LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE AND SUBSTANTIVE EPISTEMIC CONTEXTUALISM

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ABSTRACT: Epistemic contextualism (EC) is the thesis that the standards that must be met by a knowledge claimant vary with (especially conversational) contexts of utterance. Thus construed, EC may concern only knowledge claims ("Semantic EC"), or else the knowledge relation itself ("Substantive EC"). Herein, my concern is with "Substantive EC." Let's call the claim that the sorts of linguistic evidence commonly cited in support of Semantic EC also imply or support Substantive EC the "Implication Thesis" (IP). IP is a view about which some epistemologists have equivocated. Keith DeRose is a case in point. Herein I argue that IP is false, and that it is false for interesting reasons. To this end, I consider two other terms which DeRose investigates, "free will" and "potency" in his efforts to demonstrate the alleged inability of distinctly philosophical or skeptical doubts to infect ordinary epistemic discourse. I describe how and why these two examples speak against, rather than for, DeRose's recommendation of Substantive EC.

KEYWORDS: skepticism, contextualism, knowledge, DeRose, Rieber

1. Introduction

Ignoring minor endogenous disagreements, we can take epistemic contextualism (EC) to be the thesis that the standards that must be met by a knowledge claimant vary with (especially conversational) contexts of utterance. Thus, even though knowledge claims must satisfy relatively low epistemic standards in some contexts, they must satisfy higher standards in other contexts, where more remote sources of possible disinformation and error (ultimately generating skeptical scenarios) arise for consideration. Using precedent diction, we can say that contexts are formal structures that provide values for what counts as proof, thus determining the truth values of epistemic claims. They are distinct from situations, i.e., concrete arrangements of items within which sentential utterances occur. Consequently, situations include utterances and determine contexts which, in turn, generate variable sentential truth values. A single sentence can have different truth values at different times as a function of different contexts, which is to say, different situations in which it is uttered, causing it to vary in meaning.

Thus construed, contextualism is a semantic thesis that may or may not have epistemological consequences: it can concern only knowledge *claims,* or it can

concern the knowledge relation itself. Let's call the view that what "knowledge" *means* depends on contextual factors "Semantic EC." Let's call the claim that what knowledge *is* depends on contextual factors "Substantive EC."[1] Let's call the claim that Semantic EC presupposes, *and thus implies,* Substantive EC the "Presupposition Thesis," and the denial of this position "(Contextualist) Separatism." More specifically, Semantic EC is the view that "knowledge" discourse has an indexical status that causes the meaning and truth conditions of sentences containing "know" to vary with contextually determined standards of appropriate rigor (concerning stakes, interests, etc.) Substantive EC is the view that the knowledge relation itself varies with differences in contextually determined standards of appropriate rigor (concerning stakes, interests, etc.) Finally, the Presupposition Thesis is the assertion that Semantic EC is only plausible on the assumption of Substantive EC. It is the view that, if true, Semantic EC provides *grounds* for Substantive EC because the contextual character of "knows" implies the contextual character of the knowledge relation as a result of presupposing it. Finally, the Presupposition Thesis is itself to be distinguished from the "Implication Thesis," which is the claim that the sorts of linguistic evidence that contextualists cite in favor of Semantic EC imply Substantive EC. Note the difference between the two doctrines. The Presupposition Thesis claims that Substantive EC is a necessary condition for Semantic EC. The Implication Thesis maintains that the facts about use commonly invoked in defense of Semantic EC ensure the truth of Substantive EC.

For illustration, consider the bearing of each of these views on worldly skepticism. Semantic EC maintains that Moore's assertions and those of the skeptic don't conflict. Substantive EC holds that the skeptic can gain no critical traction against ordinary knowledge claims because there is no knowledge relation with a singular determinate nature at issue. The Presupposition Thesis implies that there is no acontextual, univocal meaning of "knowledge" that the skeptic can critically invoke *because* knowledge has no singular, determinate nature. The Implication Thesis is the claim that the observed variability of standards in our everyday use of "know" implies that knowledge lacks a singular, determinate nature.

I (apologetically) present this tiresome topography of positions only to make my limited aspirations in this paper clear. I argue elsewhere *for* the Presupposition Thesis, that is, against Contextualist Separatism. I argue here only *against* the Implication Thesis. I ask if features of linguistic employment that lead contextualists to accept Semantic EC imply Substantive EC. That is, suppose we concede that

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[1] Patrick Rysiew, "Epistemic Contextualism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), eds. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford: Stanford, CA, 2016): URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ contextualism-epistemology/.

various facts about the use of "know" that the Semantic Contextualist cites (regarding variable standards for "knowledge" discourse in different contexts of inquiry) obtain. Does this linguistic evidence support the truth of Substantive EC?

Few philosophers explicitly embrace the Implication Thesis (e.g., David Innis, David Lewis, perhaps Michael Williams).[2] Most consistently deny it or at least remain agnostic as to its truth. Keith DeRose, I submit, is an interesting case in that he has tried to have it both ways. In some of his work, he is adamant that his is merely a Semantic EC, and that the evidence from use he presents is offered in support of nothing more.[3] But at other points, he seems to describe his contextualism as a Substantive one that receives support from observable facts about the use of "knows" in varying conversational contexts. He explicitly repudiates the claim that contextualist reasoning and conclusions pertain merely to assertions *about* knowledge and not to knowledge itself. He objects to the contention that contextualism has no bearing on epistemology and skeptical concerns about the scope and limits of knowledge.

DeRose derides this critical contention and maintains that it is easily refuted. To illustrate how, he considers the case of free-will attribution, maintaining that its potential amenability to contextualist analysis provides a sanguine parallel for the example at hand. Let's examine the Implication Thesis largely through the lens provided by this suggested parallel. Once we make this analogy out in more detail, I suggest, we can see, contra DeRose's assertions, that it thwarts rather than supports the Implication Thesis. The reason: contextualist accounts of both "knowledge" and "freedom" commit us to analyses of their respective concepts upon which absolutist criteria governing these concepts' application to limiting cases (identifying "knowledge" and "freedom" in their "strictest" senses) are no more deeply motivated than any other potential set of criteria. But these analyses, I submit, are mistaken. Even though such absolutist criteria issue from highly distinctive and idiosyncratic reflections, they still exercise broad critical authority over questions we should ask about knowledge and freedom in other, more prosaic, contexts. In other words, even if the use of "know" does vary with context, the skeptic's sense of the term is privileged in a way that should give us special pause when doing epistemology.

