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# Contextualism and the Factivity Problem<sup>1</sup>

*Peter Baumann*

## *Abstract*

Epistemological contextualism - the claim that the truth value of knowledge-attributions can vary with the context of the attributor - has recently faced a whole series of objections. The most serious one, however, has not been discussed much so far: the factivity objection. In this paper, I explain what the objection is and present three different versions of the objection. I then show that there is a good way out for the contextualist. However, in order to solve the problem the contextualist has to accept a relationalist version of contextualism.

One of the hardest and most serious problems a contextualist has to face is the factivity problem. Here is a brief and very intuitive version of it. Contextualists hold that a claim that A knows that p might be correct in one context but not in another. Contextualists hold that nothing commits them to one of these claims (that A knows that p) rather than to the other (that A does not know that p). However, if one accepts the correctness of the first claim then the factivity of knowledge (*knowledge implies truth*) commits one to p. This means, however, that the contextualist cannot retain his neutrality or distance with respect to the first knowledge claim and must support it. This, however, goes against the basic idea of contextualism (see above).

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Whatever response the contextualist has to offer, it will have far-reaching implications for the kind of contextualism he will be able to defend (if any). Given the importance of the problem, it is astonishing that so far (at least to my knowledge) there has been little detailed and direct discussion of it. Elke Brendel's (2003, see also 2005) and Crispin Wright's (2005) recent papers are exceptions (see also short passages in Veber 2004, 268-269, Brueckner 2004, Engel 2005, 58, 63, Kompa 2005, 18-19, 25-26, Kallestrup 2005, Steup 2005, sec.1-2, 6). However, they have started a debate which could quickly gain much more momentum. Both Brendel and Wright are quite pessimistic with respect to the availability of a contextualist solution to the problem. I think there is a way out for the contextualist. I will first say what exactly the factivity problem is and sketch two versions of it and one related problem (I-III). I will then say what I think is the - contextualist - solution (IV-VI). It will turn out that only a special form of contextualism has a plausible answer to the problem, namely a relationalist version. This adds support to this kind of contextualism. I will conclude (VII) with some remarks on further advantages of this kind of contextualism.

### *I. The Problem (first version)*

Let us start with the core thesis of contextualism.<sup>2</sup> Suppose there are two ascribers O and S; O finds himself in an ordinary and not-so-demanding context C-O; S finds himself in a more demanding, sceptical context C-S. The contextualist says that the following is

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2 I will only deal with what I take to be defensible forms of contextualism; what I am going to say will probably not cover everything that has been labelled "contextualism".

possible: O's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" is true, and S's utterance of the same sentence is false whereas S's utterance of "S doesn't know that he has hands" is true and O's utterance of it is false.<sup>3</sup> The contextualist explanation is that because of the context-sensitivity of "know" these two utterances do not express the same proposition or do not have the same meaning: the truth of knowledge ascriptions varies with contexts of attribution; different utterances of the same sentence might mean different things in different contexts (see Cohen 1987; DeRose 1992; Lewis 1996; Sosa 1988).<sup>4</sup> So much about contextualism. What then is the factivity problem?

Here is the first version of the problem (to a large degree I will follow Brendel 2003, 1026-1027 and Wright 2005, 243 in the description of the problem<sup>5</sup>). According to it, contextualism can be shown to entail a contradiction. Why? Let us assume that the contextualist (S) finds himself in a more demanding context, say, C-S. (Below I will say a bit more about the possibility that the contextualist can find himself in a particular - ordinary or sceptical - context without ceasing to be a contextualist; at the moment it only matters that the context is more demanding, not necessarily that it is a sceptical one). As a contextualist he still wants to say (in C-S) this:

(1) O's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-O is true

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3 In the case of S, the attributor is identical with the subject referred to in the knowledge-attribution. This need not be the case but nothing hinges on this here.

4 Many people used to call this position "attributor contextualism" (in contrast to "subject contextualism"); see DeRose 1999. For other forms of contextualism see, e.g., Unger 1984 and Williams 1996. I will use the word "contextualism" in the sense of the core thesis explained in the text above. Note that contextualism starts as a meta-linguistic thesis about knowledge. Whether contextualism is confined to that level is a controversial issue and I will come back to this point.

5 See also the short passage in Brueckner 2005, 316-317, Kallestrup 2005, 249, 251 (fn.3) and Steup 2005, sec.1-2, 6.

whereas

(2) S's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-S is not true.<sup>6</sup>

Before we move on, I would like to use this and the next paragraph to get an objection out of the way that one could raise at this point. One might object that the contextualist is not committed to accept (1) as long as she finds herself in C-S.<sup>7</sup> For instance, if the contextualist finds herself in a sceptical context, she might not agree that there are persons, utterances, etc. Hence, she cannot accept (1). Similar things hold when the contextualist finds herself in certain non-sceptical but still very demanding contexts. Suppose she does not accept anything as knowledge that does not meet extremely high standards. One can call this an "extreme" context. Someone might deny knowing that some food is edible (and not poisoned, etc.) even after running extended chemical tests ("Are those scientists really sure?"). In both sceptical and extreme contexts, the contextualist would not accept (1). But she would then also not be in a position to accept her own contextualism: How could she agree that there are, say, utterers of sentences as long as she is in a sceptical or even an extreme context? What is much more important is the following point. There are strict and demanding contexts which are neither sceptical nor extreme. And in such contexts, the contextualist is committed to (1). A contextualist who finds herself in a mathematics class room might deny that a certain lay mathematician knows that Fermat's last theorem is true.

