Cognitive Mobile Homes

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Abstract

While recent discussions of contextualism have mostly focused on other issues, some influential early statements of contextualism emphasized the possibility for contextualism to provide an alternative both to coherentism and to traditional versions of foundationalism. In this essay, I’ll pick up on this strand of contextualist thought and argue that contextualist versions of foundationalism promise to solve some problems that their non-contextualist cousins cannot. In particular, I’ll argue that adopting contextualist versions of foundationalism can both (1) let us reconcile Bayesian accounts of belief updating with a version of the holist claim that all beliefs are defeasible, and (2) let us defend some intuitively plausible epistemological internalist claims from otherwise powerful counterarguments.

Introduction

Epistemic contextualists often motivate their position by arguing that contextualism provides a satisfying resolution of certain skeptical paradoxes. In this essay, however, I will present one version of a very different strategy for motivating contextualism. The strategy I’ll explore attempts to motivate contextualism by arguing that it provides an appealing way to chart a middle course between coherentism on the one hand, and traditional, non-contextualist versions of foundationalism on the other. I’ll argue that

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1 See Williams (1977) and Annis (1978). In his recent book-length defense of contextualism, DeRose (2009) brings up the idea that contextualism has some special relevance to the debate between foundationalism and coherentism, only to set it aside (pp.21-22). I agree with DeRose that there is no entailment from contextualism to either foundationalism or coherentism. But as the rest of this essay should make clear, I do think that that contextualism and foundationalism complement each other nicely.

2 For paradigm instances of this strategy, see Cohen (1987), DeRose (1995), and Lewis (1996).

3 Actually, as will become clear later, while I’ll focus on contextualism for ease of exposition, my hope is that the strategy can be employed by non-contextualists of various stripes as well. Epistemic relativists, (MacFarlane, 2011a,b) sensitive invariantists, (Hawthorne, 2004; Stanley, 2005; Fantl and McGrath, 2009) and expressivists (Chrisman, 2007) have all offered diagnoses of various phenomena that are structurally similar to contextualist diagnoses. My hope is that any view that can mimic familiar contextualist treatments of, e.g., skeptical paradoxes, (e.g., as the relativist can by appealing to assessment-sensitivity in many of the places where the contextualist would appeal to context-sensitivity) can also mimic the contextualist treatment of foundationalism that I’ll offer here, and that the issues that separate contextualism from a variety of rival views will not be relevant to the present discussion.
many apparent difficulties for foundationalism stem from the common, implicitly anti-contextualist assumption that there is a single set of context-independent criteria that beliefs must meet in order to be foundational. These difficulties can be dealt with, so the argument goes, when we adopt the contextualist view that while each context will treat some beliefs as foundational, which criteria beliefs must meet in order to be foundational is a context-dependent matter.

These two strategies are independent of one another—one can hold that contextualism provides a satisfying resolution of skeptical paradoxes without holding that it provides any special advantage to the foundationalist, just as one can endorse contextualist versions of foundationalism without using them to offer the familiar contextualist treatment of skeptical paradoxes. I focus on the less common strategy because I believe it points the way to some surprising further potential applications of contextualism—ones that I will introduce in the later sections of this paper—that don’t suggest themselves quite as readily when contextualism is motivated via skeptical paradoxes.

1 Varities of Non-Contextualist Foundationalism

I’ll use the term “foundationalism” to refer to a view about the structure of epistemic justification. In particular, I’ll use it to refer to the view that both of the following claims hold: (1) at least some beliefs can be epistemically justified even in the absence of any support they might receive from other beliefs—I’ll call such beliefs, should any exist, “foundational”—and (2) all justified beliefs are either foundational, or derive all their support (perhaps indirectly) from justified foundational beliefs. In my terminology, the foundationalist needn’t hold that all foundational beliefs are justified; it’s compatible with a belief’s being foundational—with it’s having the potential to be justified absent support from other beliefs—that it is ultimately not justified, perhaps because its support is somehow defeated.

A natural question for the foundationalist is the following: what criteria must beliefs meet in order to be foundational? I’ll try to show in this section that the question leads to something of a dilemma for non-contextualist foundationalists. Natural, well-motivated answers to the question tend toward the extremes—either very few beliefs count as foundational, or very many do. But these extremes face serious difficulties—if it’s too hard for beliefs to be foundational, then we risk a collapse into skepticism, but if it’s too easy, we risk a collapse into an implausibly strong form of epistemic permissivism. While the non-contextualist foundationalist can attempt to chart a middle course, it’s easier for the contextualist to give a well-motivated story about why, at least in most contexts, neither sort of extreme view is right.

4 As DeRose does in the passage I refer to in footnote 1.
5 E.g., while Michael Williams does endorse a sort of contextualist version of foundationalism—he calls it “formally foundationalist” (forthcoming)—he offers a very different treatment of skepticism from that found in the writings of Cohen, DeRose, and Lewis. In particular, he does not concede that there is any context in which global skeptical challenges are successful.
6 While “foundationalism” is used in too many different ways to speak of a “standard” use, my formulation is similar to what many writers call “minimal” foundationalism (Alston, 1976).
Historically influential versions of foundationalism held that beliefs must meet very strict criteria in order to be foundational—perhaps they must be impossible to doubt, or must have contents that are of necessity be true whenever believed, or must have some other strong modal properties. It’s easy to see why one might find such properties epistemologically interesting. If it were possible to rationally reconstruct our entire body of beliefs from some sparse set of claims that are impossible to doubt, or that must be true (given that we believe them), doing so would be a great intellectual achievement. Criticisms of traditional versions of foundationalism have tended not to target not the desirability of completing such a project, but the feasibility. It’s not clear whether any beliefs have such strong modal properties, and even if some do (e.g., perhaps the conclusion of Descartes’ cogito), they are almost certainly too few to serve as an adequate foundation for the rest of what we normally take ourselves to be justified in believing. In light of these considerations, contemporary foundationalists tend to defend views on which the requirements for foundational beliefs are more lax.

For example, Gilbert Harman (2001) defends a view on which all beliefs count as foundational. On Harman’s view, beliefs needn’t derive support from some distinctive class of special foundations (e.g., indubitable or incorrigible beliefs) in order to be justified. Rather, all of a subject’s beliefs are justified by default, and can only fail to be justified insofar as they are defeated by a subject’s other beliefs. However, while traditional foundationalist views made justification too hard to get, it’s easy to worry that views like Harman’s err in the opposite direction.

Suppose Connor has grown up in much the same circumstances as you, and has had largely similar experiences, but has come to believe that much of what happens in the world is due to the machinations of various competing extra-terrestrial conspiracies that have infiltrated many of the largest and most powerful institutions on earth. The US Civil War, for instance, Connor takes to have been a proxy war for the Venusians and the Martians. Asked why there’s no direct evidence of such conspiracies, Connor will give various responses. For instance, he’ll insist that there is such evidence, in the form of various hidden codes in the world’s major religious texts, as well as in contemporary popular music. He’ll also remind you that Martians, Venusians, and Alpha Centaurians have extremely advanced technology and a shared interest in secrecy, so between assassination and memory erasure they’re capable of keeping reports of their activities out of the major news media (though they don’t bother to police smaller outlets, such as the blog that Connor maintains).

If all of Connor beliefs are foundational, it’s hard to see how his conspiracy beliefs could count as unjustified. After all, they are mutually supporting, and do not substantially conflict with any of Connor’s other beliefs. But there nevertheless seems to be some important sense in which they are unjustified; freedom from substantial internal conflict is not enough to render a body of beliefs justified. Even though Connor’s beliefs

\footnote{For a developed defense of this idea in the context of a discussion of the method of reflective equilibrium, see Kelly and McGrath (2010). Especially in light of Kelly and McGrath’s discussion, it should be plausible that examples like Connor’s don’t just tell against liberal versions of foundationalism like Harman’s, but also against coherentist theories of epistemic justification. For that reason, I won’t...}
support each other well, taken as a whole, they do not constitute a reasonable response to his evidence.

Harman’s view isn’t the only contemporary version of foundationalism that is vulnerable to objections like the one above. Michael Huemer (2007) defends a version of foundationalism only slightly less extreme than Harman’s; Huemer’s view is roughly that while not all beliefs are foundational, all beliefs that seem true to their subjects are foundational for those subjects. If it seems to me that I have a hand, and I believe that I have a hand, then that belief is foundational. If it seems to me that $2 + 2 = 5$, and I believe that $2 + 2 = 5$, then that belief is foundational. With only slight modifications, however, the case of Connor’s is just as threatening to views like Huemer’s as it is to those like Harman’s. If we just supplement Connor’s intellectual life with a rich enough array of seemings—perhaps intellectual seemings to the effect that extra-terrestrial conspiracy theories are extremely plausible in light of her total evidence—then a view like Huemer’s will have difficulty explaining how he could fail to be justified in holding the beliefs he does. But I take it that adding such seemings to the case oughtn’t change our judgment that Connor lacks justification to believe in extra-terrestrial conspiracies.

Huemer’s view is itself a generalization of other foundationalist views that grant foundational status just to beliefs supported by specific sorts of seemings (e.g., perceptual seemings, or introspective seemings). To my mind, however, Huemer does a convincing job of arguing that it’s very difficult to motivate such restrictions on which sorts of seemings can grant beliefs foundational status; once one holds that certain classes of seemings play a privileged epistemological role while others do not, one bears a burden of explaining what is so special about seemings in the distinguished class that they but not other seemings can play such a role. And to my knowledge, no one has successfully discharged that burden.

Of course, I have not shown that none of the views canvassed so far can meet the prima facie objections I’ve raised against them, and there are still many other options for the non-contextualist foundationalist. Rather than attempt the impossible task of exhaustively surveying all versions of foundationalism, I want to briefly mention two that are quite different from the attempts considered so far, before introducing the contextualist alternative.

