*Episteme* (2026), **23**, 565–577
doi:10.1017/epi.2024.39

episteme

ARTICLE

# Contextualism and the truth norm

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(Received 7 January 2024; revised 14 August 2024; accepted 19 August 2024; first published online 05 March 2025)

**Abstract**

What should we believe? One plausible view is that we should believe what is true. Another is that we should believe what is rational to believe. I will argue that both these theses can be accounted for once we add an independently motivated contextualism about normative terms. According to contextualism, the content of 'ought' depends on two parameters – a goal and a modal base (or set of possible worlds). It follows that there is a sense in which we should believe truths and a sense in which we should believe what is rational to believe.

**Keywords:** Truth norm; rationality norm; contextualism

## 1. Introduction

Which norms govern what one ought to believe? The *Truth Norm* says that we ought to believe what is true. But we seem doomed to violate this norm given our imperfect epistemic position. A less demanding alternative, the *Rationality Norm*, says that we ought to believe what is rational to believe. But this seems to allow too big a gap between beliefs and truth.

I will argue that the intuitions driving the controversy can be clarified by an independently motivated contextualism about normative terms like 'ought'.[1] According to contextualism, the content of normative terms depends on two parameters – a modal base (or set of possible worlds) and a goal that provides a ranking of worlds. One goal is to have true beliefs. Another goal is to have rational beliefs. As different goals can be relevant in different contexts, there will be some contexts where the *Truth Norm* is relevant and others where the *Rationality Norm* is relevant. Thus, contextualism can explain why there is something compelling about both norms.[2] Attempts to distinguish

[1]For discussions of contextualism about normative terms, see Wedgwood (2006, 2007: ch. 5, 2016); Brogaard (2008); Kolodny and MacFarlane (2010) and Björnsson and Finlay (2010); Dowell (2012, 2013); Charlow (2013), Cariani, Kaufmann, and Kaufmann (2013), Carr (2015), and Chrisman (2015); Silk (2017); Khoo and Knobe (2018); and Worsnip (2019). This work is strongly influenced by Kratzer (1981, 1991, 2012). For earlier forerunners of contextualism in metaethics, see Geach (1956), Foot (1972), Harman (1975, 1996), and Dreier (1990).

[2]Contextualism on this topic has usually been aired only to be rejected (e.g., Gibbons 2013). One precedent is Feldman (2000). His 'epistemic ought' can be understood as being relativized to a specific goal-parameter. But my theory is quite different from Feldman's. The most salient difference is that Feldman defends evidentialism, which says roughly that one ought to have the doxastic attitude best supported by

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the objective and subjective 'ought' can be seen as coarse-grained versions of contextualism.[3]

I will focus on contextualism about 'ought', but I take contextualism about all normative terms to follow naturally. For example, if what you ought to do is relative to a goal, it is natural to say that what *reasons* you have are relative to a goal. I refer the reader to Finlay (2014) for a detailed defence of contextualism about all normative terms.

Section 2 explains the Truth Norm, Rationality Norm, and the main objections they face. Section 3 introduces contextualism. Section 4 applies contextualism to beliefs, and Section 5 shows how contextualism about beliefs deals with the objections of Section 2. Section 6 considers the objection that even rationality cannot always guide, and Section 7 considers the objection that it is implausible that there is no genuine disagreement. Section 8 concludes.

## 2. Truth and rationality

Consider two hypotheses about what one ought to believe:

*Rationality*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
S ought to believe that P iff it is rational for S to believe that P.

*Truth*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
S ought to believe that P iff P is true.[4]

Suppose there is petrol in Bernard's glass, but he has good reason to believe it contains gin.[5] *Rationality* says Bernard ought to believe his glass contains gin, and *Truth* says Bernard ought to believe his glass contains petrol. Thus, *Rationality* conflicts with *Truth*.[6] But there are strong arguments for both *Truth* and *Rationality*.

