists have offered to various difficulties look ad hoc. The second part is that the relevance of epistemic contextualism to big questions, such as scepticism, has been put into doubt. There are two reasons why one might think that the second part is worse. The first reason is that, if epistemic contextualism isn’t much of a solution to a significant problem (such as the problem of scepticism), or doesn’t offer much by way of answers to some ‘big questions’, it’s left looking rather unmotivated. If it doesn’t solve any significant problems, or offer any answers, why endorse the view? The second reason is that one can separate the question of whether epistemic contextualism - a view about the meaning of the expression ‘knowledge’ - is true from the question of whether epistemic contextualism is, or should be, of particular interest to epistemologists, or philosophers in general. Most would agree that expressions such as ‘tall’ are context-

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<sup>1</sup> If anything, Pritchard’s diagnosis is even more apt now (2013) than when it was written (2006).

sensitive, but that's not of any particular interest to philosophers, or those who study height.

This thesis deals with both parts of Pritchard's critique. In response to the first part, I argue that epistemic contextualists can deal with the various difficulties, and that they can do so without making ad hoc appeals to 'semantic blindness' and the like. In response to the second part, I grant that the application of contextualism to scepticism is suspect, but I appeal to an alternative 'basic motivation' for adopting epistemic contextualism. Rather than looking to the sceptical problem, I look to a plausible and independently motivated account of the point and purpose of our concept 'knowledge', and 'knowledge' ascriptions, and I argue that a certain sort of epistemic contextualism follows from that account. This suffices to deal with the first reason for thinking that the second part of Pritchard's critique is more pressing. What about the second reason?

It's not my aim to argue about what should and shouldn't be of interest to epistemologists, or philosophers in general. I myself think that the amount of critical discussion of epistemic contextualism over the last twenty years or so, both within and outwith epistemology, amply demonstrates that epistemic contextualism is and should be of interest. But, if the reader disagrees, I have no argument to offer here.

I should note that, in order to deal with Pritchard's critique, I do need to spend a lot of time engaging in what might look like an 'in house' debate about how to best formulate epistemic contextualism, and how to best answer certain questions about the details of the view (in particular, questions about which features of context are responsible for contextual variation in the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions). The upshot of that discussion is a particular version of epistemic contextualism, what I call 'interests contextualism'. While the response I offer to the first part of Pritchard's critique is available to any epistemic contextualist, the response I offer to the second part isn't. It's available to the interests contextualist, but it isn't available to those who defend what one might think of as the 'standard' contextualist view that one finds in the likes of Michael Blome-Tillmann, Stewart Cohen, Keith DeRose and David Lewis. The debate may be 'in house', but the consequences are of interest to noncontextualists.

# Chapter one

## Epistemic contextualism: motivations, problems, prospects

### 0. Introductory remarks

Does our willingness to credit someone with ‘knowing’ that such-and-such is the case depend on the context? Imagine my friend Catriona tells me she has decent (but not conclusive) evidence that Isla was at the party last night. Plausibly, my willingness to credit Catriona with ‘knowing’ that Isla was at the party will depend on the context. Am I just curious? If so, I may well credit Catriona with ‘knowing’. Am I going to testify to the police as to Isla’s whereabouts? If so, I may well not credit Catriona with ‘knowing’. But, one might ask, what, if anything, does that tell us about the correct *semantics* for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions? Does it tell us that whether we can *truly* credit someone with ‘knowing’ depends on the context, or just that whether it would be *proper* to credit someone with ‘knowing’ depends on the context? As applied to the present case: Does it tell us that whether I can truly credit Catriona with ‘knowing’ depends on the context, or just that whether it would be proper to credit Catriona with ‘knowing’ depends on the context?

Pairs of cases like the following might lead one to think that whether we can truly credit someone with ‘knowing’ depends on the context.<sup>1</sup> Ted, Dougal and Jack are priests who live in the same house. It’s a Monday, and Jack is meant to perform a service on Monday afternoons, but he’s notoriously unreliable. Ted, who is always keen to make a bit of money, has a long-standing bet with Dougal. If Jack performs the service Dougal wins £10, but if he doesn’t Ted wins £10. Ted and Dougal go to the church to check up on Jack. They arrive while a service is in progress, and in the vestry they see Jack’s jacket on the wall. Sister Imelda, who is aware of Ted and Dougal’s bet, winks at Dougal and says ‘Looks like you win today, Dougal’. Satisfied that Jack is performing the service, Ted and Dougal leave. Ted goes to the pub to drown his sorrows, while Dougal heads home. Let’s assume that Jack did perform the service.

PUB: Ted is complaining to Tom that he lost the bet. Tom asks Ted ‘Do you know Jack performed the service?’ and Ted responds ‘Well, we saw his jacket in the vestry, and he

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<sup>1</sup> These cases are inspired by DeRose (2009, Chapter 1).

never goes anywhere without it. Oh, and Sister Imelda seemed to know he was there. So, yeah, Dougal and I both know'. Satisfied, Tom offers to buy Ted a drink to help him drown his sorrows.

POLICE STATION: The police have stopped Dougal on his way home. A serious crime has been committed and, as part of their investigations, the police need to determine whether Jack performed his service that afternoon. They ask Dougal for a statement, and Dougal replies 'Well, I didn't actually see Jack at the church. His jacket was there, and he never goes anywhere without that, and Sister Imelda seemed to know he was there, but she didn't say that she had seen him. So you'd have to ask her. I'm afraid I don't know whether he was there or not'. When the police ask whether Ted 'knows', Dougal responds 'He doesn't know either'. When told that Ted has been overheard claiming to 'know' that Jack performed the service, Dougal says 'No, he's wrong. He doesn't know that, for the reason I just gave you'.

Intuitively - to me, anyway - Ted's 'knowledge' ascription and Dougal's denial are entirely appropriate. Does it follow that Ted and Dougal both speak truly? Not necessarily. It could be that, though Dougal speaks falsely in denying that they both 'know', it's proper for him to do so. (Similarly, but perhaps less plausibly, it could be that, though Ted speaks falsely in saying that they both 'know', it's proper for him to do so). Clearly, it can sometimes be appropriate to say things that are false. But, at the very least, I think there is some pressure to say that both Ted and Dougal speak truly. Why? Because, if we construe the cases this way, there's a nice, straightforward explanation why we find Ted's 'knowledge' ascription and Dougal's denial appropriate. They are appropriate because what Ted and Dougal say is true. Why not prefer the straightforward response?<sup>2</sup>

If - for now - we grant that we should prefer the straightforward response, further questions follow. First: Whose context is relevant? Possible answers include the 'knowledge' ascriber's context, the subject's context, or the context of whoever assesses the 'knowledge' ascription. Our cases provide *some* reason for thinking that the relevant

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<sup>2</sup> One might think there are a lot of reasons to not prefer the straightforward response. The point here is just that, *prima facie*, there's some reason to prefer it.

context is the ascriber's: Dougal 'knows' in Ted's context, but he doesn't 'know' in his own context, and Ted doesn't 'know' in Dougal's context, but he 'knows' in his own context.<sup>3</sup> Second: Which features of the context are relevant to whether someone 'knows'? Possible answers include the sorts of error-possibilities that those in the context consider, their practical situation, or the sort of inquiry they're engaged in.

I'm going to argue that we should prefer a version of the 'straightforward' response to our cases on which the relevant context is that of the 'knowledge' ascriber. This view - normally called 'epistemic contextualism' - is not new, and it has a number of defenders and detractors in the current literature.<sup>4</sup> In the last twenty years a lot of ink has been spilled debating its merits and demerits. So, one might ask, what is my defence of epistemic contextualism going to add? Broadly speaking, I have three aims:

1. To deal with a number of serious objections. It's largely because of these objections that many do not prefer the epistemic contextualist response to our cases.
2. To put a particular epistemic contextualist view on the table. The guiding idea is (very roughly) that whether someone 'knows' depends on whether they can rule out the alternatives those in the ascriber's context *have a reason* to consider, where what alternatives those in the ascriber's context have a reason to consider depends (again, very roughly) on their practical situation. I call this view *interests contextualism*. As I'll argue, there are a number of reasons why this view is preferable to both standard versions of contextualism and other rival views.
3. To motivate interests contextualism via considerations about the function that the concept 'knowledge' plays in our epistemic community. Following Edward Craig (1990), I argue that 'knowledge' ascriptions play the function of identifying good informants, from which I argue that a certain sort of contextualism - of which interests contextualism is a type - follows. (I say 'a certain sort' because, as I will

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<sup>3</sup> Again, this reason is *prima facie*.

<sup>4</sup> For defences (and this is just a sample) see Barke (2004); Blome-Tillmann (2009a); Cohen (1986; 1999); DeRose (1995; 2009); Greco (2008); Henderson (2009); Ichikawa (2011); Lewis (1996); Neta (2002). For objections (again, this is just a sample) see Brown (2006); Hawthorne (2004); Hazlett (2009); MacFarlane (2005); Nagel (2008; 2010); Pritchard (2001, 2010); Rysiew (2001); Stanley (2005a).



argue, the sort of contextualism that follows is *limited* in that contextual variation in what is required for someone to ‘know’ is *restricted* in certain ways).

But that’s all to come. In this introductory chapter my rather more limited aim is to provide a (detailed) sketch of the conceptual landscape. First, I’ll explain how I want to understand epistemic contextualism, and how I want to differentiate it from its rivals. Second, I’ll present the main arguments for epistemic contextualism, and explain how I want to understand them. Third, I’ll put the main objections to epistemic contextualism on the table. Finally, I’ll summarise the argument of the chapters to come. With these smaller aims in mind, I propose to answer the following three questions:

1. What is epistemic contextualism? (§1)
2. What are the main arguments? (§2)
3. What are the main objections? (§3)

### **1. The view**

What is epistemic contextualism (henceforth, contextualism)? I’ll start by looking at how its defenders (and detractors) have formulated the view, and I’ll show that some differences in formulation point to a need for clarification (§1.1). But, as we’ll see, other differences are important for how we situate the view with respect to its rivals, so I’ll explain what those differences are, and show how appreciating them provides a neat way of carving up the conceptual space (§1.2). I’ll finish by summarising the various views about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions that we’ll meet in this section (§1.3). The overall aim is to get clear about what contextualism is, and what alternatives to it are available.

## 1.1. Truth-values, truth-conditions and semantic contents

### 1.1.1. Formulating the view

First, contextualism has been formulated as a view about the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, or of sentences containing the word ‘knows’.<sup>5</sup> For example:

“Contextualism is the view that ascriptions of knowledge are context-sensitive - the truth-values of sentences containing the words 'know', and its cognates depend on contextually determined standards” (Cohen 1999, 57).

“One important kind of contextualism is ‘attributor contextualism’, or the thesis that the truth-value of a knowledge claim can vary across attributor contexts. Put differently: the truth-value of a knowledge claim is relative to the context of attribution” (Greco 2008, 416).

Second, contextualism has been formulated as a view about the truth-conditions of ‘knowledge’-ascribing and ‘knowledge’-denying sentences:

“[Contextualism is] a theory according to which the truth-conditions of knowledge-ascribing and knowledge-denying sentences (sentences of the form ‘S knows that p’ and ‘S does not know that p’ and related variants of such sentences) vary in certain ways according to the context in which they are uttered“ (DeRose 2009, 2).

“Contextualists hold that the truth conditions of knowledge attributions are keyed to the context of the attributor” (Henderson 2009, 121).

Third, contextualism has been formulated as a semantic thesis, or as a view about the semantic contents of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions.

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<sup>5</sup> A note on use/mention conventions: When presenting contextualist views about a certain expression, such as ‘knows’, or describing what contextualists about that expression say about particular cases, I’ll always put quotation marks around the expression in question. Otherwise, I won’t use quotation marks. In tricky cases I’ve erred on the side of caution and used quotation marks.

“[Contextualism] is a semantic view, namely the view that ‘knowledge’-ascriptions can change their contents with the conversational context. To be more precise, [contextualism] is the view that the predicate ‘know’ has an unstable Kaplan character, that is a character that does not map all contexts on the same content. According to [contextualism], ‘know’ is an indexical expression” (Blome-Tillmann 2009a, 244).

“Contextualism is the semantic thesis that knowledge ascriptions, instances of ‘x knows that p’, are context-sensitive in a distinctively epistemological way. That is, predicates such as ‘knows that the bank on the Corner of 96th and Broadway in New York City will be open on Saturday, September 11, 2004’, or ‘knows that Bill Clinton was president of the United States of America in 1999’, express different properties relative to different contexts, despite their apparent lack of context-sensitive vocabulary” (Stanley 2005a, 16).

Aren’t these formulations (more-or-less) equivalent? Isn’t saying that the truth-conditions or semantic contents of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on the context equivalent to saying that what proposition they express depends on the context? And, given that propositions are the bearers of truth and falsity, how could the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on the context unless what proposition they express depends on the context? However, as we’ll see, if we treat these formulations as even more-or-less equivalent we’ll ignore a number of possible views about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions (§1.2). Here, I’ll comment on some differences between the formulations that just point to a need for clarification.

First, an important lesson to take from David Kaplan (1989a) is that outside of a context of utterance sentences aren’t true or false, don’t have truth-conditions and don’t express determinate (i.e. truth-evaluable) propositions.<sup>6</sup> To see this, consider sentences

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<sup>6</sup> How should we think of a context of utterance? Roughly, a context of utterance is a concrete conversational situation in which speakers and their interlocutors make, challenge and, if necessary, withdraw assertions. An assertion may be withdrawn because it has been challenged, but an assertion may be withdrawn without being challenged - for example, if someone changes her mind - and an assertion may be challenged without being withdrawn - for example, if the challenge is generally regarded as misguided. The various features of a context - the speakers, the time and location,

containing indexicals such as ‘I am tired’ or ‘The time to strike is now’. Because a context is needed to provide the denotations of the indexical expressions ‘I’ and ‘now’, outside of a context of utterance these sentences aren’t true or false, don’t have truth-conditions and don’t express determinate propositions. The first sentence is true iff the speaker of the context is tired, and expresses the proposition that the speaker of the context is tired (so, if I’m the speaker of the context, it’s true iff RM is tired, and it expresses the proposition *RM is tired*).<sup>7</sup> The second sentence is true iff the time to strike is the time of the context, and expresses the proposition that the time to strike is the time of the context (so, if the time of the context is 11.10am, it’s true iff the time to strike is 11.10am, and it expresses the proposition *the time to strike is 11.10am*).<sup>8</sup> So, Michael Blome-Tillmann, Stewart Cohen, Keith DeRose, John Greco, David Henderson and Jason Stanley all have in mind instances or utterances of sentences containing the word ‘know’ and its cognates. I’ll refer to these as ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials.

Second, in all of these formulations ‘context’ means the context in which the ‘knowledge’ ascription is uttered (the context of utterance). If I say ‘Catriona knows that Isla was at the party last night’ then, for the contextualist, the truth-value/truth-conditions/semantic content of my ‘knowledge’ ascription depends on my context, not Catriona’s or some other context. So, when Cohen says that contextualists think that

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and so on - are what fix the denotations of indexical expressions used in the context. The current ‘state of play’ - including what assertions have been accepted - fixes what Lewis (1979) calls the ‘conversational score’. I should note that this way of thinking of a context of utterance, while common in contemporary philosophy of language, hasn’t gone unchallenged. For discussion see Gauker (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Here and throughout I use italics for propositions.

<sup>8</sup> Objection: This just shows that sentences containing indexical expressions don’t have determinate contents outside of a context. We could give a semantics on which sentences containing indexicals have contents relative to contexts of utterance whereas sentences that don’t contain indexicals have determinate contents outside of context, but it’s unclear why we would want to, and there are good theoretical reasons for not doing so. In particular: The semantics would have to assign an entity (a function from a context of utterance to a content) to some sentences (those containing indexicals) but not to others (those not containing indexicals). Why not just assign a function from a context of utterance to a content to all sentences? For sentences that don’t contain indexicals, the function will just map all contexts to the same content. For discussion of the need for functions from contexts to contents (‘characters’) and contents see Kaplan (1989a) and Lewis (1980).

the ‘truth-values of sentences containing the words ‘know’ ... depend on contextually determined standards’ he means that they depend on standards determined by the *ascriber’s* context, not some other context.

Third, contextualists think that the truth-values (or, truth-conditions/semantic contents) of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on the ascriber’s context. But what features of the ascriber’s context? Cohen talks about ‘contextually determined standards’, and it’s not uncommon to find contextualism formulated in terms of contextually varying epistemic standards (see also DeRose 1995; 2009).<sup>9</sup> Very roughly, the idea is that the truth-value (or, truth-conditions/semantic content) of a ‘knowledge’ ascription depends on the epistemic standards operative in the ascriber’s context. So, to take our example, the truth-value (or, truth-conditions/semantic content) of ‘Catriona knows that Isla was at the party last night’ depends on the epistemic standards operative in my context. If the standards are high, an awful lot is required in order for Catriona to ‘know’ (she has to have excellent evidence, or be able to rule out a wide range of error-possibilities); if the standards are low, a lot less is required in order for Catriona to ‘know’ (she has to just have decent evidence, or be able to rule out a narrower range of error-possibilities). Granting - for now - that this is how we should formulate the view, we can reformulate our question: What determines the epistemic standards operative in the ascriber’s context? Are they just the *ascriber’s* standards? Or some other standards that are somehow determined by the context? The various formulations above are neutral on these questions, but it’s not uncommon to find people claiming that contextualists think the standards operative in the ascriber’s context are the ascriber’s standards. This, as I’ll argue, is a mistake. Here’s Peter Klein:

“The basic claim of the contextualist ... is that the truth of sentences attributing or denying knowledge or the possession of adequate evidence to someone will vary according to some features of the speaker uttering the sentences ... “S knows that p” and “S does not know that p” can both be true because the truth value of the sentences

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<sup>9</sup> It’s also not uncommon to find contextualism formulated in terms of contextually varying ranges of relevant alternatives (Blome-Tillmann 2009a; Ichikawa 2011; Lewis 1996). For further discussion see Chapter three (§1).

depends in part upon the standards employed by the person who is uttering them” (Klein 2000, 108).

On this view, the truth-value (or, truth-conditions/semantic content) of ‘Catriona knows that Isla was at the party last night’ depends on *my* epistemic standards (what epistemic standards I adopt). I’ll call this ‘simple contextualism’. But contextualists don’t need to say that the epistemic standard operative in a context is the epistemic standard that the speaker (the ascriber) adopts, or that it is the epistemic standard that any particular individual in the context adopts. Rather, the operative epistemic standard could be determined by (or, be a function of) the various epistemic standards that all of those in the context adopt. It’s worth pausing to see how that might work.

### **1.1.2. Interlude: conversational scoreboards**

As above (fn. 6), think of a context of utterance as a concrete conversational situation in which speakers and their interlocutors make various conversational moves. The speakers in any conversation will have entered that conversation with various intentions, interests and purposes (to distribute or receive information, to argue their case, and so on) and, all being well, those intentions, interests and purposes will underlie and explain the various conversational moves that the speakers make. At any point in the conversation, there will be certain things that the conversational participants all accept, whether because it’s just obvious that they all accept them, or because they have explicitly been discussed and accepted. But the set of things that they all accept is not static; rather, the set will change (it may expand, but it may contract) as the conversation progresses. Borrowing terminology from Lewis (1979): At any point in a conversation the conversational kinematics - the various conversational moves that have been made - determine the ‘score’ of the conversation at that point. Call this the ‘conversational score’.

The conversational score will have various components. The epistemic standard that the participants all accept could be one of those components. Note that this need not be the epistemic standard that any particular participant accepts. It could be that the various participants have been pushing for different epistemic standards, and the standard that’s registered on the scoreboard is a compromise. So the epistemic standard operative in a context could be whatever standard is a component of the conversational

score. On this view, the truth-value (or, truth-conditions/semantic content) of ‘Catriona knows that Isla was at the party last night’ depends on whatever epistemic standard is a component of the conversational score at the point at which I ascribe ‘knowledge’ to Catriona. I’ll call this *conversational contextualism*.

Does this exhaust the possibilities? No. There are contextualist views on which the ascriber’s context doesn’t ‘select’ the ascriber’s epistemic standards (as in simple contextualism), or whatever epistemic standard is a component of the conversational score in the ascriber’s context (as in conversational contextualism), and we’ll meet a contextualist view like that in Chapter three (my view).

Before ending this digression, I want to highlight something that will be important later (Chapter three (§0; §3); Chapter four (§2)). Most of the ‘main players’ in the debate - in particular Blome-Tillmann, Cohen, DeRose and David Lewis - endorse conversational contextualism.<sup>10</sup> Here’s DeRose:

“My own thought ... has always assumed what I call ‘single scoreboard semantics’, due to the influence of David Lewis’s ‘Scorekeeping in a Language Game’ (1979) which seems to me to promote such an account. There is a single scoreboard in a given conversation; the truth-conditional content of both our speakers’ uses of ‘know(s)’ is given by the score registered on this single scoreboard. The score of course can change as the conversation progresses, and the score it registers is responsive to the maneuvers made by all the various speakers, but there is at any given time a single score that governs the truth-conditions of all the speakers’ uses of the relevant term” (DeRose 2009, 135-6).

And here’s Cohen considering the question how context determines the epistemic standards:

“This is a very difficult question to answer. But we can say this much. The standards are determined by some complicated function of speaker intentions, listener expectations,

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<sup>10</sup> What about Greco, Henderson and Stanley? Stanley (2005a) argues that there are good reasons to reject *any* version of contextualism. I take up these arguments in Chapter two (§1). For Greco and Henderson see Chapter four (§2.1).

presuppositions of the conversation, salience relations, etc., by what David Lewis calls the conversational score” (Cohen 1999, 61).

Finally, here’s Blome-Tillmann:

“I have proposed an amended version of Lewis’s contextualist theory of ‘knowledge’, one that posits a semantic connection between ‘knowledge’ on the one hand and what is pragmatically presupposed in the speaker’s context on the other” (Blome-Tillmann 2009a, 289).

Pragmatic presuppositions, both as they are normally understood and as Blome-Tillmann understands them, are components of the conversational score.<sup>11</sup> As these quotes make clear, Blome-Tillmann, Cohen and DeRose are all drawing on Lewis (1979), so we can count Lewis among the defenders of conversational contextualism as well.

### **1.1.3. Summing up**

What differences remain between our various formulations? I suggest the following:

1. Contextualism is the view that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on (are sensitive to) the context of utterance (‘context-sensitive’) (Cohen, Greco).
2. Contextualism is the view that the truth-conditions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive (DeRose, Henderson).
3. Contextualism is the view that the semantic contents of (or, propositions expressed by) ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive (Blome-Tillmann, Stanley).

I’ll now explain why these formulations aren’t equivalent. In the process I’ll provide a neat way of distinguishing a number of possible views about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions.

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<sup>11</sup> Blome-Tillmann (2009a) argues for a slight modification of Stalnaker’s (1974; 2002) account of pragmatic presuppositions, on which they are components of the conversational score.



## 1.2. The rival views

First, I'll explain why the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions might be context-sensitive even though their truth-conditions and semantic contents aren't (§1.2.1). In the process I'll distinguish between indexical and nonindexical contextualism (§1.2.1.1), and I'll introduce content and truth relativism (§1.2.1.2). Second, I'll explain why we shouldn't equate views about the semantic contents of 'knowledge' ascriptions with views about their truth-conditions, and in the process I'll distinguish between standard and speech-act contextualism (§1.2.2). Third, I'll situate the views presented in §1.2.1 and §1.2.2 with respect to more traditional invariantist views (strict and sensitive invariantism), and I'll briefly discuss an expressivist view (§1.2.3). By the end of §1.2.3 I'll have put the main views about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions on the table.

### 1.2.1. Varieties of context-sensitivity (Part 1)

#### 1.2.1.1. Indexical and nonindexical contextualism

Let's work with a standard semantic framework in which a sentence uttered in a context has a content that is evaluated for truth relative to the circumstance of evaluation of the context in which it was uttered (see Kaplan 1989a). (As I've already done above, I'll often put this in terms of *propositions*. I'll say that a sentence in a context *expresses* a proposition). Clearly, the truth-values of some sentences depend on the context of utterance. Take the sentence 'I am sitting'. Imagine Ruaraidh says 'I am sitting' at 12.30pm. Whether what he says is true depends on whether *Ruaraidh* is sitting at 12.30pm, not on whether Catriona is sitting at 12.30pm, or on whether Ruaraidh was sitting at 11.30am. Both the time at which this sentence is uttered, and the person who utters it, are *determinants* of the truth-value of the proposition that the sentence expresses. On the standard framework, the time at which this sentence is uttered, and the person who utters it ('the speaker'), can determine the truth-value of the proposition it expresses either by entering into the proposition expressed or the circumstance relative to which the proposition is evaluated. Since Kaplan (1989a) and Lewis (1980), everyone would agree that, in this case, the speaker determines the truth-value of the

proposition by entering into the proposition expressed. But what about the time at which it is uttered?<sup>12</sup>

On one view, the time at which this sentence is uttered determines the truth-value of the proposition it expresses by entering into the proposition itself. So, on that view, Ruairaidh expresses the proposition *Ruairaidh is sitting at 12.30pm*, and that proposition is evaluated for truth relative to the actual world. (On this view, circumstances of evaluation are just worlds). On the other view, the time at which this sentence is uttered determines the truth-value of the proposition it expresses by entering into the circumstance relative to which the proposition is evaluated. So, on this view, Ruairaidh expresses the proposition *Ruairaidh is sitting*, and that proposition is evaluated for truth relative to the actual world and the time at which Ruairaidh uttered the sentence (here, 12.30pm). (On this view, circumstances of evaluation are pairs of worlds and times).<sup>13</sup>

Call those who think that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on the context of utterance *contextualists*. Imagine that Ailsa and Laurie both, simultaneously, say ‘Morven knows that penguins eat fish’. Contextualists think that whether what Ailsa says is true depends on the epistemic standards operative in *Ailsa’s* context, and whether what Laurie says is true depends on the epistemic standards operative in *Laurie’s* context. The epistemic standards operative in their respective contexts are one of the determinants of the truth-values of their ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. On the standard framework, the epistemic standards can determine the truth-values of their ‘knowledge’ ascriptions either by entering into the proposition expressed or the circumstance relative to which the proposition is evaluated. On one view, the epistemic standards determine the truth-values of their ‘knowledge’ ascriptions by entering into the proposition itself. So, on that view, Ailsa expresses (something like) the proposition *Morven knows, by the standards of Ailsa’s context, that penguins eat fish* whereas Laurie expresses the proposition

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, if Ruairaidh had said ‘I am sitting *now*’ everyone would agree that the time at which that sentence was uttered would enter into the proposition expressed (again, see Kaplan 1989a and Lewis 1980). The point here is that, in cases where the tensed element isn’t part of the surface form of the sentence uttered, we can argue that the time at which the sentence was uttered enters into the circumstance relative to which the proposition it expresses is evaluated rather than the proposition itself.

<sup>13</sup> For a defence of the former view, see King (2003); for defences of the latter view, see Brogaard (2012); Récanati (2007). Which view is right doesn’t concern me here.

*Morven knows, by the standards of Laurie's context, that penguins eat fish*, and both propositions are evaluated for truth relative to the actual world. On the other view, the epistemic standards determine the truth-values of their 'knowledge' ascriptions by entering into the circumstance relative to which the proposition is evaluated. So, on this view, Ailsa and Laurie both express the proposition *Morven knows that penguins eat fish*, and that proposition is evaluated for truth relative to the actual world and the epistemic standards operative in their respective contexts.

On the first contextualist view, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are context-sensitive because 'knowledge' ascriptions express different propositions in different contexts. This view is analogous to the view on which Ruaraidh's utterance of 'I am sitting' expresses the proposition *Ruaraidh is sitting at 12.30pm*. Following John MacFarlane (2009a), I'll call this view *indexical contextualism*. On the second contextualist view, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are context-sensitive because, even though what proposition a 'knowledge' ascription expresses doesn't depend on the context, the epistemic standard parameter of the circumstance of evaluation relative to which the proposition expressed is evaluated does depend on the context. This view is analogous to the view on which Ruaraidh's utterance of 'I am sitting' expresses the proposition *Ruaraidh is sitting*. Again following MacFarlane (2009a), I'll call this view *nonindexical contextualism*.<sup>14</sup>

If we treat the thesis that the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are context-sensitive as equivalent to the thesis that the truth-conditions/semantic contents of 'knowledge' ascriptions are context-sensitive, we ignore the distinction between indexical and nonindexical contextualism. Our first formulation of contextualism isn't equivalent to the second or third.<sup>15</sup> (In what follows I'll often use the label 'contextualism'. Unless otherwise indicated, when I do so I mean both indexical and nonindexical contextualism).

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<sup>14</sup> Defences of nonindexical contextualism about 'knowledge' ascriptions include Brogaard (2008a) (under the label 'perspectivalism') and perhaps Kompa (2002) (although not under the label 'nonindexical contextualism'). Nonindexical contextualism also goes by the label 'moderate relativism' (see Récanati 2007). To keep things simple I'll use the label 'nonindexical contextualism' throughout.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps nonindexical contextualism is false. No matter. The point here is just that, given that it's a coherent view, we shouldn't ignore it.

### 1.2.1.2. Contextualism and relativism

We can now situate both varieties of contextualism with respect to content and truth relativism. I'll start with the intuitive idea, and then I'll sketch a relativist semantic framework for 'knowledge' ascriptions.

What if the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions depended not on the epistemic standards operative in the context of utterance but on the epistemic standards operative in the context in which they are assessed (the 'context of assessment')?<sup>16</sup> As before, Laurie says 'Morven knows that penguins eat fish'. What if the truth-value of Laurie's 'knowledge' ascription depended on the epistemic standards operative in the context in which someone else - Ailsa, say, - assesses her 'knowledge' ascription? But, clearly, there are multiple contexts in which Laurie's 'knowledge' ascription can be assessed: Ailsa can assess Laurie's 'knowledge' ascription in her context, and I can assess Laurie's ascription in my context. It could be that, relative to the epistemic standards operative in Ailsa's context, Laurie's 'knowledge' ascription is true whereas, relative to the epistemic standards operative in my context, Laurie's 'knowledge' ascription is false. So, on the view we're considering, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions would be *relative* to the *multiple* contexts in which they can be assessed. This would be a sort of *relativism* about 'knowledge' ascriptions. A number of views about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions could lay claim to the label 'relativism' (including the contextualist views we've just met) so I'll explain how this view differs from the views already on the table.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> How should we think about a context of assessment? The short answer: In much the same way as we think about a context of utterance (see fn. 6), but with the crucial difference that, for each sentence uttered, there's a single context in which it was uttered whereas there are many contexts in which it can be assessed.

<sup>17</sup> Below I'll sketch MacFarlane's (2005) relativist semantic framework for 'knowledge' ascriptions. MacFarlane has used the same framework in arguing for (truth) relativism about epistemic modals (2009b), future contingents (2003), deontic modals (Kolodny & MacFarlane 2010) and taste predicates (2007a). However, I'll be focusing on 'knowledge' ascriptions here. Two things to note: First, there are other defenders of (truth) relativism, and in some cases the proposed semantic framework is slightly different from the one I'm about to sketch (see Egan, Hawthorne & Weatherson 2005). Second, Cappelen & Hawthorne (2009) argue that MacFarlane's focus on contexts of assessment (and what I call 'assessment-sensitivity' below) isn't necessary for formulating the view he defends. I follow MacFarlane on focusing on contexts of

On the view we're considering, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions depend on the epistemic standard operative in the context in which they are assessed. Following MacFarlane (2005), and to avoid confusion with what I'm calling 'context-sensitivity', I'll call this *assessment-sensitivity*. There are two ways in which the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions could be assessment-sensitive. First, it could be that the epistemic standard operative in the context of assessment enters into the proposition that the 'knowledge' ascription expresses. So, on this view, Ailsa assesses the proposition *Morven knows, by the standards of Ailsa's context, that penguins eat fish* whereas I assess the proposition *Morven knows, by the standards of RM's context, that penguins eat fish*, and those propositions are evaluated for truth relative to the actual world. Second, it could be that the epistemic standard operative in the context of assessment enters into the circumstance relative to which the proposition that the 'knowledge' ascription expresses is evaluated. So, on that view, Ailsa and I assess the same proposition - *Morven knows that penguins eat fish* - but we assess it relative to different epistemic standards. Ailsa assesses it relative to the epistemic standards operative in her context of assessment, and I assess it relative to the epistemic standards operative in my context of assessment.

On the first relativist view, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are assessment-sensitive because 'knowledge' ascriptions express different propositions in different contexts of assessment. I'll call this *content relativism*. On the second relativist view, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are assessment-sensitive because, even though what proposition a 'knowledge' ascription expresses doesn't depend on the context of assessment, the epistemic standard parameter of the circumstance of evaluation relative to which the proposition expressed is evaluated does depend on the context of assessment. I'll call this *truth relativism*.<sup>18</sup> Note that both relativist views reject the

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assessment, but I need not take any stand on whether one needs to use them in formulating MacFarlane's brand of relativism.

<sup>18</sup> Giving these views the labels 'indexical relativism' and 'nonindexical relativism' respectively would reflect the intended parallels with indexical and nonindexical contextualism, but the terminology I'm using instead is approaching orthodoxy (see López de Sa 2011), and what I'm calling 'indexical contextualism' often goes by the label 'indexical relativism' (see, for example, Dreier 2009 and López de Sa 2008). Note that truth relativism also often goes by the label 'radical relativism' (see Récanati 2007). To

standard semantic framework, either because a single ‘knowledge’ ascription doesn’t express the same proposition that is then evaluated for truth or falsity in every context of assessment (content relativism), or because a ‘knowledge’ ascription is evaluated for truth or falsity relative to the circumstance of evaluation of the context of assessment rather than of the context in which it was uttered (truth relativism). So, in an important sense, the proposed relativist semantics is *revisionary*.<sup>19</sup>

I should note that MacFarlane, along with almost everyone else I’ve cited or will cite, is primarily interested in truth relativism. In what follows I’ll often use the label ‘relativism’, by which, unless otherwise indicated, I mean both content and truth relativism. I do so because most of what I have to say about truth relativism - in particular, why some of the usual arguments for contextualism are as much arguments for relativism - will go for content relativism as well. However, at certain points, I’ll have cause to keep the two apart. (It’s at those points that it will perhaps become clear why most are primarily interested in truth relativism).

Summing up, I have distinguished between indexical and nonindexical contextualism (§1.2.1.1), and content and truth relativism (§1.2.1.2). We’ll soon see that the sorts of arguments that have standardly been taken to motivate adopting contextualism are as much arguments for one form of contextualism or relativism as the other (§2).

## **1.2.2. Varieties of context-sensitivity (Part 2)**

First, I’ll explain why we should be wary of equating views about the semantic contents of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions with views about their truth-conditions (§1.2.2.1). Second, I’ll draw on this explanation in distinguishing between standard and speech-act contextualism (§1.2.2.2).

### **1.2.2.1. The semantics/pragmatics interface**

I’ll start with a question: what is the ‘semantic project’? Following François Récanati (2004b), we can distinguish between two ways of understanding the semantic project:

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keep things simple I’ll use the labels ‘content relativism’ and ‘truth relativism’ throughout.

<sup>19</sup> You might think that both indexical and nonindexical contextualism are revisionary too, and as we’ll see there’s a sense in which that’s true (§1.2.3.1), but note that both can be formulated within the standard semantic framework.

1. Semantics concerns the conventional or linguistic meaning of expressions.
2. Semantics concerns the truth-conditional contents of utterances (the things that we say).

I'm going to argue that, because we should be open to the possibility that these are separate projects, the word 'semantic', and therefore phrases like 'semantic content', is somewhat ambiguous. But I'll start by explaining why one might think that these ways of understanding the semantic project coincide.

We're capable of understanding a potentially infinite number of sentences, most of which we've never encountered before. How is that possible? The best, and perhaps only, answer is that our language is *compositional*. The truth-conditions and contents of complex expressions (sentences and the like) are determined by the contents of their constituent parts and certain rules governing their composition. The semanticists job is to explain how, exactly, that works. The aim is to specify the contents of primitive expressions and the compositional rules in such a way that the truth-conditions and contents of a potentially infinite number of sentences can be derived from a finite number of primitives and compositional rules.

An illustrative (and simplistic) example: Imagine a language that just contains the primitive expressions 'Ruaraidh', 'Raibeart' and 'snores'. The semantics will tell us what the contents of the primitives are (for 'Ruaraidh' and 'Raibeart', the individuals *Ruaraidh* and *Raibeart*; for 'snores' a function from individuals to truth-values such that it maps an individual who snores to True and an individual who doesn't snore to False) and the semantics will give us a rule that tells us how those primitives can be combined to form grammatical complex expressions (it will tell us that we can form 'Ruaraidh snores' or 'Raibeart snores' but not 'Ruaraidh Raibeart' or the like). From the contents of the primitives and the rule governing their composition we can derive the truth-conditions and contents of both 'Ruaraidh snores' (true iff Ruaraidh snores) and 'Raibeart snores' (true iff Raibeart snores).

If this captures the aim of the semantic project, one might expect our two ways of understanding the semantic project to coincide. The idea is that, from the meaning of primitive expressions (the first understanding), and a finite number of compositional

rules, one can derive the truth-conditional contents of utterances (the second understanding). In our example: From the meanings of ‘Ruaraidh’, ‘Raibeart’ and ‘snores’, and a compositional rule, we can derive the truth-conditional contents of utterances of ‘Ruaraidh snores’ and ‘Raibeart snores’. So semantics concerns both the linguistic meaning of expressions and the truth-conditional contents of utterances, but these aren’t separate concerns. Rather, both are part of the larger project of explaining how our language works and how linguistic understanding is possible.

To see why things aren’t quite so straightforward take any sentence containing an indexical, like ‘I am tired’. Our semantics will tell us what the contents of ‘am’ and ‘tired’ are, but what about ‘I’? A context is needed to determine an indexical expression’s contribution towards the truth-conditional contents of utterances of sentences that contain it (§1.1.1). Our semantics can’t tell us an indexical expression’s contribution towards the truth-conditional contents of utterances of sentences containing that expression, so it can’t tell us the contribution that all primitive expressions make towards the truth-conditional contents of utterances of the sentences from which they can be constructed.<sup>20</sup>

However, the spirit if not the letter of the semantic project can be salvaged if we notice that we can say quite a lot about ‘I’ and other indexical expressions. In particular, we can give rules (what Kaplan 1989a calls ‘characters’) that tell us how context determines the contribution that an indexical expression makes towards the truth-conditional contents of utterances of sentences containing it (its ‘denotation’). So, the rule for ‘I’ will tell us that the denotation of ‘I’ is always the speaker (when I say ‘I am tired’ that just means *RM is tired*), the rule for ‘now’ will tell us that the denotation of ‘now’ is always the time of the context (when I say ‘RM is tired now’ that just means *RM is tired at 3.05pm*), and so on. So, while certain expressions - indexicals - have *incomplete* linguistic meanings (their denotations depend on the context), we can give rules that tell us how their denotations depend on the context. Introducing some jargon, and following Récanati (2004a), we can say that the processes by which indexical expressions

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<sup>20</sup> Clearly ‘I’ does have a context-independent meaning (something like a function from contexts to individuals), but that meaning isn’t sufficient to determine the truth-conditional content of any particular utterance of ‘I am tired’ because it can’t tell us which particular individual is tired.



acquire their denotations in a context are *linguistically controlled* ('linguistically controlled' because in our semantics we can give rules that tell us how their denotations depend on the context). We'll need a name for these sorts of processes so, again following Récanati (2004a), I'll call them processes of *saturation* ('saturation' because, through these processes, an incomplete - unsaturated - indexical expression acquires a denotation in a context). We can modify our first way of understanding the semantic project accordingly:

- 1\*. Semantics concerns both the linguistic meaning of expressions, and the rules specifying how the denotations of certain expressions (indexicals and demonstratives) depend on the context.<sup>21</sup>

Are there other (non-indexical or demonstrative) expressions whose linguistic meanings are incomplete? Gradable adjectives, such as 'tall' and 'rich' perhaps? Maybe. If so, in order to salvage the spirit of the semantic project, we would have to give rules that tell us how their denotations depend on the context. If we can give such rules, the processes by which these expressions acquire denotations in context will also be linguistically controlled processes of saturation. It will be helpful to have a name for this sort of dependence of denotation on context, so I'll call it *indexicality in the broad sense*, and I'll refer to expressions that are context-sensitive in this sense as *broad indexicals*. If we wanted to accommodate the phenomenon of indexicality in the broad sense, we could modify our first way of understanding the semantic project accordingly:

- 1\*\*. Semantics concerns both the linguistic meaning of expressions, and rules specifying how the denotations of certain expressions (broad indexicals) depend on the context.

It's time to take stock. I started by distinguishing two ways of understanding the semantic project (as concerned with linguistic meaning and as concerned with the truth-conditional contents of utterances) and I explained why, given a certain conception of the aim of the semantic project, one might think that these understandings coincide.

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<sup>21</sup> While I have only mentioned 'pure' indexicals, everything I say here would also apply to demonstratives ('this', 'that' etc).

However, as I've argued, in order to accommodate the phenomenon of indexicality we need to modify the first way of understanding the semantic project, whether as in (1\*\*) or in (1\*). One might wonder whether, in the process, we've not just started to think about the semantic project as primarily concerned with the truth-conditional contents of utterances (the second understanding), but I'll set that aside. I'm now going to turn to another phenomenon which some think shows that the first way of understanding the semantic project has to be divorced from the second.

Imagine that Father is tending to Daughter, who has just cut herself on a small piece of glass. Father says 'Don't worry. You are not going to die'.<sup>22</sup> The natural reaction would be to think that what Father has said is true (it's not a serious injury). If what Father has said is to be true, the truth-conditional content of his utterance - what he intuitively said, the proposition he expresses - would have to be *Daughter is not going to die from the cut* (Daughter, we'll assume, isn't immortal). But, one might think, the proposition that's literally expressed - the 'literal meaning' of the sentence Father utters in the present context - is just *Daughter is not going to die*, which is false. Why might one think that? Consider the way in which 'You' acquires its denotation in the present context. There's a rule that tells us that the denotation of 'You' is the most salient individual in the context (or something like that), and the most salient individual in this context is Daughter, so 'You' acquires its denotation via a linguistically controlled process of saturation. Contrast that with the qualification *from the cut*. It doesn't correspond to any element in the surface form of the sentence and, even if it does correspond to some hidden element, what is the rule that tells us how the denotation of that element depends on the context going to be?

Reflection on this case, and many others like it, may lead one to conclude not just that context often has an effect on the truth-conditional contents of utterances (the phenomenon of indexicality in the broad sense tells us that), but that we can't put all of the truth-conditionally relevant effects of context down to linguistically controlled processes of saturation. Introducing some more jargon, and following Récanati (2004a), there may be non-linguistically controlled processes by which context has an effect on the truth-conditional contents of utterances called *free enrichment* ('enrichment' because

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<sup>22</sup> This example is ubiquitous in the literature.

the processes produce something ‘richer’ than the literal meaning, ‘free’ because we don’t need to give rules that tell us how the denotations of particular expressions depend on the context in our semantics).<sup>23</sup>

Could we modify our first understanding of the semantic project to cope with the phenomenon of free enrichment? Here’s a stab:

1\*\*\*. Semantics concerns the linguistic meaning of expressions, rules specifying how the denotations of certain expressions (broad indexicals) depends on the context, and any other affect that context may have on the truth-conditional contents of utterances.

At this point, it should be clear that we’re no longer modifying the first way of understanding the semantic project (as concerned with the linguistic meaning of expressions). Rather, we’re now just thinking about semantics as concerned with the truth-conditional contents of utterances (the second way). What this shows is that, if there are non-linguistically controlled processes by which context has an effect on the truth-conditional contents of utterances, we have to divorce the first way of understanding the semantic project from the second. Semantics could concern itself with linguistic meaning, and perhaps the rules specifying how the denotations of broad indexicals depends on the context, or it could concern itself with the truth-conditional contents of utterances, but the two will not coincide. In a moment I’ll explain what I want to take from this discussion, but first an aside.

Aside: A lot more would need to be said here if I wanted to actually argue that there are non-linguistically controlled processes such as free enrichment that have an effect on the truth-conditional contents of utterances, and there’s a voluminous literature in

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<sup>23</sup> If I were being more careful here I’d have to introduce a range of non-linguistically controlled ‘pragmatic’ processes but, because the example I’m using just involves free enrichment I’ll talk here and throughout as if this were the only pragmatic process. For discussion see Récanati (2004a, 23-37).

which opposing sides argue their case.<sup>24</sup> I'll have cause to consider that literature further in Chapter two (§1.3), but nothing I say here, and nothing I say in this thesis, stands on its truth. The point here is modest: The view that there are such processes is coherent, and it has some initial plausibility. Recognising this fact has consequences for how we think of the semantic project (as above), and for how we formulate contextualism (immediately below and §1.2.2.2).

The moral I want to draw from my discussion is that we should be wary of equating views about the semantic contents of utterances of sentences containing certain expressions such as 'knows' with views about the truth-conditions of utterances of those sentences. Why? Because, as we've seen, we might need to distinguish between semantics as it concerns the linguistic meaning of expressions, and the literal meaning of utterances of sentences containing those expressions, and semantics as it concerns the truth-conditional contents of utterances of those sentences. If we need to distinguish between these two understandings of the semantic project, we also need to distinguish between two understandings of 'semantic content', 'semantic content' as the literal meaning of utterances and 'semantic content' as the truth-conditional content of utterances. Clearly, then, we should be wary of equating views about semantic content with views about truth-conditions.

#### **1.2.2.2. Standard and speech-act contextualism**

Granted that we should be wary of equating views about the semantic contents of 'knowledge' ascriptions with views about their truth-conditions, why is this relevant? Because, as I'll now argue, we need to be careful not to ignore a choice-point for contextualists. Is contextualism a view about the linguistic meaning of 'knows' and the literal meaning of 'knowledge' ascriptions, or is it a view about their truth-conditional contents?

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<sup>24</sup> For discussion see Bach (2002; 2005); Borg (2004; 2012); Cappelen & Lepore (2004; 2005); Carston (2007; 2008); King & Stanley (2005); Récanati (2004a); Stanley & Szabó Gendler (2000); Stanley (2007).

I'll start with some distinction mongering.<sup>25</sup> I've been talking about the 'linguistic' or 'literal' meaning of expressions and sentences, but we need to distinguish between the literal meaning of *expression-* or *sentence-types* and the literal meaning of *expression-* or *sentence-tokens*. I'll call the former *unsaturated expression* or *unsaturated sentence meaning*, and I'll call the latter *saturated expression* or *saturated sentence meaning*. For illustration, take our example, 'You are not going to die', and the context in which Father utters it. The unsaturated meaning of the expression 'You' is something that isn't specific to any individual (a function from contexts to individuals, perhaps), and the unsaturated meaning of the sentence is something about how a non-specific individual is not going to die. The saturated meaning of the expression 'You' is *Daughter*, and the saturated meaning of the sentence is *Daughter is not going to die*.<sup>26</sup> Finally, if one thinks that there are non-linguistically controlled processes such as free enrichment by which context has an effect on the truth-conditional contents of utterances - for example, if one thinks that, through a process of free enrichment, the truth-conditional content of Father's utterance is *Daughter is not going to die from the cut* - there's a further distinction between saturated sentence meaning and the truth-conditional contents of utterances. For want of a better name, I'll call the truth-conditional content of an utterance the *utterance meaning*.