In section 1, I sketch this analogy between Semantic EC and Semantic Free Will Contextualism. In section 2, I contrast these two positions with simple

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[2] David Annis, "A Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978): 213-219, David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996): 549–567, Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
[3] Keith DeRose, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Context," *Philosophical Review* 111 (2002): 167-203.

invariantist alternatives. In section 3, I turn from expository to critical aims and address four questions: what is the alleged semantic evidence for substantive "knowledge" and "free will" contextualism; how does this evidence allegedly provide these positions support; and what must we assume (regarding language, the world, and the relation between the two) to view semantic phenomena as having substantive consequences for our understanding of the phenomenon of free will and knowledge, respectively. In section 4, I ask if the assumptions identified in section 3 are supported by DeRose's linguistic evidence. I contend that they are not. That is, I argue that DeRose's linguistic evidence doesn't support an account of knowledge that obliges invariantist epistemologists to rethink their views about knowledge and skeptical threats. Finally, I offer morals and conclusions concerning the status of distinctly philosophical inquiries about knowledge and agency. Note that my consideration of agency talk is purely heuristic. I have no immediate interest in this paper with issues of free will. I discuss them merely to shed light on epistemic concerns. My point is that DeRose's parallel between epistemological concerns and concerns regarding free will speak *against*, rather than *for*, the conclusions that DeRose recommends.

2. DeRose's Analogy and Rieber's Account

Let's begin with exposition. What are the details of DeRose's analogy between the attribution of knowledge and the attribution of free will, and what form must a contextualist account of free-will attribution take? Consider the following passage from one of DeRose's most extended expositions of the alleged parallel between knowledge and free-will attribution.

> Though contextualism/invariantism is an issue in the philosophy of language, it's a piece of philosophy of language that certainly has the potential to be of profound importance to epistemology. How we should proceed in studying knowledge will be greatly affected by how we come down on the contextualism/invariantism issue. For contextualism opens up possibilities for dealing with issues and puzzles in epistemology which, of course, must be rejected if invariantism is instead correct. And how could it be otherwise? Those who work on the problem of free will and determinism, for instance, should of course be very interested in the issue of what it means to call an action 'free.' If that could mean different things in different contexts, then all sorts of problems could arise from a failure to recognize this shift in meaning. If there is no such shift, then that too will be vital information. In either case, one will want to know what such claims mean. Likewise, it's important in studying knowledge to discern what it means to say someone knows something. If that can mean different things in different contexts, all sorts of problems and mistakes in epistemology, and not just in philosophy of language, will arise from a failure to recognize such shifts in meaning. If, on the other hand, there is no such

shift, then we're bound to fall into all sorts of error about knowledge, as well as about 'know(s),' if we think such shifts occur. It's essential to a credible epistemology, as well as to a responsible account of the semantics of the relevant epistemologically important sentences, that what's proposed about knowledge and one's claims about the semantics of 'know(s)' work plausibly together across the rather inconsequential boundary between these two subfields of philosophy.[4]

Here DeRose imagines how the dialectical precedent established by the free will debate might support his own strategic goal of deriving substantive epistemological morals from facts about the use of the term "knowledge."

The above passage calls for a bit of rational reconstruction. What would have to be the case for DeRose's observations about *use* to have consequences for the *phenomena* of knowledge and freedom, respectively, particularly insofar as skepticism about knowledge and freedom are concerned? Just as a speaker can truthfully say 'S freely performed A,' in low-standard contexts and 'S doesn't freely perform A' in high standards contexts, even though S and A remain constant, a speaker can truthfully say 'S knows that p' in low standards contexts and 'S doesn't know that p' in high standards contexts, where, again, S and p remain constant. In the case of each topic, the use of a critical term ("freedom," "knowledge") directly determines that term's range of application. Thus, by showing that philosophical uses of "free will" and "knowledge" differ from more ordinary uses of these terms, we automatically show that philosophical claims and queries concerning the phenomena of freedom and knowledge do not overrule our more ordinary claims and queries about these topics.

In the epistemic case, the skeptic aims to derive a negative philosophical conclusion about knowledge and then generalize this conclusion across all other contexts of epistemic claim-making. The epistemic contextualist then seeks to undermine this strategy by invoking the alleged indexicality of epistemic standards to show that the skeptic's use of "know" differs from more prosaic senses. Finally, the opponent of the Implication Thesis contends that this contextualist rejoinder is illegitimate, as it concerns the use of the word "knowledge" rather than knowledge itself. DeRose then responds that facts about the use of "knowledge" do indeed yield substantive truths about knowledge. Given the nature of the disagreement, it is clear that DeRose must concede this, as it is otherwise difficult to ascribe consequence to his claim that if "knowledge means different things in different contexts, then all sorts of problems could arise" for epistemology. What problems could arise for epistemology if the issue is merely semantic? It is hardly a difficulty for our

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[4] Keith DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Context*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: OUP, 2009): 18.

understanding of the skeptic that standards of knowing might shift. This is a mere equivocation which, once pointed out, dissolves in a flash as the skeptic, once she becomes cognizant of it, restates her original challenge with perfect clarity. Problems do not remain for epistemology because of equivocation once this equivocation is resolved. And such resolution requires nothing more than a moment's conversation and reflection.

As for his parallel with issues of free will, DeRose must reason in similar terms. He must believe that the agency skeptic who imposes libertarian demands on freedom but denies that they can be satisfied, much like the epistemological skeptic, aims to derive a negative philosophical conclusion and then generalize this conclusion across all contexts of personal agency ascription. Second, he must have us imagine a contextualist rejoinder to this reasoning. Suppose we found out that said agency skeptic's use of freedom" is distinctly idiosyncratic to philosophical inquiry. Surely, DeRose maintains, we would not suspect the free-will contextualist of illegitimately drawing substantive conclusions from "merely" semantic premises. By parity of reasoning, we should not suspect the epistemic contextualist of doing this either. Thus, DeRose suggests, the precedent presented by the free will debate helps us see why facts about the use of "knowledge" have a bearing on knowledge itself.

Steven Rieber elaborates on these matters by offering us a more detailed contextualist account of free will ascription. Significantly, this account is closely modeled on DeRose's contextualist account of knowledge attribution.[5] Rieber asks us to consider a statement triple (1-3) that closely mirrors the statement triple (4-6) that DeRose uses to articulate both his skeptical puzzle and his response to it.

> (1) Emma raised her hand freely.
>
> (2) If Emma's raising her hand is the product of a causal chain going back to something other than Emma, then her raising her hand was not free.
>
> (3) Emma's raising her hand is the product of a causal chain going back to something other than Emma
>
> (4) Tom knows that this animal is a zebra.
>
> (5) If Tom does not know that this animal is not a cleverly disguised mule, then he does not know that it is a zebra.
>
> (6) Tom does not know that this animal is not a cleverly disguised mule.

