INTRODUCTION

Philosophical reflection about what we call "knowledge" has a natural starting point in the view that knowledge has certain fundamental characteristics and that it is one of the basic tasks of epistemology to identify these characteristics. No matter whether knowledge is taken to be a Platonic idea, a natural kind, something that can be captured by reductive definitions in terms of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, or something else, and no matter whether knowledge is taken to involve certain characteristics rather than others (justification, reliability, etc.), the underlying idea of basic characteristics remains the same. Very often a second idea comes with it, namely the idea that we are always talking and thinking about the same thing when we use words like "knowledge". In this sense, one could also say that knowledge is orderly.

     I will argue here that knowledge is not orderly but disorderly in a certain sense. More precisely, I will argue for a contextualist account of "knowledge" (but also see Lewis 1996, 566-567 for the legitimate dropping of quotation marks). According to such a view, the truth conditions or the meaning of knowledge sentences of the form "S knows that p" can vary with the context of the speaker; and they can vary because of some contextual variability in the meaning of the word "know" and of related words. Similar things can be

said about knowledge attributions not expressed in a natural language but made in solitary thought. The content of a thinker's thought about someone's "knowledge" that p can vary with the thinker's context, and it can vary because of contextual variation in the content of the concept of knowledge used by the thinker. If contextualism is correct, then the above, initial characterization of the task of epistemology is a bit misleading. According to the contextualist, talk about what we call "knowledge" concerns what we mean by that word in our particular context of using that word and thus lacks a certain generality of scope. Risking misunderstandings, one could put this in the following way: Contextualists talk about "knowledge" rather than knowledge. One might worry here (see, e.g., Sosa 2011, ch.5 and Blome-Tillmann 2014, 49-52) that contextualist epistemologists lose their subject matter and just talk about words for things and not the things themselves. However, this is not so and I hope that this worry will be allayed in the following chapters.

Contextualism about "knowledge" and epistemic contextualism more generally has been discussed a lot over the last few decades (mainly in articles; there are surprisingly few monographs on the subject). Why then add another proposal and defense of contextualism? The reason is simple and straightforward. The main and best arguments in favour of contextualism are, in my opinion, quite different from the ones typically put forward by defenders of contextualism. And the objections against contextualism should also be sought in other places than those usually occupied by critics. The virtues of contextualism - and perhaps also its vices - are sufficiently different from what they're typically taken to be. Contextualism therefore deserves a new and fresh exposition and defense.

Part I of the book deals with core arguments in favour of contextualism. One of the most popular such arguments starts with the consideration of examples and cases. Answering the question of what we would say about certain scenarios and how we would use words like "knowledge" in relation to such cases is supposed to give crucial support to contextualism. Even though I think that the importance of cases has been overestimated quite a bit, I start with the discussion of (mostly new) cases in chapter 1. This is a somewhat natural starting point which also allows one to make some systematic points about our topic and show how contextualists can think systematically about cases. The most common form of contextualism (usually supported by arguments from cases) can be called "standard contextualism". Standard contextualism is standards contextualism, that is, contextualism about epistemic standards. As the consideration of cases is supposed to show, the variation in the content of knowledge attributions is driven by the variation in the epistemic standards of the attributor. I propose to think more systematically about contextual parameters (aspects of epistemic contexts); as one will see in later chapters, epistemic standards constitute just one type of parameter. Here, I distinguish between standards concerning what needs to be ruled out by the subject, the subjects' evidence, the reliability of their beliefs, the subject's required degrees of belief and the required type of the subject's epistemic positions (while I argue against the importance or relevance of other parameters often proposed in current discussions, like the conversational score or psychological salience). One general implication of this conception of parameters is that the common idea of a hierarchy of more or less demanding contexts is mistaken. It is also important to identify what I call the "determinants" of such parameters; the former fix the

value of the latter. As far as the determinants of standards are concerned I propose to distinguish between attributors' stakes, attributors' purposes and intentions, and norms and conventions relevant in the attributor's context.

