THE CONCEPT OF CERTAINTY
AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE VIEW
THAT KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT REQUIRE CERTAINTY

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Thesis Abstract

Dilek Arlı Çil, "The Concept of Certainty and Implications of the View That Knowledge Does Not Require Certainty"

This thesis aims at investigating the odd implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty such as the utterances "I know p, but I am not certain that p", "I know p, but it is not certain that p", "I know p, but I may be wrong" and "I know p, but it is possible that not-p". In order to do that the concept of certainty is analyzed in detail. And it is indicated that certainty is a context sensitive term. A proposition may be certain in one context while it is not certain in the other context since different contexts have different requirements for certainty.

In this thesis, it is claimed that the context sensitive understanding of certainty can give an account of the oddity of these utterances together with the view that knowledge indeed requires certainty. Though most epistemologists defend the view that knowledge does not require certainty, they cannot give an account of the implications of this view. In this study, it is stated that these utterances express our intuition concerning the view that knowledge requires certainty in a contextual way.

Tez Özeti

Dilek Arlı Çil, “The Concept of Certainty and Implications of the View That Knowledge Does Not Require Certainty”

Bu tezin amacı bilginin kesinliği gerektirmediği görüşünün, “biliyorum, ama emin değilim”, “biliyorum, ama kesin değil”, “biliyorum, ama yanılıyor olabilirim”, “biliyorum, ama tersi de olabilir” gibi garip imalarını araştırmaktır. Bu amaçla kesinlik kavramı detaylı olarak incelenmiş ve kesinliğin bağlam duyarlı bir kavram olduğu belirtilmiştir Bir önerme bir bağlamda kesin iken diğer bir bağlamda kesin olmayabilir çünkü farklı bağlamlar kesinlik için farklı gerekliliklere sahiptirler.

Bu tezde, bağlam duyarlı kesinlik anlayışının, bilginin kesinliği gerektirdiği görüşü ile birlikte belirttiğimiz ifadelerin garipliğine bir açıklama getirebileceği iddia edilmiştir. Çoğu bilgi felsefecileri, bilginin kesinliği gerektirmediği görüşünü savundukları halde, bu görüşün imalarına bir açıklama getirememektedirler. Bu çalışmada, söz konusu ifadelerin, bilginin bağlam duyarlı bir şekilde kesinliği gerektirdiği ile ilgili sezgimizi ifade ettikleri belirtilmiştir.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century has witnessed a major break in the philosophy of science and epistemology. "Certainty" has been brought down from its throne. It has been claimed that we can never be certain about empirical facts but this does not constitute an obstacle against science and knowledge. Philosophers have claimed that human knowledge is fallible and we can not know anything with certainty, but this does not mean that we should give up the search for truth; it only means that we should give up the search for certainty. The search for truth is one thing; the search for certainty is another.

This view has also influenced the philosophy of science. Popper has indicated that "falsificationist methodology" was used in the sciences. It means reversing the picture. It is not possible to verify the scientific theories, but by eliminating the falsities we can come closer to truth. He gave the name "verisimilitude" to the concept of "being closer to truth". According to him, science is a process towards truth though it never arrives at absolute truth. In a way, science is a journey to truth which does not end. We may refer to the following quatrain which Popper quotes from Xenophanes in the third preface of his book *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*.

> There never was, nor ever will be,
> any man who knows with certainty
> the things about the gods and about all things which I tell of.
> For even if he does happen to get most things right,
> still he himself doesn't know it.
> But mere opinions all may have.[1]

[1] Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p.41.

Recently, knowledge without certainty has also become a major issue in epistemology. It is clearly manifested in Reichenbach's words: "We can do without certainty. But it was a long way to this more liberal attitude toward knowledge. The search for certainty had to burn itself out in the philosophical systems of the past before we were able to envisage a conception of knowledge which does away with all claims to eternal truth."[2] It has become common to admit that knowledge with certainty was a dream, and its realization was impossible. Ayer expresses the same idea in different words: "The quest for certainty is a quest for peace which is assured, an object which is unqualified by risk and the shadow of fear which action casts."[3] He thought that certainty was men's desire for security for an unshakable ground to rest on, which was a dream that could not be realized.

In this climate, an epistemological view which was called "fallibilism" originated from the idea that we are fallible beings and we make mistakes concerning our beliefs. This view has become very popular in the twentieth century in epistemology. Different definitions have been suggested for "fallibilism". Although there is still a disagreement on its definition, we can say that it is a view which is based on the idea that human knowledge is fallible, and knowledge is compatible with the possibility of error. Feldman's two definitions contain common points with the other definitions which have been suggested. One of them is "S can know that p even if it is possible that S is mistaken in believing that p"[4] and the other is "it is possible for S to know that p even if S does not have logically conclusive evidence to

[2] Hans Reichenbach, "The Search for Certainty and the Rationalistic Conception of Knowledge," in *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (California: University of California Press, 1961), p.120.

[3] A.J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1979), p.8.

[4] Richard Feldman, "Fallibilism and Knowing that One Knows," *The Philosophical Review*, vol.90, no.2. (1981), pp. 266-282.

justify believing that p."[5] Although there is no direct reference to 'certainty' in both definitions of fallibilism, it can be understood that it is a theory which is nourished by the idea that knowledge does not require certainty.

As we have said, the view that knowledge does not require certainty is a common view among philosophers. But though it is a common view, very few philosophers talk about the reasons which lead them to adopt this view. In addition, there is not much work which has been done on the implications of this view. I think that in order to defend the view that knowledge does not require certainty, we should be aware of its implications and be able to give an account of them. Therefore, in this thesis I want to investigate the concept of certainty and the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty.

With this aim, in the second chapter of my thesis I will analyze the concept of "certainty", focusing on various definitions which have been suggested before. Then, I will focus on the expressions which contain certainty. There are basically two kinds of expressions that involve certainty. One of them is the expression "I am certain that p" and the other one is the expression "It is certain that p". Some people claim they express two different senses of certainty. In my work, I will investigate these expressions and in detail and inquire whether certainty is really used in two different senses.

In the third chapter I will be dealing with the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty. It seems that both views concerning the relation between certainty and knowledge lead us to some undesired results. If we claim that knowledge requires certainty, we may encounter some problems such as

[5] Feldman, "Fallibilism and Knowing that One Knows," p.266.

skeptical arguments and dogmatism. If we admit that knowledge requires certainty and also believe that we cannot have certainty in terms of empirical statements, then knowledge becomes impossible. I think nobody would object to the idea that if something is certain, then there is no need to question it again. It means that if I know something with certainty, I cannot be mistaken. This point of view leads us to dogmatism since we will not have any need to question what we know or even what we think we know since we assume that it is certain. Skepticism and dogmatism as undesired results of the view that knowledge requires certainty have a great influence on people adopting the view that knowledge does not require certainty.

On the other hand, if we claim that knowledge does not require certainty, then we are faced with some odd utterances such as "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p". If we admit that certainty is not a condition for knowledge, then we should be able to utter these sentences, but it sounds odd to utter them. The reason why they seem odd is that the second part of the sentence seems to violate what is said in the first part. When one says "I am not certain that p" or "It is not certain that p", it implies that one has lack of confidence in p, and it seems that being aware of his lack of confidence in the truth of p, one cannot truly assert that he knows p. In this part of the thesis, I will focus on the oddity of these sentences and discuss some explanations which have been offered for them. I will also investigate whether these expressions are really odd and if they are, whether they constitute counterevidence against the view that knowledge does not require certainty.

There are other utterances such as "I know p, but I may be wrong" and "I know p, but it is possible that ~p" which may be derived from the view that knowledge does not require certainty. In this thesis I will try to find out whether they

are instances of "I know that p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know that p, but it is not certain that p". In order to do that, I will work on the relation between certainty and possibility and try to find out whether certainty can be defined in terms of possibility.

Moore claims that certainty can be defined in terms of possibility and vice versa. He thinks that "there is a use of 'possible' in which 'it is possible that p'= 'it is not certain that ~p'."[6] So, according to him the expression "I know p, but it is possible that ~p" is an instance of the expression "I know p, but it is not certain that p". On the other hand, Stanley does not agree with him, though he does not clearly state it. He thinks that the expression "I know p, but it is possible that ~p" is false whereas the expression "I know p, but it is not certain that p" is true but unassertable. According to him, if one of them entailed the other, they would not ascribe different truth values to them.

He thinks that the expression "I know p, but it is possible that q" where q entails not-p expresses a false proposition and this falsity comes from the definition of epistemic possibility. He defines epistemic possibility as "it is possible for A that p is true if what A knows does not, in a manner that is obvious to A, entail not p."[7] If we apply this definition the expression becomes "I know p, but what I know does not, in a manner that is obvious to me entail not-q". In the first part of the sentence one says something which entails not q and then in the second part of the sentence he denies that what he knows does entail ~q.

David Lewis explains the oddity of the expression "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" in the following way. "If you claim that S knows that p, and yet

[6] G.E. Moore, *Commonplace Book* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p.279.

[7] Stanley, "Fallibilism and Concessive Knowledge Attributions," *Analysis*, vol.65, no.2, (2005), pp.126-131.

you grant that S cannot eliminate a certain possibility in which not-p, it certainly seems as if you have granted that S does not after all know that p. To speak of fallible knowledge, of knowledge despite uneliminated possibilities of error, just sounds contradictory."[8] Lewis thinks that these expressions are entailed by fallibilism. And he also thinks that fallibilism has a problem concerning these expressions. Therefore he prefers contextualism instead of fallibilism. But even the defenders of fallibilism find these utterances problematic and they have different reasons for it. Later I will talk about the fallibilists who find these utterances odd and focus on some solutions which they suggested.

Consequently, whether we adopt the view that knowledge requires certainty or not, we have to deal with the implications of our claim. Although we are intuitively inclined to say that knowledge does not require certainty, we cannot disregard the implications of our answer. My aim in the thesis is to investigate these undesired implications in detail and try to give an account of them. In order to do that first, I will study the concept of certainty. Throughout the thesis, I will also search for a solution which may help us with the dilemma between "knowledge requires certainty" and "knowledge does not require certainty".

[8] David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol.74, no.4, (1996), p.549.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPT OF CERTAINTY

Recently, in epistemology it has frequently been asserted that we cannot be certain about empirical facts. Nowadays there seems to be a great agreement on this view. Most philosophers who deal with epistemology admit that knowledge does not require certainty. The most important reason is that certainty is seen as a very high requirement and it is almost impossible to attain it.

In this chapter, first I will try to explain some of the reasons which may lead philosophers to think that certainty is not a condition for knowledge. Then I will focus on the concept of certainty. There are various definitions which have been suggested for certainty, but there is no consensus on them. In order to understand the concept of certainty better first we should consider what the object of certainty is and what kinds of statements are thought to be certain. Some people think that only propositions which express necessary truths can be certain and they claim that empirical propositions cannot be certain since they are contingent. But other people think that empirical propositions can be certain too. Malcolm defends the view that certainty can be ascribed to empirical statements. In this part of the work, first I will focus on his account and discuss the definitions which he has presented for "certainty". Then I will investigate the expressions in the form of "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p" focusing on Stanley's definitions. Considering their definitions, I will discuss whether they express two different senses of certainty, and I will talk about different definitions of certainty and especially focus on the Cartesian understanding. Finally, considering the common points between the

various definitions of certainty, I will try to give a new account and suggest a new definition. While trying to give a new definition I will focus on our intuitions and appeal to Dretske's relevant alternatives theory.

I think that the undesired implications of the view that certainty is a condition for knowledge lead people to deny it. One of the undesired implications of this view is that if we set certainty as a condition for knowledge, then we may be lead to skepticism. Skeptics use the idea that knowledge does require certainty in order to prove that nobody ever knows anything. They claim that if we state certainty as a condition for knowledge then knowledge becomes almost impossible. Unger claims that making certainty a condition for knowledge leads us to skepticism. He says that "a person knows something to be so only if he is certain of it."[9] This implies that certainty is a necessary condition for knowledge. He introduces the following argument which arrives at a skeptical conclusion:

> If someone knows something to be so, then it is alright for the person to be absolutely certain that it is so. It is never all right for anyone to be absolutely certain that anything is so. Nobody ever knows that anything is so.[10]

In my interpretation of the argument, if someone knows something then it is justified to be certain about that thing since knowledge requires certainty. Under the assumption that nobody can be justified to be certain, we come to a conclusion that nobody knows anything. Refuting such skeptical arguments constitute one of the reasons for denying that certainty is a condition for knowledge.

