

A Contrastivist Manifesto

Walter Sinnott-Armstrong

General contrastivism holds that all claims of reasons are relative to contrast classes. This approach applies to explanation (reasons why things happen), moral philosophy (reasons for action), and epistemology (reasons for belief), and it illuminates moral dilemmas, free will, and the grue paradox. In epistemology, contrast classes point toward an account of justified belief that is compatible with reliabilism and other externalisms. Contrast classes also provide a model for Pyrrhonian scepticism based on suspending belief about which contrast class is relevant. This view contrasts with contextualism, invariantism, and Schaffer's contrastivism.

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A spectre is haunting epistemology—the spectre of contrastivism ... It is high time that contrastivists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the spectre of contrastivism with a manifesto of the party itself.

The contrastivist party is more radical than many of its own members realize. Contrastivism is usually understood merely as a position in epistemology. Schaffer defines it as “the view that knowledge is a ternary relation of the form $Kspq$, where q is a contrast proposition” (2004a, 77). I want to suggest a broader approach (which builds on Dretske 1972).

Contrastivism should be a movement not only in epistemology but also in many other areas of philosophy. Schaffer (2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2008) and Karjalainen and Morton (2003; Morton and Karjalainen 2008) have argued forcefully in detail that a three-place relation is needed in epistemology. What creates this need? In my view, epistemologists need contrasts in their analyses of knowledge and justified belief because knowledge and justified belief require reasons (or, if you prefer, grounds), and reasons are always reasons for one thing as opposed to another. The point is not that

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there is a reason for a contrastive proposition (“one thing rather than another”). The point is, instead, that the reason favours one thing and disfavors others. It is the reason that is contrastive, not the proposition.

The same rationale will then apply to any other kind of reasons, and many philosophical issues concern reasons. Epistemologists study reasons *for belief*. Moral philosophers investigate moral reasons *for action*. Aestheticians explore reasons *to like* or *to value* certain art, music, and so on. Philosophers of science analyse explanations, which give reasons *why* events happen. And so on. Because reasons are central to all these areas of philosophy, and all reasons are relative to contrasts, all these areas of philosophy can benefit from introducing a new place for contrasts into the relations used in analyses. In short, they all need contrastivism.

The benefits of contrastivism come not from picking sides in ancient disputes. The benefits come, instead, from clarifying issues and showing how to make progress and avoid useless squabbles. Contrastivists dissolve rather than solve traditional philosophical issues.

The point is perhaps clearest in explanation. Why is it raining? The humidity explains why it is raining rather than not precipitating at all, but the temperature explains why it is raining rather than snowing (see Lipton 1991; van Fraassen 1980). There is no point in arguing about whether humidity or temperature, or both or neither, really explains rain. The point extends to causation in so far as causes are cited to explain (see Schaffer 2005b).

Another example is Goodman’s grue paradox (Goodman 1955). Do our past visual experiences of emeralds give us evidence that emeralds are green even though those experiences are also compatible with the contrary hypothesis that emeralds are grue? This question is puzzling because it asks simply whether past experiences are evidence that emeralds are green. The puzzle dissolves (or is reduced) when we add contrast classes: past experiences give us evidence that emeralds are green as opposed to blue, but those experiences do not give us any evidence that emeralds are green as opposed to grue.

Yet another example is moral dilemmas (Sinnott-Armstrong 1988). If Jim promises to meet Kate for lunch at one restaurant at noon and also makes an equally weighty promise to meet Laura for lunch at a different restaurant at noon on the same day, does Jim have a reason to meet Laura? The question is puzzling because it leaves out contrasts. Jim does not have any reason to meet Laura instead of Kate, but he does have a reason to meet Laura instead of playing golf at the time and meeting neither Laura nor Kate.

