

WHAT IS THE RELATION BETWEEN SEMANTIC AND SUBSTANTIVE EPISTEMIC CONTEXTUALISM?

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ABSTRACT: Epistemic Contextualism is generally treated as a semantic thesis that may or may not have epistemological consequences. It is sometimes taken to concern only knowledge claims (as the assertion that the word “know” means different things in different contexts of use). Still, at other times it is taken to regard the knowledge relation itself (as the assertion that knowledge itself has no single univocal nature). Call the former view Semantic EC, the latter view Substantive EC, and the idea that the plausibility of Semantic EC presupposes that of Substantive EC, the “Presupposition Thesis.” Numerous authors argue against the Presupposition Thesis on the grounds that an understanding of the nature of knowledge is no more required to understand the meaning of knowledge assertions than an understanding of the self, for instance, is needed to understand the meaning of sentences containing “I.” These authors then offer additional arguments for the same conclusion, using further comparisons between “know” and other indexicals, as well as between “know” and quantifiers, gradable and modal adjectives. Herein, I defend the Presupposition Thesis by arguing against these authors’ claims (based as they are on these types of comparisons) that Semantic EC is plausible without the supposition of Substantive EC.

KEYWORDS: epistemic contextualism, knowledge, Paul Grice, Keith DeRose, Stewart Cohen

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 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) legitimately arise for consideration. Using precedent diction, we can say that contexts here 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 that generate various meanings and consequent sentential truth values that vary across contexts. A single sentence

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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.

Thus construed, contextualism is generally treated as 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 "(Epistemic Contextualist) Separatism." More specifically, Semantic EC is the view that "knowledge" discourse has an indexical status that causes the meanings and thus the 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 asserts 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. The Presupposition Thesis thus claims that Substantive EC is a necessary condition for Semantic EC.

For illustration, consider the bearing of this account on familiar 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* there is no singular, determinate nature that knowledge has.

In what follows, I argue for the Presupposition Thesis. Note that in doing this, I do not lobby for Semantic EC (if anything, I describe reasons to reject it). I merely maintain that the plausibility of Semantic EC presupposes that of Substantive EC. (The task of arguing against Substantive EC itself must wait for another occasion.) To this end, I propose a number of metaphysical assumptions that I take to recommend the Presupposition Thesis.

There are several things worth noting before we begin. First, I take the skeptical problematic seriously in this paper. That is, I reject any putative account of

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

knowledge or knowledge discourse that doesn't at least try to say something (either positive or negative) in response to worldly skepticism (rather than merely speak past it). This has several consequences, which I describe below in due course. Also, it bears notice that I intentionally describe the type of Semantic EC with which I deal generically. Even though I invoke Keith DeRose (and a handful of other expositors) most often for exposition purposes, I aim to assume very little about Semantic EC other than what I say in the opening paragraph of this paper. To paraphrase Crispin Wright on the topic of realism, this is best because contextualism comes in so many flavors and fragrances these days that to utter the word "contextualism" is to do little more "than clear one's throat."² Numerous distinctions are drawn in the literature. Fortunately, for present purposes, most of these distinctions are irrelevant. It *does* matter here that contextualism regards whether certain mental states of the subject count as evidence at all.³ For reasons I describe below, It *also* matters here that contextualism is primarily "subject-regarding" rather than "attributer-regarding" (i.e., that it concerns first-person claims about what one knows rather than third-person claims about what others know), and that the circumstances with which the truthfulness of knowledge claims vary are internalist rather than externalist. However, as far as I can see, it doesn't matter for my purposes if we describe the *mechanism* through which the shifting of epistemic standards occurs in terms of "relevant alternatives,"⁴ subjunctive conditionals⁵ or varying constraints on epistemic closure principles. Nor does it matter how we rank or weigh the relative significance of interests, expectations, stakes, and the like in our list of meaning-determinative factors. Finally, it doesn't matter if we take the pertinent feature of "known" beliefs to be "sensitivity," according to which one only knows p if one's belief p matches the facts in the closest \neg p-worlds⁶ or "safety," according to which one knows that p only if one's belief p matches the facts in all nearby worlds,⁷

² Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1.

³ Ram Neta, "S knows that P," *Nous* 36, 4 (2002): 663–681.

⁴ e.g., Alvin I. Goldman, "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 771–791; Fred Dretske, "Epistemic Operators," *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): 1007–1023.

⁵ e.g., Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Keith DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," in *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, eds. Keith DeRose and Ted A. Warfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 183–219.

⁶ e.g., Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*.

⁷ e.g., Ernest Sosa, "How to Defeat Opposition to Moore," in *Epistemology: An Anthology*, eds. Jaegwon Kim Jeremy Fantl, Matthew McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 147.

What is the Relation between Semantic and Substantive Epistemic Contextualism? or some other sufficiently similar property. I have little interest in the specific question of “which epistemic gear the wheel of context turns.”⁸

1. The Issue: Indexical Analysis

My suspicion that Substantive EC about knowledge undergirds semantic EC is grounded in a more general conviction which, on the face of it, seems quite common-sensical: all things being equal, prior suppositions concerning the nature, specificity, and determinateness of a term’s reference or denotation should inform any semantic analysis of that term. The fact that a term’s *use* is prima facie amenable to a certain analysis doesn’t allow us to conclude that said analysis is correct. It tells us only that this analysis is a potential candidate. Though a term’s use may be subject to numerous different analyses, the analysis we settle on should be guided, though not completely determined, by our beliefs about the natures of these terms’ denotations and what these natures tell us about how these terms effect reference. To do this is to guide our views about language, in part, by our views about ontology. To those who think that such a procedure has things backward and that we should base ontological commitment solely on linguistic practice, I commend an account of things on which language is merely one naturalistic phenomenon among others, and thus part of a world of language-independent facts which it may only imperfectly describe. On the supposition that the primary role of assertive language is to represent reality, reality constrains language, not the other way around. To contend with Quinean pithiness, “ontology recapitulates philology” only to the extent that philology gets things right in the first place.

The claim that ontology recapitulates philology is weaker than the Separatist doctrine that there is *no* essential connection of any sort between semantic analysis and metaphysical presupposition. Quine’s view, taken at face value, is a claim about the order of semantic and ontological considerations. Separatism, on the other hand, is the view that Semantic and Substantive EC enterprises are as apples are to oranges. Separatism is a view succinctly expressed by Patrick Rysiew.⁹ As he tells it, Semantic

⁸ Jonathan Shaeffer, “What Shifts? Thresholds, Standards, or Alternatives?,” in *Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth*, eds. Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 115. Personally, I believe with Kornblith that so-called “safety” accounts should be modified to include a “sensitivity” element. Sosa himself offers his safety account as only a first approximation, and writes, “What is required for a belief to be safe is not just that it would be held only if true, but rather that it be based on a reliable indication.” [Sosa, “How to Defeat,” 286] Such an idea of being “based on a reliable indication” suggests a notion of “responsiveness,” which itself smacks of sensitivity.

