



Critical Notices in Analytic Philosophy

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Shiffer's Objections to DeRose's Contextualism

Abstract

If the classical argument from skepticism is true, then we cannot claim that we know something and this also affects our ordinary claims about life, nature and us. DeRose proposes the New Contextualist Solution. Shiffer argues against DeRose's explanation about the strength of the epistemic position. He also finds contextualist's claim that in knowledge sentences without indexical terms the skeptical paradox arises, problematic. In this paper, I am trying to argue that we should look at examples in which the same object, different persons and different standards of knowing are involved. In that case it is hard to agree either with Shiffer's or with DeRose's solutions.

Key words

knowledge, skepticism, attributors contextualism, epistemic standards, new contextualist solution, indexical and non-indexical terms

Introduction

If I asked someone, do you know that you have hands or do you know that we are just slaves of higher developed creatures, she would intuitively say yes, of course, to the first question and no, not really, to the second one. This seems plausible. But if I had a really good equipment so that I could produce virtual reality (for instance, I could make people think that there is a red ball in a room) she would say again that she knows that there is the red ball in the room. The problem is that she claims that she *knows* that there is the red ball in the room. But this claim is not true. Illusions and hallucinations were among the first examples which stimulated people for raising different skeptical questions.

One form of the skeptical argument, which can be called the classical one, goes as follows:

(cAS):

1. *I don't know that I am not-H* (not-H means the skeptical hypothesis, which must be such that we can't say that we know that something is so and so and also such that we cannot say that we know that something is not so and so. In this argument not-H stands for *I am not a brain in a vat (BIV)*, i.e. I am not bodiless and not every sensory experience that I have has been electrochemically stimulated). (DeRose, 2000: 482)

2. *If I don't know that I am not-H (not BIV), then I don't know that O* (The skeptic needs something from the external world that is possible and imaginable to stand for O and that an agent would ordinarily think that she knows, for example, something that seems intuitively true, like *I have hands*).

Therefore,

3. *I don't know that O (that I have hands)*.¹

This kind of argument was a great trial to philosophers, because some of them think that every premise is very plausible; but, to reject skepticism one must show that one of these premises is false. The contextualists offer their own solution, which is very interesting, because they don't deny any of the premises at all. But DeRose thinks that there *are* some defectivenesses in the contextualist solution and therefore offers *a new contextualist solution* that I am going to present in the first section of this paper. In the second section, I am going to present Shiffer's two main objections to DeRose's theory. In the end, i.e. in the last section, I will try to argue for (1) Shiffer's inaccuracy and (2) DeRose's problem.

I.

In the case of cAS the contextualists are convinced that the skeptic manipulates the semantics of knowledge sentences. What does that mean? The contextualist is trying to say that the skeptic is creating a context in which her argument will succeed, i.e. where the claim that we don't know anything or a little will be plausible. The skeptic is doing this with raising the standards of knowledge and her denial of knowledge is correct indeed but only when we are in her conversational context. But when we are in the more ordinary conversational context, then not only it is correct to claim that we know certain things but it is also wrong to say that we don't know something. Therefore, the contextualist shows how both are right, i.e. why the skeptical argument seems so persuasive and why our ordinary claims about knowing things are so plausible.

When I am talking about contextualism, I am talking about the attributor's contextualism which is the contextualism where knowledge, or we can also say, the epistemic standards, vary in accordance with attributors of the context and not with the context of subject. The reason that I am using this sort of formulation is that DeRose's contextualism is of this sort (*See DeRose, 2004: 228–238*). According to him, the problem with this kind of the contextualist's theory is that it doesn't give us the explanation of the mechanism or the rule by which the skeptic can raise the standards of knowledge. The problem with other contextual theories is that they don't explain why the skeptical premises seem so plausible. His solution is based on the *Subjunctive Conditionals Account (SCA)*, on *The Rule of Sensitivity* and on *The Strength of the Epistemic Position*.

Let's see that briefly.