None of the versions of foundationalism I have mentioned so far have been (obviously) externalist. While traditional versions of foundationalism were clearly internal-

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8Huemer (2007, p.30) clarifies the relevant sense of seeming:

I take statements of the form “it seems to S that p” or “it appears to S that p” to describe a kind of propositional attitude, different from belief, of which sensory experience, apparent memory, intuition, and apparent introspective awareness are species.

9For example, BonJour (1998) defends a view on which beliefs based on intellectual seemings have a foundational status, but beliefs based on perceptual seemings do not. Pryor (2000) defends a view according to which beliefs based on perceptual seemings have a foundational status, without taking a stand on beliefs based on other sorts of seemings. Dogramaci (Forthcoming) defends a related view concerning beliefs that are the conclusions of inferences.

10Many epistemologists have drawn distinctions that they have labeled “internalism/externalism”
ist, abandoning internalism opens up many options for the foundationalist, and versions of externalist theories like reliabilism have been presented along foundationalist lines.\textsuperscript{11} I will not discuss externalist versions of foundationalism here, however. A major part of the motivation for externalist views in epistemology is the perceived hopelessness of internalism.\textsuperscript{12} But, as I'll argue in §3, the availability of contextualist versions of foundationalism makes it possible to defend strong forms of internalism from otherwise powerful arguments. If I'm right about this, then the availability of contextualist foundationalism constitutes a kind of indirect argument against externalism in epistemology—it suggests that externalism isn't the only game in town, as many have thought.

Another option for the foundationalist is to simply not give a substantive, informative account of which criteria beliefs must meet in order to be foundational. She might insist that some beliefs are foundational, but deny that there are any interesting properties they have in common other than their foundationality. The only answer to the question: “what criteria must beliefs meet in order to be foundational?” then, would be a trivial one: “they must be foundational.” Because this view bears some similarity to particularist views in ethics, I'll call it “particularist foundationalism.”\textsuperscript{13} It’s easy to imagine a foundationalist inspired by Timothy Williamson’s work offering a similar line. Such a foundationalist might hold that everything a subject knows is foundational for that subject, while denying that it is possible to give a substantive, informative answer to the question of what it takes for a subject to have knowledge. While such a view deserves to be taken seriously, I still take it that it should be seen as something of a last resort—we should seriously examine all promising versions of foundationalism before concluding that such an uninformative, quietistic theory is the best the foundationalist can do.

I don’t for a moment pretend to have shown that all non-contextualist versions of foundationalism are hopeless. I do hope that I’ve pointed to some prima facie difficulties, and that these difficulties are sufficient to motivate curiosity about alternative forms of foundationalism.

\textsuperscript{11} Goldman's (1979) distinction between beliefs produced by unconditionally reliable processes and beliefs produced by conditionally reliable processes looks much like the foundationalist’s distinction between justified foundational beliefs, and non-foundational beliefs that are justified because of support they receive from foundational beliefs.

\textsuperscript{12} For example, a major theme in Timothy Williamson’s Knowledge and its Limits (2000) is that internalism requires that at least some non-trivial conditions have a property which Williamson calls “luminosity,” but that no non-trivial conditions have this property, so epistemological internalism is a non-starter.

\textsuperscript{13} See Dancy (2004).
2 Contextualist Foundationalism

As I’ve already indicated, the contextualist foundationalist holds that which criteria beliefs must meet in order to be foundational is in some sense a context-sensitive matter.\textsuperscript{14} There are many ways of developing this idea, not all of which would be labeled “contextualism” in contemporary parlance. I’ll begin this section by stating four different views that bear a family resemblance to one another, and each of which, in my opinion, can be motivated by the considerations I’ll discuss in this essay. While I’ll generally focus my discussion on what I’ll call “orthodox contextualist foundationalism,” this is for ease of exposition; most of what I say (with some exceptions that I’ll make explicit) should be applicable to each of the views I’m about to mention.

Orthodox Contextualist Foundationalism:

Sentences of the form “S’s belief that $P$ is justified” (as well as sentences attributing foundational justification more narrowly) express different propositions when uttered in different conversational contexts. Features of conversational contexts that affect which propositions such sentences express may include the presuppositions made by the participants to a conversation, the purposes of the conversation, and the practical situation faced by the participants to the conversation. In general, a proposition $P$’s being presupposed by the parties in a conversational context $C$ tends to make sentences of the form “S’s belief that $P$ is foundational,” true, when uttered in $C$.\textsuperscript{15}

Sensitive Invariantist Foundationalism:

While sentences of the form “S’s belief that $P$ is justified” (as well as sentences attributing foundational justification more narrowly) express the same proposition in every context, the truth conditions of the propositions expressed are sensitive to various factors not considered by traditional foundationalist theories. Such factors may include the presuppositions made by $S$ and her interlocutors, the purposes of $S$ and anybody she might be interacting with, and $S$’s practical situation.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14}Why not just say that the contextualists holds that which beliefs are foundational somehow varies with context, rather than putting things in terms of criteria? I worry that this way of putting things would threaten to make contextualism trivial. E.g., a certain sort of classical, anti-contextualist foundationalist will be happy to agree that in contexts in which I am having an experience as of an apple, beliefs about apple-experiences are foundational for me, while in other contexts in which I am having no such experiences, no such apple-experience-beliefs are foundational. The reason she is not a contextualist is that she will identify a fixed, context-independent set of criteria that beliefs must meet in order to be foundational (e.g., perhaps they must bear a certain sort of relation to a subject’s experiences), and hold that any contextual variation in which beliefs are foundational is entirely explained by contextual variation in which beliefs meet that fixed set of criteria. The contextualist foundationalist, by contrast, will identify some sense in which there is no such fixed, context-independent set of criteria that beliefs must meet in order to be foundational.

\textsuperscript{15}E.g., Cohen (1987), DeRose (1995), and Lewis (1996)

\textsuperscript{16}E.g., Hawthorne (2004), Stanley (2005), and Fantl and McGrath (2009).
Relativist Foundationalism:

Sentences of the form “S’s belief that P is justified” (as well as sentences attributing foundational justification more narrowly) express propositions that are not absolutely true, but only true relative to contexts of assessment. Which contexts of assessment we take on for the purpose of evaluating sentences about foundationality (and so which such sentences we’ll be prepared to endorse) may depend on factors such as which presuppositions we and our interlocutors make, our purposes in evaluating the attribution, and our practical situation (along with, perhaps, the practical situation of the subject of the evaluation).\textsuperscript{17}

Expressivist Foundationalism:

Sentences of the form “S’s belief that P is justified” (as well as sentences attributing foundational justification more narrowly) do not express propositions of the usual sort (except perhaps in a deflationist sense), but instead are used to express our acceptance of epistemic norms. As a matter of anthropological fact, which epistemic norms we accept (and so which such sentences we’ll be prepared to endorse) varies with factors such as which presuppositions we and our interlocutors make, our purposes in evaluating attributions of foundationality, and our practical situation.\textsuperscript{18,19}

I have characterized the above views as views concerning the truth conditions of sentences of the form “S’s belief that P is justified” or “S’s belief that P is foundationally justified.” While this might seem like a simple extension of familiar views about sentences of the form “S knows that P”, in fact things are not so simple; unlike “knows,” “justified” and “foundational” are technical terms in philosophy, rarely used by non-philosophers. While it’s easy to see how one might appeal to empirical linguistic data to adjudicate debates about the semantics of “knows”, it’s harder to see how similar debates can even get off the ground concerning terms that do not occur in ordinary usage. My hope is that while I’ve expressed the views above as views about the truth conditions of a certain sort of sentence, it’s not so hard to see how we can understand them as views about what it takes for beliefs to have certain sorts of epistemic statuses—statuses that could be attributed by sentences containing words like “justified” and “foundational,” but which can play important theoretical roles even if we don’t often directly attribute them. For instance, if I take some belief of yours to have one of the relevant statuses (e.g., to justified), that will likely have implications for how I interact with you—perhaps I’ll be willing to take the belief for granted in the course of planning our joint endeavors, and won’t object when you express the belief in assertion, or assert consequences of the belief—even if I never directly attribute that status. And even if we rarely explicitly

\textsuperscript{17}E.g., MacFarlane (2011b).
\textsuperscript{18}E.g., Chrisman (2007).
\textsuperscript{19}It may also be the case that epistemic contrastivists such as Schaffer (2004, 2007) can take advantage of some of the arguments I’ll discuss.
attribute foundationality (or lack thereof) to beliefs, we may manifest judgments about which beliefs are foundational in other ways. For instance, if I assert “Bob must be in his office,” it’s plausible that I am not only expressing my belief that Bob is in his office, but also conveying that I do not take this belief of mine to be foundationally justified.20

There are many important differences (and perhaps some not-so-important ones as well) between orthodox contextualism, sensitive invariantism, relativism, and expressivism, and these differences have been much debated outside the context of their relevance to foundationalism (usually concerning knowledge attributions rather than attributions of justification, but the issues are similar).21 My hope and expectation, however, is that these differences will not substantially affect how, as a class, these views interact with foundationalism. In particular, I expect that each of these views promises to offer some similar improvements over traditional versions of foundationalism, whatever other drawbacks they may have. For this reason, while I’ll focus on arguing that orthodox contextualist foundationalism is preferable to non-contextualist versions of foundationalism, I expect that similar arguments could be constructed for each of the other three views listed above.

