

Epistemic Scorekeeping

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Abstract: Edward Craig (1990) has urged that instead of analyzing ‘knows’ and its cognates, we should ask, “what knowledge *does* for us, what its role in our life might be, and then ask what a concept having that role would be like”. Here, an alternative to the Craigian account of the role of ‘know(s)’ (/KNOWS) -- *the certification view* -- is presented. (Though caution about whether there is such a thing as *the* such role is also recommended.) It is then argued that, contrary to initial appearances, a traditional (insensitive invariantist) semantics can explain knowledge ascriptions’ playing the ‘certifying’ role; whereas (and again, contrary to appearances), it’s not clear how well-equipped various non-traditional theories are to explain ‘know(s)’ playing that role. Overall, then: supposing that something like the certification view is correct, contrary to how it might seem, it’s far from clear that traditional invariantism is in trouble.

1. Introduction

While *particular uses* of ‘know(s)’ – specifically, their intuitive truth or falsity – have been a prominent source of evidence in recent epistemological theorizing, the *general role* of ‘know(s)’ (or the corresponding concept, KNOWS¹) has been relatively unexplored. It has been Edward Craig, more than anyone else, who has urged that instead of analyzing ‘knows’ and its cognates, we should ask “what knowledge *does* for us, what its role in our life might be, and then ask what a concept having that role would be like” (*ibid.*, 212, emphasis added). According to Craig, such a ‘practical explication’ of KNOWS yields the result that our concept of knowledge is descended from the concept of a good informant, the identification of which was and is of abiding concern to inquiring creatures like ourselves.

Of late, the Craigian project has been quite influential: a number of recent theorists,² some of them drawing upon Craig’s own specific views, have used putative facts about the role ‘knows’ (KNOWS) plays, what function it serves, as evidence for this or that

¹ Here I follow the convention of using single quotes for terms and CAPS for concepts. For the most part, the distinction makes no real difference to the present discussion. However, while Craig himself focuses on the issue of the role of the concept of knowledge, many who’ve followed him speak of the *linguistic* role of (the term) ‘know(s)’. Here, except where I’m discussing Craig’s views, I will favor a linguistic framing of the subject – not least because the primary concern is with our (public, linguistic) knowledge-attributing behavior; and while our talk is of course informed by and in some sense reflective of our concepts, since other factors contribute to our linguistic behavior as well, we should be cautious in moving from facts about the latter to claims about the former.

² Including Miranda Fricker (2008), John Greco (2004, 2007), David Henderson (2009, 2011), Martin Kusch (2009), Ram Neta (2006), Duncan Pritchard (forthcoming), and Jonathan Schaffer (2004).

substantive epistemological theory. Such views, as it turns out, often involve significant departures from traditional epistemological theory.

The aim of the present paper is twofold. First, I want to advertise a rival to Craig's own 'practical explication'. Specifically, I'll be advertising what I call 'the certification view' -- that, to a first approximation, 'knows' plays a special role in signaling an appropriate end to particular lines of inquiry. (Though I'll also be suggesting that it would be unwise to assume, as Craig and others have done, that 'know(s)' has some *single* role.) This, or something very much like it, is an idea that others -- most notably, Klemens Kappel (forthcoming) and Chris Kelp (2011) -- have recently suggested as well; and I'll both rehearse some of their main ideas and add some further reasons for favoring the non-Craigian alternative. However, while those whose accounts of 'the role of "knows"' are most similar to that offered below are deliberately cautious about semantical claims, and about the matter of whether/how they enable 'knows' to play the indicated role, it's precisely that question that's central here: for purposes of the present discussion, the real interest of thinking about what role 'know(s)' plays in our social-linguistic interactions is that it constitutes an important and largely neglected source of data which can be profitably brought to bear upon current, and perhaps more familiar, debates about the semantics of knowledge sentences.

No doubt, any account of the semantics of a given term should be consistent with, and hopefully shed light on, the fact that it has such-and-such characteristic uses. Part of the burden of the present discussion, however, is to raise doubts about the advisability of arguing directly from facts about the function of 'knows' to facts about its semantics.³ This is not merely because of general worries about the 'speech act fallacy' -- that is, supposing that, because some term is characteristically used to *X*, that directly reveals facts about its meaning (Seale 1969, 136-141).⁴ It is because, as I hope to show, even though the certification view may at first seem to favor a non-traditional epistemological

³ While some of the views discussed below (e.g., contextualism) are exclusively semantic, others (e.g., contrastivism, 'subject sensitive invariantism') combine semantic and metaphysical theses. Here it's semantic issues that are most at issue -- although, to the extent that various linguistic data are part of what inspire the relevant metaphysical claims, linguistic considerations have an indirect bearing upon debates about the latter as well.

⁴ I.e., supposing that, because some term is characteristically used to *X*, that directly reveals facts about its meaning (Seale 1969, 136-141).

view, a *generic moderate (insensitive) invariantist* semantics is compatible with ‘knows’ playing the role that it does. At the same time, it’s a mistake to think that, when it come to their accounting for how ‘know(s)’ plays its (imagined) role, *non-traditional* views have a very easy time of it. Overall, then: supposing that something like the certification view is correct, contrary to appearances, traditional invariantism is not clearly in trouble. To begin, however, we’ll briefly rehearse the main features of the Craigian view and the recently-popular general approach it illustrates.

2. Craig’s ‘Practical Explication’

Craig holds that “the core of the concept of knowledge is an outcome of certain very general facts about the human situation” (1990, 10). The most conspicuous such general fact is that we must rely on others as sources of information (1990, 11), which in turn gives rise to the need for some way to pick out *good* informants. Craig asks us to consider this question first “at its most subjective”:

“...I am seeking information as to whether or not *p*, and hence want an informant who is satisfactory for my purposes, here and now, with my present beliefs and capacities for receiving information. I am concerned, in other words, that as well as his having [(0)] the right answer to my question,

- (1) He should be accessible to me here and now.
- (2) He should be recognisable by me as someone likely to be right about *p*.
- (3) He should be as likely to be right about *p* as my concerns require.
- (4) Channels of communication between him and me should open.” (1990, 84-5)

Of course, this is a highly ‘subjectivized’ notion of the good informant, and there is a large mismatch between it and our concept of knowledge. For surely there can be knowers neither accessible to (1) nor recognizable by (2) me, or with whom I’m unable to communicate (4). Just as important, the fledgling concept of knowledge before us – following Miranda Fricker (2008) and Martin Kusch (2009), we might call it ‘proto-knowledge’ – incorporates a high degree of purpose-relativity: the good informant “should be as likely to be right about *p* as my concerns require.” But how high is that? Plausibly, that can vary widely, both across individuals and for an individual in different

situations. Hence Fricker's (2008, 43) claiming that Craig's account provides a kind of "contextualist picture".⁵

While some may see this as a strike against Craig's views, the concern *for Craig* is that the highly subjectivized nature of the concept of the proto-knower makes it ill-suited to play an effective inter-personal role:

"What we have at this stage... is a number of individuals with the same problem – how to come by the truth as to whether *p* – and their various ways of approaching it, determined by their individual requirements and circumstances. But these individuals form a community, and are in some degree at least helpful to others and responsive to their needs." (Craig 1990, 87-8)

For there to be useful sharing of information there needs to be some means by which these individuals can come to share a common point of view concerning the character and presence of good informants as to whether *p*. So there need to be versions of the above requirements that *aren't* tied to the needs, abilities, and so on, of specific individuals. Hence the pressure to form an 'objectivized' concept, one that retains the 'common core' of the notion while letting go "the multitude of accretions due to particular circumstances and particular persons and so varying with them" (1990, 88). Here, the concept comes to reflect the fact that there can be good informants neither accessible to (1) nor recognizable by (2) *me*, or with whom *I'm* unable to communicate (4). Meanwhile requirement (3) (*He should be as likely to be right about p as my concerns require*) is dramatically strengthened. While it remains purpose-relative, there is no longer the threat of great *variability* in its application, for the reliability of the prospective informant is now pegged to the interests and purposes of the most demanding potential consumer of the information in question: "These thoughts," Craig says, "take us further down the road of objectivization. Knowledge, so the hypothesis goes, lies at the end of it" (1990, 91). In short, according to Craig, our concept of the KNOWER is the highly objectivized notion of a good informant. (Though initially geared towards assessing others as potential sources of information, the concept can be applied to oneself, and used in one's epistemic self-assessments (e.g., Craig 2000, 656-7).)

