RELATIVISM IN CONTEXT

[RELATIVISMO EM CONTEXTO]

Rodrigo Laera *
Universidad de Barcelona, Espanha

ABSTRACT: The present paper introduces four fundamental issues within the framework of epistemic relativism: (a) the lack of precision in the concept of *knowing*; (b) the changes in the demands between context of use and of evaluation; (c) the violation of the real disagreement intuition; and (d) the incommensurability of epistemic frameworks. The answer to these problems should revolve around the idea that knowledge is subject to the interests and intentions of individuals in everyday life. The main thesis thus consists in that it is necessary to avoid the impression that epistemic frameworks are some sort of watertight compartment. In this way, relativism may be defended from the viewpoint that epistemic frameworks are artificial generalizations that may be relevant to the attribution of knowledge. In this respect, it must be borne in mind that some norms are shared by different epistemic frameworks, and that each time a given context or circumstance takes place, the same norm may be applied.
KEYWORDS: Relativism; Contextualism; Epistemic Frameworks; Factive Reason

RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta quatro questões fundamentais a partir do relativismo epistêmico: (a) a vaguidão do conceito de *conhecimento*; (b) as mudanças nas demandas entre o contexto de uso e o contexto de avaliação; (c) a violação da intuição em desacordo com a realidade; e (d) a incomensurabilidade dos limites epistêmicos. A resposta a estes problemas deveria ser buscada em torno da ideia de que o conhecimento está sujeito a interesses e intenções de indivíduos na vida cotidiana. A tese principal, desse modo, consiste em afiramr que é necessário evitar a impressão de que as estruturas epistêmicas sejam algum tipo de compartimento à prova dá'água. Assim, o relativismo pode ser defendido a partir de um ponto de vista em que as estruturas epistêmicas são tomadas como generalizações artificiais que podem ser relevantes para a atribuição do conhecimento. A este respeito, deve-se ter claro que algumas regras são compartilhadas por diferentes estruturas epistêmicas, e que cada vez que um dado contexto ou circunstância toma lugar, a mesma regra pode ser aplicada.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: contextualismo; estruturas epistêmicas; razão factual

1. INTRODUCTION: EPISTEMIC RELATIVISM AND CONTEXTUALISM

Epistemic relativism concerning knowledge holds that any person may know a proposition when it is related to the evaluative standards that prevail in a group of individuals and not know it when it is related to different evaluative standards that prevail in another group. This position, also known as pluralism[1] (e.g., Luper, 2004) or non-transcendency (e.g., Seidel, 2014), is close to the relationist position (e.g.,

* *Doctor en filosofía por la Universidad de Barcelona. Professor en la misma universidad.*
m@ilto: rodrigolaera@gmail.com

Boghossian, 2006). Relationism claims that in order for a person's epistemic judgments (S knows that p) to be possibly true, such a judgment must be expressed in accordance with accepted standards that justify the information that S knows that p. Regarding justifications, relativism will tell us that the standards that justify our beliefs are formed in the epistemic community in which these beliefs occur. In epistemic relativism concerning knowledge just as in the epistemic relativism concerning justifications, these standards, combined into a whole, are called "epistemic frameworks".

From common sense, relativism seems acceptable when it is applied to, for example, the issue of taste, even if people share the same epistemic framework. Two people who belong to the same or different cultures may disagree about the taste of food or fashion without this necessarily leading to them questioning their choices because they are epistemically unacceptable. Disagreements about matters of taste cannot be objectively resolved; one man's meat is another man's poison. This relativism would not appear as acceptable in the case of attributions of knowledge - which consist of statements of the form "S knows that p" – since people intend that what they say to know is not only valid for their particular epistemic framework, but rather for all such frameworks. As such, perhaps we shouldn't simply speak about knowledge but rather about the pretension of knowledge (e.g., Geertz, 2000). The epistemic challenge is not to resolve whether there are cases in which relativism applies but, instead, whether there are cases in which it does not.

Taking into account that different epistemic frameworks entail different regulatory standards of the attribution of knowledge, there can be no fixed semantic assessment of propositions involving the concept of *knowledge*. For example, the religious framework assigns a central epistemic role to Holy Scriptures as the word of God, to justify *prima facie* a variety of beliefs. Consequently, each statement is reliable only in relation to the norms of its framework, so that the judgment "S knows that p" is true or false depending on the framework. Furthermore, epistemic frameworks are not static but change over time within the same culture. For example, the epistemic framework of physics has changed since the days of Aristotle to Galileo's time, so that one can speak of Aristotelian or Copernican Physics. Relativism does not only mean that the standards of attribution of knowledge vary, but also that no epistemic framework is superior to another, contrary to classical foundationalism which claimed the existence of basic beliefs that ensure the validity of the epistemic building. Since there is no independent assessment to arbitrate between frameworks, there cannot be competition between beliefs belonging to different frameworks.