Inspiration for *Truth* can be traced to at least William James:

> We must know the truth; and we must avoid error—these are our first and great commandments. (James 1911, p. 17)

The list of proponents runs from Chisholm (1977) to Joyce (1998), Goldman (1999, 2001, 2015), Wedgwood (2002), and McHugh (2012).[7]

One powerful argument for *Truth* is that *Rationality* breaks the close connection we want between norms of belief and truth. As Gibbons puts it:

your evidence. By contrast, contextualism says that evidentialism results when 'ought' is relativized to a particular parameter, while other theories result from different parameter values. Another precedent is Lord (2015) who looks all set to offer a contextualist dissolution of the debate but doesn't do so. Instead, he argues for a perspectival view, offering this as the correct reading of the 'deliberative' ought. See also Lord (2018).

[3]See Ross (1939, p. 46–167), Parfit (1986, p. 25), and Jackson (1991) for classic discussions of objective versus subjective ought.

[4]I've used the strong, bi-conditional version of *Truth* because I think even this can be reconciled with *Rationality* given contextualism. I say more at the end of Section 5.

[5]See Williams (1981). Williams' focus is on reasons, and mine is on 'ought', but, as I say above, the contextualist framework can be naturally extended to other normative terms such as 'reasons'.

[6]The conflict could be avoided by denying that a belief can be rational and false (e.g. Sutton 2007).

[7]See fn. 1 of McHugh (2012) for a more comprehensive list.

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> *The Truth Connection Objection*
> If you reject [*Truth*], then it seems that you're saying that when it comes to belief, truth is not required. And if it's not required, then it's optional. But if you see truth as an optional extra, what could be wrong with thinking that you don't have it? So what could be wrong with thinking that you believe it's raining but it's not? (Gibbons 2013, p. 10–11[8])

Whereas *Truth* says that in believing that it is raining when it is not, you are not believing as you ought to.

On the other hand, a powerful argument for *Rationality* is that *Truth* breaks the close connection we want between norms of belief and guidance: [9]

> *The Guidance Objection*
> Norms must be able to guide us, and *Truth* cannot always guide us. Specifically, *Truth* cannot guide us in cases where the truth is not available. For example, *Truth* says that if there is petrol in Bernard's glass then he ought to believe there is petrol in his glass. But Bernard does not have access to the truth about what is in his glass so he cannot be guided by *Truth*.

We cannot always be guided by *Truth*, but, the thought goes, we can always be guided by *Rationality*. If we add that genuine norms must always be able to provide guidance, it follows that *Truth* is not a genuine norm.

Most epistemologists in this debate defend one of *Truth* and *Rationality* and reject the other.[10] An alternative approach, recently defended by Hughes (2019, 2021a, 2021b, forthcomin), is to defend both of *Truth* and *Rationality*. He argues that each places an incompatible demand on us, with the result that we face epistemic dilemmas. I also defend both *Truth* and *Rationality*, but I don't think we face epistemic dilemmas. Instead, each of *Truth* and *Rationality* is true in specific contexts; there are no contexts where both are true and so no epistemic dilemmas. I return to Hughes in Section 6.

## 3. Contextualism

It is a familiar thought that whether someone is correctly described as tall depends on the details of the conversation. For example, Michael Jordan, at 1.98 m, is tall for an ordinary person, but not tall for a basketball player. So the truth of 'Michael Jordan is tall' depends on the conversational context. It is true given a context in which ordinary people are being discussed but false given a context in which basketball players are being discussed. So the word 'tall' has hidden parameters that are filled by the conversational context. As the meaning of 'tall' depends on the conversational context, the word is *context-sensitive*.

The standard view in linguistics is that normative terms like 'ought' are context-sensitive in a similar way. They have hidden parameters that are fixed by the conversational context, resulting in different semantic values in different contexts. The

[8]Gibbons ends up defending *Rationality*.

[9]See Glüer and Wikforss (2009, 2010) and Steglich-Petersen (2006, 2010, 2013a, 2013b). This sort of motivation for *Rationality* can be found in the literature on evidentialism (Conee and Feldman 1985) and internalism (Alston 1989, Conee and Feldman 2001).

[10]See Gibbons (2013) for a book length defence of a version of *Rationality*.

