

Wams: Why Worry?

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Abstract: One of the most popular objections against epistemic contextualism is the so-called 'warranted assertability' objection. The objection is based on the possibility of a 'warranted assertability manoeuvre', also known as a *WAM*. I argue here that WAMs are of very limited scope and importance. An important class of cases cannot be dealt with by WAMs. No analogue of WAMs is available for these cases. One should thus not take WAMs too seriously in the debate about epistemic contextualism.

Epistemic Contextualism, the view that 'knowledge' and related terms are context-sensitive, has been discussed a lot over the last years. One of the most discussed objections by critics of epistemic contextualism (by 'invariantists') is based on the idea of a 'warranted assertability manoeuvre' (WAM). I am going to argue in this paper that WAMs are, contrary to what many people, contextualists as well as invariantists, believe, of very limited scope and importance. The debate on epistemic contextualism should focus on other topics. I will start with some stage-setting (I). I will continue with a distinction between two forms of contextualism; the important differences between the two forms have been widely neglected but they have significant implications for the argumentative burden of using a WAM against contextualism (II). It turns out that the objections of those who would like to WAM contextualism are much less forceful than expected (III).¹

I. Contextualism, invariantism and WAMs

Epistemic contextualism can roughly and in a provisional way be characterized as the view that the truth conditions of knowledge sentences

¹ I will not touch on other objections to contextualism; this would lead too far away from our topic here.

vary with the speaker's context (see, e.g., Cohen 1987, Lewis 1996, DeRose 1999). Contextualists have come up with cases which, according to them, strongly support contextualism. Take as an example Keith DeRose's bank cases (1992, 913; see also Stewart Cohen's airport case in his 1999, 58):

Bank Case A. My wife and I are driving home on a Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past the bank, we notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, 'Maybe the bank won't be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays.' I reply, 'No, I know it'll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It's open until noon.'

Bank Case B. My wife and I drive past the bank on a Friday afternoon as in Case A, and notice the long lines. I again suggest that we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday morning only two weeks ago, and discovered that it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and very important check. If our paychecks are not deposited into our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a *very* bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, 'Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?' Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, still, I reply, 'Well, no. I'd better go in and make sure.'

Contextualists typically hold that the attributor, Keith, is right both times: when he claims to know in case A and when he claims not to know in case B. This does not constitute a contradiction because the same sentence 'Keith knows that the bank will be open' has different truth conditions or

meanings in cases A and B.² It is true in case A but false in case B. Truth conditions vary with contextually variable epistemic standards for knowledge some of which are stricter and some of which are more relaxed. It is an open question amongst contextualists what the relevant contextual parameters are that determine epistemic standards for knowledge (practical stakes, salience, etc.); we can leave this open here.

The denial of epistemic contextualism is usually called ‘epistemic invariantism’ (leaving aside positions like truth-relativism about ‘knowledge’; see, e.g., MacFarlane 2005). We can restrict ourselves here to ‘classical’ invariantism according to which knowledge depends only on epistemic factors like truth, belief, warrant, etc.³ Invariantists about ‘knowledge’ deny that the truth conditions of knowledge sentences vary with the speaker’s context; according to them, these sentences have invariant truth conditions. The sentence ‘Keith knows that the bank will be open’ has the same truth conditions and meaning in case A and case B, and so does the sentence ‘Keith does not know that the bank will be open’. Hence, Keith’s utterances in case A and case B are contradictory. Invariantists are committed to saying that in one of the scenarios Keith is saying something true while in the other scenario he is saying something false. Some (‘sceptical’ or ‘demanding’) invariantists go with more demanding epistemic standards and claim that Keith is right only in case B while other (‘non-sceptical’ or ‘moderate’) invariantists go with more relaxed epistemic standards and claim that Keith is right only in case A.

What can invariantists say about the contextualist ‘data’, like the above bank cases? It is and should be uncontroversial between invariantists and

2 To avoid potential misunderstandings: I am not claiming that meaning just consists in truth conditions. I am only claiming that different truth conditions entail a difference in meaning.

