The Problem With Who I Know:
What Contextualism Can Tell Us About Interpersonal Knowledge Claims

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Abstract: 'I know his name.' 'I know something about him.' 'I know him.' Consider how these uses of 'know' differ. The first two instances of know, seem to point to knowledge about something. Yet in the latter claim, the subject of the assertion is not a singular fact, but another person. I call these knowledge claims interpersonal knowledge. In the following paper, I provide an account for these interpersonal knowledge claims which employs the Conversational Contextualist view of language by synthesizing Allan Gibbard's Norm-Expressivist account for 'good' with an account of knowledge based in social epistemology. Under my theory 'knowing someone claims' amount to endorsements of our beliefs; as such, there is no truth-apt interpersonal knowledge. What is occurring is a self-assessment of our relationship to another person, based on our non-cognitive attitude towards the fact that we should know them. Therefore interpersonal knowledge claims are self-affirmations that assert we are doing what we believe we should, in an attempt to embody our perceived relationship with another person.

I. Introduction

'I know his name.' 'I know something about him.' 'I know him.' Consider how these uses of 'know' differ. If your intuition is like mine, you might note that the first two utterances indicate the same sort of knowledge claim; there is some fact being pointed to which is directly targeted as an object of knowledge. The latter utterance, however, is more vague, as as it does not appear to pick out one specific fact.

In propositions like 'I know him,' 'know' seems to function differently than it does in propositions like 'I know something about him.' There may be several ways to account for this distinction, however, one intuitive difference comes to mind: claiming to know some*thing* picks out a specific fact, whereas claiming to know someone picks out *something* else. Because I

distinguish these types of knowledge claims from other epistemic claims, it seems apt to assign them their own term, thus, I will refer to these 'knowing someone utterances' as 'interpersonal knowledge.'

To provide some justification for the term I have chosen, it is in our best interest to get clear about what I mean by 'interpersonal.' Two related uses come to mind: (1) things dealing with connections between groups of two or more people, and (2) interpersonal in the sense of, 'she has strong interpersonal skills.' I would like to dispel this skill connotation early, and instead focus solely on connections between people. Since I am only looking at relationships between people, I am also excluding propositions such as 'know thyself,' from the dialogue. Summarily, neither cases where 'know' references a specific knowledge claim nor cases of self-knowledge fall under the label of 'interpersonal knowledge.'

On the surface, there are three explanations which might potentially account for what interpersonal knowledge picks out. I would like to dispel these first.

The first account is that knowing someone, rather than some*thing*, means you know of a specific person's existence. However, this does not seem to be a rich definition, nor does it entirely fit our usage. There is no interpersonal relationship expressed. For instance, just because I know of the existance of John F. Kennedy, it does not mean I know *him*, I merely know about him. My relationship with Kennedy is one-sided. However, in the way I have designated interpersonal knowledge, it must pick out relationships between groups. You might think of this as a sort of reciprocity condition. To truly know someone, they must also know you. To

elaborate, there are cases when people use 'know' where they do refer to one-sided relationships, like when referring to celebrities.

While I will elaborate further on this notion in section three, it seems necessary to briefly mention parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships occur when there is some imagined interpersonal connection towards one spokesperson or celebrity that may feel like the same sort of knowledge someone might have about close friends or family. Yet while these are a sort of interpersonal claim about a relationship, they are not reciprocal in the same way that a person's day-to-day relationships are. Thus, I take this to be an incorrect application of interpersonal knowledge. It is more like one person memorizing many facts or experiences about a person. So in these parasocial cases, you do not actually know someone who does not also know you.

A clarification must be made here: In cases of claims such as 'I know my wife better than she knows herself,' or even 'I know my wife better than she knows me,' seem prima facie to go against this notion of reciprocity. However, by claiming interpersonal knowledge must be reciprocal, I do not necessarily imply that you cannot know someone more than they know you, or more than they know themselves, but rather that both parties must consider the other person to be known.