A clarificatory note: If all effects of context on the truth-conditional contents of utterances are linguistically controlled, the distinction between saturated sentence meaning and utterance meaning will collapse. Even if some affects of context on the truth-conditional contents of utterances aren't linguistically controlled, the two will coincide in some cases (possible examples: 'I am tired', 'Now is the time to strike'). The point is that, if some effects of context on the truth-conditional contents of utterances aren't linguistically controlled, the two will come apart in other cases. Our earlier example - 'You are not going to die' - is a case in point. The thesis that the meaning of an utterance (the utterance meaning) depends on the context is logically weaker than the

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<sup>25</sup> These distinctions are mostly standard in the literature, but I'm not aware of a standard term for the intuitive truth-conditional content of an utterance (other than 'what is said', which everyone can agree is rather ambiguous) so I introduce my own term below.

<sup>26</sup> I'm assuming that the process by which the qualifying element is provided isn't linguistically controlled here.

thesis that the saturated meaning of a sentence (the saturated sentence meaning) depends on the context. The latter entails the former, but the former does not entail the latter.

Is contextualism the view that the saturated sentence meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive, or the view that the utterance meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive? On the first option, the expression ‘knows’ would be an indexical (presumably in the broad sense), and the processes by which the denotation of instances of ‘knows’ are provided by context would be linguistically controlled. So, if we take a particular ‘knowledge’ ascription, such as Laurie saying ‘Morven knows that penguins eat fish’, and the context in which Laurie utters it, the saturated meaning of the expression ‘knows’ would be (something like) *knows by the standards of Laurie’s context* and the saturated meaning of the sentence would be *Morven knows, by the standards of Laurie’s context, that penguins eat fish*. Call this *standard contextualism*. On the second option, using the same example, the meaning of Laurie’s utterance would be *Morven knows, by the standards of Laurie’s context, that penguins eat fish*. This could be because ‘knows’ is an indexical in the broad sense, but it need not be. It could be that the saturated meaning of the sentence in our example is *Morven knows that penguins eat fish* but her utterance comes to have the richer meaning through free enrichment. Call this *speech-act contextualism*.<sup>27</sup> (In what follows I’ll often use the label ‘contextualism’. Unless otherwise indicated, when I do so I mean both standard and speech-act contextualism).

Two clarificatory comments: First, do contextualists generally endorse standard contextualism? If we look at prominent contextualists, we find that some do seem to explicitly endorse standard contextualism. Here’s Blome-Tillmann:

“[Contextualism] is the view that the predicate ‘know’ has an unstable Kaplan character, that is a character that does not map all contexts on the same content. According to [contextualism], ‘know’ is an indexical expression” (Blome-Tillmann 2009a, 261).

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<sup>27</sup> For articulations and partial defences of this view see Montminy (2007) (under the label ‘non-denominational contextualism’) and Stainton (2010) (from whom I take the label ‘speech-act contextualism’).

Others have been rather more non-committal. This quote from Cohen is fairly representative (see also Greco 2008, 417; Henderson 2009, 121-2):

“How from the view point of formal semantics should we think of this context-sensitivity of knowledge ascriptions? We could think of it as a kind of indexicality ... But we could instead view the knowledge predicate as expressing the same relation in every context ... we could think of knowledge as a three-place relation between a person, a proposition, and a standard” (Cohen 1999, 61).

Cohen isn't committing himself to the claim that 'knows' is an indexical, but he only mentions one other option for understanding the context-sensitivity of 'knowledge' ascriptions. What does that other option involve? On one reading, the idea is that 'knows' is an incomplete expression that denotes the same three-place relation between a person, proposition and a standard in each context, where the standard can be thought of as a free variable that has its value provided in a context. If that's the view, then this is a sort of indexicality in the broad sense ('knows' is an incomplete expression, and there's a rule that tells us how a value for the free variable is provided in context). But perhaps there some other way of reading what Cohen says here.

DeRose has been similarly non-committal:

“There is another way to move beyond generic contextualism that I won't be engaging in at all. That is to provide an account of the kind of underlying semantic linguistic mechanism responsible for the varying truth-conditions that govern knowledge-attributing and -denying sentences” (DeRose 2009, 9).

Given that most contextualists haven't said much about how, exactly, we are to understand the 'semantic' component of their view, we shouldn't conclude that contextualists generally endorse standard contextualism. But I also don't think we should conclude that contextualists are generally neutral between standard and speech-act contextualism. I suspect - this is only a suspicion - that most contextualists just haven't given the speech-act version much thought.

Second, I've been using the label 'contextualism' without indicating whether I mean the indexical or nonindexical variety. Indexical contextualism is a thesis about the *contents* and *truth-conditions* of 'knowledge' ascriptions whereas nonindexical contextualism is a thesis about the *circumstances relative to which* the contents of 'knowledge' ascriptions are evaluated for truth and falsity. Both standard and speech-act contextualism are theses about the contents and truth-conditions of 'knowledge' ascriptions. So standard and speech-act contextualism are both varieties of indexical contextualism, not nonindexical contextualism.

### 1.2.3. Invariantism and expressivism

I'll now situate the views we've met so far with respect to two varieties of the dominant invariantist view (§1.2.3.1) and I'll briefly sketch a final alternative, expressivism (§1.2.3.2).

#### 1.2.3.1. Strict and sensitive invariantism

On all of the views we've met so far, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are 'shifty'. We've met views on which the truth-values shift because the proposition expressed depends on the context of utterance (indexical contextualism) or the context of assessment (content relativism), and we've met views on which the truth-values shift because the circumstance relative to which the proposition expressed is evaluated depends on the context of utterance (nonindexical contextualism) or the context of assessment (truth relativism). In some sense, all 'shifty' views are *revisionary*. On the traditional, and still dominant, way of thinking about 'knowledge' ascriptions, whether a 'knowledge' ascription is true or false - whether you or I 'know' that such-and-such is the case - doesn't depend on the context in which someone ascribes 'knowledge' to us, or the context in which someone assesses whether we 'know'. It just depends on the sorts of things epistemologists have always talked about: our evidence, the reliability of our perceptual and other cognitive faculties, and the like. In short, whether you or I 'know' just depends on various truth-conducive factors (factors that are relevant to whether our beliefs are true or false). I'll call this view *strict invariantism*.

Strict invariantism has two components. First, there's the 'invariantist' component: whether you, I, or anyone else 'knows' doesn't shift with the context. Second, there's the 'strict' component: whether you, I, or anyone else 'knows' just depends on truth-



conducive factors (evidence, reliability). One could endorse the first component without endorsing the second. On that view, whether someone ‘knows’ doesn’t shift with the context, but it does depend on a combination of truth and non-truth-conducive factors. I’ll call this view *sensitive invariantism*. One can ask the sensitive invariantist what sorts of non-truth-conducive factors are relevant here, and different versions of sensitive invariantism will answer this question differently. On one popular view, the non-truth-conducive factors are just features of the subject’s context, where we can think of the subject’s context along the same lines as contexts of utterance and assessment. The idea is that whether a subject ‘knows’ depends on a combination of truth-conducive factors and various features of the subject’s context, such as the error-possibilities that the subject is considering and the subject’s practical situation.<sup>28</sup> (In what follows I’ll often use the label ‘invariantism’. Unless otherwise indicated, when I do so I mean *both* strict and sensitive invariantism. I’ll also often use the label ‘sensitive invariantism’. Again, unless otherwise indicated when I do so I mean the popular version of the view sketched here, on which the relevant non-truth-conducive factors are features of the subject’s context).

If you like, sensitive invariantism is a sort of shifty view. Sensitive invariantists think that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions shift with (or, depend on) various non-truth-conducive factors. But, if we take a subject - Morven, say - and a proposition she believes - that penguins eat fish, say - then, at any given time, the sensitive invariantist will say that Morven either knows that penguins eat fish, or she doesn’t. This is not so on any variety of contextualism or relativism.

### 1.2.3.2. An expressivist alternative?

All of the views we’ve met so far are *descriptivist*. On those views, the meaning of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is taken to consist in the obtaining of some epistemological relation between a subject and a proposition. (Of course, on some of the views whether

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<sup>28</sup> Prominent defenders of sensitive invariantism include Fantl & McGrath (2009) (under the label ‘fallibilist impurism’); Hawthorne (2004) (‘sensitive moderate invariantism’); Stanley (2005a) (‘interest-relative invariantism’); Williams (1991). Fantl & McGrath, Hawthorne and Stanley all think of the non-truth-conducive factors along the lines indicated (as features of the subject’s context). Williams thinks of the factors rather differently (very roughly, in terms of the subject’s inferential commitments). See Pritchard (2002) for discussion.

the relation holds, or what the relevant relation is, depends on the context). But, given that there seem to be certain parallels between the epistemic and ethical domains - in particular, both are, in some sense that needs to be made precise, *normative* - and given that descriptivist views in metaethics have non-descriptivist rivals, we need to at least consider the prospects for an *expressivist* view about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions ('epistemic expressivism'). But what would an epistemic expressivist view look like? Matthew Chrisman (2007) proposes the following:

“Rather than explaining the meaning of instances of [‘S knows that p’] in terms of expressing a proposition with relativized truth conditions ... as the contextualist does, I suggest the epistemic expressivist will treat instances of [‘S knows that p’] as expressions of states of epistemic norm-acceptance” (Chrisman 2007, 241).

Very roughly, the idea is that we can explain the meaning of 'knowledge' ascriptions (instances of 'S knows that p') in terms of the complex state of mind that they express, where the complex state of mind consists of (1) a belief that the subject S is entitled to her belief that p by a system of epistemic norms, and (2) endorsement of that system of norms. (Clearly, this view does say that the meaning of a 'knowledge' ascription consists in part in the holding of a relation between a subject and a proposition - the relation of being entitled by a system of epistemic norms - but presumably this relation isn't epistemological, at least in the relevant sense).

I'm not going to say much about epistemic expressivism, but I'll briefly comment on how it fits into the dialectic. First, Chrisman (2007; 2012a) argues that epistemic expressivists can accommodate the same data as contextualists (data provided by cases like our earlier PUB and POLICE STATION) but, unlike contextualists, they can deal with inter-contextual disagreement reports. If that were right, it would provide an argument for epistemic expressivism, but, as I'll argue, contextualists can deal with inter-contextual disagreement reports (Chapter two (§2)). Second, epistemic expressivism will face a number of problems, including (but perhaps not limited to) some of the well-

known objections to ethical expressivism (in particular, the Frege-Geach problem).<sup>29</sup> However, I won't comment on these problems here. Third, it's unclear whether epistemic expressivism needs to be thought of as in direct competition with any view, whether invariantist, contextualist or relativist, about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions. We have to distinguish between a 'semantic theory' - a theory that assigns contents to simple and complex expressions of a language - and a 'metasemantic theory' - a theory about why the expressions of our language have the contents they have. In case the need for the distinction isn't immediately obvious, here are Kaplan and Lewis making the same point:

“The fact that a word or phrase has a certain meaning clearly belongs to semantics. On the other hand, a claim about the basis for ascribing a certain meaning to a word or phrase does not belong to semantics. “Ohsnay” means snow in Pig-Latin. That's a semantic fact about Pig-Latin. The reason why “ohsnay” means snow is not a semantic fact; it is some kind of historical or sociological fact about Pig-Latin. Perhaps, because it relates to how the language is used, it should be categorized as part of the pragmatics of Pig-Latin (though I am not really comfortable with this nomenclature), or perhaps, because it is a fact about semantics, as part of the Metasemantics of Pig-Latin” (Kaplan 1989b, 573-4).

“I distinguish two topics: first, the description of possible languages or grammars as abstract semantic systems whereby symbols are associated with aspects of the world; and, second, the description of the psychological and sociological facts whereby a particular one of these abstract semantic systems is the one used by a person or population. Only confusion comes of mixing these two topics” (Lewis 1970, 19).

While the usual way of construing the descriptivist/expressivist debate is as a debate about the contents of certain expressions (are they belief-like or desire-like states?) it would perhaps be better to construe the debate as a debate about why certain expressions of our language have the contents they have (in virtue of expressing belief-

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<sup>29</sup> Cuneo (2007) and Lynch (2009) argue that epistemic expressivism is particularly problematic in that it's incompatible with inquiry. See Carter & Chrisman (2012) for a response.

like, or in virtue of expressing desire-like, states?). If we think of the debate this way, we can think of epistemic expressivism as a metasemantic theory, and therefore not in direct competition with invariantism, contextualism or relativism, which are all semantic theories.<sup>30</sup> (I say ‘not in direct competition’ because, if this line of thought is right, the views operative on different levels. But it may well be that there are interesting interrelations between levels).

### **1.3. Summing up**

I started this section by noting that contextualism has been formulated as a view about the truth-values, truth-conditions and semantic contents of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. I’ve shown that this is problematic because it ignores the range of possible views one might have about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. First, one might think that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive even though their truth-conditions and semantic contents aren’t (nonindexical contextualism). Second, even if one does think that the truth-conditions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive (indexical contextualism), one might be wary of saying that the semantic contents of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive (the distinction between standard and speech-act contextualism). Along the way I have situated the varieties of contextualism with respect to its rivals, relativism (content and truth), invariantism (strict and insensitive) and epistemic expressivism. The end result is, hopefully, a neat carving up of the conceptual space.

## **2. The main arguments**

In this section I’ll present and discuss three arguments for contextualism. I’ll start with so-called ‘context-shifting arguments’ (CSAs for short) (§2.1). I’ll then discuss the distinctive way in which contextualists propose dealing with scepticism (§2.2). I’ll finish by adverting to the possibility that one can motivate contextualism via considerations about the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions (§2.3). Along the way I’ll comment on important objections to each of these arguments, and I’ll indicate to what extent they support the various views we met in §1.

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<sup>30</sup> For essentially the same point about ‘ought’ see Chrisman (2012b). Ridge (ms.) argues that ethical expressivism is better thought of as a view in metasemantics than a view in semantics.

## 2.1. Context-shifting arguments

Cases like our earlier PUB and POLICE STATION are nice examples of a more general phenomenon: The appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials depends on the context. A reminder: In PUB, Ted, who is talking to Tom about a bet he has lost, says with intuitive propriety that he and Dougal both ‘know’ that Jack performed the service whereas, in POLICE STATION, Dougal, who is giving a statement to the police, says with intuitive propriety that neither he nor Ted ‘knows’ that Jack performed the service. But, as we’ll see, this general phenomenon doesn’t, by itself, provide much of an argument for contextualism. My aim here is clarify the role that CSAs play in arguments for contextualism. I think we should see contextualists as arguing that they can give the best explanation of the general phenomenon, and I’ll explain what contextualists would need to show to make good on that claim.

So: how does the argument go? The explanandum is the appropriateness of a pattern of linguistic behaviour (Ted’s ‘knowledge’ ascription and Dougal’s denial). A nice, straightforward explanation of the appropriateness of that pattern of linguistic behaviour would be that Ted and Dougal both speak truly. Ted and Dougal could both speak truly because the truth-conditions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on the context of utterance (indexical contextualism), or because the truth-values (but not the truth-conditions) of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on the context of utterance (nonindexical contextualism). So contextualism, whether of the indexical or nonindexical variety, provides a nice, straightforward explanans for our explanandum.

This argument raises three questions. First, would everyone agree that Ted and Dougal’s ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials are appropriate? This question concerns whether what I’m calling a ‘general phenomenon’ is a genuine phenomenon. Second, even if they would, why does that carry any evidential weight? Third, can other views about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions explain the data? I’ll take these questions in turn.

First question: Recent experimental work has cast doubt on whether folk judgements about the appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials are sensitive to contextual factors (Buckwalter 2010; Feltz & Zarpentine 2010; May et. al. 2010). Further, while other work has indicated that folk judgements are sensitive to contextual

factors, different studies have identified different contextual factors. There are studies that indicate that folk judgements are sensitive to both practical factors (in particular, stakes) and salience of error (DeRose 2011; Hansen & Chemla forthcoming), that folk judgements are sensitive to practical factors but not salience of error (Pinillos 2012; Sripada & Stanley forthcoming), and that folk judgements are sensitive to salience of error but not practical factors (Schaffer & Knobe 2012). What are we to make of this? I think we can draw two morals.

The first moral is that one shouldn't put too much argumentative weight on CSAs. So we should be rather wary of the methodology DeRose seems to be endorsing in these passages:

“The best grounds for accepting contextualism come from how knowledge attributing (and knowledge-denying) sentences are used in ordinary, nonphilosophical talk: What ordinary speakers will count as ‘knowledge’ in some non-philosophical contexts they will deny is such in others” (DeRose 2009, 47).

“This type of basis in ordinary language not only provides the best grounds we have for accepting contextualism concerning knowledge attributions, but, I believe, is evidence of the very best type one can have for concluding that any piece of ordinary language has context-sensitive truth-conditions” (DeRose 2009, 48).

I'll clarify my own methodology below.

The second moral is that one should be careful when identifying the features of context that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials supposedly depend on. As we'll see (Chapter three (§2)), I think that there are serious problems with the view that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions vary with the salience of error and other features of conversational kinematics, but I certainly don't want to reach that conclusion via reflection on cases like PUB and POLICE STATION.

Second question: Putting this to one side, one might wonder why folk judgements about the appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions should carry any weight. In contrast with the first, I don't think this question is hard to answer. The idea, I take it, is that competent speakers have some idea about what their words mean, so the ‘linguistic

intuitions' (intuitions about appropriateness and so on) of competent speakers are, broadly speaking, relevant to semantics. However, for reasons made quite clear by H.P. Grice (1989) and others, one can't 'read off' the correct semantics for an expression from intuitions about appropriate and inappropriate usage. So we need to consider the following question: Why do intuitions about appropriate and inappropriate usage tell us anything about the semantics, as opposed to the pragmatics, of 'knowledge' ascriptions? I'll return to this question at several points (in particular, immediately below, and in Chapter four (§2)).

Third question: Other (noncontextualist) views about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions can explain the general phenomenon. There are some tricky issues for the relativist lurking in the background - shouldn't the truth-values of Ted and Dougal's respective 'knowledge' ascriptions and denials depend on the context in which we're assessing them? - But it looks like a relativist of either type can mimic the contextualist explanation of the phenomenon. The relativist can say that both Ted and Dougal speak truly, either because the (different) propositions Ted and Dougal express are true in their respective contexts of assessment (content relativism) or because the (single) proposition that Ted accepts and Dougal denies is true in Ted's context but false in Dougal's context (truth relativism).

What about strict and sensitive invariantism? Sensitive invariantism first: As I've setup the case, in PUB Ted says that he and Dougal both 'know' whereas in police station Dougal denies that he and Ted 'know'. On one popular version of sensitive invariantism (§1.2.3.1), whether a subject 'knows' depends on certain features of the subject's context, so whether Dougal 'knows' certainly shouldn't depend on features of Ted's context, and whether Ted 'knows' certainly shouldn't depend on Dougal's context. So, *prima facie*, these cases are a problem for sensitive invariantists. However, there are a number of responses that the sensitive invariantist can make here, and I'll consider them in Chapter three (§4). As for strict invariantists: A popular move is to distinguish between the appropriateness of a pattern of linguistic usage and the truth of that pattern of usage (§0). On one version of this move, the idea is that we're mistaking contextual variation in the assertability-conditions for 'knowledge' ascriptions and

denials with contextual variation in their truth-values or truth-conditions.<sup>31</sup> In what follows I'll call this a *warranted-assertability manoeuvre* (WAM for short). While the details need to be spelled out, the basic idea should be clear: In PUB Ted speaks truly and appropriately in ascribing 'knowledge' to himself and Dougal whereas in POLICE STATION Dougal speaks falsely but appropriately in denying 'knowledge' to himself and Ted.

Summing up: With the exception of sensitive invariantism, all of the views we've met seem to be able to explain what's going on in our cases, there's no reason to think that those explanations won't generalise to other cases and, even in the case of sensitive invariantism, there are responses that one could make. Further, we shouldn't put too much argumentative weight on CSAs anyway (the first moral). Where does this leave the contextualist's appeal to CSAs?

While the experimental evidence isn't conclusive, there is reason to think that there's a general phenomenon - that the appropriateness of 'knowledge' ascriptions depends on the context - which stands in need of explanation. We should see contextualists as arguing that they can provide the *best* explanation of the general phenomenon. Establishing this will require showing that the rival explanations are, in some way, inferior. I'll set about doing so as follows. First, I'll go on the defensive, and argue that contextualists can deal with certain objections that have been taken to provide good reason to reject the view (Chapter two (§1; §2); Chapter three (§3.2; §5)). Second, one of those objections - an objection concerning disagreement and retraction data - has been taken to provide *the* reason to prefer a revisionary relativist semantics for 'knowledge' ascriptions to a contextualist semantics. In dealing with the objection, I show that there is no reason to prefer relativism (of either variety) to contextualism (Chapter two (§2)). Third, I'll argue that sensitive invariantists have problems with certain instances of the general phenomenon (Chapter three (§4)). Finally, I'll argue that the contextualist explanation of the general phenomenon can be motivated on independent grounds, in particular via considerations about the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions (§2.3 below; Chapter three (§2.2-2.3); Chapter four (§2)). If I can do all of

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<sup>31</sup> For variants on this move see Brown (2006); Hazlett (2009); Pritchard (2010); Rysiew (2001).



that, I will have established that contextualists provide the best explanation of the general phenomenon.

## 2.2. Solving the sceptical problem?

It used to be thought that contextualism derived a large part of its appeal from the distinctive way in which it dealt with scepticism. I say ‘used to be thought’ because contextualist solutions to scepticism have since fallen into disrepute. My aim here is to explain why. I’ll start by distinguishing between ‘radical’ and ‘high-standards’ scepticism (§2.2.1). I’ll then present the contextualist solution, and explain why it initially seemed so attractive (§2.2.2). Finally, I’ll discuss a number of problems with that solution (§2.2.3).

### 2.2.1. Radical scepticism

There are two dimensions along which we can distinguish radical scepticism from other forms of scepticism. The first dimension concerns the *scope* or *extent*; the second concerns the *depth*. I’ll take each dimension in turn.<sup>32</sup>

It’s common to distinguish *radical* sceptical hypotheses from *local* sceptical hypotheses. Take the sceptical hypothesis that we’re all (handless) brains in vats. This doesn’t just threaten particular beliefs, such as my belief that I have hands, or a restricted class of beliefs, such as my beliefs about what body parts I have. It threatens pretty much all of my beliefs about non-abstract matters. Call this a *radical* sceptical hypothesis. Contrast this with the sceptical hypothesis that the zebra-shaped animal I’m looking at is a cleverly disguised mule. This just threatens a particular belief (my belief that the animal I’m looking at is a zebra), or perhaps a restricted class of beliefs (my beliefs about the veracity of the staff at the zoo). Call this a *local* sceptical hypothesis. The distinction between radical and local sceptical hypotheses concerns the scope or extent of the scepticism: radical sceptical hypotheses are supposed to cast doubt on pretty much all of our beliefs, at least about non-abstract matters; local sceptical hypotheses are supposed to cast doubt on particular beliefs, or a restricted class of beliefs.

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<sup>32</sup> It should go without saying that my aim here is merely to explain why one might find scepticism of various sorts compelling, not to argue for those sorts of scepticism.

It's also common to distinguish *radical* scepticism from *high-standards* scepticism. Here, an analogy will help. Clearly, some things are flatter than other things: roads are flatter than mountains, and tables are flatter than roads. But, presumably, nothing is 'absolutely' flat. If, as one might think, being flat requires being absolutely flat, then nothing is flat. This is a sort of 'flatness scepticism'. Analogously, one could think that, even though some beliefs are 'epistemically better supported' than others (my belief that I have hands is epistemically better supported than my belief that it will rain tomorrow), none of our beliefs meet the level of epistemic support required for knowledge, perhaps because knowledge requires being able to rule out all counter-possibilities.<sup>33</sup> Putting the idea in different terminology: none of our beliefs, no matter how epistemically well supported, meet the epistemic standards required for knowledge. Call this *high-standards* scepticism.<sup>34</sup>

Contrast this with another sort of scepticism, on which none of our beliefs are epistemically better supported than any other. Why might one be drawn towards that sort of scepticism? Perhaps because, by reflecting on radical sceptical hypotheses - such as the handless brain in vat hypothesis - one realises that, because of the way in which the hypothesis is designed, we could *never* be in a position to rule it out. But, if we could never be in a position to rule it out, why is my belief that I have hands epistemically better supported than my belief that it will rain tomorrow? Indeed, why is my belief that I have hands epistemically better supported than the possibility that I don't have hands because I'm actually a handless brain in a vat? The worry is that, because I could never rule out these sorts of possibilities, all of my beliefs are *groundless* (cf. Wittgenstein (1969, §266) on scepticism and the 'groundlessness of our believing'). Call this *radical* scepticism.

The distinction between radical and high-standards scepticism concerns the depth of the scepticism, not its scope or extent. Both radical and high-standards scepticism apply to all of our beliefs about non-abstract matters. But the obvious response to the high-standards sceptic - roughly, to accept that we don't have knowledge by the standards

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<sup>33</sup> I'm using 'epistemic support' as a placeholder for whatever one thinks is required for a belief to enjoy a positive epistemic status (evidence, reliability etc).

<sup>34</sup> For this sort of scepticism, as applied to 'knowledge', 'flat', and other 'absolute' terms, see Unger (1975).

she requires, but to question why we need to apply such high standards - isn't available to the radical sceptic. The radical sceptic thinks that none of our beliefs are epistemically better supported than any other, so none of our beliefs qualify as knowledge by any standards, high or low.

The distinction along the second of these dimensions will be important in what follows (§2.2.3).

### **2.2.2. The contextualist solution**

For the purposes of presenting the contextualist solution to scepticism I'll focus on the following argument:

1. I don't know that I'm not a handless brain in a vat.
2. If I don't know that I'm not a handless brain in a vat, then I don't know that I have hands.
3. I don't know that I have hands.

This is a valid argument so, unless we want to accept the sceptical conclusion, we need to find a reason for denying one of the premises. But, at first glance, the prospects look bleak. How can I know that I'm not a handless brain in a vat given that, as discussed above, I could never rule out the possibility? If I don't know that I'm not a handless brain in a vat, how can I know that I have hands, given that it follows from my having hands that I'm not a handless brain in a vat? Clearly, there's *something* compelling about this argument. Of course, that doesn't mean that we can't find a reason for denying one of the premises. But it does mean that there are certain things we should want from a solution.<sup>35</sup>

First, the solution must explain why we found the argument compelling in the first place. If the argument involves some elementary error, why do we find it compelling, even after much reflection? Second, the solution must explain why, even though it's true that I know that I have hands (and perhaps that I know that I'm not a handless brain in

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<sup>35</sup> What follows is my attempt to reconstruct why the contextualist response to scepticism found in DeRose (1995) and elsewhere was so influential in light of the obvious problems that I'll discuss below.

a vat), in certain contexts - in particular, in the context of responding to the argument we're considering - there's something entirely *inappropriate* about a flat-footed Moorean response along the lines of 'Here's one hand, and here's another, so I know that I have hands'.<sup>36</sup> Third, while we shouldn't reject the possibility of denying the second premise out of hand, we need to be given *extremely* good reason for doing so. The second premise is supported by the closure principle, which I'll formulate as follows:

CLOSURE: If S knows that p, and S knows that p entails q, and S comes to believe that q solely on the basis of competently deducing it from p while retaining knowledge that p throughout the competent deduction, then S knows that q.<sup>37</sup>

The intuitive idea is that competent deduction can extend one's knowledge. So, as applied to the example at hand, if I know that I have hands, and I know that if I have hands then I'm not a handless brain in a vat, and I come to believe that I'm not a handless brain in a vat solely on the basis of competently deducing it from my having hands, then I know that I'm not a handless brain in a vat. While there are tricky issues about how best to capture this intuitive idea, in what follows I'll just work with the principle as stated. Note that, from CLOSURE, the second premise follows by contraposition (plus the removal of some complexities in formulation). So, if we reject the second premise, we need to reject CLOSURE.

The contextualist solution to scepticism is appealing because, *prima facie*, it can give us almost everything we want from an adequate solution. First, contextualists can accept something very like CLOSURE. They can't accept the principle as stated because it makes no reference to contexts, but they can accept all *instances* of 'if S knows that p, and S knows that p entails q, and S comes to believe that q solely on the basis of competently deducing it from p while retaining knowledge that p throughout the competent deduction, then S knows that q', so they can accept the second premise, irrespective of the context in which it is uttered. Second, in some contexts - contexts where sceptical

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<sup>36</sup> I won't speculate about the difference between this flat-footed 'Moorean' response and the response in Moore (1939).

<sup>37</sup> For defences of closure principles see DeRose (1995); Hawthorne (2004); Williamson (2000). Famously, Dretske (2005) and Nozick (1981) reject closure principles. Somewhat unfairly, I'm not going to get into the reasons why here.

hypotheses are up for discussion - they can say that the first premise and therefore the conclusion of the sceptic's argument are *true*. In those contexts, the epistemic standards are high, so I don't 'know' that I have hands, or that I'm not a handless brain in a vat.<sup>38</sup> This explains why, in certain contexts - in particular, when responding to the sceptic - there's something wildly inappropriate about claiming to 'know' that one has hands. In such contexts what one is claiming is *false*. Third, in other contexts - contexts where sceptical hypotheses are not up for discussion - they can say that the first premise and therefore the conclusion of the sceptic's argument are *false*. In those contexts, the epistemic standards are lower, so I do 'know' that I have hands, and that I'm not a handless brain in a vat. Finally, contextualism isn't *obviously true*, and that's why we find the sceptical argument so compelling. So, taken together, the contextualist can give us almost everything we wanted.

This, I hope, goes some way to explaining why the contextualist solution to scepticism is attractive. But there are problems. Before I get into them, two comments. First, note that I've assumed that, in contexts where sceptical hypotheses are up for discussion, the epistemic standards are high. So it must be that the taking seriously of error-possibilities (the 'salience of error') affects the operative epistemic standards. As we'll see later, one might think that these features of context don't affect the operative epistemic standards (Chapter three (§2)). (I discuss the consequences for the contextualist solution to scepticism in Chapter four (§3)). Second, note that what I've said on behalf of the contextualist goes for all of the varieties of contextualism (indexical and nonindexical, standard and speech-act), and all of the other shifty views (relativism, sensitive invariantism). (But the first note applies here too: The relevant features of the context of assessment or subject's context must include the salience of error).

### 2.2.3. Problems for the contextualist solution

I'll split the problems into three types. First, what I'll call *competing account objections*. We've already met an objection of this type (the second note above: some rival views can mimic the contextualist response to scepticism) but, as we'll see below, strict

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<sup>38</sup> Again, I'm putting things in terms of contextually varying epistemic standards rather than sets of relevant alternatives (see fn. 11).

invariantists might have the resources to respond to scepticism too (§2.2.3.1). Second, what I'll call *elusiveness objections*. The worry here is that contextualists make knowledge too difficult (or, impossible) to obtain in certain contexts) (§2.2.3.2).<sup>39</sup> Third, what I'll call *irrelevance objections*. The worry here is that contextualism is irrelevant to both radical and high-standards scepticism (§2.2.3.3).

### 2.2.3.1. Competing accounts

There are two reasons why I can't respond to the sceptical problem by just insisting that I 'know' that I have hands. First, in the context where the sceptic has laid out her argument, doing so would be wildly inappropriate. Second, I wouldn't have explained why the sceptical argument seems compelling (§2.2.2). But contrast that response with the *neo-Moorean* response. For instance, Duncan Pritchard (2007) proposes that knowing something, such as that one has hands, requires having *favouring* evidence, where favouring evidence is evidence that favours what one believes over any alternative in which what one believes is false (such as the handless brain in a vat hypothesis).<sup>40</sup> Crucially, Pritchard proposes that we understand favouring evidence in such a way that, in order for one to have favouring evidence, one doesn't have to be reflectively aware of the fact (i.e. a form of epistemic externalism) and he allies this with a form of content externalism on which the content of one's perceptual state when one is looking at one's hand differs from the content that one's state would have had if one had been a handless brain in a vat (i.e. a sort of disjunctivism).<sup>41</sup> So, on this view, no doubt many assertions of 'I know that I have hands' and 'I know I'm not a handless brain in a vat' are true, even when made in the context of responding to the sceptic. But, Pritchard argues, we can explain why such assertions would be inappropriate:

“[T]he claim that, for example, one knows one has two hands, will generate the false conversational implicature that one has reflectively accessible grounds which would

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<sup>39</sup> I've purposefully omitted the quotes here. The complaint that contextualists make 'knowledge' elusive is either false ('knowledge' isn't lost) or nonsensical (there isn't anything to lose).

<sup>40</sup> See also Sosa (1999; 2000).

<sup>41</sup> More accurately, Pritchard argues that allying this form of context externalism with epistemic externalism is the most promising avenue available to the neo-Moorean (2007, 81-7).

suffice to distinguish between the scenario in which one has hands and the alternative sceptical scenario in which one is, say, a BIV [i.e. brain in a vat] who merely seems to have hands. Similarly, the claim to know that one is not a BIV will generate the false conversational implicature that one has reflectively accessible grounds which would suffice to indicate that one can distinguish between the scenario in which one is not a BIV from the alternative scenario in which one is a BIV” (Pritchard 2007, 91).

The idea is that *knowing* that one has hands doesn’t require reflective access to one’s favouring evidence but *properly asserting* that one knows, at least in contexts where one is responding to the sceptic, does. If Pritchard is right, this would explain why, in arguing with the sceptic, it’s wildly inappropriate to claim that one ‘knows’ one has hands, or that one isn’t a handless brain in a vat. Further, presumably the contextual variation in the assertability-conditions of these ‘knowledge’ claims isn’t immediately obvious, so this also explains why we found the sceptical argument compelling. In short, Pritchard’s neo-Moorean can do everything that the contextualist can do, but in terms of assertability-conditions rather than truth-conditions (or truth-values).

More generally, in the contemporary literature there are a wealth of anti-sceptical strategies available, ranging from variants on the neo-Moorean response to Wittgensteinian approaches (see Coliva 2010; Pritchard 2012a; Wright 2004). Given that there are other ways of dealing with scepticism available, why go contextualist? This line of thought is bolstered by the next two problems.

#### **2.2.3.2. Elusive knowledge**

You might think that contextualism makes knowledge too hard, or even impossible, to obtain in certain contexts (in particular, the context of responding to the sceptical argument). Here’s Lewis:

“Do some epistemology. Let your fantasies rip. Find uneliminated possibilities of error everywhere. Now that you are attending to them, just as I told you to, you are no longer ignoring them, properly or otherwise. So you have landed in a context with an enormously rich domain of potential counter-examples to ascriptions of knowledge. In such an extraordinary context, with such a rich domain, it never can happen (well, hardly ever) that an ascription of knowledge is true. Not an ascription of knowledge to

yourself (either to your present self or to your earlier self, untainted by epistemology); and not an ascription of knowledge to others. That is how epistemology destroys knowledge” (Lewis 1996, 559).

Lewis freely admits that epistemological inquiry destroys knowledge, and that we cannot (truly) assert that anyone ‘knows’ that *p* in epistemological contexts, but many have thought that these are disastrous consequences (Fogelin 2000; Sosa 2000; Williamson 2001). Are these just consequences of Lewis’s idiosyncratic version of contextualism, or are they consequences of contextualism more generally? I’m going to argue that defenders of conversational contextualism face a dilemma here. On the first horn, they must accept the disastrous consequences. On the second, they must offer something other than the contextualist solution to the sceptical problem outlined above.

Putting things in an abstract way, we can think of an epistemological context as a context in which a very wide range of error-possibilities are up for discussion (local sceptical hypotheses, radical sceptical hypotheses), and we can think of the sceptic as someone who, in her conversational moves, is pushing for the highest possible epistemic standards, standards which are such that ‘knowing’ requires ruling out the very wide range of error-possibilities up for discussion. Question: Does the sceptic inevitably succeed in pushing for the highest possible epistemic standards (as Lewis seems to have thought), or can other conversational participants resist? If the sceptic inevitably succeeds, the conversational contextualist must accept the disastrous consequences (the first horn). If the conversational participants can resist, the conversational contextualist isn’t proposing the solution to scepticism outlined above, so she must either offer something else, or abandon contextualist solutions to the sceptical problem entirely (the second horn).

### **2.2.3.3. Irrelevance**

I’ve talked indiscriminately about the contextualist solution to the ‘sceptical problem’ without indicating whether I had high-standards or radical scepticism in mind. An important - and to my mind, devastating - objection to the contextualist response to scepticism is that it’s irrelevant to both radical scepticism and high-standards scepticism (see Kornblith 2000). I’ll take each point in turn.



First, the basic idea behind the contextualist response to scepticism is that I ‘know’ that I have hands (and that I’m not a handless brain in a vat) in some contexts because, in those contexts, the standards are low whereas I don’t ‘know’ these things in other contexts because, in those contexts, the standards are high. But the radical sceptic argues that none of our beliefs are epistemically better supported than any other, so none of our beliefs qualify as knowledge by *any* standards, high or low. Of course, the radical sceptic could be mistaken, but if she is that has nothing to do with contextualism. Consequently, contextualism is irrelevant to radical scepticism. Second, the obvious response to the high-standards sceptic is to accept that we don’t have knowledge by the standards she requires, but to question why we need to apply such high standards. Given that we don’t need to go contextualist to respond to the high-standards sceptic, why go contextualist?

### 2.3. Craigian contextualism

In light of §2.1 and §2.2, contextualism is in trouble. I’ve issued a promissory note - that I will show that contextualism offers the best explanation of a general phenomenon - but argued that one can’t put too much argumentative weight on this (§2.1), and I’ve argued that there are good reasons to doubt that contextualism can be motivated via the sceptical problem (§2.2). If I want to defend a version of contextualism, more is needed. My aim here is to sketch, in very rough form, what I take to be the main motivation for contextualism.

The idea that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have a distinctive function is popular in contemporary epistemology. The idea - very roughly - is that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have the function of identifying good informants. If I say that S ‘knows’ that p I identify S as a good informant on the matter of p. This idea - originally from Edward Craig (1990) - has been developed in a number of directions, and has been appealed to in connection with a number of debates, but my focus here will be on its relevance to views about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions.<sup>42</sup> While I will address worries

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<sup>42</sup> To give an idea of the variety of applications: Fricker (2012) appeals to the function of ‘knowledge’ in developing an account of group testimony, Neta (2006) appeals to the function of epistemic discourse in developing an account of epistemic evaluation and Pritchard (2012b) appeals to the function of ‘knowledge’ in support of ‘anti-luck virtue epistemology’.

about its relevance to such views (Chapter four (§2)), I won't be undertaking a defence of the general approach, or of Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions.<sup>43</sup> So my assumptions are that the general approach is viable, and that Craig's account is along the right lines. I'll sketch the basic idea, and then I'll explain why some think it motivates a contextualist semantics for 'knowledge' ascriptions. However, the argument will have to wait until Chapter four (§2).

Craig's guiding idea is that, rather than trying to give an analysis of the concept 'knowledge' in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, we should start with a hypothesis about its function, and explore what a concept which serves that function would be like (Craig 1990, 2). The hypothesis is that 'knowledge' ascriptions have the function of identifying good informants (11). Motivation for this hypothesis comes from the observation that humans, both now and in the past, have a need for information about the world. We can get some information 'first-hand' through perception, introspection and the like. But others are often better placed to get the information that we need. This means there's a need for a way of identifying those who are good sources of that information. So, there's a need for a concept with the function of identifying good informants, and it's plausible that 'knowledge' is what plays that role. An illustrative example: Alasdair is a police officer chasing a suspect. He has no way of tracking the suspect on foot, so he calls his boss and she dispatches the unit helicopter. The pilot scans the area and locates what she thinks is the suspect. Of course, at this point it's very important that the pilot identifies the right man, so Alasdair makes sure that the description matches exactly. This done, Alasdair says that the pilot 'knows' that the suspect is in such-and-such a location, and he heads off to arrest him. In doing so, Alasdair is identifying the pilot as a good informant on the matter of the suspect's whereabouts.

Greco (2008) and Henderson (2009) have argued that this account of the function of 'knowledge' supports a sort of contextualism:

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<sup>43</sup> See Beebe (2012), Kelp (2011) and Lackey (2012) for some reasons to worry about Craig's account. I should note that Chapter four (§1; §2) deals with some (but not all) of these worries.

“[A]n important function of our concept of knowledge and our knowledge language, perhaps its primary function, is to flag information and sources of information for use in practical reasoning ... it speaks in favour of a version of attributor contextualism that allows the attributor context to be sensitive to the interests and purposes operative in the subject’s practical environment. My thinking is this: if the function of knowledge is to serve practical reasoning, it should be tied to the interests and purposes that are relevant to the practical reasoner at issue” (Greco 2008, 433).

“If a good part of the point and purpose of the concept of knowledge has to do with certifying sources, or withholding certification, and thereby keeping epistemic gate for a community, then a form of contextualism gets a kind of principled motivation: the contexts themselves come to have a kind of principled rationality, being keyed to the concerns of attributor and audience. The contextual demands on knowledge will not swing freely with whatever moves happen to be made in language games. Instead, they will be rationally conditioned by the stakes within the communities for which the attributor and interlocutor are keeping gate” (Henderson 2009, 125-6).

The basic idea in both of these passages is that, if the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is to identify good informants, then, given that what one will require of a good informant can vary with the context, the truth-values or truth-conditions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions can vary with the context too. Ultimately, I’ll give an argument for this basic idea, but for now two things to note. First, it’s right to be suspicious here. One might wonder why Craig’s account supports contextualism rather than one of the other shifty views - including sensitive invariantism - that we’ve met in this chapter. Or one might wonder why Craig’s account is relevant to the semantics, rather than the pragmatics, of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. I’ll address these questions in Chapter three (§4) and Chapter four (§2). Second, as both Greco and Henderson emphasise, Craig’s account seems to support a sort of contextualism on which contextual variation in the truth-values or truth-conditions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is tied to the ‘interests and purposes’ (Greco) or ‘concerns’ (Henderson) of the ‘knowledge’ ascriber and her audience. As I’ll also argue in Chapter four (§2), Craig’s account supports a distinctive sort of contextualism that I’ll call Craigan contextualism (see also Chapter three (§2.2;

§2.3)). As we'll see, Craigian contextualism should be distinguished from conversational contextualism, which isn't supported by Craig's account.

Putting aside these worries, and assuming that I can make good on the various claims I've made here, why do I take this to provide the main motivation for contextualism? If I can show that Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions supports a sort of contextualism then I'll have provided an explanation *why* the appropriateness of 'knowledge' ascriptions depends on the context (i.e. of the 'general phenomenon'), and therefore an explanation *why* 'knowledge' ascriptions have context-sensitive truth-values or truth-conditions. The general phenomenon is *explained by* Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions. If the Craigian story is on the right track, we should expect 'knowledge' ascriptions to have context-sensitive truth-values or truth-conditions. The upshot is that contextualism isn't simply a way of respecting intuitions about patterns of linguistic usage. Rather, it's an explanation why we see those patterns of linguistic usage.

### 3. The main objections

In this section I'll present three classes of objections to contextualism. The first class of objections concerns the linguistic evidence for the context-sensitivity of the expression 'knows' (hence, 'linguistic objections') (§3.1). The second concerns the way that the expression 'knows' behaves in certain contexts (§3.2). The third concerns what I'll call 'epistemological' objections, by which I mean objections that focus on epistemological issues, not issues in the philosophy of language. In particular, I'll look at an objection concerning the knowledge norms of assertion and action, and an objection concerning the mechanisms of context-sensitivity.<sup>44</sup>

#### 3.1. Linguistic objections

How do contextualists propose understanding the context-sensitivity of 'knows'? A common claim is that one can think of 'knows' as being much like a gradable adjective ('tall', 'flat') (DeRose 1995; Cohen 1999). Why? On a widely accepted account, gradable

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<sup>44</sup> A comment on the setup here: If sound, the objections to CSAs and the contextualist response to scepticism show that there is no reason to *endorse* contextualism. But they don't show that there is reason *not* to endorse contextualism. If sound, the objections considered here show that there is reason not to endorse contextualism.

adjectives have contents that make implicit reference to a contextually provided scale: for example, the content of ‘tall’ makes implicit reference to a contextually provided scale of height (Kennedy 1999). Similarly, one might think the content of ‘knows’ makes implicit reference to a contextually provided epistemic standard, where we can think of particular epistemic standards as points along a scale, in the same way that particular heights are points along a scale. (Note that the claim is not that ‘knows’ is a gradable adjective, but that it’s *analogous* to gradable adjectives).

However, Stanley (2005a, Chapter 2) has argued that contextualists can’t appeal to an analogy with gradable adjectives because ‘knows’ isn’t gradable. Compare and contrast:

(1) ‘flat’	‘knows’
x is completely/very/quite flat	*x completely/very much/quite knows that p <sup>45</sup>
x is flatter than y	*x knows that p more than y

Unlike ‘knows’, gradable adjectives accept various degree modifiers (completely/very/quite) and comparative constructions. Consequently, ‘knows’ isn’t analogous to gradable adjectives.

Further, John Hawthorne (2004, 104-8) has argued that, unlike gradable adjectives, ‘knows’ doesn’t accept clarifying devices (see also Stanley (2005a, 69)). Compare and contrast:

(2) ‘flat’	‘knows’
x is roughly flat	*x roughly knows that p
x is approximately flat	*x approximately knows that p
x is flat for a table	x knows that p by strict/loose standards <sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> I’ve used ‘\*’ to indicate ungrammaticality.

<sup>46</sup> As Ludlow (2005) notes, this construction is perfectly felicitous. But, as Stanley argues in response (2005a, 69-70), while we do say things like that, we also say things like ‘France is hexagonal by loose standards’. While expressions like ‘by strict/loose

More generally, Stanley (2005a, Chapter 3) argues that the following generalisation provides good inductive reason to think that ‘knows’ isn’t context-sensitive:

MULTIPLE OCCURRENCES: Since semantic context-sensitivity is traceable to an individual element (although that element may be unarticulated), multiple occurrences of that element in a discourse should be able to take on differing contents (57).

A wide range of context-sensitive expressions behave as the generalisation predicts:

- (3) Every sailor waived to every sailor. (Read as: Every sailor on one ship waived to every sailor on another ship).
- (4) That mouse is tall, but that elephant is not tall.
- (5) That table is flat, and Holland is flat.
- (6) This is heavier than this. (Read as: One object is heavier than another object).
- (7) Edinburgh has many bagpipers but not many Scots. (Edinburgh has far more Scots than bagpipers, but it has a lot more bagpipers than other Scottish cities, and less Scots).

Once any ambiguity is resolved, it’s simple to read (3-7) in such a way that different occurrences of the various context-sensitive expressions (‘every’, ‘tall’, ‘flat’, ‘this’, ‘many’) take on different contents. But contrast (3-7) with (8-10):

- (8) If they have hands, most non-epistemologists know that they have hands, but, even if they have hands, no epistemologist knows that she does.
- (9) Morven knows that she has hands, but she doesn’t know that she’s not a handless brain in a vat.
- (10) If the bank is open on Saturdays, I know that the bank is open on Saturdays, but now that you mention the possibility that it has changed its opening hours, even if it is open on Saturdays I don’t know that it is.

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standards’ might perform some interesting function, they don’t tell us anything about the context-sensitivity of the expression ‘knows’ (or ‘hexagonal’).

