

CONTEXTUALISM AND THE MANY SENSES OF KNOWLEDGE

René van WOUDENBERG
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Summary

Contextualists explain certain intuitions regarding knowledge ascriptions by means of the thesis that ‘knowledge’ behaves like an indexical. This explanation denies what Peter Unger has called invariantism, i.e., the idea that knowledge ascriptions have truth value independent of the context in which they are issued. This paper aims to provide an invariantist explanation of the contextualist’s intuitions, the core of which is that ‘knowledge’ has many different senses.

0. *Contextualism’s crucial contention*

Contextualism, as developed by Stewart Cohen and Keith DeRose, is a theory according to which the truth-value of sentences in which knowledge is ascribed to, or denied of, a certain subject is relative to the context of the utterer of the sentence. So sentences of the form “S knows that P” and “S doesn’t know that P” (henceforth referred to as K-sentences), aren’t true or false *simpliciter*, but are only true or false relative to the context of the utterer. As DeRose says:

In some contexts [of utterance, RvW], “S knows that P” requires for its truth that S have a true belief that P and also be in a *very* strong epistemic position with respect to P, while in other contexts, the very same sentence may require for its truth, in addition to S’s having a true belief that P, only that S meet some lower epistemic standards. Thus, the contextualist will allow that one speaker can truthfully say “S knows that P”, while another speaker, in another context where higher standards are in place, can truthfully say “S doesn’t know that P”, though both speakers are talking about the same S and the same P at the same time. (DeRose 1999, 187–8)¹

1. It should be noted that DeRose wavers as to what it is that is context relative. Most

The same point can also be put as follows. The contextualist allows that “S knows that P” can both be true and false at the same time, provided there are two contexts, a low standard one (in which it is true) and a high standard one (in which it is false). Cohen and DeRose have proposed that the contextual relativity of the truth-value of K-sentences is due to the fact that the word ‘know’ and its cognates are context relative in much the same way as attributive terms² like ‘flat’ and ‘bald’, and indexicals like ‘I’ and ‘here’ are. In this paper I will argue against their proposal. I will furthermore argue that the sort of cases they have marshalled in order to provide contextualism with some initial credibility (or perhaps I should say: the sort of cases that trigger contextualist intuitions), can be explained in a better way, one that has no contextualist implications. I will go some way towards arguing that the word ‘knowledge’ and its cognates such as ‘know’, have various senses or meanings. In effect I will be suggesting that the contextualist’s intuitions can best be explained by reference to the phenomenon of polysemy.

1. *Contextualism’s motivation*

I start out my argument by reminding us of two important motivations behind contextualism. First, there is the ambition to solve the sceptical problem, and, second, there is the conviction that the sceptical problem can be solved in the slip-stream of an explanation of a surprising feature of our intuitions about the truth-value of K-sentences. Let me expand on both.

The sceptical problem contextualism means to solve is the problem of how to respond to the following closure-based sceptical argument:

- (1) I don’t know that I am not a brain-in-a-vat (or BIV for short).
- (2) If I don’t know that I am not a BIV, then I cannot know anything about the external world.
- (3) Therefore, I cannot know anything about the external world. (cf. DeRose 1995, 1)

often he says it is the truth-value of K-sentences. But sometimes he also says that it is knowledge, and other times that it is the meaning of ‘knowledge’ that is context relative. I will be working with the formulation that contextualism is a thesis about the truth-value of K-sentences.

2. Searle reports that old-fashioned grammarians called ‘tall’, ‘hot’, and other such rela-

The conclusion of this argument, (3), is surely most unwelcome and no one, or virtually no one, will accept it. After all, we do think that we know a fair bit about the external world. Since the conclusion does seem to follow from the premises, the only way to escape it is to deny at least one of the premises. But when we look at the premises, they seem so obviously true that we wouldn't want to deny either of them. We therefore face the problem of how to respond to the sceptical argument. This is the sceptical problem.

Contextualists think they can solve it in the slip-stream of an explanation they have proposed for certain intuitions about K-sentences, for instance certain intuitions about the Bank Cases that DeRose has presented.

Bank Case A. My wife and I are driving home on a Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past the bank, we notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, 'Maybe the bank won't be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays.' I reply, 'No, I know it'll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It's open until noon.'