⁹ See Rysiew, “Epistemic Contextualism.”

EC is a thesis about the truth conditions of knowledge sentences in specific contexts (i.e., the propositions expressed by utterances thereof). In contrast, Substantive EC is a thesis about the knowledge relation itself. As one more contextual term amongst others, Semantic EC's accuracy as a correct semantic analysis of "know" can, therefore, receive support from comparisons with other ordinary language indexicals, such as "here," "now," and "I." The truth conditions of a tokening of the sentence "I hunger for pie" clearly depend on contextual features concerning the speaker's identity, Rysiew concedes, since these features precisely determine which proposition is expressed (who's hungry, you or me?) However, the mere fact that "I" is token reflexive, Rysiew insists, tells us nothing about the nature of the speaker or about the nature of the self more generally. Similarly, he suggests, the contextuality of "x knows that p" tells us nothing about the nature of knowledge. The semantic analyst is concerned to tell us only when the statement "x knows that p" is truthfully asserted. In contrast, the epistemologist is concerned to tell us when x knows that p.¹⁰

Thus, we are told, the question of what a subject knows is different from the question of what knowledge claims are true of that subject, allowing contextualists to refrain from issuing first-order judgments about knowledge. As Geoff Pynn writes, to truthfully say of a subject that she knows is to claim, in effect, that she satisfies the epistemic standards in place in [the applicable] context. The case for contextualism, Pynn tells us, doesn't involve "some intuitive judgment that [a subject] meets or doesn't meet the epistemic standards in place in the context of a philosophical discussion about knowledge or knowledge claims. Instead, it depends on the judgment that subjects' knowledge claims, as made in their imagined contexts, are true."¹¹

Most contextualists express sympathy with this idea. Both DeRose and Cohen, for instance, claim to be concerned with whether speakers use "know" correctly, with whether they "speak truly," not with whether said speakers actually know. DeRose claims that he "find[s] skepticism persuasive and [merely] wants to explain the persuasiveness of the skeptic's attack."¹² Cohen maintains that contextualism "preserves our belief that we know things" while "explaining the undeniable appeal of skeptical argument."¹³

¹⁰ See Rysiew, "Epistemic contextualism."

¹¹ Geoff Pynn, "The Intuitive Basis for Contextualism," in *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Contextualism* (Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy) (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, Kindle Edition, 2017), 34.

¹² Keith DeRose, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Context," *Philosophical Review* 111 (2002), 168.

¹³ Stewart Cohen, "Contextualism and Skepticism," *Philosophical Issues* 10 (2000): 100.

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2. Anomalousness of an Indexical Analysis of “Know”

My argument herein is that DeRose’s and Cohen’s claims above are mistaken. To provide an adequate account of “knowledge” discourse to the end of “explain[ing] the persuasiveness or undeniable appeal of the skeptic’s attack,” we automatically disallow ourselves from retaining the distinction that most contextualists posit between Semantic and Substantive issues.¹⁴ However, fleshing out this argument requires the length of this paper. Let’s start with first impressions. What should we make of the sort of Separatist argument against the Presupposition Thesis described above?

A recurrent contextualist defense of such Separatism invokes the distinction between subject and attributer stances and the idea that proponents of the Presupposition Thesis suffer from a “levels confusion” between the first-person subject’s and third-person contributor’s knowledge. Conversational propriety (a factor we consider at greater length below) partly determines whether an attributer can truthfully describe a subject as “knowing.” The reason is that such factors affect the content of a third-person attributer’s claim without affecting the subject’s own epistemic state.

It is critical to note that this move is inapplicable in the present dialectical context. As noted, I take contextualism to be subject-regarding (rather than attributer-regarding), and the circumstances with which the truthfulness of knowledge claims vary to be internalist rather than externalist. These assumptions are not *ad hoc* on my part. As will be remembered, I take skeptical challenges to empirical knowledge seriously. Thus, I take the adequacy of contextualism to depend, in part, on its ability to say *something* (either positive or negative) in response to the skeptic’s concerns. Attributer-regarding forms of Semantic EC are unable to do this. Deep skeptical uneasiness cannot even be articulated from the stance of attributers, given that their judgments about the truth values of subjects’ knowledge claims necessarily arise from within a naturalistic background of presupposition that they share with these subjects themselves. One cannot purport to offer an attributer account in third-person terms which explains “the persuasiveness of the skeptic’s attack” or “the undeniable appeal of skeptical argument” because such accounts manifest a deep misunderstanding of the stance from which the skeptic poses his challenge, and thus a deep misunderstanding of what the skeptic’s attack and argument are. Neither can the contextualist, *qua* contextualist, purport to say anything of interest about skepticism when his initial externalist presuppositions alone do most of the anti-skeptical work before

¹⁴ Keith DeRose, “Assertion, Knowledge, and Context,” *Philosophical Review* 111 (2002): 168.

contextualist insights even arrive on the scene.¹⁵ For these reasons, I write about *first-person* “knowledge” and knowledge in the remainder of this paper.

This said, it is not at all clear what the above-described distinction between the Semantic and Substantive enterprises is supposed to be, at least when mind-independent truth (instead of “warranted assertability,” “conversational appropriateness,” or some such alternative feature [which Pynn invokes under the label “propriety”], directed at something other than truth) is at stake.¹⁶ If we assume, as have I, that ontological supposition should inform semantic analysis, then the kind of distinction between object linguistic and meta linguistic investigation which Rysiew and Pynn propose applies in connection with syntax much more clearly than it applies in connection with semantics. For the disquotationalist, “x knows that p” is true iff x knows that p, *even if* we take the content of “know” to be determined by the situation in which its utterance occurs. Let’s subscript both “knows” and the knowledge relation of this context (“know₁”, knowledg₁) to make it clear that for Semantic EC, both the sense of the term and identity of that term’s referent are context-dependent. Even when we do this, our T-Sentence dictates that we only understand what it is for the truth predicate to apply in the metalanguage by referencing the objects and relations picked out in the object language. Understanding when “I know₁ that p” is truthfully asserted requires that I understand what it is for me to know₁ that p. However, to understand this, I must surely ask myself what kind of relation “know₁” (as opposed, say, to “know₂”) denotes. To claim Semantic EC is to claim that knowledge is, at most, a disjunctive relation. Thus, Semantic EC makes a substantive claim about the knowledge relation itself, not just knowledge assertions. Specifically, it maintains that there is no knowledge relation, *simpliciter*, but instead numerous different knowledge relations somehow appropriate to different contexts of inquiry. But such a position, I submit, is just Substantive EC.