(1) and (4) articulate ordinary claims concerning the phenomenon (e.g., free will, knowledge) at issue, each employing a perfectly ordinary instance of the relevant

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[5] Steven Rieber, "Free Will and Contextualism," *Philosophical Studies* 129 (2006): 223–252.

concept. (2) and (5) articulate conditionals asserting "very reasonable necessary condition[s] for the application[s] of the[se] concept[s]." (3) and (6) articulate negative conclusions regarding the possibility that these concepts might ever apply.[6]

In large part, it is because these two puzzles are so similar in form that Rieber derives the strategic moral that he does: contextualist analysis is no less appropriate to the analysis of "free will" attribution than it is to "knowledge" attribution. Both notions are indexical ones, characterized by meanings that vary with speakers' circumstances of use. Paralleling DeRose, Rieber takes his analysis of "freedom" to bear upon a proper understanding of freedom itself. Just as epistemic contextualists maintain that applicable constraints on knowledge automatically increase when we consider the likes of (4) and (5), freedom contextualists should maintain that applicable constraints on free agency automatically increase whenever we consider the likes of (2) and (3). When we consider (4) and (5), the number of counter possibilities we are obliged to rule out before issuing knowledge claims increases automatically.

Similarly, when we consider (2) and (3), the remoteness of the prompting causes that we are obliged to consider before judging an action free increases to a similar degree. In consequence, just as (4) is true in ordinary contexts in which we ignore skeptical scenarios and false in contexts in which we contemplate them, (1) is true in ordinary contexts in which we ignore distant prompting causes of action and false in contexts in which we consider them. To parallel epistemic contextualist strategy, Rieber phrases his solution to the free will puzzle in terms of shifting standards governing the ascription of agency. In short, we need reject none of hard determinism, compatibilism, or libertarianism. Each of these accounts is legitimized by different criteria of use appropriate to distinct situational and conversational contexts.

To Rieber's credit, his account does not stop with the above story. He does not merely describe the form that a contextualist treatment of freedom should take. He also endeavors to justify this description with a background account that receives support from something other than its mere ability to solve the puzzle posed by (1) - (3). That is, Rieber aims to show that the consequence described above is but one application of a more general feature of our causation discourse, a hallmark that manifests itself in ordinary conversation about agency. This feature regards the meaning of the phrase "did an action freely." "To say that an agent did F freely is to say that the agent caused F and in so doing was the original cause of F."[7] Here the expression "in so doing" ensures identity between the agent's performing the action

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[6] Rieber, "Free Will and Contextualism," 223–224
[7] Rieber, "Free Will and Contextualism," 234.

and the agent's being the original cause of the action, and the expression "original cause" fuels contextualist meaning shifts by being itself deeply contextual in character.[8]

Puzzle cases and questions of agency aside, Rieber insists, the contextuality of "original cause" also elucidates our common practices of causal ascription. It explains, for instance, why "if the burning of the house is the product of a causal chain going back to something that is not lightning, then the original cause of the house's burning was not lightning" is true in any context in which we utter or entertain it.[9] Rieber makes much of this fact because he takes it to show why his puzzle solution is not *ad hoc*. It is a special application of a more general rule applying to a wide swath of ordinary language.

3. Classic Absolutist Alternatives

We've sketched Rieber's contextualist analysis of the concept "free will" as an aid to understanding freedom itself. But is this account convincing? Rieber defends its cogency through an argument that is virtually identical in form to DeRose's argument for Semantic EC and the Implication Thesis. Both arguments are essentially comparative, contrasting Semantic contextualist accounts with their invariantist alternatives (according to which sentences containing relevant terms retain single sets of truth-conditions across all contexts of inquiry), and then urging the greater relative plausibility of the former. Let's briefly review these invariantist notions of "knowledge" and "free will," respectively, as well as the comparative arguments for contextualism that they are used (as critical targets) to fuel.

In the case of knowledge, we can do no better than focus on Peter Unger's original, classic, and quintessential classical skeptical invariantist account in *Ignorance*.[10] On Unger's account, "know" is a verb that conversational conventions allow us to employ even though its hyper-stringent conditions of application seldom,

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[8] This account selectively obviously invokes an originationist, rather than a so-called "consequence" account of what free will involves (à la Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). I think that this focus is justified, however, for two reasons. For one thing, the originationist account seems more clearly to be what Rieber has in mind, given the continuum analysis. For another thing, I take these two sorts of accounts to be very closely related: the ability to cause personal actions is effectively identical to possessing the ability to have done otherwise than one has (à la Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). It's being the case that one could have one otherwise than one did is a best understood as a *symptom* of the fact that one is the source or origin of the action in question.

[9] Rieber, "Free Will and Contextualism," 235.

[10] Peter Unger, *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

if ever, apply. Consequently, on Unger's account, the skeptic's professions of ignorance as to whether she is, e.g., possessed of hands, though true, carry numerous false implicatures concerning what we are ordinarily allowed to assert and infer. Moreover, this fact about "know" is not an isolated one. Unger is as concerned as Rieber to offer a solution that isn't *ad hoc*, and to offer one that appeals to even more general features of language than does Rieber's. On Unger's account, "know" is a member of a broad class of "absolute" terms (e.g., "flat," "straight," "empty") whose conditions of conversational appropriateness vary similarly from their truth conditions.

Let's call the principle governing this variance the "Absolute Term Rule" (ATR). According to ATR, one may use absolute terms in circumstances that approximate literal satisfaction conditions well enough in ordinary contexts to serve our purposes, even when this use is, strictly speaking, incorrect. It is incorrect because absolute terms refer to the logical upper limits of their target properties. To say that an object is flat is to say that it "could not possibly get any flatter."[11] Similarly, to say that one knows a proposition is to say that one could not be more certain of it.[12] DeRose argues against this account because it displays a fatal attraction to error theory according to which most of our claims about knowledge, though meaningful, are false. It is an account according to which we seldom, if ever, know anything, and few, if any, of our ordinary knowledge claims are correct.