In summary, epistemic relativism can be explained beginning with four statements[2]:

> *Dependency*: The evaluation of a belief or attribution of knowledge depends upon the epistemic framework of the subject of said attribution.

> *Variability*: Epistemic frameworks can vary from culture to culture and, over time, within the same culture.

> *Coexistence*: In the case of conflicting epistemic frameworks that coexist in the same culture, the beliefs or attributions of knowledge belonging to each framework are equally reliable for their respective subjects of attribution.

> *Non-hierarchy*: No epistemic framework is superior to another.

Close to relativism is contextualism, given that both share the idea that truth-

values in relation to the proposition "*S* knows that *p*" are sensitive to contextual epistemic standards: the truth-values of the attributions of knowledge vary with the attributor´s context because the standards for "knows" vary with the attributor´s context. Their opposite is invariantism, which asserts that the attribution's value of truth does not vary (neither in different assessment contexts nor in different contexts of use)[3].

Both relativism and contextualism hold that the attribution of knowledge must satisfy specific regulatory standards, but how high these standards are or how they change with the circumstances is a matter of debate. For the contextualist, the standards can be a very demanding or extremely lenient set of semantic rules. For example, the attribution of knowledge in the case of Descartes during his Meditations, sitting by the fire, has extremely high standards, based on clarity and distinctness. However, when he deals with everyday activities, the standards are considerably lower[4].

On one hand, contextualists agree with relativists in that there are subjective interests in practical life influencing what is meant by *knowledge*[5]. Therefore, the truth value of statements involving the concept of knowledge changes according to the features of the context of the utterance. Moreover, the truth value of the sentence that involves the concept of knowledge may vary depending on the speaker's purposes, expectations, assumptions, etc. (e.g., Cohen, 1999). This is evident when one considers the context of justification as functional to doxastic attitudes, since in many cases the attribution of knowledge derives from an explanation about why we know what we know, and the weight of such explanations hinges on the circumstances.

According to Greco (2003; 2004), attributions of knowledge establish causal relationships whose explanations, when they are developed, always entail some kind of bias. For example, the explanation of why John was unfaithful to Anna, from John's point of view, is that she was not paying sufficient attention to him; but from Anna's point of view, the explanation is that he is a disloyal traitor. Similarly, there might be different reasons why *S* knows that *p*. Many disagreements thus arise because of lack of precision. The general idea is that such bias, if properly oriented towards truth, is a key intellectual ability of the subject of knowledge.

On the other hand, MacFarlane (2005) claimed that there is a significant difference between contextualism and relativism. From a contextualist perspective, truth conditions are sensitive to the state of affairs at the time of utterance; more precisely, the belief assessment depends on the epistemic standards relevant to the context of utterance or context of use. In contrast, from a relativist perspective, truth conditions are sensitive either to the epistemic framework at the moment that the utterance is assessed or to the *assessment context*: this content is true if *S* knows that *p* relative to the circumstance provided *by* the context of assessment.

One could preserve the advantages of relativism in terms of the attributions of knowledge, considering it a synthesis of the best features of contextualism and invariantism. From contextualism one may take the idea that assessment is relative to the epistemic standards of a given context, while from invariantism one may take the idea that the concept of knowledge expresses the same subject-object relationship in every context of use. In this way, given that the role of contextualism in attribution of knowledge is different than that of invariantism, the two approaches alone are not only non-exclusive, but they complement each other. In other words, according to MacFarlane (2010, 2014), utterance-truth is relative both to the use's context and the assessment's context, the latter providing the values for the relevant parameters of the circumstances of evaluation of the utterances. Given the connection between truth and accuracy, and the fact that truth is relative, accuracy will also be relative in

MacFarlane's framework; an assertion is accurate (as assessed from a context of assessment) if its content (as determined by the context of use) is relative to the truth of the context of assessment from which it is assessed. Relativism may be seen as a mixture of contextualism and invariantism[6].