Bank Case B. My wife and I drive past the bank on a Friday afternoon, as in Case A, and notice the long lines. I again suggest we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday only two weeks ago and discovered it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and very important check. If our paychecks are not deposited into our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a *very* bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, 'Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?' Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, still, I reply, 'Well, no. I'd better go in and make sure.' (De Rose 1992, 913)

Here we have two cases with, in each, a K-sentence—the first contains a knowledge ascription, the second a knowledge denial. The important

tive terms 'attributive terms' (Searle 1979, 79). Even though neither DeRose nor Cohen uses this term, for ease of reference I will adopt it.

difference between these cases is that in case A not so much is at stake, whereas in B a lot is. DeRose's intuitions tell him that in both cases the K-sentence is true. In Case A the sentence that he knows that the bank will be open on Saturday is true. In Case B the sentence that he doesn't know that the bank will be open on Saturday is true.

I call this a surprising feature of the contextualist's intuitions. For isn't it surprising to have the intuition that both "S knows that p" and "S doesn't know that p" are true? Aren't the contextualist's intuitions simply contradictory?

2. Contextually varying standards for knowledge ascriptions

The contextualist now proceeds to explain these seemingly contradictory intuitions, that is, he tries to show that they are not contradictory after all. In order to do just this, he frames an answer to the question "When, generally speaking, are K-sentences true?" An answer to this question, the contextualist seems to imply, will explain the seemingly conflicting intuitions and, in its slip-stream, solve the sceptical problem.

So when, generally speaking, are K-sentences true? We have seen the essence of the contextualist's answer in the quotation in section 0: that depends on the conversational context of the utterer. For an utterer's K-sentence to be true in an ordinary context, much less is required than in a context where higher standards are in place. In some contexts what is required for the truth of a knowledge ascription is that S believes that P and also is in a very strong epistemic position with respect to P. In other contexts the same knowledge ascription, i.e., the ascription of knowledge of the same proposition P to the same S, requires for its truth next to S's having the true belief that p, only that S meets some lower epistemic standard. So, DeRose's intuitions that in the one case "I know that the bank is open on Saturday" is true whereas in the other its negation is true, are explained by invoking contexts of ascription.

The contextualist then continues to argue that this explanation of what I have called the surprising features of the contextualist's intuitions, helps to forestall the skeptical conclusion that no one knows anything about the external world. The reasoning is that when the ascriber is in a non-sceptical context, i.e., in a context where the stakes are not so high, then for the subject S to know that P, it isn't needed that S is in a very strong epistemic position with respect to P. The reasoning is that

in certain ordinary contexts an ascriber may truthfully ascribe knowledge to S even when S's evidence does not exclude certain skeptical possibilities. In a skeptical context, however, i.e., in a context where the standards are very high, an ascriber may truthfully ascribe knowledge to S only if S is in a very strong epistemic position *vis-à-vis* P. And what does that mean? It means that S is able to rule out certain skeptical possibilities. Since S cannot rule out such possibilities, knowledge ascriptions are false in contexts where the standards are high. Nevertheless, in non-skeptical contexts the same knowledge ascriptions may be true. In this way the general skeptical conclusion is evaded.

Applied to the bank cases this gives the following result. In case A, in order for DeRose to be able to truthfully ascribe knowledge to himself, he only needs to meet a low epistemic standard, perhaps the standard of "having some reason for thinking that the bank is open on Saturdays". In case B, however, in order for DeRose to truthfully ascribe knowledge to himself, he must meet a much stronger standard, perhaps the standard of "ruling out the possibility that the bank has changed its hours". And so long DeRose hasn't done that, the K-sentence "I don't know that the bank will be open on Saturday" will be true, which means he has no knowledge of the bank's opening hours.

The contextualist's explanation of the surprising features of his intuition also explains why the skeptical argument seems so compelling. The explanation is that the skeptical argument unthinkingly implies or assumes that the standards for knowledge ascriptions are the same in all contexts of attribution and that the standards for knowledge ascriptions are always as high as they are in skeptical contexts; i.e., it assumes that all knowledge ascriptions require for their truth that S is in a very strong epistemic position with respect to P.

3. *No disquotation for the truth of K-sentence and no invariantism*

A contextualist, then, thinks he can say without contradiction or embarrassment that the sentence "S knows that P" can be true and false at the same time. He can say this without contradiction so long as one instance of "S knows that p" is uttered in a low standards context (where it is true), and the other in a high standards one (where it is false). He can also say this without embarrassment, because he is able to provide an explanation of the fact *how* K-sentences have this remarkable capability

of being true and false at the same time.