Even once any ambiguity is resolved, it's not easy to read (8-10) in such a way that different occurrences of 'knows' take on different contents.<sup>47</sup>

Stanley (and presumably Hawthorne) doesn't think that these arguments demonstrate that contextualism is false, but he does think that they provide good inductive evidence that 'knows' isn't context-sensitive (2005a, 51-2; 54; 56). Clearly, if contextualists want to claim that 'knows' is context-sensitive, they need to find a response to Stanley's arguments. I'll take up this task in Chapter two (§1). Note that these objections target the claim that the expression 'knows' is a (broad) indexical. As such, they don't touch nonindexical contextualism, on which 'knows' has the same denotation in all contexts of utterance. So, unless we can find a response, these arguments should incline someone sympathetic to contextualism towards nonindexical contextualism.

### 3.2. Retraction and disagreement

Contextualists have argued that the way that the expression 'knows' behaves in certain contexts - for example, PUB and POLICE STATION - supports contextualism (§2.1). But the way the expression behaves in other contexts casts serious doubt on contextualism. I'll split the data into two types, *retraction data* and *disagreement data*.

#### 3.2.1. Retraction

Here's MacFarlane:

“If yesterday Sally asserted ‘I know that the bus will be on time’, and today she admits that she didn't know yesterday that the bus would be on time, I will expect her to retract her earlier assertion. I will find it exceedingly bizarre if she replies by saying that her assertion was true, even if she adds ‘by the standards that were in place yesterday’” (MacFarlane 2005, 203).

MacFarlane is pointing to a general phenomenon: If, in a context *c*, ascriber *A* claims to 'know' that *p*, and then the context shifts such that *A* would now claim that she doesn't 'know' that *p*, it's entirely natural for *A* to *retract* her earlier 'knowledge' ascription.

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<sup>47</sup> Of course, contextualists have often been concerned to argue that (8-10) *can't* be read in that way. For (8) and (10) see DeRose (2009, Chapter 6) and for (9) see DeRose (1995) on 'abominable conjunctions'.

When the context shifts, A won't just claim that she doesn't 'know' that p, she will recognise that she was *wrong* to have said she 'knows' in the earlier context. But, by the contextualist's lights, A may well not have been wrong.<sup>48</sup> Unlike intuitions about cases like PUB and POLICE STATION, this general phenomenon casts serious doubt on contextualism.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2.2. Disagreement

The retraction data shows that contextualists have problems with a special sort of disagreement, viz. disagreement with one's past self. But what about disagreement in general? We can distinguish between disagreement within a conversational context ('intraconversational disagreement') and disagreement across conversational contexts ('interconversational disagreement'). Here are some examples:

(11) Ailsa: I know that the animal in the cage is a zebra.

Laurie: No, you're wrong. You don't know it's a zebra because you can't rule out the possibility that it's a mule cleverly disguised to look like a zebra.

(12) Context 1: Niall and Cormac are at the zoo.

Niall: Do you know what animal that is?

Cormac: I know that it's a zebra. Look, it has black and white stripes.

Context 2: Niall is telling Laurie about his trip to the zoo.

Laurie: What animals did you see?

Niall: We saw a zebra.

Laurie: How do you know it was a zebra?

Niall: Cormac told me it was because it had black and white stripes.

Laurie: Cormac's wrong, he doesn't know that. How could he rule out the possibility that it was a mule cleverly disguised to look like a zebra?

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<sup>48</sup> For other versions of this objection see Stanley (2005a, 52-4) and Williamson (2005, 220-5).

<sup>49</sup> Why not just indexical contextualism? Because the nonindexical contextualist will also have to accept that Sally's 'knowledge' self-ascription ('her assertion') may well have been true. So why would Sally admit she was wrong and retract?



Again, these dialogues point to a general phenomenon: If, in a context *c*, A claims to ‘know’ that *p*, then others, whether in her conversational context or in another conversational context, may well assess her claim to ‘know’, and, when they do so, they may well say things like ‘No, A is/was wrong’. But, by the contextualist’s lights, A may well not have been wrong.<sup>50</sup> Again, unlike intuitions about cases like PUB and POLICE STATION, this general phenomenon casts serious doubt on contextualism.<sup>51</sup>

Three comments: First, recall that many of the arguments that are supposed to motivate adopting contextualism work for relativism too (§2). So what decides the issue between contextualism and relativism? It’s probably fair to say that the retraction and disagreement data are supposed to provide *the* reason for adopting relativism rather than contextualism (MacFarlane 2005; Richard 2004).<sup>52</sup> The idea is that, while the way in which ‘knows’ behaves in certain contexts - PUB, POLICE STATION - is consistent with both contextualism and relativism, the way ‘knows’ behaves in other contexts - contexts where speakers retract past assertions, or intra/interconversational disagreement contexts - provide reason to reject contextualism but not relativism. Of course, this means that the relativist owes us her account of the retraction and disagreement data, but I won’t get into that here.

Second, a popular contextualist response to this objection is to posit extensive *semantic blindness* (Blome-Tillmann 2008; Cohen 1999, 77-9; DeRose 2009, Chapter 5). The idea is that competent speakers are blind to the context-sensitivity of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and ‘knows’. Semantic blindness would explain both the retraction and the disagreement data (by denying its relevance to views about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and ‘knows’), but one might wonder whether this is the best response

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<sup>50</sup> Why not just indexical contextualism? Because the nonindexical contextualist will also have to accept that Ailsa and Cormac’s ‘knowledge’ self-ascriptions may well have been true. So what are they wrong about?

<sup>51</sup> For versions of this objection see MacFarlane (2005); Richard (2004); Stanley (2005a, 52-6).

<sup>52</sup> While I’m focusing on ‘knowledge’ ascriptions here, that retraction and disagreement data are supposed to provide *the* reason for adopting relativism over contextualism is a more general theme in contextualism and relativism debates. See Cappelen & Hawthorne (2009); MacFarlane (2007a; ms.).

available to the contextualist. In Chapter two (§2) I'll argue that a better response is available.

Third, the retraction and disagreement data is as much a problem for nonindexical contextualists as it is for indexical contextualists (fn. 49, fn. 50). This data shouldn't incline someone sympathetic to contextualism towards nonindexical contextualism.

### 3.3. Epistemological objections

The first two types of objections are objections from the philosophy of language. But there are also epistemological objections to contextualism. I'll consider two such objections here.

#### 3.3.1. Knowledge-assertion and knowledge-action links

In contemporary epistemology it's common to think of assertion as governed by a norm or set of norms. What norm (or norms)? One popular answer is that assertion is governed by a *knowledge* norm.<sup>53</sup> For my purposes I'll separate sufficiency and necessity claims:

SUFFICIENCY (ASSERTION): If S knows that p, then S is in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p.

NECESSITY (ASSERTION): If S is in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p, then S knows that p.

Clearly, contextualists can't accept SUFFICIENCY (ASSERTION) or NECESSITY (ASSERTION) (what S can and can't assert doesn't depend on features of my context) but one might wonder why they can't just accept the following 'contextualist friendly' versions (see DeRose 2009, 99):

SUFFICIENCY-C (ASSERTION): If 'S knows that p' is true at time t in context c, then S is in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p at t in c.

NECESSITY-C (ASSERTION): If S is in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p at time t in context c, then 'S knows that p' is true at t in c.

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<sup>53</sup> Defenders of the knowledge norm of assertion include DeRose (2009, Chapter 3); Hawthorne (2004, Chapter 1); Williamson (2000, Chapter 1).

But, as Hawthorne (2004, 85-91) points out, if the contextualist accepts SUFFICIENCY-C (ASSERTION) and NECESSITY-C (ASSERTION), she faces some unpleasant consequences. She has to accept that sentences like the following will often be true:

(13) Low doesn't know that p but she's in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that p.

(14) High knows that q, but she isn't in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that q.

Explanation: Say we have an ascriber in a high standards context (High) and a subject in a low standards context (Low). For (13), say that Low truly believes that p, and meets the epistemic standards operative in her context, so 'Low knows that p' is true in Low's context. This means that, by SUFFICIENCY-C (ASSERTION), she's in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p. But, because Low doesn't meet the epistemic standards operative in High's context, High can truly assert (13). For (14), say that High truly believes that q, but doesn't meet the epistemic standards operative in her context, so 'High knows that p' is false in High's context. This means that, by NECESSITY-C (ASSERTION), she's not in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p. But, because High does meet the epistemic standards operative in Low's context, Low can truly assert (14).

It's also common to think that there is a knowledge norm of *action*.<sup>54</sup> Again, for my purposes I'll separate sufficiency and necessity claims:

SUFFICIENCY (ACTION): If S knows that p, then it's appropriate for S to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting.

NECESSITY (ACTION): If it's appropriate for S to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting, then S knows that p.

Again, contextualists clearly can't accept SUFFICIENCY (ACTION) or NECESSITY (ACTION) (what propositions S can treat as reason for acting doesn't depend on features of my

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<sup>54</sup> Defenders of the knowledge norm of action include Fantl & McGrath (2009); Hawthorne & Stanley (2008). While I'm glossing over some complexities in formulation here, these complexities won't matter for what follows.

context) but one might wonder why they can't just accept the following 'contextualist friendly' versions (see DeRose 2009, 263):

SUFFICIENCY-C (ACTION): If 'S knows that p' is true at time t in context c, then it's appropriate for S to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting at t in c.

NECESSITY-C (ACTION): If it's appropriate for S to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting at time t in context c, then 'S knows that p' is true at t in c.

But, as Hawthorne (2004, 88) points out, if the contextualist accepts SUFFICIENCY-C (ACTION) and NECESSITY-C (ACTION), she faces some unpleasant consequences. She has to accept that sentences like the following will often be true:

(15) Low doesn't know that p but it's appropriate for her to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting.

(16) High knows that q, but it isn't appropriate for her to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting.

Explanation: Say we have an ascriber in a high standards context (High) and a subject in a low standards context (Low). For (15), say that Low truly believes that p, and meets the epistemic standards operative in her context, so 'Low knows that p' is true in Low's context. This means that, by SUFFICIENCY-C (ACTION), it's appropriate for Low to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting. But, because Low doesn't meet the epistemic standards operative in High's context, High can truly assert (15). For (16), say that High truly believes that q, but doesn't meet the epistemic standards operative in her context, so 'High knows that p' is false in High's context. This means that, by NECESSITY-C (ACTION), it's not appropriate for High to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting. But, because High does meet the epistemic standards operative in Low's context, Low can truly assert (16).

I'll argue that the contextualist can respond to both of these objections in Chapter three (§5). Note that, for the sake of argument, I'll accept the necessity and sufficiency claims

for both assertion and action.<sup>55</sup> My aim will be to show that, even if we accept them, contextualism escapes unscathed.

### 3.3.2. Epistemic descent

A common objection to contextualism - particularly of the conversational variety - is that, while it's quite clear how the epistemic standards can *rise* (when new error-possibilities are taken seriously, perhaps), it's not at all clear how the epistemic standards can *fall* (DeRose 1995, 42). Call a rise in epistemic standards *epistemic ascent* and a fall *epistemic descent*. Pritchard (2001) argues that, even if contextualists can answer this objection, they can't explain how one could ever *properly* assert that a subject S 'knows' a proposition p after one has denied that S 'knows' that proposition. Why not? If I assert 'S knows that p' I conversationally implicate that S is an *authority* on the matter of p, whereas if I assert 'S doesn't know that p' I conversationally implicate that S is not an authority on the matter of p. So if, in a low standards context, I truthfully assert 'S knows that p', and the standards then rise to a level such that I truthfully assert 'S doesn't know that p' then, even if the standards subsequently fall to a level such that I could truthfully assert 'S knows that p', it would be improper for me to do so because I would be generating contradictory conversational implicatures. Call this the *epistemic descent objection*.

How pressing is this objection? Clearly, it's not *always* improper for me to assert something if doing so would generate contradictory conversational implicatures. Often, I'll assert that p, therefore generating the conversational implicature that q, but then change my mind and assert that not-p, therefore generating the conversational implicature that not-q. In some cases my asserting that not-p may be improper, but it won't be in all cases. Pritchard's point is that, on a certain contextualist picture - and certainly on the conversational contextualist picture - the epistemic standard operative in a context depends on the conversational score, and the conversational score is in constant state of flux. If, as this picture seems to suggest, the epistemic standards are constantly fluctuating, 'knowledge' ascribers may well be constantly be generating

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<sup>55</sup> For critical discussion of the knowledge norm of assertion see Weiner (2007). For critical discussion of the knowledge norm of action see Brown (2008a).

contradictory conversational implicatures. It's plausible that this would be a bar to proper assertion.

In Chapter three (§3.2) I'll argue that interests contextualism is at an advantage over conversational contextualism because it can deal with this objection.

#### **4. The plan**

In this chapter we've met various views about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions (indexical and nonindexical contextualism, standard and speech-act contextualism, content and truth relativism, strict and sensitive invariantism, epistemic expressivism). As we've seen, it's unclear whether the sorts of considerations that have been taken to motivate adopting contextualism actually do so, whether because there are serious problems (as with contextualist solutions to scepticism) or because the relevant considerations don't tell between contextualism and the various other views (as with CSAs). However, I have indicated how contextualists could utilise CSAs to their advantage, and I've promised that I will offer another argument for contextualism, via the Craigian story about the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions. Finally, we've seen that there are a number of serious problems with contextualism.

At this point, contextualism looks to be in a bad way. The recovery process will be gradual, but here's how I'll go about arguing for the version of contextualism I favour, interests contextualism.

My first aim is to deal with the objections from the philosophy of language (Chapter two). If I'm successful, this will have serious implications for the dialectic. First, contextualism and relativism are both, in some sense, revisionary views, but the contextualist, unlike the relativist, doesn't propose a revision to our standard semantic framework (§1.2.1.2). This means that, in the absence of reason to accept relativism over contextualism, we should accept contextualism. But, as we've seen, *the* reason for accepting relativism over contextualism is the disagreement and retraction data (§3.2), and I'll argue that contextualists can deal with that data (Chapter two (§2)). So one of the upshots of Chapter two is that relativism is off the table. Second, because contextualism is still, in some sense, revisionary, in the absence of reason to accept contextualism over invariantism, we should accept some variety of invariantism. So

another upshot of Chapter two is that we need to find some reasons to favour contextualism over both varieties of invariantism.

My second aim is to put interests contextualism on the table (Chapter three). In doing so I'll provide one half of an argument against sensitive invariantism (Chapter three (§4)), I'll argue that interests contextualism is preferable to conversational contextualism for a whole number of reasons (§3) and I'll deal with the remaining epistemological objections (§5). The upshot of Chapter three is that interests contextualism is the most attractive version of contextualism available, and there is some reason to prefer it to sensitive invariantism.

My third and final aim is to make good on my claim that the Craigian account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions supports what I called Craigian contextualism (§2.3), of which interests contextualism is (and conversational contextualism isn't) a type (Chapter four (§2); see also Chapter three (§2)). The upshot of Chapter four is that there are further reasons to prefer interests contextualism to conversational contextualism and, crucially, there is good reason to prefer it to both strict and sensitive invariantism.

If I can achieve these aims, I'll have shown that there is good reason to prefer interests contextualism to all of its rivals. I now turn to that task.

## Chapter two

### Epistemic contextualism defended

#### 0. Introductory remarks

My aim in this chapter is to deal with the objections to contextualism from the philosophy of language. The first set of objections concern the linguistic evidence (or lack thereof) for contextualism ('linguistic objections'), and the second concern the disagreement and retraction data. The linguistic objections target indexical contextualism but leave nonindexical contextualism unscathed, whereas the disagreement and retraction data are problems for indexical and nonindexical contextualism alike.<sup>1</sup> First, I tackle the linguistic objections (§1). I argue that there are two viable approaches that indexical contextualists can take towards the linguistic objections. The first approach meets the objections 'head on' whereas the second avoids the objections altogether by retreating to speech-act contextualism (for the distinction between standard and speech-act contextualism see Chapter one (§1.2.2)). Consequently, linguistic objections provide no reason to reject indexical contextualism. Second, I tackle the disagreement and retraction data (§2). I argue that, because contextualists can deal with the data, disagreement and retraction provide no reason to reject contextualism and, consequently, no reason to accept a revisionary relativist semantics for 'knowledge' ascriptions. Taken together, §1 and §2 show that a contextualist semantics for 'knowledge' ascriptions is a viable position in the philosophy of language. But what they don't show is that we should adopt contextualism rather than rival invariantist views. I take up that task in Chapters three & four.

#### 1. Linguistic objections: two approaches

Some brief remarks should suffice to introduce the two approaches. Recall one of our earlier examples: Daughter has cut herself, and Father tells her 'You are not going to die'. Intuitively, what Father has said is true. There are various ways in which one might try to accommodate this intuition, but two are particularly relevant here. First, one might - albeit rather implausibly - decide that the expression 'die' is an indexical in

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<sup>1</sup> Consequently, in §1 I will usually use the label 'indexical contextualism', whereas in §2 I will usually use the label 'contextualism'.



the broad sense.<sup>2</sup> On this view, what I called the ‘saturated sentence meaning’ of Father’s utterance is *Daughter is not going to die from the cut* (for this bit of terminology, and others that I’ll use in what follows, see Chapter one (§1.2.2)). This view will face a number of objections concerning the linguistic evidence (or lack thereof) for the claim that ‘die’ is a broad indexical (‘die’ will fail a number of the standard tests). Second, one might - rather more plausibly - decide that, while ‘die’ isn’t an indexical even in the broad sense, the truth-conditional content of Father’s utterance - what I called the ‘utterance meaning’ - is *Daughter is not going to die from the cut*. Why could one still say that? Because, due to processes such as free enrichment, utterance meanings may well be ‘richer’ than the literal meanings of the sentences that we utter. This view won’t face objections concerning the linguistic evidence for the claim that ‘die’ is a broad indexical.

Indexical contextualists think that the truth-conditions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions depend on the context of utterance. There are two ways in which one might try to accommodate this. First, one might decide that the expression ‘knows’ is an indexical in the broad sense. On this view, the saturated sentence meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions make reference to contextually determined epistemic standards (or, ranges of relevant alternatives). For example, in our earlier PUB case, the saturated sentence meaning of Ted’s ‘knowledge’ ascription (‘I know that Jack performed the service’) will be *Ted knows, by the standards of Ted’s context, that Jack performed the service*. Second, one might decide that, whether ‘knows’ is an indexical in the broad sense or not, the utterance meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions make reference to contextually determined epistemic standards. So, for example, the utterance meaning of Ted’s ‘knowledge’ ascription will be *Ted knows, by the standards of Ted’s context, that Jack performed the service*. The first view - which I called ‘standard contextualism’ - faces the various linguistic objections. However, the second view - which I called ‘speech-act contextualism’ - has no problem with those particular objections.<sup>3</sup> (Of course, it faces other objections, including the disagreement and retraction data).

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<sup>2</sup> Reminder: By ‘broad indexical’ I mean the whole range of expressions whose meanings plausibly depend on the context of utterance (so not just ‘I’, ‘you’, etc but also ‘tall’, ‘empty’, etc).

<sup>3</sup> Reminder: Speech-act contextualism is logically weaker than standard contextualism. If ‘knows’ is a broad indexical, then the utterance meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions

By tackling the linguistic objections ‘head on’ I mean arguing that, contra Hawthorne, Stanley and others, ‘knows’ is a broad indexical. I call this approach ‘head on’ because it contrasts with the other approach available to indexical contextualists, on which they can retreat to the logically weaker speech-act contextualist view outlined here and earlier. In this section I’ll start with the ‘head on’ approach. Drawing on recent work by Blome-Tillmann (2008) and DeRose (2009, Chapter 5), I’ll argue that the indexical contextualist has the resources available to respond to all of the linguistic objections, and so maintain that ‘knows’ is a broad indexical (§1.1). I’ll then expand on the brief remarks made here about speech-act contextualism (§1.2). I’ll finish by weighing up these rival approaches that indexical contextualists can take towards tackling linguistic objections (§1.3). My aim is to outline the considerations that might incline indexical contextualists towards one or the other approach, not to recommend one approach over the other. (Why so neutral? As we’ll see in §1.3, the right approach depends on the right answers to some hotly debated questions in the philosophy of language, in particular about the semantics/pragmatics interface).

### **1.1. The ‘head on’ approach**

I take each of the objections in turn. I’ll start by briefly recapping each objection, and then I’ll give what I take to be the best response available to the indexical contextualist. In dealing with the first two objections I’ll be drawing on Blome-Tillmann (2008) and DeRose (2009, Chapter 5), but, as we’ll see, I think Blome-Tillmann takes on some unnecessary commitments in dealing with the second objection.

#### **1.1.1. Gradability**

A quick recap: Indexical contextualists are fond of thinking of the expression ‘knows’ as being semantically linked to a scale, hence locutions like ‘knows by low standards’ and ‘doesn’t know by high standards’. A paradigm of an expression with a semantic link to a scale would be a gradable adjective such as ‘flat’, and indexical contextualists are also fond of saying that ‘knows’ is analogous to expressions such as ‘flat’. But, quite clearly, ‘knows’ isn’t gradable (compare: ‘x is completely/very/quite flat’ and ‘x is flatter than y’

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make reference to contextually determined epistemic standards, but the utterance meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions could make reference to contextually determined epistemic standards even if ‘knows’ isn’t a broad indexical (for example, if processes such as free enrichment are at work in the case of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions).

vs. ‘x completely/very much/quite knows that p’ and ‘x knows that p more than y’). Consequently, ‘knows’ isn’t analogous to gradable adjectives.<sup>4</sup> This objection is part of Stanley’s inductive argument that ‘knows’ isn’t context-sensitive (Chapter one (§3.1)), but it’s also evidence that ‘knows’ isn’t semantically linked with a scale. As Stanley puts it, the disanalogy “casts doubt upon the claim that knowledge comes in varying degrees of strength, a core claim of many versions of contextualism” (Stanley 2005a, 36). While, by itself, the disanalogy doesn’t show that ‘knows’ isn’t context-sensitive (it’s just part of the inductive argument), it does pose a serious problem for any indexical contextualist who wants to claim that ‘knows’ is semantically linked with a scale. And, as we’ve seen, a number of indexical contextualists - in particular, those who talk in terms of contextually varying epistemic standards - do want to claim that ‘knows’ is semantically linked to a scale (Chapter one (§1.1)).

Underlying this argument is something like the following assumption: If an expression is semantically linked to a scale, then that expression is gradable along that scale. From this assumption, and the observation that ‘knows’ isn’t gradable, it follows that ‘knows’ isn’t semantically linked to a scale. But should we accept the assumption? I think that, once we consider a number of other expressions, it becomes clear that we shouldn’t.

The first expression is ‘snore’. I’m in the library at the end of a long day and I’m a little sleepy. At some point I start dozing, so I’m breathing a little heavier than normal. A hard-working student says ‘That guy is snoring. I wish he would stop!’ Intuitively - to me, anyway - what the student says is true. But, if I were to make the exact same sounds in some other context - during the night, say - someone who could hear me would say ‘That guy isn’t snoring. He’s just asleep’. Again, intuitively, what they say is true. What is required to count as ‘snoring’ depends on the context. Breathing that qualifies as ‘snoring’ in some contexts, such as the library, doesn’t qualify as such in other contexts, such as the bedroom. Keeping things rather rough, a semantics for

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, ‘knows’ is a verb rather than an adjective. The point here is that the analogy breaks down because ‘knows’ isn’t gradable, not because ‘knows’ isn’t an adjective. Note that the same considerations show that ‘knows’ isn’t analogous to gradable verbs (‘empty’, ‘regret’). Compare: ‘S completely/very much regrets that p’ and ‘S regrets that p more than R’ vs. ‘S completely/very much knows that p’ and ‘S knows that p more than R’ (see Stanley 2005a, 40-1).

'snores' claims (statements of the form 'x snores') might look something like this: 'x snores' is true in context c iff (x is asleep and x's breathing takes a value on a scale of loudness that is greater than or equal to the minimum required to count as 'snoring' in c) (see Blome-Tillmann 2008, 45). So, on our semantics for 'snores' claims, 'snore' is context-sensitive because it has a semantic link to a scale of loudness. While the proposed semantics is, at best, a simplistic approximation (snoring isn't just heavy breathing while asleep) nothing stands on this particular implementation of a contextualist semantics for 'snores' claims.

The second expression is 'shout'. Again, I'm in the library, but this time I'm getting a little over-excited because I'm eagerly discussing *Naming and necessity* with a colleague. I raise my voice to a level that is far too loud for a library. A distracted student says 'That guy is shouting. I wish he would stop!' Again, intuitively what the student says is true. But, if I were to raise my voice to the exact same level in some other context - in the pub, say - and someone were to hear me, they would say 'That guy isn't shouting. He's just having a conversation with his friend'. Again, intuitively what they say is true. What is required to count as 'shouting' depends on the context. A noise level that qualifies as 'shouting' in some contexts, such as the library, doesn't qualify as such in other contexts, such as the pub (or, a rugby game etc). Keeping things rough, a semantics for 'shouts' claims (statements of the form 'x shouts') might look something like this: 'x shouts' is true in context c iff the volume of x's voice on a scale of loudness is greater than or equal to the minimum required to count as 'shouting' in c). Again, the proposed semantics is, at best, a simplistic approximation, but that 'shouts' is context-sensitive because it has a semantic link to a scale of loudness is very plausible.

However, neither 'snore' not 'shout' are gradable along a scale of loudness:

- (1) 'snores':
  - \*x completely/very snores
  - x snores more than y
- (2) 'shouts':
  - \*x completely/very shouts
  - x shouts more than y

The first constructions for both ‘snore’ and ‘shout’ are infelicitous and, while the second constructions are felicitous, they have to be read as x snores more *frequently* than y and x shouts more *often* than y respectively, rather than as x snores more loudly than y and x shouts more loudly than y. So it looks like we have two options. We can either abandon the assumption that expressions with a semantic link to a scale are gradable along that scale, or abandon our contextualist semantics for ‘snore’ and ‘shout’.<sup>5</sup> At this point, we’re in a tricky position. Our contextualist semantics for both ‘snore’ and ‘shout’ look plausible, but someone who wants to press the gradability objection against the indexical contextualist about ‘knows’ presumably thinks the assumption is plausible too. What gives?

However, as Blome-Tillmann points out, the plausibility of the assumption is explained by the plausibility of a similar but importantly different assumption (2008, 45-6). Note that, while neither ‘snore’ nor ‘shout’ are gradable, there are constructions available which serve to rank individual acts of snoring and shouting according to their loudness, for instance adverbial modifiers such as ‘very/quite/extremely loudly’ and adverbial comparatives such as ‘more loudly than’:

(3) ‘snore’:

x snores very/quite/extremely loudly

x snores more loudly than y

(4) ‘shout’:

x shouts very/quite/extremely loudly

x shouts more loudly than y

This suggests that expressions with a semantic link to a scale are *either* gradable along that scale *or* adverbially modifiable along that scale. So the choice isn’t between abandoning the original assumption or our contextualist semantics for ‘snore’ and ‘shout’. Rather, it’s between modifying the original assumption along these lines and abandoning our contextualist semantics for ‘snore’ and ‘shout’. Given the plausibility of

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<sup>5</sup> There is another option: Perhaps ‘snore’ and ‘shout’ are both context-sensitive, but not because either have a semantic link to a scale of loudness. I won’t explore this option here, but I don’t think it looks very promising.

the contextualist semantics, why not modify the assumption? And, if we do so, it becomes clear that, at least in this respect, ‘knows’ is analogous to both ‘snore’ and ‘shout’. In the case of ‘knows’ we have a number of adverbial modifiers and adverbial comparatives at our disposal (Blome-Tillmann 2008, 46; DeRose 2009, 182):

(5) ‘knows’:

- x knows with quite/very/extremely good evidence/justification that p
- x knows that p with better evidence/justification than y knows that p/q
- x knows that p with (absolute) certainty
- x knows that p with more certainty than y knows that p/q
- x knows that p by any reasonable standard
- x knows that p by a more reasonable standard than y knows that p/q<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, there is no reason to conclude that ‘knows’ isn’t semantically linked to a scale just from the observation that it isn’t gradable along that scale. Rather, given the plausibility of the modified assumption - that expressions with a semantic link to a scale are either gradable or adverbially modifiable along that scale - and the observation that ‘knows’ is adverbially modifiable, there is actually reason to conclude that ‘knows’ is semantically linked to a scale. Further, we have found two expressions that are plausibly context-sensitive - ‘snore’ and ‘shout’ - which, in some respects, behave analogously to ‘knows’. One of Stanley’s aims is to show “that the alleged context-sensitivity of knowledge ascriptions has no other parallel among the class of uncontroversial context-sensitive expressions” (2005a, 47). If Stanley were right, that would certainly be good evidence that ‘knows’ isn’t context-sensitive. But, as we’ve just seen, it’s not at all clear that indexical contextualists need to claim that ‘knows’ is some sort of *sui generis* context-sensitive expression. They can appeal to expressions that have a semantic link to a scale and are adverbially modifiable along that scale, such as ‘snore’ and ‘shout’.

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<sup>6</sup> Recall Chapter one (§3.1, fn. 46): Unlike constructions such as ‘by strict/loose’ standards, these constructions can’t be used to modify a range of expressions other than ‘knows’. Consequently, there is reason to think that they tell us something specifically about ‘knows’.

If the reader is unconvinced by the above argument, I urge him or her to place it within the proper dialectical context. The argument is best seen as shifting the burden of proof off the indexical contextualist and onto her opponent. Everyone will agree that indexical contextualists have to find context-sensitive expressions that are analogous to ‘knows’, and that they can’t claim that ‘knows’ is semantically linked to a scale if the evidence tells us that it isn’t. But, in discharging these obligations, indexical contextualists are entirely within their rights to appeal to other expressions that are plausibly context-sensitive which behave analogously to ‘knows’. If, in the process, we find that we have to modify certain assumptions about context-sensitivity then, as long as we are given independent reasons for doing so, that shouldn’t be overly worrying for the indexical contextualist about ‘knows’. Consequently, I conclude that the indexical contextualist can deal with the gradability objection.

### 1.1.2. Clarifying devices

A quick recap: Unlike gradable adjectives, ‘knows’ doesn’t accept clarifying devices. Compare and contrast:

(6)	‘empty’	‘knows’
	x is roughly empty	*x roughly knows that p
	x is approximately empty	*x approximately knows that p
	x is empty of beer	x knows by strict/loose standards <sup>7</sup>

This points to another disanalogy with gradable adjectives but, as we’ve just seen, indexical contextualists don’t need to (and can’t) appeal to that analogy anyway. However, the indexical contextualist who goes along with the argument of §1.1.1 can’t just dismiss this objection out of hand. Consider this dialogue:

- (7) Drinker: This beer glass is empty.  
 Teetotaller: No it isn’t, it has air in it.  
 Drinker: Don’t be so annoying. All I meant was that it is empty *of beer*.

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<sup>7</sup> While this is felicitous, it doesn’t tell us anything about the context-sensitivity of ‘knows’ in particular (see fn. 6 above and Chapter one (§3.1, fn. 46)).

As Hawthorne (2004, 104) points out, when it comes to ‘empty’ claims, and other claims involving context-sensitive expressions, there are a number of ways in which one can clarify what exactly one meant in order to deal with a challenge.<sup>8</sup> If there were no clarifying devices available for ‘knows’, that would be very odd indeed and, absent a good explanation why, a reason to be wary of contextualism about ‘knows’. Fortunately, though, I see no reason to think that there are no clarifying devices available for ‘knows’ (for the a similar point see DeRose 2009, 180-4). The various adverbial modifiers discussed above seem to be able to perform that function:

(8) Morven: I know that I have hands.

Laurie: Really? I did a philosophy class once and we talked a lot about the possibility that we’re all handless brains in vats. Can you rule that out?

Morven: Seriously? I didn’t mean that I know with absolute certainty. I just meant that I know *by any reasonable standard*.<sup>9</sup>

To my ear, this dialogue sounds about as natural as the dialogue between Drinker and Teetotaller. Here’s another (utilising the setup for the earlier PUB case):

(9) Ted: I know that Jack performed the service.

Polly: Really? You didn’t actually see him! You need far more evidence.

Ted: Seriously? I didn’t mean that I know *with certainty* that Jack performed the service. I just meant that I know *with quite good evidence* (or, justification) that Jack performed the service.

Again, to my ear this dialogue sounds perfectly natural. I conclude that the indexical contextualist can deal with the clarifying devices objection.

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<sup>8</sup> It’s hard to make the dialogues sound natural, but one can imagine challenges to claims involving indexicals such as ‘now’ that call for the use of clarifying devices. For example: ‘RM is in the building now’. Challenge: ‘Aha! RM just left so he isn’t in the building now’. Response: ‘I didn’t mean that RM is in the building *now*, I meant that RM was in the building at the time at which I spoke’. The availability of clarifying devices is a feature of all context-sensitive expressions, not just gradable adjectives.

<sup>9</sup> In making this dialogue sound natural it helps to think of Morven as exasperated that Laurie is raising the sorts of possibilities that, outside of the philosophy class, nobody pays any attention to.



It's important to note that this response to the clarifying devices objection is separate from the response to the gradability objection. Clearly, we have adverbial modifiers for 'knows', but that does *not* show that they can function as clarifying devices. A clarifying device is a construction that one can utilise to clarify what one meant and so deal with a challenge to what one has asserted. Not every grammatically acceptable response to a challenge can be so utilised to deal with that challenge. As DeRose puts it:

"It's important here that these [clarifying devices] are not just modifiers that 'S knows that p' can take, but function as devices of clarification: In a context in which one's meaning or consistency are questioned, these devices at least arguably can function to clarify the content of one's claim" (2009, 182).

One might wonder whether indexical contextualists should take this line in response to the clarifying devices objection. In particular, Blome-Tillmann has argued that, because 'knowledge' is factive and the norm of assertion, one shouldn't expect clarifying devices to be available for 'knows' (2008, 50-2).<sup>10</sup> A rough sketch: Situations where a clarifying device for 'knows' would be called for will have the following general structure. First, someone - call her A - makes a 'knowledge' ascription ('S knows that p'). Second, someone else - call her B - raises the epistemic standards (or, expands the range of relevant alternatives) such that 'S knows that p' is now false. Third, if there were clarifying devices for 'knows' available, A could utilise them to deal with B's challenge ('I didn't mean that S knows that p by the present standards, I meant that S knew that p by the previous standards'). Now, use 'by X standards' as a dummy for a proposed clarifying device for 'knows'. First, note that if one asserts 'S knows that p by X standards' then one is committed to p (factivity). Second, note that if, in asserting something, one commits oneself to p, then one implicates that one 'knows' that p (at least, Blome-Tillmann thinks that, with a bit of work, this follows from the knowledge norm). From this it follows that, once she has been challenged by B, A can no longer claim that S 'knows' that p by X standards, or that S 'knew' that p 'by X standards',

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<sup>10</sup> I said above that the lack of clarifying devices for 'knows' would provide reason to be wary of contextualism about 'knows' *absent a good explanation why clarifying devices aren't available*. Blome-Tillmann's point is that, because 'knowledge' is factive and the norm of assertion, there is a good explanation why.

because she (presumably) doesn't currently satisfy 'knows that p'. Consequently, one shouldn't expect clarifying devices to be available for 'knows', but that's just because 'knowledge' is factive and the norm of assertion.

Why not follow Blome-Tillmann here? Here are four reasons why not: First, I think that clarifying devices are available for 'knows', so I don't think indexical contextualists need to wheel in the knowledge norm of assertion here. Second, while appealing to the knowledge norm is dialectically sound (a number of contextualism's most prominent opponents endorse it, and it forms the basis of a number of objections to contextualism) it is a contentious thesis, and indexical contextualists don't need to commit themselves to it. Third, appealing to the knowledge norm won't help with the next objection, whereas appealing to the availability of clarifying devices for 'knows' will. Fourth, I said above that, with a little bit of work, it follows from the knowledge norm that if, in asserting that p one is committed to q, then one implicates that one 'knows' that p. As Blome-Tillmann points out, the general principle is something like this:

'EXTENDED' KNOWLEDGE NORM: If your assertion of S in C implicates p, assert S in C only if you satisfy 'knows p' in C (2008, 50).

As applied to this particular case, the assertion is of the form 'S knows that p by X standards', and by 'implicates' Blome-Tillmann means 'semantically entails', the idea being that, because 'knows' is factive, 'knows p' semantically entails that p (2008, 50 fn. 53). Should we accept the 'EXTENDED' KNOWLEDGE NORM? *Prima facie*, it's too strong. One might think that I can properly assert 'I remember that p', 'I see that p' or 'I regret that p' even if I don't satisfy 'knows p' (perhaps I'm misremembering, hallucinating, or mistakenly regretting). But, because 'remember', 'see' and 'regret' are factive, 'I remember/see/regret that p' semantically entails that p. Consequently, according to the 'EXTENDED' KNOWLEDGE NORM, I can't properly assert 'I remember/see/regret that p' when I don't satisfy 'knows p'. I don't take this to be a decisive objection to the 'EXTENDED' KNOWLEDGE NORM, but it suffices to show that it doesn't straightforwardly follow from the original knowledge norm.

### 1.1.3. Stanley's inductive argument

A quick recap: For a wide range of context-sensitive expressions, multiple occurrences of the relevant expression within a single discourse, or even an individual sentence, can take on different contents (examples: 'This table is flat, and Holland is flat', 'Edinburgh has many bagpipers but not many Scots'). Compare:

- (10) If they have hands, most non-epistemologists know that they have hands, but, even if they have hands, no epistemologist knows that she does.
- (11) Morven knows that she has hands, but she doesn't know that she's not a handless brain in a vat.
- (12) If the bank is open on Saturdays, I know that the bank is open on Saturdays, but now that you mention the possibility that it has changed its opening hours, even if it is open on Saturdays I don't know that it is.

It's hard to read (10-12) in such a way that the multiple occurrences of 'knows' take on different contents. Further, indexical contextualists have often claimed that the multiple occurrences of 'knows' *can't* take on different contents (Chapter one (§3.1, fn. 47)). Stanley concludes from this that there is good reason to think that 'knows' isn't context-sensitive.

Note that indexical contextualists can't explain away this observation by appealing to the factivity of 'knowledge' and the knowledge norm of assertion (Stanley 2005a, 63 fn. 11). The conditional form of (10) means that, in asserting it, one isn't committed to anyone having hands, or anyone 'knowing' that they have hands. Similarly the conditional form of (12) means that, in asserting it, one isn't committed to the bank being open on Saturdays, or 'knowing' that the bank is open on Saturdays. And, if (11) is unassertable, that's most likely because it's an apparent violation of the CLOSURE principle (Chapter one (§2.2)). But, as I'll now argue, indexical contextualists should hold that (10-12) can be read in such a way that the multiple occurrences of 'knows' take on different contents. They can be read in that way because there are adverbial modifiers and clarifying devices available for 'knows'.

What we have here is a genuine phenomenon. Competent speakers *do* find it very hard to read (10-12) in such a way that the multiple occurrences of ‘knows’ take on different contents. But consider another example:

(13) That mountain is tall, but now that you mention that you are from Switzerland, that mountain isn’t tall.

To my ear, (13) sounds strange. The height of a mountain doesn’t depend on where your interlocutor is from, and mountains don’t change their height upon you finding out that your interlocutor is from Switzerland. But, if the speaker uttering (13) had wanted to do so, she has devices at her disposal for clarifying what, exactly, she meant. She could have said this instead:

(14) That mountain is tall *for Scotland*, but now that you mention that you are from Switzerland, that mountain isn’t tall *for Switzerland*.

And, while a little stilted, it’s clear enough what (14) means. Similar remarks apply to (10-12). If the speaker uttering (10-12) had wanted to do so, she also had devices at her disposal for clarifying what she meant. For example:

(15) If they have hands, most non-epistemologists know *by any reasonable standard* that they have hands, but, even if they have hands, no epistemologist knows *with certainty* that she does.

(16) Morven knows *by any reasonable standard* that she has hands, but she doesn’t know *with certainty* that she’s not a handless brain in a vat.

(17) If the bank is open on Saturdays, I know *with quite good justification* that the bank is open on Saturdays, but now that you mention the possibility that it has changed its opening hours, even if it is open on Saturdays I don’t know *with extremely good justification* that it is.

Again, it’s clear enough what (15-17) mean. Because ‘knows’ accepts modifiers and clarifying devices, speakers have devices at their disposal for clarifying that multiple occurrences of ‘knows’ within a single discourse or sentence are to be given different meanings. Our example above (13) doesn’t pose a problem for contextualism about

‘tall’, and (10-12) don’t pose a problem for contextualism about ‘knows’. I conclude that the indexical contextualist can deal with Stanley’s inductive argument. Consequently, she can deal with all of the linguistic objections.

It’s worth recalling a point made earlier (§1.1.1). The linguistic objections put the burden of proof squarely on the indexical contextualist. In dealing with those objections, my aim has been to shift that burden off the indexical contextualist and onto her opponent. Just as the linguistic objections don’t purport to show that ‘knows’ definitely isn’t context-sensitive, my responses to those objections don’t purport to show that ‘knows’ definitely is context-sensitive. But they do show that, in certain respects, ‘knows’ behaves much like a number of other plausibly context-sensitive expressions. The indexical contextualist’s opponent needs to show that the differences between ‘knows’ and those expressions are more important than the similarities. Of course, the retraction and disagreement data seem to show that ‘knows’ behaves very differently to paradigm context-sensitive expressions in intra and interconversational disagreement reports. But, as I’ll argue in §2, the contextualist can deal with the retraction and disagreement data.

## **1.2. Speech-act contextualism**

Given that, as I’ve just argued, the indexical contextualist can deal with all of the linguistic objections, one might wonder why I need to explore the alternative approach, viz. speech-act contextualism. One could bolster this point as follows. First, while, as we’ve seen, it would be a mistake to assume that most contextualists endorse standard (as opposed to speech-act) contextualism, that’s most likely because speech-act contextualism hasn’t generally been considered a ‘live’ option (Chapter one (§1.2.2.2)). Second, the reason why it hasn’t generally been considered a ‘live’ option is most likely because one has to take on contentious views about the semantics/pragmatics interface in order to formulate the view. But, as we’ll see, whether indexical contextualists are best taking the first approach, tackling the linguistic objections ‘head on’ and endorsing standard contextualism, or taking the second approach, avoiding the linguistic objections and endorsing speech-act contextualism, depends on the outcome of a long-standing and somewhat intractable debate within the philosophy of language about the semantics/pragmatics interface itself (§1.3). Given this, I need to say a little more about speech-act contextualism. I start by recapping why the speech-act contextualist avoids

the linguistic objections (§1.2.1). I then motivate a question: why is speech-act contextualism a form of contextualism at all? (§1.2.2) Finally, I explain why it is (§1.2.3).

### **1.2.1. Speech-act contextualism and linguistic objections**

On the speech-act contextualist view, the utterance meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive. For example, in our earlier PUB case, the utterance meaning of Ted’s ‘knowledge’ ascription is *Ted knows, by the standards of Ted’s context, that Jack performed the service*. As I’ve formulated it, speech-act contextualism is *neutral* as to whether this is because ‘knows’ is a broad indexical or because, while ‘knows’ isn’t a broad indexical, and the saturated sentence meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions aren’t context-sensitive, the utterance meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive because of non-linguistically controlled processes such as free enrichment. So, when I say that speech-act contextualism ‘avoids’ linguistic objections, I mean that the three objections discussed above don’t give us any reason to reject speech-act contextualism. The objections target the claim that ‘knows’ is a broad indexical, and speech-act contextualists aren’t committed to ‘knows’ being a broad indexical.

One might object that it’s a bit strong to say that speech-act contextualists ‘avoid’ linguistic objections. The linguistic objections, if sound, show that speech-act contextualists are *committed* to processes such as free enrichment having an effect on the utterance meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. So the linguistic objections, if sound, force speech-act contextualists to take on *additional* commitments. I agree. If one wishes, one can add this qualification whenever I talk of speech-act contextualists ‘avoiding’ linguistic objections in what follows.

### **1.2.2. Contextualism and epistemological (ir)relevance**

If one responds to the linguistic objections by denying that ‘knows’ is a broad indexical, and ‘retreating’ to speech-act contextualism, why does one qualify as an ‘indexical contextualist’, or indeed a ‘contextualist’? In what follows I’ll offer two ways of motivating this question. I’ll argue that, while the first way is based on a misunderstanding, the second way does at least merit some attention.

First way: A popular view about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is that, while their truth-conditions and truth-values don’t depend on the context of utterance, their assertability-conditions do (see Chapter one (§2.1)). A ‘knowledge’ ascription that is

assertable in one context need not be assertable in another context even though the subject still has all the same beliefs and all the same evidence (which hasn't been defeated or the like). One way of implementing this sort of view would be in terms of conversational implicatures, the idea being that, in some contexts, true 'knowledge' ascriptions implicate things that are false, and therefore are unassertable (similarly - although perhaps less plausibly - in some contexts false 'knowledge' ascriptions implicate things that are true, and therefore are assertable). Clearly, the resulting view doesn't qualify as a sort of contextualism, indexical or otherwise. (Indeed, a number of contextualism's opponents defend this view!). But one might ask what the difference is between the view just sketched and speech-act contextualism. When I say that, for the speech-act contextualist, the utterance meanings of 'knowledge' ascriptions are context-sensitive, why does this rule out a view on which 'knowledge' ascriptions have context-sensitive assertability conditions? Why can't a conversational implicature be part of what I'm calling the utterance meaning?

These questions involve a misunderstanding (for discussion see Récanati 2004a, 23-37; Stainton 2010, 132). Again, recall our example: Father says 'You are not going to die' to Daughter who has just suffered a minor cut. The expression 'die' doesn't seem to be a broad indexical, and the sentence doesn't seem to have an unarticulated element whose meaning depends on the context, so the literal meaning of this sentence, once context has provided the denotation of 'You' - what I'm calling the saturated sentence meaning - is *Daughter is not going to die*. But, intuitively, what Father has said is true. To explain this, one could appeal to a non-linguistically controlled process of free enrichment that generates the 'richer' utterance meaning. But conversational implicatures are not produced via processes such as free enrichment. If we take a paradigm example of a conversational implicature - Professor writing 'Smith has good handwriting' in a job recommendation letter, say - we can identify, first, what Professor has intuitively said - *Smith has good handwriting* - and, second, what Professor has conversationally implicated via the Gricean maxims - *Smith isn't much of a philosopher*, or similar. What Professor intuitively said is the utterance meaning, which, in this case, coincides with the saturated sentence meaning. What Professor has conversationally implicated isn't something 'richer' than the utterance meaning or saturated sentence meaning, it's something that one can infer from what Professor has said together with the Gricean maxims.

Saturated sentence meanings and utterance meanings both serve as the input for the inferential processes that produce conversational implicatures and the like as output. Consequently, conversational implicatures can't be part of the utterance meanings of 'knowledge' ascriptions, and speech-act contextualism differs from the 'warranted assertability' view sketched above.

Second way: Those who study mortality and immortality won't be that interested in the observation that, intuitively, Father speaks truly when he says 'You are not going to die' to Daughter. They're interested in mortality and immortality, not 'mortality' and 'immortality' ascriptions. And epistemologists - those who study knowledge - might not be that interested in the observation that, intuitively, whether 'knowledge' ascriptions are true or false depends on the context. Epistemologists are interested in knowledge, not 'knowledge' ascriptions. Or so goes an objection that one might raise about contextualism (the objection is rarely stated so baldly, but for something approaching it see Feldman (1999); Schiffer (1996); Sosa (2000)).<sup>11</sup> I don't think contextualists should take this objection all that seriously. As DeRose puts it, drawing on an analogy with the expression 'free' and debates about free-will:

“Those who work on the problem of free will and determinism, for instance, should *of course* be very interested in the issue of what it means to call an action 'free'. If that could mean different things in different contexts, then all sorts of problems could arise from a failure to recognize this shift in meaning” (DeRose's emphasis) (2009, 19).