Even if the consideration of cases and of what we "would say when" is of some relevance, especially at the beginning, other, more theoretical, arguments for contextualism are more important. The next two chapters deal with such more theoretical support for contextualism. Chapter 2 starts with a defense of a very broad and general type of reliabilism according to which knowledge requires reliability. The core of the chapter is dedicated to an extension and strengthening of a well-known and obnoxious problem for reliabilism: the socalled generality problem. This problem is just an aspect of an underlying problem about the relevant reference class. I argue that the prospects for a "non-sceptical" solution of the problem are bleak. However, the apparent vice of reliabilism can be turned into a virtue of contextualism. If one acknowledges that the reference class problem has no non-sceptical solution, then contextualism should be accepted as an interesting and promising "sceptical" solution. The contextualist way out of an important problem offers important support and motivation for contextualism. I also argue in favour of a probabilistic version of contextualism here and against a modal version of it. Thinking about what fixes the reference class leads to a new set of contextual parameters (topics, methods, temporal frames, and spatial frames) and their determinants (attention, purposes and intentions, and norms and conventions).

Chapter 3 argues against the very common view that knowledge excludes epistemic luck of a certain interesting and relevant type. I think that this view is just another dogma

of epistemology and in need of criticism. This is interesting and important in itself but it also leads to another "theoretical" argument for contextualism. I argue that the notions of epistemic luck and of knowledge are context-sensitive in a parallel way. Again, I explain why I prefer a probabilistic account of knowledge to a modal account. The discussion of epistemic luck leads to the identification of a third type of parameters, "descriptions". The relevant determinants are, again, attention and purposes and intentions (while it is left open here whether norms and conventions play a determining role).

The arguments for contextualism offered in part I make up the core of the book. However, one can often hear people say that contextualism also has to prove itself by offering promising solutions to important philosophical problems. I do think that the theoretical arguments in favour of a philosophical view are more important than its explanatory potential, but the latter aspect is still important enough to deserve extended discussion. Part II of the book deals with the way contextualism can respond to important philosophical problems (and with extensions to non-epistemic notions). Many defenders of contextualism hold that contextualism should (also) be accepted because it can respond to the problem of (Cartesian) epistemological scepticism. And many critics of contextualism reject it also because of its alleged failure to respond to the sceptic. I think that the fate of contextualism is largely independent of what it does and can say in response to Cartesian scepticism. There are other problems I find more pressing in this context. As a representative example, I discuss the lottery problem (the one brought up by Gilbert Harman) in chapter 4. Lottery scepticism is in many ways more of a challenge to epistemology than Cartesian scepticism because it is much more mundane and harder to

counter. I propose a contextualist response to the lottery problem which differs considerably from common contextualist takes on it. In contrast to most people I deny that one cannot truly be said to know a lottery proposition. The proposed solution of the problem involves a focus on the notion of an epistemic position as well as an independently plausible modified principle of epistemic closure (which in its unmodified, basic and very rough form says that one can come to know something on the basis of inference from something else one knows).

Chapter 5 deals with a "homemade" problem for contextualism: the knowability problem. This problem concerns the evaluation of the truth value of knowledge attributions made in other contexts than the attributor's one. It is astonishing how little has so far been said about this problem. I think that this is the hardest problem contextualism has to face. The problem consists in a threat of inconsistency. A contextualist could find herself in a context where she would have to deny that she "knows" a given proposition but at the same time, qua contextualist, would have to admit that some other subject does "know" that same proposition. A few argumentative steps lead to a contradiction. This chapter argues that the inconsistency can be avoided if one chooses a view according to which knowledge is a ternary relation between a subject, a proposition and a contextual parameter (standards, reference classes, descriptions). This also suggests that the common tendency to see the semantics of "knowledge" as close to the one for indexicals and demonstratives is mistaken. Apart from a relational, ternary view of knowledge, the contextualist also needs to modify the closure principle further.

