The Disagreement Challenge to Contextualism

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Contextualism about "knows" is the view that knowledge ascriptions (sentences of the form "S knows p") may express different propositions in different contexts of utterance, even when the ascription contains no other context-sensitive vocabulary (throughout this chapter, I'll just refer to this view as "contextualism"). This view is contrasted with invariantism about "knows," which is the view that knowledge ascriptions containing no other context-sensitive vocabulary always express the same proposition in every context. Consider the following knowledge ascription:

(1) Barack Obama knows that it is raining in Cambridge, MA.

The standard motivation for contextualism is that knowledge ascriptions like (1) intuitively have different truth values when uttered in different contexts, holding fixed the facts about the subject's (in this case, Obama's) epistemic situation (his evidence, beliefs about whether p, the truth of p, etc). Consider the following two contexts:

CONTEXT 1: Sue is talking with some friends at MIT (in Cambridge, MA); they are watching it rain outside. They have just learned that Obama, who is currently in the White House, has recently seen a weather report in which the reporter said that it is currently raining in Cambridge, MA. Sue then says, "Barack Obama knows that it is raining in Cambridge, MA."

CONTEXT 2: Jim is talking with some friends at Harvard (in Cambridge, MA); they are watching it rain outside. They have just learned that Obama, who is currently in the White House, has recently seen a weather report in which the reporter said that it is currently raining in Cambridge, MA. Jim then says, "Obama *thinks* that it's raining here in Cambridge. But he cannot rule out the possibility that the weather reporter is lying as part of an elaborate hoax. So, Barack Obama doesn't know that it is raining in Cambridge, MA."

Intuitively, when Sue utters (1), she says something true. However, it also intuitively plausible that when Jim utters the negation of (1), he says something true. Contextualism predicts that what Sue says is true and that what Jim says is true by predicting that (1) expresses a different proposition in CONTEXT 1 than it

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does in CONTEXT 2.[1] Call the proposition (1) expresses in CONTEXT 1 *knows-low* and the proposition (1) expresses in CONTEXT 2 *knows-high*. Since these propositions are distinct, the negation of *knows-high* is compatible (in principle) with *knows-low*—in other words, both *knows-low* and *~knows-high* may be true. That is how Contextualism predicts that what Sue says and what Jim says are both true.

What I will call the *disagreement challenge to contextualism* is a way of turning this standard motivation for contextualism on its head. The problem is that some cases in which contextualism predicts that a knowledge ascription made in one context is compatible with the negation of that knowledge ascription made in another context are also cases in which the two speakers intuitively disagree. However, from the fact that the two speakers disagree it seems to follow that at least one of the propositions they assert must be false. Yet, the opposite is predicted by contextualism, since it predicts (*ex hypothesi*) that the propositions asserted by the two speakers are compatible (so that they may both be true together). So, contextualism predicts in such cases that the two speakers do not disagree, contrary to our intuition. Hence, contextualism is false.

We can state a general disagreement argument against various contextualist theories as follows. First, let "X" denote some particular contextualist theory.[2] Say that X *compatibilizes* a knowledge ascription ϕ and its negation $\sim\phi$ across contexts C1 and C2 iff X predicts that the proposition expressed by ϕ at C1 is compatible with the proposition expressed by $\sim\phi$ at C2. We can now state a schematic disagreement argument against theory X as follows:

Disagreement:
In some cases in which X compatibilizes ϕ/$\sim\phi$ across C1 and C2, the speaker uttering ϕ in C1 disagrees with the speaker uttering $\sim\phi$ in C2.

Compatibility > No Disagreement:
If the proposition asserted by the speaker uttering ϕ in C1 is compatible with the proposition asserted by the speaker uttering $\sim\phi$ in C2, then the two speakers do not disagree.

Contextualism > No Disagreement:

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[1] This kind of contextualism is sometimes called "indexical contextualism" to distinguish it from the view called "non-indexical contextualism" (cf. Macfarlane (2009)). The key difference between the views is that non-indexical contextualism predicts that knowledge ascriptions always express the same proposition in every context of utterance, and instead predicts that different contexts of utterance initialize different epistemic standards parameters—thus, allowing that the same knowledge ascription may be true when uttered some contexts and false when uttered in other contexts. I will set aside this variation of contextualism in what follows.

[2] Though united in their general commitments sketched above, different contextualist theories will differ over what propositions are expressed by "S knows that p" in certain contexts. I will be largely abstracting away from such details in this chapter.

In all cases in which X compatibilizes ɸ/~ɸ across C1 and C2, X predicts that the speaker in C1 does not disagree with the speaker in C2.

> (This follows from **Disagreement**, **Compatibility > No Disagreement**, and the definition of "compatibilizes")

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So, X is false.