But, one might think, the situation is far worse for the speech-act contextualist. The speech-act contextualist can't appeal to the muddles that might be caused within epistemology by failing to pay attention to the indexicality of the expression 'knows'. So what can she appeal to?

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<sup>11</sup> Just to clarify: The objection isn't that contextualism is really a view within the philosophy of language. Clearly, views within the philosophy of language are often of interest to epistemologists. The objection is that contextualism is a view within the philosophy of language that isn't of much interest to epistemologists. (In much the same way that the observation that Father speaks truly isn't of much interest to those who study mortality and immortality).



### 1.2.3. Salvaging the spirit of contextualism

Robert Stainton (2010) argues that speech-act contextualism can, as he puts it, ‘salvage the spirit of contextualism’, by which he means that it can achieve three aims that Stainton thinks capture what is distinctive about contextualism in epistemology. The three aims are as follows (2010, 129):

1. To allow ordinary ‘knowledge’ ascriptions to be literally true (and unambiguous) while also explaining the genuine pull of sceptical arguments.
2. To let an ascriber’s epistemic standards partly determine what is asserted when that ascriber makes a ‘knowledge’ ascription or denial.<sup>12</sup>
3. To save the principle of deductive epistemic closure.

As Stainton argues, the speech-act contextualist can achieve all of these aims. First, speech-act contextualism is a view about the utterance meanings of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials. On that view, features of the ascriber’s context, such as her epistemic standards, partly determine the truth-conditional contents of utterances of sentences of the form ‘S knows that p’ (and ‘S doesn’t know that p’). So the ascriber’s epistemic standards will partly determine what she asserts when she makes a ‘knowledge’ ascription or denial (aim two). Second, the contextualist solution to the sceptical problem is neutral between standard and speech-act contextualism (see Chapter two (§2.2)). That solution involves allowing that ordinary ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are literally true while explaining the genuine pull of sceptical arguments (or, why we find them so compelling) (aim one) and saving the CLOSURE principle (aim three). So, insofar as one thinks that the contextualist solution to the sceptical problem is viable, the speech-act contextualist can achieve aims one and three. Consequently, Stainton concludes that speech-act contextualism captures what is distinctive about contextualism in epistemology. If that’s right then, if standard contextualism is of interest to epistemologists, then speech-act contextualism should be too. And I think that standard contextualism is (or, should be) of interest to epistemologists. Consequently, speech-act contextualism should be too.

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<sup>12</sup> While Stainton talks in terms of epistemic standards, I assume he would be happy to talk instead of the alternatives that are relevant in the ascriber’s context.

One could certainly quibble about whether these three aims capture the spirit of contextualism.<sup>13</sup> One might think - and I certainly think - that aims one and three, which both relate to the contextualist solution to scepticism, shouldn't be seen as *essential* to the contextualist project in epistemology. But I also don't think it should be controversial that any view that promises to achieve the three aims *qualifies* as a version of 'contextualism'. So I conclude that there is no good reason to doubt that the speech-act contextualist qualifies as a 'contextualist'.

### **1.3. Should contextualists face their problems head on?**

The upshot of §1.1 and §1.2 is that there are two viable approaches that indexical contextualists can take towards tackling the linguistic objections. But which do I recommend that the indexical contextualist take? My aim here isn't to recommend one approach over the other. Rather, I will outline the considerations that might incline the indexical contextualist towards one or the other approach. I'll start by arguing that the right approach depends on what the right view about the semantics/pragmatics interface is (§1.3.1). I'll then briefly highlight a possible connection between the literature on the semantics/pragmatics interface and the distinction between indexical and nonindexical contextualism (§1.3.2). I'll finish by summarising the conclusions of this section (§1.3.3).

#### **1.3.1. The semantics/pragmatics interface (again)**

I've often referred in passing to the 'semantics/pragmatics interface', but I've not been entirely clear about what that means. Almost everyone will agree that we can split the things - propositions, perhaps 'propositional radicals' - that get communicated in conversational exchanges into those that are generated by semantics and those that are generated by pragmatics. On one side, the paradigm would be the conventional, linguistic meanings of the words and sentences expressed. On the other, conversational implicatures and the like. But where, exactly, should the boundary be drawn? And is it

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<sup>13</sup> Two things to note: First, because aim two makes reference to the epistemic standards determining what is *asserted*, the nonindexical contextualist doesn't, by Stainton's lights, 'salvage the spirit of contextualism'. One might question whether this is desirable, but I won't do so here. Second, because aim two makes reference to the *ascriber's* epistemic standards, invariantists (particularly sensitive invariantists) can't salvage the spirit of contextualism, and relativists can't either. This is definitely desirable.

sharp? These questions concern what I'm calling the semantics/pragmatics interface. In what follows I outline a number of different answers to these questions (§1.3.1.1). I'll then connect these views with the question of whether indexical contextualists should opt for standard or speech-act contextualism (§1.3.1.2).

### 1.3.1.1. Minimalism, indexicalism and linguistic contextualism

We can start by recalling some of the lessons of Chapter one (§1.2.2). At first, one might think it's obvious how we should draw the boundary between semantics and pragmatics. Semantics concerns the linguistic or conventional meaning of expressions and sentences, and pragmatics concerns the rest. But, as we saw, this won't work. There are certain expressions (indexicals) whose contributions to the truth-conditional contents of utterances of sentences that contain them depend on the context. However, as we also saw, there are rules that tell us *how* their contribution depends on the context (for example, the rule for 'I' tell us that its denotation in a context is always the speaker of the context). Indexical expressions such as 'I', 'now' etc, acquire their denotation in a context via linguistically controlled processes of saturation (again, 'linguistically controlled' because their denotation is given by a rule that our semantics associates with the expression; what Kaplan calls a 'character'). Saturated sentence meanings are the upshots of processes of saturation. We can situate the three most prominent views about the semantics/pragmatics interface in terms of the answers they give to the following questions:<sup>14</sup>

1. What role, if any, do saturated sentence meanings play in an account of linguistic communication?
2. How extensive is the range of expressions that acquire their denotations via processes of saturation (or, how many indexicals - broad or otherwise - are there)?

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<sup>14</sup> How to best formulate the views in question, and how to best understand the differences between them, is a vexed question and the subject of much disagreement in the semantics/pragmatics literature (compare and contrast Bach 2006; Cappelen & Lepore 2004; Récanati 2004a). This is not a controversy that I want, or need, to get involved in. If the reader prefers to understand the views differently, substitute your own understanding, and the morals I draw from this discussion in §1.3.1.2 should still go through.

*Minimalists* (Borg 2004; 2012; Cappelen & Lepore 2004; 2005) think that saturated sentence meanings - what they call 'minimal propositions' - play an essential role in an account of linguistic communication.<sup>15</sup> The picture, put very roughly, is that a speaker utters a sentence in a context, the denotations of any indexical expressions are provided by the context, and the product - the saturated sentence meaning, or minimal proposition - is available to be grasped by her audience. As Cappelen & Lepore sometimes put it, the minimal proposition serves as a sort of 'shared fallback content' (2004, 143-154; 2005, 214-16) the idea being that, because it's the upshot of linguistically controlled processes of saturation, it can be grasped by any competent speaker, even if they aren't aware of a wide range of features of the context of utterance. Further, they think that, in order for the minimal proposition to be able to play this role, there can only be a relatively small number of indexical expressions, perhaps just the pure indexicals and the demonstratives (Borg 2004, 29-33; Cappelen & Lepore 2004, 1-2). (Why? I need to be aware of a number of features of the context to figure out the comparison class for a gradable adjective such as 'tall'. In contrast, I need to be aware of very little to figure out who the speaker of the context is, or where the context is located).

Note that minimalists do *not* need to deny that there are non-linguistically controlled processes such as free enrichment by which context has an effect on utterance meanings (Borg 2004, 260-3; Cappelen & Lepore 2004, 190-208 on 'speech-act pluralism'). The idea is that, whenever a speaker utters a sentence, she expresses the minimal proposition, but that minimal proposition need not be what, intuitively, the speaker has said. Example: In our Father/Daughter case, Father expresses the minimal proposition *Daughter is not going to die*, but he also expresses the 'enriched' proposition *Daughter is not going to die from the cut*. Which is 'the' proposition that Father expresses? From this

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<sup>15</sup> Some will complain that Bach should be classified as a minimalist, including Bach himself (Bach 2006; however, see Cappelen & Lepore 2006). Like Borg and Cappelen & Lepore, he thinks that (something like) minimal propositions play an essential role in an account of linguistic communication, and he thinks that a limited range of expressions acquire their denotations via processes of saturation (Bach 2005; 2006). However, unlike Borg and Cappelen & Lepore, he thinks that minimal propositions need not be truth-evaluable (they need not be true or false) (2006, 441-2). Does that make Bach a minimalist or not? I don't need to take a stand on that question.

minimalist perspective, the question doesn't make much sense. All that the minimalist wants to insist on is that semantics should concern itself with minimal propositions, and that minimal propositions play an essential role in account of linguistic communication.

*Indexicalists* (or, *semanticists*) (King & Stanley 2005; Stanley & Szabó Gendler 2000; Stanley 2005b; 2007) agree that saturated sentence meanings play an essential role in an account of linguistic communication, but, unlike minimalists, they think that saturated sentence meanings *coincide* with what speakers, intuitively, say. The idea is that what results from processes of saturation just is the intuitive truth-conditional content of utterances. As Stanley puts it: "Our knowledge of meaning, together with our knowledge of relevant contextual facts, allows us to assign meanings to the parts of a sentence, and the intuitive truth-conditions of an utterance of that sentence are what results from combining these values" (Stanley 2005b, 223). What's the upshot? Take any case where one might think that the intuitive truth-conditional content of an utterance differs from the saturated sentence meaning, such as our Father/Daughter case. In such a case, the indexicalist has two options. First, she can just deny the intuition. In this particular case, she'd have to deny the intuition that what Father said is true. Second, she can argue that we only think there's a difference between the intuitive truth-conditional content of the utterance and the saturated sentence meaning because we're working with an overly simplistic account of the meaning of some constituent expression, or an overly simplistic account of the syntactic structure (Stanley 2005b, 226-7). In this particular case, it might be that 'die' is, despite surface appearances, a broad indexical, or it might be that there's some hidden element in the logical form of the sentence 'You are not going to die' that explains our intuitions about the case. While the indexicalist may take the first option in isolated cases, if she wants her view to look at all plausible she has to take the second in most cases. Consequently, the indexicalist will end up positing a wider range of indexical expressions than the minimalist. (Stanley, for example, takes the second option in a wide range of cases. For details see the papers cited above).

*Linguistic contextualists* (Récanati 2004a; 2004b; 2005; Searle 1978) deny that saturated sentence meanings have any essential role, or perhaps even any role at all, to play in an

account of linguistic communication.<sup>16</sup> It's important to note that the claim need not be that what I called 'unsaturated sentence meanings' - the conventional, linguistic meaning of sentences and expressions - have no role to play in an account of linguistic communication. The picture, very roughly, goes like this: The starting point in communication is a speaker uttering a sentence with a certain conventional meaning. That sentence then serves as the input for various processes - such as saturation and free enrichment - which produce as output the truth-conditional content of the utterance of that sentence. Unlike the minimalist, the linguistic contextualist doesn't postulate a minimal proposition as a 'stopping point' between the conventional meaning of the sentence and the truth-conditional content of the utterance of the sentence. Example: Father utters the sentence 'You are not going to die', which has a conventional meaning (something about how a non-specific individual is not going to die) and, in doing so, he expresses the proposition *Daughter is not going to die from the cut*. There is no minimal proposition or saturated sentence meaning that Daughter has to grasp, or otherwise entertain, to understand what Father means (which is that Daughter is not going to die from the cut).

At least, this is the picture that is (tentatively) endorsed in Récanati (2004a). But, as Récanati notes, linguistic contextualism comes in more-or-less radical versions, the most radical of which seems to involve not just discarding saturated sentence meanings but also conventional meanings; see Récanati (2004a, 146-151) on 'meaning eliminativism', which Charles Travis (2008) seems to endorse. But there are less radical versions, the least radical of which seems to be open to there being some sort of role for saturated sentence meanings even though they aren't, strictly speaking, *essential* to linguistic communication; see Récanati (2005, 136-140) on 'quasi-contextualism' and 'pragmatic composition'. However, in what follows I'll take the view sketched here as *the* linguistic contextualist view.

Note that the linguistic contextualist's answer to the second question - how many expressions acquire their denotations via processes of saturation? - will depend on how

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<sup>16</sup> The usual label for this view is just 'contextualism', which is unfortunate from the point of view of clarity. For lack of anything better, in what follows I'll use the somewhat unhelpful label 'linguistic contextualism'.

radical their brand of linguistic contextualism is. On the most radical version - a sort of meaning eliminativism - the answer will be 'none' (because there are no such processes). However, defenders of less radical versions may well be happy with accepting that there are linguistically controlled processes of saturation as well as processes of free enrichment (again, see Récanati 2004a, 83-97; 131-153).

### **1.3.1.2. Standard and speech-act contextualism, semantics and pragmatics**

Whether indexical contextualists should opt for standard or speech-act contextualism depends on which of the three views about the semantics/pragmatic interface just outlined is right. If minimalism is right, that casts doubt on whether a whole host of expressions are context-sensitive ('tall', 'flat', etc). Because there's already a lot of doubt about whether 'knows' is context-sensitive, this puts the standard contextualist under even more pressure. At this point, speech-act contextualism starts to look like an attractive option. If indexicalism is right, the distinction between saturated sentence meaning and utterance meaning that is needed to distinguish between standard and speech-act contextualism collapses. On the indexicalist view, the outputs of processes of saturation just are the intuitive truth-conditional contents of utterances. Consequently, the distinction between standard and speech-act contextualism collapses. At this point, it becomes clear that indexical contextualists need to meet the linguistic objections 'head on'. If linguistic contextualism is right, context-sensitivity is a lot more widespread - and a lot cheaper - than many think. Many, perhaps most, of the indicative sentences that we utter have truth-conditions that depend on the context in which we utter them. At this point, indexical contextualism about 'knowledge' ascriptions looks quite attractive. Whether this would vindicate standard or speech-act contextualism depends on the letter of linguistic contextualism - for example, does it discard saturated sentence meanings altogether? - But, either way, indexical contextualism is in good shape.

Where does this leave the dialectic? While the conclusions just drawn took some work to reach, I don't think they are at all controversial. There are views about the extent of context-sensitivity in natural languages on which the expression 'knows' is very unlikely to be an indexical, even in the broad sense (a very austere form of minimalism), and there are views on which context-sensitivity is so widespread that indexical contextualism is almost certainly true (a very radical form of linguistic contextualism).

Because, as I've argued, speech-act contextualism is a viable option, the first result isn't a disaster for indexical contextualists.<sup>17</sup> However, this raises a question: Rather than, as I am doing here and throughout, slowly building a case for contextualism, why not just focus on the broader issues in the philosophy of language, and the semantics/pragmatics interface?

First, because that would be a rather roundabout route to take to reach my desired conclusion. Ultimately, I will defend a view - interests contextualism - that is neutral between indexical and nonindexical contextualism, and standard and speech-act contextualism (Chapter three (§2-§4)). Consequently, as far as this thesis is concerned, I can remain entirely neutral as to which of our three views about the semantics/pragmatics interface - minimalism, indexicalism and linguistic contextualism - is right. I think that interests contextualism captures what many think is attractive about contextualism in epistemology, and I think it's a virtue that, in defending the view, I have clarified how things stand with respect to issues in the philosophy of language and the semantics/pragmatics interface. But, in clarifying how things stand, I've shown that no matter how the issues in the philosophy of language and the semantics/pragmatics interface play out, some version of contextualism, whether indexical or nonindexical, standard or speech-act, emerges as a viable option. Consequently, while it's important to be *aware* of these broader issues, I need not worry that the view I will defend is a hostage to fortune.

Second, because - and this is just an assumption on my part, I won't argue for it - I don't think that the extreme versions of minimalism or linguistic contextualism are at all attractive. I think it's far more plausible that some more moderate view is the right one. But, on a more moderate form of linguistic contextualism, I don't think it's just *obvious* that indexical contextualism is true (on that view, presumably it's not so that *every* indicative sentence we utter has truth-conditions that depend on the context in which we utter it) and, on a more moderate form of minimalism, I don't think it's just *obvious*

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<sup>17</sup> Why isn't the second result a disaster for this thesis? (Did I really need to expend so much energy?). Because - as I won't argue, but almost everyone seems to accept - a very radical form of linguistic contextualism isn't at all attractive. (Arguing for indexical contextualism via a radical form of linguistic contextualism would be to take a somewhat roundabout route!).



that ‘knows’ isn’t a broad indexical (on that view, presumably pure indexicals and demonstratives aren’t the *only* indexical expressions). On these more moderate views, the sorts of arguments I’m giving for indexical contextualism here and in the rest of this thesis are relevant.<sup>18</sup>

Third, one could justifiably complain that not enough discussion of contextualism in epistemology has drawn on the lessons that can be taken from the debate about the semantics/pragmatics interface, or reflected on what impact certain views about that debate could have on epistemic contextualism.<sup>19</sup> My aim here has been to highlight a number of important connections, and to clarify how the semantics/pragmatics debate impacts on both the dialectic of the present thesis, and on the debate about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions more generally. This is, I think, worth doing.

Fourth, there’s a more general issue of whether philosophers should inquire into particular issues - in this case, into whether contextualism is true - before they settle more general issues - in this case, how widespread context-sensitivity is in natural languages. Of course, ideally philosophers will do both, inquiring into particular issues with an eye to the more general issues, and inquiring into more general issues with an eye to the particular issues that they may resolve. But I suppose one might have the view that philosophers *can’t* draw conclusions about particular issues - in this case, that contextualism is true - before they have settled the more general issues - in this case, how widespread context-sensitivity is. I myself don’t find this view particularly persuasive. Perhaps one can’t draw conclusions about particular issues without *consideration* of more general issues, but that doesn’t mean that one needs to settle those more general issues once and for all before one draws conclusions about the particular issues. But, if the reader does find the view - or perhaps a more nuanced version of it - persuasive, let me urge, again, that the view I will defend is neutral between the various

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<sup>18</sup> One can - and should - think of minimalism, indexicalism and linguistic contextualism - as not entirely discrete points along a continuum of possible views about the semantics/pragmatics interface. At one end are austere forms of minimalism, at the other radical forms of linguistic contextualism, with indexicalism in the middle. I’m urging that a moderate view is most plausible, but I’m not urging that indexicalism is most plausible.

<sup>19</sup> Just to be clear: The complaint is *not* that there has been no discussion. The complaint is that there hasn’t been *enough* discussion.

views about the scope and extent of context-sensitivity (minimalism, indexicalism, linguistic contextualism), and between standard and speech-act, and indexical and nonindexical, contextualism.

### **1.3.2. Indexical and nonindexical contextualism, semantics and pragmatics**

One can draw a quick and easy argument for why contextualists should favour nonindexical over indexical contextualism from these remarks about the semantics/pragmatics interface (for something like this argument see MacFarlane 2007b). Insofar as one has good reason to accept minimalism, one has good reason to think that there aren't all that many indexical expressions, broad or otherwise (perhaps even just pure indexicals and demonstratives). And, if there weren't that many indexical expressions, it would be somewhat surprising if 'knows' qualified. So, insofar as one has good reason to accept minimalism, one has good reason to reject indexical contextualism. But indexical contextualism did seem to explain certain features of our epistemic discourse that were otherwise puzzling (CSAs, scepticism). And, as we've seen, the nonindexical contextualist can explain those features without claiming that 'knows' is an indexical, or that the truth-conditions of 'knowledge' ascriptions depend on the context. So, insofar as one has good reason to accept minimalism, and insofar as one has good reason to accept some sort of contextualism, one has good reason to accept nonindexical contextualism.

The problem with this quick and easy argument is that it ignores the speech-act contextualist option. Insofar as one has good reason to accept minimalism (at least in its more austere forms), and insofar as one has good reason to accept some sort of contextualism, one also has good reason to accept speech-act contextualism. So the quick and easy argument doesn't tell us why we should prefer nonindexical contextualism to speech-act contextualism. Again, ultimately, nothing that I say here, or in the rest of this thesis, depends on which you prefer. But note that, if one thinks that Stainton is right about what is distinctive of contextualism in epistemology (§1.2.3) that should incline one towards speech-act contextualism rather than nonindexical contextualism. As we saw, unlike nonindexical contextualism, speech-act contextualism captures what Stainton thinks is distinctive of epistemic contextualism (§1.2.3, fn. 13). So perhaps there is some - albeit not all that strong - reason to prefer speech-act contextualism to nonindexical contextualism on this score.

### 1.3.3. Summing up

I've argued that there are two viable approaches that indexical contextualists can take towards linguistic objections. First, they can tackle them 'head on', and endorse standard contextualism. Second, they can retreat to speech-act contextualism, and avoid the objections entirely. This suffices to deal with the linguistic objections, but it leaves us wondering which of these approaches the indexical contextualist should take. To answer that question I have outlined the considerations that might incline the indexical contextualist towards one or the other approach. In summary: If it turns out that minimalism is the right view about the semantics/pragmatics interface, and particularly if it turns out that an austere form of minimalism is the right view, then speech-act contextualism starts to look like an attractive option. If it turns out that indexicalism is the right view, standard contextualism is the only option, and indexical contextualists have no choice but to meet the linguistic objections 'head on'. If it turns out that linguistic contextualism is the right view, and particularly if it turns out that a more radical form is the right view, things look very promising for indexical contextualists, and the preferable brand of indexical contextualism (standard or speech-act) will depend on the letter of linguistic contextualism. I conclude that, however things turn out, indexical contextualism is in good shape here.

Finally, I haven't given any indication of which approach I favour. I suppose that, if I had to choose, I'd plump for the 'head on' approach, and for standard contextualism. But nothing I've said here forces me, or any other indexical contextualist, to do so. And, again, the view I will defend is neutral between standard and speech-act contextualism, and indexical and nonindexical contextualism.

## 2. Shifting targets, retraction and disagreement

If Sophie were to say 'I'm tired', and Janine were to respond 'No, you're wrong, I'm not tired', we'd suspect that Janine didn't understand what Sophie said and we'd certainly not think that Janine and Sophie disagreed about anything, although Janine perhaps thinks she disagrees with Sophie. Perhaps the best way of explaining Janine's bizarre response - her use of the disagreement markers 'No' and 'You're wrong' - would be to take her as confused about the meaning of the indexical expression 'I'. In short, dialogues like this don't pose any sort of puzzle.

By contrast, consider another dialogue. If Ailsa were to say ‘I know that penguins eat fish’, and Laurie were to respond ‘No, you’re wrong, you don’t know that. For all you can tell we’re all brains in vats, and there are no penguins’ we perhaps wouldn’t suspect that Laurie didn’t understand what Ailsa said and we perhaps would think that Ailsa and Laurie disagreed about something, viz. whether Ailsa knows that penguins eat fish. For the indexical or nonindexical contextualist, these dialogues pose a real puzzle. Putting things roughly, indexical contextualists think that Ailsa has said *Ailsa knows, by Ailsa’s standards, that penguins eat fish* whereas Laurie has said *Ailsa doesn’t know, by Laurie’s standards, that penguins eat fish*.<sup>20</sup> If that’s right, there isn’t anything for Ailsa and Laurie to disagree about and Laurie is just confused. As for the nonindexical contextualist, they think that, while Ailsa accepts, and Laurie rejects, one and the same proposition - *Ailsa knows that penguins eat fish* - whether that proposition is true in Ailsa’s context depends on Ailsa’s standards, whereas whether that proposition is true in Laurie’s context depends on Laurie’s standards. But, if one and the same proposition can be true (false) for Ailsa and false (true) for Laurie, what is there for Ailsa and Laurie to disagree about? We’ve already met this problem, and we’ve seen that it’s supposed to provide the reason for abandoning contextualism in favour of some sort of relativism (Chapter one (§3.2)).<sup>21</sup> In this section I argue that the contextualist (whether indexical or nonindexical) can solve it.

Here’s my plan. I start by presenting three cases. I’ll assume that, in these cases, we have the intuition that the parties involved disagree, and I’ll say a bit more about what

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<sup>20</sup> Here, and throughout §2, I’m working with a simplistic sort of indexical contextualism on which the operative epistemic standard is just that of the ascriber. I do so because the solution I develop in §2.5 is neutral as to whether the operative standard is that of the ascriber, or some larger group of which the ascriber is part. (I called this view ‘simple contextualism’ in Chapter one (§1.1.2)).

<sup>21</sup> Two things to note: First, I say here, and have said elsewhere, that this problem provides *the* reason, but perhaps it would be better to say that it’s this problem, together with the linguistic objections that I tackled in §1, that provide the reason to prefer relativism to *indexical* contextualism. Second, a common theme in contextualism and relativism debates in general is that disagreement and retraction are the key considerations that motivate relativism over contextualism. For aesthetic predicates see Baker (2012); Sundell (2011). For epistemic modals see Egan, Hawthorne & Weatherston (2005); MacFarlane (2009b); von Fintel & Gillies (2009). For moral predicates see Brogaard (2008b); Björnsson & Finlay (2010); Kolodny & MacFarlane (2010). For taste predicates see Huvenes (2012); Stephenson (2007); Stojanovic (2007).

this intuition amounts to (§2.1).<sup>22</sup> I'll also identify two desiderata for a solution to the problem (§2.2). I then examine three potential solutions and argue that all of them fail to meet one, or both, of the desiderata (§2.2-2.4). Finally, I propose another solution, and argue that it meets both desiderata and so deals with the problem (§2.5-2.6). In (very) broad outline, my solution goes like this. When B assesses A's 'knowledge' ascription using various disagreement markers - 'No', 'You're wrong' - B isn't assessing the truth-conditional or semantic content of A's ascription. Rather, she is assessing the content that A's ascription would have had if it had been made in B's context. Because the target of utterance assessment shifts with the context, B can negatively assess A's 'knowledge' ascription even if A's ascription was true.

Aside: It should be clear that the problem I'm going to solve is a problem for indexical and nonindexical contextualists alike, and it will become clear that the solution I propose is available (once the appropriate changes in phrasing are made) to the nonindexical contextualist as well as the indexical contextualist. However, in what follows I'm going to be discussing (and rejecting) some solutions that have been proposed on behalf of the indexical contextualist, and my own solution will be worked out within the indexical contextualist framework rather than the nonindexical contextualist framework. So, rather than engage in a series of pointless clarifications, let me just note from the outset that, while I will often use the label 'contextualism', I usually mean 'indexical contextualism'.

## **2.1. The problem**

### **2.1.1. The cases**

I'm going to need three cases: first, a 'base case' where a 'knowledge' ascription is made; second, a case of disagreement within a context ('intraconversational disagreement'); third, a case of disagreement across contexts ('interconversational disagreement'). I'm going to use modified versions of our earlier PUB and POLICE STATION cases, and I'll

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<sup>22</sup> Should this assumption be questioned? Perhaps, although in most of the literature it's taken as read (for a possible exception see DeRose 2009, Chapter 5 on 'the methodology of the straightforward'). My aim here is to show that, even granting the retraction and disagreement data, contextualists can deal with the problem.

add a new case. A reminder of the setup: Ted, Dougal and Jack live in the same house. Ted and Dougal have a regular bet about whether Jack will perform his Monday afternoon service. Ted and Dougal have decent (not conclusive) evidence that Jack performed the service. Ted and Dougal go to the pub.

PUB\*: Ted and Dougal are talking about how Ted lost the bet. Tom asks them how they know Jack performed the service, and Ted responds ‘Well, we saw his jacket in the vestry, and he never goes anywhere without it. Oh, and Sister Imelda seemed to know he was there. So Dougal and I both know’. Satisfied, Tom offers to buy Ted and Dougal drinks.

PEDANTIC POLLY: Polly has been eavesdropping. Polly, who is famous for holding high epistemic standards, demands to ‘know’ why Ted claimed that they both ‘know’ that Jack performed the service when neither of them actually saw him. Ted tries to defend himself, but Polly insists ‘No, you’re wrong. You don’t know that Jack performed the service.’

POLICE STATION\*: The police have stopped Ted and Dougal on their way home. A serious crime has been committed and, as part of their investigations, the police need to determine whether Jack performed his service that afternoon. They ask Ted for a statement first, and he says ‘I didn’t see Jack at the church, so I don’t know that he performed the service’. When told that he has been overheard claiming to ‘know’, he responds ‘I was wrong, I don’t know, for the reason I just gave you’. They then ask Dougal for a statement, and he also tells them that he doesn’t ‘know’. When told that Ted has been overheard claiming to ‘know’, he responds ‘No, he’s wrong. He doesn’t know that because he didn’t see him’.<sup>23</sup>

Why do I need all of these cases, and why have made these modifications? I need PUB\* (the ‘base case’) because I need a ‘knowledge’ ascription that can be disputed, whether in the same context (PEDANTIC POLLY) or another context (POLICE STATION\*), and I need both intra and interconversational cases because, as we’ll see, some ways in which contextualists have tried to deal with this problem can handle intraconversational cases

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<sup>23</sup> A note on terminology: I’ll refer to constructions like ‘No’ and ‘You’re wrong’ as ‘disagreement markers’ and constructions like ‘I was wrong’ as ‘retraction markers’.

but not interconversational cases. The modifications allow me to deal with the retraction data and the disagreement data simultaneously. As we'll see, the solution I propose handles both the retraction data and the disagreement data. However, in what follows, I'll often lump them together under the label 'the problem of disagreement'.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.1.2. What is the problem?

What is disagreement? One might think the answer is straightforward: Two people disagree iff they have incompatible beliefs (cf. Cappelen & Hawthorne 2009, Chapter 2 on the 'simple view'). If that were right, contextualists would be in a lot of trouble. But there are good reasons for thinking that it isn't right. First, as MacFarlane (2007a) and Mark Richard (2011) point out, two people might have incompatible beliefs without disagreeing. Let's assume both that Ruaraidh's utterance of the sentence 'I am sitting' expresses the proposition *Ruaraidh is sitting*, and that the objects of propositional attitudes are propositions.<sup>25</sup> Ruaraidh is sitting at 12.30pm, so at 12.30pm he truly believes the proposition *Ruaraidh is sitting*. However, Ruaraidh isn't sitting at 12.45pm, so at 12.45pm he truly believes the proposition *Ruaraidh isn't sitting*. Ruaraidh's belief at 12.45pm is incompatible with his belief at 12.30pm, but he clearly doesn't disagree with his past self.<sup>26</sup> Second, as Torfinn Huvenes (2012), MacFarlane (ms., Chapter 6), Richard (2011) and Timothy Sundell (2011) point out, there are ways in which two people can disagree other than by having incompatible beliefs. For example, two people disagree if they have incompatible *non-doxastic attitudes*. If Raibeart loves haggis, and expresses this by saying 'Haggis is delicious', while Sorcha hates haggis, and expresses this by saying 'Haggis is disgusting', then Raibeart and Sorcha disagree. Raibeart could not adopt Sorcha's attitude, and Sorcha could not adopt Raibeart's attitude, without

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<sup>24</sup> Why? Partly convenience, partly because one can think of retraction as a special sort of disagreement (viz. disagreement with one's past self).

<sup>25</sup> The point here is that, if we make both assumptions, we can describe a case where the necessary and sufficient conditions for disagreement are met but there is clearly no disagreement. This point stands whether both assumptions are true or not.

<sup>26</sup> As Richard (2011, 424-5) points out, the problem here might not be with the account of disagreement but with temporal propositions (propositions that are true or false relative to times), or perhaps with temporal propositions as objects of propositional attitudes. But, even if the reader is attracted to this line of response, the second reason for rejecting this account of disagreement remains.

thereby adopting incompatible attitudes. The sort of incompatibility is practical, but it's incompatibility nonetheless.<sup>27</sup>

Given that there are a variety of ways in which two people can disagree, how do we go about deciding which variety of disagreement is involved in a particular case, such as PEDANTIC POLLY or POLICE STATION\*? I'm going to adopt MacFarlane's proposal (see MacFarlane ms., Chapter 6). In order to decide, we need to look at as wide a range of ways of felicitously expressing that disagreement - or, as wide a range of what I'm calling 'disagreement markers' and 'retraction markers' - as possible. So, for example, in our Raibeart, Sorcha and haggis case we need to look at the range of ways in which Raibeart and Sorcha might felicitously express their disagreement. If Raibeart were to say 'Haggis is delicious', would we find a response such as 'What you believe - that haggis is delicious - is false' felicitous? Presumably not.<sup>28</sup> Would we find the response 'No, you're wrong, haggis is delicious' felicitous? If so, any explanation of what's going on in the case needs to be able to account for the felicity of 'No' and 'You're wrong'. My task then, when developing a contextualist explanation of cases like PEDANTIC POLLY and POLICE STATION\*, is to show that the contextualist can account for the full range of felicitous disagreement markers.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The basic idea I'm appealing to here - that of disagreement in attitude - comes from Stevenson (1944). I should note that, while I am assuming that we can make sense of attitudinal disagreement, I'm not committed to any particular understanding of it. For discussion see Ridge (2013).

<sup>28</sup> This is just my intuitive reaction. Perhaps others will differ. If so, any explanation of what's going on here would need to account for the disagreement marker 'What you believe ... is false' too.

<sup>29</sup> Why adopt this proposal? First, my doing so makes sense from a dialectical point of view. One of my aims is to respond to MacFarlane's argument for truth relativism about 'knowledge' ascriptions. Second - and more importantly - we should be suspicious about a solution that only deals with disagreement markers such as 'No' and 'You're wrong'. If all the contextualist has to do is explain why responding to 'knowledge' ascriptions with those sorts of constructions can sometimes be appropriate, she can just note that those constructions are sometimes appropriate because they signal disagreement in attitude. As we'll see, the solution I develop does appeal to attitudinal disagreement but, because it deals with the variety of ways in which two people can felicitously express their disagreement, it goes beyond a mere appeal to attitudinal disagreement.



It's something of a commonplace in the literature that the problem of disagreement is only a problem for contextualists. What about for invariantists and relativists? For both sensitive and strict invariantists, things are clear enough: either Ted's 'knowledge' ascription in PUB\* is true, and Polly, Ted and Dougal's denials in PEDANTIC POLLY and POLICE STATION\* false, or Polly, Ted and Dougal's denials are true and Ted's ascription false (Ted and Dougal either know or they don't). So Ted disagrees with both Polly and Dougal because either Ted is right and Polly and Dougal wrong, or vice versa.<sup>30</sup> For relativists, things are a little more complicated: Relative to the epistemic standards operative in PUB\*, Ted's 'knowledge' ascription is true whereas, relative to the epistemic standards operative in PEDANTIC POLLY or POLICE STATION\*, his 'knowledge' ascription is false. So it's not the case that Ted is right *simpliciter* and Polly and Dougal are wrong *simpliciter*, or vice versa. But MacFarlane has argued that (truth) relativists have no problem making sense of disagreement (ms., Chapter 6), and for my purposes I'm happy to grant this to MacFarlane. My aim here is just to argue that contextualists can deal with the problem of disagreement.<sup>31</sup> This, at the very least, means that they are on a par with both invariantists and truth relativists. The upshot is that one can't appeal to the problem of disagreement to motivate rejecting a contextualist semantics, or endorsing a relativist semantics, for 'knowledge' ascriptions. First, though, I'll show that three proposed contextualist solutions to the problem of disagreement fail. I'll start with an appeal to semantic blindness. I'll argue that this solution fails, and, in doing so, I'll say a little about what a successful solution to the problem would look like.

## 2.2. Semantic blindness

One way in which contextualists could deal with the problem would be by positing extensive *semantic blindness*. The idea would be that competent speakers are often blind to the context-sensitivity of 'knows' (see Blome-Tillmann 2008; Cohen 1999, 77-9;

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<sup>30</sup> Perhaps disagreement doesn't require that one person be right and the other wrong, but it's certainly a sufficient condition.

<sup>31</sup> Two things: First, I say truth relativism because it's very unclear how content relativists can make sense of disagreement, and MacFarlane certainly doesn't claim that they can. This, I think, is part of the reason why many prefer truth relativism to content relativism. Second, some doubt that truth relativists can make sense of disagreement. But, again, I'm granting MacFarlane that the truth relativist has no problem here. For discussion see Dreier (2009) and Franc en (2010).

DeRose 2009, Chapter 5). So, when Polly, Dougal and Ted negatively assesses Ted's 'knowledge' ascription in their respective contexts, they do so because they're semantically confused. Further, presumably we're often blind to the context-sensitivity of 'knows', and that's why we have the sense that Polly and Dougal disagree with Ted, and that Ted disagrees with his past self.

I don't think this is a plausible solution. Here are two objections. (Note that, while I take the first objection to put pressure on the appeal to semantic blindness, I take the second objection to be most damaging).

First objection: The proposed solution is a sort of error-theory. In making any error-theory plausible, one has to at least say something about why the error in question is so widespread, and contextualists have often tried to meet this burden by way of analogy. Cohen, for example, considers an analogy between 'knowledge' and 'flatness' ascriptions:

“[W]hy can we get competent speakers to question their everyday flatness ascriptions by implicitly raising the standards? It must be that although ascriptions of flatness are context-sensitive, competent speakers can fail to realize this. And because they can fail to realize this, they can mistakenly think that their reluctance to ascribe flatness, in a context where the standards are at the extreme, conflicts with their ascriptions of flatness in everyday contexts” (Cohen 1999, 79).

If this phenomenon doesn't pose a serious problem for contextualism about 'flat', why does it pose a serious problem for contextualism about 'knows'?

One reason might be a felt difference between 'flatness' and 'knowledge' ascriptions. One might end up in the situation Cohen describes, but a bit of reflection would quickly dispel any air of mystery. Imagine that Morag, who has always described playing fields as flat, is confronted with 'flatness scepticism'. Impressed by the obvious truth that playing fields aren't perfectly flat, she enthusiastically denies that playing fields are flat. But, upon reflection, Morag would realise that she was never committed to playing fields being perfectly flat. And once she'd realised that, Morag would realise that she was wrong to deny that playing fields are flat. Morag would become reflectively aware

of the context-sensitivity of ‘flat’. In contrast, so the objection might go, a bit of reflection wouldn’t achieve the same results in the case of ‘knows’.<sup>32</sup>

Second Objection: An important motivation for contextualism is that it explains the intuitions of competent speakers about the appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials in cases like PUB\* (and the original PUB), PEDANTIC POLLY and POLICE STATION\* (and the original POLICE STATION) (Chapter one (§2.1)). If the intuitions of competent speakers are going to carry weight in arguments for contextualism, it’s *very* problematic for the contextualist to deny that the intuitions of competent speakers about other matters, such as when two parties disagree, or when it’s appropriate to use disagreement markers such as ‘No’ and ‘You’re wrong’, carry any weight. Contextualists can’t just pick the intuitions that support their view and disregard the rest (for a similar point, see MacFarlane 2009b, §2.4).

Taken together, these objections give us two desiderata for a contextualist solution to the problem of disagreement. First, if the solution appeals to a general feature of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions - for example, our blindness to their context-sensitivity - it must explain why ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have that general feature. Second, the solution must not be in tension with one of the motivations for contextualism. The appeal to semantic blindness certainly fails to meet the second desideratum (the second objection), and it might have problems meeting the first (the first objection).

I’m now going to argue that two other solutions - DeRose’s single-scoreboard semantics and Dan López de Sa’s appeal to presuppositions of commonality - have problems meeting one (or both) of the desiderata just identified.

### **2.3. Single scoreboards**

Contextualists think that, unless they are supplemented with a contextually provided epistemic standard, sentences involving the word ‘knows’ are truth-valueless. On DeRose’s view, the relevant epistemic standard is the standard that the conversational participants converge on, where what standard they converge in is determined by the

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<sup>32</sup> See Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, 118-221) on ‘Pyrrhonian reflection’. The idea here is that, while Pyrrhonian reflection would achieve this result for ‘flat’, it wouldn’t for ‘knows’.

various conversational moves that the participants make. As DeRose puts it, “there is a single scoreboard in a given conversation; the truth-conditional content of ... uses of ‘know(s)’ is given by the score registered on this single scoreboard” (DeRose 2009, 135-6). But, in conversations where participants A and B have different standards, and continue to push for those different standards, an ascription or denial of ‘knowledge’ that p to S is true (false) iff S meets (fails to meet) the standards of both A and B, and truth-valueless iff S meets (fails to meet) one set of standards but not the other. The idea is that, if the speakers in a context can’t agree on a single epistemic standard, then sentences involving the word ‘knows’ remain truth-valueless. Following DeRose, I’ll call this the *symmetric gap view* (2009, 144-5). (‘Gap’ because the view posits truth-value gaps; ‘symmetric’ for reasons that will become clear in what follows).

The gap view deals nicely with cases of intraconversational disagreement. Consider the PEDANTIC POLLY case. On DeRose’s view, Polly’s claim that Ted doesn’t ‘know’ that Jack performed the service is truth-valueless *because* Ted and Polly disagree about what epistemic standard should be operative in their context. But, while the gap view deals nicely with cases of intraconversational disagreement, it doesn’t deal with cases of interconversational disagreement (cases like POLICE STATION\*). In response, DeRose proposes extending the gap view to disagreements across contexts. So, in interconversational disagreement cases, DeRose holds that an ascription or denial of ‘knowledge’ that p to S is true (false) iff S meets (fails to meet) the standards of both A and B, and truth-valueless iff S meets (fails to meet) one set of standards but not the other. DeRose calls this the *asymmetric gap view* (2009, 148-50). (‘Asymmetric’ because the view posits an asymmetry: Ted’s original claim to ‘know’ remains true, but Polly’s claim that Ted doesn’t ‘know’ is truth-valueless).

This view faces a number of problems, but I’ll just focus on one here (for others see López de Sa 2008 and Montminy forthcoming). As I’ll now argue, the asymmetric gap view doesn’t meet the second desideratum for a contextualist solution to the problem of disagreement. It’s in tension, and perhaps even incompatible, with one of the motivations for contextualism.

On the asymmetric gap view, if A claims that S ‘knows’ that p in one context, and B disputes that claim in another context, then, unless A and B end up adopting the same

epistemic standard, A can't truly re-ascribe 'knowledge' that p to S *in any future context*. Consider this sort of case: In one context Sophie, a committed non-sceptic, claims to 'know' that she has hands. In another context Janine, a committed sceptic, is told about Sophie's 'knowledge' self-ascription. Janine says 'No, that's wrong, Sophie doesn't know that. She could be a handless brain in a vat'. On DeRose's view, Sophie's claim was true, Janine's claim truth-valueless, and, unless Sophie and Janine end up adopting the same epistemic standard, any future claim to 'know' by Sophie will also be truth-valueless. Disagreement renders future 'knowledge' ascriptions (or denials) truth-valueless *irrespective of the context in which they are made*. But one of the motivations for contextualism is meant to be that, in all of the cases just mentioned, we have the intuition that Sophie and Janine both speak truly. On DeRose's view, those intuitions are actually mistaken, so they can't motivate adopting contextualism.

Note that nothing I've said shows that the original symmetric gap-view needs to be rejected. So, DeRose might ask, why not adopt the symmetric gap view to deal with cases of intraconversational disagreement, and some other view to deal with cases of interconversational disagreement? There are two problems with this response. First, if the asymmetric gap-view is rejected then DeRose has no way of dealing with cases of interconversational disagreement. Absent a way of dealing with those cases, DeRose's solution is incomplete, and contextualism is in trouble.<sup>33</sup> Second, if a way of dealing with interconversational disagreement cases is found, one might worry about having different sorts of solutions to different sorts of cases. If there's a plausible solution to both intra and interconversational disagreement cases, why not adopt that solution for both, rather than a hybrid of that solution and the gap-view? (The second problem is particularly relevant because, as we'll see, the solution I develop in §2.5 deals with both sorts of cases). I conclude that the objection gives us good reason to reject DeRose's solution to the problem of disagreement.

#### **2.4. Presuppositions of commonality**

It's perhaps plausible that a 'knowledge' ascription always carries with it the presupposition that the participants in the conversation are similar with respect to their

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<sup>33</sup> See MacFarlane's (2007a, 21) objection that DeRose (2004) only deals with intraconversational disagreement.

epistemic standards. By ‘presupposition’ I mean a pragmatic presupposition, where pragmatic presuppositions are understood as those propositions that are part of the common ground in that conversation.<sup>34</sup> By a ‘knowledge’ ascription ‘always carrying’ a presupposition I mean that the ascription would be infelicitous if the presupposition weren’t in place. This solution to the problem of disagreement has it that any ‘knowledge’ ascription is infelicitous if the participants in the conversation aren’t similar with respect to epistemic standards. Call this the *presuppositions of commonality strategy*.<sup>35</sup>

Take our earlier PEDANTIC POLLY case. The defender of the presuppositions of commonality strategy holds that there’s no incompatibility between what Ted says and what Polly says. Ted expresses the proposition *Ted knows, by Ted’s standards, that Jack performed the service* whereas Polly expresses the proposition *Ted doesn’t know, by Polly’s standards, that Jack performed the service*. But, because ‘knowledge’ ascriptions always carry the presupposition that the members of the conversation are similar with respect to epistemic standards, it should be common ground that Ted and Polly are similar with respect to epistemic standards. Because it should be common ground that Ted and Polly are similar, we have the intuition that there’s a disagreement between Ted and Polly (if they were similar, and it was common ground that they were similar, there would be a disagreement in the usual sense viz. the expressing of incompatible contents). However, *ex hypothesi*, it isn’t common ground that Ted and Polly are similar with respect to epistemic standards. That means that our intuition that there’s a disagreement between Ted and Polly is mistaken. We can think of this as an error-theory: We have the intuition that Ted and Polly disagree, and that intuition is mistaken, but the reason why we have the intuition is that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have this feature, viz. always carrying presuppositions of commonality.

I think this solution should be rejected. Here are four objections. (I take the first two objections to be challenges to the defender of the presuppositions of commonality

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<sup>34</sup> The propositions that are part of the common ground are just those that the participants in the conversation accept, all believe that all accept, and so on. For discussion see Stalnaker (2002).

<sup>35</sup> For this strategy see López de Sa (2008). I should note that López de Sa is interested in predicates such as ‘funny’ rather than ‘knows’. My aim here is to argue against applying the solution to ‘knows’, not against López de Sa’s original proposal.

solution rather than reasons to reject it outright. However, I take the third and fourth objections to provide reason to reject it outright).

First objection: *Prima facie*, this solution does well with respect to the first desideratum for a contextualist solution, given that the error-theory appeals to a general feature of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, viz. always carrying presuppositions of commonality. But it’s not clear *why* ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have this general feature. The defender of the presuppositions of commonality strategy has to give an explanation in order to make it plausible.

Second objection: If the defender of the presuppositions of commonality strategy can explain why ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have this general feature, she’s going to find it difficult to meet the second desideratum for a contextualist solution. One would expect that, if ‘knowledge’ ascriptions were to always carry presuppositions of commonality, this would be because people who engage in conversation about epistemic matters generally are similar with respect to epistemic standards (if people who engaged in such conversations weren’t generally similar, why would there be a presupposition that they were?). But one of the motivations for contextualism seems to require that people who differ with respect to epistemic standards often interact with each other about epistemic matters. If people who differ with respect to epistemic standards didn’t often interact with each other, we wouldn’t get the wide range of cases that contextualists think motivate adopting their view.<sup>36</sup> So there’s a tension here.

Third objection: There are ways of testing whether ‘knowledge’ ascriptions always carry the presupposition of commonality, and the results don’t look promising.

TEST ONE - ‘HEY, WAIT A MINUTE!’