2.1 Advantages of Contextualist Foundationalism

Why think that contextualist foundationalism can avoid the problems for the versions of foundationalism discussed in the previous section? It’s relatively straightforward to see how contextualist foundationalism can avoid the skepticism that threatened strict, traditional versions of foundationalism. The contextualist does not impose any requirement on foundational beliefs to the effect that they must be indubitable or incorrigible, so there is no reason why, in most contexts, a great many beliefs shouldn’t be foundational. In most conversational contexts, the participants to a conversation together presuppose many beliefs (e.g., that their senses are working properly, that they are all speaking the same language, etc.) that, in light of their shared purposes, they have great practical reason to rely on—without any such presuppositions, conversation (and cooperative activity more generally) would grind to a halt.22 A contextualist version of foundationalism is well placed to allow that such assumptions count as foundational beliefs, at least in the contexts in which they are made, as it is natural for the contextualist to hold that a belief’s being sensibly presupposed by the members of a conversational

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20I am gesturing towards the view that ‘must’ in English is an ‘evidential’, in that (one of) the roles of ‘must’ in sentences of the form “it must be that P” is for the speaker to indicate the nature of her evidence for her belief that P. While the view that ‘must’ is an evidential is common, it is controversial just what about a speaker’s evidence she conveys by using ‘must’. See Aikhenvald (2004) for a general discussion of the category of evidentials.

21Hawthorne (2004) and Stanley (2005) both compare sensitive invariantism with orthodox contextualism, and both argue that sensitive invariantism is more attractive than orthodox contextualism. Chrisman (2007) argues that expressivism can reap the benefits of contextualism without some of the main costs. Field (2009) expresses sympathy for both expressivism and relativism in epistemology, and expresses doubts that, properly understood, the views ultimately conflict with one another.

22For a (non-contextualist) version of foundationalism that places great weight on these sorts of practical considerations, see Wright (2004).
context will tend to make it count as foundational in that context.\textsuperscript{23} Somewhat more carefully, the contextualist can allow that assertions made in context $C$ to the effect that some belief is “justified” will count as true just in case the belief in question derives support from beliefs that count as “foundational” in $C$. And since, as we have seen, in most contexts the extension of “foundational” will be far from empty, most contexts will be non-skeptical ones.

It is also not so hard to see how contextualist foundationalism can avoid the permissivism that threatens more recent, liberal versions of foundationalism. As mentioned above, in most contexts a great many beliefs will count as “foundational” (because, e.g., jointly presupposed with good practical reason). But for the same reason, few if any contexts will treat all beliefs as foundational, since in few if any contexts will the participants in a conversation presuppose everything, let alone with good practical reason. When you and I are evaluating Connor’s beliefs, we will not share his presuppositions, and in light of our purposes and practical situation, treating beliefs to the effect that many Fortune 500 CEOs are Martians as foundational (as Connor does) would make little sense. So, assertions to the effect that Connor’s conspiracy beliefs are “justified” needn’t come out as true when made in our context, since few if any of Connor’s conspiracy beliefs will count as “foundational” in our context.

This does, however, raise an obvious question. How should we evaluate assertions to the effect that Connor’s beliefs are justified when those assertions are made in Connor’s context, perhaps among likeminded conspiracy theorists? At this point it may make an important difference which of the four views mentioned earlier in this section we opt for. It strikes me as very difficult for the orthodox contextualist foundationalist to deny that Connor’s assertions (made among fellow conspiracy theorists) to the effect that his beliefs are “justified” are true. Along similar lines, the relativist foundationalist must allow that Connor’s assertions have a kind of relative truth; they are true relative to the standards that prevail in his community. To what extent these consequences of orthodox contextualism and relativism are costs—or, granting that they are costs, to what extent they can be overcome—is a controversial matter.\textsuperscript{24} In my view, the expressivist and relativist foundationalists can capture the more unequivocally negative verdict on Connor’s views that seems to be warranted better than the contextualist, while still retaining the main advantages of orthodox contextualism.\textsuperscript{25} For now I’ll ignore this wrinkle, however.

I hope the above makes it plausible that the contextualist foundationalist can avoid

\textsuperscript{23}This is actually too quick—if we are together making some presupposition, we still might not take it as foundational for some other subject who is not a member of our conversational context. But what I say in the text should at least hold true in cases where the people making epistemic assessments are themselves the subjects of those assessments.

\textsuperscript{24}E.g., in the case of relativism, much will turn on what the relativist says about the relation between relative truth and monadic truth. The relativist may say that, even though Connor’s assertions are true relative to the standards that prevail in his community, they are not true (full stop). At the very least, the relativist has room to maneuver here. See MacFarlane (2011a). And of course, the contextualist can make a similar move—she can insist that while Connor’s assertions to the effect that his beliefs are “justified” are true, his beliefs aren’t justified.

\textsuperscript{25}A version of this point is a main theme of Chrisman (2007).
the extremes of traditional, strict foundationalism, as well as of contemporary, permissive foundationalism. This on its own, however, isn’t obviously such an impressive accomplishment; the particularist foundationalist can do so as well. For instance, she can hold that the criteria beliefs must meet in order to be foundational are laxer than those assumed by traditional foundationalists, but not so liberal as to lead to the consequence that any body of beliefs free from substantial internal conflict (e.g., Connor’s) is justified, without giving a positive account of just what those criteria are, and perhaps denying that such an account can be had.

Does the contextualist foundationalist have any advantage over this sort of approach? I think she does. Not only can the contextualist avoid the implausible consequences of extreme forms of foundationalism (as can the particularist foundationalist), but she can do so in an independently motivated way. While the particularist foundationalist can work backwards from, e.g., the implausibility of skeptical conclusions to get the result that the criteria for foundationality are laxer than those assumed by traditional foundationalists, the contextualist can do better; the sorts of factors that, according to the contextualist, determine which criteria beliefs must meet in order to count as “foundational” in a context are themselves factors that rarely (if ever) lead to contexts that vindicate skeptical arguments. Similarly, while the particularist foundationalist can work backwards from the implausibility of extreme permissivism to get the result that the criteria for beliefs to be foundational must be stricter than those assumed by philosophers like Harman, the contextualist has an independently motivated account of why not all beliefs count as foundational (again in at least most, and perhaps all, contexts). For reasons discussed above, the sorts of factors that allow beliefs to count as “foundational” according to the contextualist are factors that, in almost no contexts, will allow every belief to count as foundational.

We can say a bit more, I think, about why the best way of avoiding the extreme forms of foundationalism will involve some element of contextualism. A natural thought for the contextualist foundationalist is that when a belief counts as “foundational” in a context, it is treated by the occupants of that context as (at least provisionally) a default assumption in reasoning and argument. Foundationalism is plausible because we must always treat some beliefs as default assumptions in reasoning and argument. But it’s also plausible that no belief will (or should) be treated as a default assumption for reasoning and argument in every context. Rather, any belief that we treat as a default assumption in one context, we can treat as a mere hypothesis in another, to be accepted only if it can be supported on independent grounds—i.e., only if it receives support from what we treat as default assumptions in our new context.

While the metaphor of Neurath’s raft is often appealed to by coherentists, I think it is ultimately most congenial to the contextualist foundationalist. The metaphorical way of putting the point of the previous paragraph is as follows: at any given time, we must stand somewhere on the raft, and we cannot examine the planks on which

\[26\] Of course, many contextualists hold that skeptical arguments are sound when voiced in special “skeptical contexts,” such as those in play in certain epistemology seminars. But this belief is by no means universal among contextualists. Michael Williams, e.g., makes no such concession.
we are currently standing (i.e., each context treats some beliefs as foundational, so the
coherentist is wrong). But still, we can always shift our weight to new planks, so as to
be able to examine the ones on which we were previously standing (i.e., no belief counts
as foundational in every context, so the non-contextualist foundationalist is wrong).

So far I’ve presented some motivations for contextualist foundationalism in the con-
text of traditional debates about the structure of epistemic justification. In the remaining
sections of this essay I’ll argue that contextualist foundationalism promises to bear some
more surprising fruit. In the next section, I’ll argue that it can resolve a persistent puzzle
in Bayesian confirmation theory, and in the section after that I’ll argue that it can be
used to save an intuitive form of epistemological internalism from otherwise powerful
arguments.

3 Bayesianism and Defeat

A number of writers have argued that there is a tension between Bayesian accounts
of belief updating, and the holist epistemological claim that all beliefs are defeasible.27
In this section, I’ll first introduce the topic of defeat, and will try to show why, prima
facie, Bayesian approaches to belief updating promise to deliver an attractive account of
how defeat works. I’ll then introduce an apparent problem for such approaches—their
apparent inability to allow that all beliefs are defeasible. While we might respond to this
problem by rejecting Bayesian accounts of defeat, or by rejecting the holist claim that
all beliefs are defeasible, both of these options involve biting a bullet. I’ll argue that we
can solve the problem without biting either bullet—at least not exactly—once we view
Bayesian theories of belief updating as species of foundationalism, and recognize that
this leads to the possibility of a contextualist Bayesian foundationalism. The argument
that there is a problem for the Bayesian depends, I’ll argue, on the assumption that
the Bayesian is a non-contextualist foundationalist. If the Bayesian is a contextualist
foundationalist, however, the problem has a very natural solution.

3.1 Defeat

Consider the following situation:

• Lionel tells you that there’s beer in the fridge, but then Daphne tells you that
  Lionel is a pathological liar.

After you hear from Lionel but before you hear from Daphne, you have justification
to believe that there’s beer in the fridge. But after you hear from Daphne, you no
longer have such justification. Epistemologists say that Daphne’s testimony “defeats”
the support that you had for the claim that there’s beer in the fridge.28

27 In particular, David Christensen (1992), Jonathan Weisberg (2009) and James Pryor (Forthcoming).
28 See INSERT REFERENCE, PROBABLY POLLOCK BUT CHECK PRYOR.
Can we say anything more precise about defeat? Suppose $E$ is our initial evidence, $H$ is the hypothesis that evidence supports, and $E'$ is our defeater. A natural thought is that in cases of defeat, while $E$ on its own is good evidence for $H$, $E \& E'$ is not.