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6 Given bivalence, we can replace "not true" by "false". - One should be careful with the scope of "in context C-O" here: I certainly don't want to propose a notion of "truth in a context".

7 Timothy Williamson has made this objection in discussion.

At the same time, however, the contextualist has to accept that in a lay context it is true to say that our lay mathematician knows that Fermat's theorem is true, given that he has heard about Wiles' proof in the news. It is sufficient for my purposes here that the factivity problem arises in some contexts even if not in all (sceptical or extreme). Furthermore, it seems to me that the contexts in which it arises are straightforward and perhaps even paradigmatic cases of contexts.

What should one think about contextualism if the contextualist could never accept (1) in a more demanding context? Assume the contextualist finds herself in a non-sceptical and non-extreme but still very demanding context. Here, the contextualist agrees that there are speakers, utterances, and less demanding contexts. Suppose O has just uttered "S knows that he has hands" in context C-O. The contextualist would have no ground for refusing to accept that fact. What the contextualist could not do (in her more demanding context), according to the objection, is to concede that O's utterance is true. And that even though the contextualist holds that the truth value of knowledge ascriptions can vary with context. The contextualist would have to retreat to something like "It is possible that O's utterance is true". This strikes me as a reluctance to take one's own contextualism seriously and apply it to concrete cases. What is the attraction of contextualism if one cannot (at least as a contextualist) coherently say or think that knowledge attributions made in a lower context are in fact true? Only that that might be possible? The kind of contextualism that results would be a very much weakened one and not very attractive (see also below). In the following, I will only talk about non-sceptical and non-extreme contexts which allow for holding true knowledge attributions made in less demanding contexts.

Now, to get back to the development of our problem, suppose (1) and (2) are true and the contextualist even knows this "in his more demanding context" (which should be possible according to contextualism). Then the following would also hold:

(3) S's utterance of "S knows that (1)" in context C-S is true.<sup>8</sup>

Now, whenever an utterance of a sentence of the form "A knows that p" (in some context) is true, it seems unavoidable to accept that p:

(DF) "A knows that p" (as uttered in some context) is true  $\Rightarrow$  p.

One can (but need not) see (DF) as a principle that combines a disquotation principle - which allows us to move from the meta-linguistic level (talk about "knowledge") to the object-level (talk about knowledge) - with a principle that expresses the factivity of knowledge (whenever somebody knows something then what he knows is the case). One can also see (DF) as another principle that directly expresses the factivity of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> It certainly seems weird if not crazy to deny the factivity of knowledge. Whatever knowledge is, it is factive. Nothing is a concept of knowledge in a broad sense if what it is a concept

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8 Or, more explicitly: S's utterance of "S knows that (O's utterance of 'S knows that he has hands' in context C-O is true)" in context C-S is true.

9 Brendel 2003 deals with them in one step, as one principle. Here is one way to analyze it into those two components. Disquotation allows us to go from "'A knows that p' (as uttered in some context) is true" to "A knows that p". Factivity allows us to move from "A knows that p" to "p". This would be a two-step version of (DF). Wright 2005, 243 also explicitly distinguishes between disquotation and factivity. – For more on a contextualist disquotation principle see below; these complications don't matter for the argument here.

of isn't factive. The solution to the factivity problem proposed here will therefore not deny factivity.

If we apply (DF) to (1) we get

(4) O's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-O is true  $\Rightarrow$  S has hands.

It is certainly possible for the contextualist to know this ("in his more demanding context"). Hence, we may assume that

(5) S's utterance of "S knows that (4)" in context C-S is true.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, there is a very plausible closure principle:

(Clos) For all contexts C, subjects A and propositions  $p$  and  $q$ : ["A knows that  $p$ " (as uttered in C) is true and "A knows that ( $p \Rightarrow q$ )" (as uttered in C) is true]  $\Rightarrow$  "A knows that  $q$ " (as uttered in C) is true.

From (Clos) together with (3) and (5) follows:

(6) S's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-S is true.<sup>11</sup>

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10 Or, more explicitly: S's utterance of "S knows that (O's utterance of 'S knows that he has hands' in context C-O is true  $\Rightarrow$  S has hands)" in context C-S is true.

11 If we substitute " $p$ " for "O's utterance of 'S knows that he has hands' in context C-O is true" then (3) turns into:



However, (6) contradicts

(2) S's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-S is not true.

