

## **“Bamboozled by Our Own Words”: Semantic Blindness and Some Arguments Against Contextualism**

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The best grounds for accepting contextualism concerning knowledge attributions are to be found in how knowledge-attributing (and knowledge-denying) sentences are used in ordinary, non-philosophical talk: What ordinary speakers will count as “knowledge” in some non-philosophical contexts they will deny is such in others. Contextualists typically appeal to pairs of cases that forcefully display the variability in the epistemic standards that govern ordinary usage: A “low standards” case (henceforth, “LOW”) in which a speaker seems quite appropriately and truthfully to ascribe knowledge to a subject will be paired with a “high standards” case (“HIGH”) in which another speaker in a quite different and more demanding context seems with equal propriety and truth to say that the same subject (or a similarly positioned subject) does not know. The contextualist argument based on such cases is driven by the premises that the positive attribution of knowledge in LOW is true, and that the denial of knowledge in HIGH is true. And where the contextualist has constructed HIGH and LOW wisely, those premises are in turn powerfully supported by the two mutually reinforcing strands of evidence that both of the claims intuitively seem true, and that both claims are perfectly appropriate. The resulting argument for contextualism is very powerful indeed, but I am on the offensive making that case in another paper: “The Ordinary Language Basis for Contextualism and the New Invariantism.”<sup>1</sup>

Here I play defense, defending contextualism from several related objections. First, an objection from comparative judgments of content: It is alleged that the denial of knowledge in HIGH seems to contradict the affirmation of knowledge in LOW, and that this is a problem for

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<sup>1</sup> DeRose, “The Ordinary Language Basis for Contextualism and the New Invariantism” (henceforth, “OLB”), *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 55 (2005): 172-198. Links to this paper, as well as the other papers of mine that I refer to in the present paper, are to be found at <http://pantheon.yale.edu/~kd47/OLP.htm>

contextualism. Second, an objection from metalinguistic claims: It is alleged that if S-HIGH (the speaker in HIGH) and S-LOW (the speaker in LOW) were told of each other, S-HIGH would say, “S-LOW’s claim is (probably) false” and/or that S-LOW would say “S-HIGH’s claim is false,” and that this is a problem for contextualism. Third, an objection from belief reports: It is alleged that if S-HIGH and S-LOW were told of each other’s claims, and each thought that the other’s claim was sincere, S-HIGH wouldn’t hesitate to say “S-LOW believes that she knows” and/or S-LOW wouldn’t hesitate to say “S-HIGH believes that she doesn’t know,” and that this is a problem for contextualism.

Such objections are sometimes accompanied by the charge that the contextualist’s best response to them – though it is costly to have to reply this way – is to appeal to “semantic blindness”: to admit that in the ways indicated in the objection, speakers do talk as if contextualism were false, but to claim that speakers do so because they are unaware of – blind to – the context-sensitivity of “knows.” So, we will also look at a related objection Stephen Schiffer raised against contextualism (and in particular to the application of contextualism to the problem of skepticism), which seems to have inspired this talk of semantic blindness. I will argue that none of the objections succeeds, and that the way that contextualism does implicate speakers in semantic blindness does not hurt the case for contextualism, because speakers are involved in equally problematic semantic blindness whether or not contextualism is true.

## **1. The Objection from Judgments of Comparative Content**

S-LOW says that someone “knows” something to be the case, while S-HIGH says that very same person “doesn’t know” that very same thing to be the case. It is alleged that these two seem to be contradicting one another, while contextualism counter-intuitively rules that the two assertions are perfectly compatible. It can appear that the contextualist’s best hope here is to – quite lamely – appeal to semantic blindness. The two assertions are “surface contradictory,” just as “I am hungry” and “I am not hungry,” said by two different speakers, are surface-contradictory. Now, this latter pair don’t even seem to us to be incompatible with one another, because the relevant “context-sensitivity” – that “I” refers to different people in the different claims – is quite clear to us. It can seem that the contextualist’s best hope here is to claim that S-

HIGH's assertion seems incompatible with S-LOW's because the two assertions are surface-contradictory, and, unlike what happens with "I," we are blind to the relevant context-sensitivity that renders these two surface-contradictory claims compatible with one another.

But is the contextualist's verdict here really counter-intuitive? Not if we use the right test cases.

What will the contextualist's pair of cases – HIGH and LOW – be like? Many immediately imagine a dispute between two speakers, one of whom is insisting she does "know" something and the other of whom insists that the first does not "know" any such thing. And, more particularly, many immediately imagine just such a dispute between a skeptic and some Moore-like resistor of skepticism – perhaps even Moore himself.<sup>2</sup> In such cases of dispute, the intuition that the two speakers are contradicting one another can indeed be very powerful. (Correlatively, the intuitions that S-LOW's claim to "knowledge" and S-HIGH's denial of "knowledge" are both true can be extremely weak to non-existent.) Yet isn't the contextualist's position that both assertions are true, and that they are compatible with one another?

No!

Well, let me be a bit more careful. That both speakers are asserting compatible truths in such cases of dispute is a possible contextualist position. But contextualists don't have to take that position. Indeed, I don't take that position, and if any actual contextualists do take it, I'm unaware of that fact.

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<sup>2</sup> Thus, for instance, in his recent "Contextualism and Relativism" (*Philosophical Studies* 119 (2004): 215-242), Mark Richard writes:

Suppose a confrontation between a skeptic with high standards, and Moore, who has low standards. The skeptic says

(1) You don't know that you have hands.

Contextualism tells us that the content (and thus the extension) of 'knows' in the skeptic's context is determined by the standards that his context provides. Since he, unlike Moore, has high standards, Moore and the claim that he has hands just don't make the cut. The skeptic's utterance of (1) is true: that is, Moore doesn't know that he has hands.

Of course, when Moore utters

(2) I know that I have hands

the standards in his context are the relevant standards, and so, given his low standards, he speaks truly. So Moore knows that he has hands after all. But how can that be? Didn't the skeptic just establish that Moore doesn't know that he has hands? Well, says the contextualist, what the skeptic said was true. But since 'know' is contextually sensitive, (2) doesn't say the same thing, when Moore uses it, as does

(3) You know that you have hands

when the skeptic uses it. So there's nothing contradictory about the skeptic's being able to use (1) truly while Moore can so use (2).

One feels that something is awry. One wants to say that when the skeptic and Moore argue with each other, they disagree about whether Moore knows that he has hands.

In assuming that contextualists will judge both assertions in such a dispute to be true, it is assumed that contextualists will take what in my paper, “Single Scoreboard Semantics,”<sup>3</sup> I call a “multiple scoreboards” approach to such disputes, on which the content of each speaker’s use of “knows” follows that speaker’s own “personally indicated content.” But I and, so far as I can tell, the other contextualists I know of, all opt instead for some version of the “single scoreboard” approach, on which the content of both speakers’ uses of “knows” is the same, so that what the one speaker is affirming is exactly what the other is denying, and their assertions are not at all compatible. (Indeed, on the version of the single scoreboard approach I prefer, the “gap view,” so far from its being the case that both of our speakers are asserting truths, neither of them is!<sup>4</sup>)

So, if you claim that the parties in such a dispute are contradicting one another, don’t be surprised to find contextualists agreeing with you. You’re going after a straw contextualist. We need to instead check the right cases – cases about which the contextualist really will claim that both S-LOW’s affirmation of and S-HIGH’s denial of “knowledge” are true.