This is hasty and thus suspect. So, let’s take things more slowly. We can begin by briefly canvassing contemporary trends that have led to EC. These trends are numerous: Malcolm’s distinction between strong and weak knowledge¹⁷ and the epistemic pluralism suggested by Wittgenstein’s talk of different language games designed for different purposes;¹⁸ relevant alternatives approaches to understanding

¹⁵ Kornblith makes much the same point concerning the role that a prior externalism plays in contextualist responses to skepticism (Hilary Kornblith, “The Contextualist Evasion of Epistemology,” *Philosophical Issues* 10 (2000): 24–32).

¹⁶ See Kornblith, “Contextualist Evasion.”

¹⁷ Norman Malcolm, “Knowledge and Belief,” *Mind* 61, 242 (1953): 178–189.

¹⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

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knowledge claims, as anticipated by Austin¹⁹ and more explicitly articulated by Dretske²⁰ and Goldman;²¹ the social epistemology movement championed by the likes of Annis²² and Rorty;²³ and attempts to deal with Gettier cases with the idea that variability in expectations calls for variation in epistemic standards (Pollock, who credits Harman, who in turn credits Sosa).²⁴

It is not always clear that these precedent quasi-contextualist treatments are offered as exclusively semantic theses, that is, as theses concerning “knowledge” rather than knowledge. But explicitly Semantic EC seems to come into its own with the advent of the sort of indexical analysis articulated by Rysiew and Pynn above. So, to give Separatism, the idea that Semantic EC is independent of Substantive EC, its due, we would do well to examine some of the contextual terms that are most commonly invoked as precedents to support EC as a distinctively Semantic thesis. If the natures of the items that these terms regard and the ways that these terms affect reference seem significantly different than in the case of “know,” this should prove illustrative. How does “know” compare to the sorts of items that contextualists commonly invoke as precedent indexical contextualist terms on whose treatment Semantic EC is allegedly modeled.

Indexical analyses were first offered by Kaplan of “pure indexicals” (terms like “I,” which automatically pick out referents irrespective of a speaker’s intentions) and “true demonstratives” (terms like “he” which do require an accompanying speaker’s intentions or gestures).^{25,26} I suggest that the first thing to note is that the indexical analysis of “know” is *prima facie* contentious in a way that corresponding contextualist analyses of these other terms are not. Epistemology displays a long tradition in which “knowledge” is taken to refer to an invariant, unchanging, specific, and determinate relation between claimants and the world, mediated by

¹⁹ J. L. Austin, “Other Minds,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 20: 148–187. 113; cf. *ibid.*, 88.

²⁰ See Dretske, “Epistemic Operators.”

²¹ See Goldman, “Discrimination.”

²² David Annis, “A Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978), 213–219.

²³ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

²⁴ John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1986); Gilbert Harman, “Knowledge, Inference, and Explanation,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5-3 (1968): 164–173.

²⁵ David Kaplan, “Demonstratives,” in *Themes from Kaplan*, eds. Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 481–563.

²⁶ David Kaplan, “Afterthoughts,” in *Themes from Kaplan*, 565–416.

evidence. In itself, this fact doesn't speak for or against contextualism, as the traditional invariantist view might simply be misguided. However, it does speak to a distinct difference between "knowledge" talk and the various pronouns, adverbs, and adjectives to which indexical analysis is otherwise typically applied. Semantic EC's advocates present their view as a recent discovery about "know." The likes of "I," "this," "now," "here," "tomorrow," however, were not discovered to be contextual: they were introduced into English to serve indexical functions from the very outset. This fact explains why philosophers have never dined out on the issue of these terms' indexical status, and it grounds the wisdom of Schiffer's observation that it is a general linguistic truth that speakers automatically recognize implicitly relative predications when they occur.²⁷

Moreover, when construed as the name of a relation, "know" is very unlike these other examples. "I know that p," where "know" is construed as a two-place relation term, is structurally akin to "I hunger for pie." However, "hunger for," not "I," stands in a predicate position parallel to the position of "know that." And while it may be true (paraphrasing Rysiew) that we need not understand anything about the nature of the self when specifying the conditions under which we truly assert "I hunger for pie," we surely *do* need to understand something about the nature of hunger for this assertion to have content for us. Similarly, while it is true that we may need not understand anything about the nature of the specious present or simultaneity when specifying the conditions under which "Fred is taking a test now" is true, we surely do need to understand something about the nature of test-taking. Similarly, while it is true that we need not understand anything about the nature of temporal passage when we assert, "Fred is driving to Cincinnati tomorrow," we surely do need to understand something about the nature of driving. And while it may be true that we need not understand anything about the character of the excursionist in question when we assert "He is traveling tomorrow" (perhaps with accompanying ostensive gestures), we surely do need to understand what it is to travel.

The reason for these differences is that to exhibit hunger, take a test, drive a car, or travel is to display a determinate nature or quality satisfying what we might call "non-conversational" criteria, which is to say that to have these properties and relations is a function of something other than satisfying various indicative conversational conventions. In the indexical use of "I," allusion to myself is affected by a direct referential performance devoid of descriptive content. However, reference to "hunger" is not directly affected in this way because the exhibition of

²⁷ Stephen Schiffer, "Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96 (1996): 317-333.

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hunger is identified through something more than the exercise of various verbal moves supplemented, perhaps, by appropriate motions. “Hunger” designates hunger by satisfying criteria that do or don’t obtain irrespective of social performance. For convenience, let’s say that a property or relation of this sort has “non-conversational specific criterial determinacy (or “NCS Criterial Determinacy” for short).” Further, we can say that terms like “instantiates hunger,” “takes a test,” and “drives a car” either do or don’t apply when they stand for “non-conversational specific criterial determinants” (or “NCS Criterial Determinants”).

I am not claiming here that terms with NCS Criterial Determinacy designate specific items in a way that simple indexicals and pure demonstratives do not. On particular occasions of use, “I” obviously refers to a particular person. Neither am I claiming that indexical and demonstrative terms lack *functional* dictionary definitions concerned to describe what they *do*. “I” clearly means something along the lines of “the first-person singular used by a speaker to refer to himself or herself.” Finally, I am *not* claiming here that the “is hungry” relation, unlike “I” (across *all* occasions of use), has a singular nature (though I presume it does).