Using Unger's skeptical invariantism as a model, let's ask what a parallel free will invariantism must be like. Its defining feature must be a construal of freedom as a limiting target or regulative ideal. An action is free, on such an account, only if it "could not possibly get any freer." Thus, even though attributions of "freedom" might colloquially vary in degree along a single scale of measurement, they can only strictly and correctly apply at this scale's limiting upper boundary. For Rieber, the central requirement of invariantist free will is apparent in the second premise of his puzzle, which stipulates that a person's actions are free only if they eventually "go back" to oneself. Even more fundamentally, this requirement is apparent in Rieber's decision to treat "original cause" as more primitive than "free will" itself, as when he writes, "the claim is that statements about free will are, upon analysis, statements about the original cause of action."[13] Robert Kane effectively describes the libertarian invariantist notion of freedom at play here with his account of "ultimate origination."[14] On Kane's telling, different senses of "freedom" are best compared

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[11] Unger. *Ignorance*, 64.
[12] Unger. *Ignorance,* 61.
[13] Rieber, "Free Will and Contextualism," 235.
[14] Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

through their relative placement along a single serial scale of increasing autonomy. At the base of this scale lies the freedom of "self-realization" (exploited by simple compatibilists, for instance, Hume on a standard interpretation) to do what we want in the absence of external constraint. Above this lies the freedom of "self-control" exploited by hierarchical compatibilists (e.g., Frankfurt and Fischer) to be moved by desires that are themselves regulated by higher-order wants and values.[15][16] At the upper limit of this scale lies the fully incompatibilist libertarian freedom of "self-determination," according to which we somehow autonomously source our higher-order desires and values, as it were, from nothing (or ourselves). Self-determination, if it existed, would consist in ultimate originating control," exercised by agents when it is "up to them which of a set of possible choices or actions will now occur, and up to no one and nothing else over which the agents themselves do not also have control."[17]

Paralleling DeRose, Rieber argues against this invariantist account of freedom because it displays a fatal attraction to error theory. That is, on this absolutist account, to say that A is the original cause of B is to say that A is absolutely the first cause in the causal chain leading to B. Still, given our actual use of the phrase "original cause," most, if not all, of our claims, not just about free will but about original causation itself, are rendered false on such an absolutist telling.

4. Basic Questions

Our aims so far have been expository. Through DeRose, we have articulated the idea of using the free will debate to clarify the relevance of Semantic EC to Substantive EC. Through Rieber, we have put ourselves in a better position to explore this strategy. Since Rieber's "free will" contextualism is closely modeled on DeRose's "knowledge" contextualism, it affords us a useful instrument with which to identify basic presuppositions present in both accounts. To provide this explanation, let's pursue more critical aims in this section by addressing the following questions about both epistemic and free will contextualism. First, in the case of both "knowledge" and "free will," what is the alleged evidence for semantic contextualism (about "knowledge" and "free will")? Second, how might this evidence provide support for

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[15] Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 5–20.

[16] John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005).

[17] Robert Kane, "Free Will: New Directions for an Ancient Problem," in *Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford: Blackwell (2003): 232.

substantive contextualism (about knowledge and free will)? Third, what must we assume (regarding language, the world, and the relation between the two) to view the semantic evidence used to adduce semantic contextualism as having substantive consequences for our understanding of the phenomena of free will and knowledge? Fourth, does it provide such support?

The answer to the first question is clear. It is apparent in the common form of the puzzles described above. The evidence for Semantic EC consists of observed facts about our use of the relevant terms. In the puzzle cases, these facts regard conflicts that arise between attributions or denials (of knowledge and free will) that we assert juxtapositionally in the same breaths. Because all the claims (1-6) seem true to us, we are loath to deny any of them. Semantic EC purports to save the day by making such denials unnecessary. By allowing all of our seemingly true claims to remain true, albeit within their separate and distinctive contexts, it saves us from having to judge any of them false. The alleged advantage of Semantic EC, then, is that it allows us to retain our original convictions concerning the truth and falsity of relevant claims. We need not choose between some of these claims and others in ways that court fatal error theoretic consequences by making intuitively true claims false. To attribute an absolute invariant character to "know" is to deviate so wildly from our ordinary attributive knowledge talk as to render it unrecognizable.

The answer to the second question is still not obvious. We have seen DeRose assert that if either "know" or "free" means different things in different contexts, then "all sorts of problems could arise from a failure to recognize this shift in meaning." But this is merely to assert that a connection obtains between the investigations of "knowledge" and knowledge, respectively. It is not to explain what this connection is. As noted above, the "problems" in question cannot only be that "know," and "free" are equivocal, irrespective of whether it is a contextualist mechanism or some other that spins the wheel of meaning variation. Again, what problems could arise for epistemology if the issue is of this nature? It is hardly a difficulty for our understanding of the skeptic that standards of knowing might shift. This is a mere equivocation which, once pointed out, dissolves in a flash as the skeptic, once she becomes cognizant of it, restates her original challenge with perfect clarity. Serious problems do not remain for epistemology due to trivial equivocations whose resolutions require nothing more than a moment's conversation and reflection. We will return to this issue shortly.

The answer to the third question obviously depends upon assumptions we make regarding the evidential value of our normal patterns of assent and dissent to attributions of knowledge and freedom, respectively. Must we assume that our initial pre-theoretical patterns of knowledge and agency attribution should be taken at face

value? Why should we assume that an adequate account of such attributions must accord with our initial usage? Isn't it enough to explain why we *attribute* truth-values in the ways we do? Must we also show that these attributions are correct? On the face of it, there seems to be no reason to assume that our initial convictions about knowledge and agency attribution are truths to be grounded rather than predictable illusions to be explained away.

What makes this fact pressing, of course, is that the Semantic invariantist accounts of knowledge and agency attribution described above explain, no less effectively than their contextualist alternatives, why we *initially* distribute truth-values to the relevant attributions in the ways that we do. And they do so in a manner that is not *ad hoc*. Invariantist positions explain the behavior of "knowledge" in terms of a general ATR that applies across broad swaths of language (e.g., "flat," "vacuum," and the like). Similarly, invariantist positions explain the behavior of "freedom" in terms of a general notion of agency that is itself grounded in a broader concept of "ultimate origination." Importantly, they provide this explanation without assuming the ultimate correctness of the attributions at issue: indeed, they are engineered to avoid precisely these attributions. Skeptical invariantism typically tells us that we ordinarily ascribe knowledge and agency as we do because our purposes in engaging in such ordinary ascription grant us practical license to speak loosely.[18]

On this telling, we can employ "knowledge" and "freedom" in circumstances that approximate the satisfaction conditions of these terms well enough for conversational and situational purposes, even though, strictly speaking, these terms hardly ever or never literally apply (such being the nature of absolute terms). Bear in mind that I have no concern *here* to argue that Semantic EC is false (though I believe it is unmotivated if Substantive EC is false, and I believe that Substantive EC is false). My concern is with the question of what, if anything, the contextualist's account of knowledge attribution tells us about the phenomenon of knowledge itself. One might argue that a construal of knowledge as a singular, determinate relation is distasteful because it fails to accord with the surface grammar of

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[18] Note that DeRose would presumably take exception to the claim that ATR "applies to broad swaths of language." He explicitly contrasts Unger's account of absolute terms with the likes of "Assert the Stronger" on the grounds that the latter, but not the former, functions as a *general* conversational rule. I don't understand the motivation behind this criticism, however, given that we have no reason to suppose that a linguistic rule must be *completely* general to be significantly general at all. "I before e," "avoid contractions in formal academic writing," and so on, come immediately to mind, as does Grice's "assert the stronger" rule itself. To describe Unger-style warranted assertability analyses of "knowledge " as "bare" or "lame" is to practice name-calling, not philosophy.

knowledge attribution. However, I suggest that this fact gives us no more reason to accept Substantive EC than it gives us reason to take surface grammar less seriously.