⁵ Contextualism, of course, is not in fact singled out here. Other views – e.g., that best known as 'subject sensitive invariantism' (SSI) – also permit such context- or purpose-relativity.

3. Forms and Degrees of Sociality: From Informants to Inquiry

While the ideas just rehearsed are really just a jumping-off point for the present discussion, a brief consideration of some objections to Craig's view serves to introduce some ideas that it will be important to keep in mind in what follows.

First, then, there is the concern that Craig's discussion of the process of objectivization unfairly tips the balance towards skepticism, implying as it does that one must be in a *very* strong epistemic position in order to know. But this result is not forced upon Craig, or us (see Kelp 2011, 65, n. 2; Schmitt 1992, 558; Feldman 1997, 211) – it might make more sense to suppose that objectivization results in standards that would tend to serve the interests of the majority of potential recipients of the information in question, rather than the most demanding among them.

A comparison with designed artifacts is helpful here:⁶ an automobile manufacturer designs a suspension system expected to meet the needs of ordinary drivers, say – mostly paved roads; some bumps, but no 2-foot drop offs; no high-speed chases, etc. (A suspension system designed for rough off-road terrain is going to function less well, and more expensively, on typical city streets, it will require complementary and compensatory changes to other parts of the car, and so on.) Those who anticipate very demanding driving conditions can seek out a different vehicle design, or modify the factory-issue model accordingly. Or again, they may simply use the tried-and-true factory model and count on it to see them through any unusually demanding situations that may occasionally arise. Analogously, those whose epistemic demands exceed what's ordinarily expected of 'know(s)' are free to employ some other concept or term ('certain', 'past doubt', e.g.), or else to modify the existing one ('know for sure', or '...by such-and-such standards', etc.) such that it better reflects their heightened interests. Or again, they may employ the well-functioning talk of 'knowing' and count on their interlocutors to

⁶ Here, I am in part responding to David Henderson's invocation of roughly the same analogy in arguing that (what Craig calls) objectivization favors quite high standards (Henderson 2009, 127-128). In Henderson 2011, a more measured take on the matter is presented.

understand that it's some stronger (or weaker) epistemic relation that's actually meant when it's mutually obvious that that's what the situation calls for. This is the idea explored below.

A second worry concerns Craig's use of the device of the 'state of nature' and, more generally, his purporting to offer a 'genealogy' of KNOWS. Both Bernard Williams (2002) and Axel Gelfert (2011), e.g., have cautioned that a 'genealogy' such as Craig's needs to be backed-up by consideration of actual history, including the adaptive history of humans' cognitive repertoire. However, we can disentangle the notions of a *practical explication* of a concept and a *genealogical account* (or a state of nature genealogy) thereof: the latter concerns the origin of a concept, while the former attempts to explain how, given some set of facts, and some set of interests or aims, we have a need that the concept in question fulfills (see Kappel, 5*). Craig himself tends to move amongst these notions or projects. However, while the facts, needs, and aims that a practical explication draws upon need to be genuine (compare Craig 2007, 193), such a practical explication is itself essentially ahistorical: it purports to tell us what a concept *does*, not how it came to be.⁷ As far as the present discussion goes, it's the ahistorical, functional question that's at issue.

Third,⁸ one might think that Craig's practical explication *can't* be right, as one can imagine examples wherein even the *objectivized* Craigian protoknower and the intuitive knower diverge.⁹ Craig, however, *contrasts* his method with the analytic project of stating necessary and sufficient conditions (e.g., 1990, Chapter II); and he is careful to allow that there may be knowers, and cases where 'know(s)' is appropriately used, even though the subject fails to be a good informant (e.g., p. 96). This suggests that the informant-flagging function Craig identifies is not seen, even by him, as necessarily constitutive of the term's truth-conditional content. Extrapolating away from Craig, while the content of 'know(s)' should help explain its playing whatever role(s) it does, there may be cases wherein the function and content of the term come apart – where, that is,

⁷ In subsequent discussion of the relation between practical explications, state of nature stories, genealogies and real history, Craig (2007, esp. at 191) comes very close to granting this point.

⁸ This paragraph owes much to Mikkel Gerken.

⁹ Kelp (2011, Section 2) presents such examples. While he is careful to note that he does not regard them as *counterexamples* to Craig's view, he does believe that they pose a real problem for it.

one knows, even though the situation fails to exemplify those features that it is the role of the term's normal use to reflect. This too is an idea that's important to the discussion to follow.

A final sort of concern about Craig's view is this. It is often said that one great benefit of the Craigian approach is that it opens the door to a fuller engagement with the sort of social and/or socio-political issues to which traditional epistemology is supposed to have been blind. As Martin Kusch likes to say, unlike traditional, analytic epistemology, the Craigian story recognizes that "human cognizers are 'highly gregarious and deeply interdependent' creatures" (2009, 60). However, while Craig's view does put social matters closer to the heart of epistemological theory, the picture it paints is not *so* very social. Recall the beginnings of the Craigian story: "Consider...the position of someone seeking information on the point whether or not *p*;" what's he to do? (1990, 12). So: in the beginning there was the solo inquirer, in need of true beliefs, but unable to gather information on everything of real or potential relevance to the satisfaction of his ends; he, and each of us, must rely on others for information; from this arises the need to pick out and designate good informants.

Thus stated, and as far as the role of KNOWS goes, the sociality of inquirers begins and ends with *informational dependence*. But this is a rather 'thin' view of the matter, surely. We don't just form beliefs and then share information; we engage in joint epistemic ventures – whether merely so as to increase knowledge, or as part of our everyday planning, co-ordinating, and so on. And we do so not just with our near neighbors; we rely on reports, people and sources far removed from us in time, place, situation, and so on. So, if the 'very general facts about the human situation' we might draw upon in understanding our ordinary epistemic thought and talk includes our need for correct information, it also includes the ubiquitous and characteristically human sociality of the sort involved in the *pursuit* of such information– it includes *inquiry*, and not merely information-exchange.

Craig *does* speak of "the special flavour of situations in which human beings treat each other as subjects with a common purpose" (1990, 36). But he does so only in service of articulating the distinction between good informants and good sources of information

(non-sentient instruments, etc.). So too, Craig's position hardly requires *denying* the existence and importance of inquiry of the sort described: KNOWS (/‘know(s)’) could well be *for* flagging good informants, even if the latter often occurs within a larger, more socially rich framework of inquiry. However, just what we end up saying about ‘the (social) role of KNOWS’ may importantly depend upon how we’re conceiving of the relevant sort of sociality in the first place – is it an individual’s reliance upon others for information, or is it a mutual and mutually interested undertaking to uncover some fact of importance to us?

