

TO KNOW IS TO BE ABLE TO DO

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Abstract

In this paper, I articulate a (somewhat) novel conception of knowledge, one that integrates the most important insights of epistemic contextualism and the idea, for which I am indebted to the later Wittgenstein, that to know this or that is to be able to do something. On my conception, S knows that p if and only if p is true and S is able to Φ (where Φ is a variable determined by the context in which the knowledge claim is made). I contrast my conception of knowledge with epistemic contextualism and an account similar to my own put forward by John Hyman. Unlike the conceptions of knowledge I critique, my account allows us to better understand how the word “know” functions in conversation and what our intuitions track in the Gettier cases.

Here I articulate a (somewhat) novel conception of knowledge, one that integrates the most important insights of epistemic contextualism (“contextualism”) and the idea, for which I am indebted to the later Wittgenstein, that to know this or that is to be able to *do* something. This conception of knowledge, to be spelled out below, offers a better account of how the word “know” functions in conversation and allows us to better understand what our intuitions track in the Gettier cases.

In the first section, I explicate the core thesis of contextualism and give a reason to believe that the contextualist is mistaken about how the word “know” functions in conversation. In the second section, I present and evaluate John Hyman’s attempt to flesh out the idea that knowledge is an ability. I conclude that Hyman’s theory, while interesting, is problematic. Oddly, Hyman’s theory seems to require that we say that the subjects in the Gettier cases know the proposition in question. In the third section, I articulate my account of knowledge as a contextually-specified ability, citing the advantages of my account over the previously-discussed conceptions of knowledge.

I. Epistemic Contextualism

Contextualism is the view that sentences of the form “S knows the p” are not true absolutely, but only true relative to a context.¹ For the contextualist, context determines the epistemic standard by which the truth of a knowledge claim is to be determined. Here I will only be concerned with ascriber-contextualism, the view that the context that matters in determining the truth-value of a knowledge claim is that of the one who *ascribes* knowledge to others or to himself.²

To illustrate, say A claims to know that B was in B’s office yesterday. For the contextualist, in a context in which A speaks to B’s co-worker, A most likely speaks truthfully when he says “I know that B was in his office yesterday.” The contextualist would say that in this context the epistemic standards are relatively low. However, argues the contextualist, in another context it may be false that A knows that B was in B’s office yesterday. Assume that C claims that A *doesn’t* know that B was in B’s office because A is unable to rule out the possibility that the person A saw in B’s office was really B’s twin brother. The contextualist would say that relative to the epistemic standards operative in C’s context, it may be true that “A *does not know* that B was in B’s office yesterday.” For the contextualist, the knowledge claims of both A and C may be true, *relative to the epistemic standards operative in the knowledge-ascriber’s context.*³

Some contextualists liken “know” to other context-sensitive terms, such as “tall,” “rich,” and “strong,”⁴ while others argue that we should understand the context-sensitivity of “know” on the model of indexicals like “I” or “here.”⁵ Regardless of how one understands

1 To be clear, contextualism holds that sentences of the form “S knows that p,” can express different propositions relative to different contexts of use. As such, utterances of sentences of this form may differ in truth-conditions. See Stanley (2005), p.16.

2 “Ascriber-contextualism,” is a term Wright uses to distinguish the version of contextualism discussed here from what he calls “subject-contextualism.” Wright (2005), p. 237. For a full explication of ascriber-contextualism, see DeRose (2002).

3 To be clear, ascriber-contextualism should not be confused with relevant alternatives theory (RAT), on which one knows that p if one is able to rule out *relevant* alternatives to the truth of p. See DeRose (1992). See also Stanley (2008), p. 17. I recognize that on RAT the concept of “relevance” can be spelled out in terms of context, but RAT should not be conflated with ascriber-contextualism.

4 See Hambourger (1987).

5 See Cohen (1988).

the contextualist's claim about the nature of the context-sensitivity of "know," the contextualist, it seems, is committed to the idea that contextualism makes explicit what is implicit in our use of "know": reference to an epistemic standard.