This means that the contextualist in effect denies disquotation for K-sentences. He denies that the sentence “S knows that p” is true only if S knows that p, or only if S is in the knowledge state *vis-à-vis* p. As the contextualist sees it, whether or not a K-sentence is true depends on the contextual standards of the ascriptor. It doesn’t depend on the *knowledge state* of S, or the obtainment of the *knowledge relation*. Had it been thus dependent, disquotation would hold, and “S knows that p” would be true if and only if S knows that p. But it is not, says the contextualist, and hence disquotation doesn’t hold.

Another way of saying essentially the same thing is that contextualism denies what Peter Unger has called ‘Invariantism’ (see DeRose 1999, 188): the claim that there is a single and invariant set of standards that determines whether or not a particular K-sentence is true, regardless of the context in which the K-sentence is uttered.

4. *‘Knows’ behaves like either an attributive term or an indexical*

The contextualist, then, holds that the truth-value of K-sentences depends on the context of the utterer. But how, exactly, should we understand this remarkable capability of K-sentences? What quality of K-sentences is responsible for their contextual dependency? The contextualist’s answer is that the word ‘knows’ linguistically behaves either like attributive terms such as ‘flat’ and ‘short’ (DeRose 1992, 925; DeRose 1995, 30), or like indexicals such as ‘I’ and ‘here’ (Cohen 1998, 517). The characteristic linguistic behaviour of such words is that sentences that contain them are not true or false *simpliciter*, but only true or false *in (or given) a context*. Some examples may illustrate this. Consider the following two sentences:

- (a) Sam is short.
- (b) He is in pain.

The truth-value of these sentences depends on contextual factors, in the following way. If (a) is uttered in the context of a discussion about the length of basketball players it may be true, whereas if it is uttered in the context of a discussion about liliputs it may be false. The truth-value of (b) depends on contextual factors in a similar way. If ‘he’ refers to you

it may be true, but if it refers to me it may be false. In both cases, the context that is relevant for determining the truth-value is the context of the ascriptor. (For ease of reference, let us call sentences that contain attributive terms (i.e., adjectives that allow of degrees), A-sentences, and sentences that contain an indexical, I-sentences.)

Since, as contextualists hold, ‘knows’ linguistically behaves like ‘flat’ and ‘I’, the truth-value of K-sentences also depends on contextual factors—factors immanent in the ascriptor’s context. For instance, if in a certain context someone says “S knows that P”, his K-sentence will be true if his conversational context determines that the K-sentence requires for its truth that S is in an average epistemic position *vis-à-vis* P; the K-sentence will be false, however, if the conversational context determines that the K-sentence requires for its truth that S be in a very strong epistemic position *vis-à-vis* P. DeRose’s bank case A is supposed to be a case where the K-sentence “The bank is open on Saturday until noon” is true; its truth does not require that S is in a very strong epistemic position with respect to that proposition. In case B, however, the K-sentence is false because the context of the ascriptor determines that for the K-sentence to be true, it is required for its truth that S is in a very strong epistemic situation *vis-à-vis* P—a requirement that, on DeRose’s view, isn’t satisfied. The contextualist’s basic idea, then, is that whether or not ‘knows’ applies to a subject, depends on the context of the knowledge ascriptor, just as whether or not ‘is tall’ applies to a subject depends on the context of the tallness ascriptor, and just as whether or not ‘here’ refers to Amsterdam depends on the location ascriptor.

The contextualist, then, claims that ‘knows’ linguistically behaves either like attributive terms or like indexicals. He further claims that this fact explains both his intuitions about the bank cases and our intuition that in sceptical contexts we cannot ascribe knowledge to anybody, whereas in everyday contexts it is fully legitimate to do so.