(What of cases of what we might call “one-way disputes,” where a speaker, S1 has said, “S knows,” and a later speaker, S2, in a different conversation in which, on contextual analysis, higher standards seem to be operative, disputes S1’s earlier claim: “S1 was so wrong! S knows no such thing”? The sense that S2’s denial is incompatible with S1’s affirmation can seem pretty strong here, too – almost as strong as in two-way arguments. But since these speakers are in different contexts, perhaps governed by different standards (on contextual analysis), it can seem that the “single scoreboard” approach won’t apply here, and the contextualist will have to somewhat counter-intuitively say about many such cases that the denial and the affirmation are both true and are compatible with one another. But I think contextualists may well want to, and may well be able to, preserve incompatibility here, as well. I, for one, am inclined to do that. See the **Appendix** for how.)

So, what are the “right” cases – cases about which the contextualist really will say that the affirmation in LOW and the denial in HIGH are both true – like? I go into that in some detail in the first four sections of OLB; I will summarize here. First of all, S-HIGH and S-LOW are not having any argument at all; indeed, they’re not even talking to each other. They’re in completely

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<sup>3</sup> DeRose, “Single Scoreboard Semantics” (henceforth, “SSS”), *Philosophical Studies* 119 (2004): 1-21.

<sup>4</sup> See esp. pp. 15-19 of SSS.

different conversations.<sup>5</sup> The speakers in LOW are applying relatively low epistemic standards to subjects, describing them as “knowing” various things so long as they meet rather moderate standards. And such use of low standards is quite appropriate given the practical interests in play in LOW. But in HIGH, different interests are in play: for instance, the speakers may be facing a very high-stakes decision which makes the use high epistemic standards appropriate, and the speakers in HIGH have indeed been applying such elevated standards, describing subjects as “knowing” only if they meet unusually elevated standards, and going so far as describing subjects as not “knowing” if they meet only the moderate standards used in LOW, but not the elevated standards of HIGH. However, the standards being applied in HIGH, while they are unusually heightened, still are not the ethereal standards that can seem to be in play in discussions of philosophical skepticism, and do seem to be appropriate to use given the heightened practical concerns in play in HIGH. In neither LOW nor HIGH is there any disagreement among any speakers about whether any subject knows. When S-HIGH says that the subject does not “know,” she meets with no resistance at all from their conversational partners, who have also sensed that unusually stringent standards are appropriate in the context, and have adjusted their use of “knows” to these high standards, themselves saying, with apparent truth and appropriateness, that they and other subjects do not “know” things if those subjects fall short of the unusually high standards in question, even if they meet more ordinary standards. This best kind of high-standards case involves no element of arm-twisting, arguing or convincing, but only of informing – one speaker informing others that, according to the appropriately heightened standards that obviously govern their conversation, some subject does not “know” something. Paired off against such high-standards cases, it’s also a feature of our use of “knows” that often, where unusually heightened practical concerns are not involved, speakers behave in ways that show that they are in a low standards context, informing each other that the same subjects described above, or similarly positioned subjects, do “know” those same things that they alleged not to “know” in the high standards cases. So it is in LOW. And where there is no dispute among the parties to the conversation in either of cases; and where none of the speakers in either case is made to reverse herself, saying that something is not “known” that she had earlier claimed was “known,” or vice versa; and where the different standards that seem to

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<sup>5</sup> S-HIGH and S-LOW may be, and indeed usually are, one and the same person, imagined as being in two quite different conversations.

govern the two cases both seem appropriate, given the practical situations involved in each case, the intuitions that the relevant claims in each of the cases (the ascription of knowledge in LOW and the denial of knowledge in HIGH) are true can become extremely powerful indeed. (And the contextualist needs only some case pairs to work to win the day, while the invariantist needs all cases to governed by the same, invariant epistemic standards.)

What becomes of the intuition that S-HIGH's assertion contradicts S-LOW's when we construct HIGH and LOW in the right way (so that contextualists really will say both assertions are true)? It is putting the matter extremely mildly to say that the intuition is then considerably weakened.

If you teach a class (perhaps in epistemology or philosophy of language) in which the issue is relevant, you can try the issue out on your students: Present to them good LOW and HIGH cases (but don't label them as "LOW" and "HIGH," since that might start biasing matters), and see whether they think there is a contradiction here. When seeking intuitions, it's often important that issues be presented as fairly and as neutrally as possible, because, as we all know, the manner of presentation can greatly affect the responses one receives. But you can forget all that in this case. Present the issue in a way that creates a strong bias against the contextualist answer. Indeed, rather than asking in any fair way whether there's a contradiction here, you can authoritatively assert that there is one, and then ask for feedback on a related question. Try this, for instance: "Sue says that John knows; Mary says that he doesn't know. Obviously, these assertions contradict one another, so they can't both be true. So, I ask you: Which speaker is making a true claim, Sue or Mary?" If my past experience is any guide at all, in almost every class of sufficient size, you will find that some student will overcome the strong anti-contextualist bias of the presentation, insist that both speakers are asserting truths, and then, if you're at all lucky, will even present a proto-contextualist analysis of the situation to explain how this can be. And once this happens, a significant proportion of this brave student's classmates will join her in her verdict that both are asserting truths (though some squabbles may well break out within this camp over the details of the proto-contextualist analysis they're using to explain the situation). In fact, if you really do a good job of constructing LOW and HIGH, it's a good bet that significantly more students will follow this contextualist suggestion than will stick with you on the issue of contradiction. But I'm on defense here, and am not looking for

any positive support for contextualism. For my current defensive purposes, it's more than sufficient that there is no intuitive winner here. And that, at least, seems quite safe.

## 2. "Semantic Blindness": Get Used to It!

Of course, you will get results pushing even more strongly in a pro-"contextualist" direction if you present speakers with a similar question involving a term that is more obviously context-sensitive than "knows" is, like "here": "It's snowing in Chicago, but not in Los Angeles. Cher is in Chicago, talking on the phone with Lonnie, who is in Los Angeles. Cher says, 'It's snowing here.' Lonnie replies, 'It's not snowing here.' Obviously, these two assertions contradict one another, so they can't both be true. So I ask you: Which speaker is making a true claim, Cher or Lonnie?" Hopefully, all your students will go "contextualist" here on "here", insisting that both speakers are making true claims and are not contradicting one another. Contextualism about "knows" doesn't fare nearly as well, I freely admit. So I suppose there must be something to the charge that if contextualism is true, we suffer from some degree of "semantic blindness": Speakers are to some extent blind to the context-sensitivity of "knows".