In consequence, substantive contextualist accounts of knowledge and agency are not recommended by the linguistic evidence *per se*. Rather, they are supported by a specific construal of the prosaic linguistic evidence as a repository of criteria for identifying instances of genuine knowledge. What, if anything, favors such a construal? My focus here is on the work of DeRose. Much of DeRose's writing in this connection is negative; he argues *against* alternative positions according to which truth conditions and warranted assertability conditions (which I here take to be conditions that render knowledge assertions "appropriate" even when said conditions need not track truth) come apart. Since these arguments take us too far afield and constitute a minor paper on their own, however, I must leave them for another occasion. So, let's concern ourselves here only with possible positive arguments, that is, direct arguments for the position that prosaic linguistic evidence is a repository of evidence for identifying instances of genuine knowledge.

5. Is Prosaic Use Relevant to Knowledge and Freedom?

What must such arguments presuppose? To answer this question, we must ask the following: what must we assume (regarding language, the world, and the relation between the two) to view the linguistic evidence for contextualism as having substantive consequences for our understanding of free will and knowledge? I submit that the assumptions we would have to make to do this are implausible. Thus, I deny the Implication Thesis.

Peter Ludlow writes, "if someone claimed that to know that "Snow is white" is to bake a cake and write "Snow is white" in icing on the cake, the first and most obvious objection is that they do not know what "knows" means."[19] This is true enough, but hardly helpful or telling. It is not enough to note that no "investigation into the nature of knowledge that does not conform to some significant degree with the semantics of the term "know" would simply miss the point." Even if we take meaning to be a function of use, the fact that "know" is used in different ways in different contexts tells us nothing definitive about how the various senses of "know" stand in relation *to each other*. This is a question that we must answer before the issue of the context variability of knowledge standards to Substantive EC can be addressed.

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[19] Peter Ludlow, "Contextualism and the New Linguistic Turn in Epistemology," in *Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth*, eds. Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 13.

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One implicit critical commonality between DeRose's and Rieber's accounts is what we may call the "Continuum Account." The central idea behind the continuum account is that stringent, absolutist notions of "knowledge" and "freedom" are nothing special. They are clearly extreme: in the case of knowledge, the absolutist's criteria, à la Unger, is that of certainty; in the case of freedom, the absolutist's criteria, à la Kane, is that of ultimate origination. However, this extremism, according to DeRose and Rieber, does nothing to render them privileged. They are mere points on continua of possible sets of criteria, applicable only within their own restricted contexts of usage. Both the skeptic and the libertarian go wrong because they force unusual features of context onto conversation as though they were general features of knowledge and freedom themselves. On this reading, skeptics and libertarians leave ordinary knowledge claims untouched because their use of "knowledge" and "freedom" fail to accord with those of ordinary claim-making practices and because there is nothing privileged about their use. Indeed, the very extremity of these uses highlights the fact that there are no univocal senses of "knowledge" and "freedom," but only different senses of "know" and "free" appropriate to different contexts of use. In the case of knowledge, this leads to DeRose's own positive argument for the relevance of his linguistic evidence concerning "knows" to his epistemological conclusion regarding knowledge. Based on the Continuum Account, he suggests, we can conclude that there is nothing privileged or authoritative about the skeptic's standards of knowledge. Thus, the skeptic's conclusions about knowledge carry no more weight than findings derived from any other investigative stance. Therefore, he writes.

> for my part, once the skeptical strategy is seen to have no tendency to show that any of my claims to know—except those very rare ones made in settings governed by 'absolute' standards—are in any way wrong, and once I start to get a clear look at what it would take to 'know' according to the skeptic's absolute standards, I find the distress caused by my failure to meet those standards to be minimal at best—perhaps to be compared with the 'distress' produced by the realization that I'm not omnipotent.[20]

I submit that this is mistaken. The reason is that questions about knowledge and questions about freedom, as opposed to questions about personal potency, understood strictly, both arise from highly distinctive considerations, but considerations which, by virtue of this distinctiveness, manage to exercise broad critical authority over questions we ask about these relations in other, more prosaic, contexts. We can eschew invariantist semantic analyses of knowledge attribution in

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[20] Keith DeRose, "Sosa, Safety, Skeptical Hypothese," in *Ernest Sosa and His Critics.*, ed. J. Greco (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004): 38.

specific contexts if we like. However we should view this eschewal as having no effect against the regulative authority of stringent, invariantist senses of "know." Similarly, we can eschew libertarian standards of agency in specific contexts. Still, we should view this eschewal as having no effect against the regulative authority of stringent, invariantist senses of "free."[21] To realize that we fail to know in the skeptic's sense of freedom in the libertarian's sense is not like realizing that we lack omnipotence. To lack omnipotence is to possess a set, quantifiable, but limited amount of power, which is a clearly scalable commodity. However, to lack epistemic certainty is to lack the grounds upon which we may reason that *any* of our worldly beliefs track the truth at all. Similarly, to lack libertarian agency is to lack the grounds upon which we may reason that any of "our" actions flow from us in any significant sense. Even if we accept context principles that tell us that the legitimacy of our judgments concerning what we know or how free we are depends somehow on context, the task of identifying our contexts remains.

These claims call out for elaboration. First, consider knowledge. As I have repeatedly noted, I constrain my account of knowledge's nature to subject-oriented internalist accounts. The reason is for this, again, is that my overriding concern in this paper is with first-personal skeptical challenges, and there is something distinctly suspicious about externalist responses to skepticism that leave the subject thinking: "If I stand in the right causal (veridical belief-forming) relations with reality then I have true beliefs about it; if I don't stand in such relations then I don't have true beliefs about it. Now, I wonder whether I do stand in such relations."[22] Because questions about which sorts of causal relations obtain between us and the

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[21] Thus, James writes, "Nowadays, we have a soft determinism which abhors harsh words, and, repudiating fatality, necessity, and even predetermination, says that its real name is freedom; for freedom is only necessity understood, and bondage to the highest is identical with true freedom." William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover, 1956): 149.