For the relativist, as well as the contextualist, conceptions of the attributions of knowledge require an epistemic framework as a context of assessment—i.e. a context in which to apply evaluative standards. For example, according to our epistemic framework, Galileo knows that the Earth orbits around the sun and Ptolemy did not know that the Earth orbits around the sun. However, according to Cardinal Bellamine's framework, Ptolemy knows that the Earth does not orbit around the sun, and Galileo did not know that the Earth does not orbit around the sun. Therefore, if we were to disregard epistemic frameworks, with their corresponding assessment contexts, then a contradiction would arise by which Galileo knows that the Earth orbits around the sun and he does not know that the Earth does not orbit around the sun. This version of relativism that resorts to epistemic frameworks must nevertheless deal with at least four issues that also often are treated separately: (a) imprecision in the concept of knowledge; (b) changes in knowledge standards from high-stake subject contexts to a low-stake attributor context, or vice versa; (c) violation of the intuition of real disagreements; and (d) incommensurability of epistemic frameworks. The first two issues are related to invariantism in the context of use; while issues (c) and (d) are related to the epistemic framework of the context of assessment.

The thesis of the present paper is that, while relativism is defensible from the point of view that epistemic frameworks may be relevant to attributions of knowledge, it does not follow that no rules may be shared by different frameworks or that, should the same set of circumstances reoccur, the same rules cannot be applied. For example, the attributions of knowledge within everyday contexts may vary according to the epistemic framework, but empirical evidence will always be reliable when it comes to assessing beliefs about our ways of dealing with the world. Thus, epistemic frameworks are generalizations based on rules that are fixed for certain contexts, because they very often have proved to be more reliable than other competing standards in relation to practical reason.

2. ISSUES WITH EPISTEMIC RELATIVISM

(a) *Imprecisions in the concept of knowledge*

Should the idea of epistemic frameworks prevail, one may ask whether Galileo and Cardinal Bellarmine had in mind the same concept of knowledge, or, put more generally, if the object of knowledge entails changes in what is meant by *knowledge*. Such controversial issues arise because the concept of knowledge exceeds the reliability of the sources, which in this case are perception and testimony. There are propositions that are not perceived, which nevertheless play an important role in understanding observational propositions and the same applies to testimony. The concept of knowledge in a particular context may be based on perception, which has some degree of reliability within its epistemic framework, as well as on testimony, which also has its degree of reliability (recall the different exegeses of the Bible in the Middle Ages)[7]. The issue is whether the role of perception within an epistemic framework is the same as that which testimony holds in another framework. In the demanding context of the

religious epistemic framework, the Bible is more reliable than perception, but even for Cardinal Bellarmine perception is more reliable in most everyday contexts. What changes from one epistemic framework to another is the reliability of the source relative to the reliability of the competing source.

If assessment criteria are defined in terms of reliability, it is because somehow one assumes the concept of knowledge is shared; but then, how is it possible to make sure that the concept of knowledge is shared when the attributions of knowledge belong to different epistemic frameworks? One could tend to consider that both Galileo and Cardinal Bellarmine argued on the same standards. However, ways of making reference to things are never completely accurate, although one may not be always aware of this. The relativist would surely reply that not only does one's conception of knowledge differ from what it had been in past centuries, but that the same conception could even establish levels of reliability concerning the attribution of knowledge. For example, from a Cartesian standpoint it is possible to think that "*S* knows that *p*" implies that there is no doubt about *p*; but it is also possible, from a non-Cartesian standpoint, to think that "*S* knows that *p*" does not exclude the possibility of non-*p*. Between these two conceptions there are several intermediate positions in which it is also possible to attribute knowledge. In other words, the extent to which what one knows is reliable, or how sure our conviction is that *p* is known, is somewhat imprecise: a mother knows her child has a fever by touching his forehead, but nevertheless she takes his temperature using a thermometer to verify what she already knows. One interpretation is that the relationship between subject and object of knowledge is the same. Another interpretation, although, is that the relationship between subject and object of knowledge changes to become safer or more reliable. Of course, this is a theoretical choice that seems arbitrary, since, as Stanley (2005) pointed out, subjects tend to project their current standards and interests onto those to whom they attribute knowledge[8].

(b) *Changes in knowledge standard from high-stake subject contexts to a low-stake attributor context, or vice versa*

The standard requirement for the attribution of knowledge may change as a function of the context. When there is little at stake for whoever attributes the knowledge, it can be reported that *S* knows that *p* even if there is a high-stake context for *S*; that is if both contexts are different. It is the same way when there is a high-stake for the reporter, but a low-stake for the subject of the report. In such scenarios, an invariantist position in the context of use does not seem adequate, because the reporter always can be wrong when he attempts to attribute knowledge to *S* if he does not know the proper use of the concept of "knowledge". However, a contextualist position does not seem very suitable either, since the reporter could not know the context of *S* while *S* does not know the context of the reporter. This is a problem when we want to understand attributions that imply inter-contextuality[9].