The only claim I am pressing here is the following: “it” (or “now” or “she,” or whatever), unlike “being hungry,” affects reference without the individuating mediation of descriptive content, the concern of which is to describe a nature. This is why we need to understand the meaning of “hunger” to understand sentences in which it occurs in a way that we need not understand “I” to understand sentences in which it occurs. It is also why there is a question of getting things right or wrong in the former cases that doesn’t arise in the latter sorts of cases. In these latter cases, the terms apply (even when the sentences in which they occur are false) immediately by virtue of agreed-upon performative conventions. When said performances occur, these terms enjoy immediate application without regard for whether various other non-performative criterial conditions have been satisfied. Once again, this is symptomized by the fact alluded to above. “I,” “this,” “now,” “here,” “tomorrow” were not discovered to be contextual: they were introduced into English to serve indexical functions from the very outset. No one ever imagined that the generic “this” was anything other than a term stipulated to perform an indexical function, designed to have variable reference depending upon what one intends or where one happens to point. Nothing had to be known about the range and natures of this term’s denotations for it to enjoy immediate use.

“Knowledge,” on the other hand, is at least a *candidate* denoter of a relation with such a nature. I submit that this should make us more reluctant to assume that it doesn’t denote a relation with such a nature, given that questions about its nature (unlike in these other cases) have a long-standing philosophical pedigree. However,

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my present concern is not to press this claim. My immediate concern is to advance the claim that *if* we assimilate “know” with unproblematically indexical terms, *then* we probably commit ourselves to a contentious view about knowledge itself (i.e., that it lacks an NCS Criterial Determinant nature). And this view, to repeat, is just Substantive EC.

Quantifiers, which have also been proffered as candidate precedents for a contextualist analysis of “know,” are similar to indexicals and demonstratives in this respect.²⁸ Even though “all,” for instance, has a functional dictionary definition (along the lines of “used to refer to the whole quantity or extent of a particular group or thing”) which tells us what the word does, this is not a definition that gives the word a specific, determinate denotation in the absence of various verbal moves supplemented, perhaps, by appropriate nods and gestures. Or, more precisely, it doesn’t do this unless augmented by additional phrases (e.g., “(All) people occupying classroom six in the Humanities building of the University of Woolamalo campus”) which do denote NCS Criteria Determinants.

3. Gradable and Modal Adjectives

Pure indexicals, true demonstratives, and quantifiers are not the only terms that have been served up as precedents for a contextualist account of “know.” Other terms, subject perhaps to less blatantly indexical analysis, include gradable adjectives, for instance, “warm,” “tall,” “large,” “heavy,” and “fast.”^{29,30} These terms are clearly context-sensitive: the truth value of “My uncle is tall” varies across contexts as a function of which comparison classes prove salient. However, even though these terms have more substantive content than the pure indexicals and true demonstratives considered above, they differ from “knows” in much the same way: they aren’t candidate denoters of objects or relations with specific determinate natures captured by non-conversational, non-performative criteria. The reason is that, as property terms go, they shouldn’t be taken to denote at all. We don’t really believe that there is a property of being warm (full stop) any more than we believe that there is a property of being rich (full stop). But this is because “warm,” “rich,” “tall,” and the like are inherently comparative: a subject can at most be richer (or warmer or taller) than another. Think of the problems Plato encountered when he

²⁸ Jonathan Ichikawa, “Quantifiers and Epistemic Contextualism,” *Philosophical Studies* 155, 3 (2011): 383–398.

²⁹ Stewart Cohen, “Contextualism, Skepticism, and the Structure of Reasons,” in *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, Epistemology (1999): 57–89.

³⁰ Keith DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Context*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 185.

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considered taking such terms to denote in the concrete world. The earth became a contradictory mess as the selfsame objects became warm and cold, tall and short, large and small. It was primarily for this reason that he eschewed the empirical realm as a hall of mirrors possessed of incomplete reality (not that an appeal to forms did any good). The denotation of “warm” does not have NCS Criterial Determinacy. The denotation of “warmth” does, but *only* if understood as a quantifiable physical magnitude positioned along a linear scale of gradation. However, understanding warmth in this way is to understand it as physical heat or temperature, thus removing its contextual features entirely.

To be clear, while “warm” doesn’t denote a property with a specific determinate nature, “is warmer than” presumably does. Specifically, it denotes a two-place comparative relation possessive of NCS Criterial Determinacy. However, this phrase and others like it do not provide us with a precedent for thinking that Semantic EC is true, as there is no compelling sense in which “is warmer than” is contextual. While the truth-values of sentences arrived at by substitution within [x is warmer than y] vary with values for x and y, this is not due to the contextuality of “warmer than,” since said contextuality regards issues of reference and denotation, not truth. Undoubtedly, the truth values of sentences of the form “x is warmer than y” do vary with such substitution instances. However, the meaning of “warmer than” remains constant across all its applications: it refers to a single relation, the nature of which is clarified by examples of the true sentences in which it occurs. In other words, “warmer than” purports to designate something with NCS Criterial Determinacy. Or it is at least a candidate example of such in a way that “warm” is not.

In addition to gradable adjectives, other terms have been offered as candidate precedents for a contextual analysis of “knows,” modal words like “necessarily” and the subjunctive conditional connective “if... then.”³¹ The idea here is simple enough: depending on one’s interests and purposes, one might mean, say, logical rather than nomological necessity or implication. However, these are telling examples not because they fail as candidate denoters of NCS Criterial Determinacy, but because their indexical status is dubious to begin with. Unlike the gradable terms described above (e.g., “large,” “rich”), these are not ordinary language adjectives subject to loose and unthinking use. Instead, they demarcate technical distinctions between types of possibility and necessity, distinctions originally introduced into English to serve very specific functions. Philosophers and mathematicians don’t unknowingly mean “logical necessity” as a function of conversational contingencies. These phrases

³¹ Jonathan Ichikawa, “Introduction: What is Epistemic Contextualism?,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Contextualism* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, Kindle Edition, 2011).

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mean as a function of speakers' determinate concrete intentions. Given this, I submit, we have no more reason to regard "possible" or "implies" as contextual than we have to view them as merely ambiguous. We have no more reason to treat them as contextual than we have to treat "still" ("immobile" or "quiet") as contextual.