Another undesirable implication of the view that knowledge requires certainty is that it may lead us to dogmatism. Dogmatism is an attitude of being closed to new

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[9] Peter Unger, "A Defense of Skepticism," *Knowledge, Readings in Contemporary Epistemology*, eds. Sven Bernecker& Fred Deretske, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.325.

[10] Peter Unger, "An Argument for Skepticism," *Epistemology: An Anthology* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), p. 60.

information or evidence, unwillingness to change one's position. Unger links the certainty demand with dogmatism.

> If someone is certain of something, then that thing is not at all doubtful so far as he is concerned, that is, doubt or doubtfulness is not present at all in that man with respect to that thing. In other words, if S is certain that p, then it follows that S is not at all open to consider any new experience or information as relevant to his thinking in the matter of whether p.[11]

Someone who is dogmatic does not need to reconsider anything which he grants as knowledge. One may say that there is no need to reconsider what we know since it is certain. But there is always the possibility of mistakes concerning the certainty of propositions. We may incorrectly think that a proposition is certain while it is false. A dogmatic person disregards this possibility and therefore he holds onto his false beliefs as if they are true. In addition to this, a person who is dogmatic does not open himself to the possibility of counterevidence, which may come out in the future. This attitude gives rise to being closed to new information and to resistance to change. Because of its unwelcome results, dogmatism may be counted as another reason for rejecting the view that knowledge requires certainty, and a very strong one.

As we have seen, there are undesired results of the view that knowledge requires certainty, such as skepticism and dogmatism. They have a strong influence on the denial of the view that knowledge requires certainty, but there may be other reasons as well. As far as I can see, very few people explain their reasons for claiming that certainty is not a condition for knowledge. It seems that it is mostly taken for granted.

Russell's words plainly express the idea that certainty cannot be achieved. While talking about the certainty of empirical propositions he says that "we can

[11] Unger, "An Argument for Skepticism," p. 63.

never be completely certain that any given proposition is true."[12] Contrary to the agreement on this view, there is no consensus on the definition of certainty. Though various definitions have been suggested, the meaning of certainty remains ambiguous, as it has been used in different senses.

I think that in order to be able to investigate the view that knowledge does not require certainty and the consequences one faces with when one adopts this view, we should analyze the concept of certainty. Therefore, I will devote this chapter to the investigation of the concept of "certainty". Firstly, I will try to analyze different types of statements to which certainty can be ascribed.

The Object of Certainty

In order to understand the concept of certainty better, first we should investigate its object. Ayer makes the following explanation which can be useful for us to understand certainty.

> Our behavior might still be hesitant or misguided but it is only with the use of language that truth or error, certainty and uncertainty, come fully upon the scene. It is only such things as statements or propositions, or beliefs or opinions, which are expressible in language, that are capable of being true or false, certain or doubtful. Our experiences themselves are neither certain nor uncertain; they simply occur. It is when we attempt to report them, to record or forecast them, to devise theories to explain them, that we admit the possibility of falling into error, or for that matter of achieving truth.[13]

In this paragraph Ayer declares that the things which are certain are statements, propositions, beliefs and opinions. His words are also important in terms of reminding us that certainty cannot be thought independently of a subject. It requires a

[12] Bertrand Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.166.

[13] Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, p.10.

subject who expresses facts, beliefs or thoughts. We can also say that certainty has a dimension which is relevant to the subject. In the following parts, I will focus on the subject-relevant aspect of knowledge but for now, I will leave it aside and try to find out what kinds of statements certainty applies to.

It seems that certainty can be ascribed to three different kinds of sentences. First, certainty is ascribed to sense statements such as "It seems to me that there is a bird on the tree", "this pencil looks red to me" and "I seem to see a big car in front of the house". Second, it is ascribed to analytical statements such as "all triangles have three angles", "all bachelors are unmarried". Third, it is ascribed to empirical statements. Though it is a controversial issue and some people claim that empirical statements cannot be certain, I think that there is a use of certainty which applies to empirical statements. This is the kind of certainty which will constitute the main concern of our work. So I should refine my aim as to investigate the concept of certainty regarding empirical statements and the consequences of the view that knowledge does not require certainty with respect to empirical statements.

Certainty, in the sense that it applies to sense statements and analytical statements, can be seen as an intrinsic property of a statement. Sense statements and analytical statements satisfy the certainty condition independently of the external world. When someone utters a sentence such as "It seems to me that there is a bird on the tree", we do not investigate whether there really is a bird on the tree or not. The certainty of this statement is not about what the subject is experiencing in the external world but about what he is sensing at this specific time. The sensation of "bird" may be caused by a real bird or it may be a hallucination. It does not matter at all. Nobody would argue against his claim and nobody would doubt it since it is admitted that a subject has direct access to his own mind. If he is not intentionally

deceiving others about what he is sensing, then we can say that the statement he utters is certain.

Chisholm talks about self-presenting propositions and he gives the example of "I seem to see many people".

> Let us say that a proposition 'presents itself' to a man, if, first of all it is true, and if, secondly, it is necessarily such that, if it is true, then the man knows it is true. The proposition that I seem to see many people, for example, is one that is now self-presenting to me. This means, first, that I do in fact seem to see many people and, secondly, it is necessarily true that, if I thus seem to see many people, then it is evident to me that I do.[14]

He claims that self-presenting propositions are those which are true and their truth is directly known by the subject. Therefore, they are the source of certainty for Chisholm.

In the *Meditations,* Descartes claims that sense statements are certain and therefore they constitute the ground on which we can build knowledge. He does not even count mathematical propositions as certain. I will mention Descartes' notion of certainty in more detail later.

In the same way, certainty is seen as an intrinsic property of analytical propositions too. Let us consider the statement "all triangles have three corners". "Having three corners" as a predicate of the statement does not tell anything new that is not contained in the concept of "triangle". So, on the condition that one grasps the meaning of the concept of "triangle", one does not doubt this statement and object to the idea that it is certain.

Malcolm in his article *Certainty and Empirical Statements* also talks about these three kinds of statements which the phrase "it is certain that" applies to, sense

[14] Roderick M. Chisholm, *Person and Object*: *A Metaphysical Study (*La Salle: Open Court Publications, 1976), p.24.

statements, a priori statements and empirical statements. According to him, certainty in these three kinds of statements expresses three different senses. It applies to sense statements in the sense of incorrigibility and to a priori statements in the sense of having a contradictory negative. And he claims that there must be a third kind of certainty, which applies to empirical statements. "To say that sense-statements are 'incorrigible' is to say that it does not make sense to question them. That, in short, you can know sense-statements with certainty. And when it is said that an a priori statement is certain, what it means is that the negative of it is self contradictory."[15] We should note that "having a self contradictory negative" is the defining characteristic of analytic statements, not a priori statements. So we can say that he uses the word "a priori" instead of "analytic".

According to him, if certainty is defined as "incorrigibility" or as "having a contradictory negative", it cannot be applied to empirical statements. He thinks that certainty applies to empirical statements. But some people think that empirical statements cannot be certain since they limit "certainty" into these two senses. Therefore, we need a third sense, which applies to empirical statements. But though he claims that there is a third sense of certainty which can be ascribed to empirical statements, he does not define it.

> When it is said that a sense statement is certain, what this means is that it does not make sense to doubt or question it. And when it is said that an a priori statement is certain, what this means is that the negative of it is self contradictory. Now the defining characteristic of a sense statement is that it does not make sense to question it. And the defining characteristic of an a priori statement is that it has a self-contradictory negative. Therefore, to say of a sense statement that its truth is certain is to say nothing more nor less than that it is a sense statement; and to say of a priori statement that its truth is certain, is simply to say that it is an a priori statement. The proposition 'p is a sense statement and p is absolutely certain' is a flat tautology. And so

[15] Norman Malcolm, "Certainty and Empirical Statements," *Mind, New Series*, vol.51, no.201, (1942), pp.18-46.

> is the proposition 'p is an a priori proposition and p is absolutely certain'. In both cases the phrase 'p is absolutely certain' adds nothing whatever. To say of an a priori statement or of a sense statement, that its truth is certain is to say something trivial and non-informative…While to say of an empirical statement that its truth is certain, is to say something significant and informative.[16]

I agree with him that to say that an empirical statement is certain is more informative and important than to say that a sense statement is certain. But I do not agree with him that "a sense statement is certain" is a mere tautology since the certainty of sense statements may be disputed. Even if it could be disputed, it would not be a tautology since to say that "p is a sense statement" does not mean merely to say that "p is certain". Arriving at the idea that a sense statement is certain requires an argument.

Malcolm calls attention to the point that certainty is mostly identified with "having a complete verification" by other philosophers and that is why they think that empirical statements cannot be certain. He claims that if we define certainty in this way then we arrive at the same conclusion because complete verification requires an infinite number of tests which should also take future evidence into account. Since it is not possible to have infinite series of verifications with respect to empirical statements, then it is impossible to have certainty about empirical statements. Malcolm thinks that to define certainty in this way makes it worthless since it becomes beyond our reach. He expresses his idea in the following way.

> It turns out however that the philosophers have defined 'certainty' in such a way that knowing with certainty about empirical matters is not an ideal at all, but a logically impossible state of affairs...They have defined certainty in such a way that it does not make sense to speak of attaining certainty. And therefore it does not make sense to speak of failing to attain certainty.[17]

[16] Malcolm, "Certainty and Empirical Statements," p.35.

[17] Malcolm, "Certainty and empirical statement," p.36.

He thinks that the definition which has been given for certainty is impossible to satisfy. But it does not follow that empirical statement cannot be known with certainty. It only follows that in the sense of having a complete verification no empirical statement can be known for certain. What we shall look for is a sense of "certainty" different from "having a complete verification" and which applies to empirical statements. If we can find it, we can also claim that certainty is a condition for knowledge, which can be satisfied.

Frankfurt agrees with Malcolm that if we define certainty as "having a complete verification", it becomes impossible to have certainty for empirical propositions. He explains his point by saying that "The evidence in favor of a statement cannot be absolutely conclusive if further evidence would render the statement subject to a reasonable doubt. To say that evidence is conclusive is to say that it is sufficient to justify the conclusion based on it no matter what further information is obtained"[18] He claims that if a statement is conclusively justified this means no future evidence may raise a doubt about it. But we do not know what future evidence may show us. It may support the truth of the statement, or it may be against it. In this sense the evidence for an empirical statement cannot be conclusive.

Frankfurt criticizes Malcolm by saying that the philosophers whom he talks about have presented two sufficient conditions of certainty which are "being incorrigible" and "having self-contradictory negative" but they have not given the general criteria of certainty. They cannot prove that empirical statements cannot be certain before they present a general criterion for certainty.

> The philosophers who argued in the way Malcolm describes intend to assert only that having a self-contradictory negative and being incorrigible are two sufficient conditions for certainty but neither

[18] Harry Frankfurt, "Philosophical Certainty," *The Philosophical Review*, vol.71, no.3.(1962), pp.303-327.

> of them is necessary for it… For it remains open that there are other ways besides these two, in which the general criteria of theoretical certainty can be satisfied. Clearly, the conclusion can only be established by showing that these general criteria cannot be satisfied by empirical statements. But the philosophers in question have never, to my knowledge stated the general criteria of theoretical certainty which they employ. Until they do so, they cannot hope to show that the criteria cannot be satisfied in any way by any empirical statement.[19]

As Frankfurt states, the criterion of certainty has not been presented plainly by any philosopher who claimed that empirical statements cannot be certain. He criticizes Malcolm by saying that "The question is whether philosophers who say that no empirical statement can ever be certain do mean by this merely that no empirical statement can ever be confirmed by an infinite number of tests. So far as I can see, Malcolm offers no evidence which establishes that they mean this."[20]

Malcolm's claim is that certainty applies to these three kinds of statements in three different senses. I think that certainty does not apply to different statements in different senses but it applies to all of them in the same sense. There is one definition of certainty but different statements satisfy it in different ways. It seems that a priori statements and sense statements have something in common which is "not being dubitable". So, we may say that certainty applies to those two kinds of statements in the sense of "being indubitable", and this criterion can also be valid for the certainty of empirical statements too. If we can prove that, then we may say that we have one definition of certainty which applies to all kinds of statements.