But (2) is part of the contextualist position. In other words, from contextualism ((1)-(3)), factivity ((DF) - which leads to (4) and (5)) and closure ((Clos)) we can derive a contradiction. If one builds factivity and closure into the contextualist position - as many contextualists would want to do -, then contextualism turns out to be inconsistent and should thus be given up. If one rejects them and doesn't build them into contextualism, then it is incompatible with very plausible epistemic principles and should therefore be given up. Whatever one's view here - it seems that one has to give up contextualism. Given closure, factivity is the killer; given factivity, it is closure. For want of a better name we can call this problem the "factivity problem".<sup>12</sup>

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(3\*) S's utterance of "S knows that p" in context C-S is true.

If we also substitute "q" for "S has hands" then (5) turns into

(5\*) S's utterance of "S knows that (p  $\Rightarrow$  q)" in context C-S is true

From (Clos) together with (3\*) and (5\*) we get

(6\*) S's utterance of "S knows that q" in context C-S is true.

Substituting "q" back again we get

(6) S's utterance of "S knows that S has hands" in context C-S is true.

12 This ought not to be misunderstood as indicating that the problem for contextualism is exclusively with the factivity principle. - Analogous problems arise for subject-sensitive invariantism (see, e.g., Hawthorne 2004 and Wright 2005). The solutions I propose for contextualism won't work for that form of invariantism.

## *II. A Second Version of the Problem*

So far we have looked at the contextualist as someone who finds himself in one particular context and makes particular knowledge claims from within that context. The contextualist might also want to remain neutral at a meta-linguistic level and just make statements about the truth of different knowledge claims in different contexts without committing himself to any of those contexts. To use Crispin Wright's (2005) expression, the contextualist aims at "even-handedness". Especially when it comes to disputes between common sense and philosophical scepticism many contextualists want to enjoy meta-linguistic neutrality and give both positions their due but not commit themselves to any of them.

In the following I will present another version of the factivity problem for contextualism which has been explored recently by Crispin Wright (2005). The basic idea is that the contextualist cannot avoid endorsing common sense and cannot escape ordinary contexts. There is thus an asymmetry between contexts which goes against contextualist ideas. What now is the argument?<sup>13</sup>

We have already seen that the contextualist holds that

(1) O's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-O is true.

Given a straight-forward, non-contextualist factivity principle like

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13 I won't follow Wright's exposition of this version of the problem as closely as I've followed Brendel's and Wright's exposition of the first version. See also Kallestrup 2005, 250-251.

(DF) "A knows that p" (as uttered in some context) is true  $\Rightarrow$  p.

the contextualist is certainly able to derive

(7) S has hands.

The contextualist is committed to (7). But how is that possible, given that we have no reason to assume that the contextualist is sharing O's ordinary context C-O? To make this point even clearer let us take our closure principle (Clos) again and assume that the contextualist knows (in whatever context) (1) and (DF) (how could he not?). Then it follows that he also knows (7):

(8) The contextualist knows that S has hands.<sup>14</sup>

But (8) is exactly what the contextualist does not want to endorse here. It goes against his aim of even-handedness. It is hard to see how he can remain neutral (at a meta-linguistic level) between different contexts and especially: how he can remain neutral in the dispute between philosophical sceptics and defenders of common sense.<sup>15</sup> In the end,

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14 He knows it whatever the context is.

15 - given the assumption here that he can remain a contextualist within the sceptical context (see above).

contextualism seems to collapse into an affirmation of common sense and the standards of ordinary contexts.<sup>16</sup> The contextualist would come out of the closet as a kind of Moorean.

### *III. A Related Problem*

As if these problems were not enough - there is also incoherence of a special sort lurking for the contextualist. This has already been brought up by Williamson 2001, 26-7.<sup>17</sup>

Suppose the contextualist finds himself in a sceptical or demanding context C-S. In this context, he would (given certain arguments which contextualists tend to find convincing in certain contexts) say

(9) I (the contextualist) don't know that S has hands.

Let us remember that the contextualist also has to accept that

(7) S has hands.

A plausible conjunction principle of rational belief tells us that (at least for simple cases)

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16 The same objection can be made using not (DF) but rather a combination of a different contextualist disquotation principle (like (Dc) below) and a factivity principle (like (F) below). I will spare the reader the repetitions.

17 For a quick reply see Kallestrup 2005, 249-250.

(Conj) (S believes that p & S believes that q)  $\Rightarrow$  S is rationally committed to believing that (p & q).

(Conj), (7) and (9) tell us that our contextualist is committed to hold true that

(10) S has hands but I don't know that.

The problem with (10) is that it is Moore-paradoxical. The contextualist is in additional trouble because he is apparently defeating himself.<sup>18</sup>

#### *IV. What to Do about the First Problem?*

What can or should the contextualist reply to the first version of the factivity problem (I)? She can either deny (DF) or (Clos); no other options seem available, given that all the other premises are very plausible. Is there something wrong with (DF) or its use here? This principle seems pretty plausible. Is there something wrong with (Clos) or its use here? It is certainly not an attractive idea to deny any closure principle or closure in general<sup>19</sup> – but perhaps there is something not quite right about (Clos) in particular? But what could that be?