4. Conversational Propriety Conditions

Note again both what my overall claim so far is and is not. I am not contending that the terms to which Semantic EC often compare "know" either are or are not indexical. I am claiming that *if we take* these other cases as illustrative precedents for a contextualist analysis of "knows," then we express sympathy with the view that "knowledge," like these other terms, does not refer to an NCS Criterial Determinant. But this view, I have maintained, is just Substantive EC; it is the claim that knowledge is not a single subject matter with a unitary character. The primary difference between "know" and these other terms is that this anti-realist consequence is only contentious in the case of "know." It is contentious because, unlike these other cases, where we never imagined that our use requires us to affect reference by understanding substantive concepts capturing real properties or relations, this is at least an open question in the case of "know."

One last time, I have argued for this openness in several ways. For one thing, the grammatical character of "know" differs significantly from that of indexicals and demonstratives. We cannot go wrong in applying, e.g., the concept "I," in the way that we might go wrong in using the concept "know" because there is no corresponding way in which we could go wrong. This is because "I" effects reference directly rather than through intermediate descriptive content of the sort that might pick out a kind. For another thing, the contextual character of "know" is routinely proffered by contextualists as a discovery rather than a stipulation, as reflected in the fact that questions about the nature of knowledge have a long-standing philosophical history. Thus, to assert that knowledge has no single, unitary character is to make a contentious and, therefore, substantive claim. In this, it is unlike the claim that the referent of "I," in its various contexts of occurrence, has no single, unitary nature. This latter claim is a nothing burger. This former claim is an assertion of singular epistemological significance.

Perhaps we can circumvent this joining at the hip of Semantic and Substantive EC by de-emphasizing the aim of providing truth conditions for knowledge assertions and emphasizing the aim of offering "propriety" conditions instead as their determinants of meaning. Pynn distinguishes between these two projects when describing the challenges faced by invariantist accounts, which, he claims, fail to accord with our ordinary intuitions concerning when our knowledge assertions are

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veridical or appropriate.³² Pynn explicitly distinguishes between the two criteria for understanding knowledge attribution sentences described above as the “truth challenge,” which requires that the invariantist explain how a knowledge sentence that seems true (e.g., a prosaic assertion about a subject’s knowledge of her own handedness offered in a Moorean spirit) really isn’t, and the “propriety challenge,” which requires that the invariantist explain how a seemingly improper truth attribution about a knowledge claim (e.g., a negative skeptical pronouncement about a subject’s knowledge of his own handedness, offered in a Cartesian spirit) is actually “proper.” Pynn takes care to distinguish these as two *distinct* challenges and to say that conversational propriety is a measure of something other than truth.

Here “appropriateness” commonly regards the pragmatic consequences of utterance. The idea is that “truth conditions” are assisted by “conversational propriety” conditions to determine meaning. Suppose we give due credit to this aspect of contextualist accounts. Does it, by de-emphasizing truth conditions, somehow yield a Semantic EC which avoids commitment to Substantive EC?

I will not pause here to consider DeRose’s critique of specific so-called “warranted assertability arguments.” This critique is pertinent to the issues at hand. However, it calls for a lengthy discussion that I can only offer here in glancing by way of extended endnote.¹ Instead, let me argue from a different direction for a claim that even when we turn from truth to warranted assertability conditions in the manner suggested above, Semantic and Substantive EC still remain thick as thieves, as the former recommends the latter. To the extent that we regard conversational appropriateness, understood as something other than truth, as determinative of the meaning of knowledge attributions, we automatically regard the *subject matter* of knowledge talk to possess second-rate ontological standing, as something less than a real, non-conventional relation. In effect, we deny that knowledge has NCS Determinacy. That is, we end up embracing Substantive EC anyway.

In one respect, this might seem like an odd claim. The conversational propriety of a term’s use, after all, looks to be an entirely semantic or pragmatic affair, a measure of nothing more than the degree to which various conversational norms have been satisfied. Thus, we might ask, shouldn’t measures of conversational propriety be a purely linguistic matter, implying nothing about the alleged referents of the terms at issue? This diagnosis, however, doesn’t do full justice to the topic at hand. For, we typically think that semantic analyses in terms of conversational propriety conditions, understood as something other than truth conditions, are appropriate in cases of concepts that fail to denote fully “real” properties existing as a function of what Searle calls “brute” or “non-institutional facts.” Searle’s definition

³² See Pynn, “Intuitive Basis.”

of “institutional facts” proceeds in several stages. Take ontologically subjective features to be features of mind-dependent objects in the sense that their existence depends on being experienced by subjects (e.g., phenomenal redness as opposed to electric charge). Take “relative to the observer intentionality” features of objects to be those which fail to exist independently of observers’ representations (e.g., being a screwdriver as opposed to being a metal rod with a narrowed blade at one end and a widened casing at the other). Take “agentive functions” to be features of objects which we intentionally assign rather than simply observe or discover (e.g., a rock’s serving as a paperweight as opposed to a heart’s pumping blood). Take “constitutive rules” to be maxims that define activities into existence (e.g., the rules of chess as opposed to rules of the road, which simply “regulate” the existentially autonomous activity of driving). We can now say that constitutive rules allow people to create social facts by human agreement. It may be an ontologically objective fact that I consume proteins, fats, and carbohydrates without utensils on some particular occasion, but it is merely an institutional or social fact that I display bad manners by eating lasagna with my hands at a black-tie dinner.³³

To harp further on rules of decorum, consider specifically the etiquette of verbal exchange. We do not think of an act’s being socially well-behaved as a genuine, non-institutional property. It is for this reason that we might be inclined to think of “S politely demurred from replying in kind” as a sentence to be understood solely in terms of its local norms of acceptance because it is a case in which truth conditions consist in nothing above and beyond conditions of conversational appropriateness. And though it need not generally be the case that “non-institutional” reality-status and NCS Determinacy march in lockstep (the categories are not coextensive), it seems reasonable to equate them here to the extent that the institutional reality of conversational politeness indexes the meaning of “politeness” to the local ways and customs of the settings in which sentences attributing such propriety to speakers are uttered.

Again, it is important not to misunderstand my point here. My claim is not that “knows” (as a verb) designates a “real” property or relation in a way that “politely” (as an adverb) does not. For all I’ve said, it could easily be the case that neither “knowledge” nor “politeness” denotes “real” non-institutional properties with NCS Criterial Determinacy. My present point is different: Semantic EC analysis that invokes the evidential authority of “conversational propriety,” conceived as something distinct from truth, implicitly suggests a view on which “knowledge” possesses mere institutional or social reality devoid of an intrinsic nature, the lack of which prevents it from enjoying NCS Criterial Determinacy. Thus, the

³³ John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

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contextualist's reliance on such factors of "conversational propriety" presupposes a prior commitment to a view of knowledge as a disjunctive relation devoid of a single univocal nature. And such a view of knowledge, we have noted, is just Substantive EC.

