CONTEXTUALISM AND THE AMBIGUITY THEORY OF 'KNOWS'

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The central, generally agreed upon virtues of contextualism are that it solves certain persistent epistemological problems relating to skeptical arguments and that it preserves the truth of most of our everyday, ordinary usages of 'knows' and its cognates.[1] For these reasons, many epistemologists find contextualism very appealing. However, many others resist contextualism because the view seems, to them, to come with certain unacceptable costs.

In this paper I argue that the *ambiguity theory of 'knows'*—the view that 'knows' and its cognates[2] have more than one sense, and that which sense of 'knows' is used in a knowledge ascription or denial determines, in part, the meaning (and as a result the truth conditions) of that knowledge ascription or denial[3]—ought to be taken seriously by those drawn to contextualism. It is, in a way, remarkable how little attention the ambiguity theory of 'knows' has received (although a few modern advocates of the view will be discussed later). In particular, it is remarkable how little contextualists have said against it, given that the ambiguity theory shares many of the benefits of contextualism. This paper is part of a larger attempt to direct some attention towards the ambiguity theory of 'knows'.[4]

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[1] Cf. Cohen (1988), (1999), (2010), DeRose (1992), (2005, 172 & 178), Lewis (1996), Pynn (2015b, 3 & 5), Rysiew (2001, 480, 482), (2007, 628), and Stanley (2004, 119-120), among many others. This is not exhaustive of the list of claimed benefits of contextualism, but these are the most general and widely-offered benefits. For example, this doesn't include DeRose's argument that knowledge as the norm of assertion requires contextualism (DeRose 2009, Chapter 3), which is a benefit only to the extent one find the claim that knowledge is the norm of assertion persuasive.

[2] From here on out the phrase "and its cognates" will typically be omitted, but should be taken as implied when appropriate.

[3] Most would agree that there is more than one sense of 'knows' *simpliciter*. My claim is specifically that there is more than one sense of 'knows' understood propositionally—i.e. more than one kind of 'knows that' sorts of knowing.

[4] In what follows, generally, the terms 'know', 'knows', 'knowing' and at points 'knowledge' will be used in an interchangeable fashion in the context of discussing the ambiguity theory of 'knows.'

In Section 1, I lay out the theoretical landscape by defining contextualism and the ambiguity theory of 'knows' and clarifying the differences between the positions. In Section 2, I provide some independent philosophical and linguistic considerations for the ambiguity theory. In Section 3, I make the comparative case, arguing that the ambiguity theory has the same major virtues as contextualism. In Section 4, I provide an ambiguity-theory-friendly account of why contextualism may be initially appealing, and why this shouldn't dissuade us from taking the ambiguity theory seriously nonetheless.

1. Differentiating Contextualism and the Ambiguity Theory of 'Knows'

In keeping with standard usage, I use the phrase epistemic contextualism, or more simply contextualism, to refer to the view that the truth conditions of knowledge ascriptions and denials (e.g. sentences of the form "S knows that P" and "S doesn't know that P"), in virtue of making a knowledge claim, shift in accordance with certain changes in the context of utterance. Or, to put it another way, contextualism is the view that the truth conditions of knowledge ascriptions and denials depend, in part, upon the attributor's conversational context because of the way in which 'knows' contributes to the claim.[5] Among the relevant aspects of context are both factors internal to the utterer (e.g. the utterer's purposes, interests, stakes, etc.) and factors external to the utterer (e.g. the conversation the utterer is contributing to, the community the utterer is a part of, etc.).[6]

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[5] Cf. Brown (2006, 407), Cohen (1999, 58), Conee (2010, 47), DeRose (1992,914), (1999, 187), (2002, 168), Greco (2008, 416), Rysiew (2011), Pynn (2015, 1), Stanley (2004, 119), and Steup (2005), among many others. Keith DeRose (1999) and Geoff Pynn (2015) discuss other uses of the term contextualism in epistemology, like that found in the work of Davis Annis (1978), but these are non-dominant usages of the term in epistemology and are not of importance in this paper.

[6] See, for example, Cohen (1999, 58 and 61) and DeRose (1999, 191 and 195). The claim that context contains both these internal and external elements has perhaps been denied by others at points. For example, Patrick Rysiew writes that "'context' here [in a discussion of epistemic contextualism] means none other than such things as the interests, expectations, and so forth of knowledge attributors." Depending on what he means to include in "and so forth" this may count as an implicit denial of what I've called the external factors of context, but if that is what Rysiew meant, he has provided no argument for this claim. And it other places Rysiew seems to adopt the internal/external blend

I also take the following clarification from Patrick Rysiew to express something essential about the view:

> "The thesis is that it is only relative to a contextually-determined standard that a knowledge sentence expresses a complete proposition: change the standard, and you change what the sentence expresses; acontextually, however, no such proposition is expressed. In this respect, knowledge utterances are supposed to resemble utterances involving uncontroversially context-sensitive terms…truth values shift only because, according to [epistemic contextualism], *different propositions are expressed in different contexts*."[7]

As Geoff Pynn has recently noted "[c]ontextualism is a broad tent,"[8] and the linguistic mechanisms by which context allows for the completion of a proposition differ among alternative types of contextualism. However, what remains essential in all cases is that context is required to recover the complete meaning and/or truth conditions of knowledge ascriptions and denials,[9] and that a shift in context can control a shift in truth conditions by changing the proposition expressed. This point will be useful later in clarifying the distinction between contextualism and the ambiguity theory of 'knows'.[10]

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that I've put forward when he writes that on the dominant form of contextualism "features of the knowledge *attributor(s)'* psychology and/or conversational-practical situation" are the relevant aspects of context (Rysiew, (2011)). Similarly, DeRose, in his emphasis on the internal factors at points, may implicitly be denying at least the centrality of the external factors. The place where DeRose seems to do this most strongly is in DeRose (2005) in particular sections III and VII, and perhaps in DeRose (2004), but this also seems to be offset by considerations like the quote of his above. At the end of the day, given the set of elucidations of context available in the literature and the reliance on external elements of context to generate intuitions and outcomes in contextualist data like DeRose's bank cases and Cohen's airport case, I think the best understanding of 'context' (both in general and as used by the epistemic contextualist) is that it contains both these internal and external elements. Furthermore, this seems to be in keeping with dominant understandings of context such as Lewis (1979) and Stalnaker (2014), among others.

[7] Rysiew (2011); emphasis in original.

[8] Pynn (2015b, 14).

[9] From here on out the language of "and knowledge denials" will typically be dropped, but should be viewed as implied where appropriate.