For the contextualist, just as one may make implicit reference to a class of individuals when one uses "tall" in the sentence "Jim is tall," (meaning, say, "Jim is tall (for a fifth-grader)") or to a location in using an indexical like "here" in the sentence "I'm here" (meaning, say, "I'm at your front door") we make implicit reference to an epistemic standard when we use the word "know."

A contextualist approach to, say, "tall" would allow us to make explicit the implicit reference to a class of individuals in our use of the word "tall." Contextualism about "tall" would allow us to understand how the following, seemingly contradictory, sentence could be true: "Jim is tall, but he's not *tall*." The contextualist about "tall" could say that the sentence could be seen as expressing a truth if the speaker's implicit reference to a class of individuals is made explicit. In uttering the above sentence, the contextualist about "tall" could argue, one could mean something like the following: "Jim is tall for a fifth-grader, but not tall when compared to the kids he will encounter at basketball camp." This latter sentence is intelligible and not the least bit problematic.

As Crispin Wright points out, one of the main attractions of contextualism is that it allows us to settle the dispute between the skeptic and the anti-skeptic without siding with either view.⁶ The skeptic claims, for instance, that John does not know that he works for General Motors and John, our anti-skeptic, claims to know that he works for General Motors. For the contextualist, once we make explicit the implicit reference to an epistemic standard in the skeptic's and in the anti-skeptic's use of "know", we are able to see that the dispute between the skeptic and anti-skeptic is only apparent.

For the contextualist, we can understand the skeptic's statement as follows: "John does not know, relative to the standards operative in a court of law [or, of course, the philosophy classroom], that he works for General Motors." While we can understand John's claim as follows: "I know, relative to the standards operative in day to day conversation, that I work for General Motors." Understood in this way, the contextualist argues, we need not see the skeptic and anti-skeptic as asserting contradictory claims.

⁶ See Wright (2005).

Also, for the contextualist, we need not see the following sentence as contradictory: “I know that I work for General Motors, but I do not *know* that I work for General Motors.” It should be obvious at this point why this is true. For the contextualist, we could understand the speaker who uttered this sentence as saying something like the following: “I know relative to the standards operative in day to day conversation that I work for General Motors, but I do not know that I work for General Motors relative to the standards operative in a court of law.” In fact, the contextualist himself is committed to the truth of a statement of this type. The contextualist claims that John knows that he works for General Motors relative to a low epistemic standard, yet does not know relative to a high epistemic standard. In this way the contextualist acknowledges that both the skeptic and John, the anti-skeptic, are correct.

There is, however, a problematic disanalogy between the contextualist’s statement about John’s knowledge and the above sentence which purports to make explicit the implicit reference to a class of individuals in a speaker’s use of “tall.” This disanalogy gives us reason to question the contextualist’s thesis.

In conversation, it would be immediately clear what one means to do with one’s words⁷ in uttering a sentence which makes explicit the implicit reference to the context-sensitivity of its terms. In conversation, it would not be immediately clear what one meant to do with one’s words in uttering a sentence which purports to make explicit the context-sensitivity of “know” in a sentence like “I know that I work for General Motors, but I do not *know* that I work for General Motors.” Thus, we have reason to believe that the contextualist is mistaken about how “know” functions in conversation-- mistaken, that is, in holding that we make implicit reference to epistemic standards when we use the word “know.”

It is clear what a parent would mean to do in saying to a coach, “Jim is tall for a fifth-grader, but not tall when compared to the kids he’ll encounter at basketball camp.” Here the parent would (likely) mean to express her worry that Jim will be overshadowed or intimidated by the kid’s he’ll encounter at basketball camp. I take it that the same is true for utterances of sentences which make explicit the implicit reference to contextual standards in our use of “fat,” “flat,” “rich,” and “strong.” Additionally, this pattern holds in the case of indexicals. It would be immediately clear what one meant to do in uttering “I, John Smith, promise to clean the office once a week” or “We’re here! In the parking lot, that is.”