A final example involves free will. Imagine that Mark cheats on his taxes without any coercion, compulsion, fraud, reasonable mistake, delusion, mental illness, or any other normal excuse. Then a philosopher points out that his act was determined by his brain states and inputs just prior to acting and/or by states of the world before he was born. Did Mark act freely or of his own free will? Again, the question is too simple. Mark’s acts and will are free as opposed to being caused by coercion, fraud, mental illness, or any normal excuse. His acts and will are not free as opposed to being caused by brain states or prior states of the world.

Each of these examples deserves much more attention. My point is only that each of these puzzles becomes more tractable and understandable when implicit contrasts are made explicit. The contrast is made explicit when key terms (such as “knows”, “evidence”, “ought”, and “free”) are analysed in terms of a relation with a place for contrasts. This method of handling philosophical puzzles does not apply to all philosophical issues, but it does apply to many. Hence, philosophy needs contrastivism not just in epistemology but in general.

Epistemological Contrastivism

Still, I will focus on epistemology. Epistemological contrastivism holds that reasons and grounds for belief, and hence knowledge and justified belief, are relative to contrast classes because a reason to believe a proposition is best understood as a reason to believe that proposition out of a set of conflicting propositions. In particular:

Someone, *S*, is justified out of a contrast class, *C*, in believing a proposition, *P*, when and only when *S* is able to rule out all other members of *C* but is not able to rule out *P*.

To be able to rule out an alternative, a believer needs some adequate ground or evidence against the alternative. Despite possible misleading suggestions of the phrase “rule out”, the ground need not be conclusive and the believer need not consciously think of it as a ground. The ground can be inductive and probabilistic. Still, it is not enough for the believer to have more reason to believe *P* than to believe other members of *C*, since the believer’s grounds still might not be adequate or strong enough.

In a classic example (Dretske 1970), a father sees an animal in a zoo. His visual experience makes him justified in believing that it is a zebra instead of an elephant or snake or ostrich, because this experience is incompatible with, and hence rules out, the hypothesis that it is an elephant or snake or ostrich but does not rule out the hypothesis that it is a zebra. However, that same visual experience does not make the father justified in believing that it is a zebra as opposed to a mule painted to look just like a zebra, because the father would have an indistinguishable visual experience if it were such a painted mule instead of a zebra (on indistinguishability, see Morton and Karjalainen 2008; Schaffer 2004b). If the father walked closer and washed the animal with paint solvent, then this new experience could make the father justified in believing that it is a zebra instead of a painted mule, although even this new experience could not rule out the possibility of a mutant mule or a robot inside a zebra skin or a perfect hallucination of a zebra created by a mad scientist on Alpha Centauri stimulating a brain-in-a-vat. Thus, different experiences make the father justified in believing that it is a zebra out of different contrast classes.

It might seem simpler to limit the contrast class to a proposition and its negation, but that would hide something important: the domain. If the father is justified in believing that the animal is a zebra as opposed to not a zebra, he must be justified in believing that it is a zebra as opposed to anything that is not a zebra. The quantifier “anything” is indeterminate without a domain of discourse. Normally, when we say “anything that is not a zebra”, the intended domain includes only other kinds of

animals in their normal, natural condition. Using that domain, the father is justified in believing that something is a zebra as opposed to not a zebra, since he is justified in believing that it is a zebra as opposed to an elephant, snake, ostrich, and so on. However, if the quantifier “anything” ranges over painted mules, robot replicas, and perfect hallucinations, then the father is not justified in believing that it is a zebra as opposed to not a zebra. In any case, we need to specify the domain of the quantifier. That amounts to specifying the contrast class, so we gain nothing by putting negations in the contrast class.

Some critics suggest that externalists do not need contrast classes, but they do. Consider reliabilists who hold that *S* knows or is justified in believing *P* when *S* believes *P* based on a method or process that is actually reliable (Goldman 1979). The father’s visual experience from a distance reliably distinguishes zebras from elephants, snakes, ostriches, and so on, but does not reliably distinguish zebras from painted mules, robot replicas, or perfect hallucinations. Reliabilists cannot then describe the process simply as “visual experience from a distance”, since, even if that process were deemed reliable, if that made the father justified in believing that animal is a zebra, it would also make the father justified in believing it is not a painted mule, when he cannot discriminate painted mules. To avoid that result, even reliabilists need to admit that knowledge and justified belief are relative to contrast classes.

