

The Context-Sensitivity of Knowledge Attributions

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1. Introduction

Much has been made in recent years of the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions. To give a sense of the sort of thing that's meant by this, and to facilitate my discussion of the phenomenon, I'll begin with an example:

Bank Case A: My wife and I are driving home on a Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past the bank, we notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, "Maybe the bank won't be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays." I reply, "No, I know it'll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It's open until noon."

Bank Case B: [As before.]...I again suggest that we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday morning only two weeks ago and discovered that it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and very important check. If our paychecks are not deposited in our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a *very* bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, "Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?" Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, still, I reply, "Well, no. I'd better go in and make sure." (DeRose 1992, p. 913)

Whatever else it may or may not show, the foregoing example¹ illustrates the fact that there is a manifest flexibility in our willingness to attribute knowl-

edge, whether to ourselves or to others: it is incontrovertible that, in some sense anyway, “what counts as knowing” depends upon ‘context’. For to say, of the foregoing example, *merely* that the speaker has changed his mind (about whether he knows) and cannot be speaking truly in both cases would be to skip over an important feature of the case: namely, that there’s *some* sense in which, while his epistemic position does not change (as we might say), “I know the bank’ll be open tomorrow” goes from being ‘the right thing [or an okay thing]’ for the speaker to say in Case A to something it would be *inappropriate* for him to assert in Case B. Moreover, it seems plausible to think that, in *some* sense of “says,” were the speaker to claim to know in Case B *he would be saying something different* from what he said in making this very same claim in Case A. Similarly, insofar as “context” is taken to refer to the interests, expectations, and so forth of attributors,² it is a tautology—something that everyone has got to accept—that in *some* sense “ascriptions of knowledge are context-sensitive” (Cohen 1999, p. 57).

So far, so banal: that knowledge attributions are *somehow* ‘context-sensitive’ is incontrovertible. (If you find any of the claims I’ve made concerning the lessons of DeRose’s Bank Case controversial, you cannot be respecting the numerous qualifiers attending those claims.) But while no one denies the phenomenon, there’s a great deal of controversy over how, exactly, we should conceive of it. According to the *contextualist*,³ “the truth conditions of sentences of the form ‘*S* knows that *p*’ or ‘*S* does not know that *p*’ vary in certain ways according to the context in which they are uttered” (DeRose 1992, p. 914). And since the truth *conditions* of a sentence of the form “*S* knows that *p*” can change with a bare shift in context, so can the sentence’s truth *value*. Thus, contextualism has the consequence that one speaker can attribute knowledge that *p* to *S*, while another can simultaneously deny that *S* knows that *p*, *and both can be speaking truly* (cf. Cohen 1999; 1998, p. 289; 1988, p. 97; DeRose 1999, p. 188). Thus, contextualism promises to deliver up a nice symmetry between the flexibility in our willingness to attribute knowledge, on the one hand, and a parallel plasticity in the truth conditions (and hence the truth *values*) of the knowledge-attributing sentences we are in fact prepared to utter. And on the assumption that speakers realize, however tacitly, that what it means to say that *S* knows that *p* is a context-sensitive matter, the contextualist can invoke a flexibility in the truth conditions of knowledge-attributing sentences to explain the apparent context-sensitivity of our knowledge-attributing practices.

Inasmuch as it provides us with a straightforward means of accounting for what’s going on in the Bank Case, for example, contextualism enjoys a considerable advantage over *invariantism*.⁴ For according to the invariantist, the truth conditions of knowledge-attributing sentences *don’t* vary in any interesting way depending on context. Note the qualifier “interesting.” The invariantist does not deny that whether a sentence of the form “*S* knows that *p*” is true depends in *some* sense on ‘the context’: it depends, e.g., on what the referent of ‘*S*’ is,

on whether *S* believes that *p*, on the nature of *S*'s evidentiary relation to *p*, and on whether *S*'s belief that *p* is true (cf. Cohen 1991, p. 22; DeRose 1999, pp. 190–191). What the invariantist denies is that one can fix all the facts about *S*'s beliefs and evidence (*vis-à-vis p*), and all the objective features of *S*'s circumstances, and then *in virtue merely of some shift in the psychology of the attributor*, bring about a shift in the truth conditions (and hence the truth value) of the relevant knowledge-attributing sentence: according to the invariantist, once these facts are fixed, so are the truth conditions of a sentence used in attributing knowledge to *S*. And whereas the contextualist accounts for the data in question by positing a very close connection between context (in this sense) and the truth conditions of knowledge-attributing sentences, what makes the invariantist an invariantist is the fact that he regards such context-sensitivity as due to the pragmatics (as against the semantics) of knowledge attributions. According to such a 'sophisticated' invariantist (DeRose 1995), the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions reduces to the context-sensitivity of the 'warranted assertability' conditions of knowledge-attributing sentences.

Unfortunately, sophisticated (nonsceptical⁵) invariantists have heretofore rested content with "a 'bare warranted assertability maneuver'" (DeRose 1999, p. 199); and insofar as such would-be sophisticated invariantists have denied that context affects the truth conditions (*versus* the 'warranted assertability' conditions) of knowledge-attributing sentences *and simply left it at that*,⁶ their sophistication has been mere pretense. To date, no one has offered a compelling argument showing that a nonsceptical invariantism *really is* compatible with our manifestly flexible knowledge-attributing practices. For until we have an account of what the warranted assertability conditions of knowledge-attributing sentences might be, and of how these might shift in the required manner, to claim that the Bank Case (e.g.) is perfectly compatible with an invariantist semantics for "knows" looks like a mere promissory note (at best) or (at worst) sheer bad faith (cf. DeRose 1999, pp. 201ff.). My goal here is to remedy this defect by presenting an account of the pragmatics of knowledge attributions—or, what is the same thing, a pragmatic account of the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions—one which enables the invariantist to accommodate the sort of data which have seemed to many to favor the contextualist. Rather than proceeding directly to a presentation of this view, however, I will begin by briefly outlining and critiquing (Sections 2 and 3) the contextualist's approach. To the extent that this critique is compelling, the sophisticated invariantism I then go on (in Sections 4–10) to present and defend is going to seem that much more attractive.

2. The Contextualist Approach

As already indicated, the contextualist seeks to explain the variability of "what we are prepared to say" in attributing knowledge in terms of knowledge-attributing sentences' having context-sensitive truth-conditions. And while *in*

abstracto this view strikes many as implausible,⁷ it does seem to square with the relevant data. Thus, e.g., in terms of the Bank Case, it's DeRose's contention that most of us will find both of the following claims compelling: (1) when I claim to know that the bank will be open on Saturday in Case A, I am saying something true; (2) I am also saying something true in Case B when I concede that I *don't* know that the bank will be open on Saturday. Granted, "I seem to be in no better position to know in Case A than in Case B" (DeRose 1992, p. 914). Still, DeRose thinks, one can perfectly consistently maintain both (1) and (2):

[I]n Bank Case B...when, in the face of my wife's doubt, I admit that I don't know that the bank will be open on Saturday, I don't contradict an earlier claim to know that I might have made before the doubt was raised and before the issue was so important because, *in an important sense, I don't mean the same thing by "know" as I meant in the earlier claim.* (*Ibid.*, p. 921; italics added)

According to DeRose, then, the meaning of "know(s)" varies with certain features of the context in which it is used in making knowledge attributions. And so too for Cohen; for while there are important differences between the views of Cohen and DeRose (more on this presently), both believe that context enters into epistemology in virtue of the contribution it makes to the meanings of key epistemic terms, and thus in virtue of the role it plays in the determination of the conditions to be satisfied by knowledge-attributing sentences. So, according to the contextualist, knowledge attributions are context-sensitive *because context affects what knowledge-attributing sentences literally express.*

While it promises to account for "what we want to say" with regard (e.g.) to the Bank Case, contextualists make much of the fact that their view provides what is alleged to be a novel and quite plausible resolution of sceptical puzzles (DeRose 1992, 1995; Cohen 1988; Lewis 1979, 1996; Unger 1986). Taking his cue from Cohen (1988, pp. 93–94) the sceptical argument DeRose (1995) focuses on is the following:

- (SA) P1. I don't know that I'm not a BIV [that is, a bodiless brain in a vat being electrochemically stimulated to have just those sensory experiences I'm having].
 P2. If I don't know that I'm not a BIV, then I don't know that I have hands.
 So, C. I don't know that I have hands.

Of course, unlike the Bank Case, SA isn't an example of merely pedestrian knowledge attributions. The basic strategy of the contextualist, however, is the same with respect to both sorts of case. In particular, it is the contextualist's

recommendation that we preserve “everything we want to say” about the sceptical argument by recognizing that the various things we do want to say here *don't involve a univocal use of “knows.”*

Thus, for example, DeRose’s “solution” to SA runs as follows. It is a general, though not exceptionless, rule that knowledge requires “sensitive” belief. One’s belief that *p* is sensitive just in case, if *p* weren’t the case, one wouldn’t believe that *p*. Thus, DeRose offers the following “Rule of Sensitivity”:

When it is asserted that some subject *S* knows (or does not know) some proposition *P*, the standards for knowledge (the standards of how good an epistemic position one must be in to count as knowing) tend to be raised, if need be, to such a level as to require *S*’s belief in that particular *P* to be sensitive for it to count as knowledge. (DeRose 1995, p. 36)

So, any particular utterance of “*S* knows that *p*” will be true only if *S* believes that *p*, *p*, and *S*’s epistemic position is such that his belief that *p* is sensitive. And for propositions such as, “I’m not a BIV,” the mere uttering of P1 (e.g.) induces *very* high standards for knowledge, as my belief that I’m not a BIV is manifestly *insensitive*; and at those *very* high standards, P1 is true. As for P2, DeRose claims that it is true “regardless of what epistemic standard it’s evaluated at, so its plausibility is easily accounted for” (*ibid.*, p. 39). As it happens, though, in SA P2 is being evaluated at fairly *high* standards; for those standards are the ones put into play by the mentioning of P1. But this just means that the only reading on which SA’s conclusion is true is at the unusually inflated standards induced by SA’s first premise.

Cohen too sees SA as exploiting the context-sensitivity of the standards for knowledge, though his version of contextualism differs in certain ways from DeRose’s. As Cohen (1988) sees it, “knowledge” (*pace* DeRose) *inherits* its “indexical” nature (1988, p. 97) from that of “(is) justified”; and what counts as justification is governed by a Rule of *Salience*. What the sceptic does is make salient certain not-*p* possibilities (e.g., the BIV hypothesis), with the result that the standard(s) of how good one’s reasons must be in order for one to be justified in believing that one has hands, say, *goes way up*. So, whereas DeRose’s Rule of Sensitivity deals with how far out into the space of possible worlds one must be able to ‘track the truth’, insofar as he locates the relevant standards in terms of the strength or goodness of the subject’s reasons or evidence, Cohen’s is an ‘internalist’ brand of contextualism. Nonetheless, both Cohen and DeRose regard shifts in context as effecting shifts in the operative epistemic standards and thus shifts in the truth-conditions of knowledge-attributing sentences. And, for present purposes, *that* is the important point. For according to both Cohen and DeRose, it is only by effecting shifts in the epistemic standards that the sceptic is able to truthfully state his view (DeRose 1995, p. 38; cf., also, Lewis 1996, p. 564).

3. What's Really Wrong with Contextualism

It wouldn't be overstating matters to say that the foregoing account(s)—or, rather, the account(s) of which the foregoing is a synopsis—represents the state of the art in contextualism: the accounts of Cohen and DeRose (and perhaps that of Lewis 1996, 1979 as well) are the most fully worked-out versions of the view according to which the meanings (contents) of knowledge-attributing sentences vary with context. And, of course, it is a virtue of contextualism that it gives us a means of resolving the sceptical puzzle in such a way that both the sceptic and the non-sceptic can be given his due. Yet, ingenious though it is, Cohen and DeRose's recommended means of "solving the sceptical problem" is far from unproblematic. And while there are certainly important differences between their views, those will not concern me here;⁸ the problems I want now to raise seem to me to apply to any brand of contextualism worthy of the name.