(i) DeRose is claiming that we can show the plausibility of the cAS's first premise, that is, *I don't know that not-H* (H: a brain in a vat), with the SCA. Of course, this is true only under some conditions but we will talk about that in section (ii). For now it is enough to say that he explains why this first premise seems so plausible. What is SCA? The example we can use here

(which DeRose uses) is the lottery example. When Ana buys a lottery ticket she believes that she is a loser and she would hold this belief even if she were a winner (that is, before the winner is announced). The SCA is showing how it is hard to claim that I know I am a winner (W) because even if I were a winner I would still have a belief that I am not a winner ($\beta(\neg W)$). That is, even if a belief is false, I will still hold this belief which we can see in (2) of the following schema:

1. $\neg W \longrightarrow \beta(\neg W)$
2. $W \longrightarrow \beta(\neg W)$

So, these kinds of beliefs are called insensitive. In the most cases when we are in these positions, i.e. we hold a belief ($\beta(\neg W)$) even when it is false, we have a predisposition to say we *don't know* that W. Therefore, if we go back to SCA, we can in general say: *if someone's belief in something is insensitive, then this person doesn't know that thing*. Now, according to SCA, we would say that she doesn't know that she is a loser and her belief is insensitive because she would still hold this ($\beta(\neg W)$) even if it were false.²

But why does it seem that after the radio announcement of winning numbers she *knows* that she is a loser? I mean, it can be a mistake or a fake. DeRose is claiming that before the announcement Ana would hold a belief that she is a loser even if this were false (like in (2) of previous schema). But after the announcement it seems that if she were a winner she would not hold a belief that she is a loser. In this moment, after the announcement, the second case drops out. We can say that it is false because the SCA's bar (i.e. if our belief in something is insensitive, then we don't know this thing) is skipped (i.e. we can say now that we know this thing). The same procedure, i.e. trying to skip SCA's bar, is going on with all different cases. Ana's belief that there is a tower on the hill is insensitive because even if there were a camouflaged church she would still hold a false belief that there is a tower. Someone who has more knowledge and more data is not going to hold the belief about a tower if there is a church. Even she can do some investigation and then skip the SCA's bar. DeRose's conclusion is that according to this we can say that the SCA is correct. But if this is so, then what is going on in the skeptic's first premise of the cAS? The same thing. The SCA shows how it is hard to claim that I know I am not a brain in a vat (BIV) because even if I were, I would still have a belief that I am not-BIV ($\beta(\neg BIV)$). That is, even if the belief were false, I would still hold this belief (number (2) in the following schema).

1. $\neg BIV \longrightarrow \beta(\neg BIV)$
2. $BIV \longrightarrow \beta(\neg BIV)$

1

I, as well as Shiffer, borrowed this formulation from Keith DeRose (1995), "Solving the Skeptical Problem", in: Ernest Sosa – Jaegwon Kim, *Epistemology. An Anthology*, Blackwell, London 2000. DeRose calls this cAS argument *The Argument from Ignorance (AI)*.

2

By the way, I don't know if DeRose has ever played on the lottery, because it seems to me that the case is exactly the opposite. If someone holds the belief that she is a loser, then she won't even buy a ticket. The thing is that

everyone believes that each of them can be a winner and they hold that belief until the winner's announcement. Of course, the belief is still insensitive, but it is easier to understand why it seems that after the announcement she would not hold a belief that she is a winner if she were a loser. After all then she will somehow realize that there is a minimal possibility of being a winner and a minimal possibility of a newspaper and a radio being wrong.

The problem with this case is that it is hard to skip SCA's bar because it is hard to come to evidences or at least to something which will enable the case where one can say that if she were a BIV she would not hold a belief that she is not a BIV. Therefore, SCA provides the correct explanation of why the first premise in the cAS (I don't know I am not a BIV) seems so plausible.

What about the second premise? The contextualist idea is that the truth of a claim "I know ..." varies in certain ways according to the context in which it is expressed, i.e. the epistemic standards vary in accordance with attributors of the conversational context. The question is how we can know in what kind of epistemic position we are. Let's suppose the next true proposition: If Ana knows there is a red ball in a room A then she knows there is also a red ball in a room B. This proposition is true only if both rooms are the same, or as DeRose says, we must have comparative knowledge. In our case this means that we indeed have comparative knowledge, i.e. the room A is, namely, exactly the same as the room B.³ With this kind of knowledge the comparative conditionals (If S believe P in A, then S believe P in B and A in B are the same) are mechanisms for assessing of what kind of epistemic standards are we dealing with or more precisely for assessing if one is in a different context, i.e. in a different epistemic position. In the contextualism this is called *the strength of epistemic position*. If we look at our case we can say that Ana is *in the same epistemic position* with respect to the belief (there is a red ball), which she is holding in the room A, as she is with respect to the same belief in the room B.