Another form of externalism claims that *S* knows *P* when and only when *P* is true and (a) *S* believes *P* if *P* is true; and (b) *S* would not believe *P* if *P* were not true (Nozick 1981). On a standard analysis of counterfactuals, the truth of (b) depends on which possible worlds are “nearby”. Contrast classes then specify which worlds are “nearby” by spelling out which alternatives exist in those worlds. If the contrast class includes painted mules, such creatures exist in nearby possible worlds. Then, if the animal was not a zebra, the father still might believe it is a zebra, so the father does not know that it is a zebra, according to the counterfactual analysis. However, if the contrast class does not include painted mules, robot replicas, and so on, then no such creatures exist in nearby possible worlds. In that case, the father would not believe it is a zebra if it were not a zebra, so the father does know that it is a zebra, according to the counterfactual analysis. Thus, counterfactual analyses of knowledge implicitly assume contrast classes. Causal analyses of knowledge do so, too, if causation is relative to contrast classes, as Schaffer (2008) argues. Thus, the most plausible well-known versions of externalism cannot avoid contrast classes.

Once contrast classes are introduced, the options are endless. Believers can be justified or not out of an infinite array of sets of conflicting propositions. Still, it will be useful to keep in mind three rough classes:

The Extreme Contrast Class for P = all propositions contrary to *P*, including sceptical scenarios that are systematically uneliminable.

The Rigorous Contrast Class for P = all propositions contrary to *P* that could be eliminated in some way, even if doing so is not needed in order to meet normal standards.

The Modest Contrast Class for P = all propositions contrary to *P* that could be eliminated and need to be eliminated in order to meet normal standards.

In Dretske's example, the modest contrast class includes elephants but not robot replicas, the rigorous contrast class includes elephants and robot replicas but not perfect hallucinations, and the extreme contrast class includes them all. These three classes enable us to distinguish three claims:

- (1) The father is justified out of the extreme contrast class (or, for short, is extremely justified) in believing that it is a zebra.
- (2) The father is justified out of the rigorous contrast class (or, for short, is rigorously justified) in believing that it is a zebra.
- (3) The father is justified out of the modest contrast class (or, for short, is modestly justified) in believing that it is a zebra.

By the above definition, (1) and (2) are false but (3) is true in Dretske's example, assuming painted mules need not be eliminated to meet normal standards.

Such relativized claims are basic in contrastivism. They are the stuff out of which careful epistemology is made. They are the materials needed to describe the father's epistemic position.

Unqualified Epistemic Claims

Still, relativized claims are not common language. Common speakers leave out contrast classes and make unqualified claims like this:

- (4) The father is justified in believing that it is a zebra.

To understand the relation of (4) to (1)–(3), we need to distinguish sentence-meaning from speaker-meaning.¹ When two mothers tell their children "Don't do anything dangerous while I am gone", this sentence can have the same meaning in both cases, even if the two speakers mean different things by it, because they would count different activities as dangerous. Similarly, if two speakers utter (4), that sentence can have the same meaning on both occasions even if these two speakers mean different things. The sentence-meaning of (4) seems to be this:

- (5) The father is justified out of the relevant contrast class in believing that it is a zebra.²

Different speakers take different contrast classes to be the relevant one—that is, the one whose other members must be ruled out in order for the believer to be justified without qualification. When a certain speaker takes the modest contrast class to be relevant, then an utterance of (4) by that speaker has the following speaker-meaning:

- (6) The father is justified out of the modest contrast class, which is the relevant one, in believing that it is a zebra.

When sceptics deny that the father is justified in believing that the animal is a zebra because they take the extreme contrast class to be the relevant one, they deny this speaker-meaning:

- (7) The father is justified out of the extreme contrast class, which is the relevant one, in believing that it is a zebra.