The second potential account is that perhaps knowing someone might mean you know a certain number of facts about them. There is an unspoken quota for known, memorized facts, and once you cross the threshold you know someone. This definition seems like an improvement from the first, but unfortunately it is similarly weak. There is a certain sense of representing a person which cannot be summed up in brute fact-memorization of traits or life events. Further,

someone could know your traits, and life events, but you could still feel like they do not know you in a relational sense.

This account mirrors how people tend to conceive of typical knowledge claims. When employing some truth-apt uses of 'know' we perform a double-check. When we 'know' our hypothesis is correct, we generally double-check our data to confirm it before we make that claim, so when we 'know' that the bank is open, we check before showing up at the bank.[1]

However, when we make claims about basic facts of life such as 'I know that the sky is blue,' we do not walk outside and confirm our certainty of its blueness. We merely consider it a fact of life or a justified true belief. Our past experiences confirm that the sky was blue yesterday, and consistently on days in the past. Thus, I am justified in claiming that the sky is blue.

Fact-checking and consistency conditions entailed by these sorts of knowledge claims suggest that interpersonal knowledge claims seem to function like justified true belief. They are facts of life that we take, at least a little bit, for granted. Maybe: We do not necessarily check in with people we are claiming to know every time we tell someone we know them. We instead assume that the conditions we have operated under in the past will continue to hold today and in

the future. For instance, since I knew my wife yesterday, I will continue to know my wife

tomorrow, since I can assume that nothing major has changed between yesterday and today.

Now, it is not always the case that our interpersonal knowledge claims will hold under

the assumption that the conditions for that knowledge will hold in the future. This is why they

are more like mere beliefs than knowledge.

If, for instance, your wife was secretly planning a divorce, the conditions under which

you believed yourself to possess interpersonal knowledge are certainly about to change.

The third potential account is a Pragmatic, Austinian-Gricean account for interpersonal

knowledge, where knowing some given thing, *p*, provides us with some claim to assert *p*

(Lackey, 2007, p. 594). Relatedly, natural language contains the same sort of content as formal

language. There are two sorts of social rules of implicature according to Grice: conventional and

conversational. Conventional implicature is related to conventions regarding the meaning of

words, so if we are all relying on the same cultural paradigm regarding language use, we are

operating within the same conventions (Grice, 1975).

However, the issue with the Gricean account lies in cooperation. Conventions are

integrally dependent on us following the Cooperative Principle. In short, we abide by a

Cooperate Principle in our social interactions, that when applied correctly by rational agents,

ensures others interpret us as we intend. Conversations that successfully relay information from

speaker to listener stick to an established purpose, and they utilize some sort of rules of

engagement for fulfilling that purpose: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. We strive to be

informative, to convey truthful statements, to keep our comments relevant, and truncate our expressions for brevity.

However, Grice is not interested in describing how people actually talk and interpret the meanings behind others assertions, but in giving an abstract account of the ideal conversational conditions. A conversation that abides by the Cooperative Principle as outlined by Grice is one that is concerned solely with an epistemic goal. It is an exchange of knowledge, relayed for a specific purpose, and carried out in the most expeditious and rational way possible. It is done as a direct response to some question at issue. People do not naturally shape their conversations towards these Gricean ideals. When we talk, we err, we stutter, we drone on and on and on, we engage in pointless conversations for the sake of having them, we build up (or tear down) social bonds, joke, and evoke emotions, memories, and reactions in others. The purposes of our conversations are multifaceted, multilayered, and outside of academia and in the real world in our relationships, the purpose of communication is often wholly unclear.

In this paper I will provide an account for interpersonal knowledge claims which employs the Conversational Contextualist view of language. I compare Allan Gibbard's (1992) Norm-Expressivist account for the term 'good' with the way we use the interpersonal 'know' in order to assert that interpersonal knowledge is context dependent. In short, the Conversational Contextualist view accounts for cases of knowing another person in a manner that raises the standard of knowledge in a way that classical epistemological accounts for 'know' do not. Concretely, any epistemological explanation must sufficiently account for our standard of knowledge, in a manner which its counterparts do not.