Moreover, the probability calculus suggests a natural formalization of these relations. After all, probabilistic confirmation is non-monotonic; $E$ can confirm $H$, even though $E \& E'$ does not confirm $H$. Because of the non-monotonicity of confirmation, we can treat cases of defeat as ones in which an initial body of evidence supports some hypothesis, but a larger body of evidence—one that includes a defeater in addition to the initial evidence—does not. Applied to the example of Lionel (the liar) and Daphne (the defeater), the strategy might go as follows.

\begin{align*}
\text{Lionel} & = \text{Lionel said that there’s beer in the fridge.} \\
\text{Fridge} & = \text{There’s beer in the fridge.} \\
\text{Liar} & = \text{Daphne said that Lionel is a liar.}
\end{align*}

$Lionel$ is evidence for $Fridge$. We can represent this probabilistically by saying that $P(\text{Fridge} \mid \text{Lionel}) > P(\text{Fridge})$. Daphne’s subsequent testimony is a defeater for the claim that there’s beer in the fridge. If we assume that Daphne’s testimony completely defeats the support provided by Lionel’s testimony, we can represent this as follows: $P(\text{Fridge} \mid \text{Lionel} \& \text{Liar}) = P(\text{Fridge})$. In this particular case—and the cases that will turn out to be tricky share this feature—Daphne’s testimony is not evidence against $Fridge$ in the absence of Lionel’s testimony. So $P(\text{Fridge} \mid \text{Liar}) = P(\text{Fridge})$.\textsuperscript{29} Not all cases of defeat share this feature—for instance, if Daphne had said that there isn’t any beer in the fridge, that would have defeated Lionel’s testimony, and it would have been evidence against $Fridge$ even in the absence of Lionel’s testimony.

While this is a promising beginning of a Bayesian account of defeat, a full story would have to say much more.\textsuperscript{30} The challenge to Bayesian accounts of defeat that I’ll discuss, however, challenges any probabilistic account of defeat that turns on the non-monotonicity of probabilistic confirmation, as the proto-account I’ve sketched so far does.

### 3.2 The Ubiquity of Defeasibility

The (putative) difficulty for Bayesian accounts of defeat is the following: just as one can undermine support for a hypotheses by attacking the link between one’s evidence and the hypothesis, one can also undermine support for hypothesis by attacking the evidence itself. So not all defeat can be understood as involving the accumulation of evidence, where the final, total body of evidence fails to support some hypothesis that

\textsuperscript{29}Cases with this structure are often called cases in which defeat takes the form of “undermining,” rather than “rebutting.” See Kotzen (Ms.) for a Bayesian account of the distinction. Because the cases I’ll discuss are cases of undermining, I’ll often use the term “undermine” in the text, rather than just “defeat”.

\textsuperscript{30}Kotzen (Ms.) does an admirably thorough job of displaying the resources the Bayesian has in describing a wide variety of cases of defeat.
was supported by the initial, smaller body of evidence. Arguments of this general form have been given by David Christensen (1992), Jonathan Weisberg (2009), and James Pryor (Forthcoming). Exactly what this amounts to, and why it’s been thought to be a problem for the Bayesian, can be brought out with an elaboration of our earlier example.

As before, Lionel tells you that there’s beer in the fridge. But now, instead of Daphne saying anything to you, she sends you the following email:

I’ve spoken to your doctor, and its bad news. She says you have an extremely rare condition that causes highly lifelike auditory hallucinations. Until you get treatment, you just can’t trust your ears.

Intuitively, this defeats your support for the hypothesis that there’s beer in the fridge. Why does this present a *prima facie* problem for the Bayesian? Let Lionel and Fridge have the same meanings as before, and let Email be understood as follows:

\[ Email = \text{Daphne wrote that your hearing is completely unreliable.} \]

What we’d like to say would be that the following two conditions hold:

1. \( P(Fridge \mid Lionel) > P(Fridge) \)
2. \( P(Fridge \mid Lionel \& Email) = P(Fridge) \)

This would be to treat Email as playing the same role that Liar did in our earlier case. The problem is that the second condition doesn’t hold. If Lionel said that there’s beer in the Fridge, then even if you’re having auditory hallucinations, there’s probably beer in the fridge. That is, \( P(Fridge \mid Lionel \& Email) > P(Fridge) \).

The basic problem is that if we treat the evidence provided by Lionel’s testimony as Lionel, then that evidence is not defeated by Daphne’s email. Rather, if we are to accommodate the possibility of defeat via Daphne’s email, it looks like we need to treat the evidence provided by Lionel’s testimony as something like Lionel’:

\[ Lionel’ = \text{It sounded to you as if Lionel said that there’s beer in the fridge.} \]

Only if something like Lionel’ was the evidence that Lionel’s testimony provided can we explain why Daphne’s email defeats your support for thinking that there’s beer in the fridge.\(^{31}\)

So far this might not seem like a problem at all. What’s wrong with treating the evidence provided by Lionel’s testimony as Lionel’? The danger is that just as Lionel can be undermined, so too can Lionel’. For instance, suppose Daphne sends you the following email:

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\(^{31}\)One might think that we could stick with treating your evidence as Lionel rather than as Lionel’ so long as we treat you as Jeffrey conditionalizing on the partition [Lionel, ~Lionel], rather than strictly conditionalizing. Weisberg (2009) convincingly argues that this won’t work. While discussing the details is beyond the scope of this paper, the basic problem is as follows. In order to allow that Email undermines the support that Lionel provides for Fridge, Email and Fridge must start out probabilistically independent of one another, but must become probabilistically dependent (in particular, they must become negatively relevant to one another) after Jeffrey conditionalizing on the partition [Lionel, ~Lionel]. But Jeffrey conditionalization can’t induce this sort of probabilistic dependence.
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It’s worse than we thought. Not only is your hearing completely unreliable, but you’re also completely unreliable at telling what auditory experiences you’re having. If you’re in fact hearing a dog bark, you might think that it sounds to you like a trumpet, but actually it sounds to you like a croaking frog.

Some philosophers of a Cartesian bent will recoil here. “There’s room for uncertainty about how things are, but there’s no room for uncertainty about how things seem,” they protest. But to many contemporary ears, this response sounds quaint. True, the example is highly outlandish. But to hold out hope that there is some class of beliefs that is immune to rational undermining, and is such that all episodes of learning can be understood as involving the acquisition of some new beliefs in the privileged class (with further changes in our body of beliefs coming via conditionalization) is to hope for something very much like the traditional versions of foundationalism that are now generally regarded as failures.

To sum up, the challenge to Bayesian accounts of defeat is as follows. If the Bayesian is too generous about what our evidence is—e.g., if she thinks that our evidence in the cases I’ve been discussing is Lionel—then she won’t be able to account for certain cases of defeat. But there’s no way to avoid being too generous; whatever the Bayesian says our evidence is will turn out to be immune to undermining according to the Bayesian. But nothing is immune to undermining.

In response to considerations like these, some writers have expressed optimism that some alternative approach—perhaps an extension of Bayesianism, perhaps not—will be better able to capture the phenomenon of defeat. To be sure, there are substantial limitations of the Bayesian framework, and if we are to insist on a Bayesian approach to defeat, it should not be on the basis of the view that all phenomena of epistemological interest can be captured in the Bayesian framework.

Still, there are reasons to be skeptical of the thought that some alternative approach can provide an improvement over Bayesian accounts of defeat. First, alternative formalisms available so far run into similar troubles in accounting for undermining defeat. Second, the Bayesian account of defeat handles some cases—e.g., the first version

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32Pryor (Forthcoming) discusses some less outlandish examples that could play a similar role in my argument. I’ve stuck with the one that I have for the sake of continuity with the earlier examples.

33Again, this problem might seem to be avoidable by moving to Jeffrey conditionalization, but it’s not. While Jeffrey conditionalizer can allow that what we conditionalize on can be defeated, she cannot allow for cases with the structure I’ve been discussing, where \( E' \) defeats the support \( E \) provides for \( H \), but \( E' \) on its own in the absence of \( E \) is not evidence against \( H \). Again, see Weisberg (2009).

34Christensen (1992) seems hopeful that some extension of Bayesianism will prove adequate. Pryor (Forthcoming) considers some strategies for handling defeat in a version of the Bayesian framework, but also takes seriously the idea that significant departures from that framework might be required to account for defeat.

35To take just one major example, since Bayesianism incorporates an assumption of logical omniscience, it cannot represent logical learning. While there have been attempts to model special cases of logical learning in a Bayesian framework (e.g., Garber 1988), I think it’s fair to say that they are not generally regarded as particularly promising.

36See Weisberg (Ms.).
of the case of Daphne and Lionel—extremely nicely, and these cases don’t seem all that
different from the cases where the Bayesian account seems to falter. If we rest content
with the Bayesian treatment of the original Daphne and Lionel case, but look for some
alternative approach to handle the variations on the original case, we risk ending up with
an account of defeat that looks oddly disjunctive. At least to me, it seems that the sort
of defeat provided by Daphne’s verbal testimony that Lionel is a liar is not different in
kind from the sort of defeat provided by Daphne’s email testimony that you can’t trust
your hearing, or Daphne’s later email stating that you’re unreliable about how things
sound to you. It would be nice to be able to treat each of these cases as having the
same formal structure, so if we’re going to accept a Bayesian account of the first case,
(which is hard to resist) it would be nice to have a Bayesian account of the others as
well. In the next section, I’ll argue that such an account can easily be had, so long as
our Bayesianism takes a contextualist form.