The strategy behind the argument is simple: pick your target contextualist theory, find a case in which that theory compatibilizes ɸ/~ɸ (for some knowledge ascription ɸ and its negation ~ɸ), and then instantiate the schematic argument above accordingly. This strategy of argument has been widely influential in the literature on contextualism.[3] In this chapter, I evaluate the prospects of stating a persuasive version of this challenge for contextualism and then consider and evaluate some responses to it on behalf of contextualism.

1. MOTIVATING THE ARGUMENT

Why accept the premises of the disagreement argument sketched above? Let's start with the intuitive motivation behind the argument. Consider the following two dialogues:

[PRIME]
A: 231 is a prime number.
B: No, 231 is a not prime number.

[DOCTOR]
C: I'm a doctor.
D: #No, I'm not a doctor.

Two observations jump out about these dialogues. The first is that there is something defective about D's response to C in DOCTOR (that is why it is marked with a '#', to indicate some kind of oddity), while there is nothing odd about B's response to A in PRIME. The oddity in D's response seems to stem from the feeling that D is trying to reject C's assertion but does so for a reason that doesn't make sense (perhaps

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since what D says is compatible with what C says). By contrast, B has good grounds to reject A's assertion: B thinks what A says is false. In a slogan:

> (i) Rejection is *licensed* in PRIME but not in DOCTOR.

The second observation is that in PRIME it would be sensible for A to retract what she says were she to be convinced of what B says (perhaps by saying, "I was wrong; I take back what I said"). But in DOCTOR it wouldn't be sensible for C to retract what she says were she to be convinced of what D says. In a slogan:

> (ii) Retraction is *sensible* in PRIME but not in DOCTOR.

These two marks suggest that A and B disagree in PRIME, and that C and D do not disagree in DOCTOR. But what explains this contrast? A promising answer is that in PRIME what A says is *incompatible* with what B says (in the sense that at least one of their asserted propositions must be false), whereas in DOCTOR what C says is *compatible* with what D says (since it could be that C is a doctor and D is not, in which case both of their asserted propositions would be true). Underlying this explanation is the following hypothesis about disagreement:

Disagreement Hypothesis:
If S utters ϕ and S' assertively utters ~ϕ, then X and Y disagree only if the proposition expressed by ϕ (as uttered by S) is incompatible with the proposition expressed by ~ϕ (as uttered by S').

This hypothesis explains both (i) and (ii). Take (i) first. On a standard account of assertion (due to Stalnaker (1978, 1999, 2002, 2014)), to assert a proposition is to propose adding that proposition to the *common ground* of your conversation. The common ground of a conversation is the set of propositions that are all believed by everyone in the conversation and believed by everyone to be believed by everyone in the conversation (and so on iterated infinitely). To reject an assertion is to signal that you refuse to allow the asserted proposition into the common ground in your conversation. This theory of conversation explains why it makes sense for me to reject your assertion if I believe that the proposition you assert is false. I am a cooperative interlocutor, and thus I want the common ground to contain only true propositions. Since I think the proposition you assert is false, it makes sense for me to refuse to allow it into the common ground. By contrast, it does not make sense why I would reject your assertion if I (merely) believe and assert some other proposition that is compatible with the one you assert. In that case, both our asserted propositions may be true, so I have no reason to refuse to allow your asserted proposition into the common ground.

Regarding (ii), if I assert a proposition that is incompatible with what you assert, then if you come accept my assertion, you have reason to retract your earlier assertion. To not retract would be to leave in place your earlier proposal while accepting my later proposal; but, if both proposals were accepted, two incompatible propositions would become common ground, thus ensuring that at least one false proposition is common ground.[4] Thus, we can see how **The Disagreement Hypothesis** yields a promising explanation of our observations (i) and (ii).

Turning back to contextualism, notice that **The Disagreement Hypothesis** entails **Compatibility > No Disagreement**. Then, as we saw above, it follows from this that **Contextualism > No Disagreement**. Therefore, we only need to find evidence for (the relevant instance of) **Disagreement** to support the argument against contextualism.

2. REFINING THE CHALLENGE

We have just seen some reason to accept **Compatibility > No Disagreement**, which is the second major premise in our disagreement argument above. However, **The Disagreement Hypothesis** immediately faces a challenge. The problem is that it need not be the case that someone *says* something you think to be false for you to be licensed in rejecting their assertion. Conversational implicatures are aspects of what a speaker *means*, but not part of what they *say* (cf. Grice (1989)). Thinking that something someone implicates is false is sufficient to make it linguistically appropriate to reject their claim (cf. Horn 1985):

[COOKIES]
E: John ate some of the cookies.
F: No, he ate all of them.