One reason for finding the contextualist's response to SA unsatisfactory is suggested by Dretske:

Skepticism, as a doctrine about what ordinary people know, cannot be *made* true by being put in the mouth of a skeptic. Treating knowledge as an indexical... [., however,] seems to have, or to come dangerously close to having, exactly this result. For this reason (among others) I reject it. (Dretske 1991, p. 192)

Granted, it's Cohen's indexicalist view of "knows" (see Cohen 1986, 1987, 1988, 1991) that Dretske has in mind here.⁹ Yet the worry Dretske is raising applies to contextualist theories generally. Thus, e.g., DeRose holds that any time P1 is uttered, this claim is *bound* to be true. For since the belief that one is not a BIV is extremely *insensitive*, the standards of knowledge are raised to a *very* high level; and evaluated according to that very high standard, a positive claim to *know* that one isn't a BIV is doomed to failure (DeRose 1995, p. 39). But it's not as though the contextualist thinks it's the *sceptic's* uttering P1 that makes it true—it's the bare uttering of it by *anyone* which has this effect. Still, is it really plausible to suppose that P1 is like, say, "I'm speaking English" in this respect?

Of course, DeRose's claim that P1 is bound to be true hardly amounts to saying that *scepticism* is true. For it's essential to a contextualist resolution of SA that *scepticism is not incompatible with our ordinary claims to know*: in an important sense, the commonsense epistemologist and the sceptic mean something quite different by "know." *This* is how the contextualist proposes to give each of these parties their due. Indeed, this is what Cohen and DeRose, e.g., take to be a chief *virtue* of their approach—it *just is*, really, the contextualist "solution" to SA. So it's not quite correct to say, with Dretske, that contextualism has the result that "scepticism is true"; and so, as it stands, Dretske's complaint rests on a misunderstanding of just what the contextualist's view is.

However, notice that the contextualist's proposed 'solution' to SA thus has the consequence that *it's utterly mysterious what the puzzle was supposed to be in the first place!* As Schiffer puts it, the contextualist's suggested means of solving the skeptical problem "leaves one wondering, 'If that's the solution, then what the hell was the *problem?*'" (Schiffer 1996, p. 329). SA only presents a puzzle to begin with because we think that what the sceptic means when (in SA) he talks about knowledge is what *we* mean by the term: we think that it's *knowledge*—ordinary, everyday, pedestrian knowledge—that SA calls into doubt. So the contextualist owes us an explanation of why we mistakenly believe this. Well, according to the contextualist, the explanation is that (in Schiffer's words) SA "strikes us as presenting a profound paradox merely because we're ignorant of what it's really saying, and this because we don't appreciate the indexical nature of knowledge sentences" (Schiffer 1996, p. 325).

According to Schiffer, however, the contextualist's attempt to combine a context-sensitive semantics with the error theory just described is far too uncomfortable to be at all plausible. Why? Because we know what propositions we're expressing when we use indexicals and other context-sensitive terms. So the contextualist cannot claim *both* that knowledge-attributing sentences have context-sensitive contents *and* that "people uttering certain knowledge sentences in certain contexts systematically confound the propositions their utterances express with the propositions they would express by uttering those sentences in certain other contexts" (Schiffer 1996, p. 325). Or so says Schiffer. But is he right about this?

Well, the trouble is that it's not at all clear how we should answer this question *since it's not clear what exactly Schiffer is objecting to*. Lest it be thought that I'm being difficult or dense on this point, notice that in the passage just quoted, Schiffer says that the contextualist's error theory consists in his claiming (implausibly) that people confound *the propositions their utterances express* with what *they* would express by *uttering those sentences in certain other contexts*. So? So there are actually *two* types of error theory Schiffer might have in mind in saying that the contextualist's error theory "refutes" the claim that knowledge-attributing sentences have context-sensitive semantics (*ibid.*): Is the problem supposed to be that speakers know what propositions are *literally expressed* by sentences containing context-sensitive terms? Or is the problem supposed to be that speakers know what *they* mean *in uttering* certain sentences (with context-sensitive contents)? I think that a close look at Schiffer's paper reveals that he's really not too clear on this point. But, I claim, in order to see what's *really* wrong with contextualism, we do need to keep these ideas distinct. For I think that, whether or not they have context-sensitive contents, it is actually not so implausible to suppose that speakers can be wrong about what propositions their utterances literally express.¹⁰ However, I find it manifestly *implausible* to suppose that speakers can be wrong about what it is that *they* mean—about what their communicative intentions are—in uttering certain sentences.

Thus, for example, consider an example DeRose uses to elucidate the respect in which, according to the contextualist, the sceptic and the non-sceptic aren't really in disagreement after all:

This lack of contradiction is similar to the sense in which two people who think they are in the same room but are in fact in different rooms are talking to each other over an intercom mean something different by "this room" when one claims, "Frank is not in this room" and the other insists "Frank is in this room—I can see him!" (DeRose 1992, p. 920)

I hope you will agree that, here, the propositions literally expressed by these two people's utterances aren't actually in conflict: there *is no* one room to which their respective "this room"'s both refer; and were they each to say, "Frank's in this room," their utterances would pick out different propositions and thus have different truth-conditions. Yet, the parties to this comic exchange think that they *are* disagreeing with one another—that's what makes it comic. Therefore, it can only be that they're wrong about what propositions are being literally expressed in their saying what they do: if they knew *that*, they wouldn't fall into their silly exchange. But are these two speakers confused about what *they* (each) mean in saying what they do? Not at all. Each means to say that Frank is (not) in *the room they're both in*. In fact, were they not each perfectly clear on what *they* meant, it's hard to see how they could get to *arguing* over whether Frank is "in this room."

I intend these observations to be quite general. I think speakers can be wrong about what the sentences they utter mean (what propositions those sentences literally express)—indeed, I think this phenomenon is not just possible but *pervasive*: I, along with Bach (1994a, 1994b) and Sperber and Wilson (1986a, 1986b), e.g., believe that a lot of our talk is loose, less than fully explicit, and in fact not strictly literal. Nonetheless, because (e.g.) the inferential processes involved in linguistic communication are largely unconscious, parties to a communicative exchange tend to read the speaker's communicative intentions onto the words actually spoken; so they will often be wrong about what those words literally express.¹¹ Yet it seems to me that communicative intentions are something about which we are seldom mistaken. (Chances are that if you don't know what you mean in saying "*P*," your thinking itself is, at that moment, unclear.) Now for the bearing of this upon the contextualist's complete solution to SA.

While I have argued that, contrary to what Schiffer at times seems to want to say, speakers can be wrong about what propositions the sentences they utter literally express, this doesn't help the contextualist. This, for two reasons. First, it's also pretty clear that when an apparent incompatibility between certain utterances is actually due to these claims' having context-sensitive contents *once we see that this is so* any appearance that the claims are incompatible simply goes away. (Hence the chagrin, or worse, of the two people in DeRose's exam-

ple once they realize what their situation really is.) However, if the contextualist is right and it is because we're in something very much like *these folks'* situation that we think we're disagreeing with the sceptic—if, in particular, it's true that we fail to realize that the sceptic's denials of knowledge are compatible with our ordinary claims to know *because we're ignorant of what propositions the respective claims really express*—our having the *actual* meanings of these claims pointed out to us ought to make the *appearance* of incompatibility simply go away. If “knows” really is like “other context-sensitive words, like ‘here’” (DeRose 1992, p. 925), having this pointed out to us should have precisely this effect; but it does not.^{12,13}

Second, the contextualist wants to tie what the sentences we utter mean *very* closely to what we mean in uttering them: remember, the contextualist holds that changes in the content of knowledge-attributing sentences track changes in ‘context’; and both Cohen and DeRose conceive of context in terms of the purposes, intentions, interests, beliefs, and so forth, of the *speaker*. But this just means that the independently plausible idea that we can be wrong about what *the sentences we utter* mean becomes, on the contextualist view, the manifestly *implausible* claim that we're actually systematically mistaken about what *we* (knowledge attributors) mean in uttering knowledge-attributing sentences. It seems to me that the contextualist thus tries to save our pedestrian knowledge of such matters as whether we have hands against the sceptic's attacks by giving up on the idea that we know what our communicative intentions are. But that is simply to trade one form of scepticism for another: epistemically speaking, we gain the world but lose our minds.

Moreover, *even if* the contextualist could show how it is that we're wrong about what our communicative intentions are in uttering knowledge-attributing sentences, this would be a pyrrhic victory. For to show this would be to go against the whole rationale for being a contextualist: the contextualist takes it to be a virtue of his view that it has the consequence that very many of the knowledge attributions made by speakers (of English) are true. Why would this constitute a *virtue* of his view? Presumably, because we don't want to saddle speakers with *too much error*: we want people's beliefs, as far as possible, to be *true*.¹⁴ But what we've just seen is that in order to provide a complete solution to SA, the contextualist has to saddle us with lots of erroneous beliefs after all.

4. Reinterpreting the Data: Why We Don't Have to be Contextualists

In view of the problems facing contextualism, we ought to look closely at the data which seemed so clearly to favor it.¹⁵ Thus, in terms of the Bank Case, let's suppose that the data which any plausible theory must accommodate are these:

- (1) When I claim to know that the bank will be open on Saturday in Case A, I am saying something true; and,
 (2) I am also saying something true in Case B when I concede that I *don't* know that the bank will be open on Saturday. (DeRose 1992, p. 914)

Now I, like DeRose, think that, as read, (1) and (2) are both true. But I refuse to see this as, in itself, raising a problem for the invariantist. Here's why: "says" ("what is said") can be used to refer to rather different things. Thus, for example, we might use "says" in a rather restricted way, such that anything that is not part of the literal (or conventional) meaning of an utterance is not part of "what is said." For example, there is a sense of "says" whereby if I utter the sentence, "I've had breakfast," I haven't strictly speaking *said* ($\text{said}_{\text{Strict}}$) that I've had breakfast *today*. For what is $\text{said}_{\text{Strict}}$ respects what Bach (forthcoming) calls the syntactic correlation constraint, whereby what is said must correspond to the elements of the sentence(/-fragment), their order, and their syntactic character; and the tacit reference to a particular time does *not* so correspond. But the loose, intuitive sense of "says" doesn't respect the syntactic correlation constraint: as Carston (1988), Recanati (1993), and Sperber & Wilson (1986a, 1986b) have all been at pains to argue, we ordinarily identify 'what is said' with some *conceptually and pragmatically enriched* proposition closely related to the proposition literally expressed—the proposition the speaker is most plausibly regarded as having intended to convey (in the circumstances, by a given utterance) (cf. Salmon 1991, p. 88). Thus, in the foregoing example, the speaker can be counted as having said in this loose sense ($\text{said}_{\text{Loose}}$) that she has had breakfast *today*; in the case of "They fell in love and got married," that they fell in love and *then* got married; and so on.¹⁶ Obviously, these two uses of "says"— $\text{says}_{\text{Loose}}$ and $\text{says}_{\text{Strict}}$ —correlate more or less closely with speaker meaning and linguistic meaning, respectively. Or, to use Salmon's terminology, they correlate more or less closely with the proposition(s) *pragmatically imparted* or *conveyed* by an utterance of a sentence, and the proposition(s) *semantically encoded* or *expressed* by the sentence *itself* (relative to a context of utterance) (Salmon 1986, pp. 58–60; 1991, pp. 87–89).¹⁷

Admittedly, these distinctions are all fairly rough-and-ready, but they'll suffice for present purposes: by applying them to the Bank Case we can see that it in no way singles out the contextualist account of what's going on. In particular, one will regard (the conjunction of) (1) and (2) as providing evidence for contextualism only if one understands (1) and (2) as follows:

- (1') When I claim to know that the bank will be open on Saturday in Case A, I am **saying** $_{\text{Strict}}$ something true; and,
 (2') I am also **saying** $_{\text{Strict}}$ something true in Case B when I concede that I *don't* know that the bank will be open on Saturday.

And if it's right that what one **says**_{Strict} shifts in truth value from Case A to Case B, *of course* this will be an illustration of the contextualist's thesis!¹⁸

However, since speakers tend to identify "what is said" with the most salient proposition a speaker actually communicates (see above), I think that (1) and (2) are most plausibly read as follows:

- (1'') When I claim to know that the bank will be open on Saturday in Case A, I am **saying**_{Loose} something true; and,
- (2'') I am (also) **saying**_{Loose} something true in Case B when I concede that I don't know that the bank will be open on Saturday.