We have seen that the definition of certainty which has been presented for sense statements and a priori statements did not suit empirical statements. Now we have to ask ourselves the following question. What should we do? There are two ways to go. Either we can give up certainty with respect to empirical statements and

[19] Frankfurt, "Philosophical Certainty," p.317.

[20] Frankfurt, "Philosophical Certainty," p.314.

claim that certainty is the property of sense statements and a priori statements or we can give up these definitions of certainty and suggest a new definition. Frankfurt introduces the notion of certainty which has different degrees.

Frankfurt says "I propose to use the term 'philosophical certainty' to refer to the highest degree of certainty. In my opinion, when the proponents of the Verification Argument maintain that no empirical statement can be certain, they mean that none can be philosophically certain; they do not intend to deny that empirical statements may enjoy lesser degrees of certainty."[21] He thinks that certainty comes in degrees and different kinds of statements have certainty in different degrees. He introduces the name of philosophical certainty to represent the highest degree of certainty. We cannot have certainty concerning empirical statements in the philosophical sense of certainty. But it does not prevent us from having certainty in lesser degrees. As opposed to him I do not think that there are different degrees of certainty but I do think that certainty is a context sensitive term. Different contexts change the requirements of certainty. Therefore we can have certainty in one context whereas we cannot have certainty in the other one. I will explain this view in detail and defend my point after analyzing different forms of certainty which have been presented by other philosophers.

Different Forms of Certainty

It has mostly been argued that there are two basic forms of statements which contain certainty, "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p". There is an inclination to

[21] Frankfurt, "Philosophical Certainty," p.323.

think that these two forms of certainty express two different senses. Stanley defends this view. He calls them "subjective certainty" and "epistemic certainty".

I think Stanley's distinction has its origin in G.E. Moore's views. Moore in his article "Certainty" proposes four different types of expression in which the word "certain" is used.

(1) I feel certain that p

(2) I am certain that p

(3) I know for certain that p

(4) It is certain that p

His first point concerning these expressions is that (1) can be true while p is not true whereas (3) and (4) cannot. The truth of (3) and (4) is dependent on the truth of p. He says "'I feel certain that p' does not entail that p is true (although by saying that I feel certain that p, I do imply that p is true), but 'I know for certain that p' and 'it is certain that p' do entail that p is true; they can't be true unless it is true."[22]

> This difference may be brought out by the fact that, e.g., 'I felt certain that he would come, but in fact he didn't is quite clearly not self-contradictory; it is quite clearly logically possible that I should have felt certain that he would come and that yet he didn't; while on the other hand, 'I knew for certain that he would come, but he didn't' or 'it was certain that he would come but he didn't' are, for at least one common use of these phrases, self-contradictory: the fact that he didn't come proves that I didn't know he would come, and that it wasn't certain that he would, whereas it does not prove that I didn't feel certain.[23]

As it follows from his words, he claims that the truth of (1) is not dependent on the truth of p whereas the truth of (3) and (4) is dependent on the truth of p. However he

[22] G.E. Moore, "Certainty," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p.69.

[23] Moore, "Certainty," p. 69.

does not talk about statement (2) in this respect. He does not say whether its truth is dependent on the truth of p and leaves this point open to debate.

His second point is that at first glance; (1), (2) and (3) seem relative to knower whereas (4) does not. Then he analyzes statement (4) and indicates that it is relative to knower too. He claims that a thing cannot be certain unless it is known. In order for statement (4) to be true, at least somebody should know that p is true. First it seems as if "somebody should know that p is true" is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the truth of assertion (4). But though it is a necessary condition it cannot be a sufficient condition "for if it were, it would follow that in any case in which somebody did know that p is true, it would always be false for anyone to say 'It is not certain that p'. If I say it is certain that p, that I should know that p is true is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the truth of my assertion."[24] This means that "it is certain that p" is true for me if I know that p is true. It follows that the same proposition can be certain for me while at the same time it is not certain for another person. His point is significant in terms of showing that there is no sense of certainty concerning empirical propositions which are not relative to the subject who is making the assertion. So if we want to give a definition for the certainty of empirical propositions we should take this point into account.

Jason Stanley reduces Moore's four types into two general categories. He claims that there are two senses of certainty which are represented by two different forms of statements.

> According to the first sense, subjective certainty, one is certain of a proposition if and only if one has the highest degree of confidence in its truth. According to the second sense of 'certainty', which we may call epistemic certainty one is certain of a proposition p if and

[24] Moore, "Certainty," p.71.

> only if one knows that p on the bases of the evidence that gives one the highest degree of justification for one's belief that p.[25]

He identifies epistemic certainty with having the highest degree of justification. If we take this definition in the sense of the highest degree of justification someone can ever have, then having certainty becomes almost impossible with respect to empirical statements. We can never be sure whether the justification someone has is in the highest degree or not since another person whom we do not know may have a higher degree of justification than her. Also we always have to take future evidences into account if we define certainty in this way. I may again think that I have the highest degree of justification, but in the future new evidence may come out and show that my justification is not in the highest degree. In brief, his definition of epistemic certainty does not give us any criterion for "the highest degree of justification". Though Stanley's definition of epistemic certainty is not clear, the distinction he makes between subjective certainty and epistemic certainty is accepted by many people. So, regardless of the weaknesses of the definition he suggests, I will analyze the two statements that he proposes in which certainty is used.

Subjective Form of Certainty

As we have said before, subjective certainty can be expressed in the form of "I am certain that p". The reason why we call it "subjective" is that there is a strong inclination to claim that this kind of certainty is not strictly dependent on the truth of p though they have some kind of a relation. That is to say "I am certain that p" can be true when p is false. It does not necessarily entail the truth of p. Both Moore and

[25] Stanley, "Knowledge and Certainty," p.33.

Stanley seem to take certainty in this sense as similar to a psychological state. The fact that I am certain does not necessarily entail that p is certain or p is true. In this sense, it is the confidence in the truth of p and it seems that it is easier to have subjective certainty rather than an epistemological one. But Russell says "Let us take first the belief in common objects such as tables and chairs and trees. We all feel quite sure about these, in ordinary life, and yet our reasons for confidence are really very inadequate."[26] I think he points to a distinction between "I feel certain" and "I am certain" which has also been mentioned by Moore. Russell's words imply that though we feel that we are certain about empirical facts indeed we cannot be since our reasons are not enough to be certain. We only think that we are certain or we only feel that we are certain but this does not entail that we are certain.

Let us try to understand better what philosophers mean by subjective certainty. The distinguishing characteristic of subjective certainty is that it does not entail the truth of p. That is to say we can be certain about a proposition while that proposition is indeed false. But of course we must not be aware of the falsity of the proposition. Otherwise our confidence in the truth of p is damaged. What subjective certainty implies is that without knowing that p is false, we can be certain about the truth of p. Ayer presents this idea plainly in his words. He says that "There will not be a formal contradiction in saying both that the man's state of mind is such that he is absolutely sure that a given statement is true and that the statement is false."[27]

Suppose one claims that he is certain, saying that "I am certain that p". And after he makes his claim, new evidence comes out and shows that p is false. If what

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[26] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[27] Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, p.19.

is said in the definition of subjective certainty is true, then the discovery that p is false should not constitute counterevidence against his certainty.

If another person objects to him by saying "you said that you were certain", how would he answer? There are two choices: He could say that "I felt that I was certain but I was wrong. I wasn't certain indeed." Or he might say that "I was certain then, but I am not certain anymore." If he takes the first option then he admits that one cannot be certain about a false proposition. But if he takes the second option, then he admits that he was certain concerning a false proposition. This view gives rise to the utterance "I was certain that p, but p was false". Ayer says that this utterance does not constitute a formal contradiction. If we agree that "I am certain that p" stands for "confidence in p", then we go along with him. But I cannot say that I am willing to share this idea. I think that there is something odd in this expression since when we claim that we are certain of a proposition, we imply that this proposition is true. And after it turns out that p is false we should not insist on our claim. And I also think that "I am certain that p" does not stand merely for confidence.

In order to be able to understand the issue better we can consider an example. Jane claims that she is certain that the table in front of her is red. But then someone comes into the room and turns of the red light which Jane was not aware of before. What would she say if she was accused of misleading other people in the room? According to Stanley's subjective certainty definition, she can say "I was certain that the table was red, but I am not anymore." But I think, since the claim that "I was certain" implies that p was true, she should say "I felt I was certain" instead of saying "I was certain".

Following the two examples and Stanley's subjective certainty definition we can say that subjective certainty is nothing more than stating the absence of doubt in ones mind, in one context, at a specific time. In this sense it is not very different from believing. Believing also points to the absence of doubt regardless of the truth or falsity of the proposition which is concerned. So, "I am certain that p" becomes a useless expression since we can express the same meaning with the expression "I strongly believe that p". But sometimes we choose to say "I am certain that p" instead of saying "I strongly believe that p". When we say that we are certain about something we do not merely mean that we strongly believe in that thing. In fact we sometimes say that "I do not only believe that p, I am certain that p". In this respect I think that there must be a reason for choosing to say "I am certain that p" instead of "I believe that p".

When we say we believe in something we do not make any direct claim about the truth of that thing though we imply it. But when we say that we are certain of something we make a claim that it is true. It is not like any other sense statement such as "I seem to see a pen on the table", "it seems to me that the door is open", etc. They do not make any claim about the truth of the proposition which is concerned. In contrast, "I am certain that p" involves a claim about the truth of p. We cannot deny that it has a subjective aspect but not much more than "It is certain that p".

Unger also deals with the expressions "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p" and he claims that they do not express different senses of certainty. He talks about two forms of certainty in the following way:

> With regard to being certain there are two ideas which are important: first, the idea of something's being certain, where that which is certain is not certain of anything, and, second, the idea of a being's being certain, where that which is certain is certain of something. A paradigm context for the first idea is the context 'it is certain that it is raining' where the term 'it' has no apparent reference.

> I will call such contexts impersonal contexts, and the idea of certainty which they serve to express, thus, the impersonal idea of certainty. In contrast, a paradigm context for the second idea is this one: 'he is certain that it is raining'. In the latter context, which we may call the personal context, we express the personal idea of certainty.[28]

He claims that "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p" do not correspond to two different senses of certainty but they only express two different contexts which may be called personal context and impersonal context:

> Though there are those two important sorts of context, I think that 'certain' must mean the same in both. In both cases, we must be struck by the thought that the presence of certainty amounts to the complete absence of doubt, or doubtfulness. This thought leads me to say that 'it is certain that p' means, within the bounds of nuance, 'it is not at all doubtful that p.' The idea of personal certainty may then be defined accordingly, we relate what is said in the impersonal form to the mind of the person or subject, who is said to be certain of something. Thus, 'he is certain that p' means, 'in his mind, it is not at all doubtful that p'.[29]

He makes this explanation in order to prove that "certainty" is an absolute term. But we can appeal to the very same explanation in order to show that the two kinds of certainty can be expressed in terms of one and the other. It means that subjective certainty and epistemological certainty express different forms of certainty but not different senses. He thinks "I am certain that p" means that in my mind it is not doubtful that p, and "It is certain that p" means that p is not doubtful. But a proposition cannot be doubtful or not in itself since doubt requires a subject who doubts. So, "it is certain that p" means p is not doubtful in the mind of a subject or in the mind of a group of subjects. As it has been seen they both point to the absence of the possibility of doubt in the mind.

[28] Unger, "A Defense of Skepticism," p.331.

[29] Unger, "A Defense of Skepticism," p.332.

When I say that “I am certain that p” I imply that p is true. But as Stanley does, if we claim that subjective certainty does not require the truth of a proposition then we treat it as a sense statement such as “it seems to me that p”. When we utter such sense statements we do not imply that p is true whereas when we utter “I am certain that p” we imply that p is true. I am held responsible for my statement when I say that I am certain. If it turns out that p is not true others may criticize me. In contrast I am not held responsible when I say that it seems to me that p and nobody criticizes me if it turns out that p is false. So, subjective certainty differs from a sense statement because it involves a claim about the truth of p.