If utterances of a sentence S always carry the presupposition that p, then it should make sense for someone who was previously unaware of p to respond to an utterance of S by

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<sup>36</sup> A cursory glance at the literature might give the impression that contextualists rely on a small number of cases in motivating adopting their view. While there is a lot of focus on particular cases (such as the ubiquitous bank cases) the impression is false. The cases that contextualists appeal to are meant to just be examples of a wide class of cases. For discussion see DeRose (2009, Chapters 1&2).

saying ‘Hey, wait a minute; I didn’t know that p!’ (von Fintel 2004 and Yablo 2006).

Compare and contrast:

(18) Ailsa: I’m going to pick up my sister from the airport.

Laurie: Hey, wait a minute; I didn’t know that you had a sister!

(19) Sophie: I know that penguins eat fish.

Janine: Hey wait a minute; I didn’t know that we were similar with respect to epistemic standards!

The point isn’t that there’s no way of filling in the context such that Janine’s response to Sophie isn’t puzzling; perhaps there are ways of filling in the context such that we can make sense of Janine’s response. The point is that, on the presuppositions of commonality strategy, Janine’s response should *always* make sense. But while it would always make sense for Laurie to respond to Ailsa by saying ‘I didn’t know that you had a sister’, it certainly wouldn’t always make sense for Janine to respond to Sophie by saying ‘I didn’t know that we were similar with respect to epistemic standards.’

TEST TWO - ‘AND WHAT’S MORE...’

If utterances of S always generate the presupposition that p, then it should be infelicitous to follow an utterance of S with ‘and what’s more, p’ (von Fintel 2004 and Yablo 2006). Compare and contrast:

(20) #I realise that I forgot to pick my sister up. And what’s more, I forgot to pick my sister up.<sup>37</sup>

(21) I forgot to go to the airport. And what’s more, my sister is waiting for me there.

(22) I know that penguins eat fish. And what’s more, we’re similar with respect to epistemic standards.

(20) is infelicitous because it violates Grice’s maxim of quantity (the second conjunct asserts what the first conjunct presupposes, so it isn’t informative). However, (21) is felicitous and, in particular, the second conjunct provides information not already provided by the first conjunct. If ‘knowledge’ ascriptions triggered presuppositions of

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<sup>37</sup> I’ve followed the usual convention of using ‘#’ to indicate pragmatic infelicity.



commonality we'd expect (22) to be like (20) rather than (21). However, (22) seems as felicitous as (21). Again, the second conjunct seems to provide information not already provided by the first.

#### TEST THREE - AWKWARD CANCELLATION

If I utter *S* and presuppose *p*, then an immediate subsequent denial of *p* makes my collective utterance very puzzling (Baker 2012). Compare and contrast:

(23) #I'm going to pick up my sister from the airport, although I haven't got a sister.

(24) I know that penguins eat fish, although we're not similar with respect to epistemic standards.

The subsequent denial of what is presupposed makes (23) very puzzling, so much so that it's hard to understand what an utterance of (23) communicates. In contrast, even without filling in the context (24) sounds absolutely fine. In short, these tests show that there are good reasons for thinking that 'knowledge' ascriptions don't generate presuppositions of commonality.

Fourth objection: Pragmatic presuppositions are normally understood in terms of what propositions the participants in a *particular conversation* all accept, all believe that they all accept, etc (see fn. 34). But this means that, even if the defender of the presuppositions of commonality strategy can deal with the first three objections, she still won't be able to deal with *interconversational* disagreement cases (e.g. the POLICE STATION\* case). So, like DeRose's single-scoreboard semantics, the solution is, at best, incomplete. (And what I said in response to the proposal that we combine the gap view with some other way of dealing with interconversational cases applies here as well).

### 2.5. Shifting targets

I'll now argue that contextualists can solve the problem of disagreement. My strategy will be to borrow a solution to the problem for contextualism about 'ought' from Gunnar Björnsson & Stephen Finlay (2010). Doing so will require a short detour through contextualism about 'ought', but I'll also have to justify borrowing their solution. As we shall see, their basic idea is that our concern with or interest in the truth or falsity of 'ought' claims is derivative from some more fundamental concern. I'm

going to argue that our concern with the truth or falsity of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is also derivative from some deeper concern. Identifying that deeper concern will be part of the task of this section.

What I’ll call *metaethical* contextualism is the view that sentences of the form ‘A ought to  $\phi$ ’ mean (roughly) that A ought, relative to body of information  $i$ , to  $\phi$ , where the relevant body of information is somehow determined by the context. For simplicity, we can say that the relevant body of information is just the information possessed by the speaker.<sup>38</sup> The view captures the intuitive idea that what I ought to do in some situation depends upon my information about that situation. If my information makes it more likely that performing action  $\alpha$  will obtain a desirable outcome than performing action  $\beta$ , and  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are the only available actions, then I ought to do  $\alpha$ , and I ought to do  $\alpha$  even if, unbeknownst to me,  $\beta$  would be more likely to achieve that desirable outcome than  $\alpha$ .

Imagine that someone - call them Agent - needs to rescue a missing child. Agent knows that the child is down a well, but there are two wells in her town - call them well A and well B - and she doesn’t know which is the right one. Agent needs to get to the right well quickly but, unfortunately, the wells are at opposite ends of town. Now, imagine that Agent is presented with good but not conclusive evidence that the child is in well A, so she heads off to well A. If Agent were asked why she is going to well A, she’d respond ‘I ought to go to well A’. Let’s imagine that someone else - call them Inspector - is monitoring Agent’s activities on CCTV. Inspector has excellent (better than Agent’s) but still not conclusive evidence that the child is in well B. If Inspector were to hear that Agent had claimed that she ‘ought’ to go to well A, Inspector would respond ‘No, Agent’s wrong. She ought to go to well B’. But, if the metaethical contextualist is right, Inspector shouldn’t have used the disagreement markers ‘No’ and ‘Agent’s wrong’. What Inspector said - that Agent ought, relative to Inspector’s information, to

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<sup>38</sup> See Björnsson & Finlay (2010). Two things to note: First, Björnsson & Finlay think that ‘ought’ claims are relative to standards as well as bodies of information, but for the sake of simplicity I ignore that here. Second, Björnsson & Finlay are neutral as to whether the relevant body of information is just the information possessed by the speaker, or the information possessed by some larger group of which the speaker is part.

go to well B - doesn't contradict what Agent said - that Agent ought, relative to Agent's information, to go to well A. The metaethical contextualist faces a familiar puzzle.

In presenting the puzzle, I've assumed that the target of utterance assessment (by utterance assessment I mean the assessment of someone's utterance using phrases such as 'No' and 'Agent's wrong') is always the semantic content of the utterance that's being assessed (for discussion see Björnsson & Almér 2009; Björnsson & Finlay 2010). If this assumption is right then, when Inspector says 'No, she's wrong' his target - what he is negatively assessing - is the semantic content of Agent's utterance. But, because that content is true - relative to Agent's information, it is the case that Agent ought to go to well A - Inspector must be mistaken.

Note that there are good reasons for thinking that the assumption is false. Consider these counter-examples (the second is from Huvenes 2012):

(25) Fred: I think Barney stole my coat.

Wilma: No, he couldn't have.

(26) Fred: I like this chilli.

Wilma: I disagree; it's too hot for me.

In (25), Wilma is negatively assessing the proposition *Barney stole Fred's coat*, not the proposition *Fred thinks Barney stole Fred's coat*. In (26), while Wilma has used the disagreement marker 'I disagree' she presumably isn't targeting the semantic content of Fred's utterance. But, while these cases show that the assumption is false, one might wonder what grounds there are for rejecting it in the particular case of the assessment of 'ought' claims and, indeed, 'knowledge' ascriptions (disagreements involving 'ought' claims and 'knowledge' ascriptions don't look much like these sorts of examples).

Björnsson & Finlay meet this challenge by explaining why, in the particular case of Inspector and Agent, and in the case of the assessment of 'ought' claims more generally, the assumption is false. The basic idea is that the fundamental concern or interest motivating our assessments of 'ought' claims isn't our concern with the truth or falsity of the semantic content of those claims. Rather, our fundamental concern is with settling the practical question of what to do. Often, we're concerned with settling the

question of what we are to do, but, other times - in particular, when we're giving advice - we're concerned with settling the question of what someone else is to do. This more fundamental concern does, of course, lead to a derived concern with the truth or falsity of particular 'ought' claims. In any context in which I'm trying to decide what to do, or what someone else is to do, the answer to the practical question is going to be whatever 'ought' claim is true in my context. But our concern with the truth or falsity of the content of 'ought' claims is always derivative from this more fundamental concern.

Let's apply this to Inspector and Agent. Inspector wants to settle the question of what Agent is to do. Because of this, what is relevant to Inspector isn't whether Agent uttered a true 'ought' claim but that the 'ought' claim that Agent uttered wouldn't have been true if she had uttered it in Inspector's context. In Inspector's context, it isn't the correct answer to the question of what Agent is to do. That's why Inspector assesses Agent's assertion negatively, and that's why Inspector offers some new advice. In general, assessments of 'ought' claims don't target the semantic content of those claims. Rather, they target the content that those claims would have had if they had been made in the context in which they are assessed. As we've seen, what motivates adopting this view is the idea that we're only concerned with the truth or falsity of 'ought' claims insofar as they answer the practical question of what to do. We can think of this as a *shifting target* view of utterance assessment. Unlike the semantic content of an utterance, the target of utterance assessment isn't static. Rather, it shifts with the context of the assessor.<sup>39</sup> For obvious reasons, I'm going to call this solution to the problem of disagreement the *shifting target strategy*.

One might worry that this only explains why Inspector uses the disagreement markers 'No' and 'You're wrong'. What about our sense that Agent and Inspector *disagree*? In Björnsson & Finlay's view, Inspector and Agent disagree over the practical question of what to do. Inspector and Agent give incompatible answers to the question of what to

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<sup>39</sup> It's important to distinguish the shifting target view, on which the content that gets assessed depends upon the context of assessment, from content relativist views, on which the semantic content of an utterance depends upon the context of assessment (Chapter one (§1.2); Cappelen 2008; Egan 2009). On the shifting target view, the semantic content of an utterance does not depend upon the context of assessment. However, the content that gets assessed does.

do: Agent thinks that the thing to do is to go to well A whereas Inspector thinks that the thing for Agent to do is to go to well B. This is a ‘quasi-expressivist’ solution to the problem; ‘expressivist’ because the disagreement is disagreement in non-doxastic attitude, ‘quasi’ because none of this is anything to do with the *semantics* of ‘ought’ claims.

My task is to argue that, by making the appropriate changes, the epistemic contextualist can borrow this solution. I begin by discussing why we assess ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials.

It’s plausible that the point and purpose of our epistemic practice - the ascribing of ‘knowledge’ to subjects, etc - is to satisfy our need for information. As humans, we engage in various projects, both alone and in groups. In order to engage in these projects we need information about the world around us. Some of that information can be obtained ‘first-hand’ through perception, introspection and the like. But, because of our limitations - both cognitive and practical - we can’t obtain all of the information that we need ourselves. This creates a further need for a way of keeping track of *sources* of information; subjects who have the information that we need. It’s also plausible that we keep track of sources of information - what we can call good informants - by ascribing ‘knowledge’ to them: in saying that a subject S ‘knows’ that p I ‘tag’ S as a good informant on the matter of p. As I’ll sometimes put it, the *function* of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is to *recommend* good informants, and a good informant is a sort of *epistemic authority*. So a ‘knowledge’ ascription performs the pragmatic function of recommending a subject as an authority on some matter: if I say that you ‘know’ that p, I recommend you as an authority on the matter of p. In contrast, if I say that you don’t ‘know’ that p, I don’t recommend you as an authority on the matter of p. If this picture is right, then our concern with the truth or falsity of particular ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is derivative from our concern with obtaining information, and identifying authorities.

The picture that I’ve just sketched has obvious affinities with Craig’s project of investigating the nature of our concept ‘knowledge’ via a hypothesis about its function, and the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions (Chapter one (§2.3)). But note that one can accept everything I’ve said without accepting that the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions tells us anything about the nature of the concept ‘knowledge’, or about the

semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. All I need are the claims that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have a particular sort of function, and that they have this function in virtue of the point and purpose of epistemic practice and epistemic evaluation.<sup>40</sup> These claims are plausible, and they are plausible independently of the Craigian project in which they are often embedded.

Let’s start to put the pieces together. The fundamental concern that drives our epistemic practice is with obtaining information and, to do so, we need a way of identifying authorities. ‘Knowledge’ ascriptions are what play that role, so they serve the function of identifying authorities. The fundamental concern motivating our assessment of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions isn’t with the truth or falsity of the semantic content of those ascriptions. Rather, our fundamental concern is with identifying authorities. This more fundamental concern does, of course, lead to a concern with the truth or falsity of particular ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. In any context, anyone who qualifies as an authority will also be someone who ‘knows’ in that context. But my concern with the truth or falsity of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is always derivative from this more fundamental concern.

Now apply this to PEDANTIC POLLY. Polly wants to settle the question of whether Ted is an authority on the matter of whether Jack performed the service. Because of this, what is relevant to Polly isn’t whether Ted uttered a true ‘knowledge’ ascription but that the sentence Ted uttered wouldn’t have been true if he had uttered it in Polly’s context. As far as Polly is concerned, Ted isn’t an authority (Polly generally applies unusually high epistemic standards). That’s why Polly assesses Ted’s ‘knowledge’ ascription negatively. In general, assessments of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions don’t target the semantic content of those ascriptions. Rather, they target the content that those ascriptions would have had if they had been made in the context in which they are assessed. As we’ve seen, what motivates adopting this view is the idea that we’re only concerned with

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<sup>40</sup> I think it’s very plausible that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions serve more than one function. I’m going to argue that, by appealing to the function of recommending good informants, contextualists can deal with cases like PEDANTIC POLLY and POLICE STATION\*. Perhaps, though, to deal with other sorts of cases the contextualist would need to appeal to other functions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. The account I develop here can serve as a template for doing so.

the truth or falsity of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions insofar as they help us to identify authorities. Again, we can think of this as a shifting target view of utterance assessment. Unlike the semantic content of an utterance, the target of utterance assessment isn’t static. Rather, it shifts with the context of the assessor.

Similar remarks apply to POLICE STATION\*. I’ll take Dougal first: Again, Dougal wants to settle the question of whether Ted is an authority on the matter of whether Jack performed the service. Because of this, what is relevant to Dougal isn’t whether Ted uttered a true ‘knowledge’ ascription but that the sentence Ted uttered wouldn’t have been true if he had uttered it in Dougal context. As far as Dougal is concerned, Ted isn’t an authority (unlike Polly, Dougal doesn’t generally apply unusually high epistemic standards, but he finds himself in a situation in which unusually high epistemic standards are appropriate). As for Ted: Just as an ascription of ‘knowledge’ that p to a subject S serves to recommend S as an authority, a self-ascription of ‘knowledge’ serves to recommend oneself as an authority. So Ted wants to settle the question of whether he is an authority on the matter of whether Jack performed the service. Because of this, what is relevant to Ted isn’t whether earlier he uttered a true ‘knowledge’ ascription but that the sentence he uttered wouldn’t have been true if he had uttered it in his present context. As far as Ted is now concerned, he’s not an authority (again, he finds himself in a situation where unusually high epistemic standards are appropriate). That’s why Ted assesses his ‘knowledge’ self-ascription negatively, and so retracts it.

One might worry that this only explains why Polly and Dougal use the disagreement markers ‘No’ and ‘You’re wrong’, or why Ted uses the retraction marker ‘I was wrong’. What about our sense that Polly and Dougal disagree with Ted, and that Ted disagrees with his past self? On my view, Polly and Dougal disagree with Ted, and Ted disagrees with his past self, over the practical question of whether Ted should be recommended as an authority. Ted ascribes ‘knowledge’ to himself, and in doing so he recommends himself as an authority on the matter of whether Jack performed the service. However, Polly and Dougal deny that Ted ‘knows’, and in doing so they don’t recommend Ted as an authority on this matter. Similarly, Ted denies that he ‘knows’, and in doing so he doesn’t recommend himself as an authority on this matter. This, again, is a ‘quasi-expressivist’ solution to the problem; ‘expressivist’ because the disagreement is

disagreement in non-doxastic attitude, ‘quasi’ because none of this is anything to do with the *semantics* of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions.

## 2.6. Other disagreement markers, the desiderata and the target content

There are three more tasks to complete. First, I’ve said that, because there are a variety of ways in which two people can disagree, any candidate account of what disagreement in a given domain amounts to has to be able to cope with the full range of ways of felicitously expressing disagreement available. So, for example, the solution I’ve developed deals with the disagreement markers ‘No’ and ‘You’re wrong’ and the retraction marker ‘I was wrong’. It’s plausible that there are number of other ways in which Polly and Dougal could felicitously express their disagreement with Ted, or that Ted could felicitously express his disagreement with his past self. Here is just a sample:

(27) Polly/Dougal (Ted): What Ted (I) said - that he (I) knows (knew) that Jack performed the service - is false.

(28) Polly/Dougal (Ted): What Ted (I) believes (believed) - that he (I) knows (knew) that Jack performed the service - is false.

(29) Polly/Dougal (Ted): What Ted (I) thinks (thought) - that he (I) knows (knew) that Jack performed the service - is false.

On the shifting target strategy, the target of utterance assessment need not be, and often isn’t, the semantic content of the utterance being assessed. Rather, the target shifts; when I assess a ‘knowledge’ ascription, what I assess is the content that the ascription would have had if it had been uttered in my context. That explains why Polly and Dougal use the disagreement markers ‘No’ and ‘You’re wrong’, and it also explains why Polly and Dougal might express their disagreement by using the markers ‘What Ted said/believes/thinks is false’. Similarly, it explains why Ted uses the retraction marker ‘I was wrong’, and it also explains why Ted might express his disagreement with his past self by using the markers ‘What I said/believed/thought is false’. In each case, the disagreement or retraction marker is used to assess the content that the ascription would have had if it had been made in the context in which it is being assessed. So my solution does well here.



Second, I identified two desiderata for a contextualist solution to the problem of disagreement. First, if the solution appeals to a general feature of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, it must explain why they have that general feature. Second, the solution must not be in tension with one of the motivations for contextualism. My solution certainly does well with respect to the second desideratum. Nothing I’ve said is in tension with a motivation for contextualism. With respect to the first desideratum, I have appealed to a general feature of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions - an account of their function, and the fundamental interest or concern which that function serves. I think it’s very plausible that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have that feature, and serve that function, but I haven’t offered much of an argument here. I’ll rest content with noting that many contemporary epistemologists would accept something along the lines of what I’ve said, although of course the details have to be worked out. (Remember that, as I emphasised above, one can accept everything that I’ve said without buying into the Craigian project of investigating the nature (and perhaps semantics) of ‘knowledge’ via an account of its function).

Finally, I need to say a little more about what I’ve called the target of utterance assessment (the ‘target content’) and the content of the recommendations pragmatically conveyed by ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. In particular: How is the target content generated, and what does the content of the recommendation look like? There are a number of options that the defender of the shifting target view could pursue, but I’ll focus on the option I favour.<sup>41</sup> When Ted asserts the sentence ‘I know that Jack performed the service’ he asserts the semantic content of that sentence and a bunch of other things besides that are generated by pragmatics. Drawing on our account of the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, one of the things he asserts besides will be some sort of recommendation. The content of the recommendation will be (something like) *Ted is an*

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<sup>41</sup> Here are two others: First, she could appeal to the view defended in von Fintel & Gillies (2009), on which every utterance of a sentence expresses multiple propositions, all of which can be thought of as the semantic content of the utterance. Second, she could appeal to the view defended in Cappelen & Lepore (2004), on which every utterance of a sentence expresses multiple propositions, of which only one can be thought of as the literal content of the utterance. On both views, the target content would be expressed by the utterance of a ‘knowledge’ ascription. Why not appeal to one of these views? Because both are controversial, and I consider the option I favour to be independently plausible.

*authority on whether Jack performed the service.* Let's say that - as in PEDANTIC POLLY - Polly assesses Ted's 'knowledge' ascription. She can reason as follows.

1. 'Ted said that he knows that Jack performed the service'.
2. 'I'll assume that Ted isn't deliberately trying to mislead me, so if Ted said that he knows, he thinks that he knows'.
3. 'If Ted knows that Jack performed the service, then Ted is an authority on whether Jack performed the service.'
4. 'But Ted isn't an authority on whether Jack performed the service.' (Ted doesn't meet Polly's standards).
5. 'So Ted doesn't know that Jack performed the service'.

By running through this inference, Polly can arrive at the conclusion 'Ted doesn't know that Jack performed the service'. If Polly accepts that conclusion, she'll be negatively assessing the content *Ted knows, by Polly's standards, that Jack performed the service*, which is the target content. So, via this sort of inferential process, anyone can generate (and assess) the target content.

Why think this is a plausible view about the content of the recommendation pragmatically expressed by Ted's 'knowledge' self-ascription? There are (at least) three things the defender of the shifting target strategy could say about the content of the recommendation, and all three are *prima facie* problematic. If she says that the content is *unqualified* - i.e. if she says that being an authority means being able to rule out all error-possibilities - then what Ted pragmatically expresses is false (there are outlandish possibilities which are such that nobody will ever be able to rule them out). If she says that the content is *qualified* - i.e. if she says that being an authority only means being able to rule out a set range of error-possibilities - it may well be that Polly would be mistaken in negatively assessing Ted's 'knowledge' self-ascription (even if Ted doesn't meet her epistemic standards, he might be able to rule out the set range of error-possibilities). And if she says that the range of error-possibilities somehow depends on the context - i.e. if she holds some sort of contextualist view about the content of the recommendation - the problem of disagreement will reoccur at the level of pragmatics. I think that the second and third options are non-starters, but I also think that the first isn't as problematic as it looks.

If 'knowledge' ascriptions serve the pragmatic function of recommending the subject of the ascription as an authority, then there are good reasons why the content of such recommendations would have to be unqualified. First, while those who engage in epistemic discourse are no doubt aware that there are certain error-possibilities which are such that nobody will ever be able to rule them out, it's not as if we have reached any sort of agreement as to the range of such error-possibilities. If the recommendation is qualified, what circumstances are to be excluded? Second, and far more importantly, qualifying the recommendation so as to be restricted to a (vaguely defined) range of error-possibilities would most likely nullify the intended effect of the recommendation. 'Knowledge' ascriptions will only achieve their intended effect, and so serve their particular function, if the recommendation is unqualified. I take this to be just a particular instance of a general point about recommendations. For a recommendation to achieve its intended effect, it can't be explicitly qualified. If I want to recommend a particular book to you, I might say something like 'This book will bring you great enjoyment and pleasure. I recommend that you read it'. While I am no doubt aware that there are certain circumstances which are such that, if they were to obtain, reading the book would not bring you great enjoyment and pleasure - although it's very unlikely, your reading the book could be the cause of some horrendous misfortune - qualifying my recommendation by saying something like 'This book will bring you great enjoyment and pleasure. I recommend that you read it. Unless, of course, reading the book somehow causes you to experience some horrendous misfortune, which is, I admit, possible' would not achieve quite the same effect as the original unqualified recommendation. What this suggests is that, while recommendations are perhaps generally understood to involve some sort of qualification, that qualification isn't part of the *content* of the recommendation. If that's right, then we shouldn't expect the content of the recommendations pragmatically expressed by 'knowledge' ascriptions to be qualified.

### **3. Concluding remarks**

My aims in this chapter have largely been negative. First, I've argued that there are two viable approaches that indexical contextualists can take towards the linguistic objections, and outlined the considerations that might incline the indexical contextualist towards one or the other approach. While I myself incline towards the 'head on' approach,

nothing I have said here forces the indexical contextualist to take this route. Second, I've argued that contextualists can deal with the retraction and disagreement data. In doing so I removed an obstacle to endorsing contextualism and, more importantly, what is supposed to be the main motivation for endorsing some form of relativism. Consequently, because there is no reason to accept a revisionary relativist semantics for 'knowledge' ascriptions, I conclude that it should be rejected. The upshot of this chapter is that a contextualist semantics for 'knowledge' ascriptions is a viable position in the philosophy of language. In the final two chapters I turn to arguments for contextualism.

## Chapter three

### Normative scorekeeping<sup>1</sup>

#### 0. Introductory remarks

At the end of Chapter two I concluded that a contextualist semantics for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is a viable position in the philosophy of language. But why endorse a contextualist semantics for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions? And what shape should the contextualist semantics take? My aim in this chapter is to put a particular version of contextualism - what I call interests contextualism - on the table. In doing so I’ll show why interests contextualism is preferable to conversational contextualism, I’ll deal with the remaining epistemological objections to contextualism (Chapter one (§3.3)), and I’ll provide half of an argument that interests contextualism is preferable to sensitive invariantism. The upshot is that interests contextualism is the most attractive version of contextualism available, and there is some reason to prefer it to sensitive invariantism.<sup>2</sup> But what is interests contextualism?

Imagine that Sophie and Janine are discussing the shapes of European countries. Sophie says that France is hexagonal and Janine readily accepts this claim. Although France isn’t exactly hexagonal it’s plausible that, via Lewisian rules of accommodation, Sophie’s claim is true (see Lewis 1979). But what if Sophie were to say that France is boot-shaped and, for whatever reason, Janine readily accepted that claim? It isn’t at all plausible that this claim is true. While it’s plausible that conversational kinematics - in more prosaic terms, the course of the conversation - can play a role in determining the truth-values or truth-conditions of certain claims, there must be constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on truth-values or truth-conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter incorporates two published papers: ‘Epistemic Contextualism: A Normative Approach’, forthcoming in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (§2.1; §3.1.1; §4) and ‘Interests Contextualism’, published in *Philosophia* 39 (4): 741-750 [2011] (§2.1; §3.2).

<sup>2</sup> Why interests contextualism rather than some other alternative to conversational contextualism? Given that prominent contextualists generally defend some sort of conversational contextualism (Chapter one (§1.1.2)), I take it that the conversational contextualist is the interests contextualist’s main rival.

Contextualists think that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials depend in part upon the context in which they are uttered.<sup>3</sup> On this view, certain features of the conversational context play a role in determining the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. But what features? Cohen has claimed that “[i]n the case of knowledge ascriptions, salience relations play a central role” (Cohen 1999, 61). The idea that the making salient of error-possibilities and alternatives is an important part of the story has often been attributed to contextualists, and contextualists other than Cohen seem to endorse it (Chapter one (§1.1.2); DeRose 2009; Hawthorne 2004, Chapter 2; Stanley 2005a, Chapters 1 & 6). If, as some seem to think, salience relations are an important part of the story, then conversational kinematics are central to how the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are determined by context.

I think that the contextualist focus on conversational kinematics and salience is a mistake. I’m going to argue that, just as there are constraints on what shape France can truly be said to be, there are constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. As I’ll also argue, a contextualist account of the features of context that determine the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions should say something about the *nature* of these constraints. I’ll argue that there’s a view that meets this desideratum on which the features of context that determine the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are facts about what alternatives those in the context *have a reason* to consider. On this view - which I call *interests contextualism* - conversational kinematics aren’t a central part of the explanation of how the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are determined by context. Consequently, the focus on conversational kinematics is a mistake.

I proceed as follows. First, I articulate four desiderata for a contextualist account of the features of context that determine the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. One of these desiderata - the one mentioned above - is that the account should say something about the nature of the constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions (§1). The upshot of §1 is a set of criteria for

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<sup>3</sup> Just to clarify things from the outset: The contextualist view I develop here is neutral between indexical and nonindexical contextualism, and standard and speech-act contextualism. I explained the grounds on which one can decide between these views in Chapter two (§1.3).

choosing between rival contextualist views. Second, I develop a version of contextualism - interests contextualism - that meets the four desiderata (§2). In doing so I explain what I mean by those in the context 'having a reason' to consider an alternative. Third, I argue that interests contextualism should be preferred to conversational contextualism, partly because conversational contextualists have problems satisfying all of the four desiderata, partly because interests contextualists, unlike conversational contextualists, can deal with the epistemic descent objection (§3). Fourth, I argue that there are some reasons for preferring interests contextualism to sensitive invariantism (§4). However, this is only half of my argument that we should prefer interests contextualism to sensitive invariantism (the second half comes in Chapter four (§2)). Finally, I argue that contextualists can deal with the remaining epistemological objection (the objection concerning the knowledge norms of assertion and action) (§5). Consequently, I conclude that interests contextualism is the most attractive version of contextualism available, and that there is some reason to prefer it to sensitive invariantism.

It's worth noting that, while a number of people have indicated that there is conceptual space for a view like interests contextualism, there haven't been many attempts to develop such a view in any detail.<sup>4</sup> For example, DeRose (2009, 141-2) briefly considers what he calls a 'pure reasonableness view', on which the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions depend upon whatever epistemic standard is 'most reasonable' in the relevant context.<sup>5</sup> Interests contextualism is a sort of pure reasonableness view, where what it is for a standard to be reasonable is understood in terms of the practical situation of those in the context, and the epistemic practices of the community of which they are part (again, more on this in §2). DeRose's main problem with this sort of view seems to be that what makes an epistemic standard reasonable isn't at all obvious (2009, 141). My aim in §2 is to address this problem. I will show that interests contextualism isn't just a possible position but that, even though it's often over-looked, it's preferable to (some of) the usual positions in the contemporary debate.

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<sup>4</sup> Possible exceptions include Greco (2009) and Henderson (2009). I comment on the differences between their respective views and interests contextualism in Chapter four (§2.1).

<sup>5</sup> See also Stanley (2005a, 25-8).

## 1. What makes an alternative relevant?

Contextualists think that the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions vary with the context of utterance. I’m interested in the question of what features of the conversational context are supposed to explain this contextual variation. Previously, I adopted a contextualist framework that works with contextually varying epistemic standards (Chapter one (§1.1.1)). However, in this chapter, and in the next, I will adopt a framework that works with contextually varying ranges of relevant alternatives. On this framework, a ‘knowledge’ ascription of the form ‘S knows that p’ is true in C iff S possesses evidence that rules out all the alternatives in which not-p that are relevant in C.<sup>6</sup> So the features of context that determine the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are facts about what alternatives are relevant. In terms of this framework, my question becomes *what makes an alternative relevant?* In what follows I’ll argue that there are four desiderata for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives (§1.1-1.4).

Aside: Is it a problem that I’m going to develop interests contextualism within a relevant alternatives framework? One might think that it is, given that Lewis’s (1996) defence of such a framework faces so many objections, in particular what I called elusiveness objections (Chapter one (§2.2.3.2)). Two points in response: First, the alternative available frameworks have problems of their own (Blome-Tillmann 2009b; Schaffer 2005). Second, as I argued earlier, elusiveness objections aren’t particular to Lewis’s idiosyncratic version of contextualism (Chapter one (§2.2.3.2)).

### 1.1. The first desideratum: paradigm cases

Consider this pair of cases:

NORMAL: Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way to deposit a cheque. It’s not important that they do

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<sup>6</sup> See Lewis (1996). I’ll often talk as if the truth of a ‘knowledge’ ascription requires the ruling out of relevant alternatives but nothing of substance relies upon this. I could just as well talk of epistemic standards, and at a few points it will be convenient to talk in these terms. A translation scheme will be useful. Instead of saying, as I do here, that ‘S knows that p’ is true in C iff S possesses evidence that rules out the not-p alternatives that are relevant in C one could say that ‘S knows that p’ is true in C iff S’s epistemic position with respect to p is strong enough to meet the epistemic standard operative in C (see DeRose 1995).



so, as they have no impending bills. But, as they drive past the bank, they notice that the lines inside are very long. Realising that it isn't very important that the cheque is deposited right away, Hannah says, 'I know the bank will be open tomorrow, since I was there just two weeks ago on Saturday morning. So we can deposit our cheque tomorrow morning.'

HIGH: Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit a cheque. Since they have an impending bill, and very little in their account, it's very important that they deposit their cheque by Saturday. Hannah notes that she was at the bank two weeks before on a Saturday morning, and it was open. But, as Sarah points out, banks do change their opening hours. Hannah says, 'I guess you're right. I don't know that the bank will be open tomorrow.'<sup>7</sup>

These cases, like our earlier PUB and POLICE STATION, are supposed to provide part of the motivation for contextualism. In these cases, and others, our intuitions about the appropriateness of 'knowledge' ascriptions and denials supposedly shift with the context and, by way of explanation, the contextualist posits contextual variation in the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions. As earlier (Chapter one (§2.1)), contextualists shouldn't put *too much* weight in these sorts of arguments. But, if they can show that they offer the *best* explanation of a general phenomenon (viz. contextual variation in the appropriateness of 'knowledge' ascriptions) that does provide some grounds for adopting contextualism. So the first - and most obvious - desideratum for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives is that it should give the standard contextualist explanation of cases like NORMAL and HIGH. Any answer that does this will, as I'll put it, *deal with the paradigm cases*.

## 1.2. The second desideratum: avoiding crazy results

Consider another case:

CONSPIRACY: Richard, Melvin and John are discussing their favourite topic: how blind everyone around them is to the various lies and myths perpetuated by the mainstream

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<sup>7</sup> I've taken these cases more-or-less word for word from Stanley (2005a). The cases are originally from DeRose. Note that I'm assuming that the bank is open on Saturday.

media.

Richard: Do you guys remember Dana? I was talking to her today and she still believes Neil Armstrong landed on the moon.

Melvin: Not that old myth. Didn't she watch that documentary you sent her? What about the clips where the flag is clearly fluttering?<sup>8</sup>

Richard: She said that she did, but that there was a straightforward explanation for everything.

John: Even the flag?

Richard: Even the flag. Something about how it appears to be fluttering because of the way it was stored. She told me I was crazy, that all the evidence points towards Armstrong landing on the moon, that she knows he landed on the moon.

John: How can she be so easily fooled? She doesn't know that. All of the scientists who try to explain away the evidence are just part of the conspiracy.

Melvin: Agreed.

Richard: And as for JFK...

The reader can, I'm sure, construct a number of cases along the lines of CONSPIRACY. Just take someone who holds what are often euphemistically termed 'non-mainstream' views and get them to deny that someone 'knows' all sorts of things that they, and everyone else, would ordinarily take themselves to 'know'. I take it that, in these sorts of cases, we don't think that these 'knowledge' denials are true. The second desideratum for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives is that it should avoid giving counter-intuitive results in cases like CONSPIRACY. Any answer that does this will, as I'll put it, *avoid crazy results*.

I'm going to offer two motivations for the second desideratum. First, I think that it is clearly intuitive that John's 'knowledge' denial in CONSPIRACY is false. We should, at the very least, be wary of any view which rules that John speaks truly.<sup>9</sup> Second, I take it

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<sup>8</sup> For some claims made by moon landing conspiracy theorists (and their detailed rebuttals) see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon\\_landing\\_conspiracy\\_theories-Photograph\\_and\\_film\\_oddties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_landing_conspiracy_theories-Photograph_and_film_oddties).

<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that we should just rule out such a view. Perhaps it does better with respect to the other desiderata than the alternatives. One can agree with the second

that, while CONSPIRACY is doubtless a little silly, it is representative of a feature of our epistemic discourse. Those who engage in the practice of ascribing and denying ‘knowledge’ to subjects need not always consider alternatives that we would regard as reasonable. The intuitive idea behind the second desideratum is that, when ‘knowledge’ ascribers consider unreasonable alternatives, their doing so should not have any effect on the truth-values of their ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials. (Similarly, that Sophie and Janine use a standard of precision on which France counts as boot-shaped should not have any effect on the truth of Sophie’s claim that France is boot-shaped).

### **1.3. The third desideratum: the nature of constraints**

One possible contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives is just that an alternative is relevant in a context iff it’s taken seriously by those in the context. One way for an alternative to be taken seriously would be its being mentioned and not subsequently dismissed by the conversational participants. So, for example, in HIGH the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours is taken seriously because Sarah mentions it, and both Sarah and Hannah regard it as worthy of consideration. In NORMAL that alternative isn’t taken seriously because it’s not even mentioned. But there are alternatives that everyone in a context takes seriously that aren’t mentioned in that context, perhaps because it’s obvious to everyone that they are taken seriously. For example, imagine that Hannah and Sarah are driving to the bank on Friday but need to deposit their cheque by Saturday else they go bankrupt. Sarah recalls being in the bank on a previous Saturday. Before Hannah has a chance to respond, they hear a radio report about how banks in Greece frequently change their opening hours due to financial uncertainty. Once the report has finished, it may well become obvious to both Hannah and Sarah that they are taking the possibility that the bank has changed its opening hours seriously, even if neither of them actually mentions it.<sup>10</sup>

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desideratum even if - as one should - one thinks that we can’t just ‘read off’ the correct semantics for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions from intuitions about various cases.

<sup>10</sup> Putting things in terms from earlier (Chapter one (§1.1.2)): On the imagined view, the alternatives that are relevant in a context are just those whose negations aren’t part of the set of things that all those in the context accept (the ‘common ground’). Clearly, all those in the context might accept something without them having actually discussed that thing.

This answer satisfies the first desideratum because it deals with the paradigm cases. In NORMAL Hannah's 'knowledge' ascription is true because her evidence is sufficient to rule out all of the relevant alternatives in which the bank isn't open on Saturdays (as above, the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours isn't taken seriously). However, in HIGH Hannah's 'knowledge' denial is also true because her evidence isn't sufficient to rule out all of the relevant alternatives (as above, the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours is taken seriously). Unfortunately, though, it doesn't satisfy the second desideratum. In CONSPIRACY a scenario in which the moon landing was faked is taken seriously by all of the conversational participants. That makes it relevant, so John's 'knowledge' denial must be true. The problem with this account of the relevance of alternatives is that it doesn't put any *constraints* on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives. The third desideratum for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives is that it should say something about the *nature* of these constraints. In particular, it should tell us what the constraints are, and it should tell us why we have them.

I'll also offer two motivations for this desideratum. First, any contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives that meets the second desideratum is going to have to put constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives. In CONSPIRACY Richard, Melvin and John take the moon landing conspiracy scenario entirely seriously so, if it's not relevant, that must be because alternatives that are taken seriously need not be relevant. So meeting the second desideratum will already require at least saying what the constraints *are*. Second, and more importantly, if the proposed constraints are not to be ad hoc the contextualist owes us an explanation of *why* these are the constraints. Contextualists can't just posit constraints without explaining why we have them.

#### **1.4. The fourth desideratum: tough questions**

Here are some questions that contextualists need to answer:

1. What are the features of context that determine the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions?

2. What are the mechanisms by which context shifts - expansions/retractions in the range of relevant alternatives, or upward/downward shifts in the epistemic standards - occur? (Pritchard 2001; 2010).
3. It's perhaps not that hard to see how the range of relevant alternatives might expand, or the epistemic standards rise. But how does the range *contract*, or the standard *fall*? When the 'conversational air clears'? (DeRose 1995, 42).

The first question is, of course, just the question I've been discussing in this section. The second and third questions are questions that contextualists have often found hard to answer (I briefly discussed both questions in Chapter one (§3.3.2)). All else being equal, a version of contextualism that can answer these questions, and in particular a version that can give simple and informative answers to these questions, should be preferred to versions of contextualism that either give only relatively complicated or uninformative answers to these questions, or no answers at all. This is the fourth desideratum for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives.

I'm now going to argue that there's a version of contextualism - what I call interests contextualism - that meets all these desiderata.

## **2. Interests contextualism**

The basic idea behind interests contextualism is that an alternative is relevant in a context iff those in the context have a reason to consider it. I'm going to develop the view in two stages. First, I'll explain what I mean by 'having a reason to consider an alternative', and, drawing on that explanation, I'll take a first shot at formulating interests contextualism (§2.1). However, as we'll see, while the view thus formulated has some attractive features it needs to be modified. Second, I'll develop a plausible account of the nature of the constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives (§2.2). Third, drawing on that account, I'll take a second shot at formulating interests contextualism. I'll argue that the view thus formulated meets all of the desiderata on a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives (§2.3).

## 2.1. Interests contextualism: a first pass

On the interests contextualist view, an alternative is relevant in a context iff those in the context have a reason to consider that alternative. But what determines the range of alternatives those in the context have a reason to consider? Putting things roughly, the interests contextualist thinks that their practical situation determines the range of alternatives they have a reason to consider. But what do I mean by their ‘practical situation’? And what do I mean by ‘having a reason’ to consider an alternative? I’ll start with an illustrative example.<sup>11</sup>

Saskia and Marie are trying to decide when to leave their flat to go to the cinema. They want to see the film *Troll Hunter*, which is showing at 6pm. It’s currently 5.30pm and, in normal traffic conditions, it would take them 15 minutes to get there. However, this is a weekday and rush-hour traffic can get pretty bad where they live. Because they’re not aware that the rush-hour traffic gets so bad, neither Saskia nor Marie are considering this, so they’re planning on leaving in 10 minutes. In an ‘objective’ sense of ‘having a reason’, Saskia and Marie have a reason to consider the possibility that they will be held up in traffic. Saskia and Marie’s practical interests - their desire to see the film - are such that they have a reason to consider that possibility. However, in a ‘subjective’ sense of ‘having a reason’, Saskia and Marie have no such reason. They’re not aware that the rush-hour traffic gets so bad, so as far as Saskia and Marie are concerned their practical interests are such that they haven’t got a reason to consider the possibility that they will be held up in traffic.

I’d like to pause to say a little about what I mean by ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ senses of having a reason. The idea I’m drawing on here should be familiar from Bernard Williams (1980). In Williams’ example an agent - call her Sophie - wants to drink from a glass if it contains gin, but not if it contains petrol. Imagine that, even though the glass actually contains petrol, Sophie believes that it contains gin, perhaps because there’s some indication that the glass contains gin such as an open bottle of gin nearby. Williams says that, in one sense - the objective sense - Sophie hasn’t got a reason to drink from the glass, and actually has a reason to not drink from the glass. Sophie’s

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<sup>11</sup> Just to be clear: The purpose of this example is entirely illustrative. I’m not using the case I’m about to describe to motivate adopting interests contextualism.

practical interests - her desire to drink from the glass if it contains gin but not if it contains an unpleasant liquid - are such that she has got a reason to not drink from glass, and a reason to consider the possibility that the glass contains an unpleasant liquid. However, in another sense - the subjective sense - Sophie has got a reason to drink from the glass (Williams 2001, 78-9). She thinks that it contains gin, and she wants some gin. In this same sense, Sophie hasn't got a reason to consider the possibility that the glass contains an unpleasant liquid. She's completely unaware that the glass contains petrol, and nothing she has seen suggests that it does. As far as Sophie is concerned, her practical interests are such that she has a reason to drink from the glass, and she hasn't got a reason to consider the possibility that the glass contains an unpleasant liquid.

The reason Saskia and Marie have to consider the possibility that they will be held up in traffic is of the same sort as the reason Sophie has to not drink from the glass. So when I say that Saskia and Marie have a reason, in the objective sense, to consider the possibility that they will be held up in traffic, I certainly don't mean that Saskia and Marie have what Williams called an 'external reason'. Part of Williams' aim was to argue for a conception of internal reasons on which Sophie has an internal reason to not drink from the glass. On Williams' view, the fact that the glass contains petrol gives Sophie an internal reason to not drink from it just so long as she would be motivated to not drink from the glass were she aware that it contained petrol. The basic idea is that an internal reason must be the sort of thing that would motivate an agent to act if that agent were aware of it. Saskia and Marie have an internal reason to consider the possibility that they will be held up in traffic because, if they were aware that the traffic is going to be bad, they would consider it. (If, in contrast to the original case, Saskia and Marie didn't care about getting to the film on time then they wouldn't have such an internal reason. In that case, even if they were aware that the traffic is going to be bad they still wouldn't consider it).

The distinction I'm making between 'subjective' and 'objective' senses of having a reason doesn't line-up with Williams' distinction between internal and external reasons, but it does line-up with a familiar distinction in epistemology. There's a difference between the possibilities one has a reason to consider given what one knows or believes about one's present situation and the possibilities one has a reason to consider given the

facts. If Sophie did have misleading evidence that the glass contains gin - such as an open bottle of gin nearby - then, given what she knows or believes about her present situation, she has got a reason to drink from the glass. Further, given what she knows about her situation, she hasn't got a reason to consider the possibility that the glass contains petrol. However, given the facts - the fact that the glass contains petrol - she has a reason to not drink from the glass. Further, given the facts, she has a reason to consider the possibility that the glass contains petrol. The first sort of reason - the reason Sophie has to drink from the glass - is what I mean by 'subjective'. The second sort is what I mean by 'objective'.

Here's the basic idea I want to take from this. We attach different levels of practical importance to the various projects we engage in. When we engage in these projects there are certain things that we have a reason consider. Saskia and Marie are engaging in the project of getting to the cinema in time to see a film, and this is a project to which they attach a decent amount of practical importance (they'd far rather get there on time than not). For the purposes of this project, there are certain possibilities that they have a reason to consider, and the possibility of getting caught in traffic is plausibly one of them. They have reason to consider this possibility in virtue of the practical importance of the project in which they are engaged. That they have this reason doesn't require them to consider it, and it doesn't require that they be aware of the facts in virtue of which they have this reason. Projects differ in their practical importance, and the more important the project, the greater the number of relevant possibilities. In what follows I will often say that what alternatives those in the context have a reason to consider depends on their 'practical situation'. This should be taken as shorthand for the idea just outlined.

On the interests contextualist view, the reasons that 'knowledge' ascribers have to consider alternatives are of the same type as the reason Saskia and Marie have to consider the possibility that they'll be held up in traffic, or the reason Sophie has to consider the possibility that the glass contains a petrol. So the view I'm calling interests contextualism is the combination of two theses:

- i. The truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are context-sensitive. In terms of the framework I'm working with: A 'knowledge' ascription of the form 'S knows that p'



is true in context C iff S's evidence is sufficient to rule out all of the alternatives that are relevant in C.

- ii. An alternative is relevant in a context C iff those in C have a reason, in the objective practical sense, to consider it.<sup>12</sup>

Thesis (i) is just the contextualist semantic thesis. Thesis (ii) is distinctive of interests contextualism. (Note that the two are connected, in that thesis (ii) explains why 'knowledge' ascriptions have context-sensitive truth-values).

It might be helpful to illustrate the interests contextualist view by explaining how it deals with some of the cases I've discussed so far. Consider Hannah and Sarah's practical situation in HIGH. It's in their practical interests to get the bill paid, and that won't happen unless the cheque is cashed by Saturday. Given these facts about Hannah and Sarah, they have a reason to consider the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours. Their practical interests are such that they have a reason to consider it. This is comparable to the reason Sophie has to consider the possibility that the glass contains an unpleasant liquid, or the reason Saskia and Marie have to consider the possibility that they'll be held up in traffic. Compare this to Hannah and Sarah's practical situation in NORMAL. They don't want to waste time unnecessarily, but otherwise it's all the same to them whether they go to the bank on Friday, Saturday, or next week. Given these facts, they have no reason to consider the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours. Hannah and Sarah's practical interests are such that they have no reason to consider the alternative. None of this would change if Hannah and Sarah were in the same practical situation but didn't consider the alternative. They would still have a reason to consider the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours. Similarly, if Hannah and Sarah were in the same practical

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<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge that, to some, this objective sense might be mysterious, or somehow controversial. Two points in response: First, one might think that external reasons are mysterious or controversial, but what I'm talking about aren't external reasons in Williams' sense. Second, others - in particular, Stanley (2005a, Chapter 5) - appeal to a notion of what possibilities are epistemically probable for a subject that is objective in the same sense that the reason Saskia and Marie have to consider the possibility that they'll get stuck in traffic is objective.

situation but did take the alternative seriously, they would still not have a reason to consider it.<sup>13</sup>

On the interests contextualist view, there are *normative* constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives. Alternatives that are actually taken seriously can still be irrelevant, provided those in the context haven't got a reason to consider them, and alternatives that are actually ignored can still be relevant, provided those in the context have got a reason to consider them. There are normative elements - facts about what alternatives those in the context have a reason to consider - of the conversational score. We can think of this as a sort of *normative scorekeeping*.