Now, let's change the example. In the room A there are mechanisms producing virtual reality and what Ana sees is a fake red ball (but she doesn't know that it is a fake). The room B is without these mechanisms and the red ball in here is not a fake. Ana thinks that there is a non-fake red ball in both rooms and in this particular moment she is actually looking at a non-fake red ball. DeRose claims that in the comparative conditional *If Ana knows in the first room (the fake red ball), then she knows in the second room (the non-fake red ball)* she is in at least as strong epistemic position in the case of non-fake red ball as she is in the case of the fake red ball. (We must have in mind that here is another important fact in play, namely, at this moment she is actually looking at the non-fake red ball.) But if our comparative conditional is *If Ana knows R in the room B then she knows R in the room A* then we see that she is not in the same epistemic position. Her position to know in the case of the fake red ball (the room A) is not as strong as in the case of the non-fake red ball (the room B). (And again, we must have in mind that when we make this claim she is looking at the fake red ball.) She is actually in a stronger epistemic position in the case of the non-fake red ball than in the case of the fake red ball.

Well, comparative conditionals can be also used when we want to see in what kind of relative epistemic position Ana is, according to different propositions but in the same context. Let's see our previous mentioned examples with the tower and the lottery. Ana is in no better position to know that *this building is a tower* than she is in to know that *this building is not a church*. She is also not in a better position to know that *I didn't win at the lottery* than she is in to know that *the radio station is not mistaken about the lottery winner*. From this we can make comparative conditionals: *If Ana doesn't know that the radio station is not mistaken about the lottery winner,*

then she doesn't know that she didn't win at the lottery. Or If Ana doesn't know that this building is not a church then she doesn't know that this building is a tower. These conditionals are true now matter how high or how low the standards for knowledge are because they are made from the comparative facts about the position, which claims that she is in at least as strong epistemic position with respect to *the radio station is not mistaken about the lottery winner* (or to *this building is not a church*) as she is in with respect to *I didn't win at the lottery* (or to *this building is a tower*). Now, we can go back to the cAS. According to the early mentioned examples, we can say that we are not in a better position to know *I have hands* than I am in to know that *I am not a brain in a vat*. We don't care how high or how low the standards of knowledge are because we are in the same epistemic position. Therefore, the conditional *If I don't know I am a brain in a vat then I don't know I have hands* (which is the second premise of the cAS) is plausible.

(ii) We can continue with the hand-example. Ana believes in the actual world that she has hands. There are a lot of possible worlds around this one and in one of them she doesn't have hands. In one of them she actually had an accident and she lost her hands. According to DeRose, in this "not having hands world", her belief is that she doesn't have hands. Therefore, her belief is identical to this fact. Maybe in the world where she is a brain in a vat her belief won't be identical to any of its facts, but that world is far away from the actual world. In the closest worlds, even in those where the fact really is that she doesn't have hands, her belief is consistent with the fact in that world. So, Ana can say that she is in a strong epistemic position with respect to this fact. Why is it so?

The criterion in how strong epistemic position is someone is: if one has a belief that O is true and this is the same as the fact in the world (O is really true), then you are in a strong epistemic position. But this must be true not only in the actual world but also in the worlds that are adequately close to the actual one. Therefore, the more possible worlds are included in the stronger epistemic position we are. It is important to mention that this must be non-accidentally true, which we can check by the negation of the considered fact in the actual world (not-O). Let's see what I mean by this. In the example with Ana we did so with the world in which she didn't have hands. The result was such that the belief in this possible world was also a negation of the belief in the actual world. Now, the further we go and the belief in these worlds is still identical to the fact in them the stronger epistemic position, according to the O, someone holds. We can say that an agent's belief is sensitive if in the closest possible world not-O an agent doesn't belief in O. If this is true, i.e. if we prove that a belief in O is sensitive then we can count this as knowledge. As we said before, we are looking for the nearest possible worlds in which the fact is not-O; sometimes these can be near the actual world and sometimes these can be very far away. This means that the standards of knowledge (in what epistemic position one must be that O would count as knowledge) can be different. And DeRose says that the context determines in how strong epistemic position one must be, i.e. what is the scope of possible worlds that we have to count on, so that in this worlds the beliefs would be identical to their facts.

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This means that neither of them is equipped with devices used for producing the virtual reality.

Therefore, we can present a precise DeRose's definition of the Rule of Sensitivity:

"When it is asserted that S knows (or doesn't know) that O, then, if necessary, enlarge the sphere of epistemically relevant worlds so that it at least includes the closest worlds in which O is false" (DeRose, 2000: 493).

The problem is that when the standards of knowledge are going up the range of possible worlds is spreading. And this is exactly the thing that the skeptics take the advantage of.