Before I dive into this project, however, I would like to first provide a brief note on my motivations for undertaking it. There is a hole in the existing literature for information on how

interpersonal knowledge works, and the standards for assessing it. The way we define and approach different uses of 'know' must be brought to a higher position. This terminology directly borrows from Epistemic Contextualist literature. Thus, out of a desire for raised epistemic standards, comes my inclination to present a Contextualist account for the term 'know,' wherein 'know' varies by the conversational context under which it is uttered. If we adopt the Conversational Contextualist view, we do not need to accept that claims about knowing all amount to knowledge in an objective sense, as the general topic of all knowledge claims is fundamentally an epistemological debate.

In order to show this I will first explain what I mean by raising the standard for knowledge, then I will provide an overview of Epistemic Contextualism. Next, I will relate Epistemic Contextualism to language use by discussing Allan Gibbard's Emotivism and Kaplan's theory of indexicals. Then I will employ situational epistemology to show a way that a Contextualist framework might be extended to cases of interpersonal knowledge. I will finally provide a rough sketch for a positive theory, drawing on Reliabilism to account for how the interpersonal 'know' functions to track the truth of our claims, before considering some relevant objections.

II. Contextualism and Expressivism in Review

Epistemic Contextualism is one of the newer, emergent epistemic theories and like most new philosophical theories, it is contentious. Briefly, the basic account is as follows. The context around any person who is attributed as a *haver* of some knowledge, either by themselves or others, alters the truth or falsehood of that knowledge claim in question. Since those propositional knowledge-claims depend on the context they are uttered under, the truth aptness of the propositions changes under the context as well. Normally, the relevant context is equated

to the speaker's stake in the truth or falsehood of the knowledge claim they are making; or, in light of the relationship between the speaker and the knowledge in question, the need for skeptical doubt in order to keep that knowledge from being taken for granted. The need for a higher standard for accepted knowledge claims hinges on the consequences of the knowledge being considered (Rysiew, 2021).

That is *Epistemic* Contextualism, but how does this apply to conversation? Conversational Contextualists would argue further that the subject, context, expression, and utterance, shift the context around the language being used in a way that changes the standards for knowledge claims. One way this might be accomplished is by looking at the Epistemic Contextualist account through the lens of philosophy of language.

To accomplish that, we should start at the beginning with Expressivism. At its most basic, we might call Expressivism a doctrine of rejecting the existence of moral facts. A.J. Ayer, the progenitor of Expressivism, advocated for a theory of Moral Emotivism. This theory hinges on a rejection of the representational view of moral discourse on the basis that moral discourse lacks meaning and thus fails Verificationist criteria (Ayer, 1936).

Under Gibbard's (1992) classical Emotivist account, claims about the goodness or badness of some given thing, p, serve two functions: (1) to evaluate the relationship that the speaker has to p, and (2) an attempt to bring about some effect in the listener with regard to p. In this way, we are not really expressing anything about moral reality, but our mental relationship and attitude towards the subject of moral judgment. Basically, Expressivists deny the semantic

factualist account of language. Claiming things are 'wrong' or 'right' expresses some mental state, rather than a truth-apt, objective moral proposition.

Gibbard (1992) rejects this lack of robust truth-aptness, and postulates that normative statements express non-belief mental states. When I condone some moral claim, for example, I express acceptance of a system of norms, whereas when I do not condone a moral claim, I express disapproval. As further example, when I claim that something is good, like 'giving to charity is good,' I am not predicating giving to charity with a correlate property, goodness, nor am I expressing my belief about the goodness of giving to charity, but rather, I am expressing a non-cognitive attitude towards the act of giving to charity. So, by saying 'giving to charity is good,' I am really expressing the non-cognitive attitude of approval. This is, in turn, not true or false, because I am expressing a cognitive attitude of approval.

On the surface, Gibbard's account of Expressivism seems particularly rich for epistemic applications. There are several intuitive similarities that inform my assertion that 'I know her' functions in an analogous way to 'giving to charity is good.' It appears possible to me that interpersonal knowledge could be gradable.