And now we’re close to another, alternative role for KNOWS (/‘know(s)’): namely, that it plays a special role in the practice of inquiry, as we’ve been describing it -- specifically, that it helps fulfill the need, in one’s linguistic social interactions and deliberations, for some way of marking the opening and closing of specific lines of inquiry – of indicating (and/or recommending) just which things may or should be reasonably assumed to be true, and so may (/may not) be open to reasonable further questioning. (Here too, as with Craig’s ‘proto-knowledge’, though perhaps initially geared towards situations of cooperative inquiry, there is no reason the concept couldn’t also be employed in one’s own deliberations.)

Both Chris Kelp and Klemens Kappel have very recently taken this line. According to Kelp, for example, the function of the concept of proto-knowledge

“... is to flag when agents may adequately terminate inquiry into a given question...[L]et’s reflect on what conditions would govern the application of a concept with this role...What properties would our ancestor want himself to have upon terminating inquiry? My suggestions here are as follows:

PK-A He has formed a belief on whether P.

PK-B His belief on whether P is true.

PK-C His belief on whether P stems from a source that is as trustworthy on the question whether P as his concerns require.” (2011, 62)

When subjected to the requisite ‘objectivization’ process, this yields a notion of the ‘*objectivised* protoknower’. The objectivized protoknower whether P is such that he:

“**OPK-A** has formed a belief on whether P,

OPK-B his belief is true, and

OPK-C his belief stems from a highly reliable source.” (*Ibid.*, 64)

Kappel articulates much the same idea in terms of the need for ‘a *K-predicate*’. Given that inquiry incurs costs and that it has “no natural stopping point” (7-8*), we need some way of indicating that (in our view) inquiry has gone on long enough – that some information may be fully relied upon. So too, we need some way of flagging, for purposes of transmission, trusted information *as* to-be-trusted. According to Kappel, the general need here is for a term (the ‘*K-predicate*’), for which he offers the following extensional characterization:

“ $K(S_1, S_1-S_n, p)$ iff p , and S_1 is in a sufficiently good epistemic position such that S_1-S_n , given right circumstances of transmission, ought to take the truth of p for granted in their practical and theoretical deliberation.” (11*)

It will be convenient to have a label for the idea both Kelp and Kappel recommend. Let’s call it *the certification view*: that is, the view that it is the – or, better, *a* (see just below) -- central role of ‘know(s)’ to certify¹⁰ information as being such that it may, even should,¹¹ be taken as settled, for purposes of one’s practical and theoretical deliberations.¹² No doubt, this idea could do with some sharpening, but our rough statement will serve well enough here.

Of course, one might wonder whether there’s any such thing as *the* ‘role of ‘know(s)’ (KNOWLEDGE). As Frederick Schmitt says in reviewing Craig’s book,

“There are many uses of the concept of knowledge, and in sizing up the concept there is no a priori reason to favor its use in picking good informants over its other uses. The task should be to ascertain what the concept must be like to afford all these uses.” (1995, 557)

That seems exactly right. And plenty of suggestions *have* been made about what other

¹⁰ The notion of *certification* is used by Henderson (2009) in his discussion of “the point of the concept of *knowledge*”, though he uses it in a more Craigian fashion, to refer to the identification of *an epistemic agent* as a good source of information (on a certain point or subject matter) for an understood audience.

¹¹ As we’ve seen, while Kappel puts it in terms of what one should take as settled, Kelp favors the weaker, permissibility construal. While deciding between the two suggestions is not something that’s attempted here, the stronger notion may be too strong. Perhaps what leads Kappel to its inclusion is the idea that agents need some way of *recommending* that some information actually *be* fully trusted. Plausibly, however, given Relevance (Grice 1989), it would generally be misleading to go to the trouble of pointing out the permissibility of *X* unless one was willing to recommend *X*’ing. If so, the weaker permissibility construal could do the necessary work.

¹² Others who’ve made suggestions along these lines include Kvanvig (2003, 171), Rysiew (2001, 2007a), and Sosa (see Cohen 1999, 60).

roles or characteristic uses ‘knows(s)’ might have – for instance, in providing assurance to others (Austin, esp. 99-103), countering doubts (see Rysiew 2001, 492), giving credit for true belief (Greco 2005, 116), singling out or exculpating targets for blame (see the papers by Beebe and Lackey, this volume), encouraging good testimony (Reynolds 2002), or as one way among others of keeping track of ‘who’s on top’ (*ibid.*, 143-144). Then too, there also appear to be purely descriptive uses of ‘know(s)’, where our concern is merely to communicate what the relevant sentence itself encodes – that *S* knows that *p* (Lackey, this volume; Rysiew 2007a, 641).

Obviously, sorting out and evaluating these suggestions would be a large undertaking. Fortunately, we needn’t do so here. That’s not to say that the apparent plurality of roles served by ‘know(s)’ is of no relevance to the present discussion. Quite the contrary. In the first instance, it raises problems for attempts to base claims about its semantics on some select such function. (Why is *that* role semantically significant?) So too, it constitutes a *prima facie* problem both for Craig, whose discussion seems to presume that there’s such a thing as ‘*the* role of ‘know(s)’, and for those who, like Kelp and Kappel, seek merely to *replace* the monistic Craigian suggestion with some alternative hypothesis as to “[t]he point of the concept of knowledge” (Kappel, p. 12*) – some “alternative to CT [Craig’s thesis] that, when slotted into Craig’s framework, delivers a better result than CT” (Kelp, p. 64). Schmitt’s worry, above, applies as much to any such alternative as it does to Craig’s own view.

It’s no part of the present view, however, that there is a single role of ‘know(s)’, as opposed to perhaps a number of such. The arguments to follow require only that the certification view plausibly picks out *one* of ‘know(s)’’s central roles – perhaps just one, but a common and important one. Indeed, strictly speaking, the arguments below don’t essentially depend upon the certification view *per se*. Even so, on its face, that view isn’t obviously less plausible than other suggestions as to role ‘know(s)’ plays. Further, while we shouldn’t assume that all those suggested roles are going to reduce to some unique member, it’s worth asking whether some of those roles might be *more* central or fundamental than others. And here, there’s reason to favor the certification view, at least,

over Craig's. Though hardly decisive, the following considerations appear to point that way.

First, it seems that the certification proposal explains Craig's. For it seems that our interest in flagging reliable sources stems from the more general concern with identifying and obtaining certified or certifiable information – with information that properly settles questions. In this way, the certification function appears to be central, not merely because it's a very common and important thing that we do with 'know(s)', but also because it underpins and enables at least some of the term's other (suggested) uses.¹³

Second, and picking up on an earlier point, the idea that we use 'know(s)' to certify information might better capture the sort of sociality that's involved in situations where knowledge ascriptions seem to be playing an important role. Think, for instance, of the variety of 'high stakes' ('low stakes') (paired) cases that get lots of attention in the recent literature – the Bank (DeRose 1992) and airport (Cohen 1999) cases, say, and variations thereupon, or Fantl and McGrath's (2002) train case. In these scenarios, anyway, we have people deciding what to *do*; and the relevant 'knowledge' claims/denials play a crucial role in recommending for/against particular courses of action, not merely in expressing verdicts as to whether anyone among them is a good informant on the matter in question.