If this is right—if (1'') and (2'') are the correct renderings of (1) and (2)—then the appearance that Bank Case itself favors contextualism over invariantism simply goes away. In effect, we can see this example as providing evidence for the idea that "the content of 'know'" changes with shifts in context *only if we conflate speaker meaning and linguistic meaning*.¹⁹ In itself, however, this observation does nothing to explain why it is, e.g., *that it seems right* for the speaker to say, in Case B, that he doesn't know the bank will be open on Saturday. In short, while accounting for such data in pragmatic terms might be favored by considerations of theoretical economy,²⁰ we've yet to see how the (sophisticated) invariantist can not only accommodate but *explain* our intuitions about "what we should say" with regard to the Bank Case, e.g. And, again, it's precisely because no one has suggested what an account of this sort of thing in pragmatic terms might look like that the semantic solution suggested by the contextualist has seemed to be the way to go.²¹ It's time to remedy this defect.

5. A Sophisticated Invariantism: Outline of the View

While I propose, ultimately, to accommodate examples such as the Bank Case and SA in (primarily) pragmatic terms, I'll be doing so against the background of a particular view of the *semantics* of "knows." Specifically, I favor a version of the relevant alternatives (RA) account of the meaning of "know(s)." Nonetheless, since many will find this account controversial, I will begin by sketching a neutral framework for a sophisticated invariantism. The hope is that even if you find the subsequent semantics objectionable, the theory-neutral framework will strike the disinterested reader as plausible enough (if not terribly enlightening). So:

The proposition *literally expressed* by "*S* knows that *p*" is, unsurprisingly, that *S* knows that *p*. Minimally, that *S* knows that *p* entails (trivially) that *S* believes that *p*, *p*, and that *S* is in a good epistemic position—specifically, though no more helpfully, that *S*'s epistemic position with respect to *p* is good enough for him to know that *p*. (Whatever else one takes to be implied by the sentence will depend upon one's preferred analysis of "know(s).") What is

pragmatically imparted by an utterance of “*S* knows that *p*” is a proposition of the form, ‘*S*’s epistemic position with respect to *p* is good enough....’, where the ellipsis is completed according to context. ‘Context’ in what sense? In the very same sense as Cohen and DeRose intend (see note 2, above): that is, in the sense of the intentions, purposes, expectations, presuppositions, etc., of the attributor.

As is obvious from even this meager framework, and as my remarks in the previous section were meant to suggest, I intend to locate the phenomena posited by the contextualist—context-sensitivity, a shift in truth conditions and truth values, and so forth—at the level of *what’s (pragmatically) imparted by utterances* of knowledge-attributing sentences, rather than at the level of *what those sentences literally express*. No surprise there. But in order to have an account that’s fleshed-out enough to be deployable and evaluable, we need to go beyond the meager framework itself—we need to hang a semantics on it and see what the resultant sophisticated invariantist view looks like. For this reason, I’ll now turn to a particular instance of the foregoing schema—one which I, at present anyway, am inclined to favor.

According to an RA account, for *S* to know that *p*, it’s necessary that there be no relevant alternatives to *p* which *S* cannot “rule out”; equivalently, for *S* to know that *p*, *p* must be distinguishable or discriminable by *S* from the relevant states of affairs in which *p* is false (see Goldman 1976; 1986, p. 46). RA theorists, of course, disagree over what the correct standard of relevance is. But the account of relevance I favor is this: the relevant alternatives are fixed by what we (normal) humans *take to be* the likely counter-possibilities to what the subject is said to know. So, e.g., whether *q* is a relevant alternative to *p* depends on how likely we attributors, *qua normal humans*, think it is, in the circumstances in question, that the actual state of affairs is *q*, rather than *p* (or how likely we *would* think *q* is, in the case of circumstances we simply haven’t considered).

Notice that the favored standard of relevance (like the psychology of a knowledge-attributor, *qua normal human*) is fairly invariant. So I’m advocating a fairly *invariantistic* RA semantics for “know(s)”: the mere mentioning of a certain not-*p* alternative, or the mere fact that the speaker has certain not-*p* possibilities in mind when he says, “*S* knows that *p*,” doesn’t affect what that sentence means (what it literally expresses). This is not to say, however, that which not-*p* possibilities have been mentioned, or which of these a particular speaker has in mind, are altogether *irrelevant*—they’re irrelevant to semantic issues, but they *do* matter. So let’s reserve the term “relevant” for those counter-possibilities which must be eliminated if *S* is to know that *p*; and let’s use “*salient*” to refer to those counter-possibilities which the parties in a given situation ‘have in mind’.

The distinction between relevance and salience bears emphasizing, especially in view of the fact that on the present proposal both are a matter, ultimately, of the psychology of ordinary speakers. The difference consists in just

which facts about such speakers' psychologies the respective notions are intended to capture. Thus, salience is the occasion-sensitive notion: it picks out, rather indiscriminately, features of speakers' psychologies which accompany their everyday uses of "knows," however idiosyncratic, unusual, and peculiar to the conversational setting. With regard to relevance, however, the qualification "*qua* normal humans" is essential: the goal is to capture what it is that, in terms of speakers' psychologies, the various uses of "knows" (as applied to a given proposition and situation) have in common. (Or would have in common, in the case of situations we haven't considered.) Thus, the idea is to abstract away from the vagaries of actual and possible uses of "knows"—the fact, e.g., that a person takes *r* to be a likely not-*p* possibility only because it has just been brought to salience (mentioned, say, or read about in a newspaper)—and so to get at speakers' 'considered judgments' on the matter.

I am, of course, presuming that such judgments on the part of speakers will (or would) coincide sufficiently to give us a set of 'core' not-*p* alternatives, as it were, of 'what all speakers would agree' are the likely not-*p* alternatives; and some may find this assumption dubious. It should be said, however, that the contextualist himself is in his own way just as committed to there not being gross differences in people's psychologies. For if there were, it would be utterly mysterious that hearers should be as adept as they apparently are at determining what a speaker means in uttering "*S* knows that *p*," e.g. (and hence, on the contextualist's view, the truth conditions of the sentence uttered). (Remember [note 2]: for present purposes context *just is* certain facts about the psychology of the speaker.)

Granted, one must be careful of idealizing too far, and it's highly unlikely that, even once we allow for 'recency effects' and so forth, speakers' (considered) judgments as to the likelihood of various not-*p* possibilities will perfectly coincide. In the same way—in fact, for just this reason—the distinction between relevance and salience (in my terms) is not likely to be absolute: it's very doubtful that there is a perfectly determinate boundary marking the point at which one leaves off and the other begins. (Hence my proposing a "*fairly*" invariantistic semantics for "know(s).") But all of this is exactly as it should be, given that the concept of knowledge is itself to some degree vague. And, of course, that the membership of and boundary between the relevant and the salient alternatives may be fuzzy hardly implies that these matters are not clear in the majority of cases, including those with which we'll be concerned here. Finally, let me emphasize that the present proposal is not as unusual or unintuitive as it might at first seem: if, for instance, you believe that the meaning of a term is *ultimately* a function of use (perhaps because what speakers do with words reflects certain key features of their psychologies, and you favor an intention-based semantics), but that not every use is semantically significant, then you are committed to drawing a distinction akin to the one I am proposing here. If, in addition, you are sympathetic to the RA approach, you'll need the distinction between relevance and salience.

With that distinction in hand, we can formulate the view I favor as follows: though only the *relevant* alternatives affect what is literally expressed by a given knowledge attributing sentence, what the *salient* alternatives are—what doubts are being entertained, what alternatives to *p* are ‘in the air’—will directly bear upon *what an utterance of that sentence will pragmatically impart*. And just because in any given case²² the relevant alternatives and the salient alternatives don’t have to be—and often *won’t* be—the same, we can end up with situations in which the proposition semantically encoded by a sentence and the proposition imparted by an utterance of it differ in both meaning and truth value.

Such, I claim, is precisely what’s going on in DeRose’s Bank Case. Even if what he says_{Strict} isn’t what he intends to communicate, when, in Case A, DeRose says, “I know the bank will be open tomorrow,” what he says_{Strict} is true, let’s suppose: given his evidence—he has been to the bank on recent Saturdays; he hasn’t heard anything to the effect that it’s changed its hours; etc.—he can ‘rule out’ the relevant not-*p* alternatives, such as that the bank is open only on weekdays. And prior to his wife’s making salient any other not-*p* possibilities, he’ll be naturally taken to be saying_{Loose} this as well. For until his wife ‘raises the stakes’, the salient alternatives are liable to be just the relevant ones, in my terms. (Of course, in saying this, DeRose also *communicates* or *imparts* that his epistemic position *vis-à-vis* the bank’s hours is good enough to warrant his and his wife’s putting off depositing their paychecks until the following day. And I think that what he thus communicates is also plausibly regarded as true.)

However, as soon as his wife has brought to salience the importance of their depositing their paychecks before Monday morning—if they don’t, some “large and important” checks they’ve written will bounce, etc.—it’s going to be natural for them to consider some hitherto *unconsidered* possibilities: perhaps the bank has just changed its hours; perhaps the bank will be closed *this* Saturday for some sort of special employee holiday; perhaps the bank will burn to the ground shortly after it closes on Friday; etc. But if, because of the importance of what’s at issue, the range of not-*p* possibilities under consideration—i.e., the *salient* alternatives—expands in this way, this just means that were DeRose to then say, “I know the bank’ll be open tomorrow,” he would thereby *impart* that he can rule out *these*.²³ And that might well be false (or might not be known by the speaker to be true). Whereas, by uttering (the falsehood), “I (guess I) *don’t* know the bank’ll be open tomorrow,” DeRose can impart the important truth—he says_{Loose}, in the sense described above—that his epistemic position *isn’t* so good that he can rule out the sorts of counter-possibilities which are now, in Case B, salient.²⁴ Nonetheless, if DeRose knew in Case A that the bank would be open on Saturday, he knows it in Case B—his wife’s *mentioning* the importance of their getting their paychecks deposited doesn’t change *that*. What her mentioning this changes is ‘the conversational score’, which not-*p* alternatives are salient, what DeRose would therefore say_{Loose} in

virtue of claiming to know that *p*, and thus what the ‘right’ thing for him to say is.²⁵

It might be objected that the account I’ve just sketched of the pragmatics of knowledge attributions is *ad hoc*. Whereas, as DeRose has written, a successful ‘warranted assertability maneuver’ would be one which “utilized a very general rule of conversation...which applies to assertions of *any* content” in explaining the generation of the implicatures to which the sophisticated invariantist appeals (DeRose 1999, p. 200; italics added). Yet I believe that, given Grice’s Cooperative Principle (CP), not only can we explain, but *we should expect*, that the pragmatic phenomena I have appealed to will in general be generated by the makings of knowledge attributions. In particular, I see the maxim of Relation—to wit, “Be relevant!”—as plausibly underwriting the phenomenon I’ve posited. Thus, e.g., in Bank Case B we can justify the positing of the alleged pragmatic phenomenon in the usual way, by showing how the belief that this is in fact what the speaker intends to communicate is the most natural way of preserving the assumption that the speaker is conforming to CP. Witness, then, how natural it would be for the speaker’s audience to reason as follows: “He has just said ‘I [guess I] *don’t* know that bank’ll be open tomorrow.’ And he has said this in response to my raising a doubt as to whether he can really be so sure—after all banks, as I’ve just reminded him, do change their hours. Presumably (on the assumption that he’s conforming to CP), he wouldn’t have said what he has unless he thought that there were possibilities incompatible with the bank’s being open tomorrow—specifically, that it has recently changed its hours—that he could not rule out. For to say, “I don’t know....” is to indicate that one isn’t sure. On the other hand, if this *isn’t* what the speaker meant in saying that he didn’t know the bank would be open, then I’m not quite sure what he did mean. On the assumption, then, that his conversational contribution is to the point and has been made in light of what I’ve just said, *that* must be what he intends to communicate—viz., that he can’t rule out the possibility that the bank has just recently changed his hours.”