However, the orthodox conceptualization of knowledge is that it is absolute. You know something or you do not. However, when one looks to how the term 'know' is used within a conversational context, complications for this binary view arise. For instance, we typically say things such as 'I know them fairly well.' In certain contexts, knowledge appears to function more like a scale on which you have some degree of epistemic strength. This functions much in the same way a contexualist account for 'good' might; there are degrees of knowledge just as there are degrees of goodness. Beyond this, 'know' also appears to function indexically; the object of knowledge, and the sort of knowledge and the requirements to claim that knowledge, can shift.

This is informed by our conversational conventions. To illustrate this point consider the following phrase:

'I know my wife backwards and forwards.'

This knowledge claim does not appear to equate assertions of proposition *p* with knowing that *p*. We do not double-check every time we claim to know something or someone; instead, we are making a report of what we think ourselves to know or grasp, rather than confirming it to be true. Every time I claim to know someone, I do not perform some mental tally or assessment of facts about that person, rather, I check with my own understanding of who that person is and assume it has not changed. Yet another potential insight is that we can make claims about knowledge about someone, but do not necessarily 'know' the object of that claim.[2] Take, for example, the way Norm-Expressivism views terms like 'good.' Under the Norm-Expressivist view, when I say that 'giving to charity is good,' I am expressing a non-cognitive attitude toward the act of giving to charity. Similarly, when I say 'I know my wife backward and forwards' I am really making an assertion about my relationship with my wife. By affirming this statement, I express approval of the knowledge I possess about her. It is not a truth-apt assessment of my wife but rather a reflection of my cognitive attitude toward the understanding I have of her. This expression of approval aligns with my conceptualization of the world and the norms within it.

The root of this assertion is seated primarily in situational epistemology and social psychology. There are traditions that are more concerned with mapping the situations around our knowledge claims, often regarding virtue as a major factor in our knowledge attributions. These viewpoints, or at least many of the more prominent texts on them, share a key point in common with Gibbard's Norm-Expressivism: That our dispositions, or cognitive attitudes, in Gibbard's terminology, are significantly less impactful in shaping our beliefs or knowledge than

the context surrounding our knowledge claims. However, that is not to say that we all have the same beliefs, norms, and traits. Social context shapes our norms and beliefs in a manner that impacts our behavior and personal values (Fairweather & Alfano, 2017). There is a system of norms that coincides with our non-normative propositions, and that system of norms guides us to who we will predicate knowledge of.

Although Epistemic Contextualism has staunch defenders, it is not immune to criticism, and Jason Stanley (2004) emerges as a prominent figure among these critics. In his work, Stanley raises several concerns about this theory, particularly arguing that knowledge claims are not genuinely affected by degree modifiers such as 'quite well' or 'sort of.'

In recent years, Semanticists, focused on rescuing Epistemic Contextualism from the criticisms raised against it, have proposed a number of responses. The most promising of these comes from David Kaplan (1989). The crux of his defense comes from drawing a distinction within indexicals between pure indexicals and pure demonstratives. A pure indexical has its reference fixed automatically, while a pure demonstrative has its reference fixed by something extra provided by the speaker, such as when a speaker says 'it's over here' and points. Without the pointing, 'here' lacks a reference. Kaplan's defense implies that certain aspects of knowledge claims might rely on contextual factors similar to indexicals and demonstratives. However, further examination is required to fully understand how these insights can contribute to resolving the challenges that Epistemic Contextualism faces.

While David Kaplan's defense presents a fresh perspective on Epistemic Contextualism, a synthesis of the Expressivist account with the Epistemic Contextualist account still raises more questions, as it necessitates endorsing context-dependence but rejecting the notion that every knowledge attribution is truth-apt. A synthesis of the Expressivist account with the Epistemic

Contextualist account necessitates endorsing context-dependence but rejecting the notion that *every* knowledge attribution is truth-apt. I am not going to weigh-in on this debate at length, but it seems clear to me that however 'know' functions semantically—whether it is gradable, demonstrative, or another unconsidered solution—it is at least tenable to suggest that the context surrounding the speaker is a relevant consideration. I am not rejecting the possibility of truth-apt knowledge; rather, I am asserting that interpersonal knowledge employed within common conversational contexts is a social claim, not a formal epistemological one. As such, epistemic interpersonal claims are an expression of our justified as true, emotive, relational beliefs, and an invitation to others to respond to those beliefs. They are shaped by our social context, which in turn shapes our behavior and mannerisms, and implores us to form sets of beliefs that we then shape our knowledge claims around. Perhaps this social context is what functions as the necessary extra reference-fixing content provided by the speaker.