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standard view is that there are at least two parameters needed to fix the content of 'ought' – a set of live possibilities and a standard.[11]

The first parameter, the live possibilities (called the *modal base*), are the possibilities treated as live in the conversation. For example, suppose we are discussing whether you ought to take an umbrella when you leave the house. If rain is a live possibility, then you ought to; if rain is not a live possibility, then it is not the case that you ought to. If I tell you that the forecast is for fine weather, this can be taken as eliminating the possibility in which it rains, with the result that it is not the case that you ought to take an umbrella.

The second parameter is a standard or goal that determines an ordering of the live possible worlds. The standard proposal is that 'S ought to A' is true iff S A's in every live world at the top of the ranking. Assuming the goal is to stay dry, then, if there is a live possible world in which it rains, the highest ranked worlds will be those in which you take an umbrella. It follows that you ought to take an umbrella. But things change if the goal changes. Perhaps you love getting wet, so the goal is to get wet. Now the highest ranked worlds will include those in which you get wet, and it will not follow that you ought to take an umbrella.

The standard need not be one that the subject cares about. If I say 'you ought to start with the cutlery on the outer edge', the standard might be the rules of etiquette. The more explicit sentence is 'by standards of etiquette, you ought to start with the cutlery on the outer edge'. This sentence can remain true even if you don't care about etiquette. This allows us to say to the psychopath 'you shouldn't kill people'; the full sentence is 'by standards of morality, you shouldn't kill people', which is true even if the psychopath doesn't care about morality. More importantly for us, it allows us to say 'you should believe things that are true' even to someone who doesn't care about the truth.

For our purposes, we can distinguish two goals, which might be relevant to a conversation about what someone ought to do or believe. The goal might be to:

a) set a *standard* or
b) state what is *rational*.

A similar distinction can be found in many places: Bales (1971) distinguishes decision procedures from right-making characteristics; Schroeder (2011, p. 1–2) distinguishes deliberative from evaluative oughts; McHugh (2012, p. 9–10) distinguishes prescriptive from evaluative norms; Schoenfield (2018, p. 690) distinguishes plans to make from procedures to conform to; and Steinberger (2019, p. 7) distinguishes directives that guide from evaluations which set standards. The distinction is needed in cases where agents aren't sure what is best. For example, consequentialists can say that agents ought – in the standard-setting sense – to perform the action that brings about the best consequences, and they ought – in the rationality sense – to perform the action they *think* will bring about the best consequences.

Returning to norms of belief, the contextualist view is that there are two goals, corresponding to two meanings of 'ought' and two norms. In the standard-setting sense, agents *ought* to believe what is true, and in the rationality sense, agents *ought* to believe what is rational. Which sense is relevant depends on the context:

*Contextualist Truth*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
In some contexts: 'S ought to believe that P iff P' is true.

[11]The standard view is Kratzer's (1981). I use this for concreteness, but I leave open that there are other ways to implement the semantic variability I need. See Viebahn and Vetter (2016) for non-contextualist semantic variability.

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*Contextualist Rationality*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
In some contexts: 'S ought to believe that P iff it is rational for S to believe that P' is true.

It will be useful to make explicit the sense of 'ought' being used with 'veritistically-ought' and 'rationally-ought':

*Contextualist Truth*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
S veritistically-ought to believe that P iff P.

*Contextualist Rationality*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
S rationally-ought to believe that P iff it is rational for S to believe that P.

And we can say that the context in which 'veritistically-ought' is relevant is a *veritistic context*, and a context in which rationally-ought is relevant is a *rational context*.

The question of precisely what fixes the values of these two parameters is a difficult open question. The contextualist says that it is determined by features of the conversation. But what features? Plausible candidates include the interests, goals, evidence, and beliefs of the participants in the conversation. Two plausible principles for turning these ideas into something more concrete are the principles of charity and the principle of accommodation (Lewis 1979, 1996). The principle of charity holds that we should interpret people so what they say makes a sensible contribution to the conversation. The principle of accommodation says that when a speaker makes an utterance involving a context-sensitive term, the parameters shift to make the sentence true. In Lewis's terms, the utterance changes the 'conversational score'. In some cases, the participants in the conversation might disagree about which parameters to use. In such a case, they might engage in a process of metalinguistic negotiation in an attempt to resolve the disagreement. I'll return to metalinguistic negotiation in Section 7.