If contextualism is the correct view of "knowledge", then it would be surprising if there weren't other philosophically important notions that also suggest a contextualist analysis. Why should "knowledge" be a unique case? And wouldn't such uniqueness count against contextualism about "knowledge"? Chapter 6 deals with an extension and application of contextualism to non-epistemic notions and thus also attempts to reply to the uniqueness worry. As a representative I choose the notion of responsibility for one's own actions. I start with a puzzle about responsibility and propose a solution that parallels the contextualist view of knowledge proposed before. Again, the distinction between parameters and determinants proves useful. One parameter consists in standards and thresholds of responsibility; its determinants consist in attributors' stakes, character traits, and norms and conventions. Another parameter consists in reference classes again; they are determined by the factors of attention and of purposes and intentions.

Even though the discussion in the first six chapters often goes into objections and alternative views, it is a good idea to dedicate a whole part (III) exclusively to these issues. Chapter 7 focuses on core objections to contextualist views. I discuss what is perhaps the most popular objection against contextualism, namely an objection which is based on the alleged possibility of socalled warranted assertibility manœuvres against contextualism. Furthermore, I discuss certain more linguistic objections against a contextualist semantics of "knowledge". I also go back to the discussion of cases, especially cases that are often considered problematic for contextualists (this complements the discussion in chapter 1). I end with some further problems for contextualism: mainly, a problem of complexity, an

issue with normativity and arbitrariness, and finally problems concerning speaker's error

and semantic blindness. Contextualism remains quite unscathed in my view.

The final chapter 8 discusses three major alternatives to contextualism: first,

subject-sensitive invariantism according to which the truth value of knowledge ascriptions

can vary with the context of the subject rather than the attributor (this section includes

some detailed discussion of the notion of stakes – another neglected topic so far); second,

epistemic contrastivism according to which knowledge is a ternary relation between a

subject, a target proposition and a contrast proposition; and finally, semantic relativism

about "knowledge" which claims relativity of the truth value of knowledge ascriptions to

the standards of the assessor of the claim. It turns out that these alternative accounts of

knowledge do worse than contextualism and have to face much more severe problems.

This completes the argument for contextualism.[1] A positive view of knowledge, or

better: of "knowledge", is being developed here step by step. Instead of presenting the

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1   A few side remarks about what I will not do in this book might be useful here. I will say a bit but
not too much about the semantics of knowledge attributions. I agree with Cohen 1999, 61 that there
isn't that close a connection between epistemological and semantic theories of "knowledge" (but see
for an overview Stojanovic 2008 and for a recent discussion Moghaddam 2015). – I am sceptical of
contextualism's potential to solve the "Gettier-problem", that is, to offer a reductive definition of
"knowledge" (but cf., e.g., Cohen 1998a). I don't think such a definition can be had at all (see
Baumann 2013). – Finally, I am having doubts about recent proposals, contextualist or not, of
knowledge rules of assertion ("Assert only what you know"; see Unger 1975, ch.6 and Williamson
2000, ch.11) or of practical reasoning and action ("One knows p if / only if / if and only if *p* is an
appropriate premise for one's practical reasoning and an appropriate basis for one's actions"; see
Fantl & McGrath 2009, Hawthorne & Stanley 2008, and Williamson 2005c, 231). I think that there
is some connection between knowledge and practical reasoning and also assertion but it is not as
close as suggested by many authors these days (see Baumann 2012c and also 2014c). I won't say
much at all here about such knowledge rules.

view in its entirety right at the beginning I find it preferable to develop it gradually while discussing arguments, problems, objections and alternatives. I hope that contextualism appears attractive and in some new light here. I also hope that all this is interesting in a more general way, too, apart from the main topic of contextualism and with respect to other important topics in epistemology, like reliability, the role of epistemic luck or epistemic closure. Finally, many things I say here go against some currently widely shared views. I hope this will make the book more rather than less interesting to the reader.

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