As we have mentioned, Stanley defines subjective certainty as “having the highest degree of confidence in the truth of p”. If it is true that subjective certainty does not require the truth of p and “I am certain that p” means that I have the highest degree of confidence in the truth of p, then it is all right for someone to say that “I was certain that p, but I was wrong”. Following his definition the previous sentence turns to “I had the highest degree of confidence in the truth of p, but p was wrong”.

It seems that there is nothing wrong in this claim if we assume that this definition is true. But if we define certainty in this way then it does not contain more than saying “I strongly believe that p is true” since belief does not require truth and it has the same meaning with “I have the highest degree of confidence”. But one should see that ones confidence comes from the evidence one has. It is not mere confidence without grounds. When I say that “I am certain that p” it is not enough to feel confidence in the truth of p. The evidence I have should justify my confidence in order for me to have the right to be certain. When I say that I believe in p, nobody demands concrete evidence from me. But when I say that “I am certain that p”, they expect me to present concrete evidence to convince them.

The distinction between subjective certainty and epistemic certainty has not been taken into consideration by many philosophers. Most philosophers use these two forms of certainty interchangeably. For example when Ayer claims that we can never be certain about a proposition he does not merely mean that we cannot be certain in the psychological sense, namely in the sense of having confidence in the truth of p. Russell makes a distinction between subjective and epistemic certainty regarding their meanings. His following words about certainty can be counted as proof. He says that "we can never be completely certain that any given proposition is true."[30] If subjective certainty did not require the truth of a proposition but only required the absence of doubt in the mind of a subject, it would be quite possible to be certain about some propositions. Then, what he meant was not only the absence of doubt in the mind of a subject or having confidence. By saying that we can never be certain about the truth of a proposition he must have meant something more than a psychological state.

Epistemic Form of Certainty

Epistemic certainty can be expressed in the form of "It is certain that p". It is usually agreed that epistemic certainty entails the truth of p. In other words "it is certain that p" cannot be true unless p is true.

As we have mentioned before, we can define epistemic certainty in two different ways. First, we can say that certainty is the intrinsic property of some statements. But this definition does not allow us to say that empirical propositions can be certain. The other way to define certainty as Firth emphasizes is to say that it

[30] Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth,* p.166.

is not an intrinsic property of some statements but it is relative to a subject. And he says that for empirical statements "it is certain that p" means "Statement p, made by A at t, is certain for A at t."[31] If we claim that certainty is not an intrinsic property of a statement, it allows us to have certainty concerning empirical propositions.

Firth says that "Most philosophers who have maintained that some empirical statements are absolutely certain have used the word 'certain' in such a way that a statement can never be certain 'intrinsically' but only relative to a particular person or group of people at a particular time."[32]

This explanation relates the certainty of empirical statements to subject and time. The certainty of an empirical statement does not have a meaning independently of a subject. Namely, a proposition is certain for or in relation to a subject. When we consider that point, our initial proposition "it is certain that p" becomes "it is certain that p for S" or "it is certain that p for a group of people which S is a member of".

Moore's definition of "it is certain that p" also supports the idea that epistemic certainty is relative to the subject. He defines "it is certain that p" in the following way.

> 'It is not certain that p' is used in two different ways: 'none of this group either knows that p or knows anything from which p follows' and 'no human being either knows that p or knows anything from which p follows.' The two corresponding uses of 'it is certain that' should be (1) someone of this group knows that, (2) some human being knows that. But perhaps sometimes it means rather (3) it is a matter of common knowledge that. If so, this is a use of 'it is certain that' to which no use of 'it is not certain that' corresponds.[33]

As we have seen, it is claimed that certainty is expressed in two different forms, but the two different forms do not necessarily require two different meanings. From now

[31] Firth, "The Anatomy of Certainty," p.5.

[32] Firth, "The Anatomy of Certainty," p.5.

[33] Moore, *Commonplace Book,* p.279.

on, considering the subject relative aspect of epistemic certainty, we can discuss whether the expressions “I am certain that p” and “it is certain that p” express two different senses of certainty. When we consider the forms of subjective certainty and epistemic certainty, we can see that the difference in their meanings is not as great as it is thought.

Let us consider the expressions “S is certain that p” and “it is certain that p” which represent subjective certainty and epistemic certainty respectively.

A: I am certain that p

B: It is certain that p

Since a certainty claim is made about the truth of a proposition statement, A and B turn to statements A' and B'.

A': I am certain that p is true.

B': It is certain that p is true.

Since subjective certainty is construed by Stanley as having the highest degree of confidence in the truth of p and it is the confidence of the subject who utters this sentence, he would not have doubts about the truth of p and think that p is certain for him. Then A' can be expressed in the following way.

A": That p is true is certain for me.

So far we have tried to show that epistemic certainty has an aspect which is relative to a subject or a group. Now, considering the point that every certainty claim requires a subject who makes this claim and appealing to Firth’s definition of epistemic certainty, we can say that statement B' turns into statement B".

B"(1): It is certain for me that p is true.

We can also express B" in the following way:

B"(2): It is certain for a group of people which I am a member of that p is true.

If we express epistemic certainty as in statement B", we can say that the difference between epistemic certainty and subjective certainty decreases. And in some contexts they can be expressed in terms of each other.

So far, we have tried to show that the difference between the senses of “subjective certainty” and “epistemic certainty” is not as great as it is acknowledged. They express different forms in which certainty is involved. The philosophers who thought that they expressed different senses presented some arguments. First, they claimed that the truth of subjective certainty does not depend on the truth of p whereas the truth of epistemic certainty depends on the truth of p. But we have tried show that the truth of subjective certainty also depends on the truth of p. Second, they have claimed that subjective certainty is relative to subject whereas epistemic certainty is not. We have tried to show that epistemic certainty has a subject-bound side. Third, some philosophers have defined subjective certainty in a way that is very similar to psychological states such as confidence or belief. We have stated that the expression “I am certain that p" cannot be seen as a mere psychological state. As a result, the claim that the difference between subjective certainty and epistemic certainty can be explained with respect to their meanings does not seem very convincing.

Now we are going to investigate other definitions which have been suggested for certainty in order to see whether they have something in common.

Definitions of Certainty

In the previous section we have claimed that there is not a major difference between the senses of "subjective certainty" and "epistemic certainty". Thus, while we are working on different definitions which have been presented for certainty we do not need to distinguish them in terms of their meanings.

As I have mentioned before, there is no consensus on the definition of "certainty". So far "it is certain that p" has been defined in the following ways:

a) That p is completely verified or completely justified. This is the definition which has been implied by many philosophers who claim that empirical propositions cannot be certain.

b) It gives the highest degree of justification. This is the definition which has been proposed by Jason Stanley.

c) No doubt can be raised against p −indubitability−. It is certainty in the Cartesian sense.

We focused on the first definition while we were talking about the object of certainty. Malcolm claimed that if certainty is defined in this way, it cannot be applied to empirical statements. And the second definition has been presented by Stanley for "epistemic certainty".

If we adopt these two definitions of certainty then empirical statements cannot be certain since having complete verification or the highest degree of justification is not possible in terms of empirical propositions as we have shown before. Indeed, most skeptical arguments adopt these definitions in order to prove that we do not know anything. Now, we should look at the definition of Cartesian certainty in more detail.

Cartesian Certainty

One of the definitions which have been presented for certainty is "indubitability". Descartes talks about the concept of "indubitability" in the *Meditations* while explaining "certainty". He begins *Meditations* by throwing away all the things which were counted as knowledge until that time. His aim is to find an indubitable foundation on which he can build knowledge. He says:

> I shall proceed by setting aside all that in which the least doubt could be supposed to exist, just as I had discovered that it was absolutely false; and I shall ever follow in this road until I have met with something which is certain.[34]

It follows from his words that things are certain provided that no doubt can be raised against them. In other words certainty requires the absence of the possibility of doubt. The question is that do we have to take every possibility of doubt into consideration? Descartes himself considers even the extreme skeptical scenarios. So we can say that in order to have Cartesian indubitability, we should eliminate all the possibilities of doubt.

He says "I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patiently false. So for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt."[35] It follows that to find a reason for doubt is enough to reject the certainty of a proposition.

> Descartes' appeal to the notion of doubt was explicitly methodological, and what was methodologically relevant was never

[34] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p.27.

[35] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p.12.

> anyone's de facto doubts, but always the possibility of doubting this or that proposition, since that possibility was sufficient to exclude the proposition in question from a particular class of propositions that Descartes is concerned to locate and identify in the opening stages of his Meditations.[36]

The mere possibility of doubt is enough for Descartes to refute the certainty of a proposition. Therefore certainty can be ascribed to very few statements. Only sense statements can satisfy the indubitability condition of certainty in the Cartesian sense. He even finds a reason to doubt mathematical judgments which are commonly thought to be certain. He presents the idea of an evil demon and says that he may be deceiving us about the things in the external world and about mathematical judgments. The only things which he cannot deceive us about are statements such as "I believe that", "I think that", "I doubt that", etc. He may deceive me about what I believe but he may not deceive me about the fact that I believe.

In the sense of Cartesian indubitability, certainty is an intrinsic property of sense statements. Empirical statements cannot be certain in this way since it is always possible to doubt them.

Consequently, certainty cannot be applied to empirical propositions as it has been defined so far. I agree with Malcolm that there is a sense of certainty which applies to empirical propositions. We do not use certainty only as an intrinsic property of some statements. We also talk about the certainty of empirical propositions. In the following part of my work, I will try to explain how it is possible to have certainty concerning empirical propositions and try to give a definition for it.

[36] J.F Rosenberg, "Cartesian Skepticism," in *Thinking About Knowing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.10.

I have so far tried to show that the distinction between subjective certainty and epistemic certainty in terms of their meanings is not necessary. They are only different forms through which certainty can be expressed; but they do not correspond to different senses of certainty. If they do not have different senses as we have said, then we have to account for the following statement:

C: 'I am certain that p, but it is not certain that p'.

The defenders of the view that subjective certainty and epistemic certainty have different senses would claim that there is nothing wrong in saying "I am certain that p, but it is not certain that p". If as it is thought by some philosophers subjective certainty and epistemic certainty had different senses and subjective certainty did not entail the truth of p whereas epistemic certainty did, then it totally would make sense to claim that one could be subjectively certain about p, though p was not certain. One could claim that he personally felt certain about p, but since he did not have complete justification he could not say that it was certain. And there would not be any contradiction in statement C.

Moore is one of the defenders of this view. He thinks that "'I have no doubt that p, but I don't think it's quite certain' is not self-contradictory."[37] His words imply that subjective certainty does not entail epistemic certainty and that epistemic certainty has higher requirements than subjective certainty. A subject may be certain about p but this does not mean that it is certain that p.

We may say that the proposition "I am certain that p, but it is not certain that p" seems true, assuming that subjective certainty and epistemic certainty have

[37] Moore, *Commonplace Book,* p.159.

different senses. But it does not mean that it is assertable. If I claim that "it is not certain that p", then I am aware that I do not have the highest degree of justification about p and it leaves a place for doubt. While aware that I lack evidence, how can I be subjectively certain? In other words, how can I have the highest degree of confidence in the truth of p, knowing that my justification is not in the highest degree? It seems that my knowledge about the lack of evidence damages my confidence concerning the proposition. Therefore, statement C becomes unassertable because of practical reasons.

If as we have claimed "subjective certainty" and "epistemic certainty" have the same sense, then the proposition "I am certain that p, but p is not certain" becomes false since it involves a contradiction. Assuming that they have the same sense, if one knows that p is not certain then he cannot be certain about p or if he claims that he is certain about p then he cannot claim that it is not certain that p. But we utter such statements and they make sense to us. So, we should be able to account for the utterance of such statements.

At this point, the contextual explanation of certainty can help us to give an account of the utterance of statement C. My claim is that certainty is a context sensitive term and a proposition may be certain in one context while it is not certain in a different context.