3 Non-classical forms of invariantism assume that knowledge also depends on non-epistemic factors like, for instance, the practical interests of the subject (see Hawthorne 2004; Stanley 2005). Since this kind of invariantism is also susceptible to WAMs, we can leave it aside here. Its relation to classical invariantism and contextualism would be the subject of another paper. Here, I will use the shorter expression ‘invariantism’ for classical invariantism.

contextualists that speakers really do make such divergent knowledge attributions in different contexts. It also is and should be uncontroversial between the two views that such contextual shifts are appropriate in some sense. But in what sense? Here lies the core of the disagreement between contextualists and invariantists. While contextualists claim that, say, both of Keith's utterances are appropriate because they are both true, invariantists claim that both utterances are appropriate but not because they are both true. What varies with the speaker's context, according to invariantists, are not truth conditions but something else easily mistaken for that: the conditions of warranted assertability. According to this idea, speakers can be (pragmatically) warranted to assert something false. This can explain how different utterances made in different contexts can all be appropriate; Keith's false utterance can still be appropriate. Contextualists, according to invariantists, simply confuse truth conditions with conditions of warranted assertability.

Usually, invariantists spell the idea of warranted assertability out in terms of Gricean rules of conversation (see Grice 1989). Let us consider what a moderate invariantist using Gricean ideas would say about the bank cases (similar things can, *mutatis mutandis*, be said from the perspective of a demanding invariantist). According to her, Keith knows in case B, too, that the bank will be open. However, asserting the truth would have a false implicature and convey something false to the audience, namely, for instance, that his evidence is strong enough for current practical purposes, even given the high stakes. In contrast, asserting the falsehood 'I don't know whether the bank will be open' will have a true implicature and convey something true to the audience, namely that his evidence is not strong enough for current practical purposes, given the high stakes.

The invariantist who uses Gricean ideas of (pragmatically) warranted assertability can explain why a contextualist interpretation of the data can be so tempting: it is so easy to confuse truth with warranted assertability. False sentences can seem true (and true sentences false) because of their warranted assertability (or the lack thereof). This explanation—which also has justificatory character—constitutes the objection to contextualism

known under the name of a ‘warranted assertability manoeuvre’ (*WAM*) (see, e.g., DeRose 1999, 2002, 2004, 2009, ch.3, Brown 2005, Black 2005, Rysiew 2001, 2005, Halliday 2005, Leite 2005, Pritchard 2010, Bach 2005, sec. 4-5). Following the literature, I restrict the use of the term ‘WAM’ mainly to arguments based on Gricean ideas of implicature. WAMs are perhaps the most discussed objections to contextualism. Many seem to take this also to be the most serious or at least a major objection to contextualism (see, e.g., Keith DeRose (1999, 196). I will now start my argument that WAMs are of very limited scope and importance⁴ with a distinction between two forms of contextualism and argue that the argumentative burden of an invariantist who uses WAMs against contextualism is heavier than one might think.

II. Two forms of contextualism and the burden of WAMming

(a) *A distinction*

Let us draw a distinction between two forms of contextualism. This is relevant to our understanding of contextualism in general and to the idea of a WAM in particular. If a speaker utters something of the form ‘S knows that *p*’, say ‘Jack knows that the earth is not flat’, then typically the speaker will in that context express a thought or belief with his utterance: the thought or belief that Jack knows that the earth is not flat, or, more precisely, the thought or belief expressed by the speaker’s utterance⁵ (the same holds, *mutatis mutandis* for sentences of the form ‘S does not know that *p*’). Sincere speakers, at least, usually say what they think or believe. So, contextualism should also hold for thoughts and beliefs, not just for

4 According to the currently very influential knowledge account of assertion one should assert something only if one knows it (see, e.g., Williamson 2000, 243). It is hard to see how WAMs are possible given such an account.

5 The last nine words are necessary in order to make it clear that the thought or belief reported is the one expressed by the speaker, not necessarily the thought or belief expressed by me, the author of this paper, when I use the words ‘Jack knows that the earth is not flat’. My context might differ so much from the speaker’s that I might not express the same thought with those words as the speaker (according to contextualism). For the sake of simplicity, I will in the following not express myself in this cumbersome way; nothing substantial hinges on this.

utterances and sentences. By ‘thought’ I mean an occurrent episode of holding something true while ‘belief’ refers to a dispositional state of holding something true. To avoid clumsiness of expression, I will not always use terms like ‘thought and belief’ here but often only ‘thought’ or ‘belief’, meaning that what holds for the one also holds for the other.