Similarly for the rigorous contrast class. Speakers need not think in terms of relevance or consciously intend to use a certain contrast class or speaker-meaning. The speaker meaning of a speaker's utterance is determined by the dispositions of that speaker to treat certain alternatives as relevant or irrelevant, if those alternatives were raised.

Although the fact that a speaker treats a certain contrast class as relevant is a descriptive and non-normative fact about that speaker, to call a contrast class relevant is not to make a psychological judgement about how people actually see or use that class. It is, instead, to make a normative judgement that this class captures the alternatives that the believer needs to be able to rule out in order to be justified without qualification. The class is relevant only if a believer cannot be justified without qualification in believing any alternative in that class unless the believer is able to rule out all other alternatives in that class.

This normative notion of relevance is crucial to my account of common language. Suppose Ann asserts (4) and Betty denies (4), just because Ann takes painted mules to be irrelevant but Betty takes painted mules to be relevant. They disagree about whether the father is justified because they disagree about which contrast class is the relevant one. They still agree about relativized judgements like:

- (8) The father is justified in believing that it is a zebra as opposed to a painted mule.

Thus, to capture their disagreement and others like it, the notion of relevance has to be built into the analysis of common language. Betty can say that Ann's assertion of (4) is false, even though (3) is true. To accommodate such claims, analyses of (4) must include a normative component that is lacking from (1)–(3), as well as (8), and can be captured only by adding the notion of relevance to the analysis.

In contrast, consider Schaffer's example (2008) in which Carol says she regrets that Bush is President (rather than Kerry) and Dana responds that she does not regret that Bush is president (rather than Cheney). Once Carol and Dana realize they are using different contrast classes, they should realize that they do not disagree at all. Nonetheless, when Carol asserts (4) and Dana denies (4), even if they know that they are using different contrast classes, they continue to disagree. They disagree about which alternatives need to be ruled out in order for (4) to be true. Since they are aware of contrast classes, they are not just making a performance error in overlooking the third place in the relation for justified belief. Hence, some normative notion like relevance has to be built into the analysis of (4) in order to capture their continuing disagreement.

Relevance is, however, presupposed rather than entailed. Suppose the father walks up to the zebra and washes it with paint solvent. (He also does genetic tests that rule out mutants and robots.) Now he can rule out the possibility of a painted mule, so Betty asserts (4), which means (5). If Betty's assertion of (5) entailed that painted mules are relevant alternatives, then Ann would have to say that Betty's claim is false, because Ann still thinks that painted mules are irrelevant. However, Ann would not want to

deny Betty's claim, since Ann knows that the father can now rule out painted mules along with everything in the contrast class that Ann takes to be relevant. Hence, (5)–(7) should be interpreted so that they presuppose but do not assert or entail that a contrast class is the relevant one.

Meta-scepticism about Relevance

This abstract framework is compatible with various views about which, if any, contrast class is relevant. It can accommodate extreme invariantists who claim that the extreme contrast class is always the relevant one, modest invariantists who reply that the modest contrast class is always the relevant one, and contextualists who hold that the relevant contrast class varies so that the modest contrast class is relevant in some contexts but the extreme contrast class is relevant in other contexts.³

However, I see no adequate reason to adopt one of these views as opposed to the others. Moreover, each of these positions faces profound problems. These problems are not devastating enough to prove these positions false, but they should make anyone reluctant to commit to any claim about which contrast classes are really relevant or not.

The problems for invariantism are straightforward. Since extreme invariantism implies that all contrary propositions are always relevant, it conflicts with the common practice of dismissing some outlandish sceptical alternatives as irrelevant. On the other hand, modest invariantism conflicts with the common practice of recognizing that some alternatives, which we had not previously recognized as relevant, are relevant after all. There is no reason to assume that our current standards already include everything that is really relevant, so they cannot be improved. Thus, neither variation on invariantism is compatible with our common epistemic practices.