⁷ I take the notion of doing something with one’s words to be a relatively simple one. We do many things with our words. For example, we use our words to warn others, express doubt, express excitement, inform, and congratulate.

On the other hand, consider one who utters “I know relative to the standards operative in day to day conversation that I work for General Motors, but I do not know that I work for General Motors relative to the standards operative in a court of law.” I claim that there is no conversational context in which one could utter the above sentence and in which it was also immediately clear to one’s interlocutor what one means to do with one’s words. This is so because to specify a context in making a knowledge claim is to qualify one’s claim. But if one takes it that one’s knowledge claim should be qualified or discounted in some way, one would not (typically) claim to *know*. One cannot claim to know and qualify one’s knowledge claim *and* have it be immediately clear to one’s interlocutor what one means to do with one’s words.

To see this, imagine a conversational context in which one would need to claim to know one’s place of employment. Imagine that John has been in a bad car accident and has a slight case of amnesia. The nurse asks John if he can give her any information that would allow her to discern his identity. In response to this question, John utters the above sentence.

It would not be immediately clear to the nurse what John means to do in uttering this sentence. John seems to make a knowledge claim and then qualify it. But if John were uncertain about where he worked, it seems that he would simply say “I think I work at General Motors, but I’m not positive.” And if John were certain that he worked for General Motors, he would not make a qualified knowledge claim, but would simply assert that he works for General Motors. In this conversational context, it would not be immediately clear what John wished to express. The nurse’s response to John’s statement would likely be to ask for clarification. She would likely question John: “So, what are you telling me? Do you work for General Motors or not?” It would not be immediately clear what John means to do with his words in this context.

Now one could object that all my argument shows is that we should not understand the context-sensitivity of “know” on the model of terms like “flat,” or “tall,” but on that of the indexical. For the most part, sentences that make use of indexicals can only reference one context.⁸ While one can intelligibly say “Jim is tall for a fifth-grader, but not tall when compared to the kids he’ll encounter at basketball camp,” it makes little sense to say “I, John Smith, promise to clean my (Tom Brown’s) office once a week” or “We are here, in the

⁸ I qualify this claim because one can intelligibly say “Put the couch here (pointing to the corner) and not here (pointing to the opposite room).”

parking lot, that is, and it is hot out here, in the Sahara desert, that is.” If “know” is context-sensitive in the way that indexicals are context-sensitive, then the sentence, “I know that I work for General Motors, relative to the standards operative in day to day conversation” should be immediately intelligible in conversation just as “We’re here! In the parking lot, that is” is immediately intelligible in conversation. But this is not the case.

Recall the above context in which John would need to claim to know that he works for General Motors. To the nurse’s question, John responds “I know that I work for General Motors, relative to the standards operative in day to day conversation.” It still seems that what John’s means to express would not be immediately clear to the nurse. The nurse would wonder why John felt the need to seemingly qualify his knowledge claim. She would wonder, I think, whether John thinks that there is anything else she should consider before accepting his knowledge claim. The nurse would also wonder why, if John was not positive that he worked for General Motors, he would not simply say “I’m pretty sure I work for General Motors, but not certain.” Thus, even if we model the context-sensitivity of “know” on that of the indexical, we have reason to believe that the contextualist is wrong about how the word functions in conversation.

II. Hyman’s Theory of Knowledge as Ability

John Hyman believes that both Gettier’s attack on the true justified belief definition of knowledge and the lack of philosophical consensus on what species of belief knowledge could be give us reason to opt for an alternative approach to understanding knowledge. He urges that we should view knowledge as a species of ability.⁹

In “How Knowledge Works,” Hyman develops a generalized theory of what he calls “personal propositional knowledge,” or the factual knowledge possessed by individuals. For Hyman, “knowledge is the ability to act, refrain from acting, to believe, to desire or doubt for reasons that are facts.”¹⁰ To be clearer, for Hyman, S knows that p iff S is able to take p as a reason to act, refrain from acting, believe, desire or doubt. On this theory, if one is able to, say, set one’s alarm clock for 6am because one has a meeting in the morning, one knows that one has a meeting in the morning. Similarly, on this theory, if one is able to doubt that one’s friend will show up to the meeting on time because the friend is usually

9 Hyman (1999), p. 435.

10 Ibid, p. 451.

late for meetings, one knows that the friend is usually late for meetings. In each case, the knower is able to take a given true proposition as a reason to act or believe.