I'm now going to consider three objections to interests contextualism. I'll argue that the interests contextualist can deal with the first two objections, but that the third objection shows that the view needs to be modified. It's the modified view that, as I'll argue, satisfies the four desiderata for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives (§2.3).

First objection: The interests contextualist says that an alternative is relevant in a context iff those in the context have a reason to consider it, where by 'reason' is meant an objective practical reason. But what about subjective practical reasons? Are there not cases where, intuitively, certain alternatives are relevant yet those in the context only have a subjective, not objective, reason to consider them? An example might be Jonathan Vogel's (1999) parked-car case. Imagine that I've parked my car in what I think is a fairly safe area and, while presumably I'm aware that it's possible that my car might have been stolen, I'm not particularly worried about it. Consequently, I happily ascribe 'knowledge' of where my car is parked to myself. Now imagine that a friend starts to insist that it's possible that my car might have been stolen, and she makes this possibility particularly vivid by explaining how massively important it must be to me that my car not be stolen (imagine I've only just bought it). It may well be that, as a

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<sup>13</sup> It's worth emphasising that the view I'm presenting here differs from the view defended in Stanley (2005a). For the interests contextualist it's the practical interests of the 'knowledge' ascriber that are important, whereas on Stanley's view - which is a sort of sensitive invariantism - it's the practical interests of the subject that matter. I argue below that interests contextualism does better than Stanley's view with respect to the range of cases discussed in Stanley (2005a) (§4).

result of her making these possibilities vivid, I deny that I ‘know’ where my car is parked. Clearly, her making these possibilities vivid might alter what alternatives I have a *subjective* practical reason to consider (the making salient of possibilities may well affect how I perceive my practical interests). But, so the objection would go, it’s not clear that her doing so is going to alter what alternatives I have an *objective* practical reason to consider (it’s not clear that the making salient of possibilities can affect my actual practical interests). But that means that the interests contextualist would have to say that I would be wrong to deny that I ‘know’ where my car is parked even though my friend has made possibilities in which my car has been stolen particularly vivid. This, so the objection would go, is counter-intuitive.

There are three responses that the interests contextualist can make here. First, she could just deny that interests contextualism says anything counter-intuitive about this case. Second, she could modify her view. Instead of saying that an alternative is relevant in a context C iff those in the context have an objective practical reason to consider it, she could say that an alternative is relevant in a context C iff those in the context have a practical reason, whether objective or subjective, to consider it. Third, she could argue that the making salient of possibilities can sometimes affect what alternatives one has a reason, in the objective practical sense, to consider. I think that the first response is a non-starter. But, while I have no real problem with the second response, I’m inclined to think that the interests contextualist can make the third response work, at least in the case currently under discussion. The making salient of possibilities - here, the possibility that my car might have been stolen - may well affect my actual practical interests, and so affect what alternatives I have a reason to consider. Prior to talking to my friend, I wasn’t at all worried about the possibility that my car might be stolen. But perhaps her mentioning those possibilities made me realise that I *should* have been worried. In that case, I would have a reason, in the objective practical sense, to consider the possibility. (What if there are cases in which this response isn’t convincing? If there are, the interests contextualist should endorse the second response).

Second objection: In some cases it isn’t going to be entirely clear what the practical interests of those in the context are. In contrast to the cases I’ve discussed so far, real life is complex, and real people have a far wider range of interests and concerns than Saskia and Marie, or the characters in NORMAL and HIGH. This worry might take an

epistemic form, viz. in a particular case how am I to determine the practical interests of an ascriber in order to evaluate the truth or falsity of her 'knowledge' ascription? The worry here is that, on the interests contextualist view, the facts I need in order to evaluate her 'knowledge' ascription - facts about her practical interests - might not be available to me. Further, and perhaps more pressingly, one might worry that, in some cases, an ascriber's practical interests won't just be hard to determine but actually indeterminate, perhaps because she has conflicting interests. The worry here is that, on the interests contextualist view, the facts that are relevant to the assignment of a truth-value to her 'knowledge' ascription - facts about her practical interests - might not even be determinate.

I think that these are hard questions for the interests contextualist. In what follows I pursue the following strategy. I will give some reasons for thinking that the interests contextualist can avoid the second worry, and then I will argue that something much like the first worry is also a problem for some of the interests contextualist's rivals, in particular the sensitive invariantist and the conversational contextualist.

First, it's not clear what would have to be the case for an ascriber's practical interests to actually be indeterminate. Say that I have a bunch of conflicting desires of roughly similar strength: a desire for a drink, a desire to continue my work, a desire to go for a walk, and so on. If I'm trying to decide what to do, it may well be that I have a hard time deciding which of these desires to act on. After all, each of the options has something to be said for it. Sometimes, indeed often, what it would be in my best interests to do isn't entirely clear to me. But that doesn't mean that there isn't one thing that it would be in my best interests to do. It just means that figuring out what that thing is can be difficult. So why think that, because 'knowledge' ascribers might have conflicting interests, their practical interests may be indeterminate? After all, we don't think that my conflicting desires might mean that there isn't a single thing that it would be in my best interests to do. For this reason, I would suggest that the interests contextualist can avoid the second worry.

Second, the epistemic worry isn't just a problem for the interests contextualist. Sensitive invariantists are going to face the same question - the question of how to determine practical interests - given that, on their view, the truth-values of 'knowledge'

ascriptions depend upon features of the subject's context, such as the subject's practical interests (Chapter one (§1.2.3.1)). In a particular case, in which I'm neither the ascriber nor the subject, I'm not going to find it any easier to determine the practical interests of the subject of a 'knowledge' ascription than the practical interests of the ascriber.<sup>14</sup> Further, conversational contextualists are going to face a related, although somewhat different, question (actually, two questions). On the conversational contextualist view, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions depend upon certain features of the conversational context (Chapter one (§1.2.2)). However, conversational contextualists are usually rather vague as to *which* features of the conversational context are relevant. A common move here is to give a list of some of the relevant features. Recall Cohen:

“How precisely do the standards for [epistemic predicates] get determined in a particular context of ascription? This is a very difficult question to answer. But we can say this much. The standards are determined by some complicated function of speaker intentions, listener expectations, presuppositions of the conversation, salience relations, etc., by what David Lewis calls the conversational score” (Cohen 1999, 61).

The conversational contextualist faces two questions: First, can she say anything more about this complicated function? Second, if the function is so complicated, how can I, in a particular case, determine the conversational score in order to evaluate the truth or falsity of a 'knowledge' ascription? The first question has already been brought up (Chapter one (§1.1.2)), and I discuss it further below (§3.1). The second question is just the epistemic worry.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> What about strict invariantists? If strict invariantists accept - and a lot of them seem to (see Chapter one (§2.1)) - that the *assertability*-conditions of 'knowledge' ascriptions depend on features of the ascriber's context such as her practical interests, they will face the question of how to determine the practical interests of a 'knowledge' ascriber in order to determine the assertability (or lack thereof) of her 'knowledge' ascription. Is this less pressing than the interests contextualist's epistemic worry? It's not obvious to me that it is.

<sup>15</sup> Just to be clear: My point isn't that conversational contextualists can't answer these questions. My point is just that conversational contextualists, interests contextualists and sensitive invariantists all face tough questions, and it isn't immediately clear how they should go about answering them.

Third objection: However, CONSPIRACY shows that, as it stands, interests contextualism is inadequate. In CONSPIRACY John, Richard and Melvin consider a rather unlikely error-possibility on which scientists are part of some grand moon-landing conspiracy. Perhaps, given the importance those who believe in them usually attach to conspiracy theories, John, Richard and Melvin's practical interests are such that they actually have a reason to consider the rather unlikely error-possibilities. If that's right, then the interests contextualist has to say that John speaks truly when he denies that Dana 'knows' Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. So interests contextualism doesn't satisfy the second desideratum for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives.

One might wonder why the interests contextualist can't just appeal to a substantive view of our practical interests. The idea would be that, despite the fact that if we attach a great deal of importance to conspiracy theories it may be in our immediate interests to consider certain outlandish error-possibilities, our longer term interests are best served by believing the truth, or something like that. Insisting on alternatives in which the US government conducts elaborate hoaxes for no obvious reason is not a good way of achieving true beliefs. However, I don't think that the interests contextualist can appeal to this substantive view. I agree that, looking at things from a certain perspective, there's something wrong with considering outlandish conspiracy theories. But I don't think that this perspective is available to the interests contextualist. One might want to say that, while John, Richard and Melvin have a *practical* reason to consider outlandish conspiracy theories, they don't have an *epistemic* reason to consider them. Plausibly, epistemic reasons to consider alternatives, unlike practical reasons, must somehow be connected with the aim of believing truly. But interests contextualism is a view about the connection between the relevance of alternatives and practical reasons, not epistemic reasons.<sup>16</sup>

The interests contextualist can deal with the first two objections, but the third objection shows that the view needs to be modified. I'll start with an explanation of why, if contextualism is true, we should expect there to be constraints on the effect of

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<sup>16</sup> I don't pretend to have any particular way of thinking about epistemic reasons to consider alternatives in mind here. The point is just that, even if one could make sense of epistemic reasons to consider alternatives, the interests contextualist can't appeal to them.

conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives. That explanation given, I'll propose a modification of interests contextualism that meets all of the desiderata for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives.

## **2.2. Constraints and Craigian contextualism**

My explanation will draw on Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions. In Chapter one (§2.3) I adverted to the possibility that Craig's account might support a sort of contextualism that I called Craigian contextualism. I'll offer an argument that Craig's account supports Craigian contextualism in Chapter four (§2). Here, I'll just give a preview of that argument, and sketch the sort of view that results. I'll start with a recap of Craig's account.

In Craig's view, 'knowledge' ascriptions serve the function of identifying good informants. The idea is that, in ascribing 'knowledge' that *p* to a subject *S*, I certify or 'tag' *S* as a good informant on the matter of *p*. As we saw earlier, this is motivated by the following considerations. We need information but, because we're limited beings, we can't obtain all of that information ourselves. Consequently, there's a need for a way of keeping track of those who have the information that we need. 'Knowledge' ascriptions are what meet that need. Recall our earlier illustration: Alasdair is a police officer trying to track down a suspect. The pilot of the unit helicopter thinks she has identified the right man, but because Alasdair needs to ensure no mistakes are made he checks that the description matches exactly. Once satisfied, Alasdair says that the pilot 'knows' that the suspect is in such-and-such a location. In doing so, he's tagging the pilot as a good informant as to the suspect's whereabouts.

It has often been claimed that Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions supports a form of contextualism (Chapter one (§2.3); Fricker 2008; Hannon forthcoming). The idea is that, if what I'm doing in ascribing 'knowledge' that *p* to a subject *S* is identifying *S* as a good informant on the matter of *p*, then there will be contextual variation in the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions because what it takes to be a good informant in one context may differ from what it takes to be a good informant in another context. When I'm in a rather pressing practical situation, it's going to take a lot for someone to qualify as a good informant. Putting things in terms of relevant alternatives, someone is going to have to be able to rule out a wide range of

alternatives in order to qualify. However, when I'm in a less pressing situation, it's going to take a lot less for someone to qualify. Again putting things in terms of relevant alternatives, someone is going to have to be able to rule out a narrower range of alternatives to qualify. In our example, the police officer is in an unusually pressing practical situation. He can't risk arresting the wrong man and, in the process, losing the suspect, so he's going to require that the pilot can rule out a wide range of alternatives before he tags her as a good informant. Compare this with a case in which, as part of a training programme, the same pilot has been dispatched to locate a man fitting a certain description. The same police officer might question the pilot and, if satisfied, ascribe 'knowledge' of where that man is to the pilot. In this case, though, he's not in a particularly pressing practical situation so it's not going to take as much for him to tag the pilot as a good informant. He'll require the pilot to be able to rule out a narrower range of alternatives.

On the Craigian picture as I've sketched it so far, it looks like whether a subject qualifies as a good informant depends entirely on the practical situation of the person ascribing (or denying) 'knowledge' to that subject because, for the reasons just given, people will differ in what they require of a good informant. However, Craig emphasises that, often, people will actually *not* differ in what they require of a good informant. This is because we don't tag good informants, or make 'knowledge' ascriptions, in a social vacuum (see Craig 1990, Chapter 10 on 'objectivisation'). Often, when I tag a subject S as a good informant on the matter of p I'm not just identifying S as someone that those in the immediate vicinity can rely on for the information that p, I'm identifying S as someone who the community at large can rely on. This, argues Craig, leads to pressure for each member of a community of 'knowledge' ascribers to require that a subject can rule out a similar, or perhaps even the same, range of alternatives in which not-p when evaluating that subject as an informant on the matter of p, or ascribing 'knowledge' that p to the subject. It will be helpful to think of this in terms of a range of *default* relevant alternatives. The idea is that, for each proposition p, there is a range of alternatives in which not-p that are default relevant.<sup>17</sup> Some have taken this to indicate that the end

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<sup>17</sup> I borrow this way of putting things from Hannon (forthcoming). Can the defender of this Craigian story say anything more about the default relevant alternatives? The idea is



result is something that approximates (but maybe isn't quite) a traditional strict invariantist view, on which the range of alternatives one must be able to rule out in order to count as 'knowing' that *p* doesn't vary from context to context (see Kelp 2011).

However, I think this is a mistake. A prominent contextualist idea - and an idea that I endorse - is that what alternatives are relevant in a context somehow depends on the practical interests and purposes of those in the context (Greco 2009; Hannon forthcoming; Henderson 2009). I take it that, on the Craigian picture just sketched, the relatively stable range of alternatives in which not-*p* that one must be able to rule out to count as 'knowing' that *p* somehow depends on the practical interests and purposes of the *community at large*. We're a community of 'knowledge' ascribers, and the default relevant alternatives will depend upon facts about us, in particular the sorts of practical projects that we engage in. I'm going to call this GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY ('global' because the default relevant alternatives depend on the whole community, 'interest-relative' because the default relevant alternatives depend on the practical interests and purposes of the whole community).

My argument, in a nutshell, is this. Just because the community of which we're all a part generally requires that a subject can rule out a similar, or perhaps even the same, range of alternatives in which not-*p* in order to count as 'knowing' that *p* doesn't mean that, in every case, that subject must be able to rule out that range of alternatives in order to count as 'knowing' that *p*. Instead, in certain cases - cases where our practical situation is unusually pressing - alternatives that are usually irrelevant can be relevant. I'll call this LOCAL (as opposed to GLOBAL) INTEREST-RELATIVITY ('local' because the range of relevant alternatives depends on particular practical situations). The cases that I take to support this are just the sorts of cases that provide part of the motivation for contextualism (i.e. NORMAL and HIGH, or PUB and POLICE STATION). What cases like

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that, for each proposition *p*, a community of 'knowledge' ascribers will converge on a relatively stable range of alternatives in which not-*p* that are relevant. It's important to note that someone who defends this part of the Craigian story doesn't have to specify how wide the range of default relevant alternatives is. After all, strict invariantists might think that, for each proposition *p*, a stable range of alternatives in which not-*p* are relevant, but she doesn't need to specify how wide the range is. The Craigian story is a story about how the range came about - through social pressures - not about how wide it is.

HIGH - that is, cases where 'knowledge' ascribers are in unusually pressing practical situations - show is that, sometimes, alternatives that are usually irrelevant can be relevant. While in our community we don't generally require that a subject can rule out alternatives in which the bank has changed its opening hours in order to credit that subject with 'knowing' that the bank will be open on Saturday - those alternatives aren't default relevant - such alternatives can be relevant in cases where 'knowledge' ascribers are in unusually pressing practical situations.

I take the above to support a sort of contextualism consisting of two theses:

- i. The truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are context-sensitive. For convenience, we can understand this in terms of contextually varying ranges of relevant alternatives.
- ii. The alternatives that are relevant in a context C are the alternatives that are appropriate given the practical situation of those in C. Often, the alternatives that are appropriate given the practical situation of those in C will just be the default relevant alternatives. However, when those in C are in an unusually pressing practical situation, a wider range of alternatives will be appropriate.

I'll call the combination of these theses *Craigian contextualism*. I want to note two things about Craigian contextualism.

First, what I'm calling Craigian contextualism is really just a template. To get a concrete view, something has to be said about what makes an alternative appropriate in a particular practical situation. In the next sub-section I'll argue that, suitably modified, interests contextualism gives us a good way of understanding what makes an alternative appropriate in a particular practical situation (§2.3).

Second, the Craigian contextualist not only says something about the nature of the constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics, she can also explain why there are constraints in the first place. The Craigian contextualist holds that there is contextual variation in the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions, but that variation is rather limited for two reasons. First, in a lot of contexts the alternatives that are appropriate will just be the default relevant ones. Second, contextual variation will be

tied to changes in the practical situation of 'knowledge' ascribers, not to the making salient of error-possibilities, and conversational kinematics more generally. The Craigian contextualist explains both reasons by reference to the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions. So, on the Craigian contextualist view, the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions don't, to borrow a (borrowed) phrase, "swing freely with whatever moves happen to be made in language games" (Henderson 2009, 126). The view is one on which contextual variation is actually rather limited, and is tied to shifts in the practical situation of 'knowledge' ascribers. For any proposition *p*, certain alternatives in which not-*p* are always relevant - the default relevant ones - but, when 'knowledge' ascribers are in unusually pressing practical situations, certain other alternatives may become relevant.

### **2.3. Interests contextualism: a second pass**

On the Craigian story just sketched, 'knowledge' ascribers are required to consider certain alternatives - the default relevant ones - just in virtue of being members of an epistemic community. The idea was that, if I'm a member of a community in which someone must be able to rule out a certain range of alternatives in which not-*p* in order to count as 'knowing' that *p*, then I'm required to consider those alternatives when ascribing 'knowledge' that *p* to a subject. We can say, then, that 'knowledge' ascribers have reasons to consider default relevant alternatives in virtue of being members of epistemic communities. Further, on the version of interests contextualism that I discussed above, 'knowledge' ascribers have reasons to consider certain alternatives in virtue of their practical interests. The idea was that an alternative is relevant in a context iff those in the context have a reason, in the objective practical sense, to consider it. As we saw, the problem with this version of the view was that 'knowledge' ascribers might have reasons, in the objective practical sense, to consider alternatives that, intuitively, aren't relevant (for example, the reason John, Richard and Melvin have to consider moon landing conspiracy theories in CONSPIRACY).

A modified version of interests contextualism results from combining these two different ways of thinking about reasons to consider alternatives. The Craigian contextualist says that an alternative is relevant in a context *C* iff it's appropriate given the practical situation of those in *C*. I want to propose that we can understand the appropriateness of an alternative in terms of those in the context having a reason to

consider it. As above, there are two sorts of reasons those in the context might have to consider an alternative. 'Knowledge' ascribers have reasons to consider alternatives just in virtue of being a member of an epistemic community. But, when 'knowledge' ascribers are in unusually pressing practical situations, they will also have reasons to consider alternatives in virtue of their practical interests. These sorts of reasons will be objective practical reasons. This gives us a modified version of interests contextualism consisting of two theses:

- i. The truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions are context-sensitive. For convenience, we can understand this in terms of contextually varying ranges of relevant alternatives.
- ii. An alternative is relevant in a context C iff those in the context have a reason to consider it. Those in the context will always have reasons to consider alternatives in virtue of being members of a certain epistemic community. However, when those in the context are in an unusually pressing practical situation, they will have reasons to consider alternatives in virtue of their practical interests. These will be objective practical reasons.

As I'll now argue, this version of the view satisfies all of the desiderata for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives.

First, it deals with the paradigm cases. In *NORMAL* Hannah and Sarah haven't got a reason to consider the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours (it's not default relevant, and they aren't in an unusually pressing practical situation) so Hannah speaks truly; in *HIGH* Hannah and Sarah have got a reason to consider that alternative (it's not default relevant, but they are in an unusually pressing practical situation) so Hannah speaks truly here too. Second, it avoids crazy results. In *CONSPIRACY* John, Richard and Melvin haven't got a reason to consider moon landing conspiracy theories because such alternatives aren't default relevant and, even though they have got an objective practical reason to consider the alternative, they aren't in an unusually pressing practical situation. Third, it says what the constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives are, and it explains why we have them. As I put it above, these constraints are normative. There are normative elements - facts about what alternatives those in the context have reason to consider - of the

conversational score. We have these constraints because of the function played by 'knowledge ascriptions'. Fourth, it gives simple and informative answers to the three questions identified above, viz.

1. What are the features of context that determine the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions?

Answer: Facts about what alternatives those in the context have reason to consider, where having a reason to consider an alternative is either cashed out in terms of belonging to an epistemic community, or objective practical reasons.

2. What are the mechanisms by which context shifts - expansions/contractions of the range of relevant alternatives, or upward/downward shifts in the epistemic standards - occur?

Answer: A relatively stable range of alternatives is always relevant (the default relevant alternatives). But, when ascribers are in unusually pressing practical situations, the range of relevant alternatives expands.

3. It's perhaps not that hard to see how the range of relevant alternatives might expand, or the epistemic standards rise. But how does the range contract, or the standard fall?

Answer: Both expansions and contractions in the range of relevant alternatives occur when the practical situation of those in the context changes. There is no reason why there should be a special mystery about how the set contracts.

### **3. Why not conversational contextualism?**

Interests contextualism is a plausible view that satisfies all four of our desiderata for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives. But why should we prefer interests contextualism to other versions of contextualism and, in particular, conversational contextualism? First, I'll argue that conversational contextualists have problems satisfying all of the desiderata (§3.1). Second, I'll argue that, unlike

conversational contextualists, interests contextualists can deal with the epistemic descent objection (§3.2). I conclude that interests contextualism is preferable to conversational contextualism.

### **3.1. Conversational contextualism and the desiderata**

Have I been too quick in dismissing contextualist views that appeal to the roles played by salience relations and conversational kinematics (i.e. conversational contextualism)? While it's common to distinguish views on which the alternatives that are taken seriously in a context play the central role in determining what alternatives are relevant from views on which the practical situation of those in the context plays the central role ('salience views' vs. 'stakes views') people who defend the former sort of view readily accept that salience relations can't be the whole story. The basic idea is that specifying the features of context that determine the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions is a difficult task, and while contextualists can pick out features that are particularly important - like salience relations - we shouldn't expect there to be an exhaustive list of the relevant features (§2.1; Cohen 1999; DeRose 2009; Ichikawa 2011). If this is along the right lines, that there are constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives isn't surprising. There are a number of features of the conversational context that determine the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions, and some of these features might provide constraints on conversational kinematics. It will be useful to have a name for this general line of thought so I'll call it 'pluralism'.

I must admit that it's not entirely clear to me what pluralism amounts to. Is the thought just that, because there are a number of potentially relevant features of context, there might be features such that, in CONSPIRACY, moon landing conspiracy theory scenarios aren't relevant? If so, it's clear that pluralism doesn't do at all well with respect to the third and fourth desiderata. On the third desideratum: The possibility that there might be features of context such that they put constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions doesn't even tell us what the constraints are, never mind why we have them. On the fourth: If the pluralist isn't able to say what exactly the features are, she isn't going to be able to give simple and informative answers to the three questions discussed above (§1.4; §2.3). Clearly, then, pluralism must amount to more than the mere claim that there are a number of features of context that determine the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions.

As far as I'm aware, the only real attempt to specify all of the relevant features of context is that of David Lewis. Lewis provides a number of rules governing the relevance of alternatives, some of which - for example, the rule of actuality (the rule that the alternative that actually obtains is always relevant) - can be considered as constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives (whether those in the context consider the actually obtaining alternative or not, it's still relevant; see Lewis 1996, 554-560). While there are no doubt problems with Lewis's particular rules, it will be useful to take his view as an example of the sort of approach that the pluralist must take. In explaining why I think the interests contextualist does better with respect to the desiderata than Lewis, I'll hopefully demonstrate the challenges that the pluralist will face in dealing with the desiderata.

Aside: Note that, as it stands, Lewis's view has problems with CONSPIRACY. The problem is Lewis's rule of attention, on which any alternative that those in the context attend to is automatically relevant (see Lewis 1996, 559-60). It seems that, no matter how one understands attending to an alternative, John, Richard and Melvin attend to conspiracy theory scenarios in CONSPIRACY. However, I'm sure that, with sufficient ingenuity, one could 'patch up' Lewis's view to deal with that sort of case, or indeed other problematic cases. The advantages that I want to claim for interests contextualism concern the third and fourth desiderata.<sup>18</sup>

The fourth desideratum for a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives is that it should provide simple and informative answers to a number of questions. The interests contextualist does well on simplicity because, on her view, the relevance of an alternative is just understood in terms of the reasons that 'knowledge' ascribers have to consider alternatives. As I illustrated above, this framework gives us simple answers to the relevant questions (§2.3). The interests contextualist also does well on informativeness because the notion that she appeals to - reasons to consider alternatives

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<sup>18</sup> Blome-Tillmann (2009a) argues that we should replace Lewis's rule of attention with what he calls the 'rule of presupposition', on which (roughly) an alternative is relevant if its negation isn't part of the conversational common ground (in the sense of Stalnaker 1974). While Blome-Tillmann's proposal has a lot to recommend it, it doesn't help with CONSPIRACY because, no matter how the common ground is understood, the negations of conspiracy theory scenarios won't be in it in this case.

- can be elucidated, along the lines pursued above (§2.1; §2.3). Compare this with Lewis's list of rules governing the relevance of alternatives. In order to deal with problematic data - for example, cases like CONSPIRACY - new rules will need to be added, and the end result will be a complex, unwieldy and entirely ad hoc list. In contrast, the interests contextualist gets by with just a single rule. Further, Lewis's existing rules make use of notions, such as attending to an alternative, or an alternative saliently resembling actuality, that aren't clear, and haven't been elucidated.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the interests contextualist makes use of a notion - having a reason to consider an alternative - that can be elucidated. Relatedly (and this is relevant to the charge of ad-hocery) Lewis doesn't offer any sort of explanation *why* these are the rules governing the relevance of alternatives. As I argued above, a contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives should at least say something about the nature of the constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives (the third desideratum). What are the constraints? Why do we have them? (§1.3) Because the interests contextualist endorses the Craigian story told above (§2.2), she can answer these questions, whereas it's not clear whether a defender of Lewis's version of contextualism can.

The moral I want to take from this is that any attempt to make good on the pluralist's claim that there are a number of features of context that determine the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions will face a number of challenges. First, can the pluralist avoid appealing to a very large number of rules governing the relevance of alternatives? Second, can she avoid ad hoc appeals to rules in order to deal with tough cases like CONSPIRACY? Third, can she appeal to rules that make use of notions that are clear, or can at least be elucidated? Fourth, can she explain why we have these rules? As I've argued, the interests contextualist can meet all of these challenges. Whether the pluralist can is an open question.

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<sup>19</sup> Another of Lewis's rules - the rule of resemblance - has it that any alternative that saliently resembles actuality is relevant (see Lewis 1996, 556-8).



### 3.1.1. Uncooperative participants

I'd like to briefly highlight a related problem for conversational contextualists.<sup>20</sup> Consider the following case, which is an example of a conversation involving what I'll call an *uncooperative participant*:

- (1) George: Have you read the latest issue of the New Scientist? There's some really good evidence for climate change in there. That should really answer the skeptics.  
Melanie: Why should I read it? You do know the whole thing is a conspiracy, right?  
George: Don't be ridiculous. Scientists know climate change is happening. I know climate change is happening.  
Melanie: I'm not reading it. It's all lies anyway.

I think it's quite clear that contextualists shouldn't say that George speaks falsely in ascribing 'knowledge' both to himself and others here. Uncooperative participants can't affect the truth-values of our 'knowledge' ascriptions. However, it isn't clear how conversational contextualists can deal with this. If, as the conversational contextualist holds, the conversational score determines the epistemic standards, how can Melanie's attempts to change the score by raising the standards not affect the score? The conversational contextualist seems to have three options here, but none of them look at all promising. First, she could say that Melanie's attempt to raise the standards fails, so George speaks truly in ascribing 'knowledge' both to himself and others. Second, she could say that because George and Melanie disagree as to what the standards should be George doesn't speak truly or falsely.<sup>21</sup> Third, she could say that Melanie's attempt to raise the standards succeeds, so George speaks falsely. I think the third option is obviously a non-starter, but why are the first and second so unappealing?

If the conversational contextualist takes the first option, she has to explain what the difference between this sort of case - one involving an uncooperative participant - and the sort of case where *philosophical* (as opposed to climate change) sceptics raise brain in

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<sup>20</sup> For a similar problem see Montminy (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> DeRose (2009, Chapter four) takes this line. However, as we saw in Chapter two (§2.3) there are (independent) grounds for rejecting a view that posits truth-value gaps. My point here is that, even if the gap-view could be made to work, it wouldn't help with the problem at hand.

vat-style error possibilities is. As we've seen, prominent conversational contextualists such as DeRose want to allow that, at least in some cases, when one is in conversation with a philosophical sceptic one can't truly ascribe 'knowledge' of everyday empirical propositions, either to oneself or others (Chapter one (§2.2)). If that's right, then there have to be cases in which philosophical sceptics succeed in changing the conversational score. So, if she takes this option, the onus is on the conversational contextualist to explain why philosophical sceptics can succeed in changing the score whereas an uncooperative participant such as Melanie can't. If the conversational contextualist takes the second option, she can't say that George speaks truly in ascribing 'knowledge'. True, on the second option he doesn't speak *falsely*, but I take it that this option isn't much less palatable than the third. Consequently, I conclude that the first and second options aren't much less unappealing than the third.

Another advantage of interests contextualism over conversational contextualism is that the interests contextualist has no problem with cases involving uncooperative participants. George doesn't have a reason to consider the alternative that all of the evidence for climate change is part of a conspiracy because that alternative isn't default relevant, and he isn't in an unusually pressing practical situation. And because for the interests contextualist Melanie raising that alternative doesn't affect what alternatives George has a reason to consider, he speaks truly in ascribing 'knowledge' to himself and others.

### **3.2. Epistemic ascent and descent**

Consider a different pair of cases (see Cohen 1999). Ted and Dougal are waiting for a flight to Toronto. They want to find out whether it has a stopover in Heathrow. Larry overhears the conversation and tells them that the flight itinerary says that it does. Assume that the flight does have a stopover. Ted says 'Great, Larry knows that the flight has a stopover.' Call this NORMAL\*. Suppose that Dougal says 'Hold on, we really have to meet Jack there, maybe the itinerary is inaccurate.' In response, Ted says 'You're right. Larry doesn't know that the flight has a stopover.' This, on some versions of contextualism, will lead to an expansion in the range of relevant alternatives (or, an upward shift in epistemic standards). Call this HIGH\*. Let's assume that contextualists can explain both how the range of relevant alternatives expands (or, how

the epistemic standards rise) ('epistemic ascent') and how the range can, at a later point, contract (or, how, at a later point, the epistemic standards can fall) ('epistemic descent').

Recall Pritchard's objection (Chapter one (§3.3.2)): Even if contextualists can explain how epistemic descent works such that, at some later point, Ted could *truthfully* say that Larry 'knows' that the flight has a stopover, that doesn't mean that Ted could *properly* say that Larry 'knows'. Why? 'Knowledge' ascriptions conversationally implicate that the subject of the 'knowledge' ascription is an authority on the matter that the subject is said to 'know' about whereas 'knowledge' denials conversationally implicate that the subject isn't an authority on that matter. So consider the implicatures generated by Ted's various assertions. In NORMAL\* Ted implicates that Larry is an authority on the matter of whether the flight has a stopover. In HIGH\* Ted reverses this implicature and implicates that Larry is actually not an authority on this matter. If, at some later point, Ted were to say that Larry 'knows' he would implicate that Larry is an authority on the same matter after all. At this point, because Ted is generating contradictory conversational implicatures, he is unable to properly assert that Larry 'knows'.

As Pritchard notes, this objection to contextualism isn't meant to be decisive (Pritchard 2001, 341). There are two avenues of escape. First, the contextualist could just accept that Ted couldn't properly assert that Larry 'knows' at this later point. Second, the contextualist could deny that Ted couldn't properly assert that Larry 'knows' at this later point. Taking the first option would mean accepting that once an ascriber has reversed an ascription of 'knowledge' to a subject based upon certain evidence then that ascriber could not then properly re-ascribe 'knowledge' to that subject based on that evidence. But consider what you could call 'the basic contextualist idea'. The basic contextualist idea is that in some contexts a relatively restricted range of alternatives are relevant, and so a large number of 'knowledge' ascriptions are true, whereas in other contexts a far wider range of alternatives are relevant, and so a large number of, if not all, 'knowledge' ascriptions are false. Taking the first option would mean holding that, once the range of alternatives that have to be ruled out in order for a subject to 'know' a certain proposition has expanded, then the range that has to be ruled out for the same subject to properly be said to 'know' the same proposition on the same evidence can never contract. The problem with taking this option is the sceptical consequence. The sceptic isn't totally triumphant (the sceptical consequence concerns what can be properly

asserted, not what is true) but she comes close enough. Taking the second option would mean accepting that, even though Ted is generating contradictory implicatures, that is no obstacle to him making a proper assertion. The problem with taking this option is that this sounds implausible.

Here's what the interests contextualist can say in response. Pritchard exploits a volatile contextualist depiction of our epistemic discourse in which a shift in the range of relevant alternatives can occur at any time in any conversational context. This seems to be the way that the conversational contextualist depicts our epistemic discourse, but it isn't the way that the interests contextualist depicts it. For the interests contextualist, there's no shift in the range of relevant alternatives between NORMAL\* and HIGH\*. Given Ted and Dougal's practical interest in ensuring that they meet Jack, the possibility that the itinerary is inaccurate is one that Ted has a reason to consider in both NORMAL\* and HIGH\*. So Ted's 'knowledge' ascription in NORMAL\* is false, and his 'knowledge' denial in HIGH\* is true. Of course, our practical interests do change over time, so just because we haven't got a reason to consider an alternative in one context doesn't mean we won't have a reason to consider it in some other context. Consider a modified airport scenario:

NORMAL-VARIANT\*: Ted and Dougal are waiting for a flight to Toronto and idly wondering how long it will take. They want to find out whether it has a stopover in Heathrow. Larry overhears the conversation and tells them that the flight itinerary says that it does. Ted says 'Great, Larry knows that the flight has a stopover.'

HIGH-VARIANT\*: On another occasion, Ted and Dougal are waiting for a flight to Toronto. They need to stopover in Heathrow because it is imperative that they meet Jack there. Larry overhears the conversation and tells them that the flight itinerary says it does. Ted asserts 'We have to be sure we meet Jack. Larry doesn't know that the flight has a stopover.'

Again, assume that the flight has a stopover on both occasions. We have specified that there is a change in Ted and Dougal's practical interests between NORMAL-VARIANT\* and HIGH-VARIANT\*, so Ted speaks truly in both cases. Say that, on some future occasion, Ted and Dougal are waiting for a flight to Toronto and idly wondering how long it will take. Larry has again seen the itinerary and tells them that it is a stopover in

Heathrow. It looks like Ted can't properly assert that Larry 'knows' because doing so would generate contradictory implicatures. The two options above remain. Should the interests contextualist accept that Ted couldn't properly say that Larry 'knows' or deny that Ted cannot properly say that Larry 'knows'?

Here's what I think the interests contextualist should say. The first point is that the interests contextualist has reduced the damage. Both options are non-starters if epistemic ascent and descent can happen at any time in any conversational context, in the way that conversational contextualism predicts. Let's imagine Ted is a frequent flyer and on some occasions he ascribes 'knowledge' that flights have stopovers to various subjects based upon them having seen the itinerary whereas on other occasions he denies subjects 'knowledge' where those subjects have the same evidence. If, as in the case of Ted the frequent flyer, an ascriber's interests are such that they regularly say that some subject 'knows' that proposition *p* in some contexts and doesn't 'know' that *p* in other contexts (without there being any difference in that subject's evidence or epistemic position with respect to *p* between these contexts) then she perhaps can't properly say that that subject 'knows' that *p*. But I would argue that most people don't have interests and purposes that are like Ted's. So, in response to Pritchard's objection, the interests contextualist can say that, while in certain cases - such as Ted the frequent flyer - an ascriber perhaps cannot properly make a 'knowledge' ascription that she regularly reverses, these will be isolated cases. But - and this is the important point - because the cases will be isolated, the consequences won't be overly sceptical.

### **3.3. Summing up**

A contextualist account of the relevance of alternatives should satisfy four desiderata (§1). First, it should deal with the paradigm cases like NORMAL and HIGH (§1.1). Second, it should avoid giving counter-intuitive results in cases like CONSPIRACY (§1.2). Third, I've argued that cases like CONSPIRACY show that there are constraints on the effect of conversational kinematics on the relevance of alternatives. A contextualist account should say something about the nature of these constraints (§1.3). Fourth, it should give simple and informative answers to certain questions (§1.4). I argued that there's a version of contextualism - interests contextualism - that satisfies all four desiderata (§2). However, conversational contextualism has problems satisfying the desiderata, and, unlike interests contextualism, it can't deal with the epistemic descent

objection (§3). Consequently, I conclude that interests contextualism is preferable to conversational contextualism. The default assumption has often been that contextualists think that conversational kinematics and salience relations are an important part of the explanation of how the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are determined by context. On the interests contextualist view, this assumption is mistaken. For the interests contextualist, the features of context relevant to determining the truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are not facts about what alternatives those in the context consider or take seriously. They are facts about what alternatives those in the context have a reason to consider.

This, of course, is not to say that we have reason to adopt interests contextualism over all of its rivals. Perhaps some other - non-contextualist - rival is preferable. My aim in the rest of this chapter is to provide some reason for thinking that interests contextualism is preferable to sensitive invariantism.

#### **4. Contextualism, sensitive invariantism and Stanley’s cases**

I’ll start by quickly recapping the dialectical situation: what sort of view about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions do cases like NORMAL and HIGH, or PUB and POLICE STATION, seem to support (§4.1)? I’ll then introduce the range of cases discussed in Stanley (2005a) (§4.2). Stanley argues that, taken together, these cases support his favoured variety of sensitive invariantism. However, as I’ll argue, these cases actually provide better evidence for interests contextualism than sensitive invariantism, or conversational contextualism (§4.3). I’ll finish by explaining why I take this to provide some reason for preferring interests contextualism to sensitive invariantism (§4.4).

##### **4.1. CSAs: a reminder**

Recall the upshot of my discussion of CSAs in Chapter one (§2.1): There is some reason to think that, generally speaking, our intuitions about the appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials depend on the context. Cases like PUB and POLICE STATION, or NORMAL and HIGH, are just instances of this more general phenomenon, and contextualists provide a nice, simple explanation of the general phenomenon. But, quite clearly, views other than contextualism can explain both these cases, and perhaps the more general phenomenon. First, there are other so-called ‘shifty’ views - in particular, relativism. However, as I’ve argued, contextualism is preferable to relativism just

because it's less revisionary (Chapter two (§2)). Second, there are more traditional invariantist views. Strict invariantists explain the general phenomenon as a matter for pragmatics, whereas sensitive invariantists think that whether a subject knows can depend not just on the usual truth-conducive factors but also on features of the subject's context, such as her practical interests. So why prefer the contextualist explanation of the general phenomenon to some sort of invariantist explanation? As I argued, we should prefer the contextualist explanation if (and only if) it's the *best* explanation of the general phenomenon (Chapter one (§2.1)). I've already put forward part of my argument that the contextualist explanation is the best explanation: contextualists (and particularly interests contextualists) can avoid a number of common objections that have been taken to provide reason to reject contextualism (Chapter two; §3.2). But I also need a positive case for contextualism, and interests contextualism in particular. My aim in this section is to start building one. I'm going to argue that, while contextualists and sensitive invariantists can perhaps offer equally good explanations of some cases (NORMAL, HIGH), sensitive invariantists have problems dealing with certain other cases. I'll list a range of cases (§4.2), and then identify which cases sensitive invariantists have problems with (§4.3).

Here I'm primarily concerned with the version of sensitive invariantism defended in Stanley (2005a). On that view - which Stanley calls *interest-relative invariantism* (IRI for short) - putting things roughly, whether a subject knows depends upon her practical situation. When the subject is in a high stakes situation we can say that the epistemic standards are high, and she doesn't know very much, if anything. When the subject is in a low stakes situation we can say that the epistemic standards are low, and she knows quite a lot. Three things I'd like to emphasise from the outset: First, while the view defended in Stanley (2005a) is rather more sophisticated, the details won't matter in what follows. Second, what I have to say here about Stanley's IRI will also go for a number of other prominent versions of sensitive invariantism in the literature, in particular the versions defended in Fantl & McGrath (2009) and Hawthorne (2004). Third, nothing I say in this chapter is going to show that interests contextualism is preferable to strict invariantism. I'll leave that part of my positive case until Chapter four (§2).

## 4.2. The cases

Because the main target here is Stanley (2005a), I'm going to work with the range of cases he discusses. For ease of reference call these 'Stanley's cases'. It will be helpful in what follows to have the details of Stanley's cases to hand (I've included recaps of NORMAL and HIGH):

NORMAL: Hannah and Sarah are passing the bank as they head home on Friday. They have a cheque to deposit, but it's not vitally important that they do so. Because the queue is so long, and it's not that important that they cash the cheque, Hannah says, 'I know the bank will be open tomorrow. I was there two weeks ago.'

HIGH: Hannah and Sarah are passing the bank on Friday. They have a cheque to deposit, and it's vitally important that they do so. Hannah notes that she was at the bank two weeks before on a Saturday morning, and it was open. But, as Sarah points out, banks do change their hours. Hannah says, 'I guess you're right. I don't know that the bank will be open tomorrow.'

IGNORANT HIGH: Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit a cheque. Since they have an impending bill, and very little in their account, it's very important that they deposit their cheque by Saturday. But neither Hannah nor Sarah is aware of the impending bill, nor of the paucity of available funds. Looking at the lines, Hannah says to Sarah, 'I know the bank will be open tomorrow, since I was there just two weeks ago on Saturday morning. So we can deposit our cheque tomorrow morning.'

HIGH ASCRIBER–NORMAL SUBJECT: Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit a cheque. Since they have an impending bill, and very little in their account, it's very important that they deposit their cheque by Saturday. Hannah calls up Bill on her cell phone, and asks Bill whether the bank will be open on Saturday. Bill replies by telling Hannah, 'Well, I was there two weeks ago on a Saturday, and it was open.' After reporting the discussion to Sarah, Hannah concludes that, since banks do occasionally change their hours, 'Bill doesn't really know that the bank will be open on Saturday'



NORMAL ASCRIBER–HIGH SUBJECT: Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit a cheque. Since they have an impending bill, and very little in their account, it's very important that they deposit their cheque by Saturday. Two weeks earlier, on a Saturday, Hannah went to the bank, where Jill saw her. Sarah points out to Hannah that banks do change their hours, and Hannah responds, 'That's a good point. I guess I don't really know that the bank will be open on Saturday.' Coincidentally, Jill is thinking of going to the bank on Saturday, just for fun, to see if she meets Hannah there. Nothing is at stake for Jill, and she knows nothing of Hannah's situation. Wondering whether Hannah will be there, Jill utters to a friend, 'Well, Hannah was at the bank two weeks ago on a Saturday. So she knows the bank will be open on Saturday'.<sup>22</sup>

Here are my intuitions about these cases, and I take it that they will be widely shared. In NORMAL Hannah's 'knowledge' self-ascription is true, in HIGH Hannah's self-denial is true, in IGNORANT HIGH Hannah's self-ascription is false and in HIGH ASCRIBER-NORMAL SUBJECT Hannah's 'knowledge' denial to Bill is true. I'm not alone here. Stanley takes it as read that we have this set of intuitions (Stanley 2005a, 5).<sup>23</sup> (What about NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT? Stanley claims that Jill's 'knowledge' ascription to Hannah is false but, as we'll see in §4.3.3, I'm not so sure about that).

### 4.3. Projection and the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions

I'm going to argue for three claims. First, unlike conversational contextualism, interests contextualism and IRI can accommodate our intuitions about IGNORANT HIGH. Second, unlike both conversational and interests contextualism, IRI has problems accommodating our intuitions about HIGH ASCRIBER-NORMAL SUBJECT. Third, conversational contextualism, interests contextualism and IRI can all accommodate our intuitions about NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT. Taken together, these three claims

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<sup>22</sup> Because of the dialectical strategy I've taken these cases more-or-less word for word from Stanley (2005a). Assume that the bank is open on Saturdays in all of the cases.

<sup>23</sup> Should we take this set of intuitions as read? What I said earlier about the role of appeals to intuitions about these sorts of cases - roughly, that there is some empirical evidence, but it isn't conclusive so we shouldn't put too much weight on arguments from such intuitions (CSAs) - applies here as well. It's worth noting that Sripada & Stanley (forthcoming) argue that there is evidence that the 'folk' have the set of intuitions I'm assuming here.

establish that interests contextualism does a better job of accommodating our intuitions about Stanley's cases than IRI or conversational contextualism.

#### **4.3.1. IGNORANT HIGH**

(A reminder: Hannah and Sarah have a bill due, and very little in their account. Neither Hannah nor Sarah is aware of the bill, or their perilous financial situation. Based on her memory of it being open on a recent Saturday, Hannah says that she 'knows' the bank will be open on Saturday. Intuitively, Hannah speaks falsely). Stanley (2005a, 25) argues that IRI, unlike contextualism, can accommodate our intuitions about this case. In IGNORANT HIGH, Hannah and Sarah are in a high stakes situation, even though they're not aware of it. The defender of IRI says that the epistemic standards are high, which makes Hannah's knowledge self-ascription false, so IRI accommodates our intuitions. In contrast, conversational contextualists will have to say that Hannah speaks truly. However the conversational score is supposed to determine the epistemic standards operative in Hannah and Sarah's context (or, alternatively, the set of relevant alternatives), the epistemic standards will be such that Hannah speaks truly. The alternative on which the bank has changed its opening hours isn't discussed by Hannah or Sarah, or otherwise taken seriously. The conversational contextualist can't deal with IGNORANT HIGH because, on her view, an alternative that those in the context should be considering need not be relevant (Hannah and Sarah should be considering the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours but, for whatever reason, they aren't).

However, the interests contextualist can accommodate our intuitions about IGNORANT HIGH. For the interests contextualist, an alternative is relevant in a context iff those in the context have a reason to consider it, where 'knowledge' ascribers have reasons to consider alternatives both in virtue of being members of epistemic communities and, when they are in unusually pressing practical situations, in virtue of being in those unusually pressing practical situations. In IGNORANT HIGH Hannah and Sarah are trying to decide whether to stop at the bank and, even though they're not aware of it, it's vitally important that they do so before Saturday. That means that they have a reason to consider the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours in virtue of being in an unusually pressing practical situation, so that alternative is relevant. So Hannah speaks falsely, assuming that her evidence doesn't rule out the alternative that the bank

has changed its opening hours. The interests contextualist can deal with IGNORANT HIGH because, on her view, an alternative is relevant iff those in the context have a reason to consider it, whether they actually consider it or not.