We can easily imagine cases where the attributor does not talk at all but just engages in ‘speechless’ thought. Consider this slight variation of DeRose’s bank cases (the variations concern the last sentence of each paragraph):

Bank Case A. My wife and I are driving home on a Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past the bank, we notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, ‘Maybe the bank won’t be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays.’ I remain silent but think ‘No, I know it’ll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It’s open until noon.’

Bank Case B. My wife and I drive past the bank on a Friday afternoon as in Case A, and notice the long lines. I again suggest that we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday morning only two weeks ago, and discovered that it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and very important check. If our paychecks are not deposited into our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a *very* bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, ‘Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?’ Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, I still think without replying, ‘Well, no. I’d better go in and make sure.’

These variations of the original bank cases support contextualism for knowledge attributions made in thought, especially speechless thought not accompanied by speech, as much as the original bank cases support contextualism for knowledge attributions made in speech. Therefore it would be extremely implausible to restrict the contextualist thesis to the 'linguistic' aspect of knowledge attributions and not apply it to the 'mental' aspect, too. A fully general contextualism has to deal with both aspects. This point has often been neglected in recent discussion of contextualism; many contextualists seem to restrict themselves to linguistic cases (see Lewis 1996). Similarly, invariantism should concern both forms of knowledge attributions. It is hard to make sense of mixed positions here: Contextualism about linguistic attributions *cum* invariantism about mental attributions seems as implausible and ill-motivated as invariantism about linguistic attributions *cum* contextualism about mental attributions.

(b) A complication

Before we move on, I need to address an important problem. How should one characterize the mental version of contextualism and how should one characterize contextualism more generally? Here is an idea: epistemic contextualism says that the truth conditions of knowledge sentences, knowledge thoughts and knowledge beliefs vary with the speaker's, thinker's or believer's context. More briefly: epistemic contextualism says that the truth conditions of knowledge attributions vary with the attributor's context. The problem is simply that this does not seem to make much sense. Why not?

It seems that even if the sentences of knowledge attributors are context-sensitive, the thoughts and beliefs cannot be context-sensitive. One and the same sentence can have different truth conditions or contents when uttered in different contexts. The identity conditions of a given sentence are not determined by its content in a context; identity of content is not a necessary condition for the identity of a sentence. The same linguistic vehicle can transport different contents (consider, e.g., 'It's raining now'). Thoughts and beliefs are fundamentally different in this

respect. The identity conditions of a given thought or belief are determined by its content; identity of content is a necessary condition for the identity of a thought or belief. Thoughts and beliefs are not like vehicles which can transport different contents in different contexts. Thoughts and beliefs are the very thoughts and beliefs they are because of their content; nothing like that holds for sentences. Hence, it does not seem to make any sense at all to say that the truth conditions or the content of a thought or belief vary with the thinker's or believer's context. The sentence 'It is raining here now' can mean different things when uttered at different times and places; if they do, then there are different thoughts or beliefs being expressed—not the same thought or belief with different contents. Even if certain kinds of sentences show context-sensitivity of truth conditions, the corresponding thoughts and beliefs do not: they just lose their identity with change of the relevant context.

However, there is a way out of this problem for the contextualist who wants to apply her thesis also to thoughts and beliefs. We can use David Kaplan's (1989) distinction between 'character' and 'content' of linguistic expressions and apply it to thoughts and beliefs. The character of an expression is a function mapping contextual parameters onto a content while the content is a function mapping possible worlds or circumstances of evaluation onto truth values (see Kaplan 1989, 500-507). The character of the expression 'I am hungry now' or 'He knows that the bank is open' maps certain contextual parameters (speaker, time or epistemic standards for knowledge) onto contents (say, the proposition expressed by a speaker uttering that sentence at a time) while the expressed content is true or false in certain circumstances or worlds (e.g., the actual world). How can one extend this to the case of thought and belief? A speaker who believes what she says when she utters 'Mary knows that she has hands' in different contexts thus expresses different beliefs (or thoughts) in these different contexts. But these different beliefs (or thoughts) can share the same 'character'. This is parallel to the case of indexical or demonstrative thoughts: my thought at t_1 that it is raining now or that I want this piece of a cake shares its character with your thought at t_2 that it is raining then or

that you want that piece of a cake; clearly, the contents of these thoughts are different. If we apply the character-content distinction to thoughts and beliefs, we can solve the above problem and coherently as well as meaningfully formulate the contextualist thesis for the case of thoughts and beliefs: the content of knowledge beliefs and thoughts of the same character vary with the believer's or thinker's context. We should therefore also modify the claim above that thoughts are individuated by their content: the relevant idea here is that thoughts may also be individuated by their character, not their content.⁶