5. *Problems for the claim that ‘knows’ behaves like either an attributive term or an indexical*

The problem with this explanation, however, is that ‘know’ neither behaves like an attributive term, nor like an indexical.³

3. Related arguments are offered in Stanley (2004). See also Blauw (2005).

As to the first point, words like ‘tall’, ‘small’, ‘heavy’ and ‘flat’, as I have indicated already, allow of degrees. There are *degrees* of tallness, smallness, etc. This fact accounts for the intelligibility of such comparative phrases as ‘A is taller than B’, ‘B is smaller than A’, ‘This is flatter than that’, ‘this is heavier than that’, etc. If ‘knows’ is to behave in much the same way as these adjectives, then it should allow of degrees as well. In that case, we should be able to say that one can know that P *to various degrees*. We should then be able to make sense of such expressions as “S knows more that P than S*”. But we can’t. S either knows he has two hands, or he doesn’t. Of course, S may have more reason to believe that he has two hands than S* has, but this does not mean that S* *knows less* that he has hands than S knows that *he* has hands. And again, sometimes we use the expression that S ‘knows more’ or ‘has more knowledge’ than S*. These locutions, however, never specify a proposition that is the object of knowledge. They specify, or suggest, only a subject matter, as in ‘S knows more about air pollution than S*.’ This indicates that while ‘knowing about (something)’ allows of degrees, ‘knowing that’ does not – and the contextualists have their eyes on the latter. One might be tempted to retort that there is a locution that suggests degrees of ‘knowing that’, viz., the locution ‘knowing better’, as in “Mary knows much better than I do, that Jack is wealthy”. Such expressions, however, should be taken to mean that Mary has had more opportunity to see for herself that Jack is wealthy. She doesn’t know ‘more’ that Jack is healthy than I do.

‘Knows’, then, doesn’t allow of degrees.⁴ This is of crucial importance in evaluating the contextualist’s case. For it is precisely the claim that adjectives like ‘small’ and ‘tall’ allow of degrees, that makes the truth-value of A-sentences context dependent.

Is ‘knows’, then, an indexical, and are K-sentences I-sentences? One shared characteristic of indexicals like ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’ is that while their meaning remains the same in every context in which they are uttered—namely *the present speaker/writer, the present place, and the present time* respectively—what they refer to is dependent on the context of the utterer. Put differently, the *character* of an indexical is

4. I can forego the fact that notions that allow for degrees differ among each other. Some notions that know degrees, have an ‘absolute maximum’, others don’t. For example, there doesn’t seem to be an absolute maximum of ‘greatness’, but there seems to be an absolute maximum of ‘flatness’. Although this difference is interesting in its own right, we can neglect it for present purposes.

context invariant, but its *content* is not (Kaplan 1989). ‘I’ uttered by me refers to me, but uttered by you to an entirely different thing: *you*. ‘Here’ uttered by me now refers to my office in Amsterdam, but may refer to a wholly different place when uttered by you. So tokens of the same indexical type have the same meaning but different referents, depending on the utterer. This is what is responsible for the context dependency of the truth conditions of I-sentences.

Now, if ‘know’ is to behave like an indexical, it should display similar characteristics. For example, it should in various contexts have the same *character*, but different *contents*; or, as I prefer to put it, it should have the same *meaning*, but different *referents*. But this does not seem to be the case. Consider “S knows that P,” uttered by Alice and Mary respectively in very different contexts. The contextualist assumes that ‘knows’ retains the same character (meaning), but refers to one thing in Alice’s utterance and to another in Mary’s. My present point is that I see no reason to think that this is correct. I see no reason why, assuming ‘knows’ is used univocally, ‘knows’ refers to one epistemic position of S *vis-à-vis* P in Alice’s sentence but to another epistemic situation of S *vis-à-vis* P in Mary’s sentence. I simply can’t see that this is correct. And we have not been offered a compelling argument for the thesis that ‘knows’ behaves like an indexical. We have only been offered the argument that that thesis, if true, would nicely explain what I referred to as the surprising feature of the contextualist’s intuitions about, for example, the bank cases.⁵ But that is not an independent argument for the indexicality of ‘knows’.

In the rest of this paper I will be working my way to the conclusion that, contrary to what contextualists (and in fact many if not most epistemologists now writing) assume, ‘knows’, as used in propositional contexts, has not one univocal meaning, one *character* that stays the same in varying contexts. ‘Knows’, I will be arguing, has many different meanings or senses, and this provides a better explanation of the contextualist intuitions about, for example, the bank cases.

5. Stephen Schiffer has offered the following sort of argument against ‘knows’ being an indexical. No one is ever really led into thinking that ‘I’, uttered by himself, refers to *someone else*. But the sceptical argument really can make one think that one doesn’t know anything. The semantics that the contextualists propose for the word ‘knows’ fails to explain why this should be the case. See Schiffer (1996).