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- 18 If one chooses a stronger conjunction principle, like  
 (Conj\*) (S believes that p & S believes that q)  $\Rightarrow$  S believes that (p & q)  
 then it would turn out that the contextualist actually believes (10). However, (Conj\*) seems too strong and I will not go into this version of the objection.
- 19 I cannot go into that here. Apart from that, most contextualists would not want to give up closure anyway. It is thus more interesting to those contextualists to look for another strategy. See for a discussion of different closure principles: Hales 1995. Davies 1998 and Wright 2000 go into the right direction.

Let me start with some remarks about disquotation and then move on to the factivity claim. There is a *prima facie* plausible disquotation principle:

(D) "p" is true  $\Rightarrow$  p.

However, the (alleged) context-relativity of words like "know" does not allow us to apply (D) here and, for instance, infer from (1) and (D) that

(11) S knows that he has hands.

(D) simply does not work for context-dependent sentences. It also does not help if we switch to a slightly more adequate disquotation principle like

(D') An utterance of "p" in a context C is true  $\Rightarrow$  p.

Again, according to the contextualist we cannot derive (11) from (1) and (D'): The context of the utterance of (11) could be of a different kind than C-O (more demanding, for instance) and we would have to take that context into account.

All this implies that contextualism is not committed to absurdities like the following one: O's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" is true whereas S's utterance of "S doesn't know that he has hands" is also true; hence, given (D) we could derive the

contradiction that S knows and doesn't know that he has hands. But we can't because (D) is not true of context-dependent sentences. Similar things hold for (D').

It would be very unfortunate if the contextualist had to deny any disquotation principle (see Woudenberg 2005, 152, and Schaffer 2004-b, sec.2). Ordinary usage of epistemic words is almost always not at the meta-linguistic level; people use "know" a lot but "know" only very rarely. One should, I think, try to avoid putting oneself into a position where one has to argue that there is something fundamentally wrong or misleading with the ordinary usage of some words. Apart from that, words like "know" do have a meaning; if, however, a theory of meaning for "know" at least involves some disquotational theory of meaning (see Davidson 1984), then one cannot afford forgetting about disquotation.

Fortunately, there is a different and very plausible disquotation principle, which is also more suitable for the contextualist. In order to formulate it, we must make the context-dependency explicit in the knowledge-claim. Let us call the kind of "knowledge" - or better: relevant epistemic state - we attribute in less demanding contexts, like C-O, "knowledge-low"; let us call the kind of "knowledge" that we attribute in demanding contexts, like C-S, "knowledge-high" (see for a similar proposal: Sosa 2004, 43-4; Bach 2005, 58-59; Cohen 2005, 201-204).<sup>20</sup> In other words, let us take "knowledge" as referring not to a binary but to a ternary relation between a person, a proposition, and a standard (or whatever else is responsible for the context-dependency). One can call this "relationalism"

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<sup>20</sup> Cohen 1999, 61 allows for this semantical version of contextualism but thinks it does not matter for epistemology which semantical version one chooses. What I am going to say here rather suggests that this kind of choice has important implications for epistemological contextualism.

or "relationalist contextualism".<sup>21</sup> One cannot, of course, do the kind of de-indexicalization proposed here with essentially indexical utterances (see Perry 1993) but there is no reason why we shouldn't be able to do it with "know"-sentences, and the contextualist should have nothing against it. This allows us to formulate the following general (contextualist friendly) disquotation principle for less demanding contexts like C-O:

(Dc-o) An utterance of "A knows that p" in a context C-O is true  $\Rightarrow$  A knows-low that p.

For more demanding contexts like C-S we get:

(Dc-s) An utterance of "A knows that p" in a context C-S is true  $\Rightarrow$  A knows-high that p.

More generally:

(Dc) An utterance of "A knows that p" in a context C is true  $\Rightarrow$  A knows-c that p.<sup>22</sup>

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21 see in this respect Schaffer 2004-a and Schaffer 2005 as well as Steup 2005, sec. 2, 6. I do not want to endorse Schaffer's "contrastivism" here, though. Relationalism also has nothing to do with relativism of any interesting sort. - As Bach 2005, passim, points out, attributions of such a ternary knowledge relation are not context sensitive themselves. This is, indeed, the whole point of making the context dependency explicit.

22 Stronger biconditional principles are also very plausible (just replace " $\Rightarrow$ " by " $\Leftrightarrow$ ").



This principle does not allow for the derivation of contradictions of the type just mentioned.

To be sure, (Dc) - as well as its more specific versions - looks a bit unfamiliar and perhaps even a bit ad hoc.<sup>23</sup> It differs from its more straightforward alternative<sup>24</sup> insofar as it replaces "know" by "know-c". Expressions like the latter one are certainly not part of a natural language like English. However, as sections VI and VII below will argue, expressions like "know-c" make something explicit which is implicit in ordinary language use. More important is another point here. The main work towards the solution of the factivity problem will have to be done not just by (Dc) but by a changed view on the transmission of warrant and on the kind of inferences attributors of knowledge can legitimately draw from knowledge-attributing propositions. Let me explain.