Third, notice that we have at our disposal other epistemic terms we can and do use in picking out good informants -- 'trustworthy', 'reliable', 'always right', etc. But given that there are plenty of terms available for picking out informants of one or another degree of reliability,¹⁴ what's special about '*know(s)*'? Why do children acquire *that* concept so early in life (Bartsch and Wellman 1995)? And why is '*know(s)*' one of our ten most

¹³ While the point isn't required for the current argument, and is not something that can be pursued here, there is reason to think that the certification role might underpin some of the other suggested roles just mentioned as well. For instance, it's plausible that we might hold someone morally culpable because (we think) they had sufficient information, etc., such that some fact relevant to their (in)action ought to have been treated as properly settled, but they didn't act appropriately. Similarly, it seems that in certifying some information *p* one gives one's assurance, expresses one's confidence that any not-*p* possibility worth taking seriously can be met, implicitly endorses certain norms, and so on (cf. Rysiew 2007a).

¹⁴ Not to mention, ways of linguistically encoding information which, while not explicitly epistemic, is of obvious bearing upon such questions – an important example being 'evidentials' (for representative sources and brief discussion, see Nagel 2007).

common verbs (Davies & Gardner, 2010; cited in Nagel 2010, 408)?¹⁵ The certification view suggests an answer: unlike most epistemic and quasi-epistemic terms ('reliable', 'justified', 'rational', etc.) 'knows' does not admit of degrees;¹⁶ unlike most of these terms too, it is both factive (like the straight 'p') *and* evaluative; and unlike 'certain' (as applied to a proposition), say, given a broad non-sceptical orientation it's clear that the standards for its correct application are neither too high to often be met nor much more demanding than what our ordinary purposes require. In view of this combination of features, 'knows' appears to be *very* well suited for playing the certification role, a role calling for a certain finality or categorical effect; and one in which some information is not merely presented as true but recommended as something that may or should be reasonably assumed to be true – in which an acceptable end of inquiry is not just indicated but even *encouraged* and (sometimes) *effected*. (Though knowledge ascriptions are assertions, as with our other speech, our concern in making them isn't just to communicate information -- *that* S knows; *that* we shouldn't keep inquiring; etc. -- but to achieve certain extra-communicative ends -- e.g., persuading, with a view to bringing about the actual ending of specific lines of inquiry.) None of which is to say that there may not be other ways of accomplishing this (/these) tasks. But there's no mystery here as to why 'know(s)' would occupy a central place in our mental and verbal lexicon: it occupies such a place because it combines features which make it a very effective means for marking the special property or moment in the activities of inquiring agents that the certification view features.

4. 'Know(s)' and the Certifying Role: An Apparent Tension

So, for a variety of – admittedly inconclusive -- reasons, I favor the certification view over Craig's. But, as already indicated, the main goal here isn't to champion this or that

¹⁵ Ram Neta's recommendation "that we extend [Craig's] theory to epistemological status generally" (2006, 266) – that we "generalize Craig's hypothesis by claiming that the various terms of epistemological appraisal are designed to flag informants that are creditable to various levels, or in various ways" (*ibid.*, 267) -- only heightens the present worry about how, on the Craigian view, to explain the just-noted specialness of 'knows'.

¹⁶ This is a substantive claim, of course; but it's an assumption that few epistemologists would balk at. (Hetherington 1998 is one notable exception.)

view as to ‘the role of ‘know(s)’. Indeed, as we’ve seen, there is reason not to assume that there’s such a thing as *the* role of the term. Rather, the primary goal is to bring this subject into contact with what is, to many, the more familiar query, “What are the semantics of knowledge sentences?” Or, more precisely, “What *type* of semantic theory is true of them?”

So, supposing for the sake of argument that the certification view is correct, what suits ‘knows’ to play the posited role? How, that is, does an ascription of knowledge serve to signal that inquiry has now gone on long enough, that some information is to be fully trusted? There *is* room to wonder whether ‘know(s)’ is well-suited to play the role of ‘certifier’. For instance, consider again Kelp’s notion of “objectivised protoknower” whether P. He is such that he:

“**OPK-A** has formed a belief on whether P,
OPK-B his belief is true, and
OPK-C his belief stems from a highly reliable source.” (2011, 64)

As with Craig, if objectivization is thought to involve a dramatic *heightening* of epistemic standards we run the risk of losing the general utility of the concept for the majority of people. If their concerns are mundane, learning that *S* doesn’t satisfy the *very high* requirements on ‘knowing’ will leave them wondering whether *S*’s belief might nonetheless be based on some still pretty reliable process. Much the same result ensues, however, if we have *too lax* a general reliability requirement – *it* may be so undemanding as to be of worthless to many as well. But then too, even a *moderate* standard, while it might be best for most, is itself going to be too low for some and too high for others.

In short, it appears that *no matter what uniform standard* objectivization selects, *whether high or low*, the imposition of a *uniform* standard threatens to make ‘know(s)’ (/KNOWS) unfit to play the certification role – the role of indicating, in Kelp’s formulation, that a true belief whether P “stems from a source that is as trustworthy on the question whether P *as [the subject’s] concerns require.*” (2011, 62; emphasis added); or, in Kappel’s terms, of expressing the thought that the true believer (that *p*) is “in a *sufficiently good* epistemic position”, such that he or another should take the truth of *p* for

granted in their practical and theoretical deliberation (11*; emphasis added). But whether the basis for someone's belief, or his/her epistemic position with respect to *p*, is *good enough* in the relevant sense is obviously purpose-relative.

So we seem to have hit upon a fundamental tension – between, on the one hand, the variability and purpose-relativity of whether a proposition certified for use comes from a source that's *reliable enough* for a given person's (or group's) purposes; and, on the other, the insensitivity to such relativities that both objectivized proto-knowledge and our ordinary notion of knowledge appear to exhibit. In short, it's not clear how 'know(s)' *could* be suited to play the role it's said to play.

At this point, there is perhaps some temptation to rethink the idea that 'know(s)' serves a *single* certifying role.¹⁷ Instead, we might suppose that there are in fact two distinct though related needs or roles in play here – one, corresponding to proto-knowledge, to certify information for use by this or that individual or group; the other, corresponding to objectivized proto-knowledge and (perhaps) our ordinary notion of knowledge, to mark some information out as being fit for general consumption by the inquiring public at large. Perhaps this suggestion is correct. Still, it would not put to rest the concern at hand. For, supposing the imagined suggestion were correct, the problem would then become one of explaining what suits 'know(s)' to play these two, apparently quite different, roles.