But this is not a consideration that favors invariantism over contextualism, for speakers seem about equally afflicted by semantic blindness whether contextualism or invariantism is correct. Indeed, if contextualism is true, then you and the students in your class, if any, who stick with you on the issue of contradiction are "blind" to the context-sensitivity of this very common verb. But, equally, if invariantism is instead correct, then the brave student who stands up to you in class, and all her classmates who follow her – and me, too, for that matter – are all "blind" to the context-insensitivity of that same common verb. To mimic the rhetoric one can often hear coming critics of contextualism, and turn it against them: "Are we really to believe that perfectly ordinary and competent speakers are that blind to the workings of their very own common word?!!" Well, yes, I guess we're stuck with that, either way. The intuitive situation could only appear to be so strongly favoring invariantism because people were imagining the wrong kinds of cases – cases about which contextualists themselves can and often do deny that both speakers are asserting truths. Once we look at the right cases, this issue of semantic blindness appears to cut no ice at all. Look, when HIGH and LOW are constructed right,

whether S-HIGH's claim contradicts S-LOW's is just a tough question, about which there is no intuitively clear answer. So there simply is a good deal of "semantic blindness" afflicting speakers here, whichever answer is correct.

### **3. The Objection from Metalinguistic Claims**

The situation is similar enough with the objection from metalinguistic claims that I will discuss that objection only quickly. In this objection, recall, it is alleged that if S-HIGH (the speaker in HIGH) and S-LOW (the speaker in LOW) were normal speakers and were told of each other, S-HIGH wouldn't hesitate to say, "S-LOW's claim is (probably) false" and S-LOW would quickly say "S-HIGH's claim is false," and that this is a problem for contextualism. And, again, it can appear that this is a problem for which the best solution is to lamely appeal to semantic blindness: The speakers would make these metalinguistic statements because they are blind to the context-sensitivity of "knows," and so each thinks that the truth of their own assertion implies that the other's claim is false.

But again, it seems that the intuitions appealed to here are at all strong only if we are imagining the wrong kinds of test cases. If S-HIGH and S-LOW are having an argument with one another, then, yes, each will be inclined to assert the other's claim is false almost to the same extent that each is willing to make their own object-level claim. But when HIGH and LOW are constructed correctly – and we won't again go into what's involved in doing that – things are very different.

Perhaps it's best to briefly compare the intuitive situation here with the positive basis for contextualism – that S-HIGH's denial of "knowledge" is true and that S-LOW's affirmation of "knowledge" is true. As I've reported, when HIGH and LOW are constructed correctly – and especially when the standards employed in each case are appropriate given the practical situation being faced in each case – the intuitions that the assertions are true can get very powerful indeed, especially when each case is considered individually. In addition, as we can sense with perhaps even more confidence than that with which we directly judge the truth-values of the assertions, each assertion seems to be the appropriate thing for a speaker to say in the situation at hand. And this supports the intuitions that the assertions are true, because there is a strong presumption that

perfectly appropriate assertions are true, at least when they are not based on some false belief that the speaker has about some underlying matter of fact relevant to the assertion at hand.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast, when HIGH and LOW are constructed correctly, the intuition that S-HIGH would be speaking truthfully if she said “S-LOW’s claim is false” is very weak indeed. For myself, I’ve always been inclined to judge that S-HIGH would then be saying something false, but that’s me, and it is perhaps not a coincidence that I became a contextualist. But on this question, you will find a lot of speakers siding with me, at least if you construct the cases well. But beyond the question of the truth value of such a metalinguistic claim, even the matter of whether such a claim is appropriate is quite vexed. It’s always seemed to me that either speaker would be going too far to claim that the other’s assertion is false, and again, many speakers would side with me on this.

Does LOW’s claim contradict HIGH’s? Should they each say that the other’s claim is (probably) false? Would such metalinguistic claims be true? As I’ve noted, I’ve always been inclined to give the contextualist’s answers (no, no, no) to these questions, at least when they’re asked about properly constructed test cases. But I have always taken these to be a rightly disputed matters. Those are precisely the questions we need to do some philosophy to answer. I have a hard time relating to an inquiry that takes certain answers to these questions as its starting point, or that makes delivering certain answers to these questions a desideratum of a theory. And to the extent that it is some slight advantage to a theory that it deliver intuitively correct answers to these questions, given my intuitive reactions to the questions, it’s the theory that delivers the contextualist answers that gains that slight advantage, at least in my book – and also for the many speakers who have intuitive reactions similar to mine.

#### **4. Hawthorne and Belief Reports**

We turn next to belief reports – though similar objections could be made from other reports of propositional attitudes. If one neglects to consider the best cases for testing such a general principle, it can seem that our use of “knows” within belief reports quite generally follows a “disquotational schema” like this:

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<sup>6</sup> All of this is explained more thoroughly in OLB.

(DSK) If a speaker S1 sincerely utters a sentence of the form ‘A knows that p’, and the sentence in the that-clause means that p, and ‘A’ is a name or an indexical that refers to a, then a speaker S2, also using ‘A’ to refer to a and using the that-clause to mean that p, can truthfully state that S1 “believes that A knows that p.”

If S1’s utterance of “A knows that p” is sincere, then, even if S2 is in a very different context, she can of course truthfully assert, “S1 believes what she asserts by the sentence, ‘A knows that p.’” But that is so clunky! DSK tells S2 that she can (also) come down a level and truthfully state the far simpler, though still a bit clunky, “S1 believes that A knows that p.”

It seems that if “knows” were context-sensitive, then no disquotational schema like this would govern its use, because if the epistemic standards that govern S2’s context are different from (and especially if they are higher than) those that governed S1’s context, S2 will seem to be ascribing to S1 a belief – that A knows according to the higher standards – that S1 may well not hold. Thus, it’s no surprise that John Hawthorne is able to use DSK, together with other principles, to raise an objection to contextualism. We will not look at the rest of Hawthorne’s case, for it’s at DSK that I will challenge him. And Hawthorne thinks our ordinary usage does betray a clear commitment to a principle like DSK;<sup>7</sup> he writes:

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<sup>7</sup> Hawthorne’s version of DSK is on p. 101. I based my formulation on Hawthorne’s, but modified it by making its consequent meta-linguistic, as seems appropriate to the issues at hand. In any case, the exact formulation of DSK should have no effect on my challenge to Hawthorne’s argument, because I do not question whether the observations about ordinary usage on which he grounds DSK would successfully support the principle if correct (on that matter, the exact formulation may be important), but rather argue that his observations are just not generally correct in the first place.