#### 4.3.2. HIGH ASCRIBER-NORMAL SUBJECT

(A reminder: Hannah and Sarah have a bill due, and very little in their account. Bill tells Hannah that he remembers being in the bank on a recent Saturday, so it will be open this Saturday. Hannah says that, since banks do change their opening hours, Bill doesn't 'know' that it will be open this Saturday. Intuitively, Hannah speaks truly). The usual story is that IRI, unlike contextualism, has problems with these sorts of cases. The contextualist can say that the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours is relevant, whether because Hannah and Sarah consider it, or otherwise take it seriously (conversational contextualism) or because, given their practical situation, they have a reason to consider it (interests contextualism). But, *prima facie*, IRI cannot accommodate our intuitions. Bill isn't in a high stakes situation, which means that the epistemic standards aren't high, so Hannah's denial that Bill knows is false.

In response, the defender of IRI needs to explain why our intuitions about HIGH ASCRIBER-NORMAL SUBJECT are mistaken. In what follows I'll focus on Stanley's explanation.<sup>24</sup> We need a general account of what goes on in cases where we have an ascriber in a high stakes context - call her High - and a subject in a low stakes context - call her Low - and High denies that Low knows that p. Stanley argues that the reason why we have mistaken intuitions about these cases is that ascribers tend to *project* their epistemic standards onto the subject. We have this tendency, says Stanley, because of what we're doing when we inquire into whether a subject knows, for example, if a certain bank is open on Saturdays. Generally, when inquiring into whether a subject knows that p we are using that subject as a source of information. So what we want to establish is whether, if the subject had our interests, that subject would know that p. As a consequence, we project our epistemic standards onto the subject and evaluate whether her evidence suffices for knowledge by our, rather than the subject's, epistemic standards. This explains why High denies that Low knows that p. High projects her

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<sup>24</sup> See Stanley (2005a, Chapter 5).

epistemic standards onto Low, and Low doesn't meet those standards, even though she meets her own standards. In what follows I'll call this the *projectivist strategy*.

The projectivist strategy has it that we *mistakenly* project our epistemic standards whereas the contextualist has it that we *correctly* project our standards. It might look like there's a stalemate here: on what grounds do we decide whether the projection of epistemic standards is mistaken or not? In what follows I'm going to argue that there are good reasons for thinking that the contextualist is better off here.

First, it's plausible that there should be a defeasible default assumption to the effect that, when speakers choose to apply a particular epistemic standard, they aren't mistaken in doing so. This default assumption can, of course, be defeated by a whole host of considerations. For example, if the way speakers apply some standard is incoherent then they must be making some sort of mistake. If this is correct, Stanley needs to give us a reason why the projection of epistemic standards is mistaken. In contrast, in the absence of a reason to think the projection is mistaken, the contextualist doesn't have to give a reason to think we project correctly.

I think this is right, but it doesn't go very far. The default assumption in question is, presumably, highly defeasible. In particular, if it were the case that contextualism were worse off than interest-relative invariantism in certain other respects, then that would give us good reason to reject the default assumption. This, I take it, is something that the defender of the projectivist strategy - in particular, Stanley - takes himself to have argued for (see, for instance, the various objections to contextualism discussed in Chapter two).

Second, the projectivist strategy is a sort of error-theory, so the defender of the strategy has to say something about why the error in question arises and, in particular, whether the error is a result of some more general tendency. Ideally, an error-theoretic explanation will appeal to a general tendency speakers have to go wrong that not only explains the error in question but much more besides. I think the following passage from DeRose makes this point nicely:

“While the projectivist account Stanley suggests is *possible*, he provides, and I can see, little reason to actually accept it. Stanley does not explain how misleading tendencies of

overprojection that we might display elsewhere can be applied to the case at hand to promote the thought that our tendency to deny that subjects ‘know’ when we are in such situations is a mistake” (DeRose’s emphasis) (DeRose 2009, 235).

I also think this is right, but it has more of the look of a challenge than an objection, and I’m not sure it’s a challenge that will be all that hard to meet. What I said in response to the first point seems to apply here as well. If, as Stanley argues, contextualism is worse off than interest-relative invariantism in other respects, that would give us a reason to accept the projectivist strategy.

The real problem with the projectivist strategy is that there are good reasons for thinking that the feature of our epistemological practice that it appeals to - that, in evaluating whether a subject ‘knows’ that *p*, we’re evaluating that subject as a source of information - reveals something important about the social role or function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions.<sup>25</sup> As we’ve seen, it’s plausible that one of the social roles or functions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is to, as it’s sometimes put, ‘tag’ good informants (Chapter one (§2.3); Chapter two (§2; §2.3)).<sup>26</sup> When you or I ascribe ‘knowledge’ that *p* to a subject *S* we, in effect, recommend *S* as an authority on the matter of *p*. We’ve already seen why one might think that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions play this social role, so I won’t recap that here. The point is just that if the feature of our epistemological practice that Stanley appeals to reveals something important about the social role of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, then the defender of the projectivist strategy has to say that the social role of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions involves some sort of error or mistake. This, I think, is a real cost for anyone who wants to adopt the projectivist strategy.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Henderson (2009, 123-5) for a similar objection.

<sup>26</sup> Note that all I need here is that *a* social role of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is to tag good sources of information. I don’t need this to be *the* social role of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. The sorts of considerations I’ve given elsewhere in favour of this view about the function or social role of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are entirely consistent with there being multiple functions or social roles of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions.

<sup>27</sup> Why can’t the defender of the projectivist strategy just point out that while some, or maybe most, ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have the function of tagging good informants, there isn’t a necessary connection between tagging information and ‘knowledge’ ascriptions (see fn. 26)? It could be that the cases where ‘knowledge’ ascriptions don’t have the function of tagging good informants are just the cases to which the projectivist

### 4.3.3. NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT

(A reminder: Jill is thinking of going to the bank on Saturday on the off chance that she'll meet her friends Hannah and Sarah there. Nothing is at stake for Jill, but Hannah and Sarah have an impending bill due, and very little in their account. Based on her meeting Hannah at the bank on a recent Saturday, Jill says that Hannah 'knows' the bank will be open on Saturday). The usual story is that contextualism, unlike IRI, has problems with these sorts of cases. Hannah is in a high stakes situation so, for the interest-relative invariantist, Jill's knowledge ascription is false. However, Jill doesn't consider the alternative that the bank has changed its opening hours, and it isn't otherwise taken seriously, so, for the conversational contextualist, that alternative is irrelevant (or, the epistemic standards aren't unusually high). Assuming that Hannah's evidence suffices to rule out all relevant alternatives, Jill's 'knowledge' ascription is true. This, so the usual story goes, is a problem for the conversational contextualist. In this section I'm going to argue that the interests contextualist has no problem here. (I should note that DeRose 2009, Chapter 7 argues that the conversational contextualist can also deal with this sort of case, so I'm not claiming that interests contextualism is at an advantage over conversational contextualism here).

Rather than discussing the original NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT case, I want to distinguish two sorts of cases in which the ascriber is in a low stakes practical situation and the subject in a high stakes practical situation. Once I've explained how the interests contextualist deals with these two sorts of cases, I'll explain why this helps with the original case.

In distinguishing two sorts of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT cases I'm going to draw on the idea, mentioned above, that 'knowledge' ascriptions perform the social role of tagging good informants. An informant is a subject with information that someone, or some group, needs. Sometimes when an ascriber tags a subject as a good informant she will do so because that subject has the information that she - the ascriber - needs. A case of this sort would be one in which the ascriber- call her Inquirer - is interested in

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strategy applies. I don't claim to have a decisive reason for rejecting this response, but I do think it looks ad hoc. In particular: Is there an explanation *why* the cases to which the projectivist strategy applies are the cases where 'knowledge' ascriptions don't have one of their usual functions? If not, it would be a remarkable coincidence.

whether a subject - call her Informer - has the information that Inquirer needs in order to pursue some project in which she - Inquirer - is engaged. In this case, Inquirer will take her practical situation into account rather than the practical situation of Informer. (An example: Imagine that Inquirer is outside the bank and trying to decide whether she should go in or come back on Saturday. She has no idea whether the bank is open on Saturdays so she calls Informer). Other times, when an ascriber tags a subject as a good informant she will do so because that subject has information that some other party needs. One case of this sort would be one in which an ascriber - call her Advisor - is interested in whether a subject - call her Advisee - 'knows' in order to offer advice to Advisee about some project in which Advisee is engaged. In this case, Advisor will take Advisee's practical situation into account rather than her own. (An example: Imagine that Advisor is asked whether the bank is open on Saturdays. Whether Advisor will offer herself as an informant on that question will depend on what she takes Advisee's practical situation to be). Another case of this sort would be one in which Advisor is interested in whether a third-party - call her Informant - 'knows' in order to offer advice to Advisee about some project in which Advisee is engaged. In this case, Advisor will take Advisee's practical situation into account rather than her own or Informant's. (An example: Imagine that Advisor is trying to find out whether the bank is open on Saturdays for Advisee. If Informant tells Advisor that it is, whether Advisor will tag Informant as a good source of information on the question of whether the bank is open on Saturdays will depend on what she takes Advisee's, rather than Informant's or her own, practical situation to be).

If, as I've argued, 'knowledge' ascriptions play the social role of tagging good informants, then we should expect there to be the two sorts of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT cases just discussed. In the first sort, it's the ascriber's practical situation that's important. In the second sort, it's the practical situation of some other party that's important. This is entirely consistent with the interests contextualist view, on which the practical importance of the project in which those in the context are engaged partly determines what alternatives those in the context have a reason to consider. Sometimes an ascriber will be engaged in the project of offering advice, and when she does so it's the practical situation of the advisee that will be important.

So: what about the original NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT case? If it's a case of the first sort, the interests contextualist gives the result that Jill speaks falsely. However, if it's a case of the second sort, Jill speaks truly. So, if Stanley had the first sort of case in mind, I agree that Jill speaks falsely. However, if he had the second sort in mind, I disagree. Stanley's presentation of the case might lead one to think it's of the second sort. First, it's specified that Jill isn't aware of Hannah's situation. That means that Jill isn't going to be much use as an advisor. Second, one gets the impression that Jill's only interest is in whether going to the bank is liable to lead to her meeting Hannah. But perhaps things aren't so clear-cut. After all, we do sometimes give advice even when we aren't aware of the details of the advisee's situation. My contention is just that, in both sorts of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT cases I've discussed, the interests contextualist gives the right verdict. The interests contextualist says that what alternatives one has a reason to consider in a context partly depends upon the practical importance of the project one is engaged in. But, because one can engage in the project of evaluating the actions available to others, the interests contextualist can allow that, when one does so, the subject's practical situation has an effect on the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions.

My primary aim with respect to NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT has been defensive, not offensive. The usual story is that contextualists have problems with NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT, and my aim here has been to argue that, once we distinguish between two sorts of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT cases, we see that the interests contextualist can deal with both sorts. However, if I'm right, then IRI gets the wrong result in a certain sort of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT case, viz. cases like the Inquirer case. Of course, in order to respond to my argument the defender of IRI could appeal to an error theory. That error theory would, like the error theory she appeals to in dealing with HIGH ASCRIBER-NORMAL SUBJECT, involve denying a plausible account of the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions. As I'll now emphasise, I think this point is central to the debate between interests contextualism and IRI.



#### 4.3.4. Why interests contextualism?

Interests contextualism is better supported by Stanley's cases than either IRI or conversational contextualism. This gives us further reason to prefer interests contextualism to conversational contextualism.<sup>28</sup> But, on the face of it, it's not clear why this should give us much of a reason to prefer interests contextualism to IRI. While it's a point in interests contextualism's favour that it does well with respect to Stanley's cases, more has to be said. My aim here is to say a little about the further advantages of interests contextualism over IRI.

Every candidate account of the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions - conversational contextualism, interests contextualism, sensitive and strict invariantism, truth and content relativism - will have problems accommodating some intuition or other, and to deal with the problem they will have to develop some sort of error-theoretic explanation.<sup>29</sup> So, one might wonder, why is my pointing out that the defender of IRI has to deny a plausible account of the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions in order to deal with HIGH ASCRIBER-NORMAL SUBJECT (and, indeed, certain sorts of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT cases) not just another example of a case where one account of the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions has to invoke an error-theory? Contextualists, interests contextualists included, will have to invoke error-theoretic explanations too, and one can only decide the debate between IRI and contextualism by taking all of these things into account.

I completely agree that a whole host of considerations need to be taken into account when comparing interests contextualism and IRI, and indeed interests contextualism and conversational contextualism. I take the argument of §2-§4.3 to show that, once we take a whole host of considerations into account, interests contextualism is preferable to conversational contextualism. My aim here has been to show that there is some reason to prefer interests contextualism to IRI. In doing so I have identified what I take to be a central consideration in the debate between interests contextualism and IRI. Plausibly,

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<sup>28</sup> Note that I take the argument of §2-§3 to provide the main reason to prefer interests contextualism to conversational contextualism. I don't think that the interests contextualist needs to rely on admittedly fine-grained intuitions about Stanley's cases to show why her view is preferable. (Although it's a nice bonus).

<sup>29</sup> This is one of the important lessons we can take from Hawthorne (2004).

'knowledge' ascriptions have the social role or function of tagging good informants. This is entirely consistent with - and further, as I'll argue in Chapter four (§2) *supports* - interests contextualism. But, in order to utilise the projectivist strategy, and deal with a certain sort of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT case, the defender of IRI has to say that the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions involves an *error* in our practice. (I take it that someone who invokes the IRI projectivist strategy does think that 'knowledge' ascriptions play something like the social role of tagging good informants, but that this is part of their *diagnosis* why we have mistaken intuitions in HIGH ASCRIBER-NORMAL SUBJECT cases). So, when it comes to the debate between interests contextualism and IRI, the key question is: what grounds are there for thinking that the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions reflects an error in our practice?

While, as I've argued, our hypothesis about the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions is consistent with contextualism (and, as I will argue, it supports contextualism), it's also independent of contextualism. That is, our hypothesis is plausible independently of whether contextualism is true. In my earlier discussion I dismissed two reasons for rejecting Stanley's projectivist strategy (that there's a default assumption to the effect that speakers aren't mistaken in applying a particular epistemic standard, and that he has given us no reason to think that our projection of epistemic standards is mistaken) (§4.3.2). The problem with both was that, if there are good reasons to think that contextualism is worse off than IRI in other respects, neither carries much weight. However, because our hypothesis about the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions is plausible independent of contextualism, whether there are good reasons to think that contextualism is worse off than IRI or not is irrelevant to whether the hypothesis about the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions reflects an error in our practice. When assessing the viability of the projectivist strategy, considerations against contextualism and for IRI aren't relevant. All that is relevant is the plausibility of the hypothesis about the social role. And, I would suggest, that hypothesis is very plausible indeed.

Summing up, I have shown that interests contextualism does better with respect to Stanley's cases than either conversational contextualism or IRI. This gives us further reason to prefer interests contextualism to conversational contextualism, and some reason to prefer it to IRI. Why do I say 'some reason'? Because I think that, while the way in which the defender of IRI has to handle HIGH ASCRIBER-NORMAL SUBJECT cases

is problematic for the reason just given (the IRI projectivist strategy is inconsistent with our hypothesis about the social role of 'knowledge' ascriptions), I don't think that this is enough to conclude that interests contextualism is preferable to IRI. More is needed. My aim in the final chapter is to add the required extras. I'm going to argue that our hypothesis about the social role or function of 'knowledge' ascriptions isn't just consistent with contextualism, but actually supports (a certain sort of) contextualism. Before doing so, though, I want to deal with the remaining epistemological objection to contextualism (the objection concerning knowledge norms of action and assertion).

### **5. Assertion, action and context**

Recall that, if contextualists want to endorse some sort of knowledge norm of action and assertion, they have to endorse something like this:

SUFFICIENCY-C (ASSERTION): If 'S knows that p' is true at time t in context c, then S is in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p at t in c.

NECESSITY-C (ASSERTION): If S is in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p at time t in context c, then 'S knows that p' is true at t in c.

SUFFICIENCY-C (ACTION): If 'S knows that p' is true at time t in context c, then it's appropriate for S to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting at t in c.

NECESSITY-C (ACTION): If it's appropriate for S to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting at time t in context c, then 'S knows that p' is true at t in c.

And, as we saw, these norms allow that sentences like the following may be truthfully asserted:

- (2) Low doesn't know that p but she's in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that p.
- (3) High knows that q but she isn't in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that q.
- (4) Low doesn't know that p but it's appropriate for her to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting.
- (5) High knows that q, but it isn't appropriate for her to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting.

This, so the objection goes, is problematic because (2-5) aren't the sorts of things that we can usually, if ever, properly assert. My aim here is to show that contextualists have the resources to explain why (2-5) could rarely be properly asserted.

Aside: There are reasons to be suspicious about knowledge-assertion and knowledge-action links. I'll focus on knowledge-assertion links here, but similar remarks can be made about knowledge-action links.

One might worry about both the sufficiency claim (if S knows that p, then S is in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p) and the necessity claim (if S is in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p, then S knows that p) because of cases like the following:

(6) Nurse: Doctor, which leg is it that we're amputating?

Doctor: I need to check the patient's records first.

Student: Why didn't you say it was the right leg that needs amputated? You know it's the right leg. I was with you this morning when you saw the patient.

Doctor: Of course I know it's the right leg. But I need to check the patient's records to be absolutely sure. Imagine if I removed the wrong leg! Yes, here we are, her records say that it's the right leg.

(7) Let's say that unfortunate Ulla is in a Gettier scenario. She has strong evidence that Tom, who works in her office, has a Ford. She's seen him in a Ford and pictures of him in a Ford surround his desk. This being a Gettier case, Tom hasn't actually got a Ford. However, Andy, who also works in the office, does. Ulla is asked about the various cars in the work car park and she says 'Someone in the office has a Ford'.

Plausibly, in (6) the Doctor knows that the right leg needs amputated before checking, but isn't able to properly assert this until she has checked the patient's records. If all of this sounds right, then SUFFICIENCY (ASSERTION) must be false.<sup>30</sup> Further, one may have the intuition that in (7) Ulla's assertion was perfectly proper, but clearly she doesn't

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<sup>30</sup> This is a modification of a case from Brown (2008b).

know that someone in the office has a ford. If all of this sounds right, then NECESSITY (ASSERTION) must be false.<sup>31</sup> From this it follows that the following are both true:

- (8) Doctor knows that the right leg needs amputated, but she isn't in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that the right leg needs amputated.
- (9) Ulla doesn't know that someone in the office owns a Ford, but she's in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that someone in the office owns a Ford.

No doubt the defender of SUFFICIENCY (ASSERTION) and NECESSITY (ASSERTION) will have responses to these problems, and to others. I think it would be a mistake for the contextualist to deal with the objection under discussion by just appealing to the various reasons to be suspicious about knowledge-assertion and knowledge-action links. Perhaps there are good reasons to be suspicious, but I'm not going to attempt to show that here.<sup>32</sup>

So: Why can the contextualist hold that (2-5), while perhaps true, are rarely properly asserted? Let's look at how the interests contextualist would interpret (2-5).<sup>33</sup> On the interests contextualist view, the practical importance of the project in which those in the context are engaged, along with what alternatives are generally considered within their epistemic community, determines what alternatives those in the context have a reason

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<sup>31</sup> Again, this is a modification of a case from Brown (2008b).

<sup>32</sup> So I do want to take the objection seriously. One might wonder, though, if I'm taking the objection seriously enough. Don't the contextualist-friendly versions of the knowledge-assertion and knowledge-action links sever the intuitive ties between knowledge, assertion and action? I don't think so. First, the contextualist doesn't 'sever' the ties. She just says that the ties aren't quite as straightforward as one might have thought. Second, and more importantly, the contextualist-friendly versions are an equally good explanation of the sort of data that's supposed to support the knowledge-assertion and knowledge-action links. As far as the data is concerned, there doesn't seem to be any reason to prefer the 'straightforward' versions to the contextualist-friendly versions. For further discussion see DeRose (2009, Chapter 7).

<sup>33</sup> What I say here will be worked out within the interests contextualist view, but I should emphasise that I am not going to claim that other contextualist views - in particular, conversational contextualism - can't deal with the objection from knowledge-assertion and knowledge-action links. For (to my mind) plausible responses on behalf of the conversational contextualist, see Blome-Tillmann (forthcoming) and DeRose (2009, Chapter 7).

to consider, and so what alternatives are relevant. As we saw earlier in our discussion of the NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT case (§4.3.3), this doesn't mean that it's always the practical situation of those in the context that's important. Rather, on the interests contextualist view there's a degree of *flexibility*. 'Knowledge' ascribers can engage in the project of offering advice - as in a certain sort of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT case - and when they do so it's the practical situation of the advisee that will be important. But there are other sorts of cases that call for a degree of flexibility. Example: Imagine that High is driving past the bank and trying to decide whether she should go in. High has a bill due, and nothing in her account, so it's vitally important that she cashes her cheque. Evaluator is aware of High's predicament, and offers an evaluation of High's situation. In doing so, Evaluator will take High's practical situation into account rather than her own. In these sorts of cases, Evaluator is offering an evaluation of a subject, and of the bearing of what he or she 'knows' (or doesn't 'know') on what he or she can assert, or what he or she can treat as a reason for acting. If that's what Evaluator is doing, we would expect Evaluator to take the subject's practical situation into account rather than his own. Because she allows this sort of flexibility, all of this is entirely consistent with interests contextualism.

I need to introduce some terminology. We can factor (2-5) into two components. First, there is a 'knowledge' ascription or denial ('High/Low knows/doesn't know that p'). Call this the *knowledge component*. Second, there is an assessment of the propriety of an assertion ('Low/High is/isn't in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that p') or an action ('it is/isn't appropriate for Low/High to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting'). Call this the *assertion component*. Taken together, the knowledge component and the assertion component constitute an evaluation of the bearing of what a subject does (or doesn't) 'know' on what he or she can assert, or what he or she can treat as a reason for acting. For the reasons given above, on the interests contextualist view there's no problem if 'knowledge' ascribers take into account the practical situation of the subject of their 'knowledge' ascriptions rather than their own in offering such evaluations of subjects. However, the problem with (2-5) is that the ascriber takes into account his or her *own* practical situation in asserting the knowledge component, and the *subject's* practical situation in asserting the assertion component. This is a sort of incoherence. I say 'sort of' because, of course, by the interests

contextualist's - indeed, by any contextualist's - lights, what the ascriber is doing isn't *logically inconsistent*. But not all incoherence is logical inconsistency. Consider why ascribers take into account the practical situations of the subjects of their 'knowledge' ascriptions. It may be to offer advice (as in one sort of NORMAL ASCRIBER-HIGH SUBJECT case), or to offer an evaluation of the bearing of what a subject 'knows' (or doesn't 'know') on what the subject may assert, or what the subject may treat as a reason for acting (as in the Evaluator case discussed above). If an ascriber wants to offer advice, or an evaluation, that will lead her to take the subject's practical situation into account. But, if that's what an ascriber wants to do, it makes no sense for the ascriber to also take into account her own practical situation. Doing so defeats the purpose of the assessment.

It should be clear how to apply this to (2-5). Very briefly: In (2) an ascriber says that a subject (Low) doesn't 'know' that p, but is in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that p. So, in order to assert the knowledge component of (2), the ascriber has to be taking into account her own practical situation rather than Low's. But, in order to assert the assertion component, the ascriber has to be taking into account Low's practical situation rather than her own. This is incoherent in the above sense. Similar remarks apply to (4), except in this case what is being assessed is what Low can treat as a reason for acting. In (3) an ascriber says that a subject (High) does 'know' that p, but isn't in a strong enough epistemic position to properly assert that p. So, in order to assert the knowledge component of (3), the ascriber has to take into account her own practical situation rather than High's. But, in order to assert the assertion component, the ascriber has to be taking into account High's practical situation, not her own. This, again, is incoherent in the above sense. Again, similar remarks apply to (5), except what is being assessed is what High can treat as a reason for acting.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have put a plausible version of contextualism - what I call interests contextualism - on the table (§2). I've shown that we should prefer it to conversational contextualism, and I've given some reasons for preferring it to sensitive invariantism, and Stanley's version of sensitive invariantism (IRI) in particular (§3-4). In the process I've dealt with the remaining epistemological objections to contextualism (§3.2; §5). I

conclude that interests contextualism is the most attractive version of contextualism available, and that there is some reason to prefer it to sensitive invariantism. My final aim is to show that we should prefer interests contextualism to both sensitive and strict invariantism. That is the task of the final chapter.



## Chapter four

### From Craigian genealogy to Craigian contextualism

#### 0. Introductory remarks

At the end of Chapter three I concluded that interests contextualism is the most attractive version of contextualism available, and that there is some reason to prefer it to sensitive invariantism. My aims in this chapter are to give further reason for preferring interests contextualism to sensitive invariantism, and to argue that interests contextualism is preferable to strict invariantism. If I can achieve these aims, I will have shown that we should prefer interests contextualism to all of its rivals (relativism, strict and sensitive invariantism, conversational contextualism). The interests contextualist gives the best explanation of our ‘general phenomenon’ (contextual variation in the appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions). Consequently, I will conclude that we should endorse the interests contextualist explanation of our various cases (PUB, POLICE STATION, NORMAL, HIGH etc).

I’m going to reach this conclusion by drawing on Craig’s account of the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, and his general approach to questions about the concept ‘knowledge’. I’ve briefly outlined Craig’s basic idea, and the considerations that speak in its favour, in previous chapters. In what follows I will expand on those brief remarks. But I should clarify from the outset that I will not be tackling questions about whether ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have the function Craig claims, or questions about the viability of Craig’s general approach (although I’ll suggest a particular way of understanding it). However, I will be tackling questions about whether Craig’s account of the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is relevant to their *semantics* rather than their pragmatics (I will argue that it is), and questions about which view of the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions the account supports (I will argue that it supports what I’m calling ‘Craigian contextualism’ (Chapter three (§2.2)). So one way to dispute my conclusion is to dispute Craig’s account of the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and/or his general approach to questions about the concept ‘knowledge’. But I should also note that some problems that have been raised for the account - in particular, that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have functions other than identifying good informants - don’t particularly

concern me.<sup>1</sup> All I need is the claim that one of the central functions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is to identify good informants. Whether they have other functions besides isn’t going to be important for what follows.

Clearly, contextualism - of any form - involves a rejection of some firmly held and traditional views about ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. As I put it earlier, contextualism is a *revisionary* view. And, in general, one has to be given good reason before one accepts a revisionary view over a less revisionary alternative.<sup>2</sup> A worry one might have about the appeal to context shifting arguments (CSAs), and the claim that contextualism provides the best explanation of a general phenomenon (contextual variation in the appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions) is that it doesn’t provide good *enough* reason to accept a revisionary contextualist semantics for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions over the traditional invariantist alternatives. Sure, the worry might go, contextualism provides a nice, simple explanation of a pattern of linguistic usage, sure - as I’ve argued - the contextualist can deal with the objections from the philosophy of language (Chapter two) and epistemology (Chapter three (§3.2; §5)) and sure - as I’ve also argued - the (interests) contextualist can deal with a wider range of cases than the sensitive invariantist (Chapter three (§4)). That’s certainly not enough to conclude that we should prefer contextualism to strict invariantism, but it’s also not enough to conclude that we should prefer contextualism to sensitive invariantism. Ultimately, all

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<sup>1</sup> Other possible functions for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions include identifying those who are blameworthy for uncooperative behaviour (Beebe 2012) and terminating inquiry (Kappel 2010; Kelp 2011). Beebe and Kappel propose *additional* functions for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions whereas Kelp proposes *replacing* Craig’s account of their function. If Kelp is right, why isn’t that a problem for me? The basic idea I appeal to below (§2) is that Craig’s account supports contextualism because there’s contextual variation in what we require of a good informant. But, similarly, there’s going to be contextual variation in what we take to terminate inquiry. So, *mutatis mutandis*, the reasons I give for thinking that Craig’s account of the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions supports contextualism will go for Kelp’s account too.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, this point also works in contextualism’s favour. While it puts contextualism at a disadvantage over its more traditional invariantist rivals, it puts contextualism at an advantage over its more revisionary relativist rivals. In the absence of reason to prefer some variety of relativism to contextualism, we should prefer contextualism and, as I’ve argued, the contextualist can deal with the disagreement and retraction data that is supposed to provide the reason to prefer relativism to contextualism (Chapter two (§2)).

that contextualists can appeal to is their explanation of a pattern of linguistic usage, and why put so much stock in explanations of patterns of linguistic usage?

The worry can be bolstered in two ways. First, recall what I said about CSAs earlier: While there is empirical evidence that the general phenomenon is as widespread as is often taken for granted in the literature, there is also some empirical evidence that casts doubt on whether the general phenomenon is even a genuine phenomenon (Chapter one (§2.1)). Second, the sensitive invariantist (or, at least, prominent sensitive invariantists like Fantl & McGrath, Hawthorne and Stanley) is in a better position than the contextualist because she doesn't just appeal to an explanation of a pattern of linguistic usage. Rather, she sees her view as ultimately motivated via the intuitive links between knowledge and action (i.e. the knowledge norm of action (Chapter one (§3.3.1); Chapter three (§5)), and she wants to *account for* or *explain* that pattern of linguistic usage via the intuitive links between knowledge and action. Stanley has put this point well:

“The role of these intuitions [intuitions about cases like NORMAL and HIGH, or PUB and POLICE STATION] is not akin to the role of observational data for a scientific theory. The intuitions are instead intended to reveal the powerful intuitive sway of the thesis that knowledge is the basis for action” (2005a, 12).

“Whether or not someone's true belief at a certain time that p is an instance of knowledge depends in part upon non-truth-conducive factors. The conclusion is bolstered by the intuitive connections between knowledge and action, revealed in certain intuitions we have about when someone knows and when someone does not know” (2005a, 179).

Again, in this chapter I argue that Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions supports a sort of contextualism (Craigian contextualism), of which interests contextualism is a type. So I will show that interests contextualism is motivated via a plausible account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions. Further, our account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions explains the general phenomenon. The upshot is that interests contextualism isn't simply a way of explaining patterns of linguistic usage. That's why the conclusions of this chapter will show that we should prefer interests contextualism to strict and sensitive invariantism.

Enough about my aims. How will I set about achieving them? First, I'll go into Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions, and his general project, in more detail than I have previously (§1). Second, I'll argue that the account supports Craigian contextualism (§2). In doing so I'll argue for the account's relevance to the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions, and I'll comment on why it doesn't support conversational contextualism and on how things stand with respect to strict and sensitive invariantism. Finally, I'll deal with two worries one might have about Craigian contextualism. The first worry is that it's irrelevant to the problem posed by radical scepticism. In response, I'll argue that the same goes for conversational contextualism (Chapter one (§2.2) already showed as much). This raises the second worry: Isn't solving the sceptical problem meant to be the motivation for contextualism? But, as I've already made clear, I don't think that scepticism provides the main motivation for *interests* contextualism. Rather, the main motivation for interests contextualism is the Craigian account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions. Note, though, that conversational contextualism is left looking rather unmotivated, given that it isn't supported by Craig's account. Consequently, there may be a problem for the conversational contextualist here, but there isn't for the interests contextualist.<sup>3</sup>

### **1. Craigian genealogy: an outline**

Traditionally, epistemologists have been concerned with providing an *analysis* of the concept 'knowledge', with the analysis specifying the conditions that are necessary and jointly sufficient for a subject to 'know' (truth, belief, justification). The guiding idea is that, by breaking 'knowledge' into its component parts, we'll find out what knowledge *is*. In order to analyse a concept one needs data, and in this case the data are intuitions about whether subjects in imagined cases 'know'. The current consensus is that a successful analysis of 'knowledge' must match and predict the data, explain why knowledge has value and fit with the distinctive function that the concept 'knowledge' serves in our epistemic community (see, for example, Greco 2010; Pritchard 2012b;

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, this gives us yet more reason to prefer interests contextualism to conversational contextualism (Chapter three (§3; §4)). But just to clarify: I take the argument of Chapter three to provide decisive reason to prefer interests contextualism to conversational contextualism. The further advantages detailed in this chapter don't need, and aren't intended, to be decisive.

Zagzebski 1996). But what function does ‘knowledge’ serve in our epistemic community? As we’ve seen, on Craig’s influential view ‘knowledge’ ascriptions serve the function of identifying good informants. For Craig, this claim is embedded within a larger project. The idea is that we should take this plausible hypothesis about the function of ‘knowledge’ and explore what a concept with that function would look like. And, while Craig allows that the end result might be something approaching an analysis of ‘knowledge (conditions one must meet in order to ‘know’) the procedure ensures that the ‘analysis’ will fit with the distinctive function that ‘knowledge’ serves, and perhaps explain why knowledge has value.<sup>4</sup>

This raises three questions, which I’ll take in turn. First, what’s supposed to motivate doing things this way? (§1.1) Second, how, exactly, does one ‘explore what a concept with that function would look like?’ (§1.2) Third, what’s the end result supposed to be? (§1.3)

### 1.1. Motivations

Craig adverts to three motivations (1990, 1-2). First, one of the lessons of the post-Gettier literature is that providing a successful analysis of ‘knowledge’ isn’t easy.<sup>5</sup> This may lead one to think that, if an alternative way of proceeding is available, it’s worth trying. Second, the data for an analysis of ‘knowledge’ are intuitions about whether subjects in imagined cases ‘know’. Call these *extensional intuitions* (‘extensional’ because they are intuitions about the extension of the concept ‘knowledge’). But we also have *intensional intuitions* (‘intensional’ because they are intuitions about the conditions that must be satisfied for the concept to apply). One can think of the sceptic as arguing that the two don’t mesh: the intuitive intension of ‘knowledge’ determines an extension that

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<sup>4</sup> Two things: First, I say ‘perhaps’ because one might well think that to explain why we have a concept, which, in this case, will presumably involve explaining why we value knowledge, isn’t to explain why knowledge is valuable. Not everything that we value is, for that reason, valuable. Second, note that Craig takes the end result to be conditions that capture *paradigm* or *prototypical* cases of ‘knowledge’ rather than conditions that are necessary and jointly sufficient (1990, 15-6; 33-4). So what he provides isn’t an analysis, at least in the normal sense of the term.

<sup>5</sup> For a (now dated) overview see Shope (1983). For a more contemporary overview see Ichikawa & Steup (2012).

is far smaller than that determined by our extensional intuitions.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that, in the case of ‘knowledge’, providing an intuitive intension that ‘fits’ its intuitive extension is going to be difficult. Third, even if these difficulties can be overcome and an acceptable analysis of ‘knowledge’ found, some questions would remain unanswered: Why is knowledge *valuable*? Why do we *care* about it?<sup>7</sup> A similar point has been well put by Timothy Williamson:

“[K]nowing matters; the difference between knowing and not knowing is very important to us ... This importance would be hard to understand if the concept knows were the more or less ad hoc sprawl that analyses have had to become; why should we care so much about *that*?” (Williamson’s italics) (2000, 31).

Craig doesn’t take these worries to motivate wholesale rejection of the ‘analytical project’. Rather, he takes them to motivate trying a somewhat different route (1990, 2-4). In Craig’s view, ultimately only the *success* of his approach can motivate adopting it, and rejecting the analytical project. (This, I take it, is what Craig means by the claim that, when it comes to the viability of his approach, the ‘proof is in the pudding’ (1990, 3; 106)). But what are the ‘success criteria’ here? That leads to our second and third questions.

## 1.2. Exploring Craig’s hypothesis

Here’s Craig describing his starting point: “We take some *prima facie* plausible hypothesis about what the concept of knowledge does for us ... and then ask what a concept having that role would be like” (1990, 2). The hypothesis, roughly put, is that ‘knowledge’ has the function of identifying good informants. Again, what motivates this is the thought that humans have a need for information, some of which, but not all,

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<sup>6</sup> Motivation: Sceptics often proceed by providing scenarios that are intended to elicit some intuition as to what is generally required for one to ‘know’. In doing so they hope to demonstrate that the conditions that are generally required for one to ‘know’ are so strict that we ‘know’ little, if anything. If correct, this conclusion would be very surprising because, intuitively, we ‘know’ a lot.

<sup>7</sup> One might worry that these two questions shouldn’t be run together: again, to explain why we care about something is not to explain why that thing is valuable (not everything that we care about is, for that reason, valuable). If the reader has such worries he or she can ignore the first question, as it won’t be important in what follows.

we can get ‘first hand’. This means there’s a need for a way of identifying those who have information (good informants) and, because others often have the information that we need (and are willing to share it), we have a concept with the function of identifying good informants. I propose that we think of the procedure here as involving three steps. First, we identify something that humans, both now and at all points in their development, need. Humans, both now and at all points in their development, need information about the world around them, and because they can’t get all of that information themselves they need a way of identifying those who do have it.<sup>8</sup> That humans have these needs is, in some sense, contingent. If we were Gods, we’d have all the information that we need at our fingertips. But we’re not Gods, so we don’t. Second, we ask what might meet our need for identifying those who have information, and Craig’s hypothesis is that the concept ‘knowledge’ does. Third, given that ‘knowledge’ meets this need, we identify the conditions we would have to put on ‘knowledge’ in order for it to meet it. To identify someone as a ‘knower’ is to identify her as a good informant, so what is required to be a good informant?

Something like the following captures the conditions one would have to meet to be a good informant for the rest of some small group (cf. Craig 1990, 84-5):

GOOD INFORMANT: Roughly, a good informant about p is someone who:

- i. Tells the truth about p (i.e. either p and she believes that p, or not-p and she believes that not-p).
- ii. Is as likely to be right about p as the interests and purposes of your group require.
- iii. Is detectable by you and others in your group as likely enough right.
- iv. Is immediately available to you and others in your group.

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<sup>8</sup> Why ‘now and at all points in their development’? In some sense of ‘function’, certain concepts have the function of fulfilling certain needs at some time but not at others (e.g. at some point perhaps the concept ‘marriage’ had the function of keeping parents together for the purposes of raising children). But the features of human psychology that Craig appeals to in the case of ‘knowledge’ are those that “may plausibly be supposed to be possessed by all humans, preferably ones which there is some independent reason to suppose to be possessed by all humans” (1990, 5). That humans need information about the world and a way to identify those who have it is meant to be a fact about humans, not just about present-day humans, or our ancestors.

An illustrative example: Otto, who is sitting on a hill, is scanning the horizon for a sight of our enemy. Otto has good eyesight, a great track record as a lookout and can shout loud enough for those in his group to hear. Assuming Otto is telling the truth when he shouts that the enemy is coming, he meets the above conditions on being a good informant as to whether the enemy is coming. He's as likely right as the group's interests and purposes require, detectable by them as likely enough right and available to them as an informant.

However, it seems clear that we don't identify good informants in a social vacuum. When I identify a subject as a good informant, I don't just recommend that subject as an informant to the others in my group, I recommend her to the 'world at large'. An epistemic evaluation is, so to speak, a *public property*: others who are not in my group, and who have interests and purposes that I'm not even aware of, can and will draw on my evaluation of that subject. These sorts of social pressures mean that we need to remove the 'subjective' conditions (iii) and (iv), and we need to remove the reference to the interests and purposes of some particular group in (ii). This gives us the following (cf. Craig 1990, 88-9):

GOOD INFORMANT\*: Roughly, a good informant about p is someone who:

- i. Tells the truth about p.
- ii. Is as likely to be right about p as the interests and purposes of our community require.

Craig's idea seems to be that GOOD INFORMANT corresponds to what was required to be a good informant at an earlier stage of the development of the concept 'knowledge' whereas GOOD INFORMANT\* corresponds to what was required at a later stage in its development, where that later stage includes the present day.<sup>9</sup> As Craig, talking about how social pressures would have driven this development, puts it:

"What we have at this stage [the 'early stage' just identified], then, is a number of individuals with the same problem—how to come by the truth as to whether p—and

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<sup>9</sup> See in particular Craig (1990, Chapter 10) on 'objectivisation'.



their various ways of approaching it, determined by their individual requirements and circumstances. But these individuals form a community, and are in some degree at least helpful to others and responsive to their needs. And even if I, as one of the community, am not so inclined, I shall still need an appreciation of their point of view if I am to be any good at getting them to help me. From such facts arises a pressure towards the formation of ‘objectivised’ concepts, concepts which separate as it were the common core from the multitude of accretions due to particular circumstances and particular persons and so varying with them” (1990, 87-8).

This, I take it, is what Craig means by ‘exploring what a concept with that function would look like’. The upshot of the exploration is a picture of how the conditions one must meet to be a good informant, and so to ‘know’, will have developed through social pressures.

### **1.3. The end result?**

What’s the end result? In particular, why does this tell us anything about our concept ‘knowledge’ rather than some other concept? Here’s Craig on what his ‘investigation’ can achieve:<sup>10</sup>

“Such an investigation would still have an anchorage point in the everyday concept: should it reach a result quite different from the intuitive intension, or one that yielded an extension quite different from the intuitive extension, then, barring some special and especially plausible explanation of the mismatch, the original hypothesis about the role that the concept plays in our life would of course be the first casualty. For it is not the idea to construct an imaginary concept, but to illuminate the one we actually have, though it be vague or even inconsistent; and to illuminate it by showing that a concept with the hypothesised role [of identifying good informants] would have characteristics

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<sup>10</sup> Why ‘investigation’? For the reasons already given, Craig isn’t providing an analysis of ‘knowledge’, at least as normally understood. I’ve deliberately chosen a neutral term such as ‘investigation’ rather than some of the other phrases Craig uses, for instance ‘conceptual synthesis’ (see the full title of his book) or ‘practical explication’ (see Craig 1986). Insofar as Craig explains what he means by ‘conceptual synthesis’ or ‘practical explication’ both involve something like the procedure outlined in the main body of the text.

closely resembling those that it exhibits itself. But should our intuitions prove indeterminate or elastic, this type of investigation might reveal constructive ways of stretching them, and the rationale behind the stretch” (1990, 2-3).

From this we can draw a *constraint* on Craig’s investigation: It must not yield conditions for ‘knowing’ that diverge significantly from the intuitive intension and extension of ‘knowledge’. But that, as Craig makes clear, is not to say that, in the process of determining the conditions one must meet to ‘know’ that are necessary for ‘knowledge’ to perform its hypothesised function, we can’t discard particular intuitions (or ‘stretch’ particular intuitions) as long as some reason for doing so is given. So, in Craig’s view, the end result of his investigation is a ‘reconstruction’ of the concept ‘knowledge’, where the reconstruction gives conditions one must meet to be a good informant, and so to ‘know’, such that the conditions (1) ensure that ‘knowledge’ can perform its distinctive function (2) don’t diverge significantly from the intuitive intension of ‘knowledge’ and (3) don’t determine an extension for ‘knowledge’ that diverges significantly from its intuitive extension.<sup>11</sup> Assuming Craig’s hypothesis about the function of ‘knowledge’ is right, his reconstruction will certainly achieve (1), and Craig argues, at length, that his reconstruction also achieves (2) and (3). I won’t get into the argument here but see, in particular, Craig (1990, Chapters 2-3; Chapter 10).

I’ve outlined Craig’s motivation for embarking on an investigation of the concept ‘knowledge’ via his hypothesis about its function (§1.1), what he means by ‘exploring what a concept with that function would be like’ (§1.2), and what the end result is supposed to be (§1.3). This should suffice by way of explanation, and (very) partial defence, of Craig’s hypothesis about the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, and his general approach to questions about ‘knowledge’. I’ll now turn to my argument that his investigation supports Craigian contextualism.

Terminological aside: In what follows I’ll refer to Craig’s investigation into the concept ‘knowledge’ via his hypothesis about its function as ‘Craigian genealogy’. I do so because Craig describes himself as investigating the ‘genesis’ of the concept ‘knowledge’

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<sup>11</sup> Note that Craig talks of ‘*con*structing’ the concept and the ‘*con*structed’ concept (1990, 5; 8; 13-14; 17) rather than ‘*re*constructing’ and the ‘*re*constructed’ concept.

and he refers to his account as a ‘genetic account’, the idea being that we can chart the way in which a concept (‘knowledge’) that performs a certain function (of identifying good informants) would have to have developed in order to perform that function (see 1990, 102; 107; 109; 117).<sup>12</sup>

## **2. From Craigian genealogy to Craigian contextualism**

I’ll start by outlining why one might think that Craigian genealogy supports contextualism, and in the process I’ll outline the sort of contextualist view that Craigian genealogy might support (the view I call ‘Craigian contextualism’) (§2.1). I’ll then argue that Craigian genealogy does not support conversational contextualism (§2.2). Finally - and most importantly - I’ll diagnose what I take to be the obvious problem with the argument of §2.1 and, in response, propose a way of thinking about Craigian genealogy on which the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is relevant to their semantics, as opposed to their pragmatics (§2.3).

### **2.1. Craigian contextualism and GLOBAL vs. LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY**

As we saw earlier (Chapter one (§2.3); Chapter three (§2.2)), some have thought that going from Craigian genealogy to a sort of contextualism is pretty straightforward. The thought was that, if the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is to identify good informants then, given that what one will require of a good informant depends on and varies with the context, the truth-values or truth-conditions of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions must depend on and vary with the context too. However, quite apart from worries about the semantic relevance of Craigian genealogy, this can’t be right. Whether someone meets the conditions on being a good informant specified in GOOD INFORMANT clearly varies with and depends on the context. S may be as likely right as my interests and purposes require, but not as likely right as your interests and purposes require. So - modulo issues about semantic relevance - it looks like, at an early stage in the development of our concept ‘knowledge’, some sort of contextualism was true. But whether someone meets the conditions on being a good informant specified in GOOD INFORMANT\* doesn’t depend on or vary with the context. If someone meets those

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<sup>12</sup> Note that, while Craig never uses the phrases ‘genealogy’ or ‘genealogical’ himself, it has become common to refer to Craig’s investigation as ‘genealogical’ (see Fricker 2008; Gelfert 2011; Kappel 2010, 69).

conditions, they are as likely right as our community's interests and purposes require. So it looks like, at this later stage in the development of our concept 'knowledge', contextualism is false. While this line of response gives us good reason to reject the 'straightforward' argument from Craigian genealogy to contextualism, in what follows I'll argue that it doesn't pose a problem for a rather more sophisticated way of arguing from Craigian genealogy to (a sort of) contextualism.<sup>13</sup>

Some preliminaries: First, I'll continue working with a contextualist framework on which 'S knows that p' is true in C iff S's evidence is sufficient to rule out all of the alternatives in which not-p that are relevant in C, where the range of relevant alternatives depends on and varies with the context. Second, I'll call the interpretation of Craigian genealogy given earlier and immediately above the 'standard interpretation'. On the standard interpretation the conditions on being a good informant, and so 'knowing', given in GOOD INFORMANT correspond to an early stage of development of the concept 'knowledge' whereas those given in GOOD INFORMANT\* correspond to a later stage in its development. Third, on the standard interpretation the end result of Craigian genealogy is a sort of invariantism, on which whether one 'knows' that p depends on whether one can rule out a relatively stable range of alternatives in which not-p. As I put it in an earlier chapter (Chapter three (§2.2)), the idea is that, because of social pressures, for any proposition p our community has settled on a range of alternatives in which not-p that are 'default relevant'.<sup>14</sup> Fourth, in what follows I'll assume that the sorts of alternatives that are default relevant are the sorts of alternatives that subjects in normal stakes situations (such as our NORMAL and PUB cases) are often able to rule out whereas the subjects in high stakes situations (such as our HIGH and POLICE STATION cases) aren't.<sup>15</sup> Fifth, in what follows I'll often refer to evaluations of subjects as good informants and 'knowers' as 'epistemic evaluations'.

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<sup>13</sup> In Chapter three (§2.2) I offered a somewhat sketchy version of the 'more sophisticated way'. My aim in what follows is to fill in some of the details.