I am speaking above about the case in which "conversational propriety" conditions are viewed as something distinct from truth conditions. We asked if such an approach to semantic analysis might help us avoid the problem we encounter when we consider truth conditions alone. I have maintained that it doesn't. On reflection, however, I think it clear not merely that this approach leads nowhere, but that this approach isn't even an option. For I fail to see how the evidence Pynn invokes to support his "intuitions" about when knowledge attributions are true differs in any significant way from the evidence he invokes to support his intuitions that such knowledge attributions satisfy rules of conversational propriety. The function of declarative sentences is to assert putative facts (or at least present them for contemplation or consideration, as in fiction). Given this, the following is hardly a surprise: to maintain that it is odd to say that a declarative knowledge attribution sentence is true is to assert little more than that said sentence is odd to say.

The most canonical source to consult when asking about the conversational propriety of an utterance, of course, is Grice's list of conversational maxims, his rules of quantity, quality, relation, and relevance.³⁴ The rule of quantity maintains that speakers should be appropriately informative, providing all and only as much information as needed. The rule of quality holds that speakers should avoid giving false or unsupported information. The rule of relation states that speakers should only say things that are pertinent to the discussion at hand. Finally, the rule of manner commends clarity, brevity, and the avoidance of obscurity or ambiguity. Of these, only the rule of quality may seem, on first inspection, to explicitly regard veridicality. Thus, it may seem that only the rule of quality is a rule according to which an utterance's apparent conversational oddity is tantamount to said utterance's seeming false. On closer examination, however, I submit that the other three maxims express mostly the same concern: maximizing true (or, at least, minimizing false) belief.

Consider the rule of quantity, which dictates that utterances be appropriately informative, providing all and only as much information as is required in the pertinent circumstances. The aim of this maxim is mainly to head off false utterances at the pass. Imagine that I ask a passenger carpooler if there is a gas station nearby, and he replies, "Yes, there is," knowing full well that said station is closed due to the

³⁴ Paul H. Grice, "Logic and conversation," in *Studies in the Way of Words* (Harvard; Harvard University Press, 1991).

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recent death of its manager in a freak and tragic blimp accident. His utterance is not odd in the way that it would be odd if he were to suddenly curse my mother. It is odd because he has provided false information to the question which he knows full well I am asking (i.e., "Can I buy gasoline around here?")

Consider the rule of relation, which maintains that speakers should only say things that are pertinent to the discussion at hand. Imagine the situation above, but with the following difference: my interlocutor responds by telling me that gasoline is plentiful in our county (again, while knowing full well that the only local station is closed due to the aforementioned tragedy), perhaps adding that in our state commercial gasoline is required by law to be diluted by 10% ethanol. Ignoring violations of etiquette or expectation (suppose this time he punctuates his sentence with a complicated choreography of belching and tap dancing), the oddness of his response is that it is misleading. He is very simply not answering the question which he knows full well I am asking, *and* he is inciting inaccurate inferences on my part by prompting me to misread the import of his words.

Consider the rule of manner, which recommends clarity, brevity, order, and a lack of obscurity and ambiguity. Imagine my interlocutor replying with the claim, "I have heard stories from many a weary traveler about a retail enterprise in these parts that sells fuel to those who hanker for commercial exchange." Suppose that he is correct in what he says, but only by virtue of the fact (of which he is fully aware) that a local convenience store dispenses butane tanks for barbeques. The concern for clarity, brevity, order, and non-obscurity are partly stylistic here. However, the primary concern at play is still that of accuracy. Clarity, brevity, order, and comprehensiveness expedite the utterance of determinate, unambiguous, and thus contentful propositions (the only sorts of things possessed of truth values). And the injunction against ambiguity prevents the formation of false inferences on the part of hearers.

This should hardly come as a surprise. Granted, judgments about appropriateness, for Grice, are also driven by the like of our sensitivities to the demands of rational co-operation with our conversational partners. Granted, he famously presents his conversational maxims as corollaries of a cooperative principle designed to ensure that participants in verbal exchanges make "conversational contributions such as are required, at the stages at which they occur, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange." Granted, he concedes that there are numerous "other maxims" (aesthetic, social or moral in character), such as 'Be polite!', which are also generally observed by participants and can also generate non-conventional implicatures." However, the conversational maxims of concern to him are specially connected with "the particular purposes that talk exchange is adapted

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to serve and is primarily employed to serve.”³⁵ Since the function of declarative sentences is to assert putative facts (or to at least present them for contemplation or consideration, as in the case of fiction), it is to be expected that the oddity of asserting that a knowledge assertion sentence is true amounts to little more than the oddity of asserting said sentence at all. Consequently, I find the very distinction between Pynn’s “truth challenge” and “propriety challenge” puzzling. Given the “purpose and direction” of declarative “talk exchange,” the propriety challenge is, for the most part, identical with the truth challenge.

5. Conclusions

I have made two fundamental assumptions above. First, I have assumed that contextualism should have something to say (either positive or negative) about worldly skepticism, and that, to do this, it must be construed as internalist and subject (rather than attributor) centered. Second, I have assumed that all things being equal, prior suppositions concerning the nature, specificity, and determinateness of a term’s reference or denotation should inform (even if they do not wholly determine) the semantic analysis of said term. From these assumptions, I have argued (in reverse order) for a number of conclusions. First, I have argued that the very distinction between conversational propriety and truth conditions is suspect, as it becomes a distinction without a difference, given the essential point and purpose of assertion. Second, I have argued that reliance upon “conversational propriety” conditions for the semantic analysis of knowledge talk, when *accepted* as something distinct from truth conditions, suggests a commitment to the view that facts about knowledge are merely “institutional,” and thus suppose a prior acceptance of the view that knowledge is devoid of a mind-independent nature (i.e., which is tantamount to accepting Substantive EC). Third, I have argued that a contextualist understanding of “know” in terms of Tarskian truth conditions presupposes a prior acceptance of Substantive EC because it fosters an understanding of knowledge as a disjunctive relation devoid of NCS Criterial Determinacy. Finally, I have argued that attempts to understand the alleged contextuality of “know” on the model of simple indexicals also presupposes Substantive EC, as such indexicals also fail to denote NCS Criterial Determinants. My overall conclusion is the following: if we think that semantic analysis should be informed by ontological commitment, we have good reason to believe that the presupposition of Substantive EC gives Semantic EC its force and motivation. The former is necessary for the latter, and Semantic EC is only as plausible as Substantive EC. “Knowledge” refers to

³⁵ See Grice, “Logic and Conversation,” 28.