It is, I claim, because speakers strive to conform, and are known to so strive, to the maxim of Relation (and, more generally, to CP) that an utterance of the form “*S* knows that *p*” is naturally taken to communicate—that is, the speaker intends/means and is correctly and naturally taken to intend/mean—that *S*’s epistemic position is ‘good enough’ given the epistemic standards that are operative in the context in question. Thus, I am not claiming that interpreting such utterances requires the hearer’s inferring that what the speaker actually says is false (and known to be such by the speaker): unlike *Quality* implicatures, which are triggered by the mutually obvious falsity of what is said, in the present case what triggers the hearer’s search for something other than what is strictly speaking said is its lack of relevant specificity (Bach 2000, p. 265). (Think of it this way: whether or not what he says is strictly speaking true, if the speaker *didn’t* think that *S*’s epistemic position were good enough *in the*

relevant sense of “good enough,” whatever that is, he wouldn’t say “S knows that *p*”; and regardless of the truth-value of the sentence itself, he wouldn’t say “S doesn’t know that *p*” unless he thought there were salient not-*p* possibilities that the speaker could not rule out.) Moreover, because the relevant sentences are *standardly* used in the manner being described, far from having to be conscious and/or explicit, the hearer’s inference to what is being conveyed is liable to be of the default variety.²⁶ And precisely because, in such cases, hearers will ‘hear’ what’s conveyed in the sentences themselves, the present account actually predicts that the audience will most often end up regarding the original utterance as true: hence, for example, the intuition that the speaker in DeRose’s Bank Case B is “saying something true.”

6. The ‘Queerness’ of Concessive Knowledge Attributions

It’s worth noting that the foregoing accords with and explains the (Wittgensteinian) idea that, typically, “‘I know’ [is] used in contrast with someone’s (perhaps one’s own) previous, present, or potential, disbelief, or doubt, or insecure belief” (Malcolm 1986, p. 212). (This is surely how the “I know....” functions in Bank Case A.) For the present account has it that the salient not-*p* possibilities *just are* the doubts as to whether *p* that are ‘in the air’, psychologically speaking. Moreover, we have independent reason for thinking that this is how “I know....” typically functions. For, thanks to the conditions on sincere assertion, commitment to justified true belief is already carried by a (sincere) assertion that *p*.²⁷ (That is, if the speaker takes his belief to be false and/or unjustified, he cannot be sincerely asserting that *p*.) But if this is so, and is (however tacitly) mutually known to be so, the addition of “I know....” to the assertion must be serving to communicate something over and above what’s communicated by “*p*”; otherwise, saying “I know that *p*” would mean violating the maxim of manner (be perspicuous, relevant, brief, orderly, etc.) and thus CP. And what’s (typically) conveyed by “I know that *p*” *isn’t* redundant; for the “I know” adds an element of confidence, or even certainty, to what is conveyed by the bare (sincere) assertion that *p*.²⁸ So when one says “I know that *p*,” this serves, typically, to counter some specific doubt(s) as to whether *p* by conveying one’s own confidence that *p*. Which doubts as to whether *p*? The *salient* ones, of course—for they, by definition, are the ones which the attributor has in mind.²⁹

Thus, for example, were the speaker in Case B to respond to his wife’s bringing up the possibility that the bank has recently changed its hours with “No: I *know* the bank’ll be open tomorrow,” she might be expected—by us, as well as by the speaker himself—to reply in turn, “You mean, you *know* the bank hasn’t just recently changed its hours?” But the speaker *doesn’t* know this, or doesn’t *know* that he knows it (given what we’re told), and he knows that *that* is what his insisting that he knows would communicate in Case B. And that, as the present account has it, is why he doesn’t say this.

We are now in a position to understand why *concessive knowledge attributions* (CKAs)—that is, statements of the form, “S knows that *p*, but [however, yet, although, etc.] maybe [perhaps, it’s possible that, etc.] *q* [where *q* entails not-*p*]”—are *bound* to sound odd. As we’ve just seen, “I know that *p*” standardly functions to convey the speaker’s confidence as to *p* and (thus) to counter a doubt as to whether *p*. However, the concession clause, “but, maybe, however, etc....,” *raises the then-mentioned possibility to salience*. So while the “I know....” communicates that the speaker is confident that *p* and thus that he (believes he) can rule out the salient not-*p* possibilities, the concession clause communicates that there’s a salient not-*p* possibility which the speaker *can’t* rule out.

All this might seem abstruse and implausible. But it is, in fact, supported by the following rather mundane reflections. Concession clauses are really just possibility statements—in the cases of concern to us here, they are statements to the effect that some state of affairs inconsistent with what is said to be known is possible. Now notice that, in everyday speech, “It’s possible that *q*” usually serves to (pragmatically) impart that the speaker *doesn’t* know that not-*q*, and doesn’t know that *q*. Here’s how this works: if you’re observing the Cooperative Principle and you (think you) know that not-*q* or that you know that *q*, then other things being equal you shouldn’t say (merely) “It’s possible that *q*.” For to do so would be to violate the maxim of Quantity—you’d be giving, and represent yourself as having, less information than you in fact (think you) do. (In terms of the submaxim, “Assert the stronger” (DeRose 1999), “I know that *q*” for example is ‘stronger’ than “It’s possible that *q*,” in that knowing that *q* entails *q*. So *ceteris paribus* if you take yourself to know that *q*, that is what you should assert.) Thus we come to see why “It’s possible that *q*,” for example, standardly conveys that the speaker *doesn’t* (take himself to) know that *q*; for if he did, he’d say (the stronger) “I know that *q*.”³⁰

It is only to be expected, then, that “I know that *p*, but it’s possible that *q*,” where *q* is either not-*p* itself or some proposition that entails not-*p*, should sound strange. For “it’s possible that *q*” standardly imparts, “I don’t know that not-*q*”; and since *q* (we’re supposing) entails not-*p*, “. . .but it’s possible that *q*” imparts that the speaker doesn’t know that not-not-*p*! So, in virtue of how the phrases involved standardly function, an utterance of “I know that *p*, but it’s possible that *q*” really *should* leave us perplexed. The sentence *sounds* inconsistent because anyone uttering it would seem to be contradicting himself. And *he* is! This is something the *speaker is doing in uttering* the CKA, however; the sentence itself is not self-contradictory. It really is hard, then—though not, I think, impossible—to imagine circumstances in which we’d have no trouble understanding the communicative intentions of one who uttered such a CKA. Then again, it’s hard to see why a speaker would *say* “I know that *p*, but....”: if there’s some *salient* not-*p* possibility which the speaker can’t rule out, we wouldn’t expect him to claim to know that *p*; for in doing so, as he well knows, he’d be communicating that he *can* rule out the salient not-*p* pos-

sibilities. So what, exactly, might he be trying to communicate? The answer is far from clear.

So much, for now, for the ‘queerness’ of first-person CKAs. What about the queerness of third-person CKAs? Obviously, the story here won’t be *exactly* the same there, as “*S* knows...” doesn’t have the special (intended) credal ‘oomph!’ of the first-person use, yet the first- and third-person cases are very similar. Thus, take, “They know that *p*, but perhaps....” Here, in saying that the subjects know that *p*, the speaker in virtue of the *meaning* of “knows”—rather than, as in the first-person case, in virtue of his using “know(s)” instead of merely asserting that *p*—commits himself as to *p*. Then, just as in the first-person case, due to the standard illocutionary function of possibility statements, the concession clause conveys some uncertainty as to *p*. Hence the queerness of third-person concessive knowledge attributions. (Cf. Essay 4 of Austin 1979, especially p. 98.)

In addition to its being supported, in the manner just outlined, by reflections on how certain phrases typically function in everyday speech, one of the *advantages* of the present account is that it enables us to see what’s right, and what’s wrong, in David Lewis’ recent remarks about why “it seems as if knowledge must by definition be infallible” (1996, p. 549):

If you claim that *S* knows that *P*, and yet you grant that *S* cannot eliminate a certain possibility in which not-*P*, it certainly seems as if you have granted that *S* does not after all know that *P*. To speak of fallible knowledge, of knowledge despite uneliminated possibilities of error, just *sounds* contradictory. (*Ibid.*)³¹

Agreed. On the present account, for instance, since the non-salient possibilities are by definition not under consideration, an utterance of “*S* knows that *p*” will impart that *the* not-*p* possibilities can be eliminated. So, yes, “overt, explicit” fallibilism—“*S* knows that *p*, but *S* can’t eliminate certain not-*p* possibilities”—does sound “wrong” (*ibid.*, p. 550). But it hardly follows that “knowledge is, by definition, infallible knowledge” (*ibid.*, p. 566). For while to *speak* of fallible knowledge sounds contradictory, that is simply because such talk consists in using CKAs. If the present sophisticated invariantist account is correct, however, then the puzzling character of CKAs derives, not from the sentences used in making such attributions, but from speakers’ *utterances* of such statements. The sentences themselves, I claim, make perfectly good semantic sense; the puzzling character of CKAs derives from the fact that a typical utterance of such a sentence will pragmatically impart contradictory information.

7. Uncomfortable Cancellations

We are told that, faced with the claim that some piece of information (*Q*) communicated by means of an utterance of a sentence (“*P*”) is pragmatically

imparted, rather than literally expressed, we can advert to Grice's cancellability test to see whether this is so. That is, we can see whether it is "admissible," in Grice's words (1989, p. 44), to say "*P*, but not *Q*." If not, then the allegedly pragmatically imparted information is in fact something that's literally expressed by "*P*." In a recent paper, Cohen claims that the sort of sophisticated invariantist view I have outlined here fails to pass this cancellability test. He writes:

As Grice notes...conversational implicatures are cancellable—simply by denying the implication. For example, if I say "Jones is an above-average soccer player," I conversationally implicate that Jones is not a great soccer player. But I can cancel the implication simply by saying, "Jones is an above-average soccer player—in fact he's a great player." But Sosa's alleged implicature [Sosa made the suggestion to Cohen that "I know..." implicates that there's no need for further investigation] is not so cancellable....it sounds inconsistent to say, "We know, but we need to investigate further." This suggests that the implication is semantic. (Cohen 1999, p. 60)

Here we should note, first of all, that it is not obvious that the implicatures³² I've posited here are incapable of being cancelled without discomfort. On the present account, an utterance of "*S* knows that *p*" standardly functions to impart that the subject can rule out all the salient not-*p* alternatives—hence, *the* not-*p* alternatives (see previous section). And an attempt at cancellation—e.g., "I know that *p*, but of course I cannot rule out the *bizarre* alternatives to *p*"—will strike some (including the present author) as entirely comfortable. Of course, others (including Cohen) are liable to disagree. (Just as, as Cohen reports (1999, p. 83, note 6), Sosa believes that "I know that *p*, but I need to investigate further" makes sense. Such are the limits, it would seem, to how much intuitions can help us here.) But notice the more fundamental assumption that Cohen is making here: that all implicatures are going to be cancellable without 'discomfort'; hence, that if it "sounds inconsistent" to say "*P*, but not *Q*," *P* (semantically) *implies* *Q*. Is that right? Obviously Grice's "admissible" won't help us here; for we're not told what that amounts to. Nor, of course, will it help to be told that we ought to be able to cancel an implicature without semantic contradiction. For we're using cancellability as a *test* of whether *Q* is part of (/entailed by) the semantic content of *P*.

But I think that Grice himself anticipated just this difficulty; for he admitted that at least *some* cancellations are going to be "uncomfortable" (see Grice 1989, p. 46). And, in fact, this is just what we should expect. For in addition to obvious semantic inconsistency (of the sort exhibited by "Sam's a bachelor, but he's not a male"), there is a different sort of 'inconsistency' to which an attempted cancellation of an alleged implicature can give rise. Consider, for example, "They fell in love and got married, but not in that order." Here, there's no *semantic* incoherence. Yet *the speaker's uttering this sentence* exhib-

its what we might call *speaker inconsistency*: “they fell in love and got married” conveys that the latter event happened *after* the former one; and given that this is a nearly universal feature of this use of “and,” the speaker ought to know this. But clearly he does not—either that, or he’s being precious. For the conveyed ordering of the events in question—but *not* the sentence itself—is inconsistent with “but not in that order.” What is impugned by the speaker’s uttering this sentence, then, is not the consistency of the sentence itself, nor even the speaker’s linguistic competence narrowly conceived, but rather his *general communicative rationality* (Bach 1999). In uttering this sentence, the speaker is *conveying* inconsistent information, and (we think) he ought to know better. In the absence of a description of the appropriate sort of conversational setting, it’s difficult (at best) to see what he’s trying to ‘get across’ in saying what he does.³³

What is it about this case, exactly, that makes it uncomfortable in a way in which Cohen’s example (“Jones is an above-average soccer player—in fact, he’s a great soccer player”) is not? Here’s the diagnosis: Cohen has selected as an example of the unproblematic cancellation of an implicature an instance of what is called ‘scalar implicature’, and it is questionable just how frequently such implicatures arise (see Green 1998, p. 75, including his note 34). (Imagine, e.g., that it’s Pele I’m referring to rather than humble old Jones, or that the other soccer coach and I are sorting our players into two groups, ‘below-average’ and ‘above-average’.³⁴) By contrast, when “and” is used to conjoin mentioned events, the relevant implicature—viz., a temporal ordering which mirrors the lexical one—is nearly universal. *That*, I submit, is why the implicature in question can be only uncomfortably cancelled.