Hawthorne goes on to combine his version of DSK with another principle to produce an argument against contextualism (pp. 101-104). But how to understand this argument is unclear to me. At p. 104, he considers this important objection: “But couldn’t an analogue of this argument be raised for, say, all context-dependent comparative adjectives? And wouldn’t this show that the argument proves too much?” He immediately replies, “There are disanalogies here that should not be ignored.” The disanalogy he presses is that “we have very few devices” in common talk by which we can clarify our use of “knows” (p. 105), while we have many such devices by which to clarify our use of comparative adjectives. But Hawthorne does not explain how to modify the principles he uses in the argument at 101-104 so that the a version of his argument generalized so as to be applicable to both the case of “knows” and that of comparative adjectives will apply where there is a shortage of clarifying devices but not where there is an abundance of them. Surely we do not want a disquotation schema that is just like DSK except for its being generalized, and its ending with the proviso, “provided that there are many clarifying devices in ordinary talk by which the key terms of S1’s assertion can be easily modified.” And, at any rate, I think Hawthorne is wrong about the lack of clarifying devices for “knows,” as I believe is shown in Peter Ludlow’s “Contextualism and the New Linguistic Turn in Epistemology” (in G. Preyer and G. Peter, ed., Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning and Truth (Oxford UP, 2005)). I agree with Hawthorne that his argument appears to be as strong against comparative adjectives as it is against “knows,” so he is right to worry about proving too much. But, as I have

It seems altogether obvious that we take sincere uses of the verb ‘know’ as a straightforward guide to the contents of what people believe. For example, if Jones says ‘I know I have feet’ and I reckon he is being sincere, I will have no hesitation at all in reporting the contents of his mind as follows:

(1) Jones believes that he knows that he has feet...

Of course, not all words behave disquotationally in this way. If a speaker says ‘It is raining here’, I cannot report the contents of his mind by an ascription of the form ‘He believes that it is raining here’, unless he and I happen to be in the same place. By contrast, it looks very much as if we do adopt something like DSK. If, for example, someone sincerely utters ‘I know that I will never have a heart attack’, we have no hesitation whatsoever in reporting the contents of his mind by claiming that he believes that he knows that he will never have a heart attack. That is how the verb ‘know’ seems to work. . . . DSK seems exactly right. (pp. 100-101)

But so far from being “altogether obvious” and “exactly right,” that just seems wrong, or at the very least, extremely unclear, at least as applied to the best and most relevant test cases. The best test cases for this general principle, DSK, are ones where the contextualist will think there is a marked difference in standards.

So, let’s let’s think about such cases. Let’s set LOW in a local tavern, where a speaker, Louise, is discussing whether Jim was at the office yesterday. We may suppose this is a light-hearted discussion, aimed at deciding who has to pay up on a mere \$2 bet that had been made ahead of time on whether the often-absent Jim would show up. As is appropriate to the context, speakers are describing subjects as knowing propositions if those subjects meet moderate epistemic standards. Just so, though she did not herself see him at the office, Louise is claiming to “know” that Jim was there, based on evidence that seems more than sufficient for this discussion at the tavern: She heard from a reliable source that he was in (though, as is common when taking something on a reliable source’s say-so, she doesn’t know what that report was

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argued in the text here, Hawthorne’s defense of DSK seems to be based on a mistake. Thus, I think he should worry even more about his argument not working in the first place.

based on); plus she herself saw John's hat hanging in the hall. That evidence is sufficient for Louise's listeners at the tavern, who are themselves presently disposed to describe subjects as being "knowers" if they are in an epistemic position like that Louise is in with respect to John's having been at the office yesterday.

Another speaker, Thelma, is equally well-positioned with respect to Jim's having been at the office yesterday: She was with Louise when they heard the very same report from the reliable source that Jim was in, and also herself saw Jim's hat hanging the hall yesterday. But Thelma is in a very different conversational context, HIGH, where, at least on contextual analysis, much higher epistemic standards prevail. Thelma is being interviewed by the police about whether it might have been Jim who committed some horrible crime. Our speakers in HIGH have executed conversational maneuvers for driving up the epistemic standards, and Thelma is admitting that she does not "know" various propositions if she is not in an extremely strong epistemic position with respect to them. Thus, even though Thelma has grounds that would usually suffice for claiming to "know" that Jim was at the office yesterday, she is in her present context admitting that she does "not know" that he was in – though, she adds, she has good reason to think he was in. In this context, she would claim to "know" he was in only if, say, she has a clear recollection of having herself seen Jim at the office.

Suppose the police, still interviewing Thelma, start asking whether Louise might "know" whether Jim was at the office yesterday. And suppose Thelma knows that Louise too heard the report and saw the hat, but did not herself see Jim at the office. We may suppose, if we want, that Thelma was just at the tavern talking with Louise and the other speakers, but has left them and the tavern behind before now encountering the police, and is reasonably and rightly assuming that neither Louise's evidential nor her conversational situation has changed in the meantime as Louise remains at the tavern. How will Thelma describe Louise? If Thelma is a normal speaker, then even though she's aware of the fact that Louise is presently in a very different type of conversational context, Thelma will say that Louise too "doesn't know" whether John was in (though she may well add that Louise, too, has good reason to think that Jim was in). After all, Louise has no better reason for thinking Jim was in than Thelma has, and Thelma is admitting that she herself "does not know."

Now, for the question crucial to our current interests: While in HIGH (while talking with the police), will Thelma say, "Louise believes that she knows that Jim was at the office

yesterday”? As I’ve already indicated, so far from that being clearly correct, that seems to me at least somewhat clearly wrong. Yes, as Thelma heard, Louise said, “I know Jim was at the office yesterday.” But Thelma too may well have made just such a claim herself while she was at the tavern. And now she’s telling the police that she “doesn’t know.” And it seems quite wrong for Thelma to say, while in HIGH, that either she or Louise “believes”/“believed” that she “knew”/“knows.”

I know that there’s all different kinds of wrongness we may be sensing here, and that consequently there’s plenty of room for someone to maintain that such belief reports, while they’re somehow wrong to make, would nonetheless be true if they were made. Maybe. Tough issue. But I’m playing defense here: This is the anti-contextualist’s argument (at least as it’s applied to the right kinds of test cases). And it is far from clear that such belief reports would be true, and very far indeed from clear that they would be so much as appropriate. So any argument that starts from the intuitions that such reports are obviously true and/or appropriate is in deep trouble.

Indeed, I suspect the only reason Hawthorne confidently writes that DSK seems “exactly right,” and claims that it’s “altogether obvious” that speakers show “no hesitation whatsoever” in issuing the relevant belief reports in the relevant circumstances is that he does not consider the best test cases for his principle. For when we think about the right test cases, more than just hesitation seems called for.

It’s in response to the problem for contextualism that Hawthorne derives from DSK (together with some other materials), that Hawthorne claims the contextualist is driven to appeal to semantic blindness:

How should a contextualist in epistemology respond to all this? The most promising strategy would be to adopt a view that invokes *semantic blindness*: There is a real sense in which users of the word ‘know’ are blind to the semantic workings of their language. English speakers proceed as if DSK were correct. But it isn’t. While those speakers are, at least implicitly, well aware of the context-dependence of ‘tall’, the same is not true for ‘know’. (pp. 107-108)

And Hawthorne rightly claims that having to resort to such an appeal is a drawback:

Other things being equal, a semantic theory that didn't claim semantic blindness on the part of competent speakers would be a better theory. (p. 109)

But, so far as this argument of Hawthorne's goes, the contextualist need not get to the point of having to make this problematic appeal. For the trouble Hawthorne stirs up is derived from DSK, which in turn is supported by appeals to how we report beliefs involving "knows," and this argument should be stopped right at the outset, because, as we have seen, Hawthorne's general observation here is simply wrong. About the best test cases, where there is a marked difference in standards, it is very far indeed from being altogether obvious that we display no hesitation in engaging in the relevant disquotation.