Notice in this case that E doesn't *say* that John didn't eat all of the cookies; all E has said is that John ate some of the cookies. In particular, E may follow up her claim with an explicit denial of that statement without contradicting herself: "John ate some of the cookies, and in fact he ate all of them." Nonetheless, what E says plausibly conversationally implicates that John didn't eat all of the cookies. F thinks this is false, and that seems sufficient to license her denying E's claim, even though the propositions E and F assert are compatible.

Call cases like COOKIES, where one party rejects another's claim on the basis of thinking that something implicated by her utterance is false, cases of *implicature rejection*. Defenders of contextualism may point out that such cases challenge **The Disagreement Hypothesis**, for they are cases in which two speakers disagree (in a sense sufficient to license rejection) but in which they do not assert incompatible propositions.

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[4] It should be emphasized that often accepting an assertion and retracting an assertion will be tacit, in that one need not do anything overt to signal one does either. It is an interesting question how accepting and retracting are signaled —see Farkas (2010) and Malamud & Stephenson (2015) for discussion.

However, notice that, although rejection is licensed in COOKIES, it wouldn't make sense for E to retract her claim were she to be convinced of what F says. That is, even supposing that E became convinced that John ate all of the cookies, it wouldn't make sense for her to reply, "I was wrong; I take back what I said."[5] And furthermore, although it seems intuitively correct that E and F disagree in COOKIES, it is clearly wrong that they disagree about whether John ate some of the cookies. Thus, there seems to be a sense in which E and F disagree in COOKIES, and a sense in which they do not disagree.

This observation suggests a strategy for insulating the disagreement challenge from the implicature rejection response. The new strategy is to stipulate a narrow sense of disagreement that both licenses rejection and makes sensible retraction and to formulate the challenge in those terms. As a helpful technical notion, say that A and B *strongly disagree* iff A and B make claims and:

(a) Were B to reject A's claim, that rejection would be linguistically appropriate,
(b) Were A to retract her claim in light of B's rejection, her doing so would be sensible.

(cf. Macfarlane (2014): 132–133)

Next, we reformulate our hypothesis about disagreement to be about strong disagreements:

The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis:
If S utters ϕ and S' assertively utters $\sim\phi$, then X and Y *strongly disagree* only if the proposition expressed by ϕ (as uttered by S) is incompatible with the proposition expressed by $\sim\phi$ (as uttered by S').

We can see the appeal of this hypothesis about strong disagreement by thinking about COOKIES from the perspective of how assertions aim to update the common ground. In COOKIES, E and F assert compatible propositions, so both may become common ground without ensuring that the common ground contains a false proposition. Furthermore, in rejecting E's claim, F is not trying to block *what E asserts* from becoming common ground. Rather, in rejecting E's claim, F is trying to block something *E implicates* from becoming common ground. Thus, it would not be sensible for E to retract her claim after having accepted F's—since there were some cookies to be eaten, if John ate all of them, he ate some of them, and so what E and F said may both be true. Thus, it looks like retraction is sensible only if you accept the assertion of someone who asserts something incompatible with what you assert, and this is just what **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis** predicts.[6]

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[5] It might be sensible for E to admit that she shouldn't have said what she did. Nonetheless, having said it, she need not take it back. Intuitively, it's not what she said that's problematic, it's what she didn't say (and hence implicated is false) that's at stake.

[6] Macfarlane offers an alternative hypothesis of strong disagreement within his relativist semantic framework which he calls *preclusion of joint accuracy*. I won't go into these details here.

With this strengthened disagreement hypothesis in hand, we may turn back to our disagreement argument from before. We now need to modify that argument to be about strong disagreements rather than just disagreements in general. We do so as follows:

Strong Disagreement:
In some cases in which X compatibilizes ɸ/~ɸ across C1 and C2, the speaker uttering ɸ in C1 *strongly disagrees* with the speaker uttering ~ɸ in C2.

Compatibility > No Strong Disagreement:
If the proposition asserted by the speaker uttering ɸ in C1 is compatible with the proposition asserted by the speaker uttering ~ɸ in C2, then the two speakers do not *strongly disagree*.
> (This follows from **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis**)

Contextualism > No Strong Disagreement:
In all cases in which X compatibilizes ɸ/~ɸ across C1 and C2, X predicts that the speaker in C1 does not *strongly disagree* with the speaker in C2.
> (This follows from **Strong Disagreement**, **Compatibility > No Strong Disagreement**,
> and the definition of "compatibilizes")

This argument is more compelling than the first, for it is not immediately undermined by cases of implicature rejection.

However, we still need evidence for **Strong Disagreement**, which will come from cases in which a contextualist theory X compatibilizes ɸ/~ɸ across C1 and C2 in which both (a) and (b) hold. Given that the aim of contextualism is to predict a difference in our truth value intuitions about knowledge ascriptions in various contexts, what we want is a pair of contexts in which we intuit a difference in the truth value of "S knows that p"—if our target contextualist theory is thus to be plausible, it will compatibilize "S knows that p"/"S doesn't know that p" across those contexts. Then, we can ask whether (a) and (b) intuitively hold in those contexts.