All the above in itself does not speak against (DF). At least at first sight, the following corresponding factivity principles seem true:

(F-o) [A knows-low that p]  $\Rightarrow$  p,

(F-s) [A knows-high that p]  $\Rightarrow$  p,

(F) [A knows-c that p]  $\Rightarrow$  p,

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23 Thanks to a referee here.

24 see fn.8.

And (Dc) together with (F) implies (DF).<sup>25</sup> Let us therefore take a closer look at (F).

Let us consider (F-o); similar things will hold, *mutatis mutandis* for (F-s) and for (F).

Mary, the contextualist, finds herself in C-S whereas Frank is in C-O. Mary can know-high that Frank knows-low that p. As soon as we make the context-relativity of the knowledge-relation explicit in this way, it becomes everything but plausible that

Mary knows-high that Frank knows-low that p

should imply (given (F-o) plus some straightforward closure principle plus the fact that Mary can apply (F-o) to “Frank knows-low that p”) that

Mary knows-high that p.<sup>26</sup>

The warrant Mary needs in order to count as a knower about Frank's epistemic situation is not (or usually not) the same kind of warrant as the one she needs in order to count as a knower of the things Frank knows. Mary might have very sophisticated (psychological etc.) knowledge about the rudimentary and primitive nature of Frank's knowledge about

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25 And, of course: (Dc-o) and (F-o) imply  
(DF-o) "A knows that p" (as uttered in C-O) is true  $\Rightarrow$  p,  
and (Dc-s) and (F-s) imply

(DF-s) "A knows that p" (as uttered in C-S) is true  $\Rightarrow$  p.  
26 Suppose that (a) Mary knows-high that Frank knows-low that p. Suppose further that (F-o) as applied to “Frank knows-low that p” is true and that Mary knows-high that. In other words, (b) Mary knows-high that (Frank knows-low that p  $\Rightarrow$  p). A close version of (Clos) says the following: If (S knows-high that p) and (S also knows-high that p  $\Rightarrow$  q) then S knows-high that q. Given this principle plus (a) and (b), we can then infer that (c) Mary knows-high that p.

astronomy; by no means does it follow that Mary has sophisticated knowledge about astronomy.

To be sure, Mary cannot know that Frank knows that there is no life on Mars without herself knowing that there is no life on Mars (let us assume, for the sake of the example, that there really is no life on Mars). She cannot evaluate Frank's epistemic state with regard to life on Mars as a case of knowledge or the lack thereof without committing herself to one view or another concerning the question whether there is life on Mars. Mary does not just want to find out what beliefs Frank has about life on Mars; she needs to find out whether those beliefs constitute knowledge. Thus, Mary herself must claim to know that there is no life on Mars if she wants to be able to claim to know that Frank knows that there is no life on Mars.

However, the crucial point here is that the factors which determine whether Mary's knowledge of Frank's knowledge is knowledge-high or knowledge-low have little or nothing to do with the quality (as "high" or "low") of Frank's or Mary's knowledge about Mars; rather, those factors relate to all the things an epistemic subject might do or not do in order to figure out whether something is the case or not (whether there is life on Mars or not). This explains why A's knowing-high that B knows-low that p does not guarantee (given the above principles) that S knows-high that p – even though A's knowing that B knows that p guarantees or requires that A knows that p.

One could also put all this in a different way and say that Mary is dealing with more than one question (Is there life on Mars? Does Frank know that?). When one is trying to find out whether another person knows something or not, one has to deal with more than

one question: Is he right? Has he done enough to turn his true belief into knowledge? Mary in the example above might not claim to have knowledge-high that there is no life on Mars but knowledge-low that there is no life on Mars could still be available to her. With respect to the second question (about Frank's epistemic performance), however, knowledge-high is available to her –even if she cannot claim more than knowledge-low about the astronomical subject matter. This explains why it is perfectly fine for Mary in her demanding context to deny that she knows-high that there is no life on Mars but also to claim to know-high that Frank knows or knows-low that there is no life on Mars. Knowing-high that someone else knows-low that  $p$  does not entail (given closure and factivity) or require that one knows-high that  $p$ .

So - to get back to  $(F-o)^{27}$  - one can know-high that the antecedent of  $(F-o)$  is true without knowing-high that the consequent of  $(F-o)$  is true. At the same time, one can still know-high that  $F-o$  is true. The subtle mistake of the factivity objection to contextualism is to assume that knowledge-high of both  $(F-o)$  and of its antecedent also gives one (given closure and factivity) knowledge-high of its consequent. However, there is a certain failure of transmission of warrant. The following principle of transmission of warrant is not correct:

(TW1) A has warrant for knowledge-high that B knows-low that  $p \Rightarrow$  A has warrant for knowledge-high that  $p$ .

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27 As I said above: Similar things hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for  $(F-s)$  and  $(F)$ .

As we have just seen, this is not correct. We have also seen that it is incorrect to assume that the antecedent of (TW1) could be true and that A could still have no warrant for believing that p at all. Here is a better principle:

(TW2) A has warrant for knowledge-high that B knows-low that p  $\Rightarrow$  A has warrant for knowledge-at-some-level (but not necessarily for knowledge-high) that p.