Hyman contrasts the ability to act for reasons that are facts with the ability to act for reasons that are beliefs. Hyman says that the difference between one who knows that George Washington was the first U.S. President and one who merely *believes* that Washington was the first president is that in explaining the actions of the former, we must cite the *fact* that Washington was the first president, whereas in the second case, we only need to cite the *belief* that Washington was the first president.¹¹ One could take the *belief* that Washington was the first president as a reason to act even if it were not the case that Washington was the first president. But one could not act *because* Washington was the first president unless it is true that Washington was the first president. Hyman's account preserves our intuition that one can only know *p* if *p* is in fact true, but identifies knowledge of *p* with the ability to take *p* (as opposed to the belief that *p*) as a reason to perform any of a range of actions.

Hyman's theory is also supported by an account of reasons. For Hyman, and others, reasons are premises that can figure into practical and theoretical reasoning. Also, reasons are facts or truths (as opposed to, say, mental states or requests).¹² For Hyman this latter condition for something's being a reason is supported by the fact that explanations involving reasons are factive. That is, "A Φ ed because *p*" (where *p* is taken to be a reason) implies that *p*. Additionally, according to Hyman, we can see that requests and mental states cannot be reasons by noticing that requests and mental states cannot complete sentences which purport to specify a person's reasons for acting. Take, for example, the following request: "John's request that A Φ ." For Hyman, it makes no sense to say "A Φ ed because John's request that A Φ " (or "A Φ ed because A's belief that *p*" for that matter)." Hyman contends that we must instead say "A Φ ed because John requested that he Φ ," and here we take "John requested that he Φ " as a fact, not a request.

Again for Hyman, S knows that *p* iff S is able to take the truth of *p* as a reason to do any of a number of things.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 444-446.

¹² Ibid, pp. 442-443. I note that this contention, that is, that reasons are facts, makes it hard to understand why Hyman defines knowledge as the ability to act for reasons that are facts. What other types are reasons are there? Perhaps Hyman simply wishes to distinguish a person's acting because *p* from action because the person simply believes that *p*.

a. Hyman's theory of knowledge and the Gettier problem

As stated above, Hyman tells us that the inability of belief-centered definitions of knowledge to deal with the Gettier problem counts as a reason to prefer his account. But his account of knowledge no better deals with the Gettier problem than those theories he critiques.

Consider a version of the Gettier counterexample. Say Henry is watching the Wimbledon men's finals on television and the television shows that McEnroe beats Connors. Henry infers from this that McEnroe is this year's Wimbledon champion. Unbeknownst to Henry, the cameras at Wimbledon have ceased to function and the television shows a recording of last year's men's final, in which McEnroe beats Connors. But McEnroe has beaten Connors and is this year's men's champion. Thus, Henry has a justified true belief that McEnroe is this year's Wimbledon men's champion, but it does not seem that Henry's belief amounts to knowledge.¹³

On Hyman's account, it seems, we *must* say that Henry knows that McEnroe is this year's Wimbledon champion. This is so because Henry is most likely able to take this fact as a reason to believe, say, that McEnroe will receive the prize money which is awarded to the Wimbledon champion. Hyman's account is not able to explain what may be going wrong in the Gettier counterexamples.

Hyman takes it that his account does not commit him to the view that persons in the Gettier cases know the proposition in question. In explaining why Henry believes that McEnroe will receive the prize money, Hyman claims, it would be a mistake to cite the *fact* that McEnroe is this year's champion. Instead, Hyman says, we should cite the fact that Henry *believes* that McEnroe is this year's champion in explaining why he believes that McEnroe will receive the prize money.¹⁴

However, it is not clear why Hyman takes this to be the case. It is clear why it would be wrong to cite the fact that Thomas Jefferson was the 14th President to explain why one, say, gave the answer "Jefferson" to the question "Who was the 14th President?" This is so because it is simply not true that Jefferson was the 14th President. Likewise, it is clear to see why it would be wrong to cite the fact that the Pittsburgh Steelers are the winners of

¹³ This version of the Gettier counterexample appears in Dancy (1985), p. 25.