## **5. "Knows" and "Tall" in Some Belief Reports and Some Speech Reports**

The above only responds to Hawthorne's particular argument. Naturally, there are many potential arguments against contextualism by which it might be argued that within the likes of belief reports and other propositional attitude reports, and also speech reports, "knows" behaves in such a way as to cast doubt on contextualism. And naturally, I can't anticipate every possible way such an argument might go. Additionally, evaluating many such arguments would involve us in controversial general matters about how context-sensitive terms actually behave in such contexts, and settling such matters – as we are taught to quite conveniently write – goes beyond the scope of the present paper!

But what I will do here is look at several different types of conversational situations, and compare how "knows" behaves with how some clearly context-sensitive term behaves within belief reports and speech reports. By showing that in the relevant respects "knows" behaves very much like the clearly context-sensitive term in the various situations, I may provide some grounds for thinking that some killer anti-contextualist argument in the vicinity may be hard to find.

In the above section, we tested DSK against cases where, at least on contextualist analysis, there was a very notable difference in epistemic standards between the contexts of our

two speakers. As we saw, speakers really do become queasy about “disquoting” in such cases of large and noticeable differences in standards.

But I admit that speakers are quite quick to engage in disquotation where whatever differences in epistemic standards there might be are small and not very noticeable. And, for a variety of possible reasons, this willingness on our part to so quickly engage in disquotation on “knows” in such cases may be thought to spell trouble for contextualism. Here is perhaps the most plausible way to use this feature of the behavior of “knows” against contextualism: There are many cases where speakers breezily engage in disquotation where, it can be claimed, if contextualism is true, they should suspect that they might well be mis-reporting the content of a subject’s belief. Example: I quickly walk past a group of speakers, and hear Frank say, “Mary knows that the library closes at 5.” Later, I’m engaged in a different conversation, with a completely different group of speakers. But if the occasion calls for it, I won’t hesitate to claim, “Frank believes that Mary knows that the library closes at 5.” But, from my point of view, what are the chances, if contextualism is true, that the epistemic standards of my current conversation exactly match those of the conversation I overheard? Quite small, it can seem. Perhaps that’s not so much of a problem if the only worry is that the overheard conversation may have been governed by higher epistemic standards than is the conversation I’m currently engaged in, because if Frank believes Mary meets even higher epistemic standards, then he presumably believes she meets lower standards as well. But the case can be constructed so that, from my point of view, there’s a good chance that, given contextualism, the standards of the overheard conversation were slightly lower than are the standards that govern my present discussion. Still, I’m pretty quick to disquote. And this can seem to be a problem for contextualism, because in saying the disquoted “Frank believes that Mary knows that the library closes at 5,” I would seem to be attributing to Frank the belief that Mary meets the higher standards of my current conversation, while my evidence for this claim – Frank’s assertion, made in a different conversation which may well have been governed by lower standards – seems insufficient to adequately underwrite my seemingly confident, breezy attribution.

Ultimately, we should want a good account of belief reports, and how context-sensitive terms behave within them, that will explain why we’re quick to disquote on “knows” in cases like the one I’ve just described. Several candidate explanations suggest themselves, but each is too controversial to provide adequate relief from the attack. At this point, the issue of how belief

reports work is too controversial for such a response. But we can effectively respond to this attack by noting that other terms that are clearly context-sensitive display relevantly similar behavior in analogous cases.

I assume that the gradable adjective “tall” is context-sensitive: It’s at least fairly obvious that how tall a person or an object must be for it to be true to say of it that it is “tall” is a context-variable matter. Some may deny this,<sup>8</sup> but not many. And in situations analogous to the one described above, we’re pretty quick to issue disquoting belief reports involving “tall,” too. Suppose what I hear Frank say as I quickly walk past is “Mary is tall.” In a new conversation, I’ll be pretty quick to say, “Frank believes that Mary is tall,” even though it seems I should consider it very possible that the standards governing the true use of “tall” in Frank’s conversation were slightly lower than are those governing the new conversation I’m presently engaged in. So long as it appears that the standards of Frank’s old conversation are even roughly in the same ballpark as are the standards governing my current conversation, I’m pretty quick to disquote – and here I think I’m behaving very much like a normal speaker. Why do we do this? I won’t speculate here – though I do have some ideas, as do many of you, I suspect. But what’s important to answering the charge against epistemic contextualism currently under consideration is that the behavior of “knows” here is relevantly similar to that of the clearly context-sensitive term, “tall”.

As we noted in the previous section, when the epistemic standards governing the original speaker’s knowledge attribution are clearly and substantially lower than are those that would govern the later attribution of belief, we do resist disquoting. (Recall that it seems wrong for Thelma, while talking to the police, to say that “Louise believes that she knows that Jim was at the office.”) Of course, “tall” behaves similarly. Suppose that while discussing the reasons why the 6’5” Reeves is such a great high school basketball player, Lucius has sincerely said, “Reeves is tall,” and suppose that Theo knows that Lucius sincerely said that in such a context. Now, however, Theo is in a context in which various players, including Reeves, are being discussed as potential NBA centers, and, as is appropriate when potential NBA centers are being discussed, 6’5” players are definitely not being counted as “tall,” and so Theo has admitted, “Well, Reeves is not tall.” (Perhaps adding: “But he has great low post moves, and he’s young enough that he

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<sup>8</sup> See some recent work by Cappelan and Lepore, including especially their *Insensitive Semantics: In Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism* (Basil Blackwell, 2005).

may still grow some more.”) Here, as in the high-standards Thelma/Louise/“knows” case, it does not intuitively seem right for Theo to report in his “high-standards” context, “Lucius believes that Reeves is tall,” for, though Lucius said, “Reeves is tall,” he said that in a different context where lower standards were in play. Again, there’s room for one to claim that such a report, though quite inappropriate, would nonetheless be true. But there’s room here to claim a lot of things. All I’m reporting here is that the behavior of the “tall” here is much like that of “knows”: the belief report is out-of-place, seems inappropriate and at best misleading, and normal, competent speakers wouldn’t issue it.

If our speakers can’t issue the disquoting belief reports we’re considering, what about speech reports? Here it seems that “knows” again follows “tall” quite closely. For with both terms, in cases of large, noticeable, and important shifts in standards, the relevant speech reports seem a bit, but only a bit, less wrong than do the belief reports we’ve already considered: It does seem a bit less wrong for Theo to report, “Lucius said that Reeves is tall” and also for Thelma to report, “Louise said that she knows.” But though these “said that” reports seem less bad than the corresponding “believes that” reports, they still seem at least somewhat problematic – at least a little hesitation seems called for. (Whether such “said that” reports would be true is a very difficult question; they may just be in various ways misleading. I’m here merely reporting intuitions about whether these are the right things for our speakers to say.) But we’ve so far considered only the possibility of the speakers issuing the relevant speech reports and then shutting up. And what does seem clearly correct for the speakers to instead say – in both the case of “knows” and of “tall” – is the above “said that” reports with the addition of any of a number of possible follow-ups that at least seem to work precisely by warning the listener against interpreting the content of what Lucius or Louise said as if it had been said in the listener’s new, quite different context: “Lucius said that Reeves is tall, but he was speaking of Reeves as a high school player,” “Louise said that she knows, but she was speaking casually.” Something like that seems quite clearly to be the thing to say. Again, it’s hard to resist trying to explain why this is so, but I will indeed resist. All I mean to be doing is pointing out the relevant behavior of “knows” is quite similar in these contexts to that of the clearly context-sensitive “tall.”