[22] This, in essence, is Stroud's (Barry Stroud, *Understanding Human Knowledge: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) response to Sosa's (Ernest Sosa, "Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* (1994)) contention that a 'metaepistemic' bias which privileges the centrality of justification of beliefs by other beliefs underlies the skeptic's reasoning. Stroud's response is an ingenious one. Suppose we imaging an externalist Descartes who takes the sign of a belief's veracity to consist in its external Divine causal origin, as indicated by its clarity and distinctness. Certainly, we wouldn't accept this account on the grounds that the conviction that this alleged belief forming method is accurate is itself veridical *on its own lights*. Granted, we may (and hopefully do) take the modern externalist's story about his belief-forming mechanisms to be true and the externalist Descartes' story to be false. But this is not to the point. What is relevant is that the modern externalist is in no better a position than the Cartesian externalist to provide a complete account of human knowledge by explaining how he knows that his causal story is accurate.

world are no less problematic for the internalist than are questions about any other aspect of mind-independent reality, presuppositions about these relations, just like presuppositions about context itself, can be treated as nothing more than mere notional content that we contribute to our own processes of belief formation.

On any recognizable internalist understanding, knowledge is a relation between minds and the world mediated by accessible experiential evidence. Suppose we ask the following obvious question: "how could concerns about conversational context ever affect the knowledge relation, so construed, in any relevant way?" The skeptic, of course, has always offered an answer to this question: such conversational concerns couldn't possibly have such effects because, whereas both the world and the evidence are constitutive of mind-independent reality, our presuppositions about conversational context are not. Such presuppositions can count as nothing more than presuppositional contributions that come, not from the world, but from us. Certainly, conversational context dictated by practical constraints on counter possibility salience has no bearing on the truth or falsity of worldly propositions that we claim to know. Neither does it have bearing upon the available evidence for these propositions, even if it does have bearing upon our subjective willingness to take risks. It is this very feature of our epistemic condition that lands us in ignorance on skeptical accounts, as it is this very feature of our claim-making practices that motivates concerns over whether our modes of belief modulation based on evidence lead us closer to or farther away from true belief. Skepticism arises because we are unable to determine the extent to which our own conjectures about the origins of our evidence inform our subsequent beliefs about the world, the character of which is underdetermined by such evidence. To anthropomorphize a bit, neither the world nor the evidence care about either our conversational context or our presuppositions about said context. We may care, but this only highlights the fact that whatever conclusions we draw as a result of such care reflect the ways of humanity rather than the way of the world. This criticism of contextualism, variously stated, is a common one.

Common or not, however, this criticism is a powerful one. What it points to is the fact that the skeptic's criterion of knowledge is not merely one amongst many. It is not some super-stringent variation of ordinary epistemic standards. Instead, it arises from distinctive and fundamental deliberations upon the question of how our mere assumptions about context could ever be relevant to the question of whether we know, that is, the question of how the practice of defining parochial "contexts of inquiry" as background suppositions about what we may take for granted could ever acquire epistemological traction. We cannot claim that knowledge is made possible, in contextualist fashion, by our adoption of various contexts of presupposition

without saying something about what makes these contexts of presupposition presumable. To say that context-defining background assumptions are chosen for interest-relative pragmatic reasons does not address this concern. For, if we take the target of knowledge to be justified true belief (at minimum), then we must be concerned with the question of how assumptions about context (conversational and otherwise) could ever serve as indices of either justification or truth. *It is through the invocation of the skeptical invariant's absolutist, limiting conception of truth that we naturally express this concern.*

Consider the strongest criterion of knowledge for which the skeptic is infamous, i.e., "absolute certainty." To avoid confusion, we must emphasize that such certainty is not some mere psychological state of "feeling quite sure," except with more oomph; rather, it is the (presumably unrealizable) state of fully satisfying the demands of strong epistemic deductive closure. The critical point to note here is the following. This conception of knowledge should not be viewed as the result of some unmotivated and irrational decision to impose arbitrarily high standards upon ordinary epistemic practice. Instead, it should be viewed as a result of the skeptic's attempts to question how assumptions about context, *qua* assumptions, could ever bear upon our knowledge claims, of how the evidence we cite for our worldly claims could ever count as evidence. A "context of inquiry" is best understood as the set of defining presuppositions that determine what we may take as given when we pursue further questions about knowledge. To skeptically question how our common assumptions about context can take us from evidence to true conclusions is to engage in an inquiry the generality of which robs the notion of "degrees of justification" of functional purchase because it requires that we entertain comprehensive skeptical scenarios. Comprehensive Cartesian-style skeptical scenarios describe maximal possible worlds that jointly exhaust the whole of logical space, leaving little or no presuppositional material behind with which we might judge common sense and refined scientific realism to be more likely than its various skeptical alternatives. From within such scenarios, we can agree that known facts about conversational context determine the range of counterpossibilities meriting consideration while having no access to "conversational facts" with which to delimit this range. Thus, to ask if such realism rather than, say, Berkeleyan idealism, obtains is to put ourselves in an untenable epistemological situation. This is not merely because both scenarios account for all available empirical evidence. It is also because each scenario offers its own take on the nature and authority of such non-empirical criteria as theoretical comprehensiveness and simplicity.

Knowledge for the skeptic thus becomes all or nothing; the range of epistemic states intermediate between absolute certainty and abject ignorance collapses to a

single point like the converging ends of a broken accordion. This explains why Bayesianism, for example, must always remain inadequate before the skeptical challenge. The skeptic's investigative stance is general in a way that puts all presupposition out of bounds, keeping the Bayesian from plugging initial and revised probability values into her likelihood revision machinery. In a skeptical context, Bayes' theorem would have to serve as a tool for moving from an initial pre-evidential conviction in common sense realism's truth to a revised degree of confidence formed in light of evidence of true and false positives provided by observation. But, of course, it could never do this. No matter what our prior probability ascription might be, we could never update this ascription because doing so would require observational tests able to distinguish between the truth of common-sense realism and its skeptical alternatives.

The problem with contextualist construals of skepticism is that they automatically address parochial assessments of knowledge attributions made under limited and particular circumstances. Skepticism, however, evaluates all our putative worldly knowledge at once by asking how knowledge could ever emerge in one fell swoop from something that isn't knowledge.[23] The skeptic's challenge doesn't arise from within one context amongst others. The skeptic challenges us to explain our ability to adopt particular contexts of presupposition. The skeptic's stance is one from which no presuppositions about worldly reality are available. However, this stance doesn't derive from merely one undistinguished set of intuitions we have about truth or evidence. Instead, it derives from fundamental considerations concerning the underdetermination of belief by experience. DeRose is thus off-base when he dismisses the skeptic's scenarios as no more motivated than his own "deeply felt conviction" that he knows such scenarios don't obtain. He misdiagnoses the skeptic when he accuses him of merely "playing king of the mountain."[24] This depiction represents the skeptical challenge as a mere formal exercise rather than what it is, the result of consistently pressing the demand for justification to its uniquely consistent end result.