3.3 Bayesianism as (Contextualist) Foundationalism

It is instructive to think of Bayesianism as a species of foundationalism, in which a
subject’s prior probability function, as well as her beliefs in the evidence propositions
she updates on, both have a sort of foundational status. Just as non-Bayesian founda-
tionalists hold that a subject’s beliefs are justified just in case they derive support from
the subject’s foundational beliefs, Bayesians hold that a subject’s credences are justified
just in case they receive the right sort of support from the foundational elements in the
Bayesian epistemological framework (i.e., a subject’s credences are justified just in case
they result from conditionalizing the subject’s prior probability function on the subject’s
evidence propositions).

One reason it is helpful to think of Bayesianism as a version of foundationalism is that
it makes clear that the Bayesian faces versions of the question that (as I argued above)
makes trouble for non-contextualist foundationalists. Rather than the generic “what
criteria must beliefs meet in order to be foundational?” we can pose two Bayesian-
specific versions of this question:

1. What criteria must prior probability functions meet in order to be rationally per-
missible?

2. What criteria must evidence propositions meet in order to be rationally updated
upon?

The first question—referred to in the Bayesian literature as the “problem of the
priors”—is well known, though it has no generally agreed upon solution. Many his-
torically popular answers to the first question, moreover, can be seen as paralleling
historically popular answers to the generic question for foundationalists, and as sharing
the difficulties of those answers. For example, Carnap’s project of determining a prior
probability function on purely logical grounds shares the appeal, and the infeasibility,
of the traditional Cartesian foundationalist project. And the orthodox decision theoretic view that all coherent prior probability functions are rationally permissible bears a family resemblance to Harman’s view that all beliefs are foundational, and faces similar objections. To the extent that many contemporary Bayesian epistemologists reject both of these extremes while declining to offer a positive answer to the problem of the priors, their position is similar to that of the particularist foundationalist that I mentioned earlier in this essay.

The second question—the question about which propositions subjects can rationally update on—is much less often discussed by Bayesians. As the discussion of defeat above should make clear, however, it is not obviously any less difficult than the first; the arguments discussed above seem to suggest that any answer to the second question leads to the implausible conclusion that certain beliefs (namely, whichever ones we are entitled to update on) are immune to undermining.

Both of these questions for the Bayesian, however, can be given contextualist answers. And while a contextualist treatment of the first question is a topic for another essay, in what follows I’ll argue that a contextualist treatment of the second question can let the Bayesian reconcile her treatment of defeat with a version of the ubiquity of defeasibility.

The basic strategy for saving Bayesian accounts of defeat, if we adopt contextualism about what subjects are entitled to conditionalize on, is to argue as follows. First, admit

37While there are many reasons to doubt that the Carnapian project can be completed, Nelson Goodman’s (1983) objections are perhaps the best known.

38Deborah Mayo (1996, pp.86-8) identifies the question of when one should accept a piece of evidence—in the Bayesian framework, when one should conditionalize on an evidence claim—as a crucial one for Bayesians, on which they often have little to say.

One notable exception is Timothy Williamson (2000). Like Mayo, he identifies the question as a key one for Bayesians. Rather than rejecting Bayesianism on the grounds that it cannot handle the question, however, he goes on to defend a version of Bayesianism on which a subject’s evidential probabilities are determined by conditionalizing a prior probability function on each of the propositions the subject knows.

Still, to the extent that this view does not give a broadly Bayesian treatment of knowledge, it can be seen as a sort of retreat, at least if one starts from the point of view of an orthodox Bayesian philosopher of science. As Mayo notes, “the need for a supplementary account of evidence would belie one of the main selling points of the Bayesian approach—that it provides a single, unified account of scientific inference.” (p. 88) However, if we’re not antecedently committed to Bayesianism answering all questions in epistemology and philosophy of science (as I am certainly not) this sort of retreat needn’t strike us as unwelcome, even if we find the Bayesian framework a generally useful one.

39While I know of no developed contextualist treatment of the problem of the priors, Timothy Williamson seems sympathetic to such a position in his treatment of evidential probability:

The discussion will assume an initial probability distribution \( P \). \( P \) does not represent actual or hypothetical credences. Rather, \( P \) measures something like the intrinsic plausibility of hypotheses prior to investigation; this notion of intrinsic plausibility can vary in extension between contexts. (Williamson, 2000, p.211)

Moreover, if Williamson adopted contextualism (or sensitive invariantism, or relativism, or expressivism) about knowledge, then his treatment of evidential probability would amount a (broadly) contextualist answer to the second question, since (as mentioned in the previous footnote) he holds that subjects are rationally entitled to update on (and only on) what they know. While Williamson rejects contextualism and sensitive invariantism (see Williamson, 2005) about knowledge, I don’t know of his stance (if any) on relativism or expressivism.
that in a context in which a subject counts as entitled to update on $E$, $E$ cannot be undermined. So far this looks like biting the bullet and accepting that certain beliefs are immune to undermining—each context will treat certain beliefs as indefeasible. However, the contextualist can account for a version of the ubiquity of defeasibility in the following way: even if we start in a context in which we count as entitled to conditionize on some evidence $E$, and in which $E$ thereby counts as immune to undermining, we can always shift to a new context in which we do not count as so entitled, and in which our support for $E$ (if any at all) is treated as defeasible, and may be undermined when we learn some new proposition $E'$.\(^\text{40}\) Moreover, it may be that we have a systematic tendency to shift contexts in such a way that claims that in an earlier context are treated as indefeasible are, once the question of their defeasibility is raised, treated as defeasible in a later context. Before applying this strategy to the cases discussed earlier, it may help to consider an analogy to a different sort of contextualism.

Many writers find the view that there are precise cutoffs in the extensions of vague predicates—e.g., that there is a numbers of hairs $n$ such that someone with $n$ hairs is bald, but someone with $n + 1$ hairs is not bald—extremely implausible. But it’s very hard to develop plausible alternative theories of how vague predicates work that avoid commitments to precise cutoffs of any sort.\(^\text{41}\) One way to blunt some of the counterintuitiveness of precise cutoffs claims is to adopt some form of contextualism about the extensions of vague predicates.\(^\text{42}\) Roughly, the idea is that each use of a predicate like “bald” may determine a precise cutoff, even if there is no single cutoff that is determined by all uses of “bald.” Vague predicates may have contextually local cutoffs, without having global cutoffs. Stated at this level of generality, it may be hard to see why this should constitute an advance over the more flatfooted theory on which there is a particular cutoff for all uses of “bald.” In my view, however, the details of Diana Raffman’s (1994; 1996) and Delia Graf Fara’s (2000) work show that contextually local cutoffs are significantly more palatable than global cutoffs.

For instance, imagine a particular speaker is faced with a series of increasingly hirsute men, and must classify each as “not bald” or “bald.” Just as there is a last straw that breaks the camel’s back, there will be a last man in the series that the speaker classifies as bald. But which man this is will be highly sensitive to various aspects of the local context—e.g., depending on factors such as the direction of the forced march (whether the speaker starts with the hairy men or the hairless ones), which men she’s recently heard others classify as “bald” or “not bald,” and maybe even arbitrary matters like what she had for breakfast, the speaker might draw the cutoff between the bald men

\(^{40}\)Ram Neta (2003, 2004, 2005), has defended contextualism about evidence, and the view I express here is heavily indebted to his work. To my knowledge, however, he has never combined his contextualism with Bayesian approaches to belief updating, or used it to address the apparent challenge to such puzzles presented by the ubiquity of defeasibility. The strategy I pursue in this section also bears some similarity to Lewis’ (1996) contextualist strategy for saving closure principles for knowledge from the threat of Kripke’s dogmatism paradox. Like Neta, though Lewis does not apply his discussion of contextualism to Bayesianism.

\(^{41}\)See Williamson (1994).

and the men who are not bald differently. If we think that this sort of usage is correct—that such a speaker would be using “bald” just as she should—then it’s tempting to adopt a theory on which uses of vague predicates do determine precise cutoffs, but that these cutoffs are sensitive to the idiosyncratic dispositions and interests of particular speakers on particular occasions of utterance. If this theory can be supplemented with an explanation of why the cutoffs never seem to be right where we look—e.g., why it never seems that for some particular pain of men with \( n \) and \( n+1 \) hairs, the first is bald and the second is not—then the counterintuitiveness of the claims it makes about precise cutoffs will be further blunted. And both Raffman and Fara provide such explanations.

The analogy to the present discussion works as follows. The contextualist views about vagueness I’ve just been discussing have two main components:

1. An account of how particular utterances of vague predicates determine precise cutoffs, and

2. An explanation of why the cutoffs never seem to be where we’re looking (and so, derivatively, an explanation of our temptation to deny claims about precise cutoffs)

The strategy that I’m suggesting for the Bayesian will need to have two analogous components:

1. An account of how particular contexts do treat certain beliefs as indefeasible, and

2. An explanation of why no particular belief we consider ever seems to be indefeasible (and so, derivatively, an explanation of our temptation to endorse the claim that all beliefs are defeasible)

While developing these components in the level of detail that Raffman, Fara, and others have done in the case of contextualism about vagueness is well beyond the scope of this paper, I hope the following will give the reader some idea of how the story might go, as applied to the cases of defeat discussed earlier in this section.

As for the first component of our strategy, the short answer is that in any context, certain claims will count as legitimate to update on, and for reasons we’ve already seen, what you update on will be immune to undermining, in the Bayesian framework. For instance, we can agree in the initial case that you are entitled to conditionalize on Lionel, and that doing so provides support for Fridge, but that this support is defeated when you learn Liar. The initial, flatfooted Bayesian account of what’s going on when Lionel tells you there’s beer in the fridge, and then Daphne tells you that Lionel is a liar, can remain untouched.