A standard method for ensuring that the two contexts are distinct, while also allowing the speakers to be in contact with each other, is to consult intuitions in eavesdropper cases: these are cases in which one speaker is eavesdropping on another, and then jumps into reject the latter speaker's assertion (cf. Egan et al. (2005), Egan (2007)). Here is an example (modified slightly from an example in Schaffer & Knobe (2012)):

> EAVESDROPPERS
> Hannah and Sarah arrive at the bank one Friday afternoon to deposit their paychecks. When they arrive, they find the lines to the bank are very long.

Hannah says, "Ugh, what a line! Let's come back tomorrow."

Sarah replies, "But some banks aren't open on Saturdays! Do you know if this one is?"

Hannah responds, "Yes, **I know this bank will be open tomorrow (Saturday)**. I was there two Saturdays ago and it was open."

Sarah replies, "OK, let's come back then to deposit our paychecks."

Another customer in line, Henry, overhears Hannah and Sarah. Being the intrepid type, he politely inserts himself into their conversation, saying, "Sorry to interrupt, but no, **you don't know this bank will be open tomorrow**. Banks sometimes change their hours; so, maybe it won't be open this Saturday, even though it was open two Saturdays ago. My brother Leon once got into trouble when the bank changed hours on him and closed on Saturday. How frustrating! Just imagine driving here tomorrow and finding the door locked."

Intuitively, EAVESDROPPERS is a case in which a contextualist theory may be inclined to predict that both what Hannah says and what Henry says are true. Say that X is a contextualist theory that predicts this result—then, X compatibilizes "Hannah knows the bank will be open Saturday"/"Hannah does not know the bank will be open Saturday" across Hannah's and Henry's contexts.[7] However, in this case, it seems that Henry's rejection of Hannah's assertion is licensed; and furthermore, were Hannah to retract her claim in light of Henry's rejection, her doing so would be sensible. So, it seems that Hannah and Henry strongly disagree in this case. Thus, (the relevant instance of) **Strong Disagreement** is true. We have already established **Compatibility > No Strong Disagreement** (which follows from **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis**), and thus **Contextualism > No Strong Disagreement**. Therefore, by this argument, we may conclude that theory X is false (it incorrectly predicts that Hannah and Henry are not strongly disagreeing).

Having articulated a reasonably plausible disagreement argument that is not undermined by considerations of implicature rejection, we turn next to some contextualist responses.

3. RESISTING STRONG DISAGREEMENT

Given that there are two major premises in the disagreement argument sketched above, we will consider strategies for resisting each premise. In this section, we focus on arguments against (the relevant instance of) **Strong Disagreement**.

I can see at least two ways of resisting (the relevant instance of) **Strong Disagreement**. The first is to challenge the alleged intuitions marshaled in support of it; the second is to argue that such intuitions do not support (that instance of) **Strong Disagreement**. Now, generally, intuition-mongering is not a

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[7] I changed the sentences to remove the indexicals "I," "you," and "tomorrow" to eliminate the extra complications introduced by these expressions. The issues raised by indexicals are distinct from the ones currently under discussion, which concern whether "S knows p" may express different propositions in different contexts, even when "S" and "p" contain no context-sensitive vocabulary.

fruitful dialectical strategy. However, in the case at hand, since both contextualists and anti-contextualists generally agree that the intuitions at stake are semantic intuitions of fluent speakers of English (in this case), a promising methodological strategy may be to put these intuition-claims to the test and see if ordinary speakers really have such intuitions. Despite a recent surge in experimental philosophy testing the truth-conditional predictions of various versions of contextualism, I am not aware of any experimental work examining intuitions about disagreement in compatibility pairs.[8] I leave assessing this matter aside for future work. For now, we will move on to the second kind of strategy for resisting (the relevant instance of) **Strong Disagreement**.