As a general rule, then, we might say that, the more universal the implicature, the less likely it is that it can be cancelled without ‘discomfort’. Nor is this at all surprising. For it is generally allowed, as I claimed in Section 3, that speakers aren’t very good at—or, as I’d prefer to put it, don’t much care about—distinguishing between what *they mean in uttering* certain sentences and what *the sentences they utter* mean; they’re not very good at (/don’t much care about) distinguishing between what’s *pragmatically conveyed* by their uttering certain sentences, and what the sentences they utter *literally express*. (Hence, for example, the fact that “Moore’s paradox” is regarded a *paradox*, rather than as a harmless by-product of the mundane fact that sincere assertions are expressions of belief (see Williams 1998).) And where uttering a particular word/phrase *nearly universally* imparts some further information, *Q*, it is going to be especially easy for speakers to read *Q* into the word/phrase itself. So, for example, if I am right in claiming that knowledge attributions nearly universally impart that the subject can rule out the salient alternatives, we should *expect* that attempts to cancel what’s pragmatically imparted will be quite ‘uncomfortable’ indeed: when implicatures of a nearly universal sort are present, cancellations are bound to sound a lot like seman-

tic confusions, and speaker inconsistency is apt to be mistaken for linguistic incompetence.³⁵

Of course, even if it's granted that some implicatures are harder to cancel than others, the contextualist will likely *deny* that concessive knowledge attributions (CKAs) really exhibit what I've called *speaker* inconsistency. All that's been shown is that, if the inconsistency is pragmatic, the sophisticated invariantist shouldn't be especially troubled by that. But notice that if the inconsistency of CKAs *were* semantic, we should expect it to be preserved when we simply change the precedence. Thus, for example, "*S* isn't a male, but *S* is a bachelor" is just as confused as "*S* is a bachelor, but *S* isn't a male." But now compare: "It's *possible* that the bank'll be closed tomorrow, but I *know* it will be open" or (lest it be thought that I am trading on a confusion between the epistemic and non-epistemic 'senses' of "possible"), "It's *possible*, for all I know, that the bank'll be closed tomorrow; but I *know* it *will* be open"—does this sound anywhere as 'queer' as the original, unreversed claim? I, and those I've talked to about such statements, think it does not. And I'm fairly confident that when the reader now considers again, "I know that *p*, but it's possible that not-*p*," "I know that *p*, though there are some *bizarre* not-*p* alternatives that I can't rule out," or "I know that *p*, but I can't rule out absolutely *all* the ways in which it could turn out to be not-*p*," she will be less inclined to regard the *unreversed* CKAs as semantically confused than she previously might have been.

The same point can be made with regard to third-person CKAs: "I suppose there are some *bizarre* ways it could turn out that not-*p*, but it would be crazy to deny that they know that *p*," or "It's of course *possible* (for all I know) that they're wrong, but they *know* that *p*," e.g., sound a lot less 'paradoxical' than their unreversed counterparts. Here, as in first-person case, *what the speaker is doing*—presenting information in a particular order, using stress selectively, etc.—tips us off to how to make sense of what he's trying to communicate. And that we're able to make sense of the speaker's communicative intentions in such a case shows that the queerness wasn't semantic in the first place. To drive this point home, consider again Sosa's suggestion that "*S* knows that *p*" typically conveys that there's no need for investigation. And now consider, "They know that *p*, but they need to investigate further." Here's one way in which to see that this sentence isn't semantically confused: suppose that those to whom the speaker is referring *do* know that *p*; yet, if the stakes are very high (as in DeRose's Bank Case), it will be important for the subjects to have more than mere knowledge—they will need to be certain, to *know* that they know. And so they may need to investigate further.

Of course, this example only makes sense if we reject the idea that knowing requires knowing that one knows ('the kk principle'). But recall that the argument I'm addressing here is supposed to proceed *simply* from the fact that CKAs sound so 'funny', whereas the kk principle represents a substantive claim

about the nature of knowledge. Which, in itself, is unobjectionable; but now the debate concerns the nature of knowledge, rather than the queerness of CKAs *per se*.

Similarly, it may be objected that the arguments of the last page or so presupposes an overly-restrictive notion of semantics and/or of the semantically-relevant features of utterances. Thus, for example, it might be suggested that the use of stress in certain of the examples just given in fact alters the semantic content of the relevant sentences, or that contrary to what I suggest above, it is not a good test of whether the inconsistency of CKAs is pragmatic that it seems to disappear upon changing the precedence of the relevant clauses. For (to take the latter suggestion) the contextualist can claim that the very same contextual features that I've appealed to in explaining why a change in precedence can make a difference to what is conveyed, and hence to whether an utterance will be felicitous, can be used to explain why changing the order in which information is presented can make a *semantic* difference.³⁶ Fair enough. But if, in general, precedence (or stress) affects semantic content, the whole notion of linguistic meaning, of what words mean independently of how they are used on particular occasions, is imperiled—which, in addition to being problematic in its own right, would seem to *trivialize* contextualism about specifically *epistemic* terms. And if not all changes in precedence have such an effect, we're owed an account of which ones do and why. Moreover, considerations of theoretical economy come to the fore here: if the contextualist and sophisticated invariantist appeal to the same sorts of considerations in accounting for the relevant data, neutrally described—why (at least) some changes in precedence (or stress) seem to 'matter', say—yet the former can accomplish this without a detour through the actual meanings of terms, then this last begins to look gratuitous. (Here, I anticipate the discussion of Section 10, below.) Finally, insofar as we are concerned with the question of which is the *better* way of accounting for the queerness of CKAs, the contextualist's or the sophisticated invariantist's, it cannot be that we are taking that queerness itself as favoring the contextualist.

8. A Sophisticated Invariantist Resolution of SA

Recall that while DeRose thinks that in general knowledge requires sensitive belief, he doesn't take this to be an exceptionless requirement: for any contingent proposition, *p*, there are many, many not-*p* worlds; and it's implausible to think that knowing that *p* requires not believing that *p* even in the most 'distant' of these (cf. DeRose 1995, p. 34). Still, DeRose thinks, this requirement is sufficiently inflexible, and my belief that I'm not a BIV is sufficiently insensitive, that P1 is *bound* to be true any time it is asserted: even in the *closest* world in which I'm a BIV, I'd still believe that I wasn't. So even though we're all certain that we're not BIVs—not even the sceptic denies *that*—it looks like, as soon as P1 is asserted, we must accept it as true.

On the RA view I sketched in Section 5, however, what we all believe is what fixes the bounds of what's relevant. So even though my being a BIV is sometimes going to be *salient*—for instance, when I'm considering SA—that I can eliminate this possibility cannot be part of the meaning of the relevant knowledge-attributing sentence. Putting it another way, the RA theory—and, in particular, the determinant of relevance—which I favor requires that one's belief that *p* be sensitive only in all 'normal' worlds (Goldman 1986, p. 107)—that is, those not-*p* worlds which conform to our (i.e., normal humans') beliefs about what the likely *this-worldly* not-*p* alternatives are. (If you can't rule out these alternatives, then you don't know that *p*.) But as we're all certain that we're not envatted, there's *no* normal world in which I'm a BIV. So the insensitivity of my belief that I'm not a BIV is no barrier to P1's being false.

Nonetheless, when we're considering SA, that I *am* a BIV is bound to be *salient*—this is, after all, precisely the possibility introduced by P1. But if this is right, then the following proposition is bound to be what's imparted by a *denial* of P1:

(3) I can rule out the possibility that I'm a BIV.

And most of us would want to say that (3) is *false: by hypothesis*, I'd be having all the same experiences I presently am if I were a BIV; so I've no way of telling that I'm not a BIV. Thus, though a denial of P1 would be true on my account, DeRose is right in thinking that any attempt to deny P1 is "destined to produce falsehood" (DeRose 1995, p. 40). But this isn't because any denial of P1 will *itself* be false; rather, it's because "I know I'm not a BIV" will *impart* something false—viz., (3). And those who are considering the BIV hypothesis *know* this; they know this just as surely, and just as tacitly, as they know that "I have six siblings" imparts that one has six *and only six* siblings, or that "Rex and Alicia got married" imparts that Rex and Alicia got married *to each other*. So what I say is, "I don't know I'm not a BIV" (=P1), whereby I communicate that I can't tell that I'm not a BIV. In brief, though I'm firmly convinced that I'm *not* a BIV, I deny knowledge of my nonenvatment so that I can communicate a highly salient truth.³⁷

So far, so good; let's take a look at the 'box score': Like the contextualist, I've offered a way of avoiding SA's unpalatable conclusion (I recommend that we deny P1). Like the contextualist, I've offered an account of why, nonetheless, P1 seems so clearly to be "the right thing to say." And unlike the contextualist, I haven't had to say that we are confused about what our own communicative intentions/thoughts are—that we *mistakenly* (though, we're told, understandably) think that what we mean when we claim to know various things conflicts with what the sceptic means in stating his view.³⁸

Nor have I had to adopt Schiffer's line, according to which there is an "implicit incoherence in our concept of knowledge" (Schiffer 1996, p. 333). As Schiffer sees it, though EC and my knowing that I have hands suggest that

I know that I'm not a BIV, there's a contrary strand in our concept of knowledge whereby I *shouldn't* count myself as knowing I'm not a BIV. (Hence SA's puzzling character, according to Schiffer.) I, by contrast, have located the tension we experience when we are considering SA as deriving from the 'tension' between the proposition I would express in saying "I know I'm not a BIV" and the proposition I would pragmatically impart thereby: namely, (3). Faced with SA, I want to endorse the former proposition, which I rightly regard as true; but I cannot do so, it seems, without endorsing (3) which I rightly regard as false. So I settle on P1 as "the right thing to say."

Nor, finally, have I had to adopt the Lewisian position according to which knowledge is "elusive." Briefly, the position developed in Lewis' (1996) is as follows:

Subject *S* knows proposition *P* iff *P* holds in every possibility left uneliminated by *S*'s evidence; equivalently, iff *S*'s evidence eliminates every possibility in which not-*P*. (Lewis 1996, p. 551)

What justifies Lewis' "equivalently" here? The (alleged) fact that "every" is restricted to a particular conversational domain (*ibid.*, pp. 553–554). Thus, Lewis thinks, certain not-*p* possibilities will be "properly ignored" in any given situation—they won't be within the scope of the second "every" in the passage just quoted. Now, with this quick sketch of Lewis' view before us, we can see why he thinks that knowledge disappears as soon as we do epistemology—or, more to the point, as soon as we consider SA, for example. For epistemology, by Lewis' lights, *just is* the study of the ignoring of possibilities; but then to study knowledge—to ask, for example, whether we know that we're not BIVs—is *ipso facto* not to ignore the salient possibilities. "That," Lewis thinks, "is how knowledge is elusive. Examine it, and straight-way it vanishes" (*ibid.*, p. 560).

Here again, as with the argument for the incoherence of fallibilism which Lewis describes (see Section 6, above), the present account enables us to avoid the unattractive result while nonetheless accommodating the phenomenon in question. What Lewis has put his finger on is this: when we consider an epistemic situation and pose the question of whether the subject knows that *p*, we will *ipso facto* be raising a doubt—making it an open question—whether *S* knows that *p*. This will have the result that any subsequent claim that *S* does know that *p* will communicate the proposition that *S*'s epistemic position with respect to *p* is good enough that the alleged doubt doesn't present an obstacle to *S*'s knowing that *p* and thus that *S* can 'rule it out'. But if, by hypothesis, the doubt in question is being regarded as genuine—i.e., as being such as to raise the question of whether *S* knows that *p*—the proposition thus communicated is always going to ring false. (Thus, in terms of SA: it's always going to 'feel wrong' to say, "I know I'm not a BIV.") If this is right, then it is not that knowledge is destroyed by, and therefore eludes, the epistemolo-

gist. Rather, insofar as doing epistemology “destroys” anything, it destroys the conditions for an unproblematic and felicitous assertion of “*S* knows that *p*.” So we might amend Lewis’ claim to: examine knowledge, call it in doubt, and straight-away it will be improper to claim or attribute it outright; for to do so will be to impart that one *isn’t* calling anything in doubt and so *isn’t* doing epistemology.