Similar considerations apply in the case of "agency." In fact, the commonalities that the agency case has with the "knowledge" case above help us discern a problem that contextualist accounts often have when dealing with absolute terms. As in the case of knowledge, skepticism about agency is not best viewed as the result of imposing arbitrarily high standards upon the notion of "freedom." Rather, it results from deep considerations about the issue of what would have to

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[23] Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[24] Keith DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," *The Philosophical Review* 104, 1 (1995): 50.

obtain for assumptions about context even to be relevant to agency. Remember that on the account we have been considering, the defining feature of libertarian invariantist agency is "ultimate origination." An action is free, on such an account, only if an agent is its uncaused cause. Other criteria of agency vary from this in terms of the degree to which they dictate that events merely flow through, rather than from, an agent, in the sense of being caused by personal desires of which one is not the cause, or else modulated by higher-order desires and values of which one is not the cause.

However, this is hardly the end of the story. We also talk as though people's values and first and second-order desires as free to varying degrees, and we measure this level of freedom in terms of prior conditioning and influence within and outside the agent's original control. In this manner, there is a privileged sense of "freedom," just as there is a privileged sense of "knowledge," that designates a regulative ideal to which we naturally refer in our attempts to determine how assumptions about context could possibly be relevant to our ascriptions of agency. On simple and complex compatibilist theories, we endeavor to define free actions as those that flow from our desires or are at least modulated by our second-order desires and values. However, libertarian theories aim to provide a more fundamental account of what it is for these desires and values *to be ours*, of why the fact that these actions follow from these desires and values makes these actions ours. In this way, they aim to explain how the fact that an action is caused by our wants or regulated by our higher-order desires and values could ever bear upon the question of whether said action is free. Epistemic contextualism leaves us with the question of how assumptions about the likes of conversational context could have bearing on such philosophical concerns about the possibility of knowledge? Compatibilist theories of free will leave us with a formally identical question: how could facts about the likes of second-order desires address philosophical concerns regarding ultimate origination? These are perfectly well-motivated concerns irrespective of any hopes we might have to define them away. We can choose to define "knowledge" and "free will" differently, but in doing so we cannot claim to be doing anything other than changing the subject to address entirely different, and arguably less fundamental, concerns.

In short, the manner in which Substantive EC misconstrues the challenge posed by epistemic skepticism about knowledge closely parallels the way in which free will contextualism misconstrues the challenge posed by libertarianism or incompatibilist skepticism about agency. We commonly speak of both knowledge and freedom as coming in degrees: knowledge because different background assumptions affect our probability assessments, freedom because different degrees of background conditioning affect our liberty of action. What both epistemological and

incompatibilist skeptics note, however, is that these background assumptions cannot be based on considerations of sakes, interests, needs, or practical purpose if we are to avoid changing the subjects at hand. In both cases, extreme limiting demands on the phenomenon at issue (knowledge and agency, respectively) cannot be legitimately discarded as mere fetishes. The regard for certainty does not arise from the imposition of arbitrarily extreme demands on "knowledge." It stems from fundamental concerns about our ability to delineate contexts in which less restrictive, more specialized demands on knowledge are appropriate. The regard for unconditioned agency doesn't arise from the arbitrary imposition of extreme demands on "free action." It arises from concerns about our ability to delineate contexts in which less restrictive, more specialized demands on liberty are appropriate. Concerns about both certainty and unconditioned agency arise from distinctive and fundamental deliberations over the question of how our assumptions about context could ever be relevant to questions of whether we know or if our actions are free. The demands of both the skeptic and the libertarian express concerns of general interest. Their criteria of knowledge and freedom, respectively, are not mere parochial sets of criteria amongst others. Substantive contextualism fails because it diagnoses skeptical and libertarian concerns as confined to contexts of inquiry no more interesting than others.

6. Conclusions

That matters concerning use have little or no direct interest for epistemology is hardly surprising. It reflects an obvious fact about the so-called "new linguistic turn" in philosophy. In the heyday of positivism, semantic analysis was taken to have epistemological and (anti)metaphysical consequence only because a background account existed that purported to explain the pertinent connections. This background account constituted a rationale for construing philosophical issues in linguistic terms via a verificationist theory of meaning that aimed to describe the limits of our knowledge by reference to language's sensory provenance, thereby throwing a wet blanket over our metaphysical aspirations by segregating meaningful from non-meaningful talk. The problem with DeRose-type Semantic EC is that it comes equipped with no such doctrine. It is, in a very real sense, semantic analysis devoid of the kind of accompanying doctrine required to give it philosophical consequence. This is not to say that the strategy of logical positivism was successful. It is only to say that it was a strategy.

On the other hand, the various strategies of ordinary language philosophy, on which we might take defenders of the Implication Thesis to rely, have never been convincingly articulated as constituting a systematic program. If the point of

Semantic EC is to highlight the richness of language and remind us that "know" enjoys different uses in different contexts, then this point has no force against the above argument, which does nothing to deny such richness.[25] If the point of Semantic EC is that we must take language at face value because inquiries into natures (in this case, the nature of knowledge) are inseparable from their associated linguistic inquiries (because we have no language-independent methods for studying such natures), then it is false.[26, 27, 28] The fact that reality can only be described in language (i.e., that we can only talk *in* language) does nothing to imply that reality lacks a language-independent character, which some languages are better at capturing than others. If the point of Semantic EC is that the skeptic's sense of "know" is offered without an explanation of how it is to be used, then it is false again: the use of skeptical "knowledge" is clearly analyzed in terms of the demands imposed by epistemic deductive closure. If the point of Semantic EC is that skeptics offer conclusions about knowledge which are, in fact, merely disguised prescriptions of certain forms of speech, then it is false again: the skeptic poses a specific factual question about whether any effective evidence at all is available to those operating from a subject-regarding, internalist stance.[29] If the point of Semantic EC is to proffer a paradigm case argument that ordinary knowledge assertions are meaningful to the extent that they mark significant distinctions in linguistic use, then we need take no exception to it.[30] Nothing said in this paper flies in the face of the idea that term meanings are partly identified by reference to their common instances of use. We can grant that some contextually defined relation (or set of relations) is picked out by the term "know," but still deny that it is the relation which distinctively philosophical deliberations present to us for consideration and review. Finally, if the point of Semantic EC is that skeptical arguments play on attempts to pass off specialized senses of "know" as ordinary senses of "know," then its point, once again, is implausible. This is the contention against which I have argued at length in this paper.

It may be this last "ordinary language" strategy that many Semantic Contextualists have in mind. DeRose, for instance, claims that he "find[s] skepticism

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[25] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[26] J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," in *Ordinary Language*, ed. V. C. Chappell (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964): 41-63.

[27] Stanley Cavell, "Must We Mean What We Say?," in *Ordinary Language*, ed. V. C. Chappell (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964): 75-112.