Consider one of the *bank cases* (inspired by DeRose, 1992; Stanley, 2005[10]): Mary and John are going back home in their car on a Friday afternoon. It is crucial that they deposit their pay checks before Monday or else their mortgage bill will be rejected (high-stakes). However, when they reach the bank there are very long lines and they wonder whether the bank is open on Saturdays, since most banks usually are not. Although Mary is quite certain, she feels she needs to obtain further confirmation by going into the bank and asking, given that it is imperative that they can deposit the check in due time. Instead, John is indolent about the question and he does not think

that he needs to obtain further confirmation (low–stake). He says that he knows that the bank is open. Mary and John are, presumably, in disagreement. Maybe Mary could reproach John for his lack of interest in this important matter and John could answer referring to the obsessive character of Mary. In any case, Mary will claim that John believes he knows what he does not know and John will claim that Mary believes she does not know what she does know.

Those who are unaware of the above situation could claim that John and Mary know and do not know that the bank is open on Saturday. When the situation is omitted, the reporter cannot assess rightly the attributions of knowledge. This also suggests that there is a kind of semantic blindness: users of the word "know" are blind to the working of the semantic language[11]. Thus, the contextualism fails to accommodate our inter-contextual assessments when the context of assessment differs from the context of utterance.

Suppose now that Anne is a good friend of both, but she is not aware of the importance of the bank being open. If she evaluates on her low-stake, she would agree with John but for different reasons –even if she is as obsessive as Mary. But if she were a neutral observer, she could point out that John knows that he knows that the bank is open, and Mary knows that John does not know that the bank is open. Therefore, from Anne's neutral point of view, it follows that John knows and John does not know that the bank is open, which is a contradiction.

Apart from the artificial case, for someone who "knows that p" and who also knows that "S knows that p" there are several differences about what is at stake for Mary and Anne. First, semantic contextualism holds that "S knows that p" and "S does not know that p" may be true, at the same time, with respect to different contexts of utterance. And, secondly, there must be stable standards within the knowledge in order to identify the improvements of its attributions and the chance of disagreement. However, there is not an accurate or neutral context from which to assess whether John or Mary is right.

Not only is John's context different from Mary's context of utterance, it is also different from Anne's. However, the standards remain stable. Anne could say, according to John's low standards that Mary knew that the bank is open even before she had checked it. Of course, Anne could change her standards if she gets more information about the situation. Due to the lack of information about Mary's banking situation (relevant evidence), Anne assesses that presuming John's context is usual and not extraordinary –although both Mary and Anne think it is key to try to reach a maximum level of safety with matters of great importance, leaving as little as possible to chance.

Similarly, if you go out with your car for a short drive to town, you do not need to check the engine. However, if you take a trip down a deserted road, you want to be sure that nothing goes wrong, because if it failed the problem would be very serious. Mary and Anne find themselves in the same epistemic framework; one of them simply considers more relevant alternatives than the other, showing that people's interests can define what one knows.

Although epistemic frameworks can be shared, the attributions of knowledge can vary from subject to subject, in the context of utterance and in the context of assessment.

For example, the *interests that influenced* Galileo were different from those which influenced the Cardinal Bellarmine. This resulted in their evaluations, as well as their attributions of knowledge, being different. Analogously, the *interests that defend the position* of Galileo will be different than those which defend the cardinal's. Thus,

the attributions of knowledge concerning Galileo's position and those regarding Bellarmine's will also be different. This means that the epistemic frameworks entail more than the distribution of general principles and corresponding reliability.

Still the invariantist of the context of use may insist that although Anne thought she knew that John knew that the bank was open, she really did not know. However, these types of plot twists are too complex and lead to the assumption that there is much that we do not actually know, but rather just think we know.

While one can accept that knowledge is fallible, the faults can occur on a large scale or small scale. For example, failures on a large scale are presented by skepticism, while *Gettier style* cases present those on a small scale. Thus, this plot twist flirts with skepticism by presenting a large-scale failure. When circumstances change, so do the standards of knowledge. Returning to the previous case, Mary might not know that the bank is open until five minutes have passed since she realized she had to deposit the check. Therefore, what she knew five minutes ago she may not know now and nothing prevents her from knowing something again in another five minutes. If the attributions of knowledge can be fixed by a type of interest, then what prevents these interests from changing all the time?

(c) *Violation of the intuition of real disagreements*

One of the keys of relativism is that there is no hierarchy among epistemic frameworks. In the absence of a hierarchy, the rules of two antagonistic epistemic frameworks can have the same weight within their own frames. Two men can affirm, via similarly reliable process and with equal right, propositions that depend on their respective frameworks. In this sense, the reliability of an epistemic framework does not influence the reliability of another antagonistic framework. For example, within the context of epistemic theology, beliefs whose sources lie in the Holy Scriptures are as reliable as beliefs within the secular epistemic framework whose sources lie in observation. If both sets of beliefs are based on different frameworks, then there will not be genuine disagreement. From this viewpoint, the dispute between Galileo and Cardinal Bellarmine would not be a genuine one. However, this conclusion is completely counterintuitive. Much of our daily discussions involving countless topics might just be an illusion.