Stanley introduces the idea that certainty is a context sensitive term after realizing the problems of his definitions of certainty, but he does not go into the details of this argument. He expresses this idea in the following way:

> 'Certain' is context sensitive in two ways. First, it is context-sensitive as regards the kind of scale relevant to its interpretation (a scale of confidence or a scale consisting of degrees of justification). Secondly, it is context sensitive as regards the degree on the scale that is required to satisfy the property it expresses, relative to that context. A person's belief satisfies the property expressed by a subjective use of

> certain relative to a context if and only if that person holds that belief at or above the contextually salient degree of confidence; mutatis mutandis for epistemic certainty and degrees of justification[38]

Now, we can say that statement C does not seem false because certainty is used in two different contexts in it. The first part of the sentence is uttered in a context in which the requirements for certainty is lower compared to the other context in which the second part of the sentence is uttered. Contextual understanding of certainty may provide an explanation about how such statements can be assertable. According to the contextual explanation, there is a context shift in statement C. So, it can be expressed in the following way:

C': I am certain that p in context *x*, but it is not certain that p in context *y*.

Let us consider the statement "I am certain in context *x* that an earthquake did not happen, but it is not certain in context *y* that an earthquake did not happen". In this statement, *x* represents a context in which no skeptical scenarios are considered and y represents a context in which skeptical scenarios are considered. In context *x* there is no reason for doubt since the possibility of an earthquake is not relevant to that context. But in context *y* there is a reason for doubt since the possibility of an earthquake becomes relevant to that context. The person who utters this statement claims that she is certain that "an earthquake did not happen" in context *x* but at the same time she is aware that in context *y* the proposition that "an earthquake did not happen" is not certain.

One may object to this explanation by saying that statement C is uttered either in context x or in context y. If it is uttered in context x, then the second part of the sentence becomes false. If it is uttered in context y, then the first part of the sentence becomes false. According to this view, depending on the context in which it is

[38] Stanley, "Knowledge and Certainty," p. 26.

uttered, one part of the sentence always becomes false. We can defend our position by saying that this statement expresses the awareness that a proposition may be certain in one context while it may not be certain in the other context. We can also claim that it is uttered in a meta-context through which we can speak of the other contexts. It means that statement C is uttered in a third context.

There is another explanation which can be given about the utterance of statement C. We can say that "subjective certainty" expresses certainty in a personal context and "epistemic certainty" expresses certainty in an inter-personal context. Accordingly, "subjective certainty" expresses that p is not dubitable as far as the subject's epistemic system is concerned and "epistemic certainty" expresses that p is not dubitable as far as the epistemic system of a group of people is concerned. Certainty in an inter-personal context requires the consensus of the group which is in question. Thus, in the first part of statement C, our subject asserts that p is not dubitable as far as her epistemic system is concerned, but in the second part she asserts that p is dubitable as far as the epistemic system of the relevant group is concerned since there is no consensus on p in the group. Suppose a mathematician presents a proof for a theorem and it is true. We can claim that he is certain that this theorem is true since the theorem is not dubitable to him. But unless the proof is established by the mathematical community, the truth of the theorem cannot be regarded as certain. So, our mathematician can say "I am certain that the theorem is true, but it is not certain that the theorem is true".

From now on, I will try to give a definition of certainty in the light of our discussion hitherto. So far we have seen that certainty is an epistemic concept and it has a subject relative dimension. It can be applied to all kinds of statements −including empirical statements− in the same sense. So, there are not different senses

of certainty but different forms of it. Lastly, it is a context sensitive term. Context determines the degree of the requirement for certainty. While working on a definition of certainty I will especially focus on that point.

Malcolm claims that there are two different senses of the word "know", the weak sense and the strong sense. The weak sense of "know" allows for the possibility of a refutation whereas the strong sense does not.

> When I use 'know' in the strong sense I am not prepared to look upon anything as an investigation; I do not concede that anything whatsoever could prove me mistaken; I do not regard the matter as open to any question; I do not admit that my proposition could turn out to be false, that any future investigation could refute it or cast doubt on it.[39]

Dretske objects to the idea that the word "to know" has different senses by saying that "we don't have different senses of the word "to know" −a strong sense here, a weak sense is there− but one sense with different applications."[40] He thinks that relevant alternatives theory can help us to avoid the idea that the word "know" has two different senses. According to him, knowledge is an evidential state in which all the relevant alternatives are eliminated. He says "I propose to think of knowledge as an evidential state in which all relevant alternatives (to what is known) are eliminated. This makes knowledge an absolute concept, but the restriction to relevant alternatives makes it, like empty and flat, applicable to this epistemically bumpy world we live in."[41] He claims that knowledge is an absolute concept but on the other hand it has a pragmatic side and this side comes from the idea of relevant alternatives. Unger also thinks that knowledge is an absolute term but his reason is

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[39] Norman Malcolm, "Knowledge and Belief," *Mind, New Series*, vol.61, no. 242, (1952), pp.178-189.

[40] Fred Dretske, "The Pragmatic Dimension of Knowledge," in *Perception, Knowledge and Belief*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.53.

[41] Dretske, "The Pragmatic Dimension of Knowledge," p.52.

that knowledge requires certainty. But Drestske does not think that knowledge requires certainty, thus he proposes the idea of "relationally absolute", and he gives the example of a "warehouse". An abandoned house is really empty in spite of light bulbs in it because light bulbs do not count as relevant in determining the emptiness of a warehouse. Thus, while Unger arrives at a skeptical conclusion that we do not know anything, Dretske does not. Dretske thinks that there is a pragmatic dimension to knowledge:

> The social or pragmatic dimension to knowledge has to do with what counts as a relevant alternative, a possibility that must be evidentially excluded, in order to have knowledge. It does not change the fact that to know, one must be in a position to exclude all such possibilities. It does not alter the fact that one must have, in this sense, an optimal justification – one that eliminates every (relevant) possibility of being mistaken.[42]

The relevant alternatives theory has risen from the impossibility of eliminating all the possibilities of error. It has been used to explain how we can have knowledge despite uneliminated possibilities of error. According to relevant alternatives theory, one knows p if one eliminates all the relevant alternatives in which not-p. The alternatives which are not relevant do not constitute a threat against knowledge. "According to RA (Relevant Alternatives), a claim to know that p is made within a certain framework of relevant alternatives which are incompatible with p. To know that p is to be able to distinguish p from these relevant alternatives, to be able to rule out these relevant alternatives to p."[43]

I think that just like knowledge certainty has a pragmatic side too. We use certainty in our daily conversations as it applies to empirical propositions. My concern is that while we are defining certainty as having a complete justification or

[42] Dretske, "The Pragmatic Dimension of Knowledge," p.53.

[43] Keith DeRose, "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol.52, no.4, (1992), pp. 913-929.

an absolute absence of doubt we disregard its pragmatic side. What I want to do is to adopt the relevant alternative theory to the concept of certainty. Thus we will be able to explain how we can have certainty with respect to empirical propositions despite remote possibilities of doubt. Some philosophers who have claimed that we can never be certain about empirical propositions think that in order to be certain about a proposition we should eliminate all the possibilities of doubt. If we try to eliminate all the possibilities of doubt against a proposition, then certainty cannot be achieved and skeptical arguments become an obstacle against knowledge.

In general, certainty can be defined as the absence of doubt. As we have seen, a variety of definitions have been suggested for certainty which serve the idea of "the absence of doubt". Each of them can be thought of as a way of achieving the state of absence of doubt. "Having a contradictory negative", "incorrigibility", "having the highest degree of justification" and "complete verification" can be seen as ways of removing the doubt rather than being definitions of certainty.

We have said that certainty could be defined as the absence of the possibility of doubt. But we have also said that certainty is a context sensitive term. Context determines the doubts which are relevant and must be removed in order to have certainty. For example, in an everyday context it is certain that I will find my house in its place when I go there at night. It might be doubted because there may have been an earthquake and my house may have been destroyed. But this doubt is not relevant to the context. I do not normally consider the possibility of an earthquake which destroys my house. But in a context, in which scientists always talk about an upcoming earthquake, this doubt may be counted as relevant and in order to be certain we should remove this doubt. So, we can define certainty as the absence of the possibility of doubt which is relevant to the context.

In some contexts all the possibilities of doubt are counted as relevant. In these contexts certainty is called "absolute certainty" or "philosophical certainty" by some philosophers. Its demand is so high that no empirical statement can be certain in this way. The philosophers who claim that certainty does not apply to empirical propositions use certainty in this absolute sense. Indeed it is hard to satisfy the requirements of absolute certainty not only for empirical propositions but also for other kinds of propositions.

In other contexts some possibilities of doubt are counted as relevant while some are not. In these contexts certainty can be called "practical certainty". It can be defined as the absence of the possibility of doubt which is relevant to the context. This is the kind of certainty which can be ascribed to empirical propositions. Propositions such as "I was born in 1981", "the sun rises every morning" and "I am not a brain in a vat" are certain in a context in which there is no relevant doubt.

Malcolm also makes a distinction between "practical certainty" and "absolute certainty", but he does not give a contextualist account. As we can understand from the following paragraph, his distinction depends on a semantical explanation rather than a contextualist one.

> It is practically certain that p is true implies that it is reasonable to have a slight doubt that p is true and implies that the evidence p is true is not absolutely conclusive. It is absolutely certain that p is true implies on the contrary, that the evidence that p is true is absolutely conclusive and implies that in the light of the evidence it would be unreasonable to have slightest doubt that p is true.[44]

At this point, we should specify that contextualism can be dealt with either with respect to semantics or with respect to pragmatics. A contextual account of certainty with respect to semantics would say that the truth value of certainty claims is

[44] Norman Malcolm, "The Verification Argument," *Philosophical Analysis,* ed. Max Black (New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), pp. 229-280.

determined by the context. That is, the proposition “it is certain that p” can be true in one context whereas it can be false in another one. On the other hand, a contextual account of certainty with respect to pragmatics involves the idea that in some contexts we are justified in making a certainty claim whereas in other contexts we are not. Context determines the assertability conditions of certainty claims regardless of their truth value. So, I would like to specify that when I say that certainty is a context sensitive concept, I mean that it is relative to the context with respect to semantics.

Now, we should consider what makes a doubt relevant. When it comes to the certainty of empirical propositions, context determines what is relevant and what is not. In one context there may be a reason to doubt an empirical proposition whereas in another context there may be no reason for doubt. Thus a proposition may be certain in some contexts while it is not certain in another one. For instance, the proposition that “there is a red car in front of the house” is certain in an empirical context while it is not certain in a context where Descartes’ evil demon is considered. In the same way, the proposition “I am not a brain in a vat” is certain in the everday context while it is not certain in a context in which skeptical scenarios are considered.

So far we have talked about two different contexts which are everyday contexts and philosophical contexts. But there are many different contexts and which doubts are relevant is determined by these contexts. For example, suppose that there is a bus from the university to the airport which leaves at 8 am every morning. My friend asks me the departure time of the bus and I answer by saying that the bus leaves at 8 am in the morning. My answer can be counted as certain in the context in

which buses are not late. But in the context in which buses are late, my answer cannot be counted as certain since a reason arises to doubt it.

In this chapter I have investigated the concept of certainty in detail and tried to give an account of our intuitions concerning the certainty of empirical propositions. I have proposed that certainty is a context sensitive term and based on this idea I have tried to give a definition of it. In the following chapter I will focus on the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty in the light of our discussions.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE VIEW THAT KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT REQUIRE CERTAINTY

In this chapter I will deal with the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty. We have said that nowadays most philosophers claim that certainty is not a condition for knowledge. Although it is common to admit that certainty is not a condition for knowledge, it has some consequences, which may constitute a problem and therefore need to be dealt with as we have mentioned before.

There are some statements which express the view that knowledge does not require certainty but seem odd even to the people who defend this view. They can be analyzed in two categories. The first category is constituted by expressions in the form of "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p". These expressions are the direct results of the idea that knowledge does not require certainty. The second category is constituted by expressions in the form of "I know p, but I may be wrong" and "I know p, but it is possible that not-p". These expressions can be derived from the idea that knowledge does not require certainty though they are not its direct results.