What is going on then with the skeptical argument? The skeptics want to attack that kind of facts that we think we know (O):

1. They do that by choosing the first premise in the argument (the premise must be insensitive) very smartly since they want to enable us to come to a sensitive belief.
2. This premise is also such that we are in at least as good epistemic position to know their premise (I am not a brain in a vat) as we are in to know that O. We show this under (i) above.
3. If we want to count something for knowledge, if we want to say *I know I am not a brain in a vat*, then by the Rule of Sensitivity our belief must be sensitive even if this means to raise the standards.
4. From (1) and (3) we get that the standards are raised so high that we can't count the skeptic premise as knowledge.

Therefore,

5. From (2) and (4) we get that we also don't know O.

DeRose explains why the cAS is so persuasive. But, this persuasiveness of the argument is possible only because of the skeptic who, with his smart choice of the first premise, raises standards of knowledge extremely high. So, it is possible only in this kind of context.

The goal of the New contextual solution is to present why, even if we know that the premises in the cAS are false, they still seem so plausible. We can find one answer in the epistemic standard, which is in accordance with contextualism very important. Namely, we can have different epistemic standards in a different context. Let's first take a look at the second premise of the cAS. This premise (*If I don't know that I am not-H, then I don't that O*) is true no matter how high or low epistemic standards are but it is not so with the first premise. The negation of the first premise of this argument (*I do know that not-H*) is therefore true, but it is true according to the "ordinary low standards for knowledge" (DeRose, 2000: 493).

Well, because of the high standards for knowledge, where to abandon this first premise lead us to the falsehood, we think of this premise as a plausible one. The third premise of this argument, i.e. the conclusion (I don't know that O) is the trickiest one. We can also mention that because of this third proposition the argument is also called the skeptical paradox. Namely, we are tempted to say that the first two premises are true, but the conclusion is false. DeRose says the third premise is not true according to those low standards and it also doesn't seem plausible according to the high standards that skeptic raises. Why is this so?

DeRose says that there are two things that guide us to the intuitive feeling of implausibility (i.e. that the premise *I do know that O* seems plausible). The first one is that at the same moment when we are in the context with the

high standards, i.e. where we claim that the conclusion is true (we don't know that O), we also now that when the standards are lower this conclusion is false. The second thing is that it is not only true for us to claim in these kind of circumstances that I know O, but it will also be wrong to claim the opposite. So, the skeptic's claim *I don't know O* is easily presented as false. Therefore, these are the reasons that the conclusion of the cAS, *I don't know O*, seems so implausible now matter how high the standards of knowledge are.

II.

Shiffer presents two objections to the New Contextualist Solution.

In the first one he attacks DeRose's argument, which presents the second premise of the cAS as plausible. As I already presented (and I must agree with Shiffer that in this part DeRose's paper seems a little bit confused), in previous section the implication of *If S knows that P, then S knows that Q and P and Q are the same* is always true regardless of how high or how low the standards of knowledge are. What bothers Shiffer is that DeRose is claiming how S is according to Q in at least as strong epistemic position with respect to P. This means that you can be in the stronger epistemic position in accordance with Q, then in accordance with P. His point is that DeRose's example *If Mugsy is tall, then Wilt is tall* is not, regardless of the strenght of the epistemic position, necessary true. That someone is tall means that she is tall for someone. If we have a proposition *If Mugsy is tall for midget* (a weaker epistemic position and we can named it 0), *then Wilt is tall for the NBA center* (a higher epistemic position and we can named it 1) then this conditional is false. Therefore, the proposition *If x knows that p relative to low standards of knowing (i.e. relative to 0), then x knows that q relative to high standards of knowing (i.e. relative to 1)* may be false. Or in the case of the cAS *if x doesn't know that q relative to high standards of knowing (i.e. relative to 1), then x doesn't know that p relative to low standards of knowing (i.e. relative to 0)*.

The second objection is not referring so much to the individual solution of premises. Shiffer asks what is the skeptical paradox here at all? Let's take a look at the argument representing it:

(pAS):

1. *I don't know that I am not-H* (this premise is supposed to be true)
2. *If I don't know that I am not-H, then I don't know that O* (this premise is supposed to be true)

Therefore,

3. *I know that O* (this premise is supposed to be true).

We end up with the skeptical paradox because in this argument every single premise is supposed to be true, but together they are not consistent. Shiffer says that the contextualist's explanation why we have the skeptical paradox here is not plausible. He made two points.