Technically, from now on, I should semantically ascend and only mention 'ought' rather than using it. I will balance this with readability. I think the sloppiness used and apologized for by David Lewis (1996, p. 566–7) helps beginners even if it irritates experts.

I note in passing that contextualism explains the debate about whether 'ought' is subjective or objective (see fn. 3). The contextualist can (i) associate the objective ought with the goal of believing the truth and a modal base that includes all the facts and (ii) associate the subjective ought with the goal of believing what is rational and a modal base consisting of the agent's evidence or beliefs. The subjective and objective 'oughts' are two locations in the wider space opened up by contextualism.

Now that we have this machinery on the table, I will argue that the problems regarding the norms of belief can be solved.

## 4. Truth and rationality

Let's work through a couple of examples. First, recall the case of Bernard, who reasonably believes he has gin in his glass, when in fact it is petrol. *Truth* and *Rationality* give different verdicts about what Bernard ought to believe. *Rationality* says he ought to believe there is gin in his glass; *Truth* says he ought to believe there is petrol in his glass.

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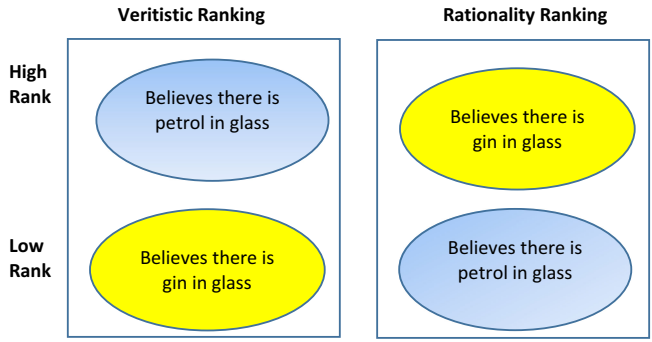



**Figure 1.** Two rankings for belief.

The contextualist says either can be true depending on the context. We can make this explicit with 'rationally-ought' and 'veritistically-ought':

> Bernard rationally-ought to believe there is gin in his glass.
> Bernard veritistically-ought to believe there is petrol in his glass.

To put the point in terms of the contextualist semantics, the ranking of the worlds changes in different contexts (see Figure 1). In a veritistic context, the worlds are ranked by the ratio of true to false beliefs, so the highest ranking world is the one in which Bernard believes there is petrol in his glass (left); in a rational context, the worlds are ranked by how well beliefs fit the evidence (or whatever determines rationality), so the highest ranking world is the one in which Bernard believes there is gin in his glass (right).

For another example, consider a question on a student S's exam: 'what is the capital of Russia?' As the answer is Moscow, there is a sense in which S ought to believe it is Moscow. And this remains true even if they have no idea what the correct answer is. Suppose S was sick for a month and missed all the work on Russia. Consider the following dialogue:

> Headteacher: S ought to believe that Moscow is the capital of Russia.
> Teacher: No, she shouldn't; she missed last month and has never been taught about Russia.

The contextualist can explain that the headteacher is invoking a context in which the student ought to believe what is true[12]:

> Headteacher: S veritistically-ought to believe that Moscow is the capital of Russia.

The teacher shifts the context to one in which the highest ranked worlds are those where the student has *rational* beliefs:

> Teacher: It is not the case that S rationally-ought to believe that Moscow is the capital of Russia.

[12]The headteacher would not demand omniscience. So perhaps this should be limited to a context in which the student ought to believe the conjunction of what is true and what is on the syllabus.

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Someone might object that there is no change in context and that the dialogue shows that the Headteacher was simply mistaken about what the student ought to believe. But the conversation might continue in ways that further strengthen the contextualist reading. For example, the headteacher might say:

> Headteacher: However much school she missed, Moscow *is* the capital of Russia, and she should know it.[13]

The contextualist can understand this as a case in which the headteacher has not accommodated the context introduced by the teacher and in which *Truth* remains relevant.[14]

## 5. The truth connection objection and guidance objection redux

Let's return to the arguments of Section 2. The objection to *Rationality* was that it breaks the close connection we want between norms of belief and truth. One quick contextualist response is to point out that the connection to truth is still there – in some contexts, *Truth* is relevant, and obviously, *Truth* provides a connection to truth. But the complaint might continue that this doesn't address the objection to *Rationality*. After all, given that beliefs should be closely connected to the truth, we need an explanation of how *Rationality* could be a norm of belief at all. As Gibbons put it, *Rationality* seems to make truth merely an optional extra for a belief.