And, to sum up this section, “knows” tracks “tall” impressively through the scenarios we’ve discussed here. In both the case of “knows” and that of “tall”:

- a) the relevant disquoting belief reports seem fine where there's no clear and marked difference in standards between the context of the report and the context of the assertion on which the report is based
- b) the relevant disquoting belief reports do seem somehow wrong where there is such a clear and marked difference in standards
- c) the analogous disquoting speech reports also seem somehow wrong – though perhaps a bit less so than the belief reports – where there is a clear and marked difference in standards, and the speech report contains no clarifying follow-up
- d) the analogous disquoting speech reports seem perfectly fine – in fact, they seem exactly the things to say – even where there is a clear and marked difference in standards, when they do include any of a number of clarifying follow-ups

So however we end up explaining this behavior, it's hard to see how this behavior of "knows" can serve as a good foundation for an argument against the context-sensitivity of "knows," given these similarities in the behavior of the clearly context-sensitive "tall."

## **6. Schiffer's Attack on Contextualist Solutions to Skepticism: Being "Bamboozled by Our Own Words"**

In a note attached to the passage I quote toward the end of section 4, above, where he introduces the notion of "semantic blindness," Hawthorne suggests that we see Stephen Schiffer's "Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism"<sup>9</sup> "for related discussion." I will close by following that excellent suggestion.

Schiffer's attack is directed specifically at one of the most important proposed applications of contextualism – to the problem of philosophical skepticism. And while Schiffer doesn't (at least so far as I can find) use the phrase "semantic blindness," he does seem to have the same idea that Hawthorne designates by that phrase when, for instance, Schiffer issues the memorable charge that the contextualist solution to the problem of skepticism essentially involves "a pretty lame account of how, according to [the contextualist], we came to be bamboozled by our own words" (p. 329). At any rate, it seems that Schiffer's attack can be

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<sup>9</sup> Schiffer, "Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 96 (1996): 317-333.

effectively answered in a way very similar to how I respond to charges of “semantic blindness” above in section 2.

Schiffer’s attack is directed at the contextualist response to this skeptical argument:

[SA] 1. I don’t know know that I’m not a BIV (i.e., a bodiless brain in a vat who has been caused to have just those sensory experiences I’ve had)

2. If I don’t know that I’m not a BIV, then I don’t know that I have hands

So, C. I don’t know that I have hands. (p. 317)

As Schiffer understands the contextualist’s account of [SA]’s persuasive power, the skeptic, in asserting her first premise, raises the standards for knowledge to a level (which Schiffer labels the “Tough” standards) at which one counts as knowing neither that one is not a BIV nor that one has hands. Thus, contextualists, as Schiffer understands them, hold that when the skeptic presents it, the sentences of [SA] express this argument:

[SA-T] 1. I don’t know know that I’m not a BIV relative to Tough

2. If I don’t know that I’m not a BIV relative to Tough, then I don’t know that I have hands relative to Tough

So, C. I don’t know that I have hands relative to Tough (p. 324)

And [SA-T], which is the argument that [SA] expresses, is not only valid, but is also sound. Why, then, does the argument strike us as at all paradoxical? Why don’t we simply accept this sound argument that the skeptic presents? Schiffer continues:

Naturally, the Contextualist realizes that he isn’t quite finished. He must explain why [SA] seemed to present a paradox. If the argument [SA] really expresses is plainly sound, then why do we instinctively feel that [SA] expresses an argument that’s plainly unsound? Why, that is, are we loathe to accept that the

sceptic's conclusion is true? To this the Contextualist has a simple answer: we instinctively know that the conclusion-asserting sentence of [SA] would express a false proposition in a quotidian context in which sceptical hypotheses weren't at issue, and we mistakenly suppose that it's asserting the same false proposition in [SA]. In other words, [SA] strikes us as presenting a profound paradox merely because we're ignorant of what it's really saying, and this because we don't appreciate the indexical nature of knowledge sentences. (p. 325)

On Schiffer's understanding of it, then, the contextualist's response to [SA] essentially involves

a certain error theory—to wit, the claim that people uttering certain knowledge sentences in certain contexts systematically confound the propositions their utterances express with the propositions they would express by uttering those sentences in certain other contexts. (p. 325)

And Schiffer finds that incredible:

But that error theory has no plausibility: speakers would know what they were saying if knowledge sentences were indexical in the way the Contextualist requires. (p. 328)

Now, some of Schiffer's construal seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the contextualist's solution. Contextualists need not hold that the skeptic's presentation of [SA] will invariably express the sound argument [SA-T]. I'm the contextualist Schiffer is most directly addressing, and I don't commit to that.<sup>10</sup> What is essential to the contextualist's account, and what I am committed to, is that in her presentation of [SA] (and, in particular, of its first

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<sup>10</sup> Schiffer's reading of me is quite understandable. In section 2 of my "Solving the Skeptical Problem" (*Philosophical Review* 104 (1995): 1-52), I provisionally assume, for ease of exposition, a "skeptical-friendly" version of contextualism, and go on to explain how to adapt my explanation for other versions of contextualism, on which the skeptic does not necessarily succeed in raising the standards for "knowledge" (p. 6). Most of the paper, then, reads as if I accept such a skeptic-friendly version of contextualism.

premise), the skeptic executes a conversational maneuver (and for our current purposes we need not go into the standards-raising rule that the skeptic exploits) that has some tendency to make Tough the operative standards. But whether and under which conditions the skeptic actually succeeds in inducing Tough is a tricky question about which there is room for contextualists to maneuver.<sup>11</sup> To explain why [SA], and in particular, its first premise, is as plausible as it is, it is sufficient to explain how it is that the skeptic at least threatens to install Tough, at which that premise is true. The contextualist's ultimate point will then be that if and to the extent the skeptic's argument does succeed, it does so by at least threatening to install unusually demanding epistemic standards, so its success has no tendency to show that our ordinary claims to "know" are false.<sup>12</sup> Whether the skeptic actually succeeds in what she threatens may be a very unclear matter.

But none of this helps with Schiffer's complaint; in fact, it may exacerbate the problem Schiffer alleges. What Schiffer finds incredible is that ordinary speakers might be "bamboozled by their own words": that they might confound what propositions they are expressing by their use of "knows" in dealing with [SA]. It certainly doesn't seem to help matters to add to that that sometimes we contextualist theorists are also quite undecided about what propositions are being expressed!