A: The contextualist's explanation why we have the paradox is as follows: when the standards of knowing are lower, i.e. we are in the ordinary context, we would intuitively know that the third proposition of the cAS is false and that the third premise of the pAS is true. Now the problem is that when

the standards of knowing are higher, i.e. we are in the “skeptical” context, we also presume that the third premise of the cAS is false and that the third premise of the pAS is true. We transferred the premise that was true in the context A to the context B and then we mistakenly presupposed that this premise was still true. In other words:

“(cAS) strikes us as presenting a profound paradox merely because we’re ignorant of what it is really saying, and this because we don’t appreciate the indexical nature of knowledge sentences.”⁴ (Shiffer, 1996: 325)

So, the contextualist is using both, a semantic and an error theory, at explaining the pAS. By the first one she tries to show which of the three premises in the pAS is false, by the second one she tries to present why the pAS seems so plausible.

B: Shiffer finds contextualist’s claim that in the knowledge sentences that are without IT (indexical term) the paradox arises because we confuse contexts, problematic. For the contextualist, namely, even when we don’t have IT the knowledge sentences can in a different context express a different proposition. But if the ITs are the key to distinguish in what kind of context we are, then those sentences, the sentences without IT, must have one of the following:

1. a hidden indexical term;
2. a verb “to know” must itself express in what kind of epistemic position we are;
3. a context variability of vagueness, i.e. because of the vagueness of the verb “to know” there is a certain context variability.

1. *A hidden indexical term*

Example 1: Ana says *it is far* or *it is red*.⁵ Shiffer’s opinion in this case is that it is simply silly to think that an agent, in our case Ana, would confound her context, i.e. she would say P is true (it is red) according to high standards because it was true according to low standards. In our case, this would mean that when she is implicitly saying there is a red ball in room A, she mistakenly thinks she is asserting that the red ball is in room B. Why is this silly for him? Because a fluent agent, as Ana is, would know what she is saying. After all, she is sane. So, if we ask her, what are you saying, she is going to tell us exactly what she means.

Example 2: Ana says *I know that there is a red ball in room A*. Shiffer’s comment on that is the following: If we ask her what she meant, she wouldn’t tell us that she implicitly said *I know that there is a red ball in room A according to standards N*, but she would say that what she meant and said was *I know that there is a red ball in room A* and period.

What the heck is Shiffer trying to say? He is confusing three different propositions but we will see what exactly is going on here in the third section of the paper.

2. *The verb “to know” is an indexical term*

The second contextualist’s respond could be that the verb “to know” is itself an indexical term. This means that when Ana is asserting the claim *I know it is a red ball*, this verb “to know”, must itself express in what kind of the position with regard to the epistemic standards of knowing she is. Namely, this verb itself can express different standards of knowing in different context.

As Shiffer notices this response is like a labor of Danaides. No improvement at all.

3. *The context variability of vagueness*

Let's suppose Ana says (she is a dentist and she is from Slovenia): *I know this ball is perfectly round* and she also says *I know this is far*. But here is George (he is a physicist and he is from Texas, USA), and he says for the same two things: *I know this ball is not perfectly round* and he also says *I know this is not far*. Both agents are considered speaking truly. The third option for the contextualist is to appeal to vagueness of the word "to know"; because this verb is vague, there is a possibility of the context variability. In our case, when Ana and George are having a conversation and she is uttering the proposition *I know...* she thinks that they are speaking in a lower standard of knowledge when they are actually speaking in a higher one. So, when she is saying *I know...* she is expressing, in the George's context, a false proposition but she thinks she is expressing a true proposition. Shiffer's comment is that this is completely insane because "the speaker is perfectly aware of what it is going on".⁶

Therefore, the contextualist cannot explain the skeptical paradox as she is trying to do, i.e. with the reference to an agent's swap of contexts because the error theory is not plausible in the cases where there are no indexical terms. An agent would know, as presented in the cases one, two and three, what she is saying. Therefore, Shiffer says that the contextualist's explanation why we have the skeptical paradox here is not plausible. Is Shiffer right?

III.

1. As we said on the previous two pages, Shiffer thinks that all three possibilities for the contextualist's answer about the sentences without indexical terms (IT) as well as why an agent is confusing the sentences are out. But, I am going to present that this (second objection) is not plausible. Shiffer calls the three contextualist's possibilities (i) a hidden indexical term, (ii) counting the verb "to know" as an indexical term and (iii) the context variability of vagueness.⁷

i. For him it is impossible to confuse the context in which the sentence is asserted. In our case with Ana (example 1, pp. 10), she won't confuse the contexts, i.e. it is not possible that she will assert *It is a red ball in room B* and mistakenly think that she is asserting the proposition *It is a red ball in room*

⁴ Indexical nature of knowledge sentences is shown in such terms, i.e. indexical terms (IT), that were supposed to show in what kind of context we are.