6. *The polysemy of knowledge: a first approach*

In order to make the idea that ‘knows’ has various meanings more vivid, I want to return to the bank cases. (But first I should like to draw attention to the fact that there is something artificial about the conversation reported in case B. Mrs. DeRose is reported as saying, “Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?” I don’t think it is natural to suppose that in a real life situation Mrs. DeRose would use those words. It is far more likely that she would have said, “Banks do change their hours. *Are you sure* the bank will be open tomorrow?” But let us stipulate that the conversation, albeit perhaps somewhat artificial, actually took place.) Then the point of case B is that the K-sentence “Keith knows that the bank is open on Saturdays till noon” is false.

But why is it false? According to DeRose, because the conversational context determines that the truth of that K-sentence requires S’s being in a rather strong epistemic position *vis-à-vis* the proposition *the bank is open on Saturdays till noon*. And Keith isn’t in that position. Hence, the K-sentence is false.

Now I myself don’t have any strong intuitions about the truth-value of this K-sentence. I would not want to say that it is false, nor that it is true. My response to the K-sentence involved is: *whether it is true or false depends on what you take ‘knowledge’ to be*. If you think that knowledge requires certainty, then you will think the K-sentence is false, since Keith isn’t certain that the bank is open on Saturdays till noon. But if you *don’t* think that knowledge requires certainty, then you might think that the K-sentence is true. If you think that knowledge requires appropriate evidence, then you may be unsure about whether the K-sentence is true; if you think that Keith’s evidence is appropriate, then you could also think that the K-sentence is true, but if you think it is not, then not. Or suppose you think that knowledge requires reliably formed belief. Then, if you think that Keith’s belief about the bank’s opening hours on Saturday is reliably formed, then you will think the K-sentence is true; but if you think it isn’t, then not. So, what I am saying is that the truth-value of K-sentences depends on what one takes ‘knowledge’ to require.

This, of course, is no more than a first suggestion. In order to strengthen it, I should now like to offer two lines of argument.

7. *The polysemy of knowledge: argument 1*

My approach to K-sentences is that in different contexts, ascriptors use ‘knows’ in different senses or meanings. Hence, my claim is that, depending on the meaning of ‘knows’ used in the conversational context in which it is used, *different* properties can be ascribed to S. And, accordingly, my suggestion is that the contextualist’s intuitions about, for example, the bank cases should not be explained by an appeal to standards that can be differentially satisfied, nor by appealing to attributor contexts that determine how strong S’s epistemic position must be with respect to P, in order for the relevant K-sentence to be true. They should be explained by reference to the polysemy of ‘knows’.

My first argument for the polysemy of ‘knows’ is that it seems to accord with a rather natural interpretation of actual and imaginary cases of knowledge ascriptions. I should like to make this clear by considering various cases of knowledge ascriptions.

[A] Ann: “Do you know Jack’s telephone number?”

William: “I believe it is 444.6676, but I’m not certain of it.”

In the context of this discussion, William takes knowledge to require certainty. After all, since he feels unsure, he only ascribes belief to himself, not knowledge. In other contexts, however, ‘knows’ is used in such a way that certainty isn’t required for knowledge. Compare

[B] Quizmaster: “When was the battle of Hastings?”

Jack on television: “eh, eh, well, ...”

Quizmaster: “You are running out of time.”

Jack: “eh, eh, ... 1066???” [The zoom goes off immediately]

Quizmaster: “Correct.”

Jack’s mom watching television on the sofa with a friend: “I told you Jack would know the answer!”

Here Jack’s mom takes knowledge to require truth, but definitely not certainty; nor does she take it to require having evidence, or being justified. She could even be taken to equate knowledge with ‘true belief’. Sometimes, however, ‘knows’ is used in a way that does require what Jack’s mom apparently does not require, viz., having a belief that is based on adequate evidence. Compare the following scenario (due to Stroud 1984):

[C] Not by his own will, Sam is locked into a room with some 10 television screens. Screen 1 shows a football match, screen 2 a weather report, screen 3 a presidential speech, screen 4 a royal wedding, etc. You and I are monitoring Sam and see him watching the weather report, that says: There was bright sunshine today.

I say: “Now Sam knows there was bright sunshine today”.