¹⁴ Hyman (1999), p. 447.

the next Superbowl as one's reason for betting that they will so win. Even if the Steelers will win the next Superbowl, that the Steelers won Superbowl XLVI is not a fact that can be known at this point. In each case, the agent's action is properly explained by citing the agent's beliefs, not the facts believed.

But, in the Gettier cases, there is a fact that can be known in play. We usually explain one's action by citing a belief rather than a fact to indicate that what is believed is not true, or that its status as true is in question. (For example, assume the party starts at 12pm. A: Why did she come so early? B: Because she believed that the party started at 8pm).

In the Gettier cases, however, there is no need to indicate that what is believed is not true or that its status as true is in question in explaining Henry's action. A third party explaining Henry's action, presumably, knows that McEnroe is this year's champion and knows that Henry believes this because Henry believes that he (Henry) watched McEnroe win this year's championship. It is not clear why one would need to cite Henry's belief, and not that fact that McEnroe is this year's champion to explain why Henry believes that McEnroe will receive the prize money.

To see this, imagine the following conversation in the following situation. A knows that Henry believes that McEnroe will receive the prize money. A also wants to know if she should so believe. B knows how Henry came to his belief. A asks: "Why does Henry think that McEnroe will receive the prize money?" B responds: "Because McEnroe is this year's Wimbledon champion."

Of course, one could cite Henry's belief instead of the fact in question in this case in explaining Henry's action, but to do so, in this context at least, would be to give one's interlocutor a reason to think that what Henry believes is not (or may not be) true.

But, clearly, explaining the actions of persons in Henry's position is not something that we often have reason to do. It is just not the case that we often find ourselves in a position in which we must explain the actions of another involved in a Gettier-type situation. If we did find ourselves in such a position, and wished to inform our interlocutor that there is something suspect about the way in which Henry came to his belief, I think the appropriate thing to do would be to simply *explain* how Henry came to his belief and not simply to cite his belief, instead of the fact believed, in explaining Henry's action(s).

Thus, Hyman is just wrong to think that it would be wrong (or inappropriate) to cite the fact that McEnroe is this year's champion in explaining Henry's action(s). One *could* cite Henry's belief instead of the fact believed, but one is not forced to do so by any rules of propriety or any fact about the world. Thus, Hyman does not give us a good reason not to conclude that persons in Gettier-type situations know the facts in question given his theory of knowledge.

Of course, Hyman is free to say that our intuitions about the Gettier cases are just mistaken, that we are just wrong to think that Henry does not know that McEnroe is this year's champion. But something is certainly amiss in these cases and most people are able to pick up on this, concluding as a result that Henry does not know. Hyman's theory suffers to the extent that it does not explain what our intuitions are tracking in the Gettier cases – that is, why our intuitions are as they are. Given our intuitions, we have reason to seek an alternative account of (personal propositional) knowledge – one that either matches our intuitions about the Gettier cases, holds that our intuitions are mistaken *and* explains why this is the case or, at least, provides a plausible explanation of what are intuitions are tracking in these cases.

III. Knowledge as a Contextually-Specified Ability

Like Hyman, I was inspired to explore the idea that knowledge may be a type of ability by a remark of Wittgenstein's in the *Philosophical Investigations*. At § 150 Wittgenstein remarks that "...the grammar of the word 'knows' is apparently closely related to that of 'can,' 'is able to.'"¹⁵ Hyman takes it that with this remark Wittgenstein sets a task for future philosophers – that of specifying which ability or abilities knowledge consists in. However, my view, to be spelled out below, is closer to the spirit of Wittgenstein's remark. For Wittgenstein does not say that knowledge *is* a type of ability, but that the *grammar* of the word "knows" is closely related to that of "can" and "is able to." I take Wittgenstein to mean here that one who claims to know can also be understood, in many circumstances, as claiming *to be able to* do something. And, when we inquire into whether someone knows, we inquire into whether that person *can* perform certain tasks.