What about the next case, where Daphne sends you the email message saying that you’re experiencing auditory hallucinations? If we started out discussing the earlier case, then bringing up this more complicated one is liable to induce a shift into a new context in which you no longer count as having been entitled to conditionalize on Lionel in the

\footnote{Raffman (1994) focuses on the forced march version of the sorites, and on the idea that correct usage will involve making arbitrary distinctions that differ from one occasion of use to another.}
first place. In this new context—one in which we are taking seriously possibilities in
which you’re unreliable about who says what—all you’re entitled to conditionalize on
is Lionel’—the claim that it sounded to you as if Lionel said there’s beer in the fridge.
While this claim on its own supports Fridge, together with Email—which we still take
you to be entitled to conditionalize on—it does not.

The next step is similar. When we move to the still more far fetched case in which
Daphne tells you that you’re not only experiencing auditory hallucinations, but that
you’re also unreliable about how things sound to you, we induce yet another context
shift. Now that we don’t regard you as having unproblematic access to how things sound
to you, we treat you as not entitled to conditionalize on claims about your auditory
experiences. Rather, we’ll think you’re only entitled to conditionalize on some other
claim—one that won’t support the hypothesis that there’s beer in the fridge when
combined with the evidence you get from Daphne’s last email message.

Whenever we regard a claim as having been defeated, we’ll give the same formal
account; we’ll regard somebody as having had an initial body of evidence $E$ that sup-
ported some hypothesis $H$, but as having a final body of evidence $E’$—a superset of
$E$—that no longer supports $E$. That is, defeat will always be explained as involving
only evidence accretion, and never evidence deletion. The role that context plays, how-
ever, is in determining what gets to count as the initial evidence; rather than giving a
context-independent, univocal answer to the question of what a subject’s evidence is, we
allow that our answer to questions about what a subject’s evidence is will change, as our
context changes (e.g., we may initially regard you as entitled to update on claims about
what Lionel said, but we also recognize that if our context shifts, we may no longer
regard you as so entitled).

Just what induces these context shifts? This is closely related to the demand for the
second component of our strategy—the demand for an explanation of why no particular
belief we consider ever seems to be indefeasible. The answer will depend on the particular
form our contextualism takes, and things will of course look different if we instead opt
for some version of sensitive invariantism, relativism, or expressivism. But certain basic
factors may be common to each approach in the family—perhaps subjects will generally
not count as entitled to update on some proposition when there are salient possibilities
(salient to whom? that may differ depending on the approach) in which they are in
error as to the truth of that proposition. Most of the time we’re ignoring lots of error
possibilities, and we’ll treat subjects as entitled to conditionalize on claims about their
external environment. But in special cases where certain error possibilities are raised
to salience, we’ll retreat, and treat subjects as entitled to conditionalize only on other
claims—perhaps claims about their experiences, or claims about their inclinations to
believe claims about their experiences, or something else. And there isn’t any principled
stopping point to this process of retreat—there’s no sort of evidence statement about
which no doubts could be raised, though in practice we’re usually not inclined to retreat

\[44\] Which one? Hard to say—we’d probably have to flesh out the case a good deal more to get a
determinate answer to the question of what, in the new context, one would count as entitled to update
on.
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very far.\textsuperscript{45}

We can use these observations to provide the basis for a general story about why no beliefs seem to be indefeasible; raising the question as to whether some belief is defeasible essentially amounts to an invitation to consider possibilities in which the belief might be false, so once the indefeasibility of a belief is in question, the context will typically shift so as to ensure that the belief is defeasible. That is, once we are considering possibilities in which we are in error as to whether $E$, it will seem irresponsible to simply take $E$ for granted; rather, we’ll be inclined to accept $E$ only if it receives adequate support from other claims we do take for granted. But this is just what it is for us to treat $E$ as enjoying merely defeasible support. Just as—at least according to Raffman and Fara—raising the question of whether the cutoff for “bald” lies between a particular pair of adjacent men in a sorites series will typically bring us into a new context in which the cutoff does not lie between those two men, even if it did in our old context, raising the question of whether some claim $E$ enjoys indefeasible support will typically bring us into a new context in which $E$ enjoys merely defeasible support, even if it initially enjoyed indefeasible support in our old context.

The apparent difficulty for Bayesian accounts of defeat required assuming that the Bayesian must give a single, context-independent answer to the question of what you should conditionalize on in the case of Lionel and Daphne. Whatever answer she gives, as we saw before, she’s in trouble. But now we see that the Bayesian can reject the demand to answer, once and for all, what you should conditionalize on in such a case. In most contexts, where we’re not worried about certain error possibilities, there’s no obstacle to allowing that you’re entitled to conditionalize on claims about what Lionel said. But other contexts will demand other treatments, and we needn’t allow that there’s some privileged, stable context that we could never be pushed out of—we needn’t allow that there’s any answer to the question of what you should conditionalize on that we couldn’t come to reject after yet another context shift.\textsuperscript{46}

Moreover, the “retreat” needn’t always be to weaker and weaker propositions. Rather, as the Neurath’s raft metaphor suggests, it might simply be to different propositions.

\textsuperscript{46}Earlier in this section I suggested that it would be a defect of a treatment of defeat if it were “oddly disjunctive.” But one might worry that the sort of account I’ve suggested on behalf of the Bayesian is just that. We might put the worry as follows: on the story I’ve been sketching, there are really two quite different types of defeat. The first is the simple sort of defeat that doesn’t involve anything like context shifting. The second is the more complicated sort, which requires a broadly contextualist explanation. This is another place where the differences between the four views I discussed earlier in this essay are significant. In particular, if we are sensitive invariantists, I think the charge is entirely accurate.

The sensitive invariantist version of the strategy that I’ve been discussing will have to countenance two very different sorts of ways in which a subject’s rational degrees of belief can change. The first way will involve acquiring new evidence, and may—for all I’ve said here, at least—be modeled as Bayesian conditionalization. The second will be the sort of update that occurs when a subject’s situation/interests change in such a way as to make different beliefs foundational for that subject. This cannot be modeled as conditionalization. And defeat can involve either sort of update. Whether it is a drawback of sensitive invariantism that it must allow for these two sorts of defeat is a difficult question, though see Greco (Forthcoming) for some discussion of some difficulties associated with the sorts of non-conditionalization updates the sensitive invariantist must countenance.

However, if we are contextualists, expressivists, or relativists, I think we can resist the charge that
In the absence of more general motivations for contextualist foundationalism, this reply on behalf of the Bayesian might seem ad hoc. But once we admit both that (a) contextualist foundationalism is a viable contender in debates about the structure of epistemic justification, and that (b) Bayesianism is in effect a species of foundationalism in which the beliefs that subjects are entitled to update on play a foundational role, it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that (c) we must take seriously contextualist Bayesian foundationalism, according to which the beliefs that subjects are entitled to update on play a foundational role, but which sorts of beliefs get to play that role varies with context. And once we take that view seriously, we see that it has the considerable virtue of providing the foundations for a general account of defeat.

Still, it’s worth acknowledging that the sort of contextualism we must appeal to in order to employ the strategy I’ve been discussing is, in important ways, a departure from some familiar forms of contextualism. Stalnaker (2008, pp.102-105) distinguishes between superficial and deep contextualism. Roughly, the sort of context-dependence posited by the superficial contextualist is eliminable, while the sort of context-dependence posited by the deep contextualist is not. The deep contextualist is contextualist “all the way down,” while the superficial contextualist thinks that, once you start digging, you eventually hit some context-independent epistemological bedrock. To illustrate the distinction, it will help to have some examples.

Consider the following simple form of contextualism about justified belief. A subject’s belief that $P$ is properly called “justified” in a given context only if the epistemic probability of $P$ for the subject is above a certain threshold. Which threshold? That depends on the context. On this view, the epistemic probability of $P$ does not depend on context—context only comes into the picture in determining how probable $P$ must be in order for a subject’s belief that $P$ to merit the label “justified.” This is a version of superficial contextualism, since it allows an epistemological notion—epistemic probability—for which contextualism does not hold.

David Lewis (1996) defends another version of superficial contextualism. According to Lewis, knowing that $P$ requires eliminating all contextually relevant counterpossibilities. The sense in which the contextualist can deny that she countenances two forms of update (or two associated forms of defeat) parallels the contextualist strategy for affirming “intellectualism”—the thesis that what one knows depends only on “truth-conducive factors.” Roughly, while the contextualist will accept different sentences involving epistemological vocabulary as factors other than truth-conducive factors change, (perhaps as the practical stakes change, or as she starts considering new error possibilities) in no context will she affirm that some subject would (or would not) know/justifiably believe some proposition if only the non-truth-conducive factors were different (e.g., if only the practical stakes were different, or if only we were considering fewer error possibilities). See Stanley (2005, pp. 2-3) and DeRose (2009, pp. 24-5), both of whom accept that the sensitive invariantist must deny intellectualism, while the contextualist may accept it. Moreover, I take it that this feature of contextualism is shared by expressivism and relativism, for essentially the same reasons.