[10] Presenting contextualism in these terms captures essential components uniting the traditional forms of contextualism advocated by those like Lewis, DeRose, and Cohen, but it somewhat suppresses a few important nuances that certain newer forms of contextualism have to offer. Geoff Pynn, for example, offers a view dubbed pragmatic contextualism which requires considering the truth conditions of knowledge ascribing and knowledge denying *assertions* apart from the truth conditions of knowledge ascribing and knowledge denying *sentences*—and posits, as a starting point in philosophy of language, that the truth conditions of sentences and their accompanying utterances can indeed come apart (see Pynn (2015a) and (2015b)). Pynn's view properly speaking is about

The ambiguity theory of 'knows' combines two theses. The first is that 'knows' has more than one sense—specifically more than one propositional sense, i.e. a sense that can properly be used in 'knows that' constructions.[11] The second is that which sense of 'knows' is being employed plays a role in fixing the truth conditions of a knowledge ascription (in virtue of contributing to the meaning of the ascription). Thus, so long as the ambiguity theorist doesn't hold a view that requires that context be determined in order to fix meaning in general, the ambiguity theory allows that the meaning and truth conditions of a knowledge ascription can be determined even when the context is not. That is to say, the truth conditions of knowledge ascriptions can be known on the ambiguity theory even if the attributor's context is unknown or if the ascription is presented acontextually (if such a thing is possible).

It has often been noted that contextualism entails the following.

Surface Conflict Without Inconsistency (SCWI): it is possible for a speaker to say about a subject S and a proposition P "S knows that P" and at the very same time for another speaker to say about the same subject and proposition that "S doesn't know that P" and for both speakers to be speaking truly.

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assertions/utterances only and not sentences, but I don't believe that appealing to that distinction here will be relevant for my arguments so I've chosen to gloss over it in this paper. On another front, views like those found in Berit Brogaard (2008), and John MacFarlane (2007, 2009) are best understood as claiming not that context is required in order for a proposition to be expressed, but rather that a context is required in order to determine the truth conditions of the proposition in virtue of the existence of an epistemic parameter of evaluation, much like more commonly affirmed parameters of evaluation like time, place, or possible world. While such views may allow for the expression of a proposition without a context, they still share two important traits in common with more standard forms of contextualism: 1) they require a context for the truth conditions of knowledge ascriptions and denials and, 2) they posit that context *determines* in part what those truth conditions are. Thus, for my purpose, I take what I say in this paper to apply to these views just as forcefully as other forms of contextualism. For a reader wary of this claim, I would suggest considering my argument against contextualism to not include this particular sub-family of views.

[11] I take it that for each distinct sense of 'knows' there is also a distinct referent. (The ambiguity theory as stated doesn't technically rule out the option that there are multiple senses but only a single referent. However, this seems to me to be a very strange view and one which I do not seriously consider.) Thus one could advocate a "companion view" to the ambiguity theory about the referents of 'knowledge' instead of senses. Steup's Multiple Concepts Theory of knowledge (Steup, 2005) might be able to serve as such a view. The ambiguity theory remains neutral on the nature of these referents. It would be a matter of one's additional epistemological views what those referents would be—e.g. relations, mental states, etc. My own view is that each sense does have a separate referent and that the referent is an epistemic relation—i.e. a three place relation where a particular kind and level of justification links a believer and a proposition.

This upshot of contextualism plays an important role in the work contextualism is able to do. The ambiguity theory also entails SCWI. This is because on the ambiguity theory the first speaker can be using one sense, while the second speaker is using another sense, which results in the two sentences having different truth conditions that can pull apart as SCWI claims. As a result, the ambiguity theory also reaps the same benefits that contextualism gains from this upshot.

While until recently the ambiguity theory has not been much defended (or even discussed), it is a view that has been previously suggested and endorsed. Two such early ambiguity theorists are Norman Malcolm[12] and Fred Feldman.[13] Malcolm's and Feldman's positions are very similar. Both posit two senses of 'knowledge' (what DeRose calls a "high" and a "low" sense"[14]) one of which is 'knowledge' in a rigorous, high-standards, "philosophical" sense and the other 'knowledge' in a practical, every-day sense.

While both Malcolm and Feldman adopt a "two senses" view of 'knowledge', it is important to note that the ambiguity theory itself doesn't say anything about the number of senses 'knows' has or the conditions under which these different senses are satisfied.[15] This point has been noticed by Matthias Steup who has more recently advocated an ambiguity theory-like position which he dubs the "Multiple Concepts Theory" (MCT).[16] Steup writes that "[a]ccording to MCT, there are as many *concepts* of knowledge as there are different *standards* of knowledge."[17] While Steup chooses to frame his discussion in terms of the multiple concepts of

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[12] Malcolm (1952)

[13] Feldman (1986, 33-37).

[14] DeRose (1999, 195).

[15] Viewed in this way the ambiguity theory is a genus for which there could be a number of species of more specific views. My aim in this paper is only to defend the "genus."

[16] Steup (2005).

[17] Steup (2005, 6).

knowledge instead of the multiple senses of 'knowledge', I take MCT to be completely compatible with the ambiguity theory.[18]

Another recent advocate of a form of the ambiguity theory is Baron Reed. The metaphysical picture Reed advocates is that "knowledge in general is a determinable; the different knowledge relations that are grounded in particular degrees of justification are its determinates."[19] He compares this to the nature of colors writing that, "[t]he same sort of metaphysical structure can be found in color: blue, for example, is a determinable with the various particular shades of blue as its determinates."[20] Reed combines this metaphysical account of blue with the following semantic account of 'blue': the "various usages of 'blue' are possible because it is ambiguous."[21] And Reed takes the same semantic account to apply in the case of 'knows'.[22]

The fact that the ambiguity theory itself doesn't say anything about the number of senses 'knows' has is a particularly important point because it shows that what distinguishes the ambiguity theory from contextualism is *not* the number of senses the theory posits. This point has sometimes gone unnoticed. For example, DeRose writes that,

> "Theories according to which there are two senses of 'know' – a 'low,' 'weak,' or 'ordinary sense' on the one hand, and a 'high,' 'strong,' or 'philosophical' sense, which is much more demanding, on the other – can be viewed as limiting cases of contextualist views…current contextualist theories don't hold that there are just

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[18] In fact, the relationship between MCT and the ambiguity theory seems to be a much stronger relationship than merely a relationship of compatibility. Steup identifies a view which he calls "New Contextualism" (NC) which he refers to as a "semanticized mirror image of MCT." I take this description of being a semanticized mirror image of MCT to also apply to the ambiguity theory.

[19] Reed (2013, 54).

[20] Reed (2013, 54).

[21] Reed (2013, 54).

[22] One might question whether or not Reed's view ought to count as a type of ambiguity theory—particularly if one has a strong intuition that color words are not ambiguous (see for example Cruse 1982). It seems to me that Reed's view is a type of ambiguity theory, and when asked, Reed said that he too saw the view as a type of ambiguity theory. Thus, I treat it as such, while realizing that certain commitments others may have about linguistics or philosophy of language may lead them to classify Reed's view differently.

two different sets of epistemic standards governing the truth conditions of knowledge attributions, but rather posit a wide variety of different standards."[23]

By taking Malcolm's two senses view of 'knowledge' to be a "limiting case" of contextualism, DeRose implies that the *only* relevant difference between Malcolm's view and views in the family of positions championed by the contemporary defender of contextualism is the *number* of epistemic standards governing the truth conditions of knowledge attributions. This seems to be a mistake. After all, if there is nothing other than the number of senses posited that separates the ambiguity theory from contextualism, we lack an explanation as to what differentiates Reed's theory from the contextualist camp.[24] Ambiguity theories of 'know' that are multivocal like Reed's and Steup's prompt one to note that there is a second, important difference between a view like Malcolm's and a view like DeRose's.