[28] John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[29] Stanley Cavell, "Must We Mean What We Say," 75-112.

[30] Norman Malcolm, "Certainty and Empirical Statements," *Mind* 52 (1942): 18-36.

persuasive and [merely] wants to "explain the persuasiveness of the skeptic's attack."[31] Cohen similarly maintains that contextualism "preserves our belief that we know things" while "explaining the undeniable appeal of skeptical argument."[32] On their simplest construal, such remarks amount to the suggestion that skeptical arguments turn on equivocations that skeptics fail to recognize and which Contextualism describes and explains. It is difficult to take this critique seriously, however. It strains credulity to suggest that the skeptical Cartesian tradition arose from nothing more than a failure to recognize a simple equivocation that is easily recognized and conveyed after a moment's reflection and conversation. Hence, I offer my alternative account: skeptical worries are motivated by the realization that parochial criteria of knowledge fail to address fundamental questions about how contexts are to be identified.

Beyond displaying the inability of semantic facts to provide evidence for Substantive EC, the primary contention of this paper is modest. Thus, it is important to note what I have *not* endeavored to show. First, I obviously do not deny that we invoke different criteria for "knowledge" and "freedom" when we use these terms in different conversational contexts. Of course, we do. It is only by doing so that we render them useful in everyday life.

Nor have I denied that there might be *non-semantic* grounds for accepting Substantive EC. In the epistemic case, there might be non-semantic evidence that Substantive EC, now taken to include the contention of the Continuum Account – that all senses of knowledge are on a par – is true. One might argue, à la Michael Williams, that the notion of "evidence" I invoke is crucially equivocal because sensory knowledge is not intrinsically more secure than other kinds of knowledge (i.e., that there are no "epistemic natural kinds").[33] One might do this by arguing that the causal/representational account of the object/evidence/mind relation I invoke to justify a phenomenal basis for evidence (and the skeptical motivations that flow from them) are suspect. In the free will case, they might argue that the very notion of libertarian agency is unintelligible, perhaps because agent causation proves epiphenomenal with respect to event causation, thus leaving libertarian "freedom" with no more content than the idea that human action is mysteriously dredged from the existential abyss.

One *inadequate* line of response, however, is that of asserting the Implication Thesis through the simple reiteration of unargued-for contextualist presuppositions themselves. That is, it does not do to maintain that the arguments I have offered are

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[31] DeRose, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Context": 168.

[32] Stewart Cohen, "Contextualism and Skepticism," *Philosophical Issues 10* (2000): 100.

[33] Williams, *Unnatural Doubts.*

themselves of merely contextualized pertinence on the alleged grounds that they stem from philosophical methods or principles that enjoy application only from within a limited context of philosophical inquiry. For instance, one cannot reject the causal/representational account of perception by claiming that in ordinary life, we presuppose something more like direct realism and that it is this doctrine that correctly directs our talk and assumptions about context. I have described a causal/representational model underlying skepticism (i.e., a model on which our representations remain distinct from the world we take them to represent) at a very high level of generality, and thus in a way that makes it dependent upon few if any particularizing problematic assumptions. To take exception to it, therefore, requires not its mere eschewal, but an intelligible account of how direct realism or some alternative account of perception, might work. Nor can one object to my argument against the Implication Thesis by reasserting the "continuum account" without responding to my principled reasons for thinking that the continuum account is false (given its problematic assumptions concerning how assumptions about context could ever be relevant to the question of whether knowledge obtains). There is something deeply illegitimate about simply specifying from the outset that the distinctly general questions about the possibility of knowledge presented by traditional epistemology critique of contextualism are too parochial to enjoy general application.

A second *inadequate* line of response bears one last repetition. DeRose offers it himself. This is his claim that the sort of reasoning I present rests on a "levels confusion" between subject's and contributor's knowledge. His contention, he maintains, is *not* that whether a subject can know depends on non-truth-relevant factors. Rather, it is that whether an attributer can truthfully describe a subject as 'knowing' depends on such factors. The reason: such factors can affect the precise content of a third-person attributer's claim without changing the subject's own epistemic state. Because I have identified skeptical concerns as those that raise the issue of how context could ever be relevant to knowledge and located such skeptical concerns within the realm of first-person phenomenally based epistemic claim-making, however, this meta-semantic response is of little help. In the cases I am considering, attributers of knowledge to subjects ("speakers") and subjects of knowledge attributions ("subjects") are one and the same. As I have explained, they must be if we are to take contextualism, either semantic or substantive, to have any relevance to skepticism at all. Thus, it can hardly be adequate to say that one knows even when one cannot truthfully claim to know. This claim is not merely mysterious; it is unintelligible.

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Contextualism comes in many flavors and fragrances, equipped with many bells and whistles. However, I submit that whichever subtleties may characterize whatever contextualism *du jour* one may have in mind, these subtleties are simply irrelevant to the most interesting issues at hand. The reason is that questions about knowledge and questions about freedom both arise from highly distinctive considerations, but considerations which, by virtue of this distinctiveness, manage to exercise broad critical authority over questions we ask about these relations in other, more prosaic, contexts.

What I have argued is that the Implication Thesis is false: facts about usage alone concerning our shifting indexical criteria for applying "knowledge" and "freedom" imply nothing concerning the phenomena of knowledge and freedom themselves. To many, this must seem like a thesis barely worth mentioning. However, the reason why this is the case is an interesting one: limiting, invariantist conceptions of "knowledge" and "freedom" express special concerns which grant them broad critical authority over questions we should ask about two these relations (i.e., knowledge and freedom) in other, more prosaic, contexts. The presuppositions that all senses of "knowledge" and "freedom," respectively, are on a par presuppose continua analyses that under-appreciate the unique authority of "knowledge" and "freedom" understood in absolute terms. What these understandings do is help us articulate our most fundamental concerns over the question of how invocations of context could ever be of epistemic or metaphysical relevance – of how our assumptions about context could be evidence and how our wants and desires could be our own. What I claim to have shown, in other words, is the following: even if there are numerous different uses of "knowledge," this fact does nothing to show that the meanings we ascribe to "knowledge" are of equal philosophical interest, or that the consequences of these senses are equally restricted to their own limited contexts of use. I thus take issue with DeRose's earlier quoted contention that contextualist reasoning "opens up possibilities for dealing with issues and puzzles in epistemology." On the contrary, I suggest that it closes more possibilities than it opens. Simple observations about use in themselves imply nothing of deeper philosophical significance. Some might regard this claim as atavistic; I obviously disagree. I maintain that it should hardly come as a surprise. To again quote DeRose, albeit to contrary argumentative ends, "how could it be otherwise?"[34]

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[34] DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism*, 18.