In this part of the work, first I will deal with the expressions in the first category and try to give an account of their oddity considering the explanations which are made by some philosophers. Then I will investigate the expressions in the second category and discuss whether they can be derived from the idea that knowledge does not require certainty. With this aim I will work on the relation between certainty and possibility and try to find out whether the expression "I know

p, but it is possible that not-p" is an instance of the expression "I know p, but it is not certain that p". Then, I will discuss some accounts which are given for the oddity of the statements in the second category. These statements are thought of as the implications of fallibilism. So, I will briefly mention fallibilism and discuss the explanations which were made by some fallibilists concerning the oddity of these expressions. While working on the expression "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" I will especially focus on the sentences in the form of "I know p, but it is possible that q" where q entails ~p. Patrick Rysiew calls them concessive knowledge attributions. Concessive knowledge attributions are also thought to be the problematic implications of fallibilism. Lastly, I will discuss whether a contextual account of certainty, which I have defended in the second chapter, can help us to explain the oddity of the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty.

Direct Implications of the View That Knowledge Does Not Require Certainty

When we claim that knowledge does not require certainty, we mean that we can have knowledge without having certainty. But when we express this view by saying "I know p, but I am not certain that p" or "I know p, but it is not certain that p" we are faced with a problem. The problem is that these expressions seem odd because what is said in the second part seems to violate the knowledge claim which is made in the first part.

As we have said, expressions in the form of "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p" are the direct results of the idea that knowledge does not require certainty. In the second chapter we have claimed that

certainty does not express two different senses in these two statements. Therefore while investigating their oddity I will not make a distinction between "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p" in terms of sense. But when I talk about Stanley's account, since he makes a distinction between two senses of certainty which are contained in these statements, I will handle them separately.

Analysis of Statements in the Form of "I know p, but it is not certain that p" and "I know p, but I am not certain that p"

The people who think that knowledge requires certainty explain the oddity of these sentences by saying that they express false propositions. If we claim that "certainty" is a condition for knowledge then these expressions do not constitute a problem. Assuming that certainty is a condition for knowledge, "I am not certain that p" and "It is not certain that p" entail "I do not know that p", and the statements "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p" become false since they express a contradiction.

Unger supports the idea that knowledge requires certainty and he makes the following explanation about the oddity of these expressions. He says that "We may think, for example, that the person just represented himself as knowing that p, and as not being absolutely certain that p. Understanding this representation, we in turn quickly realize that what he represented entails that he is absolutely certain that p, which he then goes on to deny."[45] It follows from his words that knowledge entails certainty. Namely "I know that p" entails that "I am certain that p". Then the statement "I know p, but I am not certain that p" turns into "I am certain that p, but I

[45] Unger, "An Argument for Skepticism," p.260.

am not certain that p". Though Unger does not explicitly say it, we can derive from his words that the statement "I know p, but I am not certain that p" expresses a false proposition since it involves a contradiction.

On the other hand, as we have said before, nowadays most epistemologists argue that knowledge does not require certainty. Such sentences seem odd even to the people who admit that certainty is not a condition for knowledge since it seems that what is said in the second part of the sentence damages the knowledge claim which is made in the first part. But these sentences do not manifest anything more than their claim.

If we claim that certainty is not a condition for knowledge, than we admit that one can know a proposition without being certain and we should be able to assert it in the following way:

D: "I know p, but I am not certain that p." or

E: "I know p, but it is not certain that p."

However, it seems odd to utter such sentences because the second part of the sentence seems to violate the claim which is made in the first part. Malcolm in his article "Knowledge and Belief" explains why these sentences seem odd by saying that "If you lack confidence that p is true then others do not say that you know that p is true, even though they know that p is true. Being confident is a necessary condition for knowing."[46] If one says "I am not certain that p" or "it is not certain that p", then we can infer that he has some doubts about p and he does not have the highest degree of confidence. Having lack of confidence concerning p seems to cast a shadow on the knowledge claim which is done in the first part of the statement.

[46] Norman Malcolm, "Knowledge and Belief," p.179.

Stanley presents a detailed account of the oddity of expressions D and E. We have seen that he distinguishes certainty as psychological and epistemological certainty and therefore he investigates these expressions separately. We should remember that he defines psychological certainty as "having the highest degree of confidence" and epistemic certainty as "having the highest degree of justification". Considering these definitions D and E turn into:

D': I know p, but I do not have the highest degree of confidence in p.

E': I know p, but I do not have the highest degree of justification about p.

Stanley thinks knowledge does not require certainty in either sense. He says that "even if we are certain of many things, knowing that p does not entail subjective or epistemic certainty."[47] According to him, one can know p although he is not certain of p or p is not certain. So, there is nothing wrong in this claim. But he thinks that both D and E seem odd because they violate the norms of conversation. So, he claims that though they are not false, they are not assertable either because the second part of the sentences indicates the lack of confidence and the lack of belief in p. Therefore for practical reasons one cannot legitimately claim that one knows p after asserting that one lacks confidence about the truth of p.

As we have said, Stanley admits the oddity of statements D and E although he claims that they are true. According to him the reason why it is odd to utter such sentences is not because they are wrong but because they violate the norms of assertion. He claims that there are two certainty norms for assertion, one is the "subjective certainty norm for assertion", and the other is the "epistemic certainty norm for assertion". "The Subjective Certainty Norm for Assertion: Assert that p only if you are subjectively certain that p. The Epistemic Certainty Norm for

[47] Stanley, "Knowledge and Certainty," pp. 33-55.

Assertion: Assert that p only if you are epistemically certain that p."[48] Statement D violates the subjective certainty norm for assertion while statement E violates the epistemic certainty norm for assertion. It means that to utter that "I know p" I must be both psychologically and epistemically certain that p. But according to Stanley it does not mean that knowledge requires certainty, it only means that utterance requires certainty. He clarifies this point by giving an example. He considers the proposition "John knows that Bush is president, though it is not certain that he is." which is uttered by a person called Hannah.

> In order for Hannah to assert that John knows that Bush is president, she must be epistemically certain of it; but then, by the factivity of knowledge, she must also be epistemically certain that Bush is president. So the oddity of Hannah's utterance shows that Hannah must be epistemically certain that John is president in order to assert it. But it does not show that John must be epistemically certain that Bush is president in order to know that Bush is president.[49]

In order to appeal to the certainty norms for assertion to explain the oddity of our initial expressions D and E, extending Stanley's terminology let us call them "assert that you know p, only if you are epistemically certain that p" or "assert that you know p only if you are subjectively certain that p". We can call them "the epistemic certainty norm for knowledge assertion" and "the subjective certainty norm for knowledge assertion" respectively. These two norms for knowledge assertion express the idea that knowledge assertion requires certainty.

In a nutshell, Stanley claims that knowledge assertion requires certainty while knowledge does not require certainty. It follows that we can say that in order to know p we do not have to be certain of it, but in order to claim to know p we have to be certain of it. This seems to be a very high requirement for a knowledge assertion. It

[48] Stanley, "Knowledge and Certainty," p.18.

[49] Stanley, "Knowledge and Certainty," p.20.

puts us in a position where we know something but we do not have the right to assert it since it is violating the certainty norms for knowledge assertion. It seems that Stanley's effort to explain the oddity of expressions D and E by appealing to the certainty norms for assertion does not work since they cause another oddity.

In addition to this, certainty norms for assertion have very high requirements. The epistemic certainty norm for assertion claims that in order to assert a proposition we must be epistemically certain of it, which means that we must have the highest degree of justification for it. We have seen that it is almost impossible to have epistemic certainty in the way that Stanley defines it. If we insist on the certainty norms for assertion without appealing to the contextualist account, then almost all empirical propositions become unassertable. It means that we assert mostly what is unassertable and as a result we have a norm to which we cannot conform.

Stanley tries to solve the problem by ascribing it to utterance. However, the oddity does not vanish when we only think of these statements without uttering them because the problem does not arise only at the level of utterance. So, it seems that there is something more than just violating two norms of assertion.

I think Stanley himself is aware of the problem concerning certainty norms for assertion. We can understand this from the following words:

> One might worry that the twin norms of certainty are impossibly demanding. For example, if subjective certainty is construed as credence one, then being subjectively certain of a proposition requires that one would bet on it, no matter what the odds. Similarly, if epistemic certainty is construed as knowing a proposition on non-circular logically entailing grounds from a priori premises, then epistemic certainty requires Cartesian certainty. Thus construed, the claim that there are certainty norms governing assertion is impossibly demanding.[50]

[50] Stanley, "Knowledge and Certainty," p.24.

In order to get rid of this problem, at the very end of the article "Knowledge and Certainty" he introduces the idea that certainty is a context sensitive term and changes the definitions of epistemic certainty and psychological certainty; at least he reduces the degree of the requirements for certainty by making it relative to the context. He gives up the criteria of "having the highest degree of confidence" and "having the highest degree of justification" and he adopts the criteria of "having the contextually salient degree of confidence" and "having the contextually salient degree of justification". Accordingly, certainty norms for assertion can be paraphrased as "assert that p only if you have the contextually salient degree of confidence" and "assert that p only if you have the contextually salient degree of justification". He does not give a detailed explanation about the context sensitivity of certainty. The fact that he comes up with the contextual account of certainty at the end of the article and does not go into details indicates that he suggests this explanation in order to make the two norms of assertion work. If we define two certainty norms for assertion in a contextual way, then it becomes easier to conform to them. Even though he makes them work, it cannot be said that they explain the oddity entirely.

Explaining the oddity by appealing to the violation of conversational norms seems unsatisfactory because it leaves the following question open. Why do we set certainty as a condition for knowledge assertion while we do not make it a condition for knowledge? People are inclined to think that certainty cannot be a condition for knowledge since it is very hard to satisfy. They think that in order to have knowledge we should give up the certainty condition. If one can know a proposition without being certain, then it should follow that one should be able to assert what he knows without being certain. Otherwise one is stuck in a position where he knows

something but cannot assert it. It seems to me that if we give up certainty as a condition for knowledge, then we should also give it up as a norm for assertion. Therefore, I think that the violation of conversational norms cannot give us an explanation.

So far we have presented different accounts which were suggested for the oddity of the statements "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p". The defenders of the view that knowledge requires certainty claim that they express false propositions, whereas those who claim that knowledge does not require certainty do not agree with this explanation since they claim that these expressions are true and their oddity is due to other reasons. Stanley has explained the oddity in terms of the violation of the norms of assertion but it gave rise to other problems. Now, we should look for another explanation.

Perhaps we can say that these statements seem odd because of the intuition that knowledge indeed requires certainty. The reason why these statements seem odd even to the people who claim that knowledge does not require certainty may be that they are still influenced by the view that knowledge requires certainty although they deny it. Therefore they cannot give a proper account of the oddity of these statements within the limits of the view that knowledge does not require certainty.

Lewis thinks that people embrace fallibilism in order to get rid of skepticism. He explains the reason that leads him to contextualism in the following paragraph.

> So, we know a lot; knowledge must be infallible; yet we have fallible knowledge or none. We are caught between the rock of fallibilism and the whirlpool of scepticism. Both are mad! Yet fallibilism is the less intrusive madness. It demands less frequent corrections of what we want to say. So, if forced to choose, I choose fallibilism. Better fallibilism than scepticism; but it would be better still to dodge the choice.[51]

[51] David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol.74, no.4, (1996), p.549.

He thinks that we are stuck between skepticism and fallibilism. And since we know that we have knowledge, we are forced to choose fallibilism. But he also thinks that we can get away from this dilemma by adopting contextualism.

At the beginning of this work we mentioned that skepticism and dogmatism are among the reasons why people adopt the view that knowledge does not require certainty. It seems that the view that knowledge requires certainty in the context sensitive way saves us from the threat of skepticism and dogmatism. The view that knowledge requires certainty leads us to skepticism together with the idea that certainty cannot be achieved. If we claim that certainty can be achieved, then the skeptical arguments which depend on the idea that we cannot be certain concerning empirical propositions fail. The context sensitive understanding of certainty can also save us from dogmatism since it allows for the possibility of doubt which is not relevant to the context. If one knows that a proposition may not be certain in other contexts, then he considers new evidence. I think that some of the reasons which lead people to deny the view that knowledge requires certainty may be removed by adopting the contextualist account of certainty. Therefore we should reconsider the view that knowledge requires certainty.