<sup>14</sup> Again, I borrow this way of putting things from Hannon (forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> So I'm assuming that, on the standard interpretation, the end result of Craigian genealogy is a sort of 'moderate' (as opposed to 'sceptical') invariantism. I should note that this assumption has been challenged, notably in Kelp (2011). But I find it hard to understand why social pressures would lead us to put conditions on 'knowing' which are such that subjects rarely, if ever, meet them. As Kusch puts it: "Why not hold instead,

On the standard interpretation, the interests and purposes of the whole community determine the relatively stable range of alternatives in which not-p that one generally has to be able to rule out to count as ‘knowing’ that p (the default relevant alternatives). This, as I put it earlier, makes the default relevant alternatives ‘globally interest-relative’ (Chapter three (§2.2)). The range of alternatives that are default relevant depends on the interests and purposes of the members of our community (the sorts of practical projects they engage in, the sorts of practical situations they find themselves in). Call this GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. A prominent contextualist idea is that the range of alternatives that are relevant in a context depends on *particular practical situations*, most often the practical situation of those in the context, but perhaps some other practical situation, such as that of someone who is being advised (I endorsed this idea in Chapter three (§2)). This, as I also put it earlier, makes the range of alternatives that are relevant in a context ‘locally interest-relative’. Call this LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. My diagnosis of the problem with the ‘straightforward’ argument from Craigian genealogy to Craigian contextualism is that, on the face of it, GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY is *incompatible with* or *rules out* LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. We don’t offer epistemic evaluations in a social vacuum so we need to require that subjects can rule out a relatively stable range of alternatives in which not-p to count as ‘knowing’ that p. Consequently, the range of alternatives that are relevant in any particular context must just be those that are default relevant rather than those that are appropriate in that particular context. However, despite its initial plausibility, I’m going to argue that this line of thought is based on a mistake. GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY is entirely compatible with and doesn’t rule out a certain *type* of LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY (I say ‘a certain type’ because, as we’ll see, there’s another type that it does rule out).

Why might one think that GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY rules out LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY? I think there are two reasons. (And the second reason gets to the heart of the matter, whereas the first reason can be easily dealt with).

First reason: There are many cases where GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY clearly rules out LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. One sort of case would be a case in which a

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say, that objectivisation leads merely to the demand that the knower be reliable so as to satisfy *ordinary* concerns?’ (2011, 11). For further discussion see §3.1 below.

'knowledge' ascriber (call her Ascriber) is certifying a subject as an authority on some matter. An authority is someone that a diverse range of people in different situations can draw on, so Ascriber has to consider the default relevant alternatives rather than alternatives that are appropriate to any particular practical situation (including her own). Another sort would be a case in which Ascriber is giving advice to a range of people in various different situations. Again, such advice is something that many people may draw on, so Ascriber has to consider the default relevant alternatives rather than alternatives that are appropriate to any particular practical situation. But are there any cases where GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY doesn't rule out LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY? If not, it's not just that Craigian genealogy doesn't support contextualism; it's actually incompatible with contextualism.

Response: There clearly are cases where GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY doesn't rule out LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. A particularly good example would be a case in which a 'knowledge' ascriber is in an unusually pressing practical situation. For instance, take our earlier HIGH case. (Quick recap: Hannah and Sarah are passing the bank, have a cheque to cash, and it's vitally important that they do so. Even though there's a queue they go in and, by way of justification, Hannah says 'I don't know that the bank is open on Saturdays'). In this case, Hannah's epistemic evaluation isn't a public property (it's not something that a range of people in various situations can or will draw on). Rather, her evaluation is something that Hannah and Sarah, in their particular practical situation, will draw on. Consequently, Hannah should consider the full range of alternatives appropriate to her practical situation, which will be a wider range than are default relevant. Another example would be a case where, while the 'knowledge' ascriber isn't in an unusually pressing practical situation, she's giving advice to someone who is. Imagine it isn't vitally important that Hannah and Sarah cash their cheque before Monday, but it is vitally important that their friend Lisbeth does so. Again, Hannah's epistemic self-evaluation isn't something that a range of people in various situations can or will draw on. Rather, it's something that Lisbeth, in her particular practical situation, will draw on. Consequently, Hannah should consider the full range of alternatives appropriate to Lisbeth's practical situation, which again will be wider than the range that is default relevant.

The standard interpretation assumes that ‘knowledge’ ascribers aren’t sufficiently reflective to understand what the social pressures that supposedly lead to the incompatibility of GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY with LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY require of them. The social pressures require that ‘knowledge’ ascribers only consider the default relevant alternatives when they are offering an epistemic evaluation of a subject that a wide range of people in different practical situations can or will draw on, but they don’t require that ‘knowledge’ ascribers only consider the default relevant alternatives when they are offering an epistemic evaluation that only they, or others in their group, can or will draw on. But, if ‘knowledge’ ascribers are often reflective enough to understand what is required of them - if they often realise when their epistemic evaluations are a ‘public property’, and when they aren’t - then there is no reason to think that GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY rules out LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY.

Second reason: Whether ‘knowledge’ ascribers are reflective enough to understand what the social pressures require of them is beside the point. One can never be certain that one’s epistemic evaluation isn’t going to be drawn on by some unknown party. In particular: Say I’m in a *very* low stakes practical situation and I’m evaluating whether a subject with rather meagre evidence ‘knows’ that p. Because I’m in such a low stakes practical situation, I don’t consider certain alternatives in which not-p that are default relevant. Further, say that I’m *very* confident that my epistemic evaluation isn’t something that a range of people in various situations can or will draw on (maybe I think I’m alone). Does that mean I should consider this narrower range of alternatives, and consequently ascribe ‘knowledge’ to the subject? No. It could be that, unbeknownst to me, there are people that can and will draw on my evaluation (maybe I’m actually not alone).

The second reason for thinking that GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY rules out LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY is that ‘knowledge’ ascribers can never be certain that, in taking

particular practical situations into account, they aren't providing epistemic evaluations of subjects that may mislead others who draw on that evaluation.<sup>16</sup>

Response: This gives us good reason to think that GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY rules out a certain type of LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. It rules out a type of LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY on which the range of alternatives that are relevant in a particular context can be *narrower* than those that are default relevant. Even if a 'knowledge' ascriber is in a very low stakes practical situation, she can't ignore alternatives that are default relevant because, if she does so, she'll give potentially misleading epistemic evaluations. But reconsider the HIGH case. Hannah and Sarah are in an unusually pressing practical situation, and Hannah is evaluating whether a subject (herself) with good (but not conclusive) evidence 'knows' that the bank is open on Saturdays. Because she's in such an unusually pressing practical situation, she considers certain alternatives in which the bank is closed on Saturdays that aren't default relevant. Again, Hannah is very confident that her epistemic evaluation isn't something that a range of people in different situations can or will draw on. Does that mean she should consider this wider range of alternatives, and consequently deny that she 'knows'? Yes. She can never be certain that, in taking her particular practical situation into account, she's not failing to provide a positive epistemic self-evaluation that may be of use to others who could draw on it. But, in providing a negative evaluation, she isn't *misleading* others. There's a difference between misleading someone and failing to provide them with something that could be of use to them.<sup>17</sup> So we haven't been given any reason to think

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<sup>16</sup> The thought here is that if one goes around making 'knowledge' ascriptions based on one's particular practical situation then one is making a lot of potentially misleading epistemic evaluations. Perhaps most won't be used by anyone, but some will, with potentially damaging effects. Cf. Grimm (2009) on the value of true belief as a 'common good' like clean water or clean air. Putting things in somewhat picturesque terms, the objection here is that taking one's particular practical situation into account in making a 'knowledge' ascription or denial is like polluting the water or air supply.

<sup>17</sup> The underlying idea here is that there's an asymmetry between the first sort of case, where a 'knowledge' ascriber is in an unusually low stakes practical situation, and the second sort of case, where a 'knowledge' ascriber is in an unusually pressing practical situation. In the first sort of case 'knowledge' is ascribed, and the subject thereby identified as a good informant. In the second sort of case 'knowledge' is denied, but the subject isn't thereby identified as a *bad* informant (untrustworthy, likely to be wrong etc). Rather, she's just not identified as a good informant. Consequently, the



that GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY rules out another type of LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY, on which the range of alternatives that are relevant in a particular context can be wider (but not narrower) than the range that is default relevant. In what follows I'll call this CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY.

Granted that GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY doesn't rule out CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY, why think that Craigian genealogy requires both? Or, in other words, why think that Craigian genealogy *supports* CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY, rather than that Craigian genealogy is just *consistent* with CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY? Recall that, on the standard interpretation, the subjective conditions on being a good informant given in GOOD INFORMANT correspond to an earlier stage in the development of the concept 'knowledge' whereas the conditions given in GOOD INFORMANT\* correspond to a later stage in its development. But the reason given for thinking that 'knowledge' developed in this way was just that, because we don't offer epistemic evaluations in a social vacuum, 'knowledge' ascribers couldn't take particular practical situations into account when offering epistemic evaluations. And, as we've just seen, that reason doesn't tell against CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. This means that we need not see GOOD INFORMANT as corresponding to an earlier stage in the development of the concept 'knowledge' and GOOD INFORMANT\* as corresponding to a later stage. Rather, we should see GOOD INFORMANT and GOOD INFORMANT\* as both corresponding to the present day, with GOOD INFORMANT\* capturing the conditions one must meet to be a good informant, and so to 'know', in one range of situations (when one is identifying a subject as an authority, when one is offering advice to a diverse group, etc) and GOOD INFORMANT capturing the conditions one must meet in another range of situations (when one is in an unusually pressing practical situation, or offering advice to someone else who is in such a situation). Consequently, Craigian genealogy involves both GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY and CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY.<sup>18</sup>

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'knowledge' ascription in the first sort of case is potentially misleading whereas the 'knowledge' denial in the second sort of case isn't misleading. Rather, it's a failure to provide some information.

<sup>18</sup> Objection: Given that GOOD INFORMANT and GOOD INFORMANT\* put different conditions on being a good informant, and so 'knowing', doesn't this mean that we have

Now, recall how I formulated Craigian contextualism (Chapter three (§2.2)):

- i. The truth-values of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are context-sensitive. For convenience, we can understand this in terms of contextually varying ranges of relevant alternatives.
- ii. The alternatives that are relevant in a context C are the alternatives that are appropriate given the practical situation of those in C. Often, the alternatives that are appropriate given the practical situation of those in C will just be the default relevant alternatives. However, when those in C are in an unusually pressing practical situation, a wider range of alternatives will be appropriate.

Craigian contextualism allows that the range of alternatives that are relevant in a context can be wider than those that are default relevant, but it doesn’t allow that the range can be narrower (ii). Therefore, Craigian contextualists accept CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY, and reject any other type of LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. Consequently, Craigian genealogy supports Craigian contextualism. (Again, note that Craigian contextualism isn’t so much a view as a template. In particular: What does it mean to say that an alternative is ‘appropriate’ given a practical situation? Of course, interests contextualism is one possible answer to this question (Chapter three (§2.1; §2.3)) but perhaps there are others).<sup>19</sup>

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two concepts of ‘knowledge’, one corresponding to the conditions in GOOD INFORMANT and the other to the conditions in GOOD INFORMANT\*? But that’s implausible.

Perhaps it’s implausible, but I see no reason to think that the Craigian contextualist - or, at least, the interests contextualist - is committed to there being two concepts of ‘knowledge’. The interests contextualist thinks that ‘knowing’ requires being able to rule out certain alternatives, where the range of alternatives depends on what alternatives those in the ascriber context have a reason to consider, and where ‘knowledge’ ascribers have reasons to consider alternatives both in virtue of their practical situations and in virtue of those alternatives being default relevant. There’s a single concept, and whether it applies in a particular case depends on what alternatives those in the ascriber context have a reason to consider.

<sup>19</sup> What differentiates my interests contextualism from the various other Craig-inspired versions of contextualism in the contemporary literature, such as Greco’s (2009) ‘virtue contextualism’, Hannon’s (forthcoming) ‘practical interests contextualism’ or Henderson’s (2009) ‘gatekeeping contextualism’? One of the aims of Chapter three was

A brief recap: We've seen that the 'straightforward' way of going from Craigian genealogy to contextualism fails. However, I've argued that a rather more sophisticated route is available. The sorts of considerations some have taken to show that GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY is incompatible with LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY don't tell against CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. And, as I've just argued, Craigian genealogy supports CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. So, because Craigian contextualists accept CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY, Craigian genealogy supports Craigian contextualism. Of course, the conclusion follows only if we disregard worries about the semantic relevance of Craigian genealogy. But we can't disregard those worries. I'll deal with them in §2.3, but first I'm going to say a little more about why Craigian genealogy doesn't support conversational contextualism.

## 2.2. Conversational contextualism and EXTENSIVE VARIABILITY

In brief: Craigian genealogy doesn't support conversational contextualism because conversational contextualists accept what I'll call EXTENSIVE VARIABILITY, and Craigian genealogy rules out EXTENSIVE VARIABILITY.

First, what EXTENSIVE VARIABILITY is, and why conversational contextualists accept it. Conversational contextualists think of contexts as points along a continuum, with contexts where an extremely wide range of alternatives are relevant at one extreme, and contexts where an extremely narrow range of alternatives are relevant at the other (for

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to specify the features of context that explain contextual variation in the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions. In my view, the relevant features are facts about what alternatives those in the context *have a reason* to consider. As we saw in that chapter, this answer has various virtues: it's *informative*, it appeals to a notion (having a reason to consider an alternative) that I have *elucidated* and it gives *simple* answers to a number of important questions (Chapter three (§2.1; §2.3; §3.1)). Insofar as Hannon or Henderson specify the features of context that explain contextual variation in the truth-values of 'knowledge' ascriptions, their answer is something along the lines of 'ascriber interests and purposes', which isn't informative, hasn't been sufficiently elucidated (do they mean 'actual' or 'perceived' interests and purposes?) and doesn't seem to answer many questions. Consequently, interests contextualism is rather more 'fleshed-out' than Hannon's practical interests contextualism and Henderson's gatekeeping contextualism. Greco certainly does far better on this score, given that he embeds his virtue contextualism within his particular brand of virtue epistemology. Whether Greco's virtue contextualism is preferable to my interests contextualism will ultimately depend both on the viability of the virtue epistemology programme and on Greco's particular brand of virtue epistemology.

further details about conversational contextualism, see Chapter one (§1.1.2)). For any proposition *p*, the limit at one extreme is just all the alternatives in which not-*p* and the limit at the other is perhaps just any alternative in which not-*p* that actually obtains (of course, there may not be such an alternative).<sup>20</sup> The context shifts, and the range of relevant alternatives expands or contracts, according to the conversational kinematics (the raising and taking seriously of error-possibilities etc). Consequently, conversational contextualism has the following two features:

1. There are no constraints on how wide or narrow the range of relevant alternatives can get.
2. Expansions and contractions in the range of alternatives relevant in a context are tied to conversational kinematics.

I'll call the combination of (1) and (2) EXTENSIVE VARIABILITY.<sup>21</sup> (I suppose (1) is the 'extensive variability' part and (2) is just a particular explanation of the extensive variability, but it's just a label).

Second, Craigian contextualists reject EXTENSIVE VARIABILITY. Craigian contextualists think that the default relevant alternatives are relevant in *all* contexts, and that the range of relevant alternatives in a particular context can't get narrower than the range that are default relevant (although in contexts where those in the context are in an unusually pressing practical situation, the range can get very wide). Consequently, they reject (1). Further, Craigian contextualists think that expansions and retractions in the range of relevant alternatives are tied to the practical situations of 'knowledge' ascribers, not conversational kinematics. Consequently, they reject (2).

Third, why Craigian genealogy rules out EXTENSIVE VARIABILITY. As we've seen, Craigian genealogy supports CONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY, but it rules

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<sup>20</sup> So as to guarantee factivity.

<sup>21</sup> A view that's committed to (1) need not be committed to (2) because (presumably) there are ways of thinking of context shifts other than in terms of conversational kinematics on which (1) is true. However, any view that's committed to (2) will be committed to (1) because conversational kinematics put no constraints on how wide or narrow the range of relevant alternatives can get.

out a sort of LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY on which the range of alternatives that are relevant in a context can be both narrower and wider than the range that is default relevant. Call this UNCONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. UNCONSTRAINED LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY isn't equivalent to (1) because one can endorse (1) yet not think that the range of alternatives relevant in a context depends on interests and purposes. However, anyone who endorses (1) thinks that the range of alternatives that are relevant in a context can be narrower and wider than the range that is default relevant. Consequently, Craigian genealogy rules out (1), and hence EXTENSIVE VARIABILITY.<sup>22</sup>

I conclude that Craigian genealogy doesn't support, and actually rules out, conversational contextualism.

### **2.3. 'Function' claims: Gricean or 'genealogical'?**

I proceed as follows. First, I diagnose why many will find the claim that Craigian genealogy is relevant to the semantics rather than pragmatics of 'knowledge' ascriptions problematic (§2.3.1). Second, I introduce and defend a distinction between two ways of interpreting claims about the 'function' of 'knowledge' ascriptions as they feature in Craigian genealogy, what I'll call the 'Gricean interpretation' and what I'll call the 'genealogical interpretation' (§2.3.2). Third, I argue that, once we recognise that 'function' claims as they feature in Craigian genealogy are best interpreted along the lines of the genealogical interpretation, it is clear that Craigian genealogy is relevant to the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions (§2.3.3). Finally, I comment on the upshot for strict and sensitive invariantism (§2.3.4). In broad outline, the idea to be defended is that, because how a community of speakers have used a concept over a long period of time shapes and informs the conditions that must obtain for that concept to be satisfied, the Craigian genealogical account of 'knowledge' - which concerns how a community of speakers have used 'knowledge' over a long period of time - shapes the conditions that must obtain for 'knows' to be satisfied. Consequently, it's relevant to the semantics as opposed to the pragmatics of 'knowledge' ascriptions.

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<sup>22</sup> Note that, because (2) entails (1) (see fn. 21), Craigian genealogy is incompatible with (2) as well.

### 2.3.1. The diagnosis

What does it mean to say that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have a particular function? A common way of thinking about the function of a piece of language is in terms of what speakers of that language may use the relevant piece to *do*, or what *effects* speakers of that language may intend to produce in their audience by their using the relevant piece. On this way of thinking about ‘function claims’ - which, of course, is heavily indebted to Grice (1989) - it’s clear that the function of a piece of language is often (though not invariably) a matter for *pragmatics* rather than semantics. Obvious example: When writing a job recommendation one may use the sentence ‘so-and-so has good handwriting’ to inform the hiring committee that so-and-so isn’t up to the job, or bring it about that so-and-so isn’t considered for the position. But one can’t conclude that this function of ‘so-and-so has good handwriting’ tells us anything about the semantic content of the sentence. Rather, it tells us something about what speakers can pragmatically convey to their audience by exploiting the various conversational maxims one can derive from the co-operative principle. A lesson to take from Grice, and a lesson that has been learnt by all philosophers, is not to jump to semantic conclusions based on observations about the functions that pieces of language serve.

So the diagnosis of the problem with the argument of §2.1 is that talk of the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions being relevant to their semantics as opposed to their pragmatics offends against this basic lesson. If someone pushing the line pursued above - that Craigian genealogy supports Craigian contextualism - has the familiar idea that speakers can use pieces of language to do certain things or achieve certain effects in mind, then she just can’t support her conclusion about the semantics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions by her account of their function. Understood this way, that ‘knowledge’ ascriptions have a certain function is as likely a matter for pragmatics as a matter for semantics. To clarify: The point isn’t that, understood this way, the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions is relevant to pragmatics *rather than* semantics. The point is that, absent further investigation, we can’t conclude *which* its relevant to. The ‘further investigation’ will include, *inter alia*, a weighing up of the respective merits of contextualism and invariantism (strict and sensitive). But, if further investigation of that sort is needed, then Craigian genealogy, by itself, doesn’t support (Craigian) contextualism over its invariantist rivals. Consequently, the argument of §2.1 is based on a mistake.

Terminological aside: In what follows I'll call this way of thinking of claims about the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions the 'Gricean interpretation'. (The label is ugly, but it will be useful).<sup>23</sup>

### 2.3.2. The genealogical interpretation

Is this the right way to think of claims about the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions? There are ways in which one can think about the function of a piece of language other than in terms of what particular speakers may use that piece to do, or what effects particular speakers may intend to produce in their audience by their using the relevant piece. One way - which I mention for the sake of completeness, I'll say very little about it - would be as a sort of *proper function*.<sup>24</sup> Putting things very roughly, teleosemanticists think that the proper functions of intentional signs, linguistic items (utterances, words, sentences) included, determine (via some complicated route) truth- and satisfaction-conditions.<sup>25</sup> So, if the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions were a function in that sense, the function would determine (via some complicated route) the truth-conditions of 'knowledge' ascriptions. But arguing that Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions is an account of their proper function and defending the teleosemanticists' programme are massive tasks that I won't (and don't need to) attempt here.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The label is perhaps not just ugly but liable to mislead. It's a familiar observation - and one particularly associated with Grice - that speakers of a language use pieces of that language to achieve particular effects, and by a 'Gricean' interpretation I just mean an interpretation of talk of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions that assimilates such talk to this familiar observation. One can separate this point from the 'Gricean programme', and the attempt to analyse sentence and word meaning in terms of speakers meaning.

<sup>24</sup> Very roughly, the 'proper function' of an item is the function that ancestors of the item have performed that explains why tokens of the item have been reproduced. Example: the proper function of the heart is to pump blood. That ancestors of the heart have pumped blood explains why hearts have been reproduced. For discussion, clarification and defence of proper functions see Millikan (1984; 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Teleosemantics is often talked about as a theory of mental content, but there's no reason why other sorts of intentional signs - including linguistic - can't have proper functions that fix their contents. Millikan (1984), for instance, argues for a teleosemantic account of all intentional signs.

<sup>26</sup> Is there *any* reason for thinking that Craig's hypothesis concerns the proper function of 'knowledge' ascriptions? Graham (2010) argues that there are good reasons for

There's another way - which I'll focus on in what follows - that is closer to the spirit of Craigian genealogy than either proper functions or, as I'll argue, the Gricean interpretation. There are a number of features of the Gricean interpretation that don't seem to fit with Craigian genealogy as outlined earlier (§1). First, on the Gricean interpretation, claims about the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions concern what *particular speakers* at *particular times* may choose to do, or bring about, by using a piece of language. Second, the reasons why particular speakers may choose to do something, or bring something about, concern things like their *communicative intentions*, the *particular projects they're engaged in*, their *particular beliefs about their situation* and the like. In contrast, Craigian genealogy starts with the identification of a need (for information, and therefore for a way of identifying good informants) where that need is common to all humans at all stages in our development, and then proceeds to the hypothesis that 'knowledge', and in particular 'knowledge' ascriptions, meets that need. So, contra the first feature of the Gricean interpretation, Craig's hypothesis about the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions concerns how a community used, and continues to use, a concept in order to meet a need that's shared by all members of the community. Further, contra the second feature, the focus isn't on the reasons why particular speakers may do something, or bring an effect about. Rather, the focus is on the reasons why a community does something, or brings an effect about, by making 'knowledge' ascriptions.<sup>27</sup>

Abstracting away from some of these details, the contrast between the Gricean interpretation and what I'll call the 'genealogical interpretation' (again, an ugly but useful label) can be put as follows. On the Gricean interpretation Craigian genealogy is

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thinking that *assertion* has a sort of proper function. I won't attempt to do so here, but I think that some of Graham's arguments in support of assertion having a proper function could be appealed to in support of 'knowledge' ascriptions having a proper function.

<sup>27</sup> Objection: A community consists in particular individuals, who do things at particular times for particular reasons. Recall that, insofar as Craig appeals to features of human psychology, he only appeals to features that there is reason to suppose that all individuals have in common (see fn. 8). The idea is that, because only common features are being appealed to, in hypothesising that 'knowledge' ascriptions serve a function and defending that hypothesis one can abstract away from features of the psychology of particular individuals.



concerned with the way in which particular speakers at particular times use pieces of language, whereas on the genealogical interpretation it's concerned with the way in which, over a long period of time, a community of speakers at various different times have used particular pieces of language (sentences of the form 'S knows that p' and 'S doesn't know that p'). While on both interpretations Craigian genealogy appeals to use, on the Gricean interpretation it appeals to particular uses whereas on the genealogical interpretation it appeals to extensive and long-standing patterns of use within a whole community. And, for the reasons given, Craigian genealogy is best interpreted along the lines of the genealogical interpretation rather than the Gricean interpretation.

I now turn to why, on the genealogical interpretation, Craigian genealogy is relevant to the semantics rather than the pragmatics of 'knowledge' ascriptions. I start with the connection between meaning (in the sense of literal meaning, semantic content) and use.

### **2.3.3. The genealogical interpretation and semantic relevance**

What is the connection between meaning and use? Two possible connections are relevant here. First, there's the - very controversial - view that meaning just is use. On this view, facts about the meaning of our words are facts about how they are used (or, more plausibly, facts about meaning are constituted by some subset of facts about use).<sup>28</sup> I mention this view only because I want to emphasise that nothing I say in what follows requires anything like this strong a connection. Second, there's the - very plausible, perhaps obviously true - view that the meanings of our words stand in some sort of (complicated) causal relationship to the way in which they have been used over a period of time. I'll remain vague as to how long a period of time because we should certainly allow that changes in meaning due to changes in use could happen relatively quickly. On this view, what a word means is partly a function of how it has been used, but we can't 'read off' facts about meaning from particular uses, and facts about meaning aren't facts about particular uses, use in general, or constituted by some subset of facts about use. Rather, the way in which a word is used over a long period of time

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<sup>28</sup> I say 'very controversial' but it has a number of defenders. See Horwich (1998) for a particularly able defence of the view that facts about meaning consist in a subset of facts about use.

will ‘shape’ the conditions under which the concept it expresses applies.<sup>29</sup> In what follows I assume this connection between meaning and use, but I don’t take this to be a controversial assumption.

On the Gricean interpretation, talk about the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions concerns particular uses by particular speakers at particular times. And, as I just pointed out, one can’t read off conclusions about the meaning of ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowledge’ ascriptions from particular uses at particular times. Consequently, as one would expect, on the Gricean interpretation Craigian genealogy doesn’t support Craigian contextualism. But, as I’ve just argued, Craigian genealogy isn’t best interpreted along the lines of the Gricean interpretation. Rather, it’s best interpreted along the lines of the genealogical interpretation and, on that interpretation, talk about the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions concerns extensive and long-standing patterns of use within a whole community. And, as I also just pointed out, what a word means - in the case, ‘knowledge’ - is partly a function of the way in which it has been used over a period of time within a whole community. The way in which a word has been used shapes the conditions under which the concept it expresses applies, so the way in which we’ve used ‘knowledge’ shapes the conditions under which ‘knowledge’ applies. So, on the genealogical interpretation Craigian genealogy is relevant to the semantics as opposed to the pragmatics of ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. Consequently, Craigian genealogy is relevant to the semantics rather than pragmatics of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, so it supports Craigian contextualism.

#### **2.3.4. WAMs and sensitive invariantism**

A final question before I turn to a couple of problems for Craigian contextualism: What’s the upshot for strict and sensitive invariantism?

First, sensitive invariantism. The argument of §2.3.1, with the support provided by §2.3.3, shows that Craigian genealogy supports Craigian contextualism and, as we saw in Chapter three (§2.2-2.3) interests contextualism is a type of Craigian contextualism.

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<sup>29</sup> This way of putting things is a little cumbersome. I assume that the meaning of a word is the concept it expresses, so the way in which the word is used over a long period of time shapes its meaning or, as I put it in the main body of the text, the conditions under which the concept it expresses applies.

Further, as we saw in Chapter three (§2.2) and above, Craigian genealogy explains why we see contextual variation in the appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions and denials and why such contextual variation is constrained in certain ways. Consequently, interests contextualism isn’t just an explanation of patterns of linguistic usage; rather, it follows from an independently plausible account of the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, and the independently plausible account explains why we see that pattern of linguistic usage. I take this to answer the worry - pressed in §0 above - that the arguments mustered in chapters two & three aren’t *enough* to conclude that we should prefer interests contextualism to sensitive invariantism. Sensitive invariantists ultimately appeal to the intuitive links between knowledge and action, and interests contextualists ultimately appeal to Craigian genealogy, but the interests contextualist can deal with a wider range of cases than the sensitive invariantist (Chapter three (§4)) so the interests contextualist wins the day. I conclude that I’ve given reason enough to prefer interests contextualism to sensitive invariantism.

Second, strict invariantism, in particular the appeal to ‘warranted assertability manoeuvres’ (WAMs) (Chapter one (§2.1)). I should note that, while I have primarily been concerned with building a positive case for contextualism, and therefore against strict (and sensitive) invariantism, there are problems with the strict invariantist appeal to contextual variation in the assertability-conditions (as opposed to truth-conditions or truth-values) of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. One long-standing problem concerns the observation that, in contexts where unusually wide ranges of alternatives are relevant (or, the epistemic standards are very high), it’s not just almost always (intuitively) inappropriate to ascribe ‘knowledge’ it’s almost always appropriate to *deny* ‘knowledge’. While it’s often inappropriate to assert something true, it’s not so often appropriate to assert something false.<sup>30</sup> Another problem, noted by Peter Baumann (2011), concerns the possibility that the sorts of cases (NORMAL, HIGH, PUB, POLICE STATION) contextualists use to motivate their view about the semantics of utterances of sentences could equally well be used to motivate an equivalent view about the contents of *beliefs* (‘mental contextualism’). The idea would be that, in the case of beliefs about epistemic

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<sup>30</sup> DeRose (2009, Chapter 3) presses the strict invariantist appeal to WAMs on this point.

matters, the content of what is believed depends on certain features of the believer's context. But, because the Gricean machinery strict invariantists appeal to in giving pragmatic accounts of the data has no obvious parallel in the realm of thought, it doesn't look like they can appeal to WAMs to deal with 'mental contextualism'.<sup>31</sup> I'm not going to rest my argument for interests contextualism over strict invariantism on either of these problems, but the moral - that the appeal to WAMs isn't going to be straightforward - is worth bearing in mind.

We have seen that Craigian genealogy supports Craigian contextualism, and that failure to recognise this is based on two mistakes. The first mistake - identified in §2.1 - is that, contra the standard interpretation, GLOBAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY does not rule out (CONSTRAINED) LOCAL INTEREST-RELATIVITY. The second mistake - identified in §2.3 - is that, contra our diagnosis of the problem with the argument of §2.1, one shouldn't interpret talk of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions along the lines of the Gricean interpretation. Rather, one should interpret talk of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions along the lines of the genealogical interpretation. Where does this leave the strict invariantist appeal to WAMs? I've argued that the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions - talk of which reveals a long-standing pattern of use within our community - shapes the conditions under which the concept 'knowledge' applies. I don't take this to show that it *could not* be the case that what it takes to 'know' doesn't depend on the context whereas what it takes to be properly said to 'know' does. But I do take it to show that it's *unlikely* that what it takes to 'know' is a context-insensitive matter.

This conclusion can be bolstered by noting that, if the strict invariantist who appeals to a WAM is right, then when a 'knowledge' ascriber is in an unusually pressing practical situation she could often, quite truthfully albeit improperly, say that some subject 'knows' that such-and-such. But, in doing so, she could not be identifying that subject as a good informant on the matter of such-and-such (because she wouldn't qualify). The strict invariantist needs to hold that the truth-conditions of 'knowledge' ascriptions

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<sup>31</sup> It's worth noting that Greenough (2011) argues that, just as the knowledge norm of assertion can explain the data in the case of utterances of sentences, the knowledge norm of belief can explain the data in the case of beliefs. So, if we have reason to accept the knowledge norm of belief, we have reason to think that Baumann's problem can be dealt with.

can, as this sort of case demonstrates, be inconsistent with the function of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. But, if that function shapes the meaning of ‘knowledge’, how could that be?<sup>32</sup>

I conclude that there is good enough reason to prefer Craigian contextualism, and in particular interests contextualism, to strict invariantism.

### **3. Craigian contextualism and radical scepticism**

In this section I discuss two problems for Craigian contextualism. The first problem is that it’s irrelevant to radical scepticism (§3.1). In response, I argue that the same goes for conversational contextualism (§3.2). But this just raises the second problem: Why doesn’t this leave contextualism - whether Craigian or conversational - unmotivated? But, as I’ll argue, this isn’t really a problem for Craigian contextualism, which is ultimately motivated via Craigian genealogy. However, it is perhaps a problem for conversational contextualism, which isn’t (§3.3). Finally, I argue that Craigian contextualists have nothing to fear from the various anti-sceptical strategies that have usually been thought of as rivals to contextualism (see my discussion of the ‘competing accounts’ objection in Chapter one (§2.2.3.1) (§3.4).

#### **3.1. The first problem: irrelevance**

Recall the distinction between high-standards and radical scepticism drawn in Chapter one (§2.2): The high-standards sceptic argues that we know very little, if anything, because in order to know one has to be able to rule out possibilities such that one is a handless brain in a vat, or has to meet extremely stringent epistemic standards; the radical sceptic argues that we know very little, if anything, because none of our beliefs meet *any* epistemic standard, high or otherwise. Our beliefs would be as they are whether the world was as we take it to be or not, so we don’t know by any standard.<sup>33</sup> (And recall an analogy: High-standards scepticism is akin to a view on which, in order to be flat, a surface has to be completely flat. In that case, nothing is flat. Or another analogy: Imagine a view on which, in order to be a good driver, one has to execute every

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<sup>32</sup> For a similar point see Hannon (forthcoming, §4.4) and Henderson (2009, 123-5).

<sup>33</sup> Again, it should go without saying that I’m not endorsing either form of scepticism here.

maneuver flawlessly, indicate for every turn, check their mirrors every five seconds, and so on. In that case, there are no good drivers).<sup>34</sup>

Craigian contextualists can give a neat response to high-standards scepticism. Take the ‘good driver’ analogy: Identifying those around us who are good drivers, and those around us who aren’t, serves some set of purposes (avoiding crashes etc). But, if ‘good driver ascriptions’ are to serve that set of purposes, it can’t be that the requirements we put on being a good driver are so stringent that there are no good drivers. If a concept serves some set of purposes, that concept needs to apply in a reasonably wide range of cases. If it didn’t, it couldn’t serve that set of purposes. Similarly, if, as the Craigian contextualist holds, ‘knowledge’ ascriptions serve the function of identifying good informants, it can’t be that the requirements we put on ‘knowing’ are such that no subject ever meets them. Again, if ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are to serve their function, there have to be true instances of ‘S knows that p’, otherwise they couldn’t serve their function. So, on the Craigian contextualist account, there’s good reason to think that high-standards scepticism is false.<sup>35</sup>

However, whether one thinks that this argument is on target or not, it only goes so far. In particular, it gives us no reason to think that Craigian contextualism is relevant to radical scepticism.<sup>36</sup> It tells us why, if ‘knowledge’ ascriptions are to serve their function, we can’t require that subjects be able to meet overly stringent standards in order to ‘know’. If we did so, ‘knowledge’ ascriptions wouldn’t serve their function, and so wouldn’t meet a certain human need. But why does that answer the radical sceptic? The

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<sup>34</sup> And an analogy to help clarify the difference between high-standards and radical scepticism (I owe this to Torfinn Huvenes, who in turn owes it to an unremembered source): You’ve got a tank. Think of whatever is in the tank (if anything is in the tank) as constituting your epistemic position with respect to some proposition p (your evidence, justification etc). The tank has a line near (or at) the top which marks the strength of epistemic position required for knowledge. The high-standards sceptic argues that, for every proposition p that we believe, there’s never enough in the tank to meet the ‘knowledge line’. The radical sceptic argues that there’s nothing in the tank.

<sup>35</sup> Re. fn 15: This should go some way towards explaining why I disagree with Kelp’s suggestion that the ‘standard interpretation’ of Craigian genealogy leads to a sort of sceptical invariantism (see, in particular, Kelp 2011, 7 fn. 2).

<sup>36</sup> In what follows I explain why one might think that Craigian contextualism is irrelevant. Is my explanation persuasive? In the main body of the text I assume that it is, but the reader might disagree. If so, this helps, not hinders, my cause.

radical sceptic's charge isn't that we don't know much, if anything, because knowing requires meeting overly stringent standards. Rather, it's that we don't know much, if anything, because we don't know by any standards, stringent or otherwise. Perhaps the radical sceptic is mistaken (we should certainly hope that she is!), but if she is that has nothing to do with Craigian contextualism.

I conclude that Craigian contextualism offers a neat response to the high-standards sceptic, but is irrelevant to radical scepticism. This, one might think, is a problem for the Craigian contextualist.

### **3.2. The response: conversational contextualism and irrelevance**

If it's a problem for the Craigian contextualist, then it's also a problem for the conversational contextualist. A quick recap from Chapter one (§2.2.3.3): On the conversational contextualist solution to the sceptical problem, we 'know' a lot in some contexts (contexts where brain in vat-style error-possibilities are not up for discussion) but we don't 'know' much, if anything, in other contexts (contexts where brain in vat-style error-possibilities are up for discussion). This is because whether we 'know' depends on the epistemic standards operative in the context (or, the range of alternatives relevant in the context), and the epistemic standards are such that we 'know' a lot in the first sort of context but don't 'know' much, if anything, in the second sort of context. But none of this answers the radical sceptics charge that we don't know by any standards, high or otherwise. Consequently, conversational contextualism is irrelevant to radical scepticism.

This point has been well put in a number of places:

“The debate about skepticism is...not as a debate in which the quality of our evidence is agreed to and the debate results from differing views about what the standards for knowledge are. Instead, it is a debate about how good our evidence is. Understood that way, it is difficult to see the epistemological significance of decisions about which standards are associated with the word 'knows' in any particular context. Contextualism is, from this perspective, skepticism neutral, in that it does not address this part of the issue” (Feldman 2004, 32).

“[C]ontextualism does nothing to address the Full-Blooded Skeptic, the skeptic who wishes to insist that all propositions about the external world are epistemologically on a par [i.e. the radical sceptic]. But it is this latter skeptic who is making an historically important and philosophically interesting claim. If skepticism is a position we need to worry about, it is Full-Blooded Skepticism, not High Standards Skepticism, which should concern us” (Kornblith 2000, 27).

It’s important to clarify what the objection is meant to be here. The objection is not that one can’t combine one’s contextualism with an independently appealing anti-sceptical strategy, and so offer a solution to radical scepticism. The objection is that, if one does so, one’s contextualism isn’t doing any work. (As Kornblith 2000 points out, this is exactly what one gets in DeRose 1995)

### **3.3. The second problem: what’s the motivation?**

If Craigian and conversational contextualism are both irrelevant to radical scepticism, and providing a solution to radical scepticism is supposed to provide a large part of the motivation for contextualism, doesn’t that leave both Craigian and conversational contextualism looking rather unmotivated? To bolster this problem, recall our earlier worry about the contextualist appeal to context-shifting arguments, and the contextualist explanation of contextual variation in the appropriateness of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions (§0; see also Chapter one (§2.1)). Contextualism provides a nice, simple explanation of a pattern of linguistic usage and, in the case of interests contextualism anyway, that nice, simple explanation can deal with a wider range of cases than sensitive invariantism. But why put so much stock in explanations of patterns of linguistic usage? If, in addition, the contextualist could deal with radical scepticism she could point to the further virtues of her view. But if she can’t, what else is there to point to?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> DeRose suggests that the way I put things here gets things backwards: “But while philosophical skepticism has drawn much of the attention of contextualists, support for contextualism should also—and perhaps primarily—be looked for in how ‘know(s)’ is utilized in non-philosophical conversation. For as the cases we’ve already looked at here illustrate, we do seem to apply ‘know(s)’ differently in different contexts, a phenomenon that, at least on the surface, seems to promise significant support for contextualism” (2009, 42). I’m suggesting that the contextualist explanation of our general phenomenon looks unmotivated in the absence of ‘something else to point to’; DeRose



Of course, we've already seen what Craigian contextualists can point to. They can point to the support their view gets from Craigian genealogy, and they can argue that their view is more than just an explanation of a pattern of linguistic usage. Craigian contextualism follows from Craigian genealogy, and Craigian genealogy explains why we see contextual variation in the appropriateness of 'knowledge' ascriptions and denials. Consequently, there's no problem for the Craigian contextualist here. In contrast, conversational contextualists can't appeal to Craigian genealogy (as argued in §2.2), and they can't appeal to their solution to radical scepticism (as argued in §3.2, and in Chapter one (§2.2.3.3)). Consequently, the conversational contextualist does face this problem. But how pressing a problem is it?

Two points that are important to bear in mind: First, I don't take this to provide much of an argument for the superiority of some form of Craigian contextualism (such as interests contextualism) over conversational contextualism. That's partly because I think the arguments presented in Chapter three (§3) are more powerful, and partly because I think the conversational contextualist can say something in response to the problem just raised. I think the line she should take here is to argue that too much is being expected of her. Everyone accepts that certain expressions of our language are context-sensitive, but the sorts of demands that are being made of the contextualist about 'knows' - in particular, the demand to point to something other than a feature of linguistic usage - aren't (usually) made of the contextualist about gradable adjectives or other plausibly context-sensitive expressions. That those demands probably couldn't be met in the case of gradable adjectives doesn't tell against contextualism about gradable adjectives, so it doesn't tell against contextualism about 'knows'. I'm not endorsing this line of response here, and I won't discuss whether it really deals with the problem, but I've certainly not given any reason to reject it.

Second, I take the argument of this section to disarm a potential objection to interests contextualism and (a prominent version of) sensitive invariantism: One might think that a problem for a view on which contextual variation in the truth-values of 'knowledge'

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is suggesting that the contextualist solution to scepticism looks unmotivated in the absence of the contextualist explanation of our general phenomenon. Why side with me rather than DeRose? I take the worries about context-shifting arguments discussed in Chapter one (§2.1), and recapped briefly in §0, to provide adequate reason.

ascriptions is tied to practical interests (whether of ‘knowledge’ ascribers and communities, as in my interests contextualism, or of the subjects of ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, as in a prominent version of sensitive invariantism) is that, unlike conversational contextualism, it doesn’t give us the resources to respond to the sceptic. While sceptics can succeed in making error-possibilities salient, they can’t succeed in altering the practical situations of their interlocutors.<sup>38</sup> But, as we’ve seen, conversational contextualism doesn’t give us the resources to respond to the sceptic. Consequently, the conversational contextualist is at no advantage on this score. While I’ve been urging that the conversational contextualist is perhaps at a disadvantage, the negative result (that conversational contextualism isn’t at an advantage) is really all I need at this point in the dialectic.

### **3.4. Competing accounts again**

There’s one more (small) worry that I need to address: A feature of the debate about contextualism in the last 15 or so years has been the idea that there are a number of views that can do everything contextualists can do (deal with scepticism, explain patterns of linguistic usage) without needing to posit a contextualist semantics for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions. Some of these views were intended as alternative explanations of patterns of linguistic usage (strict and sensitive invariantism, relativism) and I’ve argued that interests contextualism is ultimately preferable to all of these alternatives (Chapter two; Chapter three; §2). Other views were intended as alternative ways of dealing with the sceptical problem. I briefly discussed one such view - a neo-Moorean view defended in Pritchard (2007) - and indicated that there are many others in Chapter one (§2.2.3.1). A number of defenders of such views have argued that, because their preferred view can deal with scepticism without positing a contextualist semantics for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, their view is preferable to contextualism (see, for example, Pritchard 2005; 2007; Sosa 1999; 2000). Underlying this argument are two assumptions. The first assumption is that, in the absence of good reason to accept a contextualist semantics for ‘knowledge’ ascriptions, one should prefer the traditional invariantist alternative. I have endorsed this assumption in several places (Chapter one (§4);

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<sup>38</sup> Why can’t they? If the reader thinks they can, then he or she presumably thinks there was never a problem in the first place. But I’m inclined to think they can’t.

Chapter two (§2-§3); §0; §2). The second assumption is that scepticism is supposed to provide the main motivation for adopting contextualism. If the second assumption is granted, then showing that one can deal with scepticism without going contextualist undercuts the main motivation for adopting contextualism. But, as we've seen, the second assumption shouldn't be granted. Or, at least, the interests contextualist wouldn't grant the second assumption. Craigian genealogy, and the patterns of linguistic usage that it explains, provides the main motivation for adopting interests contextualism.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

Imagine, again, that my friend Catriona tells me she has decent (but not conclusive) evidence that Isla was at the party last night. Plausibly, my willingness to say that Catriona 'knows' depends on the context. If I'm just curious, I may well say that Catriona 'knows'. If I'm testifying to the police as to Isla's whereabouts, I may well not. This sort of case is just an instance of a general phenomenon (viz. contextual variation in the appropriateness of 'knowledge' ascriptions and denials), and I have concluded that this general phenomenon tells us something important about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions. It tells us that whether someone 'knows' depends on the context, where by 'context' is meant the context of the 'knowledge' ascriber, and where the relevant features of the context are the sorts of alternatives and error-possibilities that those in the context have a reason to consider.

It's worth recapping how I reached this conclusion. Way back at the end of Chapter one things looked bad for contextualists. We saw that the sorts of arguments that have been mustered in contextualism's favour didn't give much support to contextualism over a handful of other views about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions, and we saw that contextualism faced a number of objections that those other views avoided. I started the recovery process by arguing that contextualists could deal with the objections from the philosophy of language (Chapter two). In doing so I dealt with the retraction and disagreement data, and so removed the main motivation for preferring some sort of relativism to contextualism. Given that a relativist semantics for 'knowledge' ascriptions is more revisionary than the contextualist alternative, I concluded that we had reason to prefer contextualism to some sort of relativism (Chapter two (§2)). Next, I put a particular sort of contextualism on the table, interests contextualism (Chapter three). I

argued that interests contextualism is preferable to conversational contextualism for a number of reasons (Chapter three (§3)), one of which being that it avoids both the epistemological objections to contextualism (Chapter three (§3.2; §5)) and that there's some reason to prefer it to sensitive invariantism (Chapter three (§4)). Finally, I argued that Craigan genealogy supports Craigan contextualism, of which interests contextualism is a type (§2). In doing so I dealt with the worry that interests contextualism is, ultimately, just an explanation of a pattern of linguistic usage and I explained why Craigan genealogy casts serious doubt on the strict invariantist appeal to warranted-assertability maneuvers (§2). Consequently, I concluded that interests contextualism is preferable to strict and sensitive invariantism. Putting all that together, I can conclude that interests contextualism is preferable to all of its rivals.

Where should one look for the weak point in this argument? First, I have not sought to provide conclusive arguments for interests contextualism, or against any of its rivals. Instead, I outlined the advantages and disadvantages of a number of views about the semantics of 'knowledge' ascriptions, and concluded that interests contextualism is the best of the lot. But perhaps the reader thinks that I have downplayed (or even ignored) some disadvantage of interests contextualism, or some advantage of one of the noncontextualist views. Second, the argument of Chapter three (§2.2-2.3) and Chapter four, and to a lesser extent the argument of Chapter two (§2), relies on Craigan genealogy. I think - but haven't argued - that Craig's account of the function of 'knowledge' ascriptions is plausible, and I think what I have offered in this chapter by way of explanation and defence of his general approach to questions about 'knowledge' has gone some way towards defending my appeal to Craigan genealogy. But it certainly hasn't gone the whole way. In my view, the best way to dispute my conclusion is to dispute the Craigan account of the function of 'knowledge', and/or Craig's general approach to questions about 'knowledge'. But defending Craigan genealogy is a research project in its own right.

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