Contextualism promises to explain both aspects of our common practices that cast doubt on invariantism. Unfortunately, contextualism runs into troubles of its own when we delve into details.

One problem involves indeterminacy. Imagine a customer who asks her waiter's name. After hearing the answer, she believes that her waiter is named "Jeff". She and we could not, of course, list all of the names that she needs to be able to rule out in order to be justified without qualification in believing that the waiter's name is "Jeff". This limitation puts contextualists in the odd position of claiming that there is one, and only one, contrast class that is really relevant in this context, but neither they nor the believer can specify the members of that contrast class. Contextualists might respond that they can specify the contrast class simply as "other names". However, it is not clear whether female names are included as relevant when the waiter and his name are clearly male. Is the relevant contrast class all names or all male names? These classes differ a lot, but there is no secure basis for saying that one of them is the relevant contrast class.

Moreover, even if we stick to male names, different people would give different lists. One reason is that some people know some names that others do not know. Another reason is that some names are neither clearly inside nor clearly outside the supposedly relevant contrast class. Consider "Geoff", which is spelled differently but pronounced the same as the waiter's name. These names are different, since the customer might ask

the waiter whether his name is “Jeff” or “Geoff”. However, the customer only heard the waiter’s name spoken, so she cannot rule out that his name is “Geoff”. Hence, the customer has no justified belief about the waiter’s name, if “Geoff” is a relevant alternative. Is it relevant? You can call it relevant if you want to conclude that the customer’s belief is not justified. But you could just as easily call it irrelevant if you want to conclude that the customer’s belief is justified. I see no solid basis for deciding between these positions, because there is no way to determine whether this alternative is or is not really relevant.

Contextualists sometimes respond that relevance depends on the purpose of the epistemic judge. However, judges can have multiple purposes or no particular purpose. Moreover, even if each judge has one and only one purpose, there can be a multitude of judges with different purposes. Contextualists might call an alternative relevant when it is relevant to *any* purpose, but this move implies that the widest contrast class is the relevant one, and believers are never justified. To avoid that unwelcome result, contextualists might call an alternative relevant only when it is relevant to *all* purposes, but this implies that a very narrow contrast class is the relevant one, and believers are justified even when they cannot rule out alternatives that are relevant to the purpose that they share with the speaker. In the end, it is hard to see how any reference to purpose can solve the problem of indeterminacy.

Another problem arises when epistemic judgements cross contexts. Suppose a doctor visits a philosophy class on the problem of other minds and tells a story about a patient who experienced great pain. The philosophy teacher then asks a student in the class whether the doctor is justified in believing that the patient was in pain. Three people (the philosopher, the student, and the doctor) play different roles: the philosopher assesses the student’s judgement about whether the doctor’s belief is justified. Now, if a larger extreme contrast class is relevant in the philosopher’s context, but a smaller modest contrast class is relevant in the doctor’s context, then contextualists have no non-arbitrary way of telling which context or contrast class determines how the philosophy student should assess the doctor’s belief. The simplest and most natural way to handle such cross-context judgements is to say that the doctor is justified out of one contrast class but not another, and then refuse to pick one contrast class as the relevant one or to say whether the doctor is justified (without qualification).

Contextualists might be able to respond with a theory of sub-contexts or in some other way, so my arguments are not conclusive. Still, I do not see how such responses could handle all of the cases without becoming convoluted, arbitrary, and implausible. Thus, my arguments provide plenty of incentives to avoid contextualism, if possible.

For such reasons and more (see Sinnott-Armstrong 2006), I give up the notion of real relevance and suspend belief about whether or not any contrast class is really relevant or the relevant one. This might seem to undermine my analysis of (4) as meaning (5). However, even if we give up on real relevance, we can still accept that (4) is equivalent to (5), and that to say (4) is to say (5). Just as historians can analyse “witch” as implying “woman with supernatural powers” without committing themselves to supernatural powers, so epistemologists who analyse (4) as (5) are not thereby committed to any contrast class really being relevant. They would become committed

to real relevance if they went on to assert any of (4)–(7). However, those who doubt that any contrast class is ever really relevant can accept (5) as the meaning of (4) as long as they never go on to claim anything with the form of (4)–(7).