However, the discussion above suggests a natural response – *Truth* sets the standard, but following *Rationality* is the best way to try to meet this standard. As we don't have direct access to what is true, we cannot always follow *Truth*, but the best attempt for satisfying *Truth* is to follow *Rationality*. Thus, the objection that *Rationality* is not sufficiently connected to the truth can be answered by pointing out that *Rationality* is the best method we mere (non-omniscient) mortals have for meeting the standard set by *Truth*.[15]

The objection to *Truth* was that genuine norms must always be able to provide guidance, but *Truth* cannot always provide guidance, so *Truth* is not a genuine norm. In response, if *Truth* sets standards, it is no objection to point out that it cannot always provide guidance. The point is analogous to that made by Bales (1971). It is no problem for consequentialism if agents do not always know which action will bring about the best consequences; consequentialism sets the standard for a right act. Similarly, it is not a problem for *Truth* if agents do not always know which propositions are true; *Truth* sets the standard for correct beliefs.

It is worth mentioning a further advantage of the thesis that *Truth* sets the standard rather than states what is rational. It has proven quite difficult to work out how strong *Truth* should be. The following have all been suggested[16]:

(*Bi-conditional*) S ought to believe that P if and only if P is true.
(*Conditional*) S ought to believe P only if P is true.
(*Permission*) S may believe that p if and only if P (Whiting 2013).

[13]'Know' is the natural locution, which we can assume entails belief.

[14]Why have I claimed that the contexts at issue shift the goal but not the live possible worlds? Because we have not eliminated the live possible worlds in which Bernard believes there is gin in the glass or S believes Moscow is the capital of Russia. They could still believe these things.

[15]See Alston (1985, p. 83–4), BonJour (1985, p. 7–8), and Wedgwood (2002) among others.

[16]See Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007) for criticism.

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(*Considers*) If S considers a proposition at all, S should believe it if and only if it is true (Wedgwood 2002).

What's wrong with the straightforward bi-conditional? It seems to demand too much of us. There are truths that are inaccessible, or too complicated, or impossible for us to believe. However, if *Truth* is understood as setting the standard, these objections have no force.[17] It is not a problem if the standard demands too much of us in some cases. The standard doesn't tell us what to do or give advice, it simply sets the standard for when a belief is correct. So if *Truth* sets the standard, we can defend *Bi-conditional*.

This completes my main argument. It remains to discuss two further objections – that even rationality cannot always guide and that it is implausible that disagreement disappears.

## 6. Can rationality always guide?

Hughes (2021a) claims that *Rationality* cannot always provide guidance.[18] This seems to threaten my claim that the Guidance Objection to *Rationality* is dealt with by contextualism. I will offer a response that demonstrates the resources available to the contextualist.

Hughes argues that *Rationality*, like *Truth*, often fails to provide guidance.[19] He draws on the cognitive biases psychologists have discovered. To pick just one, everyone seems to have confirmation bias; that is, evidence that undermines our beliefs tends to be assigned too little weight, with the result that we do not change our minds as often as we should. Consider an agent who is unaware that they have this bias. They will systematically assign too little weight to evidence that undermines their beliefs, and they will have no way of knowing that they are doing this. So they are unable to rationally follow the evidence. This suggests that *Rationality* fails to give us the advertised benefit of a close connection between norms and guidance.

I suggest that we distinguish bounded rationality from ideal rationality.[20] Ideal rationality does not take into account any cognitive limitations; bounded rationality does. This allows us to distinguish two versions of *Contextualist Rationality*:

*Contextualist Ideal Rationality*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
In some contexts: 'S ought to believe that P iff it is ideally rational for S to believe that P' is true.