⁵ "Such sentences express propositions that contain what J. Perry has called unarticulated constituents". Stephen Shiffer, "Contextualist Solutions to Skepticism", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96, p. 326

⁶ He is using the example with the car. An agent A: I know that my car is on the place

L. Now, if an agent B asks an agent A how can you be sure it was not towed, he (an agent A) can get angry at the B's obtuseness because there was a mutual knowledge between them according to which A spoke causally. S. Shiffer, "Contextualist Solutions to Skepticism", p. 328

⁷ Because I don't have any objection to his second possibility, i.e. counting the verb "to know" as an indexical term, I will deal only with the first two. The second possibility might not be a problem for the contextualist, because she still has two options.

A. The reason for this is that in the first two cases, in which Ana is implicitly saying that a red ball is in room B, she would have to be insane not to know what she thought and asserted a few seconds ago and therefore confuse the context. In the third Shiffer's case (example 2, pp.10), in which is no implicit assertion, he doesn't give any further explanation. For the start, I am saying that Shiffer is confusing three types of sentences:

- a. It is a red ball.
- b. I know it is a red ball.
- c. I know it is a red ball in room A.

Firstly, first two sentences (a., b.) cannot be taken as equivalent, because the first one doesn't necessarily mean the same as the second one. Let's suppose that we accept the four conditions for ascribing perceptual knowledge: (i) what she claims must be true; (ii) an agent's perceptual mechanisms are well functioning; (iii) an agent is in excellent perceptual conditions; (iv) she doesn't have any reason to believe that deceivers could exist. This is enough on his view to know something. Then, the proposition *If I know there is a red ball then there is a red ball* can count as necessary true. But the proposition *If it is a red ball then I know there is a red ball* cannot count as necessary true, because in its antecedent illusions or hallucinations can appear. Namely, for getting necessity and for asserting a word 'to know' we cannot take into the consideration the four conditions. As Peter Unger in his article *An Argument for Skepticism* nicely presents the idea that we cannot talk about higher or lower meaning of the word *to know* because this word refers to absolute certainty (Unger, 2000: 46).

Secondly, it might be true that she is not going to confuse the contexts in example 1, because she knows for her own what she meant and said. But, she is not dealing with someone else's proposition (that is written down or even articulated). In the case of the cAS someone else is raising standards, i.e., is giving us the different context. So, if Ana reads or hears George's sentence *It is a red ball*, of course, she *can* falsely think that the red ball is in room B while actually George sentence was about room A. Because she has checked room B, she would say that George's sentence is true and she would accept his claim (because she thinks that George is talking about room B). But what she really accepted was a claim that the red ball is in room A. The confusion arises because DeRose and Shiffer are talking about two different types of contextualism. The first one speaks on "attributors contextualism", and the other on "subject contextualism" (See DeRose, 2004: 233–235).

Thirdly, as I understand him, in the first two examples he is talking about an implicitly expressed name of the cities in which it is raining (in my case *two rooms*), where this two different names represents two different contexts. The third sentence (c.), in my opinion, would therefore have to be *I know that there is a red ball in room A*, in which Ana is explicitly describing the context. But he adds here that room A is not representing the context because the sentence, in which the context is involved, should be *I know that there is a red ball in room A according to standards N*. But, if sentence (c.), as proposed above, is true, we already have a context and of course she doesn't have anything else to say. But if the sentence (c.) as proposed by him is true (according to...is added), then she can always say more.

ii. In the case of the context variability of vagueness we are dealing with Shiffer's comment that this is completely insane because "the speaker is

perfectly aware of what is going on" (Shiffer, 1996: 328). Is this so? I don't think so. After all, we are dealing here with two or three people, which cannot read each others thoughts. If Shiffer meets George and Ana and then George says that he knows that the ball he bought is not perfectly round (he is speaking truly), or when Ana says that she knows it is far from her city to the coast (she is also speaking truly), of course, they could all be confused about the context which they are referring to or about whose proposition is true. The question whether or not each of them is sure about their claim or the question according to what they are so sure is then perfectly plausible. Non of them should get "impatient at the questioner's obtuseness" (Shiffer, 1996: 328). Therefore, Shiffer's attempt to show how the contextualist doesn't have any option at defending the error theory is simply false.