Similarly, just because “I know...” standardly serves to counter doubts and to convey that one can rule out the salient not-*p* alternatives, we have a way of accounting for why certain knowledge claims seem in fact to *induce* sceptical worries. For where there *are no* salient not-*p* alternatives—when, say, I’m looking right at my own hands—there will seem to be no purpose the knowledge claim could be serving. (Cf. Moore’s “I *know* that I have hands, that the earth has existed for many years past, that there are minds other than my own....”) Yet, precisely because it is known (however tacitly) that first-person attributions function to counter doubts, “I know that I have hands” induces the thought that there *is* a salient not-*p* alternative; and if, in what *appear* to be perfectly normal circumstances, there is a doubt as to whether the speaker has hands, what’s it going to take to establish that we *know* that this is so? (Cf. Searle 1969, pp. 149–150). Hence Wittgenstein’s saying, “When one hears Moore say, ‘I *know* that that’s a [hand]’, one suddenly understands those who think that that has by no means been settled” (Wittgenstein 1969, para. 481).

Now, as I noted at the beginning of Section 5, some are bound to find the particular approach to the semantics of “know(s)” I’ve outlined here problematic. Of course, it bears emphasizing that even if the particular sophisticated invariantist view I defend here proves ultimately to be unsatisfactory, in itself that would not discredit sophisticated invariantism as a general approach: the neutral framework laid out earlier is capable of being differently elaborated by anyone wishing to do so.³⁹ Lest it be rejected too quickly, however, let me pause to very briefly consider a pair of likely objections to the view I’ve advanced here—and, in particular, to my invoking the device of normal worlds. For they seem to me to highlight what might actually be certain *desirable* features of the present approach.⁴⁰

The objections I have in mind are as follows: first, that the appeal to ‘normal worlds’ fails to give us the right results in worlds in which subjects’ general beliefs about their world are in fact false (in such unusual worlds, a particular belief of *S*’s may actually be true, and *S* may be able to distinguish her world from the *normal* worlds, which as it happens may be just what *our* general beliefs select as the normal worlds; but since her normal-world beliefs are in fact false it seems wrong to say that she has knowledge); and second, that the present account makes it far too easy to have knowledge, as it suggests that a subject can know she’s not a BIV simply because she believes (truly) that she isn’t and the vast majority of people believe it as well.

Both of these objections, note, are based on the thought that on the present account true belief plus an ability to rule out the relevant alternatives suffices

for knowledge. But I have stopped short of making that claim: here, I have focused on that aspect of the concept of knowledge (*viz.*, the requirement of the possession of certain discriminative capacities) which, it seems to me, is of particular relevance in addressing the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions; but, strictly speaking, for all that's been said here there may be further requirements on knowledge.⁴¹ Setting that aside, however, notice that even if the present view has the consequence alleged in the first objection, that can be counted as establishing a *weakness* of the view only if we think that a viable epistemology is one which works in all possible worlds, but it's hardly obvious that this is right. Moreover, if our very general beliefs about the world turn out to be false—as they do in the case of the imagined subject, above—it is arguable that all bets *should* be off with regard to the reliability of most of our concepts, epistemic and otherwise.

Similarly, even if the position being advanced here implies the existence of 'empty knowledge' (as the second objection has it), it is not clear that this is an unattractive feature of the view. For even if the present account has the consequence that certain true beliefs count as knowledge, this will be true only of cases in which there are no relevant alternatives to what's believed, and that will be so only in a very small minority of cases. Further, remember that I am trying to describe here the contours of our actual concept of knowledge, and most ordinary people, if asked how they know that a sceptical hypothesis is false, are apt to respond with "I just *know*" (or something similar), which is just what my account predicts. Of course, such a response isn't liable to satisfy a party to a philosophical discussion of the problem of scepticism. But then, one of the central points I'm trying to establish here is that in such discussions it is easy to be led away from being concerned merely with knowledge *per se*. Let me return to that argument.

9. So Why is P1 So Plausible? (Pragmatics and Beyond)

While I've spent the last few sections extolling the virtues of my proposed sophisticated invariantist account and anticipating some possible concerns about it, there do remain a number of obvious objections to it. Most obvious, perhaps, is this: none of the foregoing helps to explain why anyone would find P1 *plausible*. At most, the foregoing explains why folks would *say*, "I don't know I'm not a BIV." How the sophisticated invariantist gets from people saying P1 to their believing it is by reference to the fact (noted in Sections 3 and 7, above) that speakers aren't very good at distinguishing between what they mean and the meanings of the sentences they utter in attempting to fulfil their communicative intentions. Once again, this gives the sophisticated invariantist an account of how it can come about that people not only *won't say* that *p*, but how they come to *believe* that *p* is false; in particular, it explains how we might come to accept P1, often 'in spite of ourselves'. Previously, we saw that (not-P1) "I know that I'm not a BIV" will impart (3), "I can rule out the

possibility that I'm a BIV." But if it's true that speakers often confound the proposition expressed with the proposition imparted, then the presumed falsity of (3) *does* help to explain why people *believe* that P1 is true. (3) is plainly false (we think), (3) and not-P1 are confounded, so it seems that P1 must be true, however firmly convinced I am that I'm *not* a BIV. Hence my settling on, and *believing*, "I (guess I) *don't* know that I'm not a BIV."⁴²

Notice too that our discussion of concessive knowledge attributions in Sections 6 and 7, above, enables us to understand why the very thought(s) imparted by an utterance of the *following* sentence will strike the hearer as confused:

(4) "I know that I'm not a BIV, I just can't tell that I'm not."

(4) itself involves no *semantic* paradox; but an utterance of it will impart incompatible propositions: anyone who utters it will be naturally taken to be communicating both that she can rule out the possibility that she's a BIV, *and* that this *isn't* so.⁴³ So (4) is just the epistemic counterpart, so to speak, of the Moore paradox,

(5) "*p*, but I don't believe that *p*";

and the result of folks' confounding the proposition expressed and the proposition(s) imparted is the same as in the case of (5): the *very thought* that I might know that I'm not a BIV even though I can't tell that I'm not will seem crazy, bizarre, and in the end false.⁴⁴

Now, while I think that the foregoing account of P1's plausibility is correct as far as it goes, I doubt that it's the whole story. For while this account might apply to naive speakers confronting the hypothesis that they are BIVs for the first time, it has the consequence that no one who is both cognizant of the relevant distinctions—between salience and relevance, between speaker meaning and linguistic meaning, between what is pragmatically imparted and what is semantically expressed—and adept at applying them is going to believe that P1 is true. But I don't want to claim this. Unlike the contextualist, I don't mean to provide a unitary diagnosis of the allure of sceptical arguments. And, in fact, I think that there's another principal reason why people are led not merely to say what P1 says, but to believe it more or less whole-heartedly.

Begin by recalling that there seems to be *some* sort of close relation between knowledge and discriminative capacities. As McGinn puts it, it's an "intuitively correct principle" that "one can *know* that P only if one can *tell whether* P" (McGinn 1984, p. 543). Notice, however, that it's only on a quite particular reading of "being able to tell" that we get the result that I can't tell whether I'm a BIV. Thus, e.g., I *can* tell that I'm not a BIV at least in *this* sense: if I know that I have hands, then, by the principle of epistemic closure,⁴⁵ I know that I'm not a BIV (BIVs are handless). Or, less provocatively: *if* I am able to discriminate between having hands and being handless, since BIVs are hand-

less, I can in this way discriminate—albeit only ‘indirectly’, perhaps—between being a BIV and not being a BIV. Of course, the sceptic denies that I know that I have hands; but that’s supposed to be the *conclusion* of SA, and not part of an argument for why *PI* is true. Similarly, I might not *know* that I know that I have hands—I haven’t eliminated the possibility that I’m mistaken. But so long as I’m *not*, in fact, a BIV (and so have hands), then I can deduce from known premises that I’m not a BIV. And why shouldn’t this count as at least *a* sense in which I’m “able to tell” that I’m not?

Now, I don’t deny that the reaction of almost everybody to the possibility that we are BIVs is to say that we *can’t* “tell” whether we are. But, even setting aside how far it may be the product of the sort of pragmatic phenomena described above, this verdict is encouraged by the fact that the BIV hypothesis itself invites us to think of ‘the ability to tell’ (and so of the discriminative capacities required for knowledge) in a quite particular way—it invites us to think that knowledge requires what I’ll call ‘*Cartesian telling*’. Thus, it’s usually said that I can’t tell, and so don’t know, whether I’m a BIV *just because* whether I’m a BIV is “*first-person undecidable*” (Wright 1991, p. 101; italics added): by hypothesis, all of my ‘experiences’, the whole of my phenomenal life, would be exactly as it is were this hypothesis true. (This is why the sort of ‘*indirect telling*’ described in the previous paragraph seems objectionable.) But if it’s this ‘phenomenological equivalence’ which is supposed to render me unable to tell that I’m not a BIV, it must be that what’s wanted is a ‘way of telling’ that would work in *all* the not-*p* worlds (including worlds in which I am, in fact, a BIV) (cf. Williams 1991, p. 327). What’s wanted is, in Descartes’ words, some “*certain indications*” (Haldane and Ross 1931, Vol. I, p. 146) or “*certain signs*” (Anscombe and Geach 1954, p. 62) by which one may clearly distinguish envatment from non-envatment.

Thus, we come to see that the thought that knowledge requires *Cartesian telling* is really the thought that you don’t know that *p* unless *your experience itself* is such that it is incompatible with, is logically decisive against (*logically* “rules out”), not-*p*. But then to insist that knowing requires Cartesian telling is really to embrace the idea that knowledge must be *infallible*: if it’s possible that your belief that *p* is false, then you don’t know that *p*. This, of course, conflicts with the view of knowledge I’ve sketched here. (For on that view, one can tell whether *p*—in the sense that’s required for knowing that *p*—just in case one’s belief that *p* is sensitive in all the *normal* not-*p* worlds.) More to the point, however, it has the immediate consequence that knowledge is all but impossible. For instance, if knowledge requires Cartesian telling, then I don’t—indeed, I *can’t*—know that I have hands; for all of the relevant experiences—my seeming to see hands at the ends of what appear to be my arms, my seeming to be able to wiggle my fingers, my seeming ability to grasp objects, etc.—are all (logically) compatible with my not, in fact, having hands. But this just means that to insist that knowledge requires Cartesian telling *just is* to embrace a distinctively *sceptical* requirement upon knowledge: you don’t know if it’s possible that you’re mistaken.

Not that insisting upon such a requirement isn't perfectly 'intuitive' and natural—it *is* (at least when we're considering sceptical possibilities): getting someone to 'appreciate' a sceptical possibility such as the BIV hypothesis *just is* getting them to appreciate the fact that whether it's true is "first-person undecidable." What's more, if we are posing to ourselves the question of whether we know we're not BIVs, since our envatment (or not) is precisely what's at issue, to answer this question in the affirmative with the sort of assurance which the situation demands, it seems it won't suffice merely for us to know it (supposing that we do): we will need to *know* that we know it. And *that*, arguably, is precisely what Cartesian telling is all about (cf. Alston 1980): for if one can tell Cartesianly whether *p*, since one's experience itself is such as to present one with a logical guarantee that *p*, to be able to tell Cartesianly that *p* is to *know* that you can tell that *p*; hence, to know that *p* is to *know* that you know that *p*. So, even setting aside considerations of the influence of pragmatic factors on our thinking, it is hardly surprising that we should confuse knowledge with Cartesian knowledge, and (however unwittingly) take Cartesian telling to be a requirement on knowing. But, as we've seen, to accept that requirement is already to give the sceptic everything he needs.

10. Economy and Error

We have before us two accounts of what, exactly, the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions consists in. There are, as I see it, two general considerations which tell in favor of the sophisticated invariantist view I've outlined here. The first of these has to do with theoretical economy, the second has to do with the type of error the contextualist and I attribute to ordinary speakers of English. Let me indicate briefly why, on both these counts, the view presented here is superior to contextualism.