We can now also give a fully general characterization of contextualism: epistemic contextualism says (a) that the truth conditions of knowledge sentences vary with the speaker's context, and (b) that the content of knowledge beliefs and thoughts of the same character vary with the believer's or thinker's context. This way of expressing oneself is quite cumbersome, though. For the sake of simplicity only, I will in the following use less cumbersome expressions and talk about the context-sensitivity of the 'truth conditions' or of the 'contents' of thoughts and beliefs; this kind of talk should always be taken in the sense of the more adequate explanation in terms of 'character' and 'content' just given. Along such less cumbersome lines, we can then also go back to the following as a short characterization of contextualism: epistemic contextualism says that the truth conditions of knowledge attributions (whether in speech or in thought) vary with the attributor's context.

(c) An additional explanandum

What does all this imply for the debate between the contextualist and the invariantist? If contextualism is a thesis about both linguistic and mental knowledge attributions, then invariantism also has to say something about both kinds of attributions. The case for or against contextualism should

⁶ More could be said about the character-content distinction for thoughts but the above hints may suffice here. One can also apply this distinction to the constituents of knowledge-thoughts, especially the concept of knowledge, and say that the concept of knowledge is context-sensitive insofar as its content is context-sensitive while its character is fixed.

cover both sides of attributions. So, what do contextualists and invariantists have to say about the mental cases?

Let us go back to the mental version of DeRose's bank bases. The contextualist would and should use such cases to support the view that the truth conditions of the thoughts of the attributor vary with the thinker's context. Hence, Keith thinks something true both in case A and case B, without contradiction. If Keith thinks a thought expressible by 'I know that the bank will be open' in cases A and B, his thought has different contents. The invariantist, however, would and should argue that the truth conditions of the thoughts of the attributor do not vary with context. Keith thinks something true in one case and something false in the other case, thus producing a contradiction. If Keith thinks a thought expressible by 'I know that the bank will be open' in cases A and B, he is thinking the same thought with the same content.

It should be uncontroversial between contextualists and invariantists that thinkers change their knowledge attributions with changing contexts. Keith has thoughts with different contents in case A and case B (though the contextualist should add that the character remains the same while the content varies with context). It should also be uncontroversial between contextualists and invariantists that such divergence can be appropriate given the contextual changes. According to the contextualist, they are appropriate insofar as the thinker thinks true thoughts in both cases (without inconsistency because of changing truth conditions). But how can the invariantist explain the data? Can he show that the thinker is warranted in some sense to believe something false (and can he thus seem to be right)?

It will not help the invariantist to simply run an 'indirect' WAM here and to argue in the following way: speakers typically believe what they are saying, also when they are saying something false because they are confusing truth and warranted assertability; hence, if they are warranted to assert p , then they are also warranted to believe p . This will not help because sometimes or even often attributors make their attributions in speechless thought. And it would certainly be quite implausible and *ad*

hoc to reply that even solitary thinkers imagine what they would say to others.

So, the WAM-story as such does not look very promising here. What about WAMs then? Either WAMs express a more basic and general point than one might initially think, a point which is fundamental and far-reaching enough to be present in both versions of contextualism and which thus also concerns the mental version of contextualism. Or WAMs only concern the linguistic version. In the first case, the invariantist critic of contextualism should be able to come up with a sufficiently close analogue to WAMs for the mental version of contextualism; in the second case their criticism would only be a partial one and thus not very troublesome for the contextualist.

I will call any analogue to WAMs for the mental version of contextualism ‘warranted believability manoeuvres’ (WBM), using ‘warranted’ in ‘warranted believability manoeuvre’ in analogy to its use in ‘warranted assertability manoeuvre’. We will see whether such an analogy can be constructed. The idea is that it is easy to confuse truth with warranted believability. False propositions can seem true (and true propositions false) because of warranted believability (or the lack thereof). The warrant relevant here is not epistemic warrant for the proposition entertained but rather warrant for what is ‘pragmatically conveyed’ in thought and belief. As I will argue, the attempt to construct successful WBMs fails because of important asymmetries between thought and language (III). Given all this, it turns out that an important part of the recent debate on contextualism has been ‘barking up the wrong tree’: WAMs are not that important after all.

