

# Skepticism and contextualism by ernest sosa

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By considering the context in which the statement is uttered, there are many ways in which it might be understood to be true on some level of understanding. However, the author also asserts that the need to provide context both confuses and fails to fully answer the concerns of the skeptics on the philosophical level even when the statements are true on a more common level. This is relevant to epistemology when the truth of the statement remains even when shifts in context occur from the common to the philosophical and vice versa.

In addressing the relevance of contextualism to skepticism in epistemology, the author lists the four basic types of thresholds that must be defined in order to fully answer the skeptics' concerns. These include “‘ belief’: how sure must one be? ... ‘ justification’: how much rational support is required for one’s belief? ... ‘ reliability’: how reliable are one’s operative sources or faculties? ... ‘ safety’: how easily might one have been wrong?” (Sosa 6).

Many of these questions, of course, place the conversation, again, in the realm of contextualism even on a philosophical plane. This also illustrates the degree to which contextualism can be applied to such an extent that all meaning is rendered meaningless and the skeptics are reinforced in their argument. Instead, the author proposes that all knowledge exists on a continuum of thresholds that change for a variety of reasons and contexts and knowledge itself is something that we attain to but never reach as contexts and information continue to change or be defined. We base our feelings of knowledge, then, on a degree of safety that what we believe is actually true. The problem with this is that, even given all the information we have available to answer the various factors described, we may still believe something to be true and thus be real knowledge when it is false because

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one of those variable factors is either false or has become false through accident or fluke.

The author makes his point convincingly that the skeptics' argument is not fully met through the process of contextualism as this itself introduces reasons for skepticism. The argument is difficult to follow because of the complexity of the subject and the ambiguousness of many of the examples, which must remain ambiguous as a central element of the argument.