Pyrrhonian Scepticism

This meta-scepticism about relevance illuminates the difference between two kinds of scepticism about justified belief. Dogmatic (or Academic or Cartesian) sceptics about justified belief claim this:

(9) Nobody is justified in believing anything.

The sentence-meaning of (9) is this:

(10) Nobody is justified out of the relevant contrast class in believing anything.

Dogmatic sceptics who assert (9) cite sceptical scenarios and treat those scenarios as relevant, so they must use the extreme contrast class. Thus, the speaker-meaning of their assertions of (9) is this:

(11) Nobody is justified out of the extreme contrast class, which is the relevant contrast class, in believing anything.

Dogmatic sceptics also apply these general claims to specific cases. When they think about Dretske's example, they think this:

(12) The father is not justified in believing that it is a zebra.

(13) The father is not justified out of the relevant contrast class in believing that it is a zebra.

(14) The father is not justified out of the extreme contrast class, which is the relevant one, in believing that it is a zebra.

These negated judgements by Dogmatic sceptics all presuppose that the extreme contrast class is the relevant one.

In contrast, Pyrrhonian sceptics suspend belief about claims like (12)–(14). Why? Because they are meta-sceptics about relevance. Meta-sceptics about relevance want to avoid committing themselves to the claim that the extreme contrast class is the relevant contrast class for any belief.

Pyrrhonian sceptics need not even assert the wide-scope negation versions:

(12w) It is not the case that the father is justified in believing that it is a zebra.

(13w) It is not the case that the father is justified out of the relevant contrast class in believing that it is a zebra.

(14w) It is not the case that the father is justified out of the extreme contrast class, which is the relevant one, in believing that it is a zebra.

For example, (12w) means that (4) is either (a) false or (b) neither true nor false. Meta-sceptics about relevance want to avoid committing themselves to either (a) or (b). They do not claim that (4) is false, because they do not *assert* its presupposition that some

contrast class is the relevant one. Nor do they claim that (4) is neither true nor false, because they do not *deny* its presupposition that some contrast class is the relevant one. Hence, they do not assert or imply (12w). Similarly for (13w) and (14w).

The same goes for (9)–(11), because presuppositions carry over to generalizations. If “Sammy could not hit Rocket’s fast ball, which was his best pitch”, presupposes “Rocket’s fast ball was his best pitch”, then “Nobody could hit Rocket’s fast ball, which was his best pitch” shares the same presupposition. Similarly, since “S is not justified out of contrast class C, which is the relevant one, in believing P” presupposes “Contrast class C is the relevant one”, then “Nobody is justified out of contrast class C, which is the relevant one, in believing P” shares the same presupposition. Hence, (9)–(11) all presuppose that some contrast class is the relevant one. Meta-sceptics about relevance suspend belief about that presupposed claim, so they also suspend belief about (9)–(11).

Of course, meta-sceptics about relevance do not assert the affirmative claims that correspond to (9)–(14). They do not claim that anyone *is* justified in believing anything (without qualification or out of the relevant contrast class or out of the extreme contrast class, presupposing that this is the relevant one). Meta-sceptics about relevance avoid the whole language game of relevance, so they neither assert nor deny any claims that presuppose relevance. Thus, they suspend belief about Dogmatic scepticism. That makes them Pyrrhonian sceptics.

Moderate Scepticism

Although Pyrrhonian scepticism is distinguished from Dogmatic scepticism by what it does not claim, it is also important to realize that Pyrrhonians who are meta-sceptics about relevance can still go on to make other epistemic claims, as long as they take away that questionable presupposition. It seems plausible (and natural, for Pyrrhonians) to deny:

(15) Nobody is justified out of the modest contrast class in believing that it is a zebra. and yet assert:

(16) Nobody is justified out of the extreme contrast class in believing that it is a zebra.