You: “No he does not, for Sam has no clue whatsoever whether or not the weather report he watched was in fact *today’s* weather report, nor whether or not the report was about the area he happens to be in (he was, after all, kidnapped). Sam is simply clueless, he lacks the appropriate evidence.”

In this conversation you clearly take knowledge to require that one has appropriate evidence and ‘has’ it not in the way one can ‘have’ a coin in one’s pocket without knowing it, but has it in a reflective way, such that one can cite it, or such that one can reflexively access it. In effect you have, of course, articulated an internalist intuition. But now consider the following case:

[D] Jane is standing in front of an apple tree. She forms the belief that there is an apple tree in front of her. I ask, “Does Jane know there is an apple tree in front of her?” You answer: “Sure, Jane’s perceptual apparatus is in perfectly good working order and her recognitional skills are excellent—she can tell an apple tree from a pear tree”.

In this case, you obviously take knowledge to require a true belief that is produced by reliable mechanisms and skills—you don’t take it to require that Jane possesses evidence to which she has reflective access. Here you articulate an externalist intuition.

In some situations that look like [D], however, something else is needed for knowledge.

[E] Jane is standing in front of an apple tree. She forms the belief that there is an apple tree in front of her. I ask, “Does Jane know there is an apple tree in front of her?” You say: “Well, Jane is unable to rule out the possibility that she is dreaming that she sees a tree; she is furthermore unable to rule out the possibility that she is being deceived by a Cartesian demon; nor can she exclude the possibility that she is a BIV. Since, for all she knows, any of the scenario’s may obtain, Jane doesn’t know there is a tree in front of her.”

In this conversation you have used ‘know’ in a way that differs from the way you used it in [D]. Whereas in [D] you took knowledge to require a belief that is formed by *de facto* reliable mechanisms and skills, in [E] you take it to require the exclusion of certain skeptical possibilities.

Many more of such cases can be offered. What I claim for these cases is (1) that the K-sentences that occur in them are nothing out of the ordinary—that those are the sort of sentences that are entirely natural to use in that sort of situations, (2) that this fact strongly suggests that the word ‘knows’ is used to ascribe rather different properties to subjects, and (3) that what this come to is that ‘knows’ has different meanings.

8. *The polysemy of knowledge: argument 2*

My second argument derives from the on-going and seemingly never-ending discussion among epistemologists about the proper analysis of knowledge. The question that has framed and structured this discussion is very often put as follows: “What needs to be added to true belief in order to get knowledge?”, or “What is it that bridges the gap between mere true belief and knowledge?” (e.g., Plantinga 1993). A really bewildering array of answers has been offered. Here is a small sampling: knowledge is true belief

- [a] that is held with certainty. (Unger 1974)
- [b] that is such that the subject has been able to eliminate all sceptical alternatives to it.⁶
- [c] that the subject has adequate evidence (reasons, grounds ...) for.
- [d] that is based on adequate evidence. (Conee & Feldman 1985)
- [e] that is formed by a sufficiently reliable belief-forming process. (Goldman 1979; Kornblith 2002)
- [f] that is formed by the proper functioning of one’s cognitive faculties. (Plantinga 1993)
- [g] that is formed by the exercise of an intellectual virtue. (Sosa 1991; Greco 2000)
- [h] that is rational in one of its many senses. (Foley 1987)

6. This is sometimes called the ‘Cartesian’ position, even though Descartes didn’t hold it. See BonJour (2002, 38–43).

- [i] that is justified and satisfies an anti-Gettier condition.⁷
- [j] that is such that the subject has cognitive access to the evidence. (BonJour 1985; BonJour 1998)
- [k] that the subject cannot be blamed for having. (Ginet 1975)
- [l] that is formed responsibly. (Chisholm 1977)
- [m] that coheres with a large body of one's other beliefs. (BonJour 1985; Lehrer 1990)

This is a truly impressive list of answers, and there is no space here to discuss any of them in any detail, nor to discuss the interrelations between them.⁸ I shall have to confine myself to the remark that some of the answers on the list are radically different from some of the others. For example, [j] requires for knowledge that the subject has cognitive access to the evidence, which according to [e] isn't even necessary. Answer [a] requires that for true belief to be knowledge, it need be held with certainty, but is silent about evidence, cognitive access, blamelessness, responsibility or coherence. And this raises the question why, if so many brilliant philosophers disagree so radically about what knowledge is and what it takes to have it, we shouldn't conclude that there simply isn't just one thing or state that is called 'knowledge'. Given deep and continuing disagreements, shouldn't we conclude that the word 'knowledge' simply isn't used to refer to just *one* state of mind—'the knowledge state of mind'? Shouldn't we conclude that the word 'knowledge' refers to various different states of mind, and that it thus has a number of different senses?