Conceding that we have the relevant intuitions about rejection and retraction, one might continue to resist (the relevant instance of) **Strong Disagreement** by denying that the intuitions that the speakers in the two contexts strongly disagree support the claim that the two speakers in fact strongly disagree. In other words, the contextualist adopting this strategy holds that the strong disagreement intuitions in these cases are mistaken. We will say that one taking this line of defense is offering an **error theory** about these disagreement intuitions.[9]

In my view, the most plausible appeal to error theory about disagreement intuitions is due to Schaffer & Szabó (2014), who argue that "knows" is an adverbial quantifier (e.g., "usually," "always," etc.) on the grounds that its behavior is most analogous to that displayed by adverbial quantifiers. Schaffer and Szabó also argue that we have independent reasons to think that adverbial quantifiers are context-dependent (for instance, their domains are restricted to relevant situations, which may be sensitive to the questions under discussion in that context). Yet we also find contextualist-unfriendly intuitions about rejection and retraction for knowledge ascriptions. Thus, Schaffer and Szabó reason as follows: since

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[8] I know of three relevant studies here. Knobe & Yalcin (2014) looked at intuitions about retraction involving epistemic modal claims, Khoo (2015) looked at intuitions about rejection regarding epistemic modal claims, and Khoo & Knobe (forthcoming) looked at intuitions about rejection regarding moral claims. All three studies found evidence that ordinary speakers intuit the relevant marks of strong disagreement even when the speakers are in different contexts.

[9] Invoking an error theory to defend contextualism on this point goes back to Schiffer (1996); see also Hawthorne (2004), DeRose (2006), Schaffer and Szabó (2014). Contextualists have appealed to error theories in order to account for intuitions about homophonic inter-contextual speech reports, disagreement, and anaphora.

"knows" is an adverbial quantifier, which is a context-dependent expression, our intuitions about rejection and retraction regarding "knows" must be systematically mistaken.[10],[11]

I am not yet convinced that Schaffer and Szabó's appeal to an error theory is fair at this point in the dialectic. After all, it may be that "knows" differs in some semantically significant way from ordinary adverbial quantifiers, which makes extending lessons from the former to the latter suspect. For instance, while it seems appropriate for Henry to reject Hannah's assertion in EAVESDROPPER, it is less plausible to do so when the targeted claim involves an ordinary adverbial quantifier instead:

[CHOPSTICKS]
G (to a friend): On Mondays, John eats lunch at his favorite Chinese restaurant. He always eats with chopsticks.
H (listening in): #No, he sometimes eats with a fork; I had him over for dinner last Friday.

In this case, it seems clear that H has simply not understood what G has said, and thus her rejection of what G says here is misplaced (and hence odd). The dialogue in CHOPSTICKS seems like that in DOCTOR in this respect. Yet, there is nothing odd about Henry's rejection of Hannah's claim in EAVESDROPPER—in other words, it patterns analogously to B's rejection of A's assertion in PRIME. This gives us reason to think that "knows" behaves differently from ordinary adverbial quantifiers in the relevant respect; hence, we should not reason, as Schaffer and Szabó do, from the fact that knowledge ascriptions license cross-contextual disagreement intuitions, together with the claim that "knows" is semantically similar to an adverbial quantifier, to the conclusion that an error theory is called for to handle our intuitions of disagreement for knowledge ascriptions. Rather, the reasonable conclusion to draw, it seems, is that

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[10] This is a more plausible appeal to an error theory than is usually on offer. Another strategy is simply to appeal to an error theory on the grounds that every theory in play must do so. For instance, DeRose (2006) voices this strategy regarding the intuition whether the two speakers' claims are compatible, which he reports some tendency among his undergraduate students to endorse. DeRose's point is that the intuition of incompatibility is itself incompatible with the intuitions appealed to by contextualists—namely, that what each speaker says is true. So, DeRose concludes, whatever way you go—invariantist or contextualist—you will need to appeal to some kind of error theory. The problem with this response as a defense of contextualism is that it threatens to give up the game. There is a view which aims to capture both the truth value intuitions and the incompatibility (or in our case, disagreement) intuitions: truth relativism (cf. Macfarlane (2005)). On truth relativism, "S knows that p" expresses the same proposition in all contexts (in which "p" expresses the same proposition), but the truth of the proposition expressed by "S knows p" depends on the context in which it is assessed. According to truth relativism, in the compatibility pair, (i) what the first speaker says is true (as assessed at his context) and what the second speaker says is true (as assessed at her context), yet (ii) the two speakers disagree because (relative to any context of assessment) at least one of their asserted propositions must be false. Unless the proponent of this version of the error theory is willing to hold that theories invoking an error theory of some of the data are just as good (ceteris paribus) as theories which do not need to invoke an error theory for that data, she must concede that relativism about knowledge ascriptions is the superior view (on this point).

[11] An alternative strategy is that the disagreement intuitions are the result of a (perhaps mistaken) presupposition that the relevant contextual parameter (in this case, maybe a parameter for epistemic standards) has the same value in both speakers' contexts (cf. de Sa (2008, 2015) and Marques & Garcia-Carpintero (2014)). See Macfarlane (2014) for critical discussion of this strategy.

"knows" is semantically unlike an ordinary adverbial quantifier. Contra Schaffer and Szabó, it seems we should conclude that the data about rejection and retraction is evidence that "knows" is simply not context-sensitive, in contrast with ordinary adverbial quantifiers.