Thus, we assess our claims about knowing someone, on the basis of our own self-identity. As husband, wife, friend, foe, and so on. We form our identities, within the context of the people we know, and in doing so, we reference those identities when we make epistemic claims. We assess our relationship with another person, then we look inwardly to some non-cognitive attitude about what we should be doing or not doing in terms of our behavior towards that person and our knowledge about them. So, the reason I might claim to 'know' my wife, is because I perform a sort of inward-looking task wherein, I express an attitude of self-approval at the fact that I should, indeed, 'know' her. This falls in line with my concept of what my relationship with my wife *should* be within the social context I have accepted. Since it matches my account of myself in relation to my wife (i.e., as a wife-haver), I then say I 'know' my wife. We are making a contextual, psychosocial identity claim. We are confirming something about

ourselves—that we are correctly actualizing our perceived social role—when making claims that we know other people.

When we claim to know someone, we are performing an act of evaluating our relationship that we have to the object of our knowledge—the person we are making knowledge claims about. We are simultaneously referencing back to the social relationship that we have with that person—the propositional object of knowledge.

Importantly, in the same way we might say 'I know my wife, I love her very much,' we might also say 'I know Tim, my old college roommate, he was a real clod.' What actually determines whether we know either our wife or Tim is our strong feelings for them. If you love someone, you must know them pretty well, if you hate them, you must also know them pretty well. Hating someone requires you know them well enough to judge that you hate them.

However, there are some cases where this sort of principle seems to not apply. The first seems simple, and brings us back to a point mentioned briefly at the beginning of this paper—celebrities. When we claim to know people on television, we are still making the same sort of self-assessment we do when we talk about our wife. The difference is, it that it is not reciprocal. I will draw upon the long tradition of philosophers of language referencing British literature, here: Consider the case of Sherlock Holmes seeking out some previously unnamed criminal mastermind. Since Holmes has been seeking to catch the criminal at large, he has been gathering clues to his identity. The first fact he collects is the name of his foe, Dr. Moriarty. Holmes, obsessed with cracking the case, continues for some time collecting more and more facts about Moriarty. Eventually, the amount of facts Holmes has collected might even amount to more facts than he has collected about anyone or anything, even the facts he knows about playing the violin, or of his partner Watson. Regardless of how many facts Holmes knows about Moriarty, it

would be strange for him to claim he 'knows' his mysterious nemesis. For contrast, Holmes should claim to know his partner Watson. The fact that Holmes would say he knows Watson, despite knowing less facts about Watson than Moriarty expresses Holmes' self-identification as Watson's partner and his beliefs about himself in that position. However, if Holmes claimed to know Moriarty before ever meeting him, it would seem to me an error in his reasoning. It would be revealing of Holmes' obsession with Moriarty, an obsession which runs so deep that it has warped how he assesses his relationships.

When someone claims to 'know' a celebrity, my suspicion is that they are similarly acting as a faulty reasoner. Their constant one-sided engagement with the celebrity warps their ability to properly preform a self-assessment of their actual relationship to that celebrity. It is, in effect, a null claim.

An additional case along the same lines seems worth mentioning. Consider someone that you meet on the train. You learn the key facts: Her name is Mary, she is a banker, and she has a lovely dog named Fido. In these sorts of cases you appear to have some vague knowledge *about* Mary. But do you really know *her*?