III. WBMs: Why one worries

(a) How not to block WBMs from the start

Before even going into the details concerning WBMs, one might object that there is no need for WBMs because speakers do not believe what they (literally) say when they are making a false but warranted assertion about someone else’s knowledge or lack thereof. The moderate invariantist, for

instance, could point out that Keith in case B still believes that he knows that the bank will be open even though he says that he does not know that (the same point can, *mutatis mutandis*, be made on behalf of a demanding invariantist). Only the sentences of the attributor and their truth conditions do vary with context but neither the attributor's beliefs nor their contents do. With respect to beliefs there is no change to explain and therefore no work to do for a WBM.

This objection, however, misses a crucial point the contextualist is making: namely, that our intuitions about cases like the bank cases support both the linguistic and the mental version of contextualism. The beliefs of knowledge-attributors do indeed change with context, as the variations of the original bank cases make plausible (see above). The above invariantist 'blocking' objection against WBMs is thus not convincing.

Apart from that, the core idea of a WAM is that the attributor holds something true (false) false (true) because they confuse truth (falsehood) with warranted assertability (the lack thereof). According to the moderate invariantist, for instance, Keith (in the bank cases) not only says something false in the second scenario but also—insofar as he confuses truth and warranted assertability—believes what he says to be true. Keith not only says but also believes that he does not know that the bank will be open. The attributor, according to the idea of a WAM, does not only say something false in certain contexts but also believes the false things he says.

It is worth noting here briefly that if the invariantist rather wants to say that speakers do change their beliefs about knowledge with changing contexts and thus get their knowledge attributions systematically wrong in certain kinds of contexts, then invariantists also have to explain why attributors are convinced they are right, even when they are wrong. The invariantist needs an error theory. This is interesting in itself because it has been argued against contextualists that they have to attribute semantic blindness about the context sensitivity of knowledge sentences to speakers (see Schiffer 1996). If invariantists also need an error theory, then this objection does not cut very much ice in the debate between invariantists and contextualists (see also DeRose 2006, sec.2).

(b) Griceing thought?

So, the question remains: why can one not successfully run a WBM against contextualism? The basic problem is this: Warranted Assertability is usually explained in terms of Gricean rules of conversation but there is nothing like that in the case of thought. Thinking and believing are not communicative acts like assertions. At least, the anti-contextualist is well-advised not to burden his strategy with controversial ideas about the assimilation of thought to speech. There is implicature for assertions but not for thoughts: it is hard to see how there could be an addressee in the latter case. Can I not think that the earth is not flat, without addressing or even intending to address anyone? Are not such cases the normal cases? Even if thought is seen as a case of talking to oneself, several further questions arise: can I inform myself of something? Can I convey something to myself without explicitly thinking it? Do I have to use Gricean maxims to figure out what I am trying to convey to myself? I think the answers to all these questions will be in the negative. I can certainly think of myself as saying to someone ‘The earth is not flat’ but that is not the same as thinking that the earth is not flat; we have no reason to believe that the latter involves or entails the former. Hence, there can be nothing like warranted believability.⁷ This is the most straightforward argument against the possibility of successful WBMs (see, e.g., Speaks 2008, 111-113, 120). However, all this only shows, friends of WBMs might reply, that there is no very direct or very close analogue to a WAM in the case of thought. But perhaps there is a more indirect one that would still do?

Let us look at some details of warranted assertability.⁸ Speakers can be warranted to make a false assertion for a variety of different reasons. Let us look at some important cases. What the speaker is saying might be close

7 All this is independent from the question whether thought is conducted in some language of thought. Even if this is so, this would presumably be different from natural languages that we use in speech (see Fodor 1975). And even if there cannot be thought without language, this does not mean that thinking is a kind of speaking.

