Justification in Context

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Determining knowledge happens by indexically attuned justification. One may also say that knowledge comes without justification if standards for knowledge are measured by fancy requirements. A lower setting of scores brings justification back. Epistemic responsibility requires attuning to context. Structures of epistemic justification are extended from these resting on exceptionless general rules to the ones involving generalities with exceptions and further to those proceeding from particular contextual cases. How can justification in the context really work? Discussion involves the last two manners of how to systematize the structure of justification. The first of these involves general patterns and thus normative authority of the general and the second builds on particular contexts. The structure of justification proposed by this last one complies with accommodation requirements for a realistic account of knowledge.

1. Justification in context – how does it happen?

I did not know about the departure time of the bus in direction of town. So I phoned the bus company. They told me about the schedule and I immediately knew, so I was able to plan my trip. I took the relevant pieces of background knowledge and brought them together. It was important for me that bus at *this* particular time departs to *this* particular town. I only have guessed about the information before, but as I asked and as I received response I knew. So I skipped further verification. It would have taken me too much time anyway to check everything that could perhaps go wrong if I wished not to be too late for my bus. Counterfactual possibilities exercise a big pressure. Indexical elements have a stronger overall pull towards conditions that secure knowledge than do the non-indexical elements coming in a generalized form.

The usual story involving conditions guaranteeing knowledge has it the other way round in respect to the already explained experience and intuitions. General possibilities dealing with defeaters and counterexamples are considered as providing conditions for knowledge, for their function is to insure against fallibility. The resulting pressure for determining all possible conditions of justification screens off the importance of indexical presuppositions.

Indexical elements come with the context. Indexicality also creates context. Justification for beliefs does not come in one single form. The relevance of a feature contributing to justificatory conditions of knowledge varies from one context to another.

Maybe there are several forms of justification. If this is the case, then whatever is called "knowledge without justification" may still be justified, but just in another, perhaps in a weaker sense. Justification may come in several forms of compactness pertaining to the landscape inhabiting forces that secure knowledge. Justification may have its background consistency stressed or relieved; it may come with high, with middle or with low requirements put on the structure of the shape supporting it.

Fancy forms of knowledge won the day at the time Socrates was walking around the town, demonstrating to each person how despite this person's beliefs about possessing knowledge the person in question did not actually know. Another fancy form of knowledge figures court decisions. One would feel rather uneasy about accepting something based merely on probable opinion as an outcome of a fair trial.

As scores for most situations of knowledge are set too high, it is then natural that most of the usual cases figuring knowledge will fail to pass the test. We may say that there will be no justification for these cases, and so they will be cases of *knowledge without justification*. Myself learning and then knowing when the bus will depart is perhaps a case of knowledge. High-grade excessive justification requirements come with abstraction from context. Abstraction from a particular context is linked to stretching justificatory structure over a multitude of contexts reaching out of the range of the unique indexed context in which the agent finds himself.

There is another understanding of what knowledge without justification may be about. According to this, there are basic beliefs, so one presupposes something in the situation, without the need to account for it. Candidates for such unjustified beliefs would then be supported by presuppositions in the situation. One builds one's authority on what is given in the context.

Instead of fancy excessive requirements for justification some other structure is needed, and this is provided by *epistemic responsibility*. Being epistemically responsible does not mean that one has to check for all the ways in which the goal of knowledge can fail. Many times this would be a rather irresponsible manner of acting. It is responsible to act in a way that is appropriate to the situation at hand, and to check all the *relevant* defeaters in *this* situation.

"Broadly speaking, being epistemically responsible has to do with such activities as: (1) gathering evidence, (2) considering and dealing with counterpossibilities, and (3) dealing with internal conflicts of belief." (Timmons 1999, 195)

Here are three possible readings of the first two items proposed by the quote.

(1) (a) gathering *all* possible evidence

   (b) gathering *some* evidence

   (c) gathering *just this contextually attuned* evidence

(2) (a) Considering and dealing with *all possible* counterpossibilities

   (b) Considering and dealing with *some* counterpossibilities

   (c) Considering *just these contextually attuned* counterpossibilities

Three emerging structures of justification bases may be more systematically characterized in the following way, corresponding to possible readings of epistemic responsibility requirements:

(a) Deductive-like pattern of justification ranges over *all* single cases, and it considers *all* possible counterexamples or defeaters (for a belief to be justified knowledge).

(b) Inductive-like pattern ranges over *most* of the single cases, and it considers *most* of the possible counterexamples or defeaters (for a belief to be justified knowledge).

(c) Particularist pattern does not involve any projection from one single case to another one; the considered relevant counterexamples or defeaters all reside *in the unique context*, and are indistinguishable from this context. Once you see the context, you see them all. If you do not see some, they make part of another context.

The mistake of (a) and (b) is to suppose that *relevance* of the justificatory structure may be obtained in such a manner that it includes counterexamples or defeaters extending over general pattern which ranges through a multitude of contexts, somehow *besides* to the actual context. The basic distinction is between the particular contexts with their unique patterns, including defeaters as dynamical forces shaping them, and between generalist strategies, either without or with exceptions. The difference is thus between c) on the one hand, and between (a) and (b) coming together on the other hand. There is thus no such basic distinction between this general pattern ranging over *all* or over *most* of the cases involving defeaters, although this kind of distinction, introduced by (b) may *seem* basic at first sight, and it is indeed a qualitative jump from the position presupposed by (a). Justification includes *relevance in the context*, so it embraces the possibility (c). This last position is qualitatively different from the former two positions in that it considers the pattern in *one particular context* providing the justificatory structure, as against the former two which propose *patterns extending over several possible contexts* as providing the justificatory structure.