Claim (15) can be called *scepticism about modestly justified belief*; (16) can be called *scepticism about extremely justified belief*. The position that denies (15) but claims (16) can be called *moderate scepticism about justified belief*. Such moderate scepticism is about relativized epistemic judgements, whereas Pyrrhonian scepticism is about non-relativized epistemic judgements. Thus, although Pyrrhonian sceptics neither assert nor deny Dogmatic scepticism (i.e. (9)–(14)), they can still assert moderate scepticism about justified belief (which is (16) plus the denial of (15)). I will call this combination *moderate Pyrrhonian scepticism*.

Moderate scepticism allows Pyrrhonians to be more urbane by preserving a central part of common-sense epistemic claims. My brand of Pyrrhonism suspends beliefs about common-sense epistemic claims like (4), which presuppose relevance and do not

mention contrast classes. Nonetheless, a moderate Pyrrhonian sceptic can accept some close cousins of (4), including (3), which do not presuppose relevance and do mention a contrast class. In most contexts, the speaker-meaning of (4) is just (3) plus the dependent clause “which is the relevant one”, so it is easy to understand why speakers would be inclined to say (4) when (3) is true. Moderate Pyrrhonians thereby explain why claims like (4) seem plausible; namely, because they are close to true claims like (3). The relevance clause is needed to capture disagreements and the critical edge in common epistemic assessments. That clause creates doubts, so not all of common-sense can be preserved. Still, the doubtful part can be separated off to reveal the truth within common language. Thus, although moderate Pyrrhonism finds a fundamental problem in common epistemic assessments, it is still able to explain how that dubious element could go unnoticed and remain widespread.

Kinds of Evidence

To support this compromise, Pyrrhonian sceptics still need to argue that nobody can rule out sceptical scenarios (which makes (16) true) and that some believers can rule out every alternative in the modest contrast class (which makes (15) false). Some anti-sceptics respond that sceptical scenarios *can* be ruled out by a certain kind of evidence. In the version of Williamson (2000), my evidence includes everything I know. If so, and if I know that I have hands, then I have evidence against the sceptical hypothesis that I am a brain-in-a-vat, since brains do not have hands. However, to assume that I have such knowledge, and hence evidence, begs the question against a sceptic who is raising the question of whether I have any knowledge or evidence. It might also beg the question to assume that I have *no* knowledge or evidence incompatible with sceptical scenarios, and Dogmatic sceptics might make that assumption; but Pyrrhonian sceptics need not make either assumption, since they suspend belief about Dogmatic scepticism.

If this response seems too quick, Pyrrhonian contrastivists may make a more conciliatory move. They can add a fourth place to the relation in their analysis for kinds of evidence or grounds (compare Neta 2004), so:

S is justified out of contrast class *C* in believing *P* on evidence of kind *K* if and only if *S* has evidence of kind *K* that rules out all members of *C* except *P*.

Call evidence *internal* when it is restricted to non-factive internal states, such as that I seem to see *X* and I seem to remember *X*. Call evidence *external* when it includes factive states (or known propositions) about the external world, such as that I have hands. If *S* can rule out sceptical hypotheses with external evidence but not with internal evidence alone, then *S can* be justified in believing common-sense views as opposed to sceptical hypotheses on the basis of external evidence, even though *S cannot* be justified in believing common-sense views as opposed to sceptical hypotheses on the basis of internal evidence alone. Impatient critics will ask which kind of evidence is relevant—that is, which kind is sufficient to make a believer justified without qualification? Pyrrhonians can refuse to answer. Just as Pyrrhonians suspended belief about which contrast classes are relevant, so they can also suspend belief about which kinds of

evidence are relevant. They can again avoid all claims about relevance and about who is justified without qualification and, instead, say only that nobody is justified out of the extreme contrast class on the basis of internal evidence, even if some believers are justified out of the extreme contrast class on the basis of external evidence.