Before I am going to endorse this suggestion, I should like to acknowledge that there are continuing disagreements where it is out of doubt that there is one unique correct answer to the question under discussion. Examples would be the questions of whether all living organisms are genetically related, or whether there is extraterrestrial

7. And there has been no shortage of proposals about how to avoid Gettier problems. See Shope (1983).

8. For a very thorough discussion of this, see Alston (2005). My discussion in this section owes much to Alston (1993) and Alston (2005). Alston's argument is that the continuing disagreements over 'justification' indicate that epistemologists have been chasing a phantom; there is not one such thing as 'justification'. What there is are various different worthwhile epistemic states, epistemica *desiderata*, as he calls them. But Alston doesn't draw any conclusions from this as to what knowledge is. But I do think it has such implications, and that is the point of this section.

life. So from continuing disagreements about an issue one can't simply conclude that there is no one unique true answer to it. Still, such disagreements call for an explanation. Disagreement about the genetic relatedness of all organisms can, perhaps, be explained by the fact that the available evidence underdetermines the theory at hand and that those who endorse that theory have extra-evidential, for instance philosophical, reasons for it. Is there an explanation of that sort available for the abiding disagreements about knowledge? Can they be explained by the fact that each answer is underdetermined by the available data? Well, what *are* the data? I should think that the data are in a large measure our intuitions about cases, our data are the intuitions we have about whether or not the Nogot/Havit case, the Sheep in the Field case, the case of the Inflexible Mountain Climber, the case of the Aging Forest Ranger etc. present us with instances of knowledge. That is, those cases trigger our intuitions about whether or not we should apply the word 'knowledge' to the subject in each of the cases. But the fact is that our intuitions vary enormously. There are many cases where one epistemologist's intuitions tell him that 'knowledge' can be applied, whereas another's intuitions forbid him to do so. I take this fact to be evidence for the claim that 'knowledge' has many meanings; about as many as there are analyses of knowledge.

This conclusion can be reinforced in the following way. Sometimes we don't have an analysis available of a certain word, and still can zero-in on the object(s) it stands for. One way to do this is to work with paradigm cases and take the whole class of cases to be those that are sufficiently similar to the paradigms. Numerous words and concepts are successfully used on the basis of paradigms, for example, the word 'cat' and other natural kind terms. Even if one doesn't have an analysis of the word 'cat' (that is, even if one doesn't know what the necessary and sufficient condition are for the application of the word 'cat'), one still can successfully apply the word 'cat' to a great number of animals on the basis of paradigm cases. Can't we approach 'knowledge' in the same way, that is, on the basis of paradigm cases? If we succeed in this, the thesis that 'knowledge' has many senses becomes much less plausible. But if we can't, it becomes more plausible. Now, the point I should like to make is that epistemologists even disagree over what the paradigm cases of knowledge are. For example, Bonjour discusses imaginary cases of true belief formed by a highly reliable clairvoyant and he holds that they don't constitute knowledge. But a hard-nosed

reliabilist as D.M. Armstrong takes them to be clear cases of knowledge. Where Armstrong's intuitions urge him to apply 'knowledge' to the clairvoyant's state of mind, Bonjour's intuitions forbid him to do so. My explanation for this is that Armstrong and Bonjour use 'knowledge' in different senses. The same explanation could be given for diverging intuitions about other cases.

So, I have been arguing for two related theses. (1) There isn't one meaning of the word 'knowledge'; knowledge is polysemous. (2) There isn't just one type or state of mind that is *the* knowledge state; there are various different states that we refer to by means of the word 'knowledge'.

Where does this leave us with respect to contextualist intuitions about, for example, the bank cases? If the theses just mentioned are correct, then we have an alternative explanation of the contextualist's intuitions. The contextualist himself explained them by defending the thesis that the standards of knowledge ascriptions vary with the context of the ascriber. That explanation was based on the idea that 'knows' behaves like either an attributive term or an indexical. But this idea turned out to be very problematic. My explanation of the contextualist's intuitions is that the word 'knows' is used in different senses. And to this I add that there may very well be a correlation between contexts and senses in which the word 'knows' is used. In bank case A, the context is such that 'knows' is used in a sense that differs from the sense in which it is used in case B.