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knowledge. Thus, we have no reason to think that “knowledge” is an equivocal term unless we suppose that knowledge is a disjunctive relation devoid of a unitary nature. This paper is preliminary to a larger project. Suppose we accept the preceding conclusion that Semantic EC is only as plausible as Substantive EC because the former position is given force and motivation by the latter. Remember that I do not argue above that Semantic EC is false. I argue merely that its plausibility cannot be separated from that of Substantive EC. Given this connection, it is now reasonable to ask if the evidence from use, which is commonly cited in support of Semantic EC, gives us reason to believe the doctrine of Substantive EC upon which the plausibility of Semantic EC depends. But, as I have noted, this is a project which must wait for another occasion.

ⁱDeRose does offer more direct arguments against warranted assertability accounts of “knowledge.” However, my responses to these arguments are too lengthy to be dealt with in the main body of this text. Thus, I am forced to address them here.

Let's first consider the epistemic case, about which so much more has been written. In part, DeRose recommends this construal on the basis of his alleged demonstration that invariantist analyses fail, for independent reasons, to explain away our actual patterns of knowledge ascription in a convincing fashion. Contextualism would win support, in this case, for lack of competing alternatives. It would win, in effect, by being the only game in town. On DeRose's telling, the most widely advocated mechanism for explaining away such patterns of usage is that of "warranted assertability." However, DeRose argues that no such account could ever explain the observed mechanics of epistemic attribution. (See DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem"). DeRose's reasoning here is largely comparative: "know," he argues, proves a poor candidate for such a diagnosis when compared to other terms to which such warranted assertability maneuvers (i.e., WAMs) clearly apply. More specifically, DeRose maintains, there are several conditions governing the proper application of WAMs, constraints which knowledge attribution fails to satisfy.

On DeRose's telling, there are essentially four such constraints, reordered here for convenience. The first constraint is that WAM-amenable assertions (e.g. "It is possible that P," uttered in circumstances wherein one knows very well that P) share apparent truth-values with their contradictories (e.g. "It is not possible that P"). The second constraint is that true implicatures cannot substantively modify a person's attitudes toward false assertions. That is, one may not judge an assertion to be true simply because one judges its conversational implicature to be true. The third constraint is that WAM-amenable statements (e.g., "It is possible that P") seem false as a result of conversationally implying other sentences that are false (e.g., "I don't know that P). The fourth constraint is that such conversational implicatures occur in accordance with general and systematic (rather than particular and *ad hoc*) rules of conversational implicature. Together, these four conditions on legitimate WAMs are supposed to block the epistemic invariantist's use of this strategy, forcing us to accept the contextualist's alternative proposal. The conditions fail to do this, however. To see why, let's consider each in turn.

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The first constraint on WAM-amenable assertions, again, is that they share apparent truth-values with their contradictories. Thus, if P seems false by virtue of a false implicature in a given conversational context, so must not-P. DeRose seemingly presumes here that it is only when this occurs that we have good reason to suspect the occurrence of a genuine semantic pathology, as it were, requiring an exotic WAM-type explanation rather than a much more mundane account in terms of context-variant meaning. Arguments using this first constraint fail to disqualify knowledge WAMs, however, since the invariantist can easily describe the relevant cases as ones in which the constraint is met. Consider an example of philosophical dialectic that fairly represents the manner in which skeptical scenarios are actually introduced. A student is asked, in a prosaic conversational setting, if she knows that she has hands (P). She replies in the affirmative, only to be confronted by a skeptical scenario (e.g., brains in vats or whatnot). How should we view what transpires next? On DeRose's account, the situation must be one in which the meaning of the question "Do you know that P?" changes from one context to the next. In the prosaic setting, the looser standards in play render her response "I know that P" seemingly true, and her alternative possible response "I don't know that P" seemingly false. In the skeptical context, the higher standards in play render her response "I know that P" seemingly false and the alternative response "I don't know that P" seemingly true. Thus, if we assume, with the contextualist, that the meaning of "know" shifts with conversational context, DeRose is correct: there is no context in which both "I know that P" and "I don't know that P" strike us as simultaneously true (or false). However, the invariantist can easily describe this case as one in which we are so inclined to view these claims as simultaneously true (or false). On this alternative description, the ordinary claim to know that P seems true until challenged by the citation of a skeptical scenario, at which point its appearance of truth fades and one is forced to recognize its falsity. The assertion of knowledge remains constant across contexts; all that changes is the depth of reflection with which we challenge it. The central difference between this account and DeRose's is the following: because content is no longer assumed to be determined by context, the seeming truth-values of claims can be contrasted and compared across contexts and not merely within them. The seeming falsity of a person's claim to know that P (in the face of skeptical scenarios) can be contrasted and compared with the seeming falsity of a person's claim to not know that P (in prosaic settings). Thus, DeRose's use of his first constraint against invariantist accounts of knowledge WAMs fails by virtue of its essential circularity: his argument is only effective on the prior assumption that contextualism is true.

The second constraint, again, is that true implicatures cannot substantively modify a person's attitudes toward false assertions. That is, one may not judge a false assertion to be true simply because one judges one or more of its conversational implicatures to be true. For how, DeRose asks, could a true implicature substantively modify our attitude toward a false assertion? For, except where we engage in special practices of misdirection, like irony or hyperbole, don't we want to avoid falsehood both in what we implicate and (especially!) in what we actually say?

Like the first constraint, however, this second constraint also fails to disqualify the invariantist's appeals to knowledge WAMs as a resource with which to avoid the need for contextualist analysis, even if this is for reasons less drastic than the threat of argumentative circularity. Jessica Brown notes in detail that it is a strategic commonplace in the philosophy of language to maintain that false utterances can seem true as a result of conveying pragmatically true consequences. (Jessica Brown, "Contextualism and Warranted Assertibility Manoeuvres," *Philosophical Studies* 130, 3 (1996): 407 – 435). Along more prosaic lines, it is easy to articulate

ordinary examples of how a person's rush to judgment leads one to judge a false proposition true because the situation at hand turns a person's focus to a true conversational implicature.