The three mentioned possibilities of justificatory structure (a), (b), c) may be presented according to the parameters that shape justificatory landscape:

	(a)	(b)	(c)
i. Rules	General rules without exceptions (deduction-like)	General rules with exceptions (ceteris paribus, induction-like)	Particular contexts: no rules, just indexical relevance
ii. Defeaters	Rules determine knowledge as the result of beating all possible defeaters	Rules determine knowledge as considering most of possible defeaters	Knowledge is the result of justification coming from particular patterns, defeaters are *in* a particular context
iii. Projectibility	Projectibility extends over all contexts	Projectibility extends over most contexts	There is no projectibility: the structure of justification, including defeaters, resides in the shape of each particular context

The involved rules (i), the considered defeaters (ii) and projectibility or its absence (iii) shape the structural basis of justification.

Under (a) and (b), projectibility is *generalist* – it extends over *other contexts*, i.e. these contexts that are different from the particular context in question where justification is to be assured. So the indexical element of providing structure in this particular context is avoided. Stress is thus put on other contexts, but these contexts are just not relevant for the justification in question. The *structure of justification* may only be provided in one specific *particular context*. It is wrong to see defeaters as (additional) contexts, as the alternative possibilities (besides to the actual one) that need to be checked in order to assure knowledge. These possibilities figure as abstract contexts, i.e. the contexts abstracted from their actual basis. The *indexical* element needed for justification is missing. So the real and actual defeaters have to reside *inside a particular context* – they have to be *in* the context if the aim is that of obtaining justification. So the right *structure of justification* has to be *within* this context. This is achieved by the possibility (c). In (a) and (b) structure of justification follows the *normative authority of the general* – it reaches over to contexts that operate outside one particular context in question, and it looks at defeaters as being provided by alternative contexts. This cannot be the right way to go though because defeaters construed as alternative possible contexts lack *indexical* elements through which they became relevant in the process of securing knowledge.

2. Justification in context – how does it become effective?

I will fragmentarily use Timmons (1999) as providing a position building on general rules with exceptions, thus the position under (b) according to the discussion above. Because he is appropriating context, his work is of even a bigger interest. But there are also differences with what I think is a more appropriate position as is the one that he is defending. First, his contexts provide a different justificatory landscape if measured by the particularistic shape brought into discussion by c). Then, his is a work in moral justification and it is not dedicated just to epistemic justification *per se*. The question is what kind of *structure of justification* his proposal establishes. He talks about middle level generalizations. But more importantly, he appropriates a Rossian generalist and pluralist approach, substituting contextually basic parameters to propositions instead of Rosses' assignment of self-evidence status to them.

"There are a number of irreducible moral generalizations that are defeasible… In the ordinary context… these are often epistemically basic…
They are contextually basic…
The contextually basic beliefs provide… the justificatory basis for justified belief in other, non-basic moral propositions…
Going from basic moral beliefs… to more specific moral beliefs about particular cases is not always a matter of simply taking the moral generalization together with relevant empirical information and deducing a moral conclusion. In many cases, two or more morally relevant considerations expressed by the basic moral generalizations will be present in a single case, and for these cases we need have no algorithm or ordering system to which we can appeal to adjucate the conflict. In these cases, moral *judgment* takes over." (Timmons 1999, 214-215)

One may use the same strategy that is given here for moral epistemology for a story about the structure supporting justification. This will then be a typically pluralist story.

There is certainly a lot around to recommend the *structure of justification* according to (b) over the structure of justification according to (a). The claim of the alternative (b) supporting such flexibility is that the projectibility of the general rule prescribing complete or ideal justification has to allow for *exceptions*. *Ceteris paribus* strategy with exceptions is similar to the pluralist strategies in ethics, where a domain cannot be arranged just by application of one single rule, but by application of *several*.

A similar picture would apply to epistemology. You do not have just one general rule without exceptions as you look for defeaters. You can introduce *epistemic responsibility*, and you can shape the structure of justification so that it fits the desired context. You have to use *judgment* to be a responsible epistemic agent.

One should not make a mistake here though. The proposed strategy is still *generalist*, for it comes under (b), just that it allows for *exceptions*, and these exceptions allow for a possible plurality of principles to be considered in order to obtain epistemic justification and knowledge as a result.

The demands of common sense – what may common sensically count as knowledge – are much easier satisfied by generalities with exception strategy (b) then with the exceptionless generalities strategy (a). But it is actually not really possible to satisfy accommodation requirements determining structure of justification according to the strategy (b) if we compare it to the strategy c). The acceptance of (b) has paved the way for introducing *context* into the epistemic justification story. But the question is whether *the normative authority* determining knowledge really is *generalist* as proposed by (b) or whether it is particularist, as proposed by c). Normative authority has to be *particularist*, i.e. attuned to one *indexically* determined context, if knowledge should be the desired result. c) is superior to (b). What gives you knowledge, if you accept pluralistically minded principle of epistemic responsibility, is not the normative authority of the general, which requires you to accept the pattern of general rule that has the job of checking for all or most of logically possible defeaters. What gives you knowledge is rather being attuned to *this* context that *authorizes* you in possessing knowledge.

Relevance can only come from a *particular context*, for precisely this context provides the *normative authority* and thus the appropriate background landscape determining the range of defeaters to be checked in order that knowledge is attained. But as the defeaters are *in* the situation, shaping it, the *context* has to be considered in order that one would attain knowledge. The view will be judgmental, coming at a glance, not tractable. If defeaters are relevant in strategies (a) and (b) they can be indexicalized. The strategy c) can then take over the ensuing job of justification.

Literature

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