In the case of disagreement intuitions, the contrasts between PRIME and DOCTOR (and EAVESDROPPER and CHOPSTICKS) strongly suggest that it is something about the semantics of the expressions involved in these dialogues that is responsible for our diverging intuitions regarding them. Positing an error theory here is unsatisfying because merely making this move does not explain why we get such clear intuitive contrasts (and why we find "knows" falling on the context-insensitive side of the contrast). Supplemented with a plausible theory, answering this question would make the error theory defense significantly stronger. However, no such theory is on offer.[12]

4. RESISTING THE STRONG DISAGREEMENT HYPOTHESIS

We turn now to the other premise in the disagreement argument: **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis**. Responding to disagreement arguments about other expressions (most notably, moral expressions, predicates of personal taste, and epistemic modals), some theorists have suggested resisting disagreement arguments at this juncture on the grounds that there are better (or at least equally good) explanations for why two speakers strongly disagree that do not demand that those speakers assert incompatible propositions. For instance, one might hold that the reason why two speakers strongly disagree is that they *disagree in attitude* rather than in what they say (cf. Björnsson & Finlay (2010), Huvenes (2012, 2014, 2015)). Or one might hold that such speakers are engaged in a metalinguistic dispute over what the extensions of certain expressions should be (cf. Plunkett & Sundell (2013)). Finally, one might hold that the two speakers disagree about how to update their contexts (cf. Khoo (2015), Khoo & Knobe (forthcoming)). The unifying theme of these responses is to resist the account of strong disagreements in terms of incompatibility at the level of what is asserted, and offer an alternative understanding of strong disagreements.

Consider the first strategy—that some strong disagreements are best understood as mere disagreements in attitude. One immediate worry with appealing to disagreement in attitude as an account of strong disagreement is that it is hard to see what sort of attitude would do the work in this case. In the case of moral claims, the attitude is plausibly that of moral approval or disapproval; in the case of disagreements of taste, the attitude is plausibly that of enjoying or finding pleasurable. However, when it comes to disagreements involving knowledge-ascriptions, it less clear what the relevant attitude should be. For instance, is it some kind of attitude of epistemic approval of the subject of the knowledge-ascription S? What would this involve? Perhaps it involves approving of or recommending various related

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[12] A place to look for bolstering the contextualist's appeal to error theory here is the "pretense" theory of Lawlor (2005). However, since Lawlor's theory is a very non-standard version of contextualism (in which knowledge ascriptions are given an invariant semantics but combined with a pretense theory that generates contextualist-friendly truth conditions), I will set it aside for now.

actions of S, like acting on her belief, and so on. Suppose for now that this is the relevant attitude and suppose that speakers in compatibility pairs disagree in attitude in this sense (cf. McKenna (2014)).

With a suitable attitude in hand, we now consider whether one person having (and perhaps expressing, by making her claim) the attitude of approving of S acting on her belief that p and another having the contrary attitude toward S (and expressing it, by making her claim) would explain why the two individuals strongly disagree. One way to explore this hypothesis is to see whether rejection is licensed and retraction is sensible when the two speakers directly report having the relevant contrary attitudes. Thus, consider the following discourse:

[APPROVAL]
J: I approve of S acting on her belief that p.
K: I do not approve of S acting on her belief that p.

Here, it seems that whether rejection is licensed depends on what questions are under discussion in the context, as brought out in the following examples:

[Q1]
J and K have the same evidence as S regarding the proposition that p and are discussing whether they should act on their belief that p.
J: I approve of S acting on her belief that p.
K: No, I don't approve of S acting on her belief that p.

[Q2]
J and K are getting to know each other, and K has asked J what sorts of things he approves of.
J: I approve of S acting on her belief that p.
K: #No, I don't approve of S acting on her belief that p.

By contrast, rejection seems *always* licensed when contrary knowledge ascriptions are uttered. This is some reason to think that strong disagreements are not disagreements in attitude. A further reason comes from the fact that in APPROVAL, even if J were to be convinced that K does not approve of S acting on her belief that p, this alone would not be enough to make it reasonable for J to retract her claim.[13]

In response to challenges like these, a natural move would be to hold that *expressing* one's attitudes is not the same as *asserting that* one has them (a point familiar in the expressivism literature going back to Ayer (1936)). However, notice that the person running the above challenge on the

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[13] Interestingly, as was pointed out to me by Tim Sundell (p.c.) in cases like these, J might say, "Well, we will have to agree to disagree," suggesting that J and K disagree in some sense in such cases.

disagreement in attitude approach did not make the mistake of confusing expressing and asserting—
rather, she was looking for a reason to think that some strong disagreements were merely disagreements
in attitude. Making this move perhaps explains why we should not expect self-ascriptions of certain
attitudes to pattern the same as expressions of those attitudes. However, it does not explain why
expressions of conflicting attitudes give rise to strong disagreements. The proponent of the disagreement
in attitude strategy owes us an account of why merely expressing contrary attitudes explains why
rejection is licensed and retraction is sensible in these cases. Without such an account, we have no reason
to think that its account of strong disagreements is better (or even on a par with) that given by **The Strong
Disagreement Hypothesis**.