The third constraint, clearly presupposed by the first and second above, is that WAM-amenable assertions only seem true (or false) because they conversationally imply other propositions that actually are true (or false). This constraint, however, gives DeRose no critical pause. Unger's skeptical invariantism is easily supplemented with a WAM-type theory of mechanism, on which "know" is a term which conversational conventions allow us to positively employ even though their hyper-stringent conditions of application are seldom, if ever, met. For example, we may falsely judge speakers to know propositions only because of said propositions' true conversational implicatures concerning warranted belief and action. The fourth constraint, again, is that such conversational implicatures occur in accordance with general and systematic (rather particular and *ad hoc*) rules of conversational implicature. DeRose warns against the use of "bare" WAMs, which purport to explain away problematic intuitions of truth or falsehood without further explaining why true assertions are unwarranted, or false ones are warranted. At first sight, DeRose suggests, this demand for general explanation may seem to be met by Unger's account. The crux of Unger's account, after all, is an Absolute Term Rule (ATR), according to which "know" is a member of a wide class of terms (e.g., "flat," "straight," "empty"), which conversational conventions allow us to positively employ even though their hyper-stringent conditions of application are seldom, if ever, met. But this assessment, DeRose maintains, is premature. For, even though ATR applies "to a very wide stretch of ordinary language," it does not satisfy the generality constraint as thoroughly as do the conversational implicature rules governing other sentences to which WAM strategies are more clearly appropriate. In particular, it stands in contrast to Grice's "Assert the Stronger" rule, which dictates that, *prima facie*, speakers should assert the stronger of two claims when they are in a position to assert both. In contrast to the absolute term principle, this rule is language-wide in its application and clearly supported by numerous non-problematic cases. The consequence of this failure, DeRose maintains, is a significant motivational blow to absolute term principle-based invariantist accounts. For, "by not utilizing a thoroughly general rule which has clearly correct applications [like the "Assert the Stronger" principle] the Unger of Ignorance loses a lot of leverage in advocating his view." (See DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism*, 125). DeRose's criticism here is that ATR-based invariantism suffers for lack of a fully general theoretical justification. Perhaps its error-theoretic implications would be acceptable if they were inevitable concomitants of some fundamental and language-wide maxim of conversational implicature. The "Assert the Stronger" rule is such a principle, applying far and wide across all the statements of our language. But the Absolute Term rule has no such authority. Although applying across a wide selection of absolute terms, it presumably fails to reflect any central facts concerning the fundamental point and purpose of conversational exchange. Thus, concludes DeRose, "it's difficult to see where the pressure to accept a demanding invariantist account will come from," since a general contextualist account of allegedly 'absolute' terms is available which avoids systematic falsehood" (See DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism*, 125). Contextualism avoids error theory; and in so doing, it proves itself to be the more elegant and intuitive option.

We would do well, however, to question whether the generality of ATR really does suffer in comparison to that of the "Assert the Stronger" maxim? I suggest that it does not, and that this is clear once we look critically at the latter principle. There are two things that DeRose's could mean in claiming that the "Assert the Stronger" rule is more general than the Absolute Term Rule.

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The first is that the "Assert the Stronger" rule potentially applies to vastly more declarative sentences of natural language than does the AT rule, since the latter applies only to sentences containing "absolute" terms. The second is that the "Assert the Stronger" rule proves more inviolate in the specific cases where it is pertinent than the AT rule proves to be in the specific cases where it is pertinent. On this second reading, the former rule is more "general" than the latter rule in the sense of being more likely to trump other rules of implicature that may also apply. This would make the former rule's imperative to assert the stronger of available claims less susceptible (than the latter's imperative to use absolute terms in pragmatically approximate ways) to being over-ridden by conflicting applicable rules of conversational implicature and use.

Of these two readings of DeRose's claim that the "Assert the Stronger" rule is the more general principle, however, neither is particularly useful to his purposes. The first is of little use for being beside the point. The relevant sense in which the generality of a principle of conversational constraint might render it an effective player in warranted assertability arguments must surely regard its propensity to win out over alternative rules, not its mere availability to being raised for consideration. The second reading of DeRose's comparative claim is of little use to DeRose simply because it is implausible. This is because numerous conversational situations regularly obtain in which the very last thing a speaker is expected to do is abide by the "Assert the Stronger" rule. The situations at issue here are not restricted to those created by the usual suspects (e.g., rhetorical devices such as irony and sarcasm) (See Grice, *Logic and Conversation*, 34). These cases appear often enough to merit counter-examples status. However, we do not need to focus on instances in which understatement functions quite so closely to the surface of our talk. More interesting cases include bureaucratic and diplomatic conversational exchange. Think of pronouncements by policy Czars and administrators, such as American Federal Reserve Board chairman Alan Greenspan, who once famously uttered, "The developing protectionism regarding trade and our reluctance to place fiscal policy on a more sustainable path are threatening what may well be our most valued policy asset: the increased flexibility of our economy, which has fostered our extraordinary resilience to shocks." (Alan Greenspan, "Opening Remarks," in *The Greenspan Era: Lessons for the Future* (Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Kansas City, Mo., 2005), 8) Such utterances are crafted to violate the "Assert the Stronger Rule" in an intentional, indeed a practiced, fashion. Understatement and lack of specificity are here willfully employed as impediments to univocal interpretation. This is to keep such utterances from unduly influencing the phenomena they concern, as when one does not want a person's predicted policy actions to be effectively priced into the economy. Alternatively, think of instances of diplomatic exchange, which also often stand in direct reproach toward any supposed language-wide imperative to assert the stronger of available claims. In these cases, yet again, the effectiveness of an exchange is likely to be no less subordinate to other imperatives than to the "Assert the Stronger" rule, e.g., the imperatives to display silence, reticence, respect for elders, and to generally leave egos unharmed. More intricately, diplomatic proclamations may be crafted, not to the end of providing maximum possible information by "asserting the stronger," but to the end of understating known facts and decisions in order to gauge reactions and vet possibilities in advance.

These complications should at least make us wary of DeRose's presupposition that the "Assert the Stronger" rule serves as a shining exemplar of a "fully general" rule of conversational implicature, against which the AT rule must invariably suffer by comparison. To this extent, DeRose has not provided a convincing case for his contention that knowledge claims are not

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WAM-amenable by virtue of some distinctive failure to satisfy his fourth GI constraint.

In this endnote, I have argued that DeRose gives us no convincing reason to conclude that knowledge claims fail to be WAM amenable. In consequence, he gives us no convincing reasons to think that we cannot use a warranted assertability account to explain away, rather than assume the truth of, our ordinary seemingly non-invariantist practices of knowledge attribution.