Of course, it might seem like there's an obvious solution to the tension we are exploring. For example, operating with something like the present view of the role of 'knows' (see n. 10 above), David Henderson argues that contextualism "gets a kind of principled motivation" (2009, 125). Indeed, according to a number of recent theorists, knowledge sentences are importantly sensitive to practical concerns – either because such concerns affect (perhaps indirectly, by bringing about shifts in 'purely epistemic' standards) what those sentences express (contextualism, contrastivism), or because knowing itself is an 'impure' notion, involving as it does essential reference to the (actual or perceived) importance to the subject of being right (SSI). According to such theorists, the preceding

¹⁷ Here I am indebted to Jessica Brown and Chris Kelp.

worry over the suitability of ‘know(s)’ to play its supposed role is really an *advertisement* for *their* view. For the worry assumes ‘the traditional view’ – that knowing involves something like (unGettiered) true belief plus some version of the requirement that *S* be in a ‘good epistemic position’ with respect to *p*; that the latter constitutes a fixed (invariant, purpose-insensitive) standard; and that knowledge sentences express simply that *S* stands in the knowing relation to *p*. (Elsewhere (2007a), I’ve called this ‘the ho-hum view’.) If that’s right, there seems to be room for a mismatch between ‘know(s)’ and whatever term plays the certifying role. Whereas, if we adopt one of the non-traditional views alluded to above, there isn’t.

It is the aim of the next Section to make trouble for this assessment of the situation. In fact, there’s reason to believe that it is doubly hasty. For there is reason to think that the traditional view can be made to square with ‘know(s)’ playing the role specified by the certification view. Further, there is reason to think that, when it come to their accounting for how ‘know(s)’ plays its (imagined) role, non-traditional views don’t have such an easy time of it after all.

5. A Suitable (Sort of) Semantics

5.1. ‘Traditional’ (moderate insensitive invariantist) semantics and the certification view

It would be surprising if knowledge were in general wholly unconnected with the satisfaction of people’s interests: if having (true, unGettiered) beliefs rising to the level of knowledge did not, much of the time, serve people well in achieving their goals, intellectual and otherwise, chances are that knowledge wouldn’t be valued in the way that it ordinarily is, and that it wouldn’t occupy the central place that it has within epistemology. So too, if the requirement on knowledge were such that they were rarely met, and so the sentences used in attributing knowledge rarely true, chances are that ‘knows’ would be ill-suited for playing the role of indicating that some information is or should be taken as settled.¹⁸ These reflections suggest that knowledge and certified

¹⁸ See Henderson (2011) for related arguments. See too Gerken (ms.) for extended argument in favor of what he calls the *threshold-marking function of ‘knowledge’*: “In normal cases of epistemic assessment, the

information are non-accidentally related in at least this way: in many cases, knowledge ascriptions are true; certified information *is* known.

However, as we've seen, that leaves unanswered the question of how uttering a sentence with the avowedly insensitive content that the traditional theorist posits could serve to communicate the obviously situation-sensitive message that the certifying term is used to express. So too, it leaves unanswered the question of what to say about cases where certified information *doesn't* happen to neatly match what is and isn't known.

The way of responding to this challenge that I want to briefly rehearse exploits the fact that knowledge utterances are sources of epistemically relevant information over and above what the sentences involved literally express (what they semantically encode). That is, among the ways we have of calculating and keeping track of the epistemic score are not just explicit attributions and denials of knowledge (the usual focus of attention); and not just the use of linguistic devices (like evidentials – see n. 14) that, while not themselves involving explicitly epistemic terms, constitute another rich source of epistemically-relevant information. – In addition, there are the highly epistemically relevant things people imply, the further commitments they take on, in attributing and/or denying knowledge (e.g.) as they do. (As in our non-epistemic talk, a reliance upon such pragmatically generated information is not merely a handy, though optional, add-on: it makes linguistic communication *feasible*.)

Elsewhere (2001, 2005, and 2007a in particular), and independently from any real consideration of the sort of Craigian project being addressed here, I've discussed in some detail how this might play out. Here I'll just rehearse the basic idea as it applies in the present case.

Again, according to the traditional theorist knowing requires, minimally, (unGettiered) true belief plus the subject's being in a good epistemic position. What else it might

use of 'knowledge' and its cognates frequently fills the communicative function of marking the threshold of warrant that S must possess with regard to p in order to be epistemically rational in acting on (the belief that) p." The latter argument, and Gerken's paper generally, converges with and complements the present discussion.

require, and how the goodness of epistemic position should be cashed-out, is an in-house dispute. On the presumption that one is striving to make one's conversational contributions maximally relevantly informative, in attributing knowledge to a subject, *S*, (either him/herself or another) the speaker takes on commitments as to *S*'s epistemic position (/the status of *S*'s beliefs) *vis-à-vis* the proposition in question that plausibly go beyond what these modest conditions on knowing themselves require. For, in naturally-occurring situations,¹⁹ it would be misleading to attribute knowledge to *S* – something that entails being in a good epistemic position with respect to *p* – unless I thought that certain *other* things were true, including:

- That among the various not-*p* possibilities being considered, either *S* can rule them out (his/her evidence eliminates them) or they aren't worth taking seriously.
- That *S* is in a good epistemic position with respect to *p* given the contextually operative standards, insofar as they are appropriately in play.
- That it is permissible for *S* not to doubt that *p*, for *S* to be 'certain' [especially confident] that *p*

And so on. Putting it another way, given the assumption that I'm striving to conform to the Co-operative Principle, and especially Relevance, these further things are commitments I take on in asserting that *S* knows that *p*; or – in still other terms – they are things I represent myself as believing, as a result of uttering a sentence with just that force and content. But *these* things are more or less equivalent to what we were hoping to get from having some term playing the certifying role – viz., an efficient means of indicating and/or recommending just which things are (/aren't) or should (/shouldn't) be reasonably assumed to be true, taken as 'settled', and not open to reasonable further questioning.

So, on the present view, is 'know(s)' Kappel's 'K-predicate'? Not quite. It *is* the assertion of a 'knowledge' sentence that accounts for the relevant situation-specific information's being communicated. As we saw above, however, Kappel provides an extensional characterization of the K-predicate, whereby it is satisfied just in case the proposition in

¹⁹ As opposed to, say, in an epistemology class. There, if conditions are right, what is or would be communicated by an attribution/denial of knowledge might be of the purely descriptive sort mentioned above. Such cases, however, may well be the exception, and are arguably not representative of the knowledge ascriptions that epistemologists tend to focus on (Rysiew 2007a, 641).

question is, in our terms, properly certified.²⁰ Whereas, on the present account there is simply no need to build the latter into the satisfaction conditions for ‘know(s)’ in order to see how it can be used to serve the certifying role that Kappel’s K-predicate is said to play.

Just because that’s so – just because there is no entailment²¹ between some information’s being known and its being properly certified (/certifiable) -- knowledge and appropriately certified (/certifiable) information can come apart. That is, the present view predicts that there can be cases, for example, in which a person knows, even though it would be wrong of them to take the proposition in question as ‘settled’, to not inquire further, to not seek more evidence, and so on. (A version of this point, recall, was among the lessons extracted from our earlier discussion of Craig.) But several people – including myself (Rysiew 2001, 497), Brown (2008, 1444ff.), Reed (2010, 228-9), Bach (2010, 118), and Gerken (2011) -- have suggested that such cases *are* perfectly possible. After all, if one is a *moderate* insensitive invariantist, though knowing requires being in a good, even very good, epistemic position *vis-à-vis* the proposition in question, there will very often be room for improvement of that position (though not of one’s knowledge *per se*, of course) (see Brown 2008, 1143). When this is so, the cost of being wrong can make it rational to check further. And, in such a case, saying that the subject knows, but needs to check further, is true and makes perfect sense (Bach 2010, 118-9).