If you're asked by a friend 'do you know Mary?', we might be tempted to answer yes. This is another case of innacurate reasoning, but it comes from a different motivation. While the 'celebrity-knower' is misguided in their relational assessment, the 'stranger-knower' is likely motivated by social necessity. They feel that they should know Mary, because they are being prompted about their knowledge, much in the same way people often respond that they know a popular song playing on the radio when they've only heard it once or twice. It is part-way self-deception, and part-way social conformity. Your friend knows Mary, and you know your friend, so you must also know Mary, both out of obligation to answer correctly, and out of conflating

knowing your friend with their knowing Mary. While the claim isn't outright false, like when claiming to know a celebrity, it is inaccurate. It rests on the feeling that they should provide the right answer about knowing the other person, rather than actually knowing them.[3]

If we can accept this sort of reasoning, then perhaps we might stipulate further that this sort of social Norm-Expressivism is a modification, an additional stipulation to knowledge as justified true belief, rather than a total upheaval of it. Social context would then become a key component in our justification of interpersonal knowledge.

III. Contextualist Interpersonal Knowledge: A Preliminary Framework

Until now, we have mostly explored what interpersonal knowledge cannot be: It cannot be truth-apt; it is not an expression of a cognitive attitude but instead a non-cognitive one. You might call this a negative account. We have similarly explored how some social epistemic positions might begin to provide a model for how interpersonal knowledge claims function. Now I would like to begin providing a rough sketch of apositive account.

My proposal is Reliabilist in nature and draws upon epistemic notions of *truth-tracking* (Nozick, 1981; Dretske, 1971). If I know someone, my belief I know them will track the truth of that knowledge claim in a reliable manner through numerous modalities, and similarly, my belief that I should believe myself to know them, then I believe that I will know them.

Our beliefs are only valid if they align with the truth. So, for instance, if, through social grouping and self-role attribution, say that I know someone, I will also believe that I know them.[4] This lends towards admitting there is some condition for knowing that I am aware of, and that I apply on the basis of some socially normative application, but my belief in that knowledge is guided by some standard about who I should know. Again, I am asserting my adherence to

some more about my relationship with that person and expressing a noncognitive stance about my self-judgment in relation to that knowledge claim. To put it in more concrete terms:

Humans in society take on social roles. If some given speaker, *s,* is part of a society, they will have some social role that orders their relationships and interactions with others. If we assume that *s* is an accurate reasoner then their propositional beliefs will generally be true. The social roles which apply to *s* are known by them, so when *s* assesses their knowledge about a person, *p*, their belief that they know *p* will track the truth of their knowledge.[5] Simultaneously, their belief that they *should* know *p* internally affirms the truth of their knowledge claim. Therefore, if *s* accurately knows *p*, *s* will necessarily believe they *should* know *p*.

Note it is not necessary that *s actually* knows *p*, only that *s believes* they must know *p*. This comes into play in counter-cases where *s* is in a shifting social role. Take for example divorce. The speaker, *s*, has a formal social role as the husband which demands he knows his wife, however, due to the divorce he is going through, his adopted social role, which he chooses to take on, does not require that he knows *p*. Even if the amount of facts *s* knows about his wife has not changed, he still feels like, as a man going through a divorce, the social condition does not demand he knows his wife anymore. He no longer believes that he knows her.

Like other Reliabilitst positions[6] which employ sensitivity or safety requirements as subjunctive conditions for knowledge, there is one major objection often raised: To stipulate that any justified belief is only valid if it aligns with the truth necessitated by my social role, we will need to reject epistemic closure as a consequence. When we apply subjunctive conditionals to interpersonal knowledge in general, we are making claims about hypothetical scenarios and the potential outcomes that could have resulted. For example, when we claim to know someone, we assert that our belief that we know them will accurately align with the truth of our knowledge

concerning our social role in relation to that person. In other words, our claiming to know *p* implies genuinely and correctly believing that we know *p*. If we did not know that person, we would not believe ourselves to know them, and if we do know that person, we will accurately believe ourselves to know them. Essentially, we only know someone because we would not believe ourselves to know someone, we could not know based on our social relationship with them. Therefore, I know I cannot (interpersonally) 'know' John F. Kennedy, because I do not share a relevant social relationship with him.

This poses a problem for entailment because *s*'s belief that they should know *p* determines the truth aptness of *s* knowing *p as well as s's knowledge* that they know *p* (Collins, 2017). In reference to the example described above, the husband, *s*, might know *p*, their wife; and they might know that knowing their wife entails that they are embodying their social role as a husband. But they do not necessarily know that *because p* is their wife, they know *them*. So, in this case, knowledge fails to be closed under logical entailment.