9. Polysemy and the return of disquotation and invariantism

If what I have said so far is correct, we can have disquotation back, while at the same time acknowledging the relevance of conversational contexts. I have acknowledged the relevance of conversational contexts in that I have suggested that the word 'knows' may be used in various meanings depending on the conversational context. In one context, a K-sentence may be used to ascribe to S that his true belief was reliably formed, whereas in another context the same K-sentence may be used to ascribe to S a belief held with certainty, and in yet another context a belief that is appropriately based on evidence, etc.

But then we have disquotation back. For we can no longer talk about K-sentences without reserve. Whenever a K-sentence is used, we need

to make clear to ourselves *in what meaning* ‘knows’ is used in that K-sentence. Suppose, referring to the list in the previous section, we use indices to mark the various senses of ‘knows’. Then the K-sentence “S knows that p” must be taken either as “S knows_a that p”, or “S knows_b that p”, or “S knows_c that p”, and so forth. The truth-value of any of these K_s-sentences (the subscript s is for ‘specified’) is independent of the context of the ascriptor. “S knows_a that p” will be true iff S knows_a that p. This means we have disquotation back.

If what I have said so far is correct, we also have back invarian-tism, i.e., the thesis that the truth conditions of K-sentences don’t vary with the context of the ascriptor—the position contextualists mean to oppose. To be sure, if what I have argued is correct, there is not just *one* standard that determines the truth-value of K-sentences. There are as many standards as there are meanings of ‘knowledge’. But, and this is the crucial point, each standard is invariant. The truth-value of K_{index} sentences doesn’t vary with the context of the attributor.⁹

REFERENCES

- Alston, W. P. (1993). ‘Epistemic Desiderata’, *Philosophy and Phenomenologi-cal Research* 53, 527–551.
- (2005). *Beyond “Justification”*. *Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Blaauw, M. J. (2005). ‘How Intuitive is Contextualism?’, *Grazer Philoso-phische Studien* 69 (this issue).
- BonJour, L. (1985). *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- (1998). *In Defense of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cam-bridge.
- (2002). *Epistemology. Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham.
- Chisholm, R. (1977). *The Theory of Knowledge. Second edition*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs.
- Cohen, S. (1998). ‘Contextualist Solutions to Epistemological Problems: Scepticism, Gettier, and the Lottery’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 76, 289–306.

9. For comments on earlier drafts of this paper, I want to thank Martijn Blaauw and, especially, Filip Buekens.

- Conee, E & Feldman, R. (1985). 'Evidentialism', *Philosophical Studies* 48, 15–34.
- DeRose, K. (1992). 'Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, 913–929.
- (1995). 'Solving the Skeptical Problem', *Philosophical Review* 104, 1–52.
- (1999). 'Contextualism: an Explanation and Defense', *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, (eds.) J. Greco & E. Sosa, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Foley, R. (1987). *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Ginet, C. (1975). *Knowledge, Perception, and Memory*, Reidel, Dordrecht.
- Goldman, A. (1979). 'What is Justified Belief', *Justification and Knowledge. New Studies in Epistemology*, (ed.) G. Pappas, Reidel, Dordrecht.
- Greco, J. (2000). *Putting Sceptics in their Place*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Kaplan, D. (1989). 'Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals', *Themes from Kaplan*, (eds.) Joseph Almog, John Perry & Howard Wettstein, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Kornblith, H. (2002). *Knowledge and its Place in Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Lehrer, K. (1990). *Theory of Knowledge*, Routledge, London.
- Plantinga, A. (1993). *Warrant and Proper Function*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Schiffer, S. (1996). 'Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96, 317–333.
- Searle, J. (1979). *Expression and Meaning. Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Shope, R. (1983). *The Analysis of Knowing*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Sosa, E. (1991). *Knowledge in Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Stanley, J. (2004). 'On the Linguistic Basis for Contextualism', *Philosophical Studies* 108, 19–146.
- Stroud, B. (1984). *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Unger, P. (1974). 'An Argument for Skepticism', *Philosophical Exchange* 1, 131–155.