Now, some might question whether such examples really do succeed – whether they really do involve a subject who knows, but for whom it is rational to check further. Jeremy Fantl & Matt McGrath, for example, argue that what examples like the ones just mentioned really show is that any principles entailing that this *isn’t* possible for it to be rational to check further if one knows “are not clearly true, prior to theorizing” (2009, 63). Perhaps that’s right. But, for our purposes here, even the weaker moral that Fantl & McGrath suggest is quite enough: since it’s not clearly true (prior to theorizing) that such

²⁰ The analogous Craigian claim would be that one knows just in case one is a good informant. But as we saw earlier in answering some objections to his views, Craig deliberately avoids such claims.

²¹ Which is not to say that there’s no semantic *connection* – if knowing didn’t involve what the traditional view says it does, they relevant conveyances would not obtain (see Rysiew 2007a).

cases aren't possible, and since they at least *seem* possible, it is a virtue of the present view that it neatly accommodates that fact.

So too, it's a strength of the present view that it can help explain why, though they may sometimes be true, utterances of certain sentences – “They know, but they need to check further” -- can sound odd, whether or not there is any semantic inconsistency involved. Particularly when considered in isolation, removed from the very circumstances in which they're liable to make perfect sense (i.e., circumstances like those described above), they'll sound odd because they're liable to be heard as expressing a mixed message. And that, in turn, is to be explained by the fact that (as *per* the certification view) it's typically inferable from one's attributing knowledge that one regards further investigation as not being necessary (“Why say they know, if you think they need to check further?”).²²

Further, the preceding discussion of the role of ‘know(s)’ helps to address another worry about the present type of account of the influence of pragmatic factors on our knowledge-attributing behavior. In general, if one's linguistic intuitions are attuned more to the message conveyed in uttering a sentence than to the content literally expressed, when someone clearly needs to check further, it can seem *false* that they know; that is, one might not only withhold attributing knowledge, but *deny* it, when one considers a subject who needs to check further. Fantl & McGrath agree that “there are particular situations in which by asserting P you impart Q and by asserting ~P you impart ~Q” (2009, 41), and they agree that we do sometimes mistake merely pragmatically generated information for information entailed by the semantic content of the sentences we utter (2009, 42).

However, of the specific type of suggestion being made here, they say:

“[I]f this sort of error theory is not to be a serious cost, we need to be given some story about why we make these particular mistakes; it is not adequate merely to remark that we do sometimes confuse or run together the semantic content and the propositions pragmatically implied. Why do we do it *here* rather than *there*?” (2009, 42)

While it's hardly either the whole story, or a complete answer to the type of concern being raised, the important point suggested by the present discussion is that making this error is encouraged by the fact that *it is the role of 'know(s)'* to flag appropriate stopping

²² Such sometimes-oddity alone, then, does not show that the relevant implication cannot be cancelled, in Grice's (1989) terms. (Nor, relatedly, does it give us reason to reject the cancelability test.)

points in the course of inquiry, to indicate when a given proposition is reasonably taken for granted, and so on. – *That* is among the chief things that attributing knowledge is *for*, so to speak. And, as we noted at the start of this Section, there’s reason to think that, in ordinary cases, certified information is known and known information is certifiable. So, there appear to be relevant features of this particular case -- that it’s among the normal functions of ‘know(s)’ to flag certifiable information,²³ and that what’s known and what’s properly taken as settled very often go together – that go well beyond the general fact that we sometimes mistake semantically encoded and merely pragmatically generated information. Given these features -- and given that the examples that elicit the intuitions to be explained are, if anything, out of the ordinary (e.g., because they typically involve abnormally high stakes) -- it hardly seems *ad hoc* to suppose that we should be making the mistake in question here.

One last point. As we’ve just seen, attributing knowledge can sometimes commit one to more than knowing itself requires (according to the standard view) – *that* sort of case is what has commanded a great deal of recent attention. However, there are also occasions in which attributing knowledge can seem to commit one to a lot *less*. And it’s a virtue of the certification view that it provides a nice explanation of our use of ‘know(s)’ in those cases too. Thus, consider what Alvin Goldman (e.g., 1999, 5, 23ff.) calls knowledge in “the weak sense”, in which knowing is said to consist simply in believing truly.

According to Kent Bach, this use of the term is widespread: “most of the time, outside of epistemology, when we consider whether somebody knows something, we are mainly interested in whether the person has the information, not in whether the person’s belief rises to the level of knowledge” (2005, 62-3).

Why would this be, if knowledge requires more than having correct information? We could say that we’re just being loose or sloppy. But the certification view allows us to say

²³ Compare Bach on ‘standardization’: “Where there is standardization, the hearer’s inference to what the speaker means is short-circuited, compressed by precedent (though capable of being worked out if necessary), so that the literal content of the utterance can be bypassed” (Bach 2001, 262, n. 16). Such standardization can lead to what Bach calls ‘sentence nonliterality’. Part of what makes the latter difficult to recognize is that none of the *elements* in the sentence need be used non-literally. Whereas, of course, we aren’t tempted to regard as true figurative idioms that are conventionally used – e.g., “I’ve been waiting for ages”, “He’s as old as the hills” -- partly because it’s just obvious that some term is being used non-literally (*ibid.*, 249-50).

more: in many cases, it's easy to think that all one needs to reasonably close off some line of inquiry is to have a certain piece of information – *the answer* to whatever question's being posed. If you do, you're counted as "knowing"; if not, not.

Of course, just because we're sometimes interested only in whether someone 'has the information', that doesn't mean that they don't actually *have* (or lack) knowledge (Rysiew 2003). If the lucky quiz show contestant really does have the right answer just somehow 'come to mind', though it may be natural to say that they know, that's of course false. Still, simply to label this a misuse would gloss over the fact that, here too, 'know(s)' can be playing its proper role.²⁴ Merely supplying the right answer suffices perfectly for the contestant's quite narrow purposes: they win the prize!

Before moving on, it's important to be clear that while it is meant to illustrate some of its attractions, none of the foregoing is intended to establish that the view being described is correct (or that competing, non-traditional semantic views are mistaken). The point, rather, has been to illustrate one way in which a traditional (insensitive invariantist) semantics might be made to square with, indeed to explain, knowledge ascriptions' playing the 'certifying' role described earlier. The suggestion, once again, is to supplement the traditional semantics with a reasonable pragmatics: the latter accounts for the expressing of the situation-geared information that the certification role seems to involve, while the former provides the stable, insensitive content that objectivization seems to demand.

Others have raised objections to such a view – e.g., that it cannot explain why certain utterances sound odd, or why we might not just avoid asserting but *deny* certain claims that are, by the theory's lights, true.²⁵ We have seen above, however, an indication of how these worries might be addressed from within the theory; and such objections have been addressed, and the relevant positive view developed and defended, more fully

²⁴ Equally, to suppose that we really do need a distinct *sense* of the term, as Goldman's label suggests, or that there must be a different concept operating in such cases, seems unwarranted.

²⁵ These objections have been voiced by Cohen (1999), DeRose (1999, 2002). Subsequently, they have been taken up by, e.g., MacFarlane (2005) and Schaffer and Knobe (forthcoming).

elsewhere.²⁶ Again, though, it's no part of the discussion to attempt to establish the correctness (or incorrectness) of any particular semantic theory. The goal, rather, is to paint a fairer picture of where various such views stand when it comes to accounting for 'know(s)' playing the socio-functional role that it apparently does. What's just been argued is that the traditional view has much more going for it in this regard than might at first appear. Further, as we'll see in the next Section, non-traditional theorists face a challenge exactly analogous to that confronting the traditional view; and, on perhaps the most natural way of responding to that challenge, non-traditional theorists take on a commitment to the viability of *something like* the view described above.