This second difference deals with what is required in order for a given utterance or sentence expression of a knowledge ascription or denial to pick out a proposition. On contextualism, what is required (in addition to the things we standardly think are required) is a context. On the ambiguity theory a context is not required, but a sense of 'knows' is. This in turn results in a difference between contextualism and the ambiguity theory as to what determines the truth conditions of a knowledge ascription or denial. For the proponent of contextualism, context is one such determinant, but for the proponent of the ambiguity theory context is not (at least not in any way beyond the way in which context may always be required). This difference between contextualism and the ambiguity theory is no mere difference in degree as is the difference

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[23] DeRose (1999, 191-192). Similarly, Jason Stanley (2005, 81) considers the ambiguity theory to be a type of epistemic contextualism.
[24] Contextualists may deny that Reed's and Steup's views are not part of the contextualist camp, but in responding to the view that the ambiguity theory is distinct from contextualism, part of what I'm aiming to do is show that Reed's and Steup's view are different in kind and should be recognized as so.

between a view that advocates two epistemic standards versus a view that advocates more than two epistemic standards. This difference between contextualism and the ambiguity theory is a difference in kind.

In order to see clearly that this is a difference in kind and not just degree, one needs to clearly see the distinction, linguistically, between ambiguity and context-sensitivity. Adam Sennet makes the point nicely writing that

> "Context sensitivity is (potential) variability in content due purely to changes in the context of utterance without a change in the convention of word usage. Thus, 'I am hungry' varies in content speaker to speaker because 'I' is context sensitive and shifts reference depending on who utters it. 'I', however, is not massively ambiguous. 'Bank' is ambiguous, not (at least, not obviously) context sensitive. Of course, knowledge of context may well help disambiguate an ambiguous utterance. Nonetheless, ambiguity is not characterized by interaction with (extra- linguistic) context but is a property of the meanings of the terms."[25]

Sennet's examples clearly show that a word can be ambiguous without being context-sensitive and that a word can be context-sensitive without being ambiguous. While both ambiguity and context-sensitivity allow for a change in content across context (as is evident in our uses of both 'I' and 'bank'), with context-sensitive words the change in semantic content is *due purely* (to use Sennet's phrase) to the change in context, while with ambiguous words context plays a role relegated to the pragmatic where context merely makes it likely or sensible that a change in semantic content may occur via a change in the speaker's intention with certain changes in context.[26] Even if one were to make the case that 'bank' is context-sensitive, the context-sensitivity of 'bank' wouldn't be *because* it was ambiguous and conversely with 'I'. This is, in

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[25] Sennet (2016).

[26] I favor a view according to which it is the speaker's intention which plays the primary role in disambiguation, at least on the level of answering the question as to what proposition an utterance picks out in the case of lexically ambiguous utterances. But the specifics of this are not crucial for my case. For someone with a different view of what disambiguates a word, that thing can serve the role that I've given to a speaker's intention.

part, because ambiguity is the non-context-bound property of a word having more than one

meaning, any of which can be the meaning used in *any* context where the appropriate syntax is

present,[27] while context-sensitivity is the property of content variation *resulting from* a change in

context. This distinction is in keeping with the general assumption in linguistics that context-

sensitivity and ambiguity are distinct linguistic phenomena.[28]

One may acknowledge this difference in kind between context-sensitivity and ambiguity,

but still want to resist that there is a difference in kind between contextualism and the ambiguity

theory by suggesting that it is a specific element of context which fixes the sense of 'knows',

with that specific element of context being speaker's intention. There is a certain initial

plausibility to this counterargument. After all Cohen includes speaker's intentions among the

elements that make up context,[29] and in places DeRose gives a great amount of influence to

speaker's intentions to determine context.[30] It is true that a speaker's intention is *part* of the

context of the utterance, and on the account of speaker meaning which I currently favor, it is the

speaker's intention which fixes the sense in cases of ambiguity.

However, there are three important points to be made in response to this suggestion. First,

in looking at the popular thought experiments used to ground contextualism—like DeRose's

bank cases and Cohen's airport case—it seems clear that speaker's intention is only one of

several constituents making up the speaker's context—including other constituents that are

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[27] I include the qualifier of "where the appropriate syntax is present" to cover instances where due to an ambiguous term's meanings including different parts of speech certain meanings are blocked due to syntactic structure. Take for example the word 'duck' which has both noun-form and verb-form meanings. The syntax of the sentence "She saw him duck" blocks the possibility that the referent of 'duck' could be the animal instead of the action. This example is given by Emma Borg (2004, 143). Sennet (2016) uses a similar example to make a similar point.

[28] This is not to deny that words can be both ambiguous and context-sensitive. 'Long' seems like a plausible candidate for such a word. 'Knows' could turn out to be such a word too, but for ease of exposition, that option will not be explored in this article.

[29] Cohen (1999, 61).

[30] DeRose (2004 and 2005) in particular.

internal to the speaker (e.g. the utterer's purposes, interests, stakes, etc.) along with constituents that are external to the speaker (e.g. the conversation the utterer is contributing to, the community the utterer is a part of, etc.). The upshot of this is that, despite the fact that the exact boundaries of what counts as context for the proponent of context are often not made explicit, it is clear that much more than speaker's intention is typically taken to be part of context. Thus, even if we consider anything determined by speaker intention to be context-sensitive, the proponent of the ambiguity theory differs in kind from the traditional proponent of contextualism because the proponent of the ambiguity theory rejects the additional elements of context beyond speaker intention as having a role in determining the truth conditions of knowledge ascriptions and denials. (Or at least this will be the case for an ambiguity theorist who takes the sense of an ambiguous term to be determined by speaker's intention.)