Inspired by Wittgenstein, I now articulate an account of knowledge that integrates the contextualist's insights and is able to explain what may be going wrong in the Gettier

¹⁵ Wittgenstein (2001), § 150.

cases. In many cases, we would do better to understand knowledge as follows: S knows that p iff p is true and S is able to Φ (where Φ is a variable determined by the context in which the knowledge claim is made).¹⁶ In the remainder of this section I attempt to make clear what this conception of knowledge amounts to through an analysis of several imagined situations (contexts) in which one would make a knowledge claim or inquire into whether another knows this or that.

Imagine that a friend and I are trying to figure out if we have enough time to set up for our friend's surprise birthday party before he returns home from a football game. I say: "Well, I know the game starts at seven, so he'll probably be home at around 10:30."

On my theory, what I say is correct (that is, I know that the game starts at seven) if the game will in fact start at seven and I am able to do something specified by the context in which I make my knowledge claim. In this context I take it that I only know that the game starts at seven if I am able to give my friend reasons, appropriate to the situation, to believe that the game starts at seven. If my friend asks: "How do you know that?" I should be able to respond with a situation-appropriate answer. I could say "I checked the schedule this morning" or "My coworkers are going to the game as well and they were making a big fuss today about being able to leave work in time to make the seven o'clock kickoff." If I am unable to give such reasons, my friend should conclude that I don't really know that the game starts at seven, but am likely simply *assuming* the game starts at seven.¹⁷

Recalling Wittgenstein's remark, while, in the example, I claimed to "know" that the game starts at seven, I could have just as easily, and with the same effect, said: "I *can assure you* that the game starts at seven." In this way, we see that the grammar of "know" is closely related to that of "can" and "is able to." In the case in which I claim to know *and* the case in which I claim to be able to give you assurance, I commit myself to the truth of the claim that the game starts at seven and to being able to give reasons to believe that I am correct.

16 I don't take myself to have here provided a *definition* of knowledge. I don't think such a definition exists. I claim only that we would do *better*, in many circumstances, to understand knowledge as I suggest.

17 Notice too that I am not simply endorsing an internalist view about epistemic justification. This so because 1) it may be the case, on my view, that one *does not* know this or that, but is aware of what facts justify one's belief. In some context, knowing is constituted by being able to recall one's grounds for justification *when asked*. And because 2) it is not the case that in every context one must be aware of one's grounds for belief to count as knowing.

Imagine now that you and I are driving away from a park at which we have spent most of the afternoon. I realize that we have driven off without your dog. I alert you to this fact. You remark: “Don’t worry. I’m only five minutes away at 456 Main Street and he knows where I live.” Again, your dog knows where you live if you do in fact live at 456 Main Street and the dog is able to do something specified by the context in which you make the knowledge claim. Here your dog must be able to find his way back to your house to count as knowing where you live. Here, you could have, to the same effect, said: “Don’t worry. He can find his way home.”

With this third and final example, I hope to tie my account of knowledge to a conception of knowledge we find early on in the Western philosophical tradition. Recall that Socrates famously remarks in the *Apology* that he is the wisest man in Athens not because he knows many things, but because, unlike his compatriots, he knows that he does not know, while his fellow Athenians take themselves to be knowledgeable.¹⁸

It is not immediately clear, however, what conception of knowledge Socrates relies on in this case. In many of the Socratic dialogues, Socrates concludes that his interlocutor is not wise, not as knowledgeable as was originally supposed, because the interlocutor is unable to provide an unproblematic definition of a contested concept. I contend that in this context Socrates relies on a conception of knowledge as ability – namely, the ability to give a satisfactory account of a particular concept (piety or truth, for instance). For Socrates, one knows what piety is if there is in fact *something* picked out by the term “piety” and one can provide a definition of piety that can withstand critical reflection. For Socrates, to know is *to be able to* do something.