Plunkett & Sundell (2013) raise the possibility that many ordinary-looking disagreements are
what they call "metalinguistic negotiations" (following Barker (2002), Ludlow (2008)). When two people
are metalinguistically negotiating the extension some term *t*, they disagree about what should fall in the
extension of *t* in their context. Crucially, in a metalinguistic negotiation, the two speakers may assert
compatible propositions, since, in one speaker's context, the extension of *t* is different from what it is in
the other speaker's context. Here is an example from Ludlow (2008):

[ATHLETE] L and M are trying to write up a list of the greatest athletes of the 20th century.
L: Secretariat is an athlete.
M: No, Secretariat isn't an athlete.

As the case is to be understood, L "systematically applies the term 'athlete' in such a way as to include
non-human animals" while M "systematically applies the term 'athlete' in such a way as to never include
non-human animals. This holds true even when all of the relevant factual information is on hand,
including, as noted, the facts about Secretariat's speed, strength, etc." (Plunkett & Sundell (2013): 16).
This gives us strong prima facie reason to think that they mean different things by "athlete" and that what
each says is true in her idiolect. Yet, even with this background in place, the two speakers seem to
strongly disagree by making their claims. Intuitively,

(a) M's rejection of L's claim is linguistically appropriate.
(b) Were L were to retract her claim in light of M's rejection, her doing so would be sensible.

I understand Plunkett and Sundell to be arguing as follows. First, they argue that there are some cases of
strong disagreement that are best analyzed as metalinguistic negotiations (such as ATHLETE above). Since
the speakers engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation may assert compatible propositions, this result
immediately challenges **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis**. But this principle was our main support
in favor of **Compatibility > No Strong Disagreement**, so that premise of the disagreement argument is

also undermined. Crucially, the disagreement argument fails because, for all that has been said so far, it may be that all of the relevant cases of cross-contextual disagreement are metalinguistic negotiations, and contextualism is compatible with cross-contextual metalinguistic negotiations. Granted, *if* one could establish that a particular cross-contextual strong disagreement involving knowledge ascriptions was not a metalinguistic negotiation, then Plunkett and Sundell's resistance strategy fails. However, Plunkett and Sundell suggest that it is not at all obvious how to establish (on independent grounds) that a given strong disagreement is *not* a metalinguistic negotiation. As such, they fashion the contextualist a "get out of jail free" card—whenever someone raises a case of cross-contextual strong disagreement, the contextualist may now propose that it is a metalinguistic negotiation about what the extension of "knows" ought to be rather than a first-order disagreement about whether the subject knows.

Plunkett and Sundell threaten to blunt the dialectical force of disagreement arguments. However, we might worry that their defensive strategy merely rescues contextualism on a technicality. After all, it is still an open possibility that some cross-contextual disputes between someone uttering "S knows p" and someone uttering "S doesn't know p" are first-order disagreements (in which the two speakers assert incompatible propositions) rather than metalinguistic negotiations, and in that case Plunkett and Sundell would seem to have to concede that contextualism would fail to predict that the two speakers disagree. Plunkett and Sundell's point is just that it may not be possible to independently establish that any given dispute is first-order.

We may then wonder what our options are for independently establishing whether a dispute is first-order or metalinguistic. Khoo & Knobe (forthcoming) offer a method for investigating whether two speakers who strongly disagree must assert incompatible propositions. Although they focus on moral claims (sentences like "What S did was morally wrong"), their strategy is straightforwardly applicable to the knowledge attributions. Khoo and Knobe's strategy is to explore whether ordinary speakers' intuitions about disagreement (focusing on rejection) pattern with their intuitions about incompatibility in what is said. In a series of empirical studies, they find that, in certain cases, intuitions about whether two speakers disagree come apart from intuitions about whether at least one of those speakers' claims must be incorrect (their measure of incompatibility in what the speakers assert). Specifically, in certain cases where A utters a sentence ϕ and B utters $\sim\phi$, ordinary speakers agreed that rejection is licensed and that it would be correct to say that A and B disagree, and yet in those same cases ordinary speakers also tended to disagree with the claim that at least one of their (A's or B's) claims must be incorrect.[14] In other words, ordinary

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[14] The kind of case in which these intuitions come apart for moral claims are ones in which the two speakers' cultures value radically different things.