Second, as Reed has noted, having determination of sense by speaker's intention count as a type of context-sensitivity makes 'knows' context-sensitive in only a very trivial sense that would certainly also make all ambiguous words context-sensitive along with just about every other word as well.[31] This seems to be a good reason to reject mere sensitivity to a speaker's intention as grounds for context-sensitivity.[32]

Third, this explanation seems to undermine the distinct ways in which we use context in relation to meaning. John Perry makes a useful distinction between the *semantic* and the *presemantic* which he describes in the following way,

> "Sometimes we use context to figure out with which meaning a
> word is being used, or which of several words that look or sound

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[31] Reed (2013, 57). A similar point is raised by Rysiew who writes that "insofar as 'context' is taken to refer to the interests, expectations, and so forth of attributors, it is a tautology—something that everyone has got to accept—that in *some* sense 'ascriptions of knowledge are context-sensitive'" (Rysiew 2001, 478). See also Cohen (1999, 57).
[32] Unless one wants to take a more use-based approach to language in which such a result is desired, in which case epistemic contextualism loses any of its distinctively epistemic flavor and becomes just a general theory of language.

alike is being used, or even which language is being spoken. These are *presemantic* uses of context: context helps us to figure out meaning. In the case of indexicals, however, context is used *semantically*. It remains relevant after the language, words and meanings are all known; the meaning directs us to certain aspects of context."[33]

I (along with Perry[34]) take this difference between 'I' and 'bank' to be a case of such a difference—the way in which context determines the meaning of 'I' is clearly semantic. That is, context remains relevant after the language, words, and meanings are all known. The task of determining which sense of 'bank' is being employed is a presemantic task. We use context to figure out what meaning a speaker has employed, but once we've successfully done that, there is nothing especially context-sensitive about 'bank' that remains. It seems clear to me that contextualists have traditionally seen context playing a robust, semantic role that cannot be relegated entirely to the presemantic. But part of what the ambiguity theory claims in stating that the variability in meaning is a result of an ambiguity in the term 'knows' is that the role context is playing is solely presemantic and as a result purely pragmatic. This seems to straightforwardly constitute a difference in kind.

That being said, my primary goal in this section has been to make clear the differences between the ambiguity theory and contextualism, as it is typically presented. I have done so by denying that the ambiguity theory is a type of contextualism, but at the end of the day my primary concern is not with taxonomy. If one wished to change or expand their characterization of contextualism such that the ambiguity theory counted as a type of contextualism, they are of course welcome to do so, but it is important that it be understood that there are key differences in

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[33] Perry (2001, 39-40).
[34] Perry (2001, 40-42). Emma Borg also advocates viewing ambiguity as presemantic (2004).

kind that separate the ambiguity theory from traditional forms of contextualism and not merely a difference in the number of epistemic standards involved.

In what follows it will be useful to have a more specific form of the ambiguity theory in mind to compare to contextualism. Thus, for dialectical purposes only, I will endorse a "three senses" view of 'knows', building upon the "two sense" positions adopted by Malcolm and Feldman.[35] First, I'll employ a "low sense" of 'knows' such that it allows for most of our everyday knowledge ascriptions and denials to come out true. Second, I'll appeal to a "high sense" of 'knows' such that only very highly justified beliefs count as knowledge, but on which entitled epistemic certainty is not required. Third, I'll use a "certainty sense" of 'knows' such that the sort of justification that entitles one to epistemic certainty is required (i.e. such that the knowledge is infallible). These senses will be indicated at points with the labels knows$_L$ (short for knows in the low sense), knows$_H$ (short for knows in the high sense), and know$_C$ (short for knows in the epistemic certainty sense).

2. A Brief Independent Case for the Ambiguity Theory

This paper is not meant to be a complete defense of the ambiguity theory. The independent linguistic grounding for the ambiguity theory, how the ambiguity theory fares compared to strict invariantism, and how we can explain the semantic blindness many of us have to the ambiguity of 'knows' (if it is in fact ambiguous) are all matters I've covered elsewhere.[36] My fundamental concerns in this paper are showing that the ambiguity theory is distinct from contextualism and arguing that the ambiguity theory provides the same major benefits as contextualism.

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[35] Steup (2005) makes a similar dialectical move.
[36] See Satta (2018a, 2018b, 2018c)

But before making these arguments by comparison, it is worth briefly presenting some of the independent motivations for the ambiguity theory. After all, if contextualism already meets the goals of solving skeptical puzzles and preserving our everyday knowledge ascriptions, why look into another theory? The aim of this section is to provide initial philosophical and linguistic motivations for the ambiguity theory before arguing that the ambiguity theory shares the same major strengths as contextualism.

We'll start with a philosophical motivation. As noted in the previous section, both the ambiguity theory and contextualism entail the possibility of SCWI. However, note that only the ambiguity theory is compatible with the following.

Diverging Responses Without Inconsistency (DRWI): There are cases in which, for the same subject S and proposition p, at a given time t, one and the same speaker says truly "S knows that p" but instead could have truly said "S does not know that p" and vice versa.[37]

Contextualism must reject DRWI because context-sensitivity (via whatever the semantic mechanism may be) allows sentences and/or utterances to pick out different propositions and to have varying truth-conditions across different contexts, but doesn't allow for a sentence to pick out varying propositions or to have varying truth-conditions within a particular context.[38]

In contrast, the ambiguity theory allows for DRWI because the semantic mechanism of ambiguity allows sentences and/or utterances to pick out different propositions and to have varying truth-conditions *both across different contexts and within a particular context*. SCWI requires what context-sensitivity and ambiguity have in common, namely, the ability for varying

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[37] It is also the case that only on the ambiguity theory and not on epistemic contextualism is the following true. DRWI*: There are cases in which, for the same subject S and proposition p, at a given time t, one and the same speaker can truly choose to say "S knows that p" and can also truly chose to say "S does not know that p." If one prefers to consider a formulation that avoids 'could', the arguments that follow can just as easily be run substituting DRWI* for DRWI.

[38] Or at least not on the "single scoreboard semantics" that has been adopted by epistemic contextualists. There may be a "multiple scoreboard semantics" that is compatible with DRWI (although I'm doubtful that even this will work), but this multiple scoreboard semantics would look quite different than the current forms of contextualism on offer. For a discussion of and argument for single scoreboard semantics, see DeRose (2004).

truth-conditions for a sentence or utterance across contexts. But DRWI requires what only

ambiguity allows for: the ability for varying truth-conditions for a sentence or utterance within a

particular context.[39]

The ambiguity theory's compatibility with DRWI is what allows the ambiguity theory to

straightforwardly explain instances where DRWI is true. To see a plausible example of such a

case, let's turn to the following scenario originally provided by Jessica Brown.

> "A student is spending the day shadowing a surgeon. In the morning
> he observes her in clinic examining patient A who has a diseased
> left kidney. The decision is taken to remove it that afternoon. Later,
> the student observes the surgeon in theatre where patient A is lying
> anaesthetized on the operating table. The operation hasn't started as
> the surgeon is consulting the patient's notes. The student is puzzled
> and asks one of the nurses what's going on:
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> Student: I don't understand. Why is she looking at the patient's
> records? She was in clinic with the patient this morning. Doesn't she
> even know which kidney it is?
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> Nurse: Of course, she knows which kidney it is. But, imagine what
> it would be like if she removed the wrong kidney. She should not
> operate before checking the patient's records."[40]

In this case the nurse's claim that the doctor knows which of the patient's kidneys is to be

removed is meant to be taken intuitively as a true statement and appropriate response. This on its

own doesn't favor DRWI or its rejection. However, consider Fantl and McGrath's claim that "the

nurse in Brown's surgeon case could just as easily and just as properly have said, 'Well, of

course she's checking the chart; it's not enough to rely on her memory that it's the left kidney.