I believe that the contextual account of certainty together with the view that knowledge requires certainty may help us to explain the oddity of the expressions "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p". According to the contextualist understanding of certainty we can have certainty in one context concerning a proposition and in this context we can claim that we know p whereas in another context we cannot satisfy the requirements for certainty. We may say that the expressions "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p" are uttered in two different contexts. The first part of the

sentence is uttered in a context in which the requirement for certainty is lower and the second part of the statement is uttered in a context in which the requirement for certainty is higher. It follows that while we can have certainty in the first context, we cannot have it in the second one. Since in the context in which the first part of the sentence is uttered we satisfy the certainty requirement, we can claim that "I know p" which we are going to decline in the other context in which the second part of the sentence is uttered. We should note that this explanation also has its own problems which I will mention later.

Indirect Implications of the View That Knowledge Does Not Require Certainty

In the first part of this chapter we have worked on the expressions "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p" which are the direct implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty. There are also the expressions "I know p, but I may be wrong" and "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" which can be seen as the indirect implications of this view. From now on I will deal with these expressions but since they are the indirect results of the view that knowledge does not require certainty and they constitute the subject matter of independent studies I will not go into the details. I will handle these expressions in relation to our aim and I will also discuss whether the context sensitive understanding of certainty can present an account of their oddity.

It is thought that these expressions are the implications of fallibilism though there is no complete consensus on this. Fallibilism is a view which depends on the general idea that we are fallible beings and there is always the possibility of being

mistaken concerning our beliefs. It claims that we can have knowledge despite the possibility of error. In order to understand the idea of fallibilism, I am going to present some definitions which have been given in the literature.

While explaining fallible knowledge Stanley says that "someone can know that p, even though their evidence for p is logically consistent with the truth of not-p. For example, a fallibilist maintains that I may know that I have hands, on the basis of evidence that is logically consistent with the remote possibility that I don't have hands because I am dreaming after a particularly terrible accident."[52] He defines fallibilism as having knowledge despite the logical possibility of mistake. Hetherington comes up with a similar definition. He says that "One's knowledge that p is fallible, iff (1) one knows that p but (2) one's belief that p is compatible with one's being mistaken in believing that p."[53] In his definition he emphasizes the possibility of being mistaken and claims that we can have knowledge though there is the possibility of mistake.

Reed suggests two definitions for fallible knowledge. "FK1: S fallibly knows that p iff (1) S knows that p on the basis of justification j and yet (2) S's belief that p on the basis of j could have been false. FK2: S fallibly knows that p iff (1) S knows that p on the basis of justification j even though (2) j does not entail that S's belief that p is true."[54] Richard Feldman also suggests two definitions. "F1: S can know p even if it is possible that S is mistaken in believing that p. F2: It is possible for S to

[52] Jason Stanley, "Fallibilism and Concessive Knowledge Attributions," *Analysis*, (2005), p.127.

[53] Stephen Hetherington, "Knowing Failably," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol.96, no.11, (1999), pp.565-587.

[54] Baron Reed, "How to Think About Fallibilism," *Philosophical Studies*, vol.107, (2002), pp.143-157.

know that p even if S does not have logically conclusive evidence to justify believing that p."[55]

Feldman's and Reed's definitions are very similar and they contain two common points. The first point is that their first definitions involve the idea that a proposition can be known despite the possibility of mistake and they directly give rise to the expression "I know p, but I may be mistaken". If it is possible that I am mistaken in believing that p is true, then it means that it is possible that p is false and if it is possible that p is false, and then it is possible that not-p is true. Thus, we can say that the expression "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" can be derived from fallibilism too.

The second point which is common in their definitions is that they express the idea that one can know a proposition without having absolute certainty about the truth of that proposition and they show that fallibilism contains the idea that knowledge does not require absolute certainty. In this respect fallibilism can be seen as a view which has arisen under the effect of the idea that knowledge does not require certainty. If fallibilism can be seen as an effect of the idea that knowledge does not require certainty, then its implications can be seen as the implications of that idea. That is why I find it crucial to investigate the expressions "I know p, but I may be mistaken" and "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" while dealing with the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty.

As we have said in the beginning of this chapter, though these expressions are the implications of fallibilism, they seem odd even to some fallibilists. The reason why they seem odd depends on the idea that one cannot claim to know a proposition if he is aware that he may be mistaken about that proposition.

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[55] Richard Feldman, "Fallibilism and Knowing that One Knows," *The Philosophical Review*, vol.90, no.2.(1981), pp.266-282.

First, I will investigate the expression "I know p, but I may be wrong" and then I will focus on the expression "I know p, but it is possible that not-p".

Analysis of the Statements in the Form of "I know p, but I may be wrong"

Austin thinks that we are fallible beings and we make mistakes concerning our beliefs. He explains this general liability to mistake in the following way.

> In various special recognized ways, depending essentially upon the nature of the matter which I have announced myself to know, either my current experiencing or the item currently under consideration (or uncertain which) may be abnormal, phoney. Either I myself may be dreaming, or in delirium, or under the influence of mescal, or else the item may be stuffed, painted, dummy, artificial, trick, freak, toy, assumed, feigned, or else again there is an uncertainty (it is left open) whether I am to blame or it is –mirages, mirror images, odd lighting effects etc.[56]

Austin thinks that what is meant by the expression "I know p, but I may be wrong" is not a general possibility of mistake. He explains why "I may be mistaken" cannot be interpreted in the wide scope. He says that "being aware that you may be mistaken doesn't mean merely being aware that you are a fallible human being: it means that you have some concrete reason to suppose that you may be mistaken in this case."[57] He does not agree with the explanation of scope confusion. He suggests a pragmatic explanation for the oddity of the statement "I know p, but I may be wrong". He compares the expressions "I know" and "I promise" and says that "I know, but I may be wrong" is unassertable with the same reason that "I promise but I may fail" is. He explains the oddity by appealing to the violation of conversational rules.

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[56] John Austin, "Other Minds," in *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.87.

[57] Austin, "Other Minds", p.97.

> ‘When you know you can’t be wrong’ is perfectly good sense. You are prohibited from saying ‘I know it is so, but I may be wrong’, just as you are prohibited from saying ‘I promise I will but I may fail’. If you are aware that you may be mistaken, you ought not to say you know, just as, if you are aware you may break your word, you have no business to promise[58]

He thinks that making a knowledge claim works in the same way as making a promise. When I promise, I imply that I have a strong belief that I will realize my promise and I will not fail, just as when I say I know I imply that I have a strong belief in the truth of p and that I will not be mistaken. “When I say ‘I know’, I give others my word: I give others my authority for saying that ‘S is p’.”[59] If I assert that I may be mistaken after I claim to know p, I unwillingly shake my reliability which I claimed to have. Broyles explains Austin’s point in the following way.

> In saying that I know it I engage myself to answer for its truth: and I let it be understood that I am in a position to give this undertaking. If my credentials do not meet the usual standards, you have the right to reproach me. You have no right to reproach me if I merely say that I believe, though you may think the less of me if my belief appears to you irrational.[60]

Austin goes on to say that “If I know, I cannot be wrong. You can always show I don’t know by showing I am wrong or may be wrong, or that I didn’t know by showing that I might have been wrong… Naturally, we are judicious: we don’t say we know if there is any special reason to doubt the testimony: but there has to be some reason”[61] He claims that the possibility of making a mistake concerning a proposition shows that we do not know that proposition. It means that it is not enough to explain the oddity of the utterance “I know p, but I may be wrong” using

[58] Austin, “Other Minds”, p.98.

[59] Austin, “Other Minds”, p.99.

[60] James Broyles, “Knowledge and Mistake,” *Mind, New Series*, vol.78, no.310 (1969), pp.198-211.

[61] Austin, “Other Minds,” p.82.

the idea that it violates conversational rules because it expresses a false proposition in the first place.

Broyles criticizes Austin's account in a similar way.

> Austin is surely right when he says that one should not claim to know something if one has some concrete reason to suppose that one might be mistaken. But what is the reason for this? Is it that one should not claim to know because one lets oneself open to criticism, because one may be letting others down? Well of course in a given situation this may be true, but surely there is a more basic reason why one should not say one knows. If a person has some reasons to believe that he is mistaken then he is not justified in saying he knows, whatever the consequence of this saying may be. As a matter of fact it would be wrong for him to think that he knows (whether he says anything or not).[62]

Broyles thinks that "I know p, but I may be wrong" expresses a false proposition since if I have reasons to think that I may be mistaken about p, I can not claim to know p because I am not justified in believing p.

We have considered the pragmatic account which has been presented for the oddity of the expression "I know p, but I may be wrong". As we have said before, we are looking for an explanation other than a pragmatic one. At this point we can consider the contextualist account of certainty. It may help us to explain the oddity of this expression in the same way as we have done for the direct implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty, since "I may be wrong" can be regarded as an instance of "it is not certain that p".

Now, I am going to deal with the expression "I know p, but it is possible that not-p". First, I will investigate the relation between "certainty" and "possibility" and try to find out whether "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" is an instance of "I know p, but I am not certain that p". Then I will talk about the accounts which are given by other philosophers. And finally, I will discuss whether the context sensitive

[62] Broyles, "Knowledge and Mistake," p.204.

account of certainty can help us in explaining the oddity of the expression "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" together with the expression "I know p, but I may be wrong".

The Relation between Certainty and Possibility

It seems that our usage of certainty has a kind of relation to possibility. Intuitively we may think that if p is certain, then it is not possible that ~p and if it is not certain that p, then it is possible that ~p. This intuition leads us to express certainty in terms of possibility. In this part I am going to inquire whether our intuition concerning the relation between certainty and possibility is true or not.

Depending on our intuitions we can present the following definition for certainty. "It is certain that p iff it is not possible that ~p". Moore defines certainty in terms of possibility and he claims that there is a use of "possible" in terms of which certainty can be defined.

> There is a use of 'possible' in which 'it is possible that p'= 'it is not certain that ~p'; hence in this use, 'possible' has at least two different senses, both different from that sense of possible in which 'possible'= not self-contradictory. Hence the two senses are: 'No man in this group knows that ~p or knows anything from which not p follows' and 'no human being knows that ~p or knows anything from which ~p follows'.[63]

Logical possibility is generally defined as not having a self-contradictory negative. That is to say, it is logically possible that p means p is not self-contradictory. First Moore states that certainty cannot be defined in terms of logical possibility. Then he says that there is another use of possibility in terms of which

[63] Moore, *Commonplace Book*, p.128.

certainty can be defined, and he remarks that there are two senses of this use, one is relative to a group of people but the other is not. As far as it can be understood from the text, he takes possibility in the sense of epistemic possibility. He presents two definitions for it. “No man in this group knows that ~p or knows anything from which not p follows” and “no human being knows that ~p or knows anything from which ~p follows”.

In order to find out whether certainty can be defined in terms of possibility first we should determine how to define possibility. We can consider the two different senses of possibility, logical possibility and epistemic possibility.

X: It is certain that p iff it is not logically possible that not-p

Y: It is certain that p iff it is not epistemically possible that not-p.

Logical possibility is defined as “it is logically possible that p iff p is not self contradictory” and in the previous chapter we have defined certainty as “the absence of the possibility of doubt which is relevant to the context”. When we apply the definition of logical possibility X becomes:

X': It is certain that p iff not-p is self-contradictory.

This definition is exactly the same with the definition which was suggested by Malcolm and which we criticized. It limits certainty to only analytical statements. Then we can apply our certainty definition.

X": There is no doubt concerning p which is relevant to the context iff not-p is self-contradictory.

This definition is also odd since there may not be any doubt which is relevant to the context about the propositions which do not have self-contradictory negatives. For example the proposition “I have two hands” does not have a self-contradictory negative but it does not mean that it is not certain in the contextual sense. This

proposition is certain because in some contexts there is no relevant doubt concerning it. Therefore we can say that certainty cannot be defined in terms of logical possibility.