It is supposed that, for a true controversy to pass for an illusion, the epistemic frameworks must be completely different, when in many cases the difference can be found in the hierarchy among epistemic values or the ignorance of some epistemic standard. In the debate, Galileo does not agree with Bellarmine as to the rightful place of the Holy Scriptures and of observation in the epistemic hierarchy. Indeed, one might even say that, for Galileo, observation occupies the place of the Holy Scriptures, while the reverse happens to Bellarmine. The dispute between the skeptic and the Moorean philosophers may be read in a similar vein. Simply put, the skeptic philosopher ignores the reliability of perception, a reliability of which the Moorean philosopher is well aware; in contrast, the Moorean philosopher ignores the possibilities considered reliable by the skeptical philosopher. Nevertheless, ignoring something does not mean not being aware of it. If one ignores what *S* says, it does not mean that one is not aware of what was said. On the contrary, one must be aware of what was said to ignore it. Therefore, if the skeptic philosopher ignores the reliability of perception it is because, even though he takes into account that perception is necessary for dealing with the world, for him it is not enough to give ontological reality to that world. And that is the reason for the dispute. The same goes for contextualism with regards to skepticism: one can ignore the

alternatives that the skeptic philosopher puts forward, but only by being aware of them.

The question here is whether being aware of skeptical possibilities requires a special context, because if one does not ignore skeptical possibilities in everyday contexts—since in such context one is unaware of them—then contextualism will not be effective to account for skeptical cases. Contextualism depends, then, on what is regarded as ordinary or extraordinary circumstances; that is, on what is deemed normal. At this point, however, the relativist strategy is put into use, because what was normal at some time or for some culture may not be so in another. In order to avoid this strategy, discussions about different epistemic frameworks need to be resolved on the basis of common themes, and for this it is imperative that these frameworks are interrelated.

(d) *Incommensurability of epistemic frameworks*

The issues around real disagreements are closely related to the problems that relativism must face regarding assessment contexts. If the evidence provided by one framework is not useful in resolving issues about another framework, then each framework becomes an *epistemic island.* Epistemic frameworks are incommensurable when they produce conflicting beliefs, each of which is adequately justified, without offering the rational basis upon which the proponents of one framework may persuade proponents of the opposing framework to revise their viewpoint.

As Pritchard (2009) pointed out, if epistemic frameworks ignore evidence coming from other frameworks, the possibility of achieving true beliefs will be seriously undermined. This radical thesis leads to dogmatism in assuming that epistemic frameworks may be self-sufficient. Avoiding such dogmatism does not imply that the subject of knowledge has an epistemic perspective concerning the relationship between his belief and the framework he has adopted. In this sense, knowledge does not have to always be reflective. It may be precisely this lack of reflection which generates the illusion of confrontation. However, since there is no hierarchy among epistemic frameworks, it does not seem possible to censor or even criticize the opinion of an individual whose beliefs are based on evidence outside of the epistemic framework in question. For this to be possible, one should appeal to an independent epistemic framework. The problem would then be that this one would also legitimize itself, even if it legitimized the other frameworks. Dogmatism appears to be, thus, inevitable.

Should such inscrutability of a framework remain, the best we may expect from an epistemic framework is to be coherent (Williams, 2007), and the best we may expect from a justification is for it to be circular (*cfr.,* Bland, 2015)[12]. In consequence, epistemic relativism becomes a problem analogous to that of the criterion: if there is no group of necessary and sufficient conditions to which one may resort, neither will there be one single legitimate way to distinguish genuine knowledge from what only appears to be so, or to recognize cases of knowledge that share such conditions. Nevertheless, the analysis of knowledge and of those conditions is an epistemologist's task and not that of everyday users of knowledge.

Indeed, when those who disagree about a certain topic focus the controversy on the very foundations of the epistemic framework, the whole perspective of assessment changes. Let's consider an example given by Williams (2000): physicists may indefinitely increase the level of assessment for an experiment, repeating it under more controlled conditions each time. But if they began to consider skeptical cases which must be tested as if knowledge were, in the Cartesian sense, a building, and if they wondered about brains in a vat, it would not necessarily result in a more meticulous

research methodology. On the contrary, introducing these issues leads to a completely different set of questions. Similarly, questioning the very foundations of an epistemic framework does not lead to a more rigorous analysis of the issue at stake. Often, changes in assessment criteria go unnoticed due to the lack of separation between the framework and the object of knowledge.