She needs to know it is'."[41] The implication of such a claim on the nurse's behalf amounts to an

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[39] From here on out the relevant difference between the truth-conditions of sentences versus the truth-conditions of utterances will be suppressed with phrases like 'the truth-conditions of knowledge ascribing sentences' and 'the truth-conditions of knowledge ascribing utterances' being used interchangeably unless otherwise specified. On certain views, such as Geoff Pynn's pragmatic contextualism (2015a, 2015b), this distinction between the truth-conditions of utterances and sentences is relevant. But the distinction is not relevant for our purposes.
[40] Brown (2008, 176).
[41] Fantl and McGrath (2012, 71).

implicit denial that the doctor knows which of the kidneys is to be removed. Let us label the response that Fantl and McGrath claim the nurse could give (adding in an explicit knowledge denial) *Nurse Response 2 (NR-2)* and the original response that Brown claims the nurse could give *Nurse Response 1 (NR-1)*. Our options are then as follows:

NR-1: Of course, she knows which kidney it is. But, imagine what it would be like if she removed the wrong kidney. She should not operate before checking the patient's records

NR-2: Well, of course, she's checking the chart; it's not enough to rely on her memory that it's the left kidney. She needs to know it is, and without double-checking she doesn't know it.

Both NR-1 and NR-2 deal with the same subject (the surgeon), the same proposition (it is the left kidney of the patient that is to be removed) and are given in response to the same context.[42] NR-1 contains an explicit knowledge ascription while NR-2 contains an explicit knowledge denial concerning the same subject, proposition and context. For those with the intuition that both NR-1 and NR-2 represent plausibly true and appropriate responses, this poses a problem for contextualism, because the contexts prompting these responses are identical,[43] yet both claims seem very plausibly true. Such intuitions pose no problem for the ambiguity theory. It seems to me that it frequently is the case that in one and the same context, a speaker is

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[42] Obviously, once NR-1 or NR-2 is asserted the context is different than one in which the other claim had been asserted instead. But prior to the assertion the context for the two scenarios is the same—or at least the context is the same if we take a view of context as a sharable thing created by the conversational partners together, and not merely what is going on in one party's head. (I take this to be how context is typically understood by epistemic contextualists. See footnote 29.)

[43] One might protest that surely these contexts aren't *identical* to each other, for presumably, even if externally the contexts appear identical, there must be some kind of internal difference in the mental states of the nurse that prompt her to respond differently in the two scenarios. My response is that on the dominant pictures of conversational context (e.g. Lewis (1979), Stalnaker (2014)—the relevant sort of context at hand—context appears to be something that exists between persons in conversation. This is further verified by the "single-scoreboard semantics" that seems to have been either explicitly or implicitly been adopted by contextualism's most prominent defenders (e.g. DeRose 2004, Cohen 1999). Thus, even if there is a necessary difference in the mental states of the nurse leading up to her utterance, this mental state isn't a relevant part of the context—although any altered behavior this leads to (in this case her diverging response) is part of the context and explains why the two contexts diverge once different responses are posited.

permitted to assert a knowledge ascription or denial, holding fixed the speaker and proposition. The ambiguity theory offers the cleanest explanation of such situations.[44]

Let's turn now to a linguistic motivation for the ambiguity theory. Ambiguous words come in two types: homonyms and polysemes.[45] Homonymy is the phenomenon of one word having two or more meanings that are unrelated. Words like 'bank' and 'bear' are examples of the former and are called homonyms.[46] Polysemy refers to the phenomenon of one word having two or more *closely related* meanings. Words like 'crane' and 'arch' are examples of this and are called polysemes. Any plausible ambiguity theory of 'knows' will claim that 'knows' is polysemous, not homonymous. A linguistic motivation for the polysemy of 'knows' can be found in noting the pervasiveness of polysemy among commonly used English verbs.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary 'know' is the eighth most commonly used English verb. The rest of the twenty-five most commonly used English verbs are 'be', 'have', 'do', 'say', 'get', 'make', 'go', 'take', 'see', 'come', 'think', 'look', 'want', 'give', 'use', 'find', 'tell', 'ask', 'work', 'seem', 'feel', 'try', 'leave' and 'call'.[47] These verbs do very well at passing common tests for ambiguity.[48] For example, in the Conjunction Reduction test, one takes two sentences in which the possibly ambiguous word is supposedly being used in different senses and

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[44] For a more in depth discussion of DRWI and possible contextualist responses, see Satta (2018a).

[45] It is widely recognized that the line between homonymy and polysemy is blurry. See for example, Ravin and Lecock (2000), 2-5 and Sennet (2016). Some have used this blurriness to call into question the distinctions between ambiguity, polysemy, and vagueness—arguing that a word's (or signifier's or vocable's or what-have-you's) being homonymous, polysemous, or vague is a context-dependent property (i.e. a word can be polysemous in one context and vague in another) or are properties that come in degrees on a continuum as opposed to being clear cut categories. See, for example, Geeraerts (1993) and Tuggy (1993). For our purposes so long as there is a clear conceptual distinction between homonymy and polysemy and paradigmatic cases of both, the fact that it is often difficult to determine whether a particular ambiguous word is homonymous or polysemous is unproblematic.

[46] Depending on one's philosophy of language one may think this sentence would read more accurately as "Words like 'bank' and 'bank' and 'bear' and 'bear' are examples of the former and called homonyms." And one may wish to make a similar modification for the sentences that follows. I have no problem with such alternations and find it inconsequential to the success of the arguments that follow.

[47] "The OEC: Facts About the Language". Retrieved on August 14, 2015 from http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/words/the-oec-facts-about-the-language.

[48] In addition to the examples I've included here, more can be found in Satta (2018b).

combines the two sentences into one while using the ambiguous term only once. One then looks to see if this new sentence is a zeugma (i.e. a sentence in which a single word applies to two different parts of the sentence in two different senses).[49]

Such zeugmas can easily be constructed using many of the verbs listed above. Take 'is' for example.

(1) She is a talented artist.

(2) She is running late.

(3) She is a talented artist and running late.

The zeugma turns on the dual usage of 'is' as indicating a persisting trait and a current state.

Zeugma can also be formed where the word standing in both relations to the ambiguous word is the same word. Take for example the following case using 'made'.

(4) I made this [reed] basket.

(5) I made that [last second] basket [to win the game].

(6) I made this basket and that basket.

This can happen with constructions in subjects as well as with objects, as shown in this example with 'tells'.

(7) He tells me that he has something to hide.

(8) His nervous demeanor tells me that he has something to hide.

(9) He and his nervous demeanor tell me that he has something to hide.

If one were to go through all twenty-five verbs listed above, one would find most lend themselves to forming zeugmas.