8 Grice 1989, 34 holds of at least some of the following phenomena—hyperbole etc.—that they can count as implicatures. I’ll leave the question open here whether all of them can.

enough to the truth for all practical purposes (asserting ‘the car has run 10 000 miles’ when it is only 9981 miles). A speaker might say something that is false according to some but not all standards of precision (‘France is hexagonal’; see Lewis 1979). The speaker might very legitimately use hyperbolic language (‘I have 10 000 essays to grade until tomorrow’) or metaphors (‘your dog is a thunderbolt’). The speaker might say something false when the costs of further inquiry are too high and it matters most to say something (‘The Indian restaurant is cheaper ... What the heck, let’s go to the Indian one, it is getting late and I am really hungry’). Or the speaker might want to say something false because only a falsehood might lead to further true beliefs (uttering ‘Yes, Jones owns a car. Do you believe me now that someone in my office owns a car?’ when Jones does not own a car while some of Jones’s colleagues do but the hearer only knows Jones amongst the speaker’s colleagues and only takes facts about Jones seriously when it comes to car ownership amongst the speaker’s colleagues).

It is uncontroversial that there can be all these (and more) kinds of reasons to assert something false. However, how could they apply to knowledge attributions? There are serious problems with that idea: can one say (or think) ‘Jack knows that he has hands’ metaphorically? Or hyperbolically? It is very hard, to say the least, to even start to make sense of such ideas. Can one say (or think) ‘Mary knows that she has ears’ in a loose sense, like in the case of ‘the car has run 10 000 miles’ or ‘France is hexagonal’? Again, it is not easy to see how such ideas could apply to knowledge attributions (but see Unger 1971, Conee 2005, 52-53, Davis 2007, and Stanley 2004, 139-142).

More importantly: there hardly seem to be any parallels to the above cases of warranted assertability in the case of thought or belief.⁹ Take, for instance, metaphorical language. Is there something like metaphorical thought or belief? One can metaphorically say that life is a fountain; what

⁹ The following points hold even if one assumes that thinking consists in using sentences ‘in conversation’ with oneself.

one means by that sentence is not what it literally means. One can think or believe (hold true) that life is a fountain (though the circumstances would presumably be quite special in such a case) but one cannot think or believe (or mean) something different by that than that life is a fountain. Sure, one can think up a metaphorical way of expressing a non-metaphorical thought but then one is thinking about how to express a non-metaphorical thought in language; one is not thinking a metaphorical thought (whatever that might be). Speech expresses thought and it can do so in many different ways but thought does not express anything else.

Similar doubts seem to apply to mental analogues to other forms of non-literal speech or loose talk. Can one have a hyperbolic thought or belief that one has 10 000 essays to grade until tomorrow? Well, if that is what one holds true, then one simply has a false belief. On what basis could having such a false belief be warranted? What one thinks or believes in such a case is simply that one has 10 000 essays left to grade until tomorrow but one cannot think something different from a thought of that content by thinking a thought of that very content.

Thoughts or beliefs that the car has run 10 000 miles when one believes it only has 9981 miles on it, or that France is hexagonal when one is aware that its precise shape isn't hexagonal raise similar problems. What does a person hold true when agreeing with the sentences 'the car has 10 000 miles on it' or 'France is hexagonal'? Either something non-literal and true or something literal and false. In the latter case, the person agrees with the sentences interpreted in a strict way. If what the person thinks or believes in such cases is true, then one should reformulate such sentences by adding a 'roughly'-operator: 'the car has roughly 10 000 miles on it' or 'France is roughly hexagonal'. Certainly, nobody can have warrant to believe or think that the car has exactly 10 000 miles on it while believing that it only has 9981 miles on it. Or that France is exactly hexagonal while believing that it is not really hexagonal.

Cases in which the subject is warranted to stop inquiry with a false view because further inquiry is too costly or the falsehood reached leads to truths or other good things in the future (see above) are a bit different.

Prima facie there seems nothing wrong with saying in those cases that the subject is (pragmatically) warranted in believing something false. But is that really so?