speakers' intuitions provide evidence against **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis**.[15] Hence, we have good reason to doubt the principle, and thus the disagreement argument against contextualism is undermined.[16] One table-turning upshot of this result is that semantic theories designed to make predictions in line with **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis** are actually disconfirmed by ordinary speakers' intuitions.[17]

But then what are the speakers in cases like EAVESDROPPERS disagreeing about if not the propositions they assert? Khoo and Knobe propose understanding conversational disagreements (those in which one person rejects another's assertion and thereby puts pressure on the latter to retract) in terms of how the two speakers propose to update their conversational context. Recall from Section 2 that on Stalnaker's theory of communication, when you assertively utter a sentence, you assert some proposition, and thereby propose to add that proposition to the common ground. Although Stalnaker's view is quite popular, it is possible to understand the update proposal made by assertive utterances in different ways. For instance, Lewis (1979) proposes thinking of a context as determining a "conversational score," which changes in response to various conversational moves. For instance, in addition to a common ground parameter of the score, it may contain parameters for questions under discussion, standards for what counts as "flat," and so on. Crucially, for our purposes, is the idea that the conversational score contains an epistemic standards parameter, which entails what epistemic properties one must have with respect to a proposition to count as "knowing" it.[18] Keith DeRose then proposes that assertive utterances of knowledge ascriptions are proposals (in part) to change this epistemic standards parameter (DeRose (2004)). For instance, uttering "S knows p" is to propose (among other things) changing the epistemic standards of the context such that S counts as "knowing" p by those standards.

On this theory of communication, it may turn out that when A says "S knows p" in her context and B says "S doesn't know p" in her context, they both assert true propositions (owing to different epistemic standards being operative in their two contexts). Nonetheless, in making these assertions, A and

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[15] To appreciate why data from ordinary speakers' intuitions could undermine **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis**, recall that its support derived from the explanation it gave of the contrasting intuitions of disagreement in dialogues like PRIME and DOCTOR. However, **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis** explains this contrast only if it is tacitly accepted by ordinary speakers who have such contrasting intuitions in PRIME and DOCTOR (for instance, as part of their understanding of how words like "No" work in English). Thus, if intuitions about disagreement come apart from intuitions about incompatibility in what is said, this is evidence that **The Strong Disagreement Hypothesis** is not really what explains the relevant difference between PRIME and DOCTOR after all, and hence these intuitions are evidence against it.

[16] Admittedly, more work needs to be done. For instance, Khoo and Knobe did not explore intuitions about retraction. Furthermore, as of the time of this article's publication, there is no empirical work exploring whether there is a similar contrast between intuitions about rejection and intuitions about incompatibility in what is asserted for knowledge ascriptions.

[17] These include invariantist theories, as well as the truth-relativist theory of MacFarlane (2005, 2014).

[18] What it is to "count as knowing p by standards e" is shorthand for the relevant notion in your theory of knowledge. It could be a degree of justification, or a set of alternative possibilities your evidence must rule out, some degree of reliability throughout nearby possible worlds, and so on.

B make incompatible proposals to update their contexts. This is because there is no context whose epistemic standards count S as "knowing" p and also count S as not "knowing" p. Thus, if A were to make her assertion in conversation with B and vice versa, they would be making incompatible proposals for that context. It seems plausible that this fact licenses A and B to reject each others' assertions, and make it sensible for one to retract in light of the other's rejection. It seems then that a scorekeeping model of conversation may provide some resources toward a contextualist-friendly explanation of the intuitions of disagreement in cases like EAVESDROPPERS.[19]

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Disagreements involving two parties, one of whom makes a knowledge ascription and the other of whom rejects that knowledge ascription, pose a serious challenge to contextualism. In this chapter, I sketched the challenge and discussed several strategies contextualists have pursued for resisting it. We have seen why some of these strategies may be more promising than others, and found a promising path for the contextualist to follow. However, extending this strategy about conversational disagreements to cases in which the disagreeing parties are not in conversation with one another is non-trivial (though, it is also not obvious one would need to do so to defend contextualism from the disagreement challenge). I leave it as an open question for future work whether we should give up contextualism (in favor of some form of invariantism, truth-relativist or otherwise) in light of considerations of disagreement.[20]

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[19] A standard response to the DeRose "single scoreboard" theory of disagreement is that it does not extend to cases in which the two parties "merely *think* to themselves 'S knows that p' and 'S does not know that p,' respectively, or if one considers the other's written or taped comments months later" (Macfarlane (2014): 182). However, these are not cases in which our standard measures of disagreement (felicitous rejection and sensible retraction) are measurable (since there is no conversation between parties). As such, the disagreement challenge loses much of its force. It may still be that the two parties disagree in some technical sense (disagree*), but it is less clear that a semantic theory for "knows" needs to predict that two people disagree* merely in virtue of having certain thoughts.

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