But there does seem to be an effective response to Schiffer's complaint – disarmingly simple though it is. It is to be found in the fact that if you ask them whether the skeptic's assertion, "I don't know that I have hands," made as the conclusion of the skeptical argument [SA], contradicts what she would say by asserting "I know that I have hands" in an ordinary, non-skeptical context, or whether the former denies precisely what the latter asserts,<sup>13</sup> many ordinary speakers will say "yes," and many will say "no." (And, interestingly many who say "no" will go on to volunteer some sort of proto-contextualist analysis of the situation.) Apparently, that's just a tough question. Though some speakers will insist the answer is easy and obvious, this group will split fairly evenly between those who say the obvious answer is

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<sup>11</sup> For discussion of some of the options here, see my SSS (reference in note 3).

<sup>12</sup> See again my second "important point" about contextualist solutions to skepticism at p. 6 of "Solving the Skeptical Problem" (reference in note 10, above).

<sup>13</sup> To avoid some needless complications, it's perhaps better to formulate [SA] in the third-person – "Frank does not know that he is not a BIV...", and then ask whether the skeptic's assertion of the third person conclusion – "Frank does not know that he has hands" – contradicts what would be said by an ordinary, non-skeptical use of "Frank knows that he has hands."

“yes” and those who insist the obvious answer is “no.” So it simply is the case – whichever is actually the correct answer to the question (if there is a single correct answer: perhaps the answer depends on various details about just how the skeptical argument is presented, whether it meets with resistance, etc.) – that a substantial proportion of ordinary speakers are being “bamboozled by their own words”: they are wrong about whether the relevant skeptical denials of “knowledge” are incompatible with what ordinary affirmations of “knowledge” affirm. It’s not the contextualist’s solution to skepticism that’s causing the trouble. That there is a good deal of “semantic blindness” going on here is simply a fact that any credible analysis of the situation must face. Whether or not the contextualist solution to skepticism is correct, we simply are stuck with the result that on the matter of whether skeptical denials of knowledge are incompatible with what ordinary knowledge attributions affirm, you can fool a lot of the speakers a lot of the time.<sup>14,15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Stewart Cohen has also answered Schiffer’s objection; see his “Contextualism, Skepticism, and the Structure of Reasons” (*Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (1999): 57-89), at pp. 77-79; his “Contextualism Defended” (*Philosophical Studies* 103 (2001): 87-98), at pp. 89-91; and his “Contextualism and Unhappy-Face Solutions: Reply to Schiffer” (*Philosophical Studies* 119 (2004): 185-197), at pp. 191-193. By appealing to how, by means of arguments that are in some ways analogous to the skeptical argument [SA], ordinary speakers can be led, not only to wonder whether certain surfaces they would ordinarily call “flat” really are flat, but also whether their earlier claims about those surfaces’ “flatness” were true, Cohen persuasively argues that what Schiffer finds so blatantly incredible – that speakers might be so “bamboozled” about what propositions they are expressing by means of context-sensitive terms – undeniably does happen (assuming, as I take it is safe, that a “contextualist” resolution to this “paradox” about flatness is correct). This is a telling point against Schiffer. How can this be so incredible in the case of “knows” when we know such confusion often actually does take place with other context-sensitive terms? Schiffer’s professed bafflement here is surely an over-reaction. But this response of Cohen’s is weakened somewhat by a disanalogy between the case of “knows” and “flat” that Cohen admits: “Having said that, I should note that there is an important difference between contextualist solutions to flatness skepticism and contextualist solutions to justification/knowledge skepticism. Contextualist solutions to flatness ascriptions gain easy and widespread acceptance among most people. But contextualist theories of knowledge/justification do not” (Cohen, 2004, p. 192; see what immediately follows at pp. 192-193 for Cohen’s response to this problem). Perhaps Schiffer’s complaint can be toned down and thereby made a bit more plausible if what he were instead to say is incredible is that there should be a blindness to context-sensitivity when that context-sensitivity isn’t quickly and immediately recognized by most speakers once the possibility of context-sensitivity is pointed out to them. Then the disanalogy Cohen admits would be crucial. That’s why it’s important in responding to Schiffer to (also) point out that the type of bamboozlement in question happens, not only with other terms that are clearly context-sensitive (where this disanalogy applies), but also in the case at hand (the use of “knows” in skeptical arguments) – whether or not contextualism is right. Now, at one point (1999, p. 78), Cohen argues that since contextualism is true, and some speakers resist contextualism, the blindness Schiffer finds incredible really does exist in the case of “knows”. But this pre-supposes the truth of contextualism, and doesn’t point out that the blindness is displayed in the particular situation at hand, where speakers compare denials of knowledge made in the wake of [SA] with ordinary claims to know. That’s why it’s important to (also) urge against Schiffer the fairly obvious observation I’m pointing out here: That in the case at hand -- speakers comparing the content of skepticism-inspired denials of knowledge with ordinary positive knowledge claims -- many speakers are wrong about the matter of whether what’s being denied is the former is the same proposition that’s being affirmed in the latter whatever the correct account of that relation is.

Now, there may be some reason for thinking it's more problematic to suppose that many speakers are blind to the context-sensitivity of their own words than to suppose that many are blind to the context-insensitivity of their own words. But it's not easy to see how to give any credible argument for such an asymmetry, and it's perhaps best not to stretch to anticipate how such an argument might go. And Schiffer does not argue for any such an asymmetry in his paper. In fact, he does not give evidence of even being aware of the fact that many speakers are being bamboozled no matter what the correct answers actually are to our key questions. On the face of it, it looks like one is involved in equally problematic error theories whether one rules that many speakers mistakenly think there is context-sensitivity when there is none, or whether one rules that many speakers mistakenly think there is no context-sensitivity where it in fact does exist. Either way, many speakers are being "bamboozled by their own words."

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<sup>15</sup> In a very interesting passage, Schiffer seems to accept a contextualist account of what we might call "moderate," non-philosophical skepticism. He begins with an acceptance of some degree of contextualism:

The penumbras of vague terms can dilate or constrict according to conversational purposes. For example, in a conversation about good places to run, a runner might say 'What I especially like about Hyde Park is that, unlike Central Park, it's flat' and count as speaking truly, whereas in a conversation among engineers about where a certain flying device might land in an emergency, an engineer might count as speaking truly when he says of Hyde Park 'It's not flat'. It's clear that knowledge sentences are subject to this sort of vagueness-related variability. In certain conversational contexts you count as knowing that your spouse is faithful; in others you can't really be said to know.