When endorsing Epistemic Contextualism is difficult to avoid criticisms regarding the rejection of entailment, but there are a few relevant considerations to keep in mind here. Perhaps the interpersonal 'know' is far more reflective of our manifestation of social relationships, and not quite so related to the other sorts of knowledge claims we make. For instance, I might know someone, because she is my wife, and also because I believe my social role necessitates that I know my wife.[7] However, just because I know her, that does not necessarily entail that person can *only* be my wife. The sort of entailment as stake in other cases of knowledge claims might simply have higher stakes than our interpersonal claims do.

It may be as simple as claiming the ends justify the means. If we adopt his position, and if we can indeed accept 'know' is context-sensitive, then our analysis of what it means to know

someone, is a better mirror of our ordinary language use, but not necessarily an overarching analysis for all cases of 'know.' Thus, we can work with a theory which raises the standard for knowledge by presenting a particularized contextual standard that only applies to interpersonal knowledge. It fills a gap in our accounts of knowledge in a manner other theories do not.

So, we can accept some common sense, interpersonal knowledge claims as a practical explanation, while rejecting absurd globally skeptical arguments. If we grant that there is something inbuilt in our language regarding interpersonal knowledge, then a rejection of closure in other cases needs not necessarily follow. Considering context specific criterion for knowledge, the entailment of our knowledge can be closed in some accounts, and open in others.

Another potential objection falls out of my response to the first.[8] One might argue any Contextualist thesis entirely fails to raise the standard of knowledge because it separates philosophical questions from everyday questions when in actuality, epistemic questions and standards of knowledge need to remain consistent. Invariantists will wholly reject that standards of knowledge are context specific. Further, if we regress infinitely into what we may accept as true knowledge, and there are some contexts that are arbitrarily designated as Contextualist, then we cannot move forward to answer larger epistemic questions if we are operating under arbitrary premises.

Yet, while some epistemic theories might remain consistent in their standards, they still fail to raise the standard of knowledge in any relevant way; as they still fail to address the extent to which we must be aware of our reasons for justifying our knowledge, context variant or not.

Those very standards for justification are the basis for raising our standards about what we do indeed know. They fail by way of not providing an account of interpersonal knowledge.

If this working theory does, in fact, outlast these potential pitfalls, the result is this: we can make claims about knowing people, but since those seem to boil down to endorsements of our beliefs about our relationships to the person who is the subject of our knowledge claims, there is no truth-apt interpersonal knowledge in the traditional sense.   What is occurring is more like a self-assessment—we know them based on our non-cognitive attitude towards the fact that we should know them. Therefore, we are affirming we are doing what we believe we should, in an attempt to embody our perceived relationship to them.

Notes:

[1] This is a modified version of an example from Robin McKenna (2017), which was in turn adapted from DeRose (1992).

[2] This view is endorsed by Keith DeRose (2008, p. 5), who argues that the standards for knowledge are context-sensitive but that you can still know the object that you make claims about. This contrasts with the Invariantist position that seemingly disallows making truthful knowledge claims about most subjects.

[3] I wanted to express my thanks to an anonymous reviewer who raised a question about the perception of acquaintances within the framework presented in this paper. Their comment helped me clarify and refine this section, and I am deeply greatful for their contribution.

[4] This is not a direct paraphrase or reference, but I'm loosely drawing from Jennifer Nagel's (2014) description of truth-tracking.

[5] For clarity, please note that despite p typically standing for a proposition, that p here stands a person that may be the subject of knowledge.

[6] This is particularly true ofReliabilists such as Ernest Sosa, Robert Nozick and Fred Dretske.

[7] As I am nearing the end of this paper, I would like to address the repeated usage of the example of 'knowing my wife.' I do not have a spouse and, regrettably, cannot claim any expertise in matrimonial matters. My intent was merely to employ a relatable analogy that might resonate with a large number of people.

[8] This objection is often the first point of departure for Invariantists.

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