3. FROM RELATIVISM TO PRACTICAL REASON

The problems identified in the previous section share a common stigma: they take the situations in which knowledge is presented as if they were watertight compartments. This means that the solution to those problems lies in the practical function of the subjects of knowledge, bearing in mind their social constitution. This is not meant to sustain that human knowledge is merely a social product, but rather that cooperation between subjects is essential to evaluate certain epistemic attributions. Therefore, the solution to the above-mentioned problems must be based on the fact that knowledge is part of our practical life, which concerns not only diverse reflexive practices — which encompass various intellectual activities— but also our relationship with the environment.

Regarding the imprecision of the concept of *knowledge*, one may interpret it semantically as with many other polysemous syntagmata. This is to say, in the same way that context must be resorted to in order to distinguish between the use of the word *light* (as the weight of a feather or as the opposite of dark); the feather is light (not heavy) but not light (dark). The same can be said of the word "knowledge". One reason for the potential polysemic ambiguity of the notion of knowledge is that said notion becomes very clear in communication when the word which is registered shares the same epistemic framework and is in function of its context. And this is part of the economy of language. Indeed, one can say that S knows and does not know that p, keeping in mind that this juxtaposes two distinct senses in both uses of "know". Thus, the notion of knowledge passes three tests: The first, the most evident with respect to what we have said thus far, is the Logical Test (Quine, 1960), which sustains that a word is polysemic for any subject if an assertion involving that word can be true and false of the same referent; the second, the Linguistic Test (Cruse, 1986), which sustains that a word is polysemic when used in a zeugmatic combination; and the third, the Definitional Test, which maintains that a word is polysemic if more than a single definition is needed to account for its meaning. Thus, we can define "knowledge" alluding to the notion of infallibility (as with Descartes), or alluding to the notion of fallibility.

Certainly, even if there was a heterogeneity such that is limited by the word itself, but whose imprecision is further lessened by being context-sensitive, the context would provide clues for the correct interpretation of the word without exhausting its meaning. Misunderstandings may keep taking place and they involve natural language as a whole[13]. From this point of view, there is nothing special in the concept of knowledge that cannot be found in other polysemous words. Here confusion arises between semantics and pragmatics. It is not the same as saying that the context determines meaning to say that the meaning is determined in a context.

Considering the idea that knowledge changes across time, independently of the semantic problem, the context of attribution may be a mystery. Of course, from a theoretical point of view the epistemic relationship of the subject with the environment is not always the same with the passing of time, but this difference in knowledge at

different points in history is a task for a historian. Determining the conditions for the attribution of knowledge at specific moments in history may be useful to evaluate, for example, whether cardinal Bellarmine knew that the Earth was the center of the universe, though he would not know it today.

Let's assume for the sake of argument that Bellarmine put things at stake that were not taken into consideration by Galileo and vice versa; if such was the case, then one can state that different standards imply different uses of the concept of "knowledge". It may be argued that the statement *S* knows that *p* is, in practice, not univocal, because the concept of knowledge has different properties in different contexts. The problem with this stance is that it would be impossible to make epistemic generalizations and the entire theory of knowledge would become an unattainable endeavor. However, a vital component of the concept of knowledge is to transmit information and sources of information to assist in practical reasoning. On the other hand, the function of knowledge is subject to the interests that are relevant to those who are reasoning (Greco, 2008). Therefore, although different epistemic norms vary according to our interactions with the world, knowledge is still the same phenomenon regarding social interactions. Everything is dependent on where the interest of the individual lies: whether his interest lies in the attributions of knowledge of the context of use –i.e., interest in understanding the other party's point of view– or in the particular assessment context. The choice between the two interests –privileging one to the detriment of the other–   is, in turn, dependent on the final aims of the individual. The main idea, at this point, is that individuals' interests and goals, together with the required norms to reach knowledge, do not vary randomly.

If, as can be claimed, the subject's circumstances are constantly varying, these changes are far from being drastic; they are so subtle that they do not affect the norms. It follows naturally that practical behavior induces certain regularities that may be observed by the epistemologist. Conversely, if changes are drastic, they are not constant and they do affect the norms. This is precisely what happens with skeptical scenarios: requirements change significantly, but they are easily spotted given that they are extraordinary.

Returning to the violation of the intuition over authentic disagreements; when serious controversy occurs, the epistemic frameworks are assumed to be shielded against evidence coming from other frameworks. Broadly speaking, the goals of epistemic subjects are directly linked to the search for truth. In this way, both Galileo and Cardinal Bellarmine each believed themselves to be the owner of truth, although scientific truth may be obtained in quite a different manner from religious truth. The argument is possible because they share the same goal. Individuals may be very obstinate in their beliefs, but that does not prevent mutual understanding. Galileo understood Bellarmine's objections but did not agree with him, and vice versa. The problem had to do with the hierarchy among the sources; the scientific framework hierarchizes sources of knowledge in a different way than the theological framework does. Consequently, whether or not such a hierarchy is adequate and if it should be altered is also subject to controversy.

Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that epistemic relativism claims that there is no criterion that is especially valuable in any specific circumstance, but that its value will always depend on the context. In other words, epistemic relativism considers that there is no hierarchy among epistemic frameworks; all frameworks are equally valid, because the world may be known in a number of ways. In contrast, this varied form of understanding the world implies that knowledge can be ascribed in several ways and according to many standards where our own and other people's interests

influence the way in which we know the world. The existence of different ways of knowing the world implies different ways of describing it, in such a way that there is not a single, but rather various, correct versions of doing so. If the attribution of knowledge is a result of the generalization represented by epistemic frameworks, there are certain standards that remain fixed in a particular context because they have frequently proved themselves to be more effective than others. Their effectiveness, however, derives teleologically from the context of practical life. For instance, although perception may be more fallible than scientific theory, it is usually reliable enough to be fundamental to the epistemic framework relevant to many contexts of ordinary life; whereas in academic contexts scientific reflection is usually the most adequate epistemic framework. It should be noted, though, that this does not prevent a discussion on the reliability of perception in everyday life or about the framework that has adopted perception as its foundation.

As it has been suggested previously, epistemic frameworks are not watertight compartments. In fact, men fluctuate freely from one framework to another, according to their practical interests. The physicist may give reasons from the physics framework at his lab, but when he goes home he may use an entirely different framework to give everyday reasons, given that his interests and his relationship with the world have changed. Therefore, epistemic frameworks, although theoretical generalizations, are the product of practical reason; that is to say, the reason which determines or is determined by an action that is a means to an end. Even the questions about the reliability of the sources are not decided independently of the fundamental knowledge about ourselves and our relation with the world. The reliability of sources, such as observation, is a fact that does not depend on purely epistemic factors, but rather is related to interests relevant to the circumstances that the subject of knowledge is facing (e.g., teleological motivations). Even the attribution of knowledge in contexts where reliability is in question, is partly defined by the interests of those who claim that S knows that p[14]. In this sense, reliability is also context-dependent (Heller, 1995).

Accepting that reliability depends on context does not only imply that there is a relationship between the subject of knowledge and the object, but rather that there is also an interaction between the subjects of knowledge, something known as *epistemic cooperation*[15]. The famous Norman case (BonJour, 1985) may serve as an illustration of the above statement. Norman is a completely reliable clairvoyant in certain circumstances, but he does not rule either in favor for or against the possibility of such cognitive skill. One day Norman believes that the president is in New York and although he does not think that there is evidence to support or contradict his belief, it is nevertheless true and a result of his highly reliable clairvoyant powers. Besides the many implications and variations of this case, the question of why would Norman's belief be epistemically irresponsible leads us to think that the process by which he forms his belief is reliable only for himself, but would not be warranted to others. In other words, the epistemic framework by which one may arrive at the conclusion has been violated. If Norman had read the newspaper instead of resorting to clairvoyance, then the result would have been different. In summary, Norman's belief is epistemically irresponsible because the process of acquisition of knowledge does not belong in a Sellarsian space of reason that leads to truth, but rather is in contradiction with other, legitimate spaces of reason. The point is that there may be two propositions, each being sufficiently justified, but which are incompatible and the decision criteria to choose among the two varies according to the context.

From this viewpoint, it would seem that the evidence to determine if S knows that p depends on practical aspects with regards to assessment. One practical aspect that

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may be relevant for assessment manifests itself in the teleological character of our beliefs. Such character depends on the cultural, historical, or ideological situation of the group or community which performs the assessment or in which the assessment is performed. For instance, if a person listens to voices in his head -that is, he perceives those voices- , how do we come to the conclusion that they do not exist? Why do we believe that they are a symptom of a pathological condition? The answer is that the standards of the epistemic framework of psychiatry are regarded as more reliable —during assessment— than in private perceptions. Should someone disregard psychiatric standards and believe that such voices do exist, his behavior would be affected in a way that would surely lead to involuntary reclusion. The history of psychiatry is full of examples like this one. In short, the epistemic status of a belief is not solely determined by the agent, even though he plays a decisive role in its acceptance, but rather by its links to the beliefs of others, in agreement with an epistemic framework for assessing beliefs.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have argued that both the attribution and assessment of knowledge depend on practical reason as they are part of individuals' intellectual abilities. Aspects of practical reason include the differences among different uses of the concept of *knowledge* based on the context of attribution or assessment. In this sense, cases of semantic imprecision in the concept of knowledge can be dealt with by taking into consideration its polysemy. If the dispute between Galileo and Cardinal Bellarmine is reconsidered, both the context and the practical circumstances of the subject who tells the story will determine the function of attribution –in the same way that the historical context of the time period of Galileo and Bellarmine influences the respective evaluations and attributions. However, when ambiguity is due to historical changes, historians must be careful with their contributions. The practices of the subjects of knowledge do not change radically all the time, but remain remarkably stable and, even if they change, they do it so gradually that we do not realize it until some time later. This allows the recognition of epistemic standards and the subsequent formation of frameworks, keeping in mind the polysemic conception of the notion of "knowledge".