The view defended by Stewart Cohen (1988) isn’t too far from this one. He advances a contextualist version of the relevant alternatives theory of knowledge; on his view epistemic probability is taken as fixed independently of context, and how probable an alternative has to be before it counts as relevant is determined by context. Also, while they’re sensitive invariantists rather than contextualists, Fantl and McGrath (2009) employ a strategy very much like the one I sketch in the text.
abilities to $P$. His view is contextualist because the set of relevant counterpossibilities varies with context. But what does the eliminating—what one’s evidence is—does not. On Lewis’ view, one’s evidence is always given by the content of one’s experience and one’s memory (1996, p. 425). If we put things in Bayesian terms, this amounts to the claim that one is always entitled to update on the content of one’s experience and memory, no more and no less. For my purposes, this is a crucial juncture at which Lewis’ contextualism takes a superficial rather than a deep form, crucial because the Lewisian contextualist cannot appeal to my strategy for reconciling Bayesian accounts of updating with the apparent ubiquity of defeasibility; Lewis’ view straightforwardly implies that our knowledge of the contents of our experience and memory is indefeasible in every context, so if we want to reject that assumption we’ll need to look elsewhere.

Most writers who’ve defended versions of contextualism have only officially committed themselves to superficial contextualism, since they’ve only defended contextualism about one or another epistemological notion. Moreover, insofar as they invoke some context insensitive epistemological machinery in explaining their position—e.g., a context insensitive notion of epistemic probability—they’re committed to rejecting deep contextualism. Still, while deep contextualism is a radical thesis, I think it deserves to be taken seriously. I’ve already shown how deep contextualism (or at least, a form of contextualism that’s deeper than some extant popular forms of contextualism) can help the Bayesian. In the next section of this essay, I’ll point to another unobvious virtue of contextualist foundationalism. While it’s at least not obvious to me that only deep versions of contextualist foundationalism have this virtue, my suspicion is that, as in the case of Bayesianism and defeat, superficial contextualists will not be able to avail themselves of the argumentative strategy I suggest.

4 Internalism and Mobile Homes

In this section I’ll argue that contextualist foundationalism provides us the necessary resources to rescue a prima facie attractive version of access internalism from otherwise powerful objections.

48 Stalnaker (2008, pp.102-5) gives further reasons why Lewis’ view is best thought of a superficial form of contextualism.

49 As an aside, I’m inclined to think that many versions of superficial contextualism aren’t particularly interesting qua epistemological theses (though they may be interesting qua semantic theses); to the extent that the contextualist allows a realm of “pure,” context-insensitive epistemology, epistemologists can largely ignore context and focus their investigations on topics to which it isn’t relevant. Moreover, the existence of a set of context-insensitive epistemological questions limits the scope of the epistemological work that can be done by contextualist theses. For instance, if we try to solve skeptical problems by appeal to some version of superficial contextualism, such problems will likely reappear concerning epistemological notions where we concede that contextualism won’t help. If we are contextualists about knowledge but not epistemic probability, then even if our contextualism helps us explain why utterances of “I know that I have hands” might be true in ordinary contexts, it won’t help us explain why the epistemic probability that I have hands is any higher than the epistemic probability that I’m a handless brain in a vat.

50 See Stalnaker (2008) for further motivation.
4.1 Motivating Access

Consider the following strong “access internalist” epistemological principle:

(Access) If $S$ has justification to believe that $P$, then $S$ is in a position to know that $S$ has justification to believe that $P$.

There are various ways of providing some prima facie motivation for this principle. I’ll consider just two. The first turns on an analogy to ethics. Many ethicists distinguish between an “objective” sense of ought claims, and a “subjective” sense of ought claims, where roughly, what I objectively ought to do is what there is most reason to do in light of all the information, and what I subjectively ought to do is what there is most reason to do in light of the information available to me. For instance, suppose my friend is hungry, and I have in my possession some bread that is, unbeknownst to me, poisoned, but which I have every reason to believe is healthy and nourishing. Ethicists will say that I objectively ought not give my friend the bread, but I subjectively ought to give her the bread.

One reason many ethicists are interested in the subjective ought is that the subjective ought is thought to be “action-guiding” in a way that the objective ought is not. It’s very hard to make out just what this sense of “action-guiding” amounts to, but it’s tempting to try to explain it by appeal to the idea that subjects are often not in a position to know what they objectively ought to do, but they are always in a position to know what they subjectively ought to do. That certainly seems to be what’s going on in the example of the poisoned bread—I can’t know that things wouldn’t go best were I to give my friend the bread, but I can know that giving my friend the bread is the best option in light of the information available to me.

But the claim that we are always in a position to know what we subjectively ought to do is an ethical analogue of (Access). That is, we can draw a similar distinction between objective and subjective oughts in epistemology, and the same sorts of motivations that push ethicists to think that, if the subjective ought is to be action-guiding, we must always be in a position to know what we subjectively ought to do, will push us to accept (Access). It’s natural to think that insofar as there is an epistemic analogue of the “objective ought,” we always epistemically ought to believe the truth, in this objective sense of the epistemic ought. But that’s not the sense of epistemic justification, or

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51 For a discussion of access internalism, and how it differs from other versions of internalism, see Conee and Feldman (2001).
52 While I focused on outright beliefs in this paper, there are probabilistic versions of (Access) as well, and the strategy I provide here applies, mutatis mutandis, to the claim that subjects are always in a position to know which credence functions they have justification to adopt.
53 A common view in recent years involves holding that “ought” isn’t really two-way ambiguous or polysemous, but rather that “ought” claims must be understood as involving a kind of tacit relativity to a body of information, which might be all the information (as in the “objective ought”), might be the subject’s information (as in the “subjective ought”), but might be some other body of information too. See Finlay and Björnsson (2010), and Kolodny and MacFarlane (2010).
54 See, e.g., Hedden (2012), Sepielli (Forthcoming).
55 See Gibbard (2005).
epistemic oughts, that epistemologists are interested in. We might try to explain why
that is by saying that we are not always in a position to know what is true, so the
objective epistemic ought is not “deliberation-guiding,” but we are always in a position
to know what we have justification to believe, so epistemic justification is deliberation-
guiding.

Claims like this are apt to raise suspicions, in part because there are powerful reasons
to doubt that there could be any sort of claim that we are always in a position to know
whenever it is true, so we might worry that the relevant sense of “action-guiding-ness”
that the subjective ought is supposed to have, and “deliberation-guiding-ness” that we
might hope epistemic justification could have, is too strong for any interesting normative
notion to satisfy. (Access) just amounts to the claim that the condition of having justi-
fication to believe that \( P \) is “luminous” in the sense of luminosity for which Williamson
(2000) argues that no non-trivial conditions are luminous. I’ll discuss worries in this
neighborhood soon—for now I’m just trying to explain why one might be attracted to
(Access). Later in this section I’ll try to show that adopting contextualist foundational-
ism can let defenders of (Access) avoid objections in the spirit of Williamson’s.\(^{56}\)

The second strategy for motivating (Access) that I’ll discuss involves focusing on
the impropriety of various broadly Moore-paradoxical claims, and arguing that this
impropriety is best explained by (Access). Consider claims like the following:

1. \( P \) and I do not have justification to believe that \( P \).
2. I have justification to believe that \( P \) and it is not the case that \( P \)
3. \( P \) and it is an open question whether or not I have justification to believe that \( P \)
4. I have justification to believe that \( P \) and it is an open question whether or not
\( P \).\(^{57}\)

If (Access) were true, it would provide an easy explanation of the impropriety of
1-4. With slight modifications depending on which claim’s impropriety we’re explaining,
the general strategy is as follows. Whenever a subject has justification to believe \( P \), if
(Access) is true, then the subject is in a position to know that she has justification to
believe that \( P \). So if she believes \( P \), but fails to believe that she has justification to
believe \( P \) (either because she believes that she lacks justification to believe that \( P \), or
because she regards it as an open question whether she has such justification), then she
is going wrong in one of two ways. Either (1) she lacks justification to believe \( P \) (and so
is unreasonable in believing it), or (2) she has justification to believe \( P \), but she is failing

\(^{56}\)While I will engage with objections in the spirit of Williamson’s, I won’t respond to the specific
anti-luminosity argument here. I do offer a strategy for responding to it—I deny Williamson’s safety
requirement, and try to show why we might be attracted to it even if it is false—in Greco (Forthcominga).

\(^{57}\)This list, and the strategy of motivating claims like (Access) by appeal to the impropriety of claims
like the ones on the list, is from Smithies (2012). See also Feldman (2005), who pursues a more limited
version of a similar strategy, and Horowitz (Forthcoming), who focuses on the impropriety of claims
like 1, and in particular how believing them can lead to unreasonable behavior as well as unreasonable
inferences as more and more such claims are believed.
to believe something that she is in a position to know (namely, that she has justification to believe that \( P \)). If failing to believe something that one is in a position to know is a mistake, from an epistemic point of view, then we can explain why somebody who believes one of 1-4 is always making some kind of epistemic error.

Providing such explanations is a good deal harder if we don’t accept anything like (Access)—3 and 4 are particularly tricky. If (Access) is false, then there are cases in which one has justification to believe some proposition \( P \), but one is not in a position to know that one has such justification. But then it seems like the appropriate response to such cases should be to believe a claim like 3—to believe that \( P \), while regarding it as an open question whether one has justification to believe that \( P \). So if believing claims of the form of 3 is always improper, then we have some motivation to accept (Access).\(^{58}\)

### 4.2 Access and Traditional Foundationalism

Even if strong *prima facie* motivations for (Access) can be assembled, there are powerful reasons to think that nothing of the sort could be true. Suppose (Access) *were* true. What could explain its truth? A natural, almost inescapable thought, is the following. (Access) could only be true if there were some distinctive realm of propositions that constituted the supervenience base for facts about what we have justification to believe, such that concerning claims in this distinctive realm, one is always in a position to know the truth. While this might not be *enough* to guarantee the truth of (Access), it seems at least required. After all, if the supervenience base for facts about justification is such that in some cases we are *not* in a position to know the truth concerning it, then such cases will be natural candidates for cases in which we are also not in a position to know what we have justification to believe.