*Contextualist Bounded Rationality*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
In some contexts: 'S ought to believe that P iff it is boundedly rational for S to believe that P' is true.

[17]See McHugh (2012) for a similar point.

[18]More precisely, Hughes argues that on some ways of thinking about guidance, *Rationality* cannot always provide guidance. Hughes does not think *Rationality* should be rejected; his aim is to defend *Truth* (and *Rationality*) despite them both being unable to always provide guidance.

[19]Srinivasan (2015) argues that no norm can always provide guidance as there is no nontrivial mental state such that we are always in a position to know that we are in it. I discuss this objection in (ms).

[20]See Gigerenzer (2008), Morton (2017), and Wheeler (2020). See also Eder (2021) for a related distinction between guidance and assessment norms of rationality.

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Where an agent has confirmation bias, they will often be unable to do what is ideally rational.[21] But there will still be better or worse ways to respond to the evidence. An agent who shifts their beliefs in the right direction in the light of new evidence will be doing better than an agent who ignores all new evidence. In moving in the right direction they are satisfying the demands of bounded rationality. Where the conversational context takes into account the limitations of the agent, the relevant norm in the conversation is *Contextualist Bounded Rationality*.

I suggest that *Contextualist Bounded Rationality* can always provide guidance, allowing us to make peace with the Guidance Objection.[22] Of course, what exactly is boundedly rational is highly sensitive to the knowledge and abilities of the agent in their context, as well as the allowances that the speakers make. Leaving space for these complexities is one of the virtues of contextualism.

Someone might object that this distinction is ad hoc. But as well as being intuitive and defended by many others, it fits neatly with contextualist semantics. Recall that the context determines a set of possible worlds. These can be thought of as the relevant worlds. In an *ideal* context, a wide range of worlds are relevant i.e. worlds in which the agent has a wide range of beliefs, including the ideally rational beliefs. We can model a *non*-ideal (bounded rationality) context using a narrower range of relevant worlds. Making allowances for the limitations of the agent amounts to restricting the live possible worlds.

A different objection is that some biases are not rational in any sense of 'rational' and so not even boundedly rational. I agree. I do not say that all biases are boundedly rational; I say that *some* are boundedly rational. I am committed only to the view that there is always some norm of rationality that can guide an agent (even if they have cognitive limitations).

A counterexample to my thesis that some norm of rationality (e.g. *Contextualist Bounded Rationality*) can always provide guidance would be an agent who *cannot* be guided by any norm that deserves to be called a norm of rationality. And I think it is difficult to tell a coherent story of what that would look like. For example, consider an agent so benighted that, necessarily, they *can* only respond *irrationally* (not just non-ideally) to some piece of evidence; for example, they respond to seeing a white swan by increasing their credence that there are black swans. Note: It is not just that they *do* respond irrationally – they are *only able* to respond irrationality. I think we would be reluctant to ascribe beliefs to this agent at all. For example, the standard functionalist theory of beliefs (Lewis 1972) would say that beliefs are caused by relevant evidence; a mental state that is not sensitive to evidence fails to be a belief. An alternative theory is that beliefs are whatever would rationalize behaviour given experiences, in which case it might be metaphysically impossible for an agent who sees a white swan to infer that there are black swans (Dennett 1971, 1987).

## 7. Disagreement regained

Someone might object that it is implausible that there is no genuine disagreement in the debate about the norms of belief.[23] The challenge for the contextualist is to make sense of

[21]Is there a sense in which they can do what is ideally rational? They might form the ideal belief by luck. But this is not the sense of 'can' being used here. 'Can' is also context-sensitive (Schwarz 2020). But we can hold fixed the meaning of 'can' in this discussion.

[22]I do not say that all biases are boundedly rational. Some might be positively irrational, in which case they are not candidates to be norms of bounded rationality.

[23]This is Gibbons' (2013 ch. 3) objection to contextualism. He puts it in terms of disagreement about acceptance of a code of conduct (p. 63).

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the intuition that there is genuine disagreement. Let's consider three ways in which a genuine disagreement might be retained.