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[49] One might wonder about the value of this test. If you cannot tell if the word has changed senses going from one sentence to another, how would one be able to tell if the complex sentence is zeugmatic? This is a fine question. I am not sure what the rationale is of those who have endorsed this test, but I think there is something to be said for the particular juxtaposition that occurs in such a complex sentence that may make it easier to tell.

Similarly, it is relatively easy to craft sentences in which commonly used English verbs pass the Contradiction test (where two usages of a word are put in a sentence where the usage looks contradictory but isn't)[50] as shown with the following examples.

(a)   She made the basket but she didn't *make* the basket.

(b)   It seems red but it doesn't *seem* red.

(c)   Delisa called Skye, but she didn't *call* Skye.

(d)   That's what I said, even though that's not what I *said*.

(e)   I use my friends but I don't *use* my friends.

We can see why (a) is not contradictory if we think back to (4)-(6) and assign sinking the shot as the meaning of 'made' and crafting or creating to 'make.' In (b) we can avoid contradiction by taking 'seems' to mean looks visually and 'seem' to mean strike one as. For (c) we can avoid contradiction when 'called' means harkened after and 'call' means a certain type of contact via phone. With (d) contradiction is bypassed by taking the first 'says' in the loose sense to mean what is conveyed and the second 'said' to refer to the actual words uttered and their literal meaning.[51] And (e) can pass the contradiction test if the first instance of 'use' refers to utilizing in a non-abusive sort of manner and the second instance of 'use' refers to a sort of mere-means type of abuse of another, which Kant famously condemned. Note that to pass the contradiction test the sentences don't need to sound natural or fluid—they just need to avoid contradiction.

The initial plausibility of the view that generally commonly used English verbs are ambiguous, combined with the ability of so many of those verbs to pass classical ambiguity tests, provides us with good reason to think that most of English's most commonly used verbs are

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[50] Sennet (2016)

[51] This example is a modified version of an example suggested to me by Jennifer Saul. Saul, among others, has noted in writing that 'says' is ambiguous in this way. See Saul (2015). Similarly, Patrick Rysiew identifies and uses these two sense of 'says' in his work contextualism and invariantism (Rysiew 2001, 2005, 2007).

indeed ambiguous. Thus, without a reason to think that 'know' is unlike most other commonly used English verbs, this provides us with good reason to favor the view that 'know' is itself ambiguous. The force of this is increased when we consider the best explanation for why commonly used English verbs are ambiguous. The best explanation seems to be a functional claim that these commonly used English verbs need to be flexible and varied in order to do all the work that we use them for. The paucity of epistemic verbs available to English speakers and the varied and flexible functions 'knows' is called on to perform provides further reason to think that 'knows' is ambiguous like other commonly used English verbs.

The above argument is an indirect argument for the polysemy of 'knows' by arguing that it is part of a class of words that are almost always ambiguous. There are more direct arguments that can be made as well. One can argue that the different senses of 'knows' are semantically encoded by more than one word in another language—for example, the Latin *cognitionem* and *scientia*, particularly as they are used by Descartes.[52] While these are only initial independent motivations for the ambiguity theory, my hope is that they provide the context in which to motivate an interest in some comparative assessments between the ambiguity theory and contextualism.

3. The Strengths of Contextualism and the Ambiguity Theory

As previously stated, the generally agreed upon strengths of epistemic contextualism are (1) that it can be used to solve persistent, skepticism-driven epistemological puzzles in a manner

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[52] See Satta (2018b). Perhaps the clearest case of such a divergent usage in Descartes occurs in the Second Set of Replies (CSMII, 105-6). From this passage Fred Feldman, identifies two types of knowledge (and senses of 'knowledge') based on Descartes' distinction. Feldman labels these senses 'practical knowledge' and 'metaphysical knowledge' respectively. See Feldman (1986, 33-37). Very recently, numerous arguments that such semantic dual-encoding occurs in a variety of other languages have been offered by some of the contributors to Masaharu Mizumoto, Stephen Stich, and Eric McCready's (2018) new edited volume *Epistemology for the Rest of the World*. See the book's "Manifesto" (Stich and Mizumoto 2018) and "Introduction" (Mizumoto 2018)."

which explains why many people have competing intuitions that both skeptical and non-skeptical responses to such puzzles are plausible and (2) that it preserves the truth of our everyday knowledge ascriptions. In this section I argue that the ambiguity theory also has these strengths.

One type of puzzle which contextualism solves is exemplified in the following scenario from Stewart Cohen.[53]

> "Mary and John are at the L. A. airport contemplating taking a certain flight to New York. They want to know whether the flight has a layover in Chicago. They overhear someone ask a passenger Smith if he knows whether the flight stops in Chicago. Smith looks at the flight itinerary he got from the travel agent and responds, 'Yes, I know—it does stop in Chicago.' It turns out that Mary and John have a very important business contact they have to meet at the Chicago airport. Mary says, 'How reliable is that itinerary? It could contain a misprint. They could have changed the schedule at the last minute.' Mary and John agree that Smith doesn't really know that the plane will stop in Chicago."[54]

It would appear that Smith has a standard for knowledge that differs from Mary's and John's.

The puzzle comes about by asking which (if any) party's knowledge ascription is true. Cohen thinks that to conclude that just Smith's, just Mary's and John's, or neither Smith's nor Mary's and John's ascription is true are all dissatisfactory options. After all, to conclude that Smith's ascription is true is to conclude that Mary and John could sensibly say "Smith knows the plane will stop in Chicago but we still need to verify that this is true." But to conclude that either just Mary's and John's ascription is true or that neither Smith's nor Mary's and John's ascription is true is to conclude that many other everyday ascriptions of knowledge are incorrect and to move very strongly in the direction of skepticism.

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[53] Another popular scenario is DeRose's "bank case" (DeRose, 1992). Both contextualism and the ambiguity theory solve the bank case in a similar fashion to the respective ways in which they solve Cohen's airport case.
[54] Cohen (1999, 58).

Cohen concludes instead, by appeal to contextualism, that "[n]either standard is simply correct or simply incorrect."[55] Cohen writes that,

> "Rather context determines which standard is correct. Since the standards for knowledge ascriptions can vary across contexts, each claim, Smith's as well as Mary and John's, can be correct in the context in which it was made. When Smith says, 'I know…', what he says is true given the weaker standard operating in that context. When Mary and John say 'Smith does not know…', what they say is true given the stricter standard operating in their context. *And there is no context independent correct standard*."[56]

Many, like Cohen, consider each of the options he rejects dissatisfying. Thus, many consider it a virtue of a theory if it is able to supply an alternative. Contextualism does this. But so does the ambiguity theory.

On the ambiguity theory both Smith's knowledge attribution and Mary's and John's knowledge denial can be right in *both* their contexts, so long as Smith is using 'know' in the low sense and Mary and John are using 'know' in the high sense. Of course, Mary and John would be incorrect if they claimed Smith was *wrong* in claiming to have known that the flight would stop in Chicago. So long as Smith was using the word 'know' in the low sense (and it seems reasonable to think that he was), he is correct even in Mary and John's context.