But, Schiffer explains, this degree of context-sensitivity can't help the contextualist solution to philosophical skepticism; he continues:

The reason this sort of variability is of no use to the Contextualist is that speakers are perfectly aware of when it's going on. If you claim to know where your car is, and someone challenges you, 'But how can you be sure it wasn't towed or stolen?', you'll merely get impatient at the questioner's obtuseness: it ought to have been mutual knowledge between you that you were speaking casually. The Contextualist who tries to appeal to the context-variability of vagueness must say the following. In a context where scepticism is at issue, the penumbra of 'know' shrinks dramatically to such an extent that one who says 'I know that I have hands' is actually making a false assertion. But the speaker, either because she is unaware of how the vagaries of vagueness affect speech or because she confounds her context, mistakenly thinks that more generous precisifications are in play which count her as speaking truly. This is not a semantic story to be taken seriously. (pp. 327-28)

But I'm confident that if you ask ordinary speakers, they won't all be so "perfectly aware" of when this moderate context-shifting is going on in the presenting of such arguments. In fact, if you present them with this "moderate" analogue of [SA] –

[SA-M] 1-M. You don't know that your car wasn't towed or stolen

2-M. If you don't know that your car wasn't towed or stolen, then you don't know that it's in the Main Street parking lot

So, C-M. You don't know that your car is in the Main Street parking lot

– you will find that fewer, not more, of them accept a contextualist account of the relation between C-M, asserted as the conclusion of this argument, and an ordinary claim of a speaker to know where her car is, than will accept a contextualist account of the original [SA]. In my experience, the biggest difference between the solutions students tend to go for in reaction to [SA] as compared with [SA-M] is that, in the case of [SA-M], more of them go for the "skeptical solution" – the ordinary claim to "know" is false (though perhaps appropriate), and the argument shows this to be so – in the case of [SA-M] than in the case of [SA], and thus fewer respondents go for the other solutions, including contextualist solutions, in the case of [SA-M].

## **Appendix: Brief Reflections on One-Way Disputes and the Asymmetrical Gap Approach**

So, what of the cases (mentioned in section 1) of “one-way disputes,” where a speaker, S1 has said, “S knows,” and a later speaker, S2, in a different conversation in which, on contextual analysis, higher standards seem to be operative, disputes S1’s earlier claim: “S1 was so wrong! S knows no such thing”? As I noted, the sense that S2’s denial is incompatible with S1’s affirmation can seem pretty strong here – almost as strong as in real two-way arguments, where both speakers are participating in the same discussion. But in one-way disputes, since the speakers are in different contexts, perhaps governed by different standards (on contextual analysis), it can seem that the “single scoreboard” approach won’t apply here, and the contextualist will have to somewhat counter-intuitively say about many such cases that the denial and the affirmation are both true and are compatible with one another.

First, note that this is a general problem that can arise for any context-sensitive terms – even obviously context-sensitive ones. Suppose the earlier speaker, S3, says “Frank is here,” in a context in which “here” is being used to designate the city of Atlanta, where the discussion is taking place. Later, in a different discussion, S4 says, “S3 was so wrong! Frank wasn’t here at all.” Here, S4 seems to be vehemently disagreeing with S3. But suppose that in S4’s conversation, the extent of “here” that the speakers have been indicating covers just the hotel in Atlanta where these discussions are taking place. Well, then, should we rule that S3’s affirmation and S4’s denial are compatible, since it’s certainly possible that Frank should be in Atlanta, but not in that hotel? But S4 seems to be quite clearly indicating that she means to be saying something incompatible with S3’s affirmation! What to do? Well, that’s not the easiest of questions. But, presumably, the solution isn’t to give up on “contextualism” and instead go “invariantist” on the issue of how far out “here” reaches in different contexts!

I’m inclined to take an “asymmetrical gap” approach to these cases of one-way disputes. In SSS, I indicate my leaning toward the “gap” view on real, two-way arguments: When two speakers, engaged in an argument with one another, “personally indicate” different contents for a particular context-sensitive term, but also clearly indicate that they mean to be saying things incompatible with the other (“Frank certainly is here” / “No, he’s not here”; “Frank does too

know” / “No, he doesn’t”) the truth-conditions for both speaker’s statements are such that “Frank is here” is true and “Frank is not here” is false iff Frank is in the area that satisfies both speakers’ personally indicated range for “here”; “Frank is not here” is true and “Frank is here” is false iff Frank is in neither indicated range; and both “Frank is here” and “Frank is not here” go truth-value-less iff Frank is in one, but not the other, range – if, in the case we consider above, Frank is indeed in Atlanta but not in the hotel in question. And similarly for “knows.” This “gap” approach to two-way disputes seems the best way to take account of each speaker’s “personally indicated content,” and also each speaker’s indication that they mean to be saying things incompatible with what the other speaker say. (See SSS.)

The asymmetrical gap approach that I’m now suggesting for cases of one-way disputes is similar, but posits a gap only in the truth-conditions of the later speaker’s claim. The later speaker, after all, is indicating that she means to be disagreeing with the claim of the first speaker, but may also be in a conversation in which she and those she’s talking with have indicated a certain content that differs from the content that governed the first speaker’s claim. So, taking both of these indications seriously, the asymmetrical gap approach to such one-way disputes rules that, in the case above, S4’s assertion “Frank wasn’t here at all” is true iff Frank is not even in Atlanta, false iff Frank is in the hotel, and truth-value-less if Frank is in Atlanta but not in the hotel in question. Similarly, S2’s claim, “Frank knows no such thing,” said in dispute of S1’s earlier, “Frank knows,” is true iff Frank meets neither the epistemic standards of S1’s context nor those indicated by S2 later context, is false iff Frank meets both sets of standards, and is truth-value-less iff Frank meets one, but not the other, standard. But the earlier claims (by S1 and S3) are not rendered gappy by what happens in some later conversation.

This asymmetrical gap approach does not deliver the same, neat result that the simple gap approach does that what the one speaker is denying is the very same gappy thing that the other affirms. But that seems appropriate to the cases – those of “one-way disputes” – to which it is applied. And the asymmetrical gap does deliver the result that the relevant denials are incompatible with the relevant affirmations: No matter where Frank is, there’s no way that S3’s affirmation and S4’s denial can both be true; and no matter how well S is positioned with respect to P, there’s no way that S1’s attribution of knowledge and S2’s denial of knowledge can both be true.

The asymmetrical gap view can also be applied to some claims made in two-way disagreements, and thereby solve a perplexity that arises about such cases. In *SSS*, I suggest applying the original gap view (I guess we can now call that the “symmetrical gap” view) to two-way disagreements, after, as I put it, the debate has reached a “state of equilibrium” (see *SSS*, pp. 6-7). But what of the initial assertions made in such debates, before it is determined that the original assertion would be disputed by another speaker indicating different standards, and their relation to later claims that are intended to contradict them? In *SSS*, I set aside such tricky issues of timing. The “asymmetrical gap” view I’m now suggesting for handling cases of one-way disputes can also be usefully applied to handle some of these tricky issues that arise within single conversations. Later claims and the earlier claims they dispute, made within a single, extended argument, can be treated in the “asymmetrical gap” way that I suggest for later claims and earlier claims in cases of one-way disputes that happen in different conversations. If conversational moves have been made to alter the epistemic standards between the times of the earlier claims and the later claims within a single conversation, yet the makers of those later claims indicate not only that they intend the new standards, but also that they are contradicting (or agreeing with, for that matter) the old claims, the truth-conditions of these new claims “go gappy” between those of the old claims, and what the new truth-conditions would be were it not for the indications that the new claims contradict (or agree with) the old ones.