I do not claim that Grice's "Modified Occam's Razor" (MOR)—"*Senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity*" (Grice 1989, p. 47)—itself cuts against the contextualist's view. After all, the contextualist can say, that view no more 'multiplies senses' than does claiming that "that" is an indexical (cf. Recanati 1994). (Remember that Grice himself invoked MOR in criticizing the positing of lexical *ambiguities*.) Nonetheless, in saying that the *truth-conditions* of knowledge-attributing sentences depend on context, the contextualist introduces complexity where the invariantist does not. How so? Well, I have tried to accommodate all the relevant data—that what we're prepared to say, and what we think it's "correct" to say, shift with context; that SA does present a genuine puzzle; that concessive knowledge attributions are queer-sounding, and so on—*by making use of theoretical tools which we've already got on hand*. Thus, I take a simple semantics for "know(s)," a distinction between what's literally expressed by a sentence and what the speaker conveys in uttering it, some (I think) quite plausible Grice-like claims about how knowledge attributions and possibility statements standardly function in our everyday talk, and the pretty uncontroversial claim that speakers tend to conflate what they mean

with what their words mean; given these homely tools, I can explain what's going on in the sorts of cases that inspire the contextualist without, in addition, having to say that knowledge-attributing sentences have context-sensitive contents. The contextualist's positing this last seems to me, therefore, to involve a needless sacrificing of economy.

Now, Unger (1984) has presented a general argument purporting to show that, contrary to what I've just claimed, considerations of economy do not tell between contextualism and invariantism: according to Unger, the two views are equally complex—they just distribute the complexity differently. Thus, as Unger would put it, the complexity which the contextualist packs into the semantics of knowledge-attributing sentences is simply packed by me into the pragmatics of knowledge attributions. Or, a bit more precisely, the contextualist has a complex semantics but a straightforward psychology for language-users, whereas I have the reverse: the invariantist semantics is, of course, nice and simple; but there's a *lot* going on, psychologically speaking, in our making and understanding knowledge attributions. So, Unger thinks, the choice between the two views is arbitrary.

On closer examination, however, it's far from clear that Unger's argument is sound. For Unger assumes that a complex contextualist semantics will obviate the need for a complex psychological story; and that is doubtful. For starters, it seems that *simply in virtue of his conception of context*, the contextualist is committed to having a fairly complex psychological story: for context, at least as DeRose and Cohen conceive of it, *just is* some set of situation-relative facts about the psychology of the attributor [see note 2]. Moreover, given that what's at issue here is the complexity of one's preferred theory of linguistic communication (and not merely one's preferred semantic approach), the contextualist is going to require a fairly complex psychology for *hearers* as well. For as shifts in context (i.e., speaker psychology) bring about shifts in the truth-conditions of the sentences in question, the hearer is going to have to construct and constantly revise 'on the fly' his psychological profile of the speaker if he is to understand what it is the speaker is communicating. But this is just to say that, in addition to a complex semantics, the contextualist is going to require a psychology of comparable complexity to anything the sophisticated invariantist might posit. So here is how I think things actually stand: both the contextualist and the invariantist are committed to a fairly complex psychology; it's just that the invariantist claims that, properly understood, this complex psychology obviates the need for a complex semantics as well. Thus, so long as we aren't simply sceptics about pragmatics in general (and to the best of my knowledge neither Cohen nor DeRose, e.g., is), the question is simply this: can we give a plausible account of the phenomena in pragmatic terms, or do we need to 'go semantic' in order to accommodate the data? In my view, going semantic in accounting for the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions is simply gratuitous.

But, of course, I've also argued against the plausibility of the error theory to which the contextualist is committed. Granted, I've got an error theory of

my own—I think that speakers tend to read their communicative intentions onto the sentences (words) they utter; in this way, they can be wrong about what the literal meanings of those sentences (words) are. But I think that this account of where the folk (including ourselves, most of the time) go wrong has a great deal of antecedent plausibility, and a *lot* more plausibility than the claim that we are deeply, perhaps irretrievably, wrong about what our communicative intentions are. Yet the contextualist needs to say just that: first, because the psychology of the attributor is what determines the truth-conditions of knowledge sentences—if you don't know what the latter are, you must be in the dark as to what the former is; and second, because saying that we're mistaken *merely* about what those truth conditions are (since they have context-sensitive contents) doesn't explain why even those who understand this diagnosis would persist in thinking that scepticism conflicts with common sense.

11. Conclusion

There is no denying that epistemologists ought to “take context into account.” Nor should we dispute the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions. As for the idea that context plays an interesting role in determining the truth conditions of knowledge-attributing sentences, however, *that* is something which we need hardly accept. In my view, if traditional, noncontextualist epistemology suffers from some form of naïveté, it's not an obliviousness to the supposed context-sensitivity of key epistemic terms, but rather a failure to appreciate how far our epistemic discourse, like the rest of our talk, is more than a merely semantic endeavor. Yet it's only if we labor under this same misunderstanding that we'll look at this discourse and seem to find there any support for contextualism.

Or so I've claimed. Of course, as with any philosophical tool, it's possible to over-use the 'move' of recommending a pragmatic treatment of certain (psycho-)linguistic data. But this is no less true of the practice of seeking specifically semantic explanations of various phenomena. The question really is one of deciding which account of the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions, the contextualist's or the sophisticated invariantist's, is favored by the balance of considerations.⁴⁶ What I've tried to do here is show just how much a suitably sophisticated invariantist account can do.⁴⁷

Notes

¹There are a number of similar examples in the literature. See, e.g., Cohen's case of Mary, John, and the plane (1999), Dretske's zoo case (1970), Lewis' “the cat is in the carton” (1979), and Castañeda's Columbus example (1980).

²Both Cohen and DeRose conceive of context in terms of certain ‘attributor factors’. As Cohen (1999, p. 57) puts it, “...when I say ‘contexts’, I mean ‘contexts of ascription’. So the truth-value of a sentence containing the knowledge predicate can vary depending on things like the purposes, intentions, expectations, presuppositions, etc., of the speakers who utter these sentences.” (Cf. DeRose 1999, pp. 187–188.)

³To the best of my knowledge, while contextualism was not entirely new with him, Annis (1978) introduced the label. (For those who are interested, in his 1999 DeRose presents “A Brief History of Contextualism.”)

⁴“Invariantism” and its cognates are due to Unger (1984). One is an invariantist (with respect to a given class of statements) just in case one rejects contextualism (with respect to statements of that class).

⁵Building on some of his earlier writings, Unger (1984) sketches (but does not endorse) a sceptical invariantism which would account for why we attribute knowledge the way we do even though just about all such attributions are literally false. Though I think this claim needs some refinement (see Section 10, below), I agree with the contextualist that we ought as far as possible to preserve the truth of our everyday knowledge attributions (cf., e.g., DeRose 1992, p. 924). Thus, I want to explore here the prospects for a nonsceptical invariantism. In my view, it’s the only variety of invariantism worth wanting. (Cf. Cohen 1999, p. 83, and DeRose 1999, p. 202.)

⁶For example: “...If these sorts of psychological details could be filled in, we would then have a theory of ‘relevant alternatives’ that ought to satisfy those who find this notion occult or ad hoc. Would it be a theory that should be inserted into the definition, or the semantics, of ‘know’? I am inclined to think not; better to construe it as part of the ‘pragmatics’ of ‘know’” (Goldman 1989, p. 148); “A growing number of philosophers are able to find, or so they claim, a pragmatic, social, or communal dimension to knowledge. A variety of examples indicate, or seem to these philosophers to indicate, [that this is so]. I, personally, happen to think that most of these examples show nothing of the kind. These factors affect, not *whether* something is known, but whether it is reasonable to *say* you know or to *think* you know. But, for the moment, I do not want to argue the point” (Dretske 1981, p. 367).

⁷Cohen (1999, p. 78), e.g., writes that many “resist [the contextualist] thesis—some fiercely. Moreover, those who do accept the thesis, generally do so only as a result of being convinced by philosophical reflection.”

⁸In addition to providing a very helpful discussion (to which I’m indebted) of how exactly his and DeRose’s brands of contextualism differ, in his (1999) Cohen argues that DeRose’s brand faces problems which Cohen’s does not. I’ll leave it to others to decide which version of contextualism is the best; here, I want to suggest reasons for thinking that no version can really be correct.

⁹Castañeda too endorses an ‘indexicalist’ treatment of “knows”: see his 1980.

¹⁰See Reimer 1996 for a response to Schiffer along roughly these lines.

¹¹Though this isn’t quite the intended moral of Gibbs and Moise’s 1997, it gains a good deal of empirical support from the results of their experiments.

¹²Similarly for the example Cohen gives in his 1999, Section XII.1: though some disagreements over whether an object is flat are in fact only apparent, speakers can believe that such a disagreement is real. However, once they realize that an apparent disagreement over whether *x* is flat turns on their employing different standards of flatness, they lose interest in the ‘argument’; for they immediately see that there *is no* disagreement after all. In his 1999, Hofweber points out further respects in which the context-sensitivity which the contextualist needs to posit is fundamentally unlike other recognized cases thereof.

¹³Of course, the contextualist could say that this is simply because we are not taking his view ‘seriously enough’—if we did, then the apparently puzzling character of SA would evaporate. But this gets things backwards: the question is, what reason do we have for thinking that contextualism is right? Surely not every failure to agree with a view is a failure to take it seriously.

¹⁴I return to the subject of error in Section 10, below.

¹⁵DeRose himself doesn’t cite the Bank Case as *evidence* for contextualism in his 1992—his argument for contextualism consists in his attempting to show, in his 1995, that (his brand of) contextualism is superior to alternative accounts of the phenomena in question. Cohen, however, at times talks about the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions as though it in itself favored contextualism over invariantism—see, e.g., his (1999) remarks about the example of Mary and John. And surely many react similarly to such examples.

¹⁶Since the loose sense of “says” is simply the intuitive use, we shouldn’t expect to be able to define it very precisely; and the somewhat rough, intuitive notion is all the present discussion requires. Nonetheless, as Neale (1990, pp. 73–74) nicely illustrates, but as is hardly news, all sorts of information can be conveyed by a given utterance. So it should be added to the foregoing that when the speaker is plausibly regarded as having intended to convey multiple propositions, the loose use of “says” would appear to select the *first* proposition occurring to the hearer, in the interpretive process, which the speaker is plausibly regarded as having intended to convey. Thus, e.g., though “They fell in love and got married” may be uttered in order to convey (among other things) that theirs was a story-book wedding, this is not something that is said_{Loose}, since it is not the first proposition the speaker is plausibly regarded as having intended to convey; rather, his conveying this last presupposes his having said (loosely) that the people in question fell in love before they got married. (Here I am indebted to Recanati’s (1993) treatment of ‘what is said’.) Thus, though I regard what is said_{Loose} as informed by (presumed) facts about the speaker’s communicative intentions, I would not want to allow that loose saying is so loose as to encompass all of speaker meaning, much less everything implied or communicated by an utterance—that the speaker in Case A, e.g., speaks English; or, in Case B, that his wife has bested him again. (I am indebted here to an anonymous referee, as well as to Kent Bach, for prompting me to address my previous sloppiness on this point.)

¹⁷One could, of course, countenance the two uses of “says” described here yet deny that they reflect, as I claim, some difference between linguistic meaning and speaker meaning. And, in fact, I hardly take these distinctions to be simple equivalents (see the previous note). I do attempt here, in my positive arguments, to give the rough and intuitive says_{Strict}/says_{Loose} distinction a theoretical underpinning in terms of a semantic/pragmatic distinction, but whether this attempt is successful is separable from whether the former distinction is a genuine one.

¹⁸As one anonymous referee has pointed out, my replacing (1) with (1’) is not mandatory: one could hold that in Case A what the speaker says_{Strict} is *false*. Nonetheless, I am trying to develop here a *nonseptical* (sophisticated) invariantism: hence my favoring standards of knowledge which are, in most cases, meetably low; and hence my granting the speaker in Case A knowledge. One more sympathetic to scepticism—Unger (1986), say—than I might find this objectionable; but like DeRose and Cohen, for present purposes I am taking it to be a central goal to provide a plausible *alternative* to just such views (see note 5, above).

¹⁹And if shifts in speaker meaning suffice to render a term indexical, all words are going to end up being such. So if *that* is what it means to say that “knows” is an indexical, this claim is much, *much* less interesting than one would have thought.