(c) *The general idea of pragmatic warrant*

Let us look at the idea of warranted assertability or believability in general, whether or not spelled out in terms of Gricean rules of conversation. Let us first distinguish between epistemic and non-epistemic warrant (and call the latter ‘pragmatic’ warrant). Epistemic warrant is truth-related: It speaks in favour of the truth of some proposition; non-epistemic, pragmatic warrant does not have this link with truth but rather a link with non-epistemic factors like, e.g., the well-being of the subject. Pragmatic warrant is not warrant for a proposition but warrant to do something or, more specifically related to our topic, to believe something. Both epistemic and pragmatic warrant admit of degrees.¹⁰

Let us look at pragmatic warrant and let us consider the case of moderate invariantism according to which it is true in every context that we know lots of things (similar arguments can be constructed for demanding invariantism). The basic idea underlying a WBM¹¹ would be that in more demanding contexts the attributor has pragmatic warrant to believe something false, e.g., that she does not know that she has hands. Furthermore, the attributor could have pragmatic warrant to believe some p (that someone does or does not know a given proposition) even if she had no epistemic warrant for p (or even epistemic warrant for *not-p*). For instance, even if Jack knows that it is 3.30 pm, it might be better for me

¹⁰ A person can, of course, have epistemic warrant to believe something even when the proposition believed is in fact false: however this is not what the argument from warranted believability needs. The epistemic situation of the attributor is supposed to remain the same through context changes, at least according to the invariantist. Hence, if the attributor has epistemic warrant to believe that S knows that p , then there cannot be (according to the invariantist) another context in which the same epistemic warrant supports the contrary belief that S does not know that p .

¹¹ Those who hold that knowledge is a necessary condition for acceptable practical reasoning and action and thus also for pragmatic warrant (see Hawthorne, 2004, *passim*, Williamson 2005, 231, Stanley 2005, 9) will not be inclined to use WBMs.

not to rely on this fact about Jack or believe it if a lot is at stake for me with respect to the exact time (to consider just one way of spelling out the general idea here). Or take the bank case. Keith knows that the bank will be open on Saturday. However, because there is so much at stake in the demanding context, he has good pragmatic reasons to be very careful and not to rush things. If he took himself to know that the bank will be open on Saturday, nothing would or should keep him from acting on the basis of that knowledge.¹² Since he has good pragmatic reasons to avoid the latter, he also has good pragmatic reasons either to not take himself to know that the bank will be open on Saturday or to even deny it. This is what an attempt to run a WBM—characterized in more general terms of pragmatic warrant—looks like.

Given that in less demanding contexts the attributor has epistemic warrant for, say, her claim to know that she has hands, and given that epistemic warrant remains the same throughout changing contexts (according to invariantists), the pragmatic warrant to deny in more demanding contexts that she knows she has hands would have to go against epistemic warrant and even override it. But isn't it irrational (and perhaps even impossible) to believe something against one's epistemic reasons and just for pragmatic reasons (see Williams 1973 and many others)? How could such a person still be warranted? She could, perhaps, still be warranted in a very restricted way—partially warranted but not overall. However, the contextualist cases (like the bank cases) suggest that the attributor is warranted overall. Hence, this kind of move will not help the critic of contextualism.¹³

Furthermore, a person who is pragmatically warranted to believe something (that Jack went to the movies) which she is not epistemically

12 I am not convinced (see Hawthorne 2004, 148-149 and others) that it is incoherent to both claim that one knows that *p* and still not act on the basis of it, for instance because one thinks one should check the evidence more carefully. For the sake of simplicity, however, I will go with the assumption of incoherence here.

13 In cases where there is no epistemic warrant at all one way or the other the person would arguably still be irrational to settle for a belief one way or the other. However, we can leave this kind of case aside here.

warranted to believe would be in a kind of Moore-paradoxical predicament (given that she is able to reflect on and identify her epistemic warrant and its quality¹⁴): She would be in a position to think or say¹⁵:

Jack went to the movies but I don't have any good evidence for it,

or

I believe Jack went to the movies but I don't have any good evidence for it,

or even

Jack went to the movies but the evidence speaks against it,

or

I believe Jack went to the movies but the evidence speaks against it.

This, too, throws an unfortunate light on the idea of using the idea of warranted believability more generally: It would make the person irrational and incoherent (at least in some cases and in the sense in which commitment to a Moore-Paradox is incoherent) and thus only partially warranted—which, again, does not fit the contextualist cases (see above). The only way to block this conclusion would be to deny that the person can ever reflect on and identify the nature or quality of her warrant. But this denial would be highly implausible.