This has more general implications. The contextualist cannot and should not accept

(DF) "A knows that p" (as uttered in some context) is true  $\Rightarrow$  p.

The inference from the left-hand side to the right-hand side is only warranted if the context in which the latter is asserted (or held true) is not more demanding than the context in which the knowledge attribution on the left-hand side of (DF) is being made. In other words, the following holds:

(DF\*) For all contexts C, D: From "'A knows that p' (as uttered in C) is true" one can only infer "p" (in D) if D is not more demanding than C.<sup>28</sup>

Given (TW2) and (DF\*), we cannot uphold (Clos) anymore as it stands and must modify it accordingly. Here, again, is (Clos):

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28 Thanks to a referee here. - I must leave aside here technical problems concerning quantifying into quotations.

(Clos) For all contexts  $C$ , subjects  $A$  and propositions  $p$  and  $q$ : ["A knows that  $p$ " (as uttered in  $C$ ) is true and "A knows that ( $p \Rightarrow q$ )" (as uttered in  $C$ ) is true]  $\Rightarrow$  "A knows that  $q$ " (as uttered in  $C$ ) is true.

Now, in those special cases in which "p" or "q" deal with knowledge attributions – for instance when someone makes the factivity objection to contextualism - we cannot uphold (Clos). We also must not go back to a more general and unspecific closure principle

(C) [A knows that  $p$  and A knows that ( $p \Rightarrow q$ )  $\Rightarrow$  A knows that  $q$ .

This is a non-contextualist closure principle which won't leave the contextualist completely satisfied. Let us therefore propose this as our final general closure principle:

(Clos\*) For all subjects  $A$ , propositions  $p$  and  $q$ , and contexts  $C$  there is a context  $D$  (where  $D$  is not significantly more demanding and possibly less demanding than  $C$ ) such that: ["A knows-that  $p$ " (as uttered in  $C$ ) is true and "A knows that ( $p \Rightarrow q$ )" (as uttered in  $C$ ) is true]  $\Rightarrow$  "A knows that  $q$ " (as uttered in  $D$ ) is true.

Here is another version which follows from (Clos\*) after disquotation (see (D-c)'s biconditional relative mentioned in fn.21 above):

(Clos\*\*) For all subjects  $A$ , propositions  $p$  and  $q$ , and knowledge-relations  $know-c$  there is a knowledge-relation  $know-d$  (where  $know-d$  is not significantly more demanding and possibly less demanding than  $know-c$ ) such that: [A knows- $c$  that  $p$  and A knows- $c$  that  $(p \Rightarrow q)$ ]  $\Rightarrow$  A knows- $d$  that  $q$ .

So, we don't have to deny closure but just the very strong principle (Clos). (Clos\*) replaces it.

Since we are dealing with a special case here where "p" expresses a knowledge attribution and where we want to draw an inference from (3), (5) and some closure principle, we can also use the following special principle:

(Clos-K) For all ascribers  $S$  and subjects  $O$ , ascribers' contexts  $C-S$  and subjects' contexts  $C-O$  (where  $C-O$  is not significantly more demanding and possibly less demanding than  $C-S$ ), and propositions  $p$ :

If utterances of "S knows that utterances of 'O knows that p' are true in  $C-O$ " are true in  $C-S$

and if utterances of "S knows that if utterances of 'O knows that p' are true in  $C-O$ , then p" are true in  $C-S$ ,

then utterances of "S knows that p" are true in  $C-O$ .

The relationist version of (Clos-K) is easier to digest:

(Clos-K\*) For all ascribers S and subjects O, knowledge-relations *know-s* and *know-o* (where *know-o* is not significantly more demanding and possibly less demanding than *know-s*) and propositions *p*:

If S knows-s that O knows-o that p

and if S knows-s that if O knows-o that p, then p,

then S knows-o that p.

The attraction of such modified closure principles is that they don't deny that one can come to know what one knows to be entailed by other things one knows; they only add some restrictions to this – which the contextualist needs to do anyway (apart from that, even the non-contextualist has good reasons to modify the overly simplistic (Clos); see Baumann 2011).

The upshot of all this is obvious: Given the failure of transmission of warrant mentioned above and given the implication this has for our closure principle, the factivity objection to contextualism does not go through anymore. What does the argument look like now? The derivation of (6) from (3), (5) and (Clos) felt like the final kiss of death for contextualism. However, given (TW2) and our rejection of (TW1) we are not entitled to (Clos) here but must use (Clos\*) or (Clos\*\*) or the more specific (Clos-K) or (Clos-K\*). It is obvious that from (3), (5) and any of the revised closure principles we cannot derive (6):

(6) S's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-S is true.



We can only derive something weaker:

(6') S's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in contexts not more demanding than C-O is true.

And (6') does not contradict

(2) S's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-S is not true.

We can put (2) as

(2') S does not know-high that he has hands.

and (6') as:

(6'') S knows-at-some-level-not-more-demanding-than-C-O that he has hands.

And (6'') is not problematic at all for contextualism. No contradiction can be derived.