To see why this is so, let P stand for the claim that the flight has a layover in Chicago. Let $know_L$ stand for 'know' in the low sense. And let $know_H$ stand for 'know' in the high sense. Smith's and Mary's and John's claims can now be expressed as follows:

Smith: I $know_L$ that P

Mary & John: Smith doesn't $know_H$ that P

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[55] Cohen (1999, 59).
[56] Cohen (1999, 59); emphasis is the original author's.

Given that Smith saw on the printed itinerary that the flight had a layover in Chicago, Smith has sufficient evidence to make his claim that "I know$_L$ that P" true. The differences between his low-standard context and Mary's and John's more demanding higher-standard context do not and could not make Smith's statement false. Were Smith to have overheard Mary and John say he didn't know, and were he to have said "No, I truly do know$_L$ that P," he would still be saying something true.

But while Smith's claim would remain true, it just wouldn't be very relevant, practically speaking, to Mary and John given their context.[57] And given the relevance of the high sense of 'know' for Mary and John, it would be easy to see how Mary and John might carelessly conclude that Smith was wrong because they hadn't taken his intended sense into account.[58] Thus, the ambiguity theory seems to be able to provide as satisfying a response as contextualism to Cohen's scenario and other scenarios of a similar type—namely, it shows how both Smith on the one hand and Mary and John on the other can be correct by showing that Smith is correct when using know$_L$ and Mary and John are correct when using know$_H$.[59]

The other popular type of epistemological puzzle which the proponent of contextualism claims to be able to solve comes in the form of inconsistent triads of a particular structure. One such triad is the following:

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[57] One might think it funny to discuss the contexts of the various speakers from the perspective of the ambiguity theory, which doesn't appeal to context to generate meaning. While the ambiguity theorist may have less need to discuss context generally, she need not deny that contexts exist (and it seems clear to me she'd be mistaken if she did). In this case the point of mentioning the context of our travelers is to highlight how context is inert in explaining meaning on the ambiguity theory yet allows the speakers to remain correct within their context (and in fact expands their ability to be correct even from the perspective of the context of others).

[58] This solution does not, of course, prohibit genuine disagreement about whether or not Smith knows$_H$ or knows$_L$ that P. For example, if Smith were to say to John and Mary "I know$_H$ that P because my evidence entails P" then Smith would be contending their claim that he doesn't know$_H$ that P. However, in such a case Smith would simply be wrong.

[59] This general strategy will work with other hypothetical cases put forward like the bank cases given by DeRose (1992) and Stanley (2005) and the train cases by Fantl and McGrath (2002).

(i)   If I know I have hands, then I know I'm not a brain-in-a-vat (BIV)

(ii)   I know I have hands

(iii)   I don't know I'm not a brain-in-a-vat (BIV)[60]

Cohen considers the best type of response to such a triad to be one in which not only is a solution provided as to which premises are true but in which an explanation of the independent plausibility of each of the premises is also provided.[61]

The response which the proponent of contextualism is able to put forward is that this "skeptical paradox arises from inattention to shifts in context."[62] Thus, the skeptic is correct in accepting (i) and (iii) and rejecting (ii) relative to the *high standards context* in which all three propositions are entertained. But this does not mean that we are not typically correct in accepting (ii) in most of the *everyday contexts* in which we believe that we have hands. What is important to note now is that the ambiguity theory is once again able to give an equally (if not more) satisfying response.

Just as the proponent of contextualism claims that the paradox arises from inattention to shifts in context, so the proponent of the ambiguity theory claims that the paradox arises from inattention to shifts in the sense of 'know' employed. If the low sense of 'know' is used consistently throughout, then (iii) is false while (i) and (ii) are true. If the certain sense of 'know', $know_C$, is used consistently (or perhaps also if the high sense of 'know', $know_H$), then

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[60] The general form for such triads comes from G.E. Moore (1959), who rejected statements of type (iii) on grounds of statements of type (i) and (ii). Another triad of the same form is Dretske's zebra/cleverly-disguised mule case. Dretske chooses to reject statements of type (i) while accepting statements of types (ii) and (iii) (Dretske, (1970)).

[61] Cohen writes that "So what we want is a resolution of the paradox that preserves our strong intuitions that we know things. But any such resolution must explain the undeniable appeal of skeptical arguments. For this is what gives rise to the paradox. Though, initially we claim to know many things, under skeptical pressure we begin to worry. Often when we consider skeptical arguments, we find ourselves vacillating between thinking we know and worrying we don't…any successful response to the paradox must explain how we end up in this situation" (Cohen, 1999, 63).

[62] Cohen (1999, 67).

(ii) is false while (i) and (iii) are true. The reason both (ii) and (iii) seem plausible is because for both there is a sense of 'knows' that makes the claim true.[63] The skeptic and the Moorean go wrong only to the extent that they fail to recognize that there is a sense of 'knows' in which the respective opponent can sensibly affirm the proposition which they themselves reject.[64] Thus, like contextualism, the ambiguity theory is able not only to provide a solution to this type of paradox but is also able to explain the initial plausibility of each of the premises.

This examination of the responses the proponent of the ambiguity theory can give to such epistemological puzzles also shows how the ambiguity theory preserves the truth of everyday knowledge ascriptions. This results from the fact that on the ambiguity theory, skeptical arguments are unsound when the low, everyday sense of knowledge is employed. (Or at the very least, if they are unsound on contextualism, they are also unsound on the ambiguity theory such that no theory has an edge over the other in this regard). This shows that not only is the ambiguity theory able to solve the same epistemological puzzles that contextualism claims to solve, but that it also preserves the truth of everyday knowledge ascriptions just as well.

In this section I've aimed to show that the ambiguity theory has the same major strengths as contextualism. Contextualism explains how Smith and John and Mary can be correct in Cohen's airport case, but so does the ambiguity theory. Contextualism offers a solution to skeptical arguments and explains the appeal of each of the premises in such arguments, but so does the ambiguity theory. Contextualism preserves the truth of everyday knowledge ascriptions,

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[63] It would be a mistake for one to claim that the ambiguity theory leads to a failure in closure. On the ambiguity theory, the only situations in which (i) would not hold would be situations in which there was an equivocation in the sense of 'know' between the antecedent and the consequent of (i). And falsity due to equivocation does not lead to a failure of closure.

[64] This is a claim I'm making which goes strictly beyond what the ambiguity theory entails. After all it could be the case that there are many sense of 'knows' and we do not, in any sense of the word, know we have hands or we do not lack, in any sense of the word, knowledge that we are BIVs. But at the very least the ambiguity theory provides the conceptual space for both the skeptic and the Moorean to be right and only go wrong so far as they fail to realize the other party is using the word 'know' differently.

but so does the ambiguity theory. Given these similarities, one might wonder what it is that explains contextualism's popularity and the ambiguity theory's relative obscurity. In the final section of the paper, I want to point out an explanation available to the ambiguity theorist about why it is that a proponent of contextualism could easily misidentify context as the key to solving these epistemological problems as opposed to the different senses of 'knows'.