One might object that in cases where the speaker conveys something true by saying something that is strictly speaking false, the speaker is also only partially warranted: He has warrant for what he conveys and not for what he says. But if this does not raise problems for the idea of a WAM, then why does the restricted warrant of a pragmatically warranted belief pose a problem for the idea of a WBM? There is an important difference between the two cases. In the case of a warranted assertion of a false sentence what matters is what is conveyed by the utterance of the sentence

14 -without necessarily always knowing what exactly her warrant is.

15 -taking evidence as warrant, just for the sake of making the point here.

and the fact that the sentence is strictly speaking false and belief in it unwarranted is harmless in the pragmatic context (the literal meaning of the sentence matters only in combination with the Gricean maxims but not as such). In contrast, in the case of a pragmatically warranted but false and epistemically unwarranted belief we do have a conflict between epistemic and pragmatic warrant and there is nothing in this case (corresponding to the Gricean maxims in the case of an assertion) that could turn a false and unwarranted belief into something harmless and even useful for the overall pragmatic aim served by having the belief. Beliefs ‘aim’ at being strictly true—in what other sense could they be true?—while assertions do not always ‘aim’ at being strictly true. Beliefs are epistemic states which are essentially governed by epistemic standards (truth, warrant); if WAMs are possible, assertions are not. Given that WAMs are possible, assertions cannot be (purely) epistemic acts and therefore not essentially or not fully governed by epistemic standards. This asymmetry explains why there can in certain situations be (*pace* the knowledge account of assertion) pragmatic warrant to make a false assertion whereas there are great difficulties with the idea of pragmatic warrant for a false belief, especially when the pragmatic warrant overrides contrary epistemic warrant (see also Fumerton 2010).

(d) Non-pragmatic explanations

One should thus not try to construct WBMs. How else then—and without using WBMs—can the invariantist explain the mental version of data like the ones about the different bank scenarios? How can they explain away the appearance that the truth conditions or contents of the thoughts and beliefs of knowledge attributors vary with the attributor’s context?¹⁶ One could start with the idea that knowledge attributors often and systematically entertain false thoughts and beliefs concerning the knowledge (or lack thereof) of some subject. We would explain this by using some error theory. Such a theory can consist in a matter-of-fact

¹⁶ See the end of subsection II.b for this manner of speaking.

account of how and why people systematically go wrong in their thoughts and beliefs about knowledge. The idea of pragmatic warrant plays no role here.

The typical move here is to offer purely descriptive psychological explanations (see, e.g., Williamson 2005, sec.3, Hawthorne 2004, ch.4).¹⁷ The moderate low standards invariantist might argue that we just ‘panic’ epistemically when we are in demanding contexts and thus deny all kinds of knowledge claims; the reason would be that nothing seems good enough as entitlement to a knowledge claim, given the high stakes. The demanding invariantist might hold that we are just being over-confident in more ordinary and less demanding contexts and forget that we do not really know anything. Whatever the details of such psychological accounts¹⁸ or whatever alternative forms of explanations the invariantist might come up with—there is a basic problem with such explanations. What is it?

The invariantist who combines a warranted assertability account with some such purely descriptive explanatory account for thought would be missing a crucial bit: that we really want to say that the attributor is warranted (in whatever sense) in her judgments about the subject’s epistemic state. In other words, a purely descriptive explanation drops the core task that motivated WAMmers in the first place, namely to identify an element of warrant, whether pragmatic or not. Hence, such an invariantist account would be radically incomplete.

IV. Conclusion

All this leads to the conclusion that if one takes the complexity of contextualism and its two forms seriously, then one should be very sceptical of the use of WAMs against epistemic contextualism. WAMs themselves cannot be used for the explanation of the data in mental cases.

¹⁷ Given that both Williamson and Hawthorne defend a knowledge account of assertion, it is not surprising that both offer psychological explanations rather than a WAM (or WBM).

¹⁸ I will not go into them here; for problems with such psychological explanations see Nagel 2010.

There are also no direct or indirect analogues of a WAM in the mental case (WBM) that could be used for an alternative invariantist explanation of the data. The scope of WAMs is very limited; thus, they do not constitute a basic objection against contextualism. The conclusion here is not that we should completely forget about WAMs or similar kinds of arguments but rather not take them too seriously. The debate on contextualism should focus on other problems.¹⁹

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¹⁹ I am grateful for comments by Martijn Blaauw, Igor Douven, Duncan Pritchard and referees.

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