The factivity objection against contextualism is initially so plausible because the principles used leave the possibility of subtle context shifts implicit and thus invites equivocation over contexts. It turned out that we must be more careful with the context-sensitivity of warrant and transmission of warrant. As soon as one formulates adequate

modified principles of disquotation, factivity and, in particular, of closure, one has a solution of the factivity problem at hand. This solution is based on a particular version of contextualism, namely relationalism. The fact that this version can solve one of the hardest problems of contextualism gives it a lot of weight relative to alternative versions of contextualism.

*V. What about the other Version of the Problem?*

I have mentioned two more aspects of our problem (II, III). Since they all hang closely together, I can be very brief here. Let us take the second version of the factivity objection first. Again, there is a contextualist way out of this problem. Given what I have said above, it is pretty obvious what I have in mind. Acceptable principles of warrant-transmission, closure and factivity do not allow us to derive anything threatening to contextualism. Start again with

(1) O's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-O is true.

(Dc-o) and (F-o) do indeed allow the derivation of

(7) S has hands.

However, the replacement of (Clos) by (Clos\*) makes it impossible to derive

(8\*) The contextualist knows-high that S has hands.

And that is what the critic needs here. If we reinterpret

(8) The contextualist knows that S has hands

as

(8') The contextualist knows-at-some-level that S has hands

we can admit to the critic that (8) does indeed follow, given that we interpret it as (8'). But that is too weak to pose a problem at all for the contextualist - at least if she subscribes to a relationalist version of contextualism. The contextualist does not lose her even-handedness or neutrality. Nothing collapses into commonsensism.

#### *VI. How to Avoid Moore-Paradoxality*

Finally, the Moore-paradoxality objection (III). Again, there is help for the contextualist.

(9) is not kosher: It invites equivocation over contexts. As a contextualist (see above) one should replace (9) by

(9\*) I (the contextualist) don't know-high that S has hands.

(Conj), (7) and (9\*) commit us to

(10') S has hands but I don't know-high that.

At the moment I only want to point out that the latter would - given what I have said above - support

(10'') S has hands, and I know-low it but I don't know-high it.

And how Moore-paradoxical is that?

Even though the Moore-paradoxality has disappeared one might still object that something like (10'') is odd. But how odd is it? Sure, almost nobody talks like that in everyday life but that is obviously besides the point here. In everyday life people usually don't make explicit claims about what is important to epistemologists. Apart from that, people sometimes talk *almost* like that, that is, it seems they are aware of the point expressed by (10''). Suppose you ask your friend Jackie, the meteorologist, whether she already knows what the weather will be like tomorrow and whether rain might ruin your picnic plans. She might respond "No, don't worry, it won't rain tomorrow; I'm not talking as a meteorologist here but anyway, let's go ahead with the picnic!"

But isn't there still something wrong with (10') and (10'')? Suppose we adhere to the knowledge account of assertion (see, e.g., Williamson 2000, ch. 11). Does the correctness of an assertion of "p" require that the speaker knows-high that p or is it sufficient that he knows-low that p? In the latter case, there is nothing wrong or odd with (10') or (10''). Only in the former case.<sup>29</sup> Do we have to worry about that?

Deriving the Moore-paradoxical (10) I said that the contextualist would have to accept (7), namely that S has hands. If one is a contextualist about knowledge and if one holds a knowledge account of assertion, then it is very plausible - as Keith DeRose 2002, sec.2 has pointed out for the reverse argument- to also hold a contextualist account of assertibility (see also Blackson 2004 and DeRose 2004). How does this apply here?

I have already indicated above that a person can have warrant of different strength to believe something. Since (7) was derived from (1) and (DF) and since (1) deals with an ordinary context C-O, we would have to keep in mind that S need not know-high that (7). (7) together with (9\*) and (Conj) leads to

S has hands, but I don't know-high it

which supports

(10'') S has hands, and I know-low it but I don't know-high it.

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<sup>29</sup> This first reply presupposes, of course, that one can de-indexicalize knowledge-attributions. Not all contextualists agree with that. I think it is an advantage of the version of contextualism used here that it can do that.

If the speaker only has a weak warrant for “p”, then he is justified to assert (or believe) that p only in relatively undemanding contexts; if the warrant is stronger, then she may assert (or believe) it in more demanding contexts. As soon as we take this into account, neither (10') nor (10'') seem that odd anymore (just cumbersome).<sup>30</sup>

To be sure: I am not proposing to contextualize truth here. I am rather contextualizing the notion of holding true and asserting as true. This might have implications for the nature and scope of closure but I cannot go into that here.<sup>31</sup>

One final remark about Moore-paradoxicality. How serious would this charge be? Let us suppose for a moment that contextualists have no answer to it. All the critic would have shown is that the contextualist might end up saying incoherent or self-defeating things. But that doesn't mean that contextualism is not true (or false). Think of a classical Moore-paradoxical utterance like one of "It's raining but I don't believe it". The whole point of the paradox is that it can be true that somebody doesn't believe it's raining while it's raining; but the person herself cannot assert (or believe) it without defeating herself. Going back to the contextualist's eventual utterance of something like (10), (10') or (10''): All the objection *would* show is that contextualism is not storable in a certain way. But it can still be true and it can be stated in other ways. For instance, the contextualist could say something along the lines of

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30 An argument analogous to the one for assertibility can be made for believability.