2. Shiffer's first objection against the New Contextual Solution refers to the second premise of the cAS. Well, actually the objection is against the line of argumentation and about all other examples that are supposed to help to maintain the cAS' second premise. But they can't help, as Shiffer already pointed out. Is this a problem for the cAS? It could be. Namely, DeRose gives us the comparative conditionals (see pp. 4 and 5) and he claims that those conditionals are true no mater how high or low the standards for knowledge are, because they are made from the comparative facts about the epistemic positions. The important thing here is that he gives us only claims involving one person. Maybe in this case his claim that the second premise of the cAS is plausible could be true. But it is hard to imagine how one person can deal with different epistemic standards or how one person can have different standards of knowing. So, it is better to look at examples in which the same object, different persons and different standards of knowing are involved.⁸

Let's return to our previous example with George (who is a physicist and from USA) and Ana (who is a dentist and from Slovenia). *If George doesn't know that this ball is not perfectly round then Ana doesn't know that this ball is perfectly round or If George doesn't know that this particular destination is not far, then Ana doesn't know that this particular destination (the same destination as in George's case) is far.* Now, these claims are plausible if we are looking at them according only to high standards of knowing, i.e. relative to 1, or from the George's point of view (George is in our examples the one with the higher standards of knowing and who obviously dictates the standards). But if we look at them with respect to the different standards of knowing, i.e. from 1 and from 0 or from both, George's and Ana's, points of view then the claims are not so plausible anymore. Take the following examples: *If George doesn't know that this ball is not perfectly round relative to 1 (this claim is true because it is hard to satisfy high standards) then Ana doesn't know that this ball is perfectly round relative to 0 (this claim is false) or If George doesn't know that this particular destination is not far relative to 1 (this is true), then Ana doesn't know that this particular destination (the same destination as in George's case) is far relative to 0 (this is false).* Therefore, according to low and high standards of knowing, i.e. according to 0 and 1, these conditional claims are not plausible. The same holds with the cAS: If

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This is not against DeRose's position. See: K. DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem", p. 500 n17

I don't know that I am not a BIV relative to 1 then I don't know that I have hands relative to 0. We can conclude that this contextualist's explanation (actually deRose's explanation) of the plausibility of the cAS's second premise might be false.

3. Though, we can say that there is another important thing or that there is another possible escape for DeRose. He thinks that Ana is also in a strong epistemic position because of the Rule of Sensitivity and therefore, the second premise is plausible. Let's take a short look at his way of escaping, which is not very successful after all. According to his explanation of the Rule of sensitivity, the standards of knowledge (in what epistemic position one must be for O to count as knowledge) can be different but also that the one who claims that he knows he has hands is in the strong epistemic position. Why is this so? Because of the Rule of Sensitivity (see pp. 5/ ii). In short, an agent's belief is sensitive if in the closest possible world not-O an agent doesn't believe in O (O). Now, further we go and the belief in these worlds still being identical to the fact in them, the stronger epistemic position, according to this O, someone holds.

Firstly, there is a problem with this example. He claims that in the possible world in which Ana loses her hand (called the fact in this possible world O), she still holds a belief that she doesn't have a hand (call her belief (O)). Therefore, Anna can say that she is in the strong epistemic position with respect to that fact. Is this so? Assume Ana has lost her hand in the actual world, she doesn't remember what happened and she is unable to move. According to DeRose, her belief will be that she doesn't have a hand. DeRose forgot about the cases of the phantom limb sensation.

From this case we can clearly see that even in the actual world in which the fact is O (an agent doesn't have hands) an agent doesn't hold a belief ((O)), but rather (O) (she believes that she has hands). Now, it is weird to assume (or even be certain as DeRose is) after all we said that in the case of the closest possible world in which a fact is not-P (an agent doesn't have hands) an agent would hold a ((O)) (she holds a belief that she doesn't have hands). Therefore, we can ask ourselves if an agent (in our case Ana) is still in the strong epistemic position. Obviously not.

Secondly, suppose we ignore the previous paragraph and we accept his conviction that Ana is in the strong epistemic position with respect to her claim that she knows that she has hands (i.e. relative to 1). But what we must have in mind is that the skeptic is relative to Ana always in a higher epistemic position (his claims go well beyond all possible worlds) So, if an agent claiming *I know I have hands* is in a strong epistemic position (let's suppose she is in 1), then the skeptic claiming *I don't know that I am not a BIV* is, according to an agent, in a stronger epistemic position (let's say in 2). Therefore, there is (if we accept the contextualist's idea) always a gap between an agent's ordinary claims and the skeptic's claim.