In light of such considerations, some defenders of (Access) do endorse strong claims about our epistemic access to the facts on which justification supervenes; Smithies (2012) defends a version of (Access), and holds that the truth of his version of (Access) is explained by the fact that facts about what we are justified in believing supervene on facts about a very special class of mental states. According to Smithies, “The determinants of justification are non-epistemic facts about one’s mental states, which are introspectively accessible in the sense that one has introspective justification to believe that those mental facts obtain if and only if they obtain.”\(^{59}\) (Smithies, 2012, p.297) Smithies goes on to hold that since it is an *a priori* matter which beliefs are justified by which introspectively accessible mental states, one is always in a position to know what one has justification to believe, by a combination of introspection (to find out which introspectively accessible mental states one is in), and *a priori* reflection (to find out what beliefs those mental

\(^{58}\)If it doesn’t strike the reader as implausible that believing such claims is always improper, see Smithies (2012) for some persuasion. See also Sosa (2009), who argues for the impropriety of some similar claims, though does not take such impropriety to support (Access), and Greco (Forthcomingb).

\(^{59}\)One difference between my formulation and Smithies’ is that while I’ve put (Access) in terms of being in a position to know what one has justification to believe, the claims he discusses are put in terms of having justification to believe the truth about what one has justification to believe. I don’t think this will make a difference for my purposes.
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states justify).

If this is the only sort of strategy available for explaining (Access), however, many philosophers will be inclined to deny the truth of (Access), rather than to accept an inference to the best explanation argument for the existence of a distinctive class of "non-epistemic facts about one’s mental states," with the feature that one “has introspective justification to believe that those mental facts obtain if and only if they obtain.” After all, to accept the existence of such a class of facts is to accept something very much like a traditional, Cartesian sort of foundationalism. It is to accept that we have what Williamson (2000) has called a “cognitive home,” a realm in which nothing is hidden to us—a class of claims such that, if we pay close enough attention (for Smithies, as well as for Descartes, this will involve doing careful enough introspection), we will always know which such claims are true, and which are false. Moreover, it is to hold that this cognitive home isn’t trivially or uninterestingly small—it doesn’t only include, e.g., claims to the effect that we exist—but instead it includes enough to form a supervenience base for all facts about what we have justification to believe.

But there are both general theoretical reasons to doubt that we have any such cognitive home, as well as specific reasons to doubt that claims about our mental states in particular could constitute such a home. Rather than try to rebut these claims, in the next section I’ll try to argue that explaining (Access) does not require positing the existence of a cognitive home, or at least not one of a traditional sort. Rather, if we adopt contextualist foundationalism, we can explain (Access) by appeal to a sort of cognitive mobile home—in each context, we’ll regard some class of facts as constituting a subject’s cognitive home, but when reasonable doubts about the subject’s ability to know facts in the relevant class are raised and taken seriously, the context will shift, and so will the class of facts that we take to constitute the subject’s cognitive home.

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The basic strategy that the contextualist can use to defend (Access) is to hold that contexts determine local supervenience bases for facts about justification, rather than global ones. Moreover, she can hold that it is a constraint on B’s counting as a local supervenience base for facts about what a subject S is justified in believing, that in the context in which B counts as such a supervenience base, S counts as in a position to know the truth concerning B. To see what this amounts to, and how it can help the

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60Quine (1951/1953) is probably the most influential critic of the general picture on which all of our knowledge rests on beliefs about matters in a “cognitive home.” For some reasons to doubt that facts about our phenomenology in particular constitute such a home, see Schwitzgebel (2011).

61The distinction between local and global supervenience bases should become clear as this section progresses. As an aside, it needn’t be an idiosyncratic feature of facts about justification that they only have local supervenience bases. See Rayo (Forthcoming) for a “localist” view of representation on which, quite generally, contexts only determine local supervenience bases for facts of most sorts. It is the sort of distinction between “local” and “global” supervenience bases that he is talking about that I mean to be tracking with my terminology; the fact that philosophers of mind use the words “local” and “global” to distinguish between different versions of supervenience is, from the standpoint of the present paper, an unfortunate coincidence—I do not mean to be tracking the same distinction that they are.
defender of (Access), it will help to consider an example.

Suppose we’re in a context in which the following facts are all taken for granted: Peter is hosting a party, and he has either said to Justine that the party starts at 7:00, or that it starts at 8:00. Whatever Peter said, Justine heard him.

Now someone raises the question of what Justine has justification to believe concerning the time at which the party starts. A natural answer is that Justine should believe whatever Peter told her—if Peter said the party is at 7:00, that’s what Justine has justification to believe. Mutatis mutandis if he said the party is at 8:00. That is, the facts about what Justine has justification to believe locally supervene (given the background presuppositions of our context) on the facts about what Peter said. And because we take it that Justine heard Peter—she knows what Peter said—we’ll take it that Justine is in a position to know what she has justification to believe.

To be sure, facts about what Peter said would not make a plausible global supervenience base for facts about what Justine has justification to believe concerning the start time of the party. There are certainly contexts in which we would not hold that what Peter said fixes what Justine has justification to believe concerning when the party starts. One obvious sort of situation in which we might cease regarding facts about what Peter said as such a supervenience base would be if we were to come to doubt that such facts provide good evidence concerning the start time of the party—if, e.g., Peter had a reputation as a Prankster, we might not think that Justine would have justification to trust him. But another reason we might cease regarding facts about what Peter said as a supervenience base for Justine’s justification would be if we were to come to doubt that Justine was in a position to know what Peter said.

Suppose, e.g., we come to think that Peter might’ve mumbled, or that Justine has trouble hearing. If we continued to hold that Justine has justification to believe whatever Peter said, then we would have to regard Justine as not being in a position to know what she has justification to believe. But a more likely response, I think, is that we will change our minds about which facts determine what Justine is justified in believing. Perhaps we’ll hold that what she ought to believe about when the party starts depends on when Peter’s parties have started in the past (which we take her to remember) or on what Peter’s email said (which again, we take her to remember), or just on her best guess as to what Peter said (and we’ll take her to be in a position to know what her best guess is), or on some combination of the above sorts of facts. Whatever the new local supervenience base is for facts about what Justine has justification to believe, as long as Justine counts as in a position to know the truth about facts in the new base, there needn’t be any obstacle to her being in a position to know what she has justification to believe.

Here’s the more general picture into which the above example fits. Each context will determine a local supervenience base for facts about what a subject is justified in believing—a set of propositions $B$ such that, within the local set of worlds taken seriously...
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in the context, there are no differences in what the subject is justified in believing without differences in which propositions in $B$ are true. Moreover, it is a constraint on such bases that if $B$ is a supervenience base for $S$’s justification in context $C$, then $S$ counts as in a position to know which are the truths in $B$, relative to context $C$. This way, we will never say that the facts that determine what a subject ought to believe are facts that the subject is not in a position to know. We can think of $B$ as a sort of cognitive home—a realm of propositions such that the subject is always in a position to know which are the truths in that realm.

But because we do not believe in cognitive homes of the traditional sort, we’ll admit that whatever $B$ is, we will be able to raise reasonable doubts about $S$’s ability to know which are the truths in $B$. To the extent that we take such doubts seriously, the context will shift, and in our new context $C'$, $B$ will not be the local supervenience base for facts about what $S$ has justification to believe. Rather, there will be some new supervenience base $B'$, such that $S$ does count as in a position to know which are the truths in $B'$. In each context, we’ll count $S$ as having some cognitive home (i.e., there will be some supervenience base for facts about $S$’s justification, such that $S$ is in a position to know which are the truths in the base), but which class of facts constitutes $S$’s home will vary from context to context; because $S$'s cognitive home is apt to shift its location whenever doubts of certain sorts are taken seriously, we might call it a mobile home.

While I’ve tried to show how the contextualist can defend (Access), I certainly haven’t shown that she should; I don’t take the availability of the strategy I’ve presented in this section to come close to constituting a knock-down argument in favor of (Access). I do take it, however, to change the dialectic concerning (Access) in an important way. The truth of (Access) can seem to require the truth of a very strong version of traditional foundationalism. While some friends of (Access) have accepted this and endorsed such strong versions of traditional foundationalism, most philosophers will regard this as too big a bullet to bite. Once we see that (Access) does not depend on such a strong version of traditional foundationalism, but can get by appealing only to a more modest contextualist foundationalism, we can evaluate the plausibility of (Access) independently of the plausibility of strong versions of traditional foundationalism. Aside from adducing some prima facie motivations for (Access) at the beginning of this section, I haven’t said anything that bears on how that new evaluation will turn out. Still, I take it that the dialectical situation for defenders of (Access) looks much rosier once they are freed from commitment to strong versions of traditional foundationalism.

5 Conclusion

The idea that contextualism can provide a sort of middle way in the debate between coherentism on the one hand, and traditional foundationalism on the other, is not new. But with the exception of some discussion of traditional skeptical problems, there has been relatively little work done exploring how other epistemological debates look once
we take this middle way.\textsuperscript{63} I regard this as an oversight. Contextualist foundationalism promises to illuminate debates about Bayesianism and defeat, debates about internalism in epistemology, and probably many others as well.

**Bibliography**


\textsuperscript{63}Much of Michael Williams' work involves using a sort of contextualist foundationalism to argue that global skeptical challenges are somehow illegitimate. He has not, to my knowledge, discussed the relationship between contextualist foundationalism and Bayesianism, or attempted to use contextualist foundationalism to defend anything like (Access)—in fact, he endorses a qualified sort of externalism in Williams (Forthcoming). Ram Neta's work (2003; 2004; 2005) also involves something like contextualism about which beliefs are foundational, but to my knowledge he has not applied his version of contextualism to the topics I've addressed in the last two sections of this paper.


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