²⁰I address the issue of theoretical economy in Section 10, below.

²¹While DeRose (1999, p. 187) reports that most epistemologists who have a view on the matter reject contextualism, with the exception of Schiffer’s 1996 and Hofweber’s 1999 there has been very little in the way of published critiques of the view. And there has been even less—virtually nothing, in fact—in the way of positive suggestions as to how we could accommodate the relevant data if we do reject the contextualist view.

²²Since relevance is ultimately a matter of speakers’ [plural] psychologies, *ultimately* the relevant alternatives will be a subset of all of the salient ones (i.e., of all those alternatives which various particular speakers do or would have in mind in using “know(s)”). In *particular* cases, however, this will be so only in the case of literal uses of the term (which, I claim, are the exception).

²³Compare Lewis (1979, 1996) on how the boundaries of the possibilities under consideration tend to shift—and, in particular, expand—in response to what the conversants have said. One difference between Lewis’ view and mine, of course, is that for Lewis the boundary marks the membership of the set of *relevant* alternatives, in my terms, whereas I think what shifts is the membership of the set of *salient* alternatives. (It is a failure to make this distinction which has, in my view, crippled previous RA theorists and theories.)

²⁴Or something along these lines. (What one says_{Loose} may be vague or indeterminate. This, after all, is the ‘intuitive’ sense of “says”; and we are, as we ordinarily use the term, sometimes hard-pressed to say *exactly* what someone has said.)

²⁵I am not claiming, nor does my argument require, that speaker meaning has no bearing upon linguistic meaning—I reject what Kaplan (1989, p. 602) calls “consumerist semantics.” In fact, I favor an “intention-based” approach to linguistic meaning, according to which an expression (in *L*) means what it does because of what speakers (of *L*) mean by it. (As Bach (1987) and Reimer (1998) have argued, standard use is not sufficient for literal use; but no matter—it may still be necessary.) All that the present argument requires is that a certain subjectivized version of this intention-based approach be false.

²⁶Bach (2000), p. 263, note 4: “[in such cases] 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 is apparently bypassed.”

²⁷This was pointed out to me by Kent Bach (correspondence); DeRose (1991, p. 597) credits Unger with making this point in connection with Moore’s paradox.

²⁸This has been noted, e.g., by Grice (1989, pp. 52–3) and Quine & Ullian (1978, p. 14); indeed, the pervasiveness of this use of “I know....” has led some to claim that that’s what it *means*. (Of course, those who argue thus are guilty of committing the “assertion” (Searle 1969) or “pragmatic” (Salmon 1991) fallacy, as can be seen from the fact that while “*S* knows that *p*” entails *p*, “*S* is very confident that *p*” does not.)

²⁹To say that first-person knowledge attributions standardly function to allay doubts is not, of course, to say that the relevant sentences (therefore) *mean/express* “there is no doubt,” “I guarantee that *p*,” “I’m certain that *p*” or some such thing. (Again: standard use is no guarantee of literal use.) It does, however, suggest that such sentences (though not any of their constituents) are used nonliterally. In such cases of standardized nonliterality, not only does the speaker not mean what the sentence he uses means, but the hearer (because such use is standardized) will pass immediately to what the speaker means (see Bach 1998). I am inclined to agree with Bach that such standardized nonliterality is much more prevalent than we generally realize. It is, in part, because they presume literalness of speech that I find Cohen’s “semantic considerations” in favor of contextualism unpersuasive (see his 1999, Section II).

³⁰It’s worth noting that DeRose himself looks favorably upon the position that “It’s possible that *p*” merely conveys “I don’t know that *p*” (see DeRose 1999, pp. 196–197). Curiously, however, he seems not to see that an exactly parallel argument establishes that the speaker’s not knowing that *not-p* isn’t part of the truth-conditions of such statements either (see his 1999 & 1991).

³¹Lewis himself seeks to steer a middle course between “the rock of fallibilism” and “the whirlpool of scepticism” (1996, pp. 550, 566). His view is that while an *assertion* of fallible knowledge is in fact self-contradictory and therefore false, this does not lead to scepticism as, unasserted, fallibilism is in fact true. Though Lewis thus endorses fallibilism (of a perhaps uneasy sort), I think that in accepting the former claim he has granted too much.

³²Or implicature-like phenomena. Because I wish to resist what Carston (1988, p. 176) has called “the compulsion to treat all pragmatically derived meaning as implicature,” I have here refrained from calling these implicatures, preferring to speak more neutrally in terms of information that is “(pragmatically) imparted” or “conveyed.” And, as indicated in notes 25 and 29 (above), I suspect that the phenomenon I am describing here might be better classed as an instance of standardized nonliterality (Bach 1987, pp. 77–85). Be that as it may, I (following Bach) take it that the inferences responsible for the phenomenon (while compressed by precedent and of the default variety [*ibid.*]) are capable of being worked out in the familiar Gricean way, and that *qua* information that is only pragmatically conveyed, it is subject to cancellation.

³³One anonymous referee reports finding “absolutely no discomfort” in the case of “They fell in love and got married, but not in that order.” But I suspect that this is due, at least in part, to the fact that we are here being confronted only with the *sentence itself* (which no one thinks is problematic) rather than with an actual utterance thereof (which would be what actually gives rise to the discomfort I allege). Thus, I am claiming that confronted with an actual utterance of the sentence, the hearer is liable to think (or say), “Well, then why did you present the information in that order? Are you trying to be clever?” I believe that absent further stage-setting—i.e., something such that the hearer won’t be liable to be puzzled by the speaker’s saying what he

does—there is a pragmatic inconsistency in uttering the sentence in question. (So too for an example given by Tsohatzidis: “Can you ask Bill to make less noise?—I don’t mean to suggest that I want you to actually ask Bill to make less noise; I simply want to know whether you have the ability to do so.” Tsohatzidis (1994, p. 370) claims that the speaker would thus have “without oddity” denied that he intended to have the person he addresses ask Bill to make less noise. Well, yes and no: the uttered sentence doesn’t exhibit any *semantic* oddity; but absent a fuller account of the conversational context, given what the speaker’s communicative intention *is*, it’s not easy to see why he undertakes to execute it in quite the way he does.)

Further, consider, “They fell in love and got married, but loathed each other until their wedding day,” for example. This may not qualify as a proper application of the Grice/Cohen cancellability test: it may be that that test requires our conjoining the original sentence (“They fell in love and got married”) with something which *directly opposes* what’s alleged to be implicated (here, the ordering of the events), rather than with anything which *implies* the denial thereof, however indirectly (“but they loathed each other up until their wedding day”). (I am indebted for this suggestion to an anonymous referee.) Even so, this example serves to show that not every ‘funny-sounding’ claim is such because it involves some semantic inconsistency. (I take it—and the anonymous referee’s comments suggests he/she would concur—that “They fell in love and got married, but loathed each other up until their wedding day” seems even more clearly to exhibit the sort of queerness I allege than does “They fell in love and got married, but not in that order.”) This is all that’s needed to cast doubt on the inference which Cohen makes in responding to Sosa (i.e., from “it sounds inconsistent to say *S*” to “*S* involves some semantic inconsistency”).

³⁴It might be claimed the relevant implicata *are* present in these cases, but that the situations in question are such as to create “contextual” cancellations (Grice 1989, p. 44). But then we’re owed a principled reason for supposing this is so; else, we run the risk of having an unlimited number of contextually cancelled implicatures being *omnipresent*.

³⁵As already remarked (notes 25 and 29, above), standard use is not sufficient for literal use: so while it helps to explain why some find it easy to mistake it for such, that knowledge attributions nearly universally function in the manner I have described does not show that that discloses their literal meaning. That it does not, moreover, is suggested by the following test of Bach’s (1987, p. 81): On the supposition that the semantics of knowledge-attributing sentences is as I’ve said, we can explain (in pragmatic terms) their standard (nonliteral) use. But the converse doesn’t hold: though there are in fact occasions on which such sentences are used to express what I claim they literally mean (as in the case of certain CKAs, e.g.), on the supposition that their standard meaning *is* their *literal* meaning, we cannot explain (in pragmatic terms) the former type of use. So we’ve further reason for not wanting to say that even nearly universal implicatures, e.g., must result in the relevant sentences’ undergoing a change in literal content.

³⁶Here I am (closely) paraphrasing the suggestion made by an anonymous referee.

³⁷Notice too that we’ve now got an account of why “we’re so reluctant to claim the status of knowledge for our insensitive beliefs” (DeRose 1995, p. 42): in general, “*S* knows that *p*” will impart that *S* has whatever discriminative capacities he would have to possess in order to rule out the salient alternatives to *p*; but with regard to insensitive beliefs, the proposition thus imparted is (almost?) always going to be false.

³⁸Moreover, I can accommodate Hetherington’s insight that the relative strength of one’s epistemic position plays a much more central place in our epistemic discourse than epistemologists generally suppose. And I have been able to do this without having to say that there are better and worse kinds of knowledge *per se*, as DeRose (1995), Lewis (1996), and Hetherington (1998) believe. (This last will strike one as plausible, it seems to me, only if one starts from the assumption that our epistemic discourse is primarily, even exclusively, a matter of the meanings of our words.)

³⁹Moreover, while I have exploited the confusion of semantic and pragmatic factors in accounting for the plausibility of the first premise of SA, other sophisticated invariantists may wish to do the same in connection with other elements of that argument.

⁴⁰Both of the objections which follow were suggested by an anonymous referee. Unfortunately, here I can present only the beginnings of a complete response to them.

⁴¹Thus, it's not clear to me that the first objection, for example, is best construed as raising a special problem for the normal worlds approach, rather than as an instance of the sort of Gettier-type case which any approach to knowledge must somehow or other come to terms with.

⁴²Thus, I claim in effect that we sometimes say_{Strict} false things in order to say_{Loose} something true. In my view, this is perfectly explicable given that we tend to read our communicative intentions onto the sentences we actually utter; for this just amounts to saying that we tend to conflate what is said_{Loose} with what is said_{Strict}. DeRose thinks this is implausible: "For don't we want to avoid falsehood both in what we implicate and (especially!) in what we actually say?" (DeRose 1999, p. 199). Well, yes and no: we do want to avoid falsehood in what we "say," but only insofar as we are speaking literally—i.e., only insofar as what we say is what we mean. (This isn't surprising: presumably what we *really* want to avoid is falsehood in what we believe—which would concern us more, that *S* says "Jane's a peach" or that *S* believes that Jane is a peach?) But much of our talk isn't in fact like that—we often, in fact, take offense at another's taking us too literally.

⁴³Those who find (4) so uncomfortable that they think it *must* involve semantic inconsistency might wish to consider some closely-related sentences ("I *know* I'm not a BIV, though I grant that if I were I'd think I wasn't," say, or "I know I'm not a BIV, though I realize that everything would appear just as it does if I were") and their reversals, as well as whether we really want to say that any evidence that a speaker understands the BIV hypothesis but thinks he knows it is false is *better* evidence that he *doesn't* understand it after all.

⁴⁴Cohen (1999) notes that whereas 'Moore's paradox' requires the first-person, (what I've called) the queerness of concessive knowledge attributions does not. But what makes for the paradoxical nature of Moore-type statements is the fact that to say that *p* is to express one's belief that *p*. Thus, that the queerness of CKAs isn't restricted to self-attributions would be a problem for my view only if my account of the pragmatic nature of their puzzling character referred exclusively to the fact that sincere assertions are expressions of belief, and it does not.

⁴⁵By this principle, if *S* know that *p* and that *p* entails *q*, then *S* knows that *q*. (Further refinements are needed, but they make no difference in the present case.) Both Cohen and DeRose, note, endorse the closure principle for knowledge: the former (1999, p. 68) says that it is "axiomatic," while the latter (1995, pp. 27–9) defends it by pointing to the "abominable" consequences of its denial.

⁴⁶Thus, for example, while it may be that explaining the confusion of knowledge with Cartesian knowledge (as in the latter part of Section 9) is precisely the sort of thing at which the contextualist seems to excel, if I am correct about the problems facing contextualism, that it appears to have this point in its favor should not be weighted too heavily.

⁴⁷For their comments on the paper at various stages, thanks are due to Kent Bach, Stewart Cohen, Keith DeRose, Alvin Goldman, Scott Hendricks, Cindy Holder, Jack Lyons, Francois Recanati, Marga Reimer, and two anonymous referees at *Noûs*.

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