First, even if statements about what one *ought* to believe are context-sensitive in English, there might be a metaphysically privileged parameter that picks out a normatively privileged property. Worsnip writes:

> we should be careful to separate the question of whether (e.g.) the law . . . has genuine normative authority from whether there is a robustly normative usage of the legal 'ought'. The former requires the law to actually possess normative authority, whereas the latter only requires there to be speakers who take the law to possess normative authority. (Worsnip 2019, page numbers not yet available; see also Worsnip 2020)

Worsnip is working with a primitive concept of 'normative authority'. He is allowing that there might be lots of 'oughts', just as contextualism predicts, but that not all of them have normative authority. Indeed, perhaps only one 'ought' has normative authority.[24] Disagreement thus remains when speakers disagree about which 'ought' is privileged. And if *Truth* and *Rationality* are *both* normatively authoritative, then we have Hughes' view that there are epistemic dilemmas.

Still, I take it that contextualism reduces the motivation for the thesis that there is a normatively authoritative 'ought'. Rather than facing tricky metaphysical (what makes an 'ought' privileged?) and epistemic (how do we know which is privileged?) questions, we can explain apparent disagreements by appealing to different speakers using different parameters.

And notice that there can be genuine disagreement even if there is no privileged 'ought'. All that's needed for genuine disagreement is differing *beliefs* about which 'ought' is privileged (even if none of them actually are privileged). Compare: If you think Santa Claus is married and I think he is a bachelor, we disagree, even though we are both wrong.

The second way to retain disagreement is to hold that the full conversational context *determines* (metaphysical) the values of the parameters, but the *inference* (epistemic) from the full conversational context to the values of the parameters is non-obvious. Just because the facts are determined doesn't mean we will all figure out what they are. This leaves room for genuine disagreement about which context one is in and so genuine disagreement about which beliefs one ought to have.

The third way to retain disagreement is to hold that some instances of disagreement involve *metalinguistic negotiation*, that is, an exchange in which speakers tacitly negotiate the proper deployment of some linguistic expression in a context.[25] For example, defenders of *Truth* argue that the best norm of belief in some context is *Truth* while defenders of *Rationality* argue that the best norm of belief in some context is *Rationality*. This differs from the first way to retain disagreement because speakers need not believe that any parameter is metaphysically privileged to disagree about the aim of the conversation e.g. one person wants a conversation about the standards and another wants a conversation about rationality. Contextualism allows for genuine disagreement about which context to create. So this is best understood as a practical disagreement about what to do; that is, should we create a veritistic context or a rational context?

So the contextualist can make sense of the intuition that there is genuine disagreement between proponents of *Truth* and proponents of *Rationality*. But there

[24]A similar view has been discussed in detail in Eklund (2017).

[25]See Plunkett and Sundell (2013).

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may well be less disagreement than originally appeared, and the remaining disagreement might not be what it initially seemed to be i.e. a disagreement about the correct unique universal norm.

## 8. Conclusion

Many philosophers distinguish different senses of 'ought', for example, objective and subjective. I have argued that systematizing these different senses of 'ought' in a contextualist framework helps clarify the debate about the norms of belief. Contextualism allows us to explain the conflicting intuitions that have generated the opposing positions in the epistemology literature. We have identified three norms:

*Contextualist Truth*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
In some contexts: 'S ought to believe that P iff P' is true.

*Contextualist Ideal Rationality*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
In some contexts: 'S ought to believe that P iff it is ideally rational for S to believe that P' is true.

*Contextualist Bounded Rationality*
For any agent S and any proposition P:
In some contexts: 'S ought to believe that P iff it is boundedly rational for S to believe that P' is true.

Rather than defending one norm (or more) and biting the bullet on the conflicting intuitions, we can explain the appeal of various incompatible positions in terms of different values of the parameters.[26]

**Acknowledgements.** I am grateful to the Templeton Foundation for partial support while working on this project and to several referees for helpful comments.

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[26]I am grateful to funding body x and ....

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**Cite this article:** Bradley D. (2026). "Contextualism and the truth norm." *Episteme* **23**, 565–577. https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2024.39

https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2024.39 Published online by Cambridge University Press