5.2. Non-traditional views and the role of 'know(s)'

The big challenge for traditional (insensitive invariantist) theorists in the recent literature on knowledge ascriptions has been to explain what's going on in various specific cases (or pairs of cases) where there is a piece or pattern of knowledge-attributing behavior that is *prima facie* at odds with the traditional approach. Whereas, of course, much of the impetus to this or that non-traditional account is typically thought to be that it affords a natural (and best overall) understanding of just such cases.

But while one thing to be explained by any theory of the semantics of knowledge sentences is indeed what goes on in specific situations in which 'know(s)' is being used, another is how a knowledge report can play a role that's *not* tied to this or that specific situation -- how it can serve as a piece of common coin, usable by and useful to any number of people or groups not part of the immediate situation from which it emerges. This is one place where non-traditional views struggle: being geared towards, indeed often designed specifically to handle, variable contexts, such theories must explain how knowledge reports come to be useful to and fit for 'consumption' by the inquiring public at large. To render them such was, as we saw, the whole point of Craig's objectivization process. The challenge faced by non-traditional theorist faces is, then, to respond to the pressure to objectivize.

²⁶ Rysiew (2001, 2005, 2007a) and Brown (2006) include further elaboration and defense of the general approach described in this Section. Rysiew (2005) and Brown (2006) include responses to DeRose's (1999, 2002) arguments for pessimism about the general prospects for such an account; Rysiew (2005) includes a response to DeRose's (2002) criticism of the specific such account offered in Rysiew (2001).

It's one of the benefits of a consideration of "the role of 'know(s)'" that it brings this issue into sharp focus. But essentially the same point has been raised by others. Timothy Williamson, for instance, raises it in connection with contextualism in particular. As Williamson says, "'know' does not seem to be designed like 'here' and 'now' primarily for immediate consumption; we need to preserve and transmit information about who has what kind of knowledge, or who knew what when" (2005, 101). But contextualism makes it hard for such information to be stored and shared, since the relation picked out by 'know(s)' varies with changes in 'epistemic standards'. Thus, for a stored or received knowledge sentence to be usable by (/useful to) me, I need to know and keep track of what the operative standards were. Alternately, I need to know and remember what the relevant standard-affecting/or -setting facts -- e.g., the stakes, the salient counter-possibilities etc. -- were, and what precisely their impact was. Very often, though, we receive and make use of knowledge reports unaccompanied by any of that kind of information.

For instance, we hear, "Jim knows that Sara's Australian", or we read the headline, "Mystery solved: Scientists now know how smallpox kills"²⁷ -- either of which signals, as *per* the certification view, that the relevant individuals regard the question at issue as now properly settled. Absent concerns about the reliability of either those individuals or the reporting source, we'll often adopt precisely that attitude ourselves -- we'll take the new piece of information on board, adding it to our own stock knowledge (as we see it). In some cases, quite a bit of digging might help us arrive at an informed view as to the values of the various candidate non-traditional factors -- Jim's interests; the (perceived) costs of his or the scientists' being wrong; the speaker/reporter's own standards of epistemic assessment, and so on. In others, digging around probably wouldn't yield much of anything. But even when it would, pursuing such information can be rather costly, and storing and retaining it alongside the relevant reports themselves would quickly become unfeasible. And yet, we *do* very naturally understand and make use of

²⁷ *ScienceDaily*, reporting on an article in *Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology* (2009, December 23). Retrieved June 27, 2011, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/12/091222105217.htm>.

reports of the epistemic score that come to us from outside our own immediate practical situation.

Jonathan Schaffer registers essentially the same complaint about (non-contrastivist) contextualism's 'indexicality': it makes 'knows' ill-suited to play what is, according to him, its role "in keeping score of the overall progress of inquiry" (2004, 84). Why? Because "the denotation of 'knows' is always warped to the current context. As such 'knows' cannot keep consistent score *across contexts*....(Imagine trying to score a baseball game if the denotation of 'run' changed with every inning!)" (*ibid.*, 84-5). Whereas, on Schaffer's contrastivist view, 'knows' denotes a three-place relation, with a sometimes-shifty contrast variable being included among the *relata*. And this *does* allow 'knows' to play its role: make the contrast(s) explicit, and subject's epistemic progress can be put "on context-invariant display." (*ibid.*, 85)

True enough, *if* the value of the contrast variable(s) is (/are) made explicit. But my sense is that this rarely actually happens. Perhaps that's because the contrast variable is often obvious to the immediate audience. (Compare 'prefers', one of Schaffer's favored models for 'knows': there's no need to make the contrast explicit when I say, "Jane prefers vanilla," if I've just been asked whether we should serve vanilla or chocolate.) But the subject at hand is the *trans*-contextual employment and exploitation of knowledge ascriptions. And it's just not clear that contrastivism fares better than standard contextualism on this score. (All on its own, the one-time report, "Jane prefers vanilla," won't help you if you want to pick up her favorite flavor at the store.)

While we've been formulating the point in terms of contextualism in particular, there's reason to think that the worry isn't restricted to views whereby the *contents* of 'know(s)'⁻sentences are affected by non-'traditional' factors. On the face of it, any view whereby the contents *or (merely) the truth-values* of 'know(s)'⁻ascriptions depend in certain important ways on non-traditional, context-specific features will confront it. Thus, according to SSI (e.g., Stanley 2005, Fantl & McGrath 2009), the truth-value of a knowledge report depends on facts about the subject's interests. But then, if I don't know what those interests are (how high or low, etc.), I won't know how far the putative fact of their knowing is owing to the (perceived) strength of various traditional, truth-relevant

properties (their having excellent evidence, etc.), and how far it's owing to their having only a weak (/perceived) interest in the proposition in question. And if I don't know that, it's not clear what use I might make of a report that they know some thing that's relevant to my inquiries. Or again: if (as relativists assert) the truth-value of a knowledge ascription depends on the *assessor's* standards (MacFarlane 2005), that someone in some other situation asserted (and so judged true) such a sentence is, on its own, of very limited use as well.²⁸

If the thinking here is right, it would appear to be a feature of non-traditional views generally that they have difficulty accommodating the trans-contextual role of knowledge ascriptions. This, again, is not itself news. But the present discussion raises the stakes: cross-contextual uses of knowledge reports are essential to 'know(s)' playing its imagined role, and they not a marginal phenomenon. For it's not as though the problem-situation arises only occasionally, when a knowledge report comes to us from some other (conversational, practical, etc.) context, and we must then decide what to make of it. In a complex society, the phenomenon is ubiquitous: any given individual has different concerns, assumptions, projects, and so on, in play in different situations and at different times. And not just different stages of life, but (often quite literally) on different days of the week; and not just in places separated by large stretches of space – in some cases, a city block raises all sorts of new concerns. Moreover, the same goes for any of the many groups -- formal or informal, practical or applied -- to which a given individual belongs. Information about who knows what passes both vertically and horizontally, amongst individuals and groups; sometimes it just presents itself, sometimes it's sought out; it's stored in various forms, and made available (in many cases) to anyone who cares to inquire. And so on.²⁹

²⁸ Matters are even further complicated if we are prone to certain types of errors; and, in the course of addressing certain *prima facie* problems for their views, non-traditional theorists tend to say that we are – e.g., that we conflate contexts (Cohen, DeRose), that we project our interests onto others (Stanley), and so on. (Cf. Williamson 2005, 101-2.)