On my account of knowledge as ability, the ability that is taken to constitute knowledge varies from context to context. In the first example, the knower must be able to provide reasons to believe that the football game will start at seven. In the second, the knower (your dog) must be able to find his way back to your house. And in the third, one must be able to provide a satisfactory account of a particular concept to count as knowing. One cannot specify *a priori* which abilities constitute knowledge. In order to determine what abilities constitute knowledge in a given instance, one must look closely at the situation in which the knowledge claim is made and determine what the speakers take themselves to be saying in claiming to know or in claiming that others know. Only then will one be able

18 Plato (1997), p.21.

to determine who knows what.

a. My account of knowledge and the Gettier problem

I mentioned above that my account of knowledge is better able to explain our intuitions about knowledge in the Gettier cases than that of Hyman. In this section I explain why this is the case.

According to my account, we cannot determine whether Henry knows that McEnroe is this year's Wimbledon champion until we stipulate a context in which Henry's knowledge would be at issue. Only then will we be able to specify the ability (or abilities) that should be taken to constitute Henry's knowledge. I will now specify a context for the question "Does Henry know that McEnroe is this year's Wimbledon champion?"

Say you and I are trying to figure out who won this year's Wimbledon championship. You say to me: "Henry watches the tournament every year. Does he know who won?" I know that Henry has only watched a recording of last year's final and believes that McEnroe is the champion on this basis. I respond to your question: "Yes, Henry does watch the tournament every year, but the camera's at Wimbledon weren't working this year. Henry only watched a recording of last year's final. He believes that McEnroe won, but he doesn't know who won."

Here Henry's knowledge consists in his ability to provide a reason to believe that McEnroe is this year's champion other than the one he currently relies on. Thus, in this context, Henry knows that McEnroe is this year's champion if he is able to cite, say, the fact that this morning's newspaper reports that McEnroe is this year's champion as the reason for his belief.

Note, too, that in another context, it would be correct to say that Henry does know that McEnroe is this year's champion. Say our friend, Jenna, dislikes McEnroe very much and throws a fit every time he wins a tennis tournament. Assume too that Henry plans to visit Jenna. Concerned for Henry's safety, you ask me: "Does Henry know that McEnroe is this year's Wimbledon champion?" I respond: "Yes. He knows."

Here Henry's knowledge consists in his ability to structure his activities around the fact that McEnroe is this year's champion. In saying that Henry knows in this context, I say that he visits Jenna with the awareness that she will likely be upset and that he is able to

brace himself for Jenna's behavior. Here, that Henry is involved in a Gettier-type situation is neither here nor there.

My conception of knowledge does not require that we say that subjects in all Gettier cases either know or do not know the proposition in question. I hold that what we should say about the subjects of these cases turns on contextual factors. My conception of knowledge does, however, provide a plausible explanation of our intuitions about these cases. When we claim to know, we claim to be able to do something. Our intuitions track the abilities that we take to constitute knowledge in the Gettier cases.

IV. Conclusion

We have seen that contextualism is problematic because "know" does not seem to function as the contextualist imagines. In conversation, it would be immediately clear what one means to do with one's words in uttering a sentence which makes explicit the implicit reference to the context-sensitivity of terms like "tall," or "rich." But this pattern does not hold for utterances of sentences which purport to make explicit the implicit context-sensitivity of "know."

We have seen also that Hyman's theory of knowledge as an ability is problematic because it does not allow us to explain what goes wrong in the Gettier cases. Adopting Hyman's view seems to commit us to the claim that subjects in the Gettier cases know the proposition in question.

I proposed that we understand knowledge as a contextually-specified ability. On this conception, S knows that p iff p is true and S is able to Φ (where Φ is a variable determined by the context in which the knowledge claim is made). Integrating the insights of contextualism and Hyman's view, my view allows us to better understand what it is we do in claiming to know (or that others know) and allows us to understand what our intuitions track in the Gettier cases.

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