When the context —either of attribution or assessment— changes in a radical manner, then the difference is identified and the epistemic response adjusts accordingly. In this way, we are enabled to shed light on the incommensurability of epistemic frameworks, which leads to dogmatism. From this point of view, epistemic frameworks are conceived as an abstract generalization based on practical reason, whose function is to legitimize the claim that knowledge is relative. Such relativism is always *a posteriori*, given that epistemic frameworks are the result of the epistemologist's cuts or generalizations in order to hierarchically isolate epistemic standards. Similarly, the relativist conclusion with regards to the illusion of disagreement is attributable to the idea that epistemic frameworks are comparable to watertight compartments. The same intersubjectivity that produces certain epistemic standards leaves the door open to introduce oneself to other standards: in this transition, beliefs legitimized in one context but not in another may be threatened by arising counter-evidences. In other words, these counter-evidences are legitimized in context but not by context.

Finally, we have suggested that the current understanding of epistemic frameworks as watertight compartments should be replaced by a more flexible one articulating the subject's interests, their ways of cooperating with each other and their

point of view on Dependency while leaving aside Coexistence, and so on.

3 Moreover, for invariantism, there is a single and unchangeable set of standards that can regulate the use of the attributions of knowledge –regardless of the context in which it is pronounced or the circumstances in which it is evaluated.

4 Descartes assumes this idea in several passages of the Meditations; for example, at the end of the second and sixth meditation. It is worth mentioning that this example does not explicitly claim that Descartes be a contextualist.

5 I leave aside for now the distinctions of why a sentence varies from context to context: if because it contains "non-obvious" indexical expressions or if it contains expressions that have variables associated with them whose values are determined by context; or if it contains expressions whose senses and/or phrases whose modes of composition are modulated by context.

6 For other relativistic approaches, see: Kolbel (2007, 2009) and Richard (2004).

7 This refers to the use of perception or testimony as the base for justifying beliefs. The framework's usage of this justification has consequences for the concept of knowledge used with respect to this framework. Unfortunately, this paper cannot concern itself with either these consequences or the substances of such a perceptual or testimonial epistemic framework. Fortunately, such an investigation is not necessary for the aims of this paper.

8 See Levin (2008), who argues that the prospects for both "high standard" and "low standard" invariantist theories are better than the pragmatists contend. Also, one could compare and contrast this conception with other relativists who emphasize the practical (e.g., Rorty) or propose a complex view of contexts (e.g. Williams), but this comparison would lead us far from our goal: to argue against a conception of epistemic frameworks as fixed or stable entities.

9 See Montminy (2009)

10 However, this paper's usage of the case is not the same as DeRose and Stanley's.

11 The notion of semantic blindness can be clarified by distinguishing between content-blindness and index-blindness (Kindermann, 2013)

12 Even if one disagrees with the importance that arguments or justifications not be circular, sometimes the fact that the arguments are circular is inevitable, but that is a topic beyond the discussion of this paper (Cf., Bergmann, 2004).

13 In fact, this is one of the defining traits of natural languages as opposed to artificial languages.

14 Hawthorne (2004) illustrated the idea that knowledge is a norm of practical reason, using as an example the lottery. The question was: Why can I not use the premise that I will lose in the lottery as a justification to sell the ticket for a few bucks and thus receive some money instead of nothing at all, given that I have good reasons to believe that is the most likely outcome? The answer is that I do not know what will happen in the future, because, if I knew, I would not be playing the lottery in the first place. In this sense, playing the lottery implies having good reasons to know that one may lose, but also knowing that there are good reasons to think that there is a slight chance of winning. My interest is to play the lottery and make money, so I focus, so to speak, on my knowledge of that slight chance.

15 According to this view, context is constituted by shared acceptances, or common ground (Hirschberg 1991; Geurts 2010), where such extra information is conversationally implied by the pragmatic content of the sentence in contexts of utterance and assessment.