31 Wright 2005, too, focuses on the former and doesn't discuss the latter.

(12) It is possible (epistemically, logically or metaphysically) that O's utterance of "S knows that he has hands" in context C-O is true whereas S's utterance of "S does not know that he has hands" in context C-S is true.

There is nothing whatsoever wrong with (12) as an explanation of what contextualism is. The possibility operator blocks any move from (12) to something Moore-paradoxical or self-defeating - as one can easily see (I won't go into that here). So, contextualism is not unstatable even if true; it would only be unstatable in certain ways (see also Brueckner 2004; Williams 2000; Veber 2004, 270-271) but not in certain other (perhaps more indirect) ways. One could still be a contextualist and say it out loud! However, given some remarks I made at the beginning of this paper, I don't want to rely on this. And I don't need to since there really is no Moore-paradoxality in the first place - as I have tried to show.

### *VII. Concluding Remarks*

One last remark on linguistic oddness. It is often held against contextualists that according to them it should be o.k. for someone who has moved from an ordinary context to a demanding context (being aware of the context-shift) to say that

(13) I knew then that "S has hands" is true but I don't know it any more now.<sup>32</sup>

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32 Similar things hold for interpersonal cases like "You know that p but I don't": see, e.g., Cohen's 1999, 58 airport example. See also Yourgrau 1983; DeRose 1992; DeRose 2000.

But this is very odd and we don't talk like this (see Stanley forthcoming; see also Hawthorne 2004, 98-111; MacFarlane 2005, 202-203; Bach 2005, 59-60; Douven 2004; Ludlow 2005). If what I've said above is correct, (13) is at best misleading and we should replace it by

(13\*) I knew-low then that S has hands but I don't know-high it now.

The person could even add "- and I still know-low it!". This sounds much less odd. It also implies that we don't necessarily "lose knowledge" when we move into much stricter contexts: One can retain one's knowledge-low that p even when one moves into a context in which it is not true to say that one knows that p (see DeRose 2000, DeRose 2005, sec.9, Engel 2004 but also Lewis 1996 and Williamson 2005, sec.2). In other words, stricter contexts "contain" laxer contexts in a sense. Philosophical sceptics tend to deny this but contextualists can accept it.

But do we talk like that? Not quite. But one shouldn't, on the other hand, forget that people say things in ordinary life that amount to the same thing (see the meteorologist example above). Contextualist *theories* are not at home in everyday life but a lot of contextualist *attitudes* are. One last remark on this objection. What kind of ice would it cut to point out that we wouldn't say certain things in everyday life or that they sound odd under ordinary circumstances - if those things are being said in the not so ordinary context



of an epistemological discussion (see Nichols/ Stich/ Weinberg 2003 but also see Stanley 2004 and Cappelen/ Lepore 2003 here)?

One final remark about the version of contextualism that I have proposed and used here, namely relationalism. It allows for and perhaps even suggests a distinction between two properties contexts could be thought to have. In a *closed* context, people cannot see that there are other legitimate contexts. In a closed ordinary context, people would just outright deny that the sceptic is anything but crazy; in a closed sceptical context, people would outright deny that there is any knowledge in ordinary circumstances. In *open* contexts, people would still stick to their view but accept that other people in other contexts have a point. In an open ordinary contexts people would typically - for instance, when introduced to sceptical arguments - say things like "in THAT sense, o.k., I don't know all those things; but I was not talking philosophy when I said I knew all those things, you know what I mean?" An open sceptical context would be a context in which people don't deny ordinary knowledge-claims while sticking with their sceptical views; contextualists typically see things like that when they put themselves into the shoes of a sceptic.<sup>33</sup> One might object that this is not scepticism any more because scepticism is the unmodified denial of any knowledge claims. This is right in some sense; it shows that contextualism is proposing to "reform" radical scepticism into something more modest. Crispin Wright 2005 is right insofar as contextualism is not compatible with and cannot concede anything to radical scepticism.<sup>34</sup> However, reformed scepticism is still sceptical enough to deserve the title "scepticism". Apart from all that, I think that this way of looking at context-dependency is

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33 - assuming here that one can remain a contextualist within sceptical contexts (see above).

34 I cannot go into that here.

a good middle way: It's still contextualism of some sort but it allows for a response to the factivity problems. That's what closed-context-contextualism probably cannot do.<sup>35</sup>

The factivity problem for contextualism looks fatal as long as the contextualist does not take a closer look at his own principles of factivity and closure. A relationist version of contextualism allows him to formulate principles which allow for a solution to the factivity problem.

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35 Another advantage is this one. We don't have to assume any more that people are not aware of or blind toward the context dependency of knowledge attributions. They are not, as many examples (like the ones used above) show. They just don't express all that in epistemological vocabulary. Hence, contextualists (of the above sort) don't need an error theory and do indeed have an answer to Schiffer's 1996 objections.

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