Comparisons with Schaffer

Here contrastivists divide. Schaffer and I agree that the only knowledge relation worth arguing about has at least three places. However, I am open to the idea of adding a fourth place for kinds of evidence, whereas Schaffer (in conversation) rejects this fourth place on linguistic grounds (although he allows an additional place for times, as would I).

Although we are still both contrastivists, this difference reflects a deeper divide regarding the purpose of contrastivism. Schaffer's concerns and methods are linguistic. His main goal is to account for the semantics of common epistemic claims. I care less about common language. Instead, my concerns are epistemological. My main goal is to provide a way to describe a person's epistemic position as precisely as possible. If a four-place relation provides a more accurate description than a three-place predicate, I include the fourth place even if common language leaves it out. And if much of common language depends on a dubious presupposition (about relevance), then I think we need to admit that problem rather than covering it up. Our aim should not be to defend common language but only to locate where we stand epistemically and to understand how our position changes over time through inquiry.

In his focus on language, Schaffer is closer to contextualism than I am. Schaffer also accepts the contextualist claim that unqualified epistemic judgements have "context-dependent truth conditions" that "shift" as context shifts (Schaffer 2004a). I deny this. In my view, neither the truth-conditions nor the truth-values of either qualified or unqualified judgements shift with context. In everyday contexts, I am justified in believing many common-sense claims out of the modest contrast class but not out of the extreme contrast class (at least not on the basis of internal evidence). In philosophical contexts, exactly the same epistemic judgements are true. Properly relativized epistemic truths and truth-conditions do not shift at all when I move from one context to another.

Schaffer and I also have different attitudes to scepticism, partly because we have different sceptics in mind. Schaffer has in mind Dogmatic scepticism when he claims that scepticism is "compatible" with everyday knowledge claims (Schaffer 2004a, cf. 2004b). However, I think that everyday people and Dogmatic sceptics still disagree about which contrast class is relevant. Schaffer then takes sides when he adds, "the sceptic is accused of illicitly shifting the contrast variable" (Schaffer 2004a, 90; cf. 2004b). I am not convinced that Dogmatic sceptics must illicitly shift anything. More importantly, I do not see how Pyrrhonian sceptics could be accused of "illicitly shifting the contrast variable" when they take no position on which contrast is relevant. Finally, Schaffer claims, "sceptical arguments feel so nightmarish because the covert contrast variable in 'knows' is so easily missed" (Schaffer 2004a, 93). Although this might be

part of the story, I think there is more to it: Pyrrhonian scepticism and meta-scepticism about relevance are nightmarish (or at least disconcerting) because they uncover a pervasive but dubious presupposition in everyday epistemic judgements.

Contrastivism is, thus, not yet completely unified as a movement. Still, our differences strike me as matters of detail or emphasis when compared with the differences between contrastivism and other more traditional epistemologies, including contextualism. That is why my manifesto calls for unified action: contrastivists of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but dubious unqualified epistemic judgements.

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Notes

- [1] This distinction takes the place of character versus content in Sinnott-Armstrong (2004).
- [2] Of course, (4) and (5) would not be translated in the same way into French, so there is a kind of meaning that (4) and (5) do not share. My notion of sentence-meaning is weaker, so an elliptical sentence has the same sentence-meaning when the ellipsis is filled out. In this sense, “12 is even” has the same sentence meaning as “12 is an even number”, and “New York is south” means “New York is south of the relevant point”.
- [3] Some contextualists claim that “knows” and “justified” refer to different two-place relations in different contexts, but those versions are already refuted by arguments of Schaffer and of Morton and Karjalainen, so I will focus on a version of contextualism that admits the need for contrast classes but claims that the context determines which contrast class is relevant. Contextualists often say instead that context affects the content of “knows”, but this means that context affects the truth-conditions of “knows without qualification”, so it is equivalent to the claim that context affects which contrast class is relevant in my specified sense.

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