

3. Knowledge and Context

Take a fairly standard definition of knowledge:

X knows that P iff X can eliminate every possibility in which P is false

That is a very strong definition; it makes knowledge very hard to get. With the quantifier ranging over all possibilities whatsoever it gives rise to a form of 'invariantism' But now follow standard policy elsewhere and treat the quantifier 'every possibility' against a contextually restricted domain; as we might put it:

X knows that P iff X can eliminate every relevant possibility in which P is false

Two influential ways of doing this, which have become known, confusingly, as contextualism (e.g. Lewis) and subject sensitive invariantism (Fantl and McGrath; Hawthorn; Stanley). The two approaches are hard to tell apart with first person ascriptions

Contextualism

It is the context of the ascriber that makes the difference.

Which worlds can be properly ignored? Lewis:

Rule of actuality
 Rule of belief
 Rule of resemblance
 Rule of reliability
 Rule of attention

It's the last that enables the sceptic to destroy knowledge. Is it too strong?

Subject sensitive invariantism

It is the context of the ascriber that makes the difference. Do you know that the bank is open on a Saturday? Perhaps it depends upon how important it is to you.