²⁹ The discussion of this paragraph is largely a compressed summary of Kelp (2011, 63) and Henderson (2009, 130). As presented by Henderson, these types of phenomena are among those that threaten an otherwise contextualist-friendly picture. Henderson suggests that a central function of knowledge ascriptions is to certify agents as good sources of information, agents who can be thought of as belonging to *applied* and *general source* communities. In considering the former type of community, Henderson argues, we find a new rationale for the contextualist model. In the latter, however, where the concern is with

In this sort of society – that is to say, one like ours – sharing, interpreting and keeping track (mnemonically or otherwise) of knowledge ascriptions (/denials), having the relevant information be usable and useful, is onerous enough given a *traditional* semantics. How it's to be carried out given a *non-traditional* view must be addressed.

“But,” it may be objected, “we *do* make liberal use of clearly context-sensitive terms, for example – ‘here’, ‘tall’, ‘rich’, etc. And we appear to be pretty good at keeping track of contexts in which they occur and/or of figuring out on a given occasion what's meant by them. So the general problem being raised can't be *insoluble*.” That's right. However, when uses of clearly context-sensitive terms are not intended for ‘immediate consumption’, they are typically replaceable, and often simply replaced, by some fairly obvious, clearly understood, relatively precise, and easily articulable rendering of the relevant information in invariant terms – for example, in place of “here”, the subject's street address or map co-ordinates; in place of “tall”, his/her actual height in feet and inches; in place of “rich”, his/her average pre-tax earnings over the past 10 years, say; and so on. Plausibly, it is owing to the availability and familiarity of such devices that we're able to use and exploit clearly context-sensitive terms as successfully as we do, even across contexts. It's just not clear, however, that anything comparable is available in the case of ‘knows’.

We do, of course, have available to us notions like ‘moderate standards’, ‘the usual contrasts’, ‘ordinary purposes’, ‘average interest’, ‘with some level of confidence’, ‘really know’, ‘by today's standards’, and so on.³⁰ And just as the traditional theorist can supplement his preferred semantics with an account of the pragmatics of knowledge attributions, for example, there's no reason the non-traditional theorist can't adduce

producing “general purpose actionable information” – that is, with sources of knowledge apt to be of use for a great variety of others, with various different interests and stakes -- “something like” insensitive invariantism seems apt. Factors like those described above may make the resulting combination of contextualist and insensitive invariantist elements unstable, Henderson observes, in which case even applied communities may “come to take on more of the epistemic sensibility of source communities” (*ibid.*, 130). Henderson's discussion is extremely valuable. However, for reasons already given, I would disagree with many of the central ideas – including, that contextualism is favored even with respect to ‘applied’ communities, that objectivization (in Craig's terms) must tend towards particularly high standards and, most generally, that considerations of the role of ‘knows’ have as direct a bearing upon semantic questions as Henderson's discussion suggests.

³⁰ The latter three are representative examples from the results of Peter Ludlow's (2005) *Google* search for modifiers accompanying ‘know(s)’ in ordinary usage. (See too DeRose 2009, 180-184.)

extra-semantic factors and processes in responding to the worry at hand. One very natural way to go, for instance, would be for her to suggest that we rely on the sorts of notions and locutions just mentioned in understanding and making use of knowledge ascriptions that come to us from outside our own immediate practical situation – in interpreting their contents and/or the nontraditional factors relevant to their (alleged) truth. To go back to the examples mentioned above, we assume that Jim’s interest in Sara’s nationality is ‘ordinary’, that the scientists studying smallpox have standards that are, well, ‘scientific’, and so on.

One problem with this proposal, as Williamson notes, is that phrases such as ‘moderate’, ‘scientific’, ‘usual’, and ‘ordinary’ (Williamson himself speaks of ‘high standards’ and ‘low standards’) “are themselves context-sensitive, and in any case far too vague and unspecific for identifying location on a continuum of standards” (2005, 101), for determining the identity of the contrast set, the degree of importance, or what have you.

Just as importantly, however, any such proposal is going to run up against the very general fact we encountered earlier in discussing Craigian *objectivization* -- namely, that *no matter what uniform value* is selected as the default for the relevant non-traditional factor, there are still going to be cases for which the ‘default’ reading (supposing we have a good handle on that) won’t be correct. So, there are bound to be cases in which consumers of knowledge reports will have to draw upon their real-world knowledge, their beliefs about the source (his/her situation and interests, etc.), various linguistic and psycho-social principles, and so on, in order to arrive at the correct (i.e., intended) reading of the relevant occurrence of ‘*S* knows that *p*’. But this is just to say that, on anyone’s view, there are bound to be cases where hearers will need to deploy precisely the sorts of resources which the *traditional* view described in the previous Section portrays them as relying upon in recognizing pragmatically-generated information (information generated by speakers saying what they do). Indeed, even when the ‘default’ reading *is* the correct (intended) reading, that is something that needs to be inferred, on that grounds that *it* preserves the assumption that the speaker is, to put it in Gricean terms, observing the Cooperative Principle (see Bach 1994, 2006; Rysiew 2007b). If this is right, then it would seem that all of the relevant parties have a stake in the viability of

something like the processes appealed to in the previous Section. Putting it the other way around: if you are sceptical about how far a traditional (insensitive invariantist) semantics can take you in understanding and explaining knowledge utterances, it seems that you should perhaps be equally sceptical about how well any kind of ‘default’ reading of the non-traditional theorist’s knowledge reports is going to serve potential beneficiaries thereof.

None of this, of course, spells doom for non-traditional views – no more than the manifest variability of our willingness to ascribe knowledge spells doom for the traditional approach. Adjudicating which view of the semantic of knowledge sentences, and which strategy for accommodating both the latter variability and the apparent stability that honoring ‘know(s)’ social role requires, is a large and difficult task, to which the present discussion is merely a contribution. Hopefully, however, it will now at minimum seem clear that the traditional approach is not at an obvious *disadvantage* here: Because neither the truth-conditional contents nor the (perceived) truth-values of knowledge sentences are hostage to non-traditional factors, honoring the trans-contextual role of knowledge ascriptions seems easily done. Meanwhile, it appears that, in order to explain the successful interpretation of trans-contextual knowledge ascriptions – what, exactly, their contents are; and/or given what interests, contrasts, standards, etc., they are (held to be) true -- various non-traditional theories will need to avail themselves of the same general type of psycho-linguistic processes and abilities that the traditional theorist might invoke in explaining more local uses of ‘know(s)’, and more situation-gearred acts of certification. To the extent that that’s so, it is harder to maintain that the strategy of the traditional theorist that’s been described here suffers some obviously fatal flaw; and it’s less clear that a move to some non-traditional semantic view really is required by the latter data (cf. Rysiew 2001, Section 10).

5. Conclusion

Of course, that’s really just a sketch of an argument. And likewise, I haven’t offered much more than a *prima facie* argument for taking seriously either the certification view

or my own preferred account of how a traditional semantics can be made to square with it. Hopefully, though, it's clear that any quick move from a given account of 'the role of "know(s)"' to this or that substantive epistemological claim, still less to any non-traditional view, is probably ill-advised, and that more does need to be said by proponents of non-traditional views about how their favored account of knowledge ascriptions enable them to play their broader, social role.³¹

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