IV. Conclusion

The cAS (classical argument from skepticism) is making a big fuss not only in philosophy but also in whole science. Namely, if the argument is true, then we cannot claim that we know something and this also affects our ordinary claims about life, nature and us. The contextualists tried to prove that the argument leads us to the paradox and that our ordinary "knowing"

claims are not in danger. Because there are few objections against contextualism, DeRose – the contextualist himself, proposes the New Contextualist Solution. The key points here are to explain why the cAS seems so plausible, how come that we have a paradox and how the skeptic is raising the standards of knowledge, i.e. epistemic standards. DeRose does these by the help of the Rule of Sensitivity, the Subjunctive Conditional Account and the Strength of the Epistemic Position. Shiffer is the one who is not thrilled by DeRose's explanation about the strength of the epistemic position and about explanation that when the standards of knowing are lower, i.e. when we are in the ordinary context, we would intuitively know that the third proposition of the cAS (I don't know that I have hands) is false and the third premise of the pAS (an argument of the skeptical paradox) is true (I do know that I have hands). Now the problem is when the standards of knowing are higher. We transfer then the premise that is true from the context A to the context B and then we mistakenly presuppose that this third premise (from A/ pAS) is still true (in B/ cAS). Because indexical terms are the key to distinguish in what kind of context we are this "swapping" of the contexts happens when we do not have indexical terms. Shiffer finds this contextualist's claim that in the knowledge sentences that are without IT (indexical term) the paradox arises because we confuse contexts, problematic. He raises three objections against this but his main point is that an agent knows what is going on, i.e. what context she is in, and that something like "swapping" is not going to happen.

Is it so hard to admit that the skeptic is right or at least she is right according to some claims? In this paper, I showed that there is no clear explanation if Shiffer is talking about the context of attributor or about the context of subject, and that Shiffer's three objections against the New contextual solution are not very plausible. Namely, he is confusing different types of sentences and he gives us only claims involving one person. Maybe in this case his claim that the second premise of the cAS is plausible could be true. But it is hard to imagine how one person can deal with different epistemic standards or how one person can have different standards of knowing. We should namely look at examples in which the same object, different persons and different standards of knowing are involved. In that case it is hard to agree either with Shiffer's or with DeRose's solutions.

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Smiljana Gartner

Shiffer's Einwände gegen DeRoses Kontextualismus

Zusammenfassung

Wenn das klassische Argument des Skeptizismus wahrhaftig ist, dann können wir nicht behaupten, dass wir etwas wissen, und dies beeinflusst unsere täglichen Aussagen über das Leben, die Natur und uns selbst. DeRose schlägt eine neue kontextualistische Lösung vor. Shiffer bringt Argumente gegen DeRoses Erklärungen über die Stärke der epistemischen Position vor. Für problematisch hält er auch die Behauptung der Kontextualisten, dass in Wissenssätzen ohne indexikalische Ausdrücke ein skeptisches Paradoxon auftritt. In meinem Beitrag versuche ich für die Notwendigkeit des Inbe-trachtziehens von Beispielen zu argumentieren, die dasselbe Objekt, verschiedene Personen und verschiedene Wissensstandards einbeziehen. In diesem Fall wird man sowohl Shiffers als auch DeRoses Lösungen kaum zustimmen können.

Schlüsselwörter

Wissen, Skeptizismus, Kontextualismus des Zuschreibers, epistemische Standards, neue kontextualistische Lösung, indexikalische und nicht-indexikalische Ausdrücke

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Les objections de Schiffer au contextualisme de DeRose

Sommaire

Si l'argument classique du scepticisme est valable, alors nous ne pouvons pas affirmer savoir quelque chose, et cela influe également sur nos affirmations quotidiennes au sujet de la vie, de la nature et de nous-mêmes. DeRose propose une nouvelle solution contextuelle. Schiffer argumente contre l'explication de DeRose de la force de la position épistémologique. Il considère comme problématique l'affirmation des contextualistes que, dans les propositions qui attribuent un savoir sans termes indexicaux, apparaît un paradoxe sceptique. Dans cet article, je présente des arguments en faveur de la nécessité d'observer des exemples qui impliquent un même objet, des personnes différentes et des normes différentes. Dans ce cas, il est difficile d'être d'accord soit avec les solutions proposées par Schiffer, soit avec celles proposés par DeRose.

Mots clés

savoir, scepticisme, contextualisme des attributeurs, norme épistémologique, nouvelle solution contextuelle, termes indexicaux et non indexicaux