4. An Ambiguity-Theory-Friendly Explanation of the Appeal of Contextualism

What is at the center of explaining why the proponent of contextualism could easily misidentify context as opposed to ambiguity as the key to solving a number of epistemological problems is the semantics/pragmatics distinction. The explanation the ambiguity theorist has available is that the role of context is purely pragmatic instead of semantic as the contextualist claims. In other words, on the ambiguity theory context affects only which knowledge ascriptions and denials it would be *appropriate* to endorse while it is the sense of 'knows' which affects the *truth conditions* of those knowledge ascriptions and denials. Appealing to these distinctions is not a novel suggestion for those arguing against contextualism. Jessica Brown and Patrick Rysiew have both developed detailed accounts of the pragmatic role of context in their respective defenses of a moderate, subject-insensitive form of invariantism,[65] and more recently Baron Reed has made appeal to this distinction in defending his preferred form of the ambiguity theory.[66] The appeal of this explanatory option is noted by proponents of contextualism as well. For example, Keith DeRose writes that "the chief bugaboo of contextualism has been the concern that the contextualist is mistaking variability in the conditions of warranted assertability

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[65] Brown (2005, 2006) and Rysiew (2001, 2005, 2007).
[66] Reed (2013, 56-57).

of knowledge attributions for a variability in their truth conditions"[67] and acknowledges that this idea is a frequent first reaction to contextualism.[68]

Brown, Rysiew and Reed all appeal to Grice's Cooperative Principle, which is the maxim to "make conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."[69] Thus, a shift in our intuitions about whether an ascription or denial of knowledge is correct is to be explained by a context-derived shift in what's appropriate to endorse. For both the advocate of the ambiguity theory and the advocate of invariantism, this pragmatic explanation of context provides a tidy solution to the type of data that contextualists typically offer in favor of their position. However, the fact that the ambiguity theory allows for differing truth conditions for knowledge ascriptions and denials depending on which sense of 'knows' is used gives the pragmatic explanation of context additional power on the ambiguity theory that it lacks when combined with the moderate subject-insensitive invariantism of Brown and Rysiew. This feature of the ambiguity theory is what allows it to circumvent the most pressing problems DeRose raises for the pragmatic account of warranted assertability for the classical invariantist.

To see why the ambiguity theory has this explanatory advantage, consider that on a form of classical invariantism like Brown's or Rysiew's, meaning and therefore truth conditions must remain fixed even when context changes what is appropriate to say. Thus, those defending invariantism via a pragmatic explanation of context will need to account for instances in which it is appropriate to utter or otherwise endorse literally false assertions and most likely will also need to explain why utterances that intuitively seem true are literally false. (For example, an

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[67] DeRose (2002, 167).
[68] DeRose (2002, 170).
[69] Grice (1975, 45).

invariantist who holds a moderately non-skeptical classical view of knowledge will need to explain why Mary's and John's knowledge denial of Smith is literally false despite appearing true.) There is disagreement over how much of a cost this is for a theory,[70] and I myself do not see this challenge as insurmountable. However, the ambiguity theory appears to be able to skirt this difficulty entirely.

Unlike proponents of classical invariantism, ambiguity theorists are able to avoid dealing with instances of literally false but either appropriate or seemingly-true utterances. They can claim that on the ambiguity theory the pragmatic role that context plays is merely to indicate to or guide the listener in understanding *which* sense of 'knows' is likely being used by the speaker via the speaker's context. This is because on the ambiguity theory, unlike on either invariantism or contextualism, in a given context there is more than one proposition that can be picked out by any given knowledge ascription or knowledge denial.

This phenomenon of context pragmatically conveying which sense of an ambiguous word a speaker is using is perfectly clear in dealing with homonyms whose homonymy is a mere morphological accident like 'bank' (the financial institution) and 'bank' (the side of a river). Imagine that we are having a picnic by a river and that there is a duck down by the side of the river. If I tell you that "There's a duck down by the bank" it is clear to you that by 'bank' I mean the side of a river. And, given that there is a duck down by the river, I've said something true. Whether or not there is a duck down by any financial institution isn't relevant to whether or not I've said something true, and you most likely will not take it to be relevant because the context has pragmatically indicated to you that by 'bank' I mean the side of the river. And if it is false

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[70] DeRose argues that the fact that the invariantist proponent of a pragmatics explanation of context requires one to use pragmatic implication to explain the falsity of truth-seeming attributions is a mark against the view (DeRose, 2002). Brown argues that this is not the case (Brown, 2006).

that there is a duck down by any financial institution, this does not cause my utterance of "There's a duck down by the bank" to be a case in which I've said something strictly speaking false but only appropriate or seemingly true. In short, the ambiguity theory has the advantage over invariantism of being able to utilize a pragmatic explanation of context on which context serves to pragmatically convey which proposition a knowledge utterance picks out as opposed to pragmatically conveying something potentially false given the fixed proposition that the knowledge utterance picks out.

The fact that context plays an important role in what is being pragmatically conveyed in many knowledge ascriptions and denials provides the ambiguity theorist with an even stronger explanation for why one might mistakenly take context to be doing the semantic work that the ambiguity theorist claims the sense of 'knows' is doing. The source of this additional explanatory power is rooted in the fact that it seems very reasonable to think that there is a strong correlation between usages of certain senses of 'knows' and certain types of contexts.

For example, it seems plausible to surmise that in most everyday situations the "low" sense of 'knows' is the sense that speakers use in casual conversation. Similarly, those situations in which someone is likely to use the "high" sense of 'knows' are almost always situations in which there is some other mark which indicates that the context has shifted into a high standards situation (e.g. "Are you sure you *know* that? After all couldn't it be the case that you're a brain-in-a-vat?) and in which there is a corresponding reason for why the high sense of 'knows' is (at least taken to be) relevant. Given this high correlation between certain types of contexts and the usage of certain senses of 'knows', it would be easy to mistake the high correlation that results between certain types of contexts and certain truth conditions for knowledge ascriptions and

denials as a case in which the change in context was responsible or a sufficient reason for the change in the truth conditions.

In this paper I've shown how the ambiguity theory is distinct from contexualism, provided some initial motivations for the ambiguity theory, argued in favor of the ambiguity theory by showing how the ambiguity theory shares the major strengths contextualism does, and offered an ambiguity-theory-friendly explanation of why one might first gravitate to contextualism over the ambiguity theory even if the ambiguity theory is the correct theory. This paper focuses primarily on the relationship between the ambiguity theory to contextualism, as part of a larger general case for the ambiguity theory. I suggest that the considerations here provide good reason for those drawn to contextualism to give serious consideration to the ambiguity theory as well.[71]

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