When it comes to epistemic possibility, it gets more complicated since there are various definitions which have been suggested for it. I will present some of them and then try to find out whether certainty can be defined in terms of epistemic possibility. The most basic account for epistemic possibility was presented by Moore. As we have mentioned before, he defines epistemic possibility as it is possible that p if "no man in this group knows that ~p or knows anything from which not p follows" and "no human being knows that ~p or knows anything from which ~p follows". If we apply this definition to our original claim "it is possible that p iff it is not certain that not-p" it becomes "it is not certain that not-p iff no man in this group knows that not-p or knows anything from which not-p follows". This definition implies that if somebody knows that not-p then it is certain that not-p. Knowledge cannot be a sufficient condition for certainty. We have defined certainty as the absence of the possibility of relevant doubt. Someone who knows a proposition may still have doubts concerning it. So, we can say that certainty cannot be defined in terms of epistemic possibility in the way Moore defines it. So, we should consider other definitions of epistemic possibility.

Hacking objects to Moore's definition by saying that p can be impossible even though nobody in this group knows that p is false and he presents the following definition: "S's assertion, 'it is possible that p' is true iff (1) no one in the relevant community knows that it is false that p, and (2) There is no practical investigation by means of which members of the relevant community could establish that p is false."[64]

[64] Ian Hacking, "Possibility," *The Philosophical Review*, vol.76, no.2 (1967), p.p. 143-168.

If we apply Hacking's definition of epistemic possibility to our definition of certainty –it is not certain that p iff it is possible that ~p– it becomes "It is not certain that p iff no one in the relevant community knows that ~p is false and there is no practical investigation by means of which members of the relevant community could establish that ~p is false". But p may be certain since there may not be a reason for doubt which is relevant to the context, even though no member of the relevant community knows that ~p is false and there is no relevant way by which they come to know ~p is false.

Lastly I will consider Lewis's definition of epistemic possibility. He says that "S's epistemic possibilities are just those possibilities that are uneliminated by S's evidence."[65] We can express his definition in the following way. It is epistemically possible that p iff p is uneliminated by S's evidence. And if we apply his definition of epistemic certainty, statement Y becomes Y': It is certain that p iff the possibility that not-p is not uneliminated by S's evidence. But Y' may be disputed because the contextual understanding of certainty requires only the elimination of the possibilities which are relevant to the context. The existence of an uneliminated possibility which is not relevant to the context does not constitute an obstacle against certainty.

We have considered some of the definitions which have been presented for epistemic possibility and investigated whether our intuition concerning the relation between certainty and possibility is true. Considering the results we can say that certainty cannot be defined in terms of possibility. So, "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" cannot be seen as an instance of "I know p, but it is not certain that p". As we have explained before, these expressions are the implications of the view that

[65] David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol.74, no.4, (1996), p.5.

knowledge does not require certainty. For this reason we should investigate them more carefully.

Analysis of the Statements in the Form of "I know p, but it is possible that not-p"

There are different views concerning the oddity of the expression "I know p, but it is possible that not-p". One of them involves the idea that these statements express false propositions. This view is defended by Stanley. The other view involves the idea that these statements seem odd because "possibility" is thought as "epistemic possibility" rather than as "logical possibility". This view is defended by Malcolm. There is also a pragmatic approach which is defended by Rysiew and it claims that these statements are not assertable though they may be true. The last view is that these expressions seem odd due to the epistemic closure principle and they make sense when we deny it.

Stanley also deals with expressions in the form of "I know p, but it is possible that q" where q entails not-p. They are called concessive knowledge attributions by Rysiew. Stanley claims that these expressions are false but their falsity does not arise because knowledge requires certainty. He thinks that their falsity arises from the definition of possibility. When we clarify the meaning of the possibility in these statements we see that they involve a contradiction. He takes possibility in the epistemic sense and he gives the following definition for it:

> It is possible for A that p is true iff what A knows does not, in a manner that is obvious to A, entail not-p.[66]

[66] Stanley, "Fallibilism and Concessive Knowledge Attributions," p.128.

If we apply this definition of epistemic possibility to concessive knowledge attributions, we arrive at the expression "I know p, but what I know does not, in a manner that is obvious to me, entail q" where p entails q. It is obvious that the second part of the statement denies what is claimed in the first part. Thus, it results in a contradiction.

According to the second view these statements seem odd because it is thought that they contain an epistemic possibility. When we consider that the possibility is logical in these statements, the problem is resolved. Malcolm says that "There is a strong temptation to move illegitimately from 'it is logically possible that p', or 'it might be (logically) that p', to 'there is some possibility that p'. Any one from this one infers, properly, that it is not certain that not-p."[67] If we take possibility in the sense of logical possibility then it does not constitute any problem with respect to fallibilism. The expression "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" turns into "I know p, but ~p is not self contradictory" and there is nothing odd or wrong in this statement. I do not think that the fallibilists are going to accept that the possibility in these statements is a logical possibility. The statement "I know p, but ~p is not self-contradictory" does not express a false proposition but it does not express the idea of fallibilism either.

The third view involves the idea that these expressions seem odd due to some pragmatic reasons. It claims that the oddity of these expressions depends on violating the norms of conversation. Rysiew defends this view and he explains his position in the following way:

> Statements of the form 'S knows that p but it is possible that q, where q entails not-p' are bound to sound odd. 'I know that p' standardly functions to convey speaker's confidence as to p and to counter a doubt whether p. However the concession clause raises then-

[67] Malcolm, "Certainty and Empirical Statements," p.31.

> mentioned possibility to salience. So while 'I know' communicates that the speaker is confident that p and thus that he believes he can rule out the salient not-p possibilities, the concession clause communicates that there's a salient not-p possibility which the speaker can't rule out.[68]

This view depends on the idea that while we are speaking we imply something. When we say "I know p" we imply that we have confidence in the truth of p even though we do not assert it plainly. In the statement "I know p, but it is possible that not-p", first we imply that we have a confidence in p but then by saying that ~p is possible we imply that we have no confidence in p. We imply two things which contradict each other in the same statement. That is why it sounds odd. At this point Rysiew remarks that the sentence is not contradictory in itself; it just seems contradictory because of what it implies. There is a relation between his account and Austin's account concerning the oddity of the statement "I know p, but I may be wrong". They both present pragmatic explanations and both claim that the oddity is caused by violating some conversational norms.

It seems that the pragmatic approach has some problems. It claims that these propositions are true and it ascribes the oddity to the violation of some conversational norms. Thus, these statements become unassertable though they are true. Inan, considering that "I know p, but it is possible that ~q" can be derived from fallibilism, explains the problem of the pragmatic approach in the following way. "There must be something wrong in the idea that a fallibilist can never assert certain propositions that logically follow from her theory."[69] He points to the fact that if we adopt the pragmatic approach, we put ourselves in a position where we defend something but we can never assert it. It seems that there is something wrong in this

[68] Patrick Rysiew, "The Context-Sensitivity of Knowledge Attributions," *Nous*, vol.35, no.4 (2001), pp. 477-514.

[69] Ilhan Inan, "Why can't a fallibilist say 'I know p, but I may be mistaken'?" Unpublished manuscript, (2009).

position.

The last view claims that these statements seem odd because of the epistemic closure principle. They think that denying the epistemic closure would solve the oddity of these statements. The epistemic closure principle can be defined as **"**if S knows that p and S knows that p entails q, and then S knows that q".

> If at t, I know that p and know that p entails q, I may still have to do something- namely perform a deductive inference- in order to come to know that q. Until I perform that inference, I don't know that q.[70]

According to the epistemic closure principle, if p entails q and we know p then we automatically come to know q. Hawthorne and Dretske argue that the epistemic closure principle should be denied because we do not automatically come to know q, we need to make an inference. And they give the following examples. One can know that the animal in a cage is a zebra and yet be in no position to know that the animal in that cage is not a cleverly disguised mule. I can know that I have hands but I am in no position to know that I am not a handless brain in a vat.

As we have seen, the view that knowledge does not require certainty entails some odd expressions which are found odd also by the defenders of this view. We have seen that "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p" were the direct implications of this view whereas "I know p, but I may be wrong" and "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" were its indirect implications. We have investigated all these expressions one by one and discussed the explanations which have been offered about their oddity. Basically, there are two main directions to go. One of them is to claim that all these expressions are false since knowledge indeed requires certainty. We do not want to say that they are false

[70] Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries,* p.32.

because these are the expressions which we use in our conversations and even though they seem odd they make sense. For this reason we want to explain their oddity assuming that they are true. The other option is to claim that they are true despite the fact that they seem odd. Different explanations were made for their oddity but one of them is common to all, namely, violating conversational norms. According to this view the reason why they seem odd to us is that there are some conversational norms and these expressions violate these norms. As we have seen, all the accounts which we have presented have some problems.

Lastly, we should consider whether the contextual understanding of certainty can help us to explain the oddity of these statements. We can claim that knowledge requires certainty but in a contextual way. "I know p" entails that "it is certain that p" and "I am certain that p", whereas "I may be wrong" and "it is possible that ~q" implies that it is not certain that p. Since certainty is context sensitive, "I know p" entails that "I am certain that p" in one context while the second part of the sentence asserts that "I am not certain that p" in another context. It means that there are two different contexts in which this sentence is uttered.

I think we can suggest a contextual explanation both for the direct and indirect implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty. Though this explanation has some problems of its own, it is still the most moderate one. I think these problems can be removed. When we say that there are two contexts in these expressions, we may be criticized because a context shift cannot happen during the utterance of a statement. Some people may claim that a statement can be uttered only in one context. This objection makes sense because one cannot willingly change the context during the utterance of a statement since one does not have such a control

on it. They may say that even if they suppose that these statements are uttered in two different contexts, one part of them becomes false.

As a defense we can claim that these expressions do not necessarily involve a context shift, they only require the awareness of the subject who utters the sentence that certainty is a context sensitive term. The subject expresses her view concerning the certainty of a proposition and claims that p may be certain in one context while it may not be certain in another one. So, on the one hand by saying "I know p" she implies that p is certain in one context, on the other hand by saying "it is not certain that p", "I may be wrong" and "it is possible that not-p" she implies that p is not certain in the other context.

This point can also be criticized since to ascribe such awareness to everyone who utters these sentences would be very unrealistic. We can defend our position by saying that not necessarily awareness but also an intuition concerning the context sensitivity of certainty could cause the utterance of such statements. In brief, I would like to point out that certainty is a context sensitive term. Though we are not consciously aware of it, we intuitively know that different contexts have different requirement degrees for certainty. Expressions such as "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p" may be indications of our intuitions concerning the context sensitivity of certainty rather than awareness of it.

Consequently, at first sight it seems that there is something wrong in these expressions because we think certainty is an absolute term. The problem seems to be resolved when we think of certainty as a context sensitive concept. The contextual account of certainty seems to explain the oddity of the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty. Also, I think that it is valuable since it expresses our intuitions concerning the context sensitivity of the concept of certainty.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In the twentieth century the view that certainty is not a condition for knowledge had an important influence on epistemology. Fallibilism is one of the indications of this view. It claims that we can have knowledge that p though the evidence we have for p does not guarantee its truth. Fallibilism also contains the idea that there is the possibility of making mistakes concerning what we know.

The people who defend the view that knowledge does not require certainty have some good reasons. One of their reasons is that certainty is a very high requirement and it is almost impossible to satisfy. The other reason is that there are some undesired implications of the view that knowledge requires certainty. If we set certainty as a condition for knowledge, then it may lead us to skepticism and dogmatism. Skepticism concerning knowledge argues that we do not know anything. Skeptics use the idea that knowledge requires certainty together with the view that certainty cannot be achieved and they conclude that we know nothing. The other undesired implication of this view is that it may lead us to dogmatism. Dogmatism is an attitude of being insistent about one's own beliefs and therefore disregarding the possibility of mistake. If certainty is a condition for knowledge, then it seems that we do not really need to reconsider what we know. Denying the view that knowledge requires certainty can refute skeptical arguments and prevent dogmatism. Therefore, it may be another reason to claim that knowledge does not require certainty.

Though it is common to admit that certainty is not a condition for knowledge there is nevertheless no consensus on the definition of certainty. Different

philosophers suggest various definitions but they have not come to an agreement on any of them. Some people claim that certainty is the property of propositions which express necessary truths and empirical statements cannot be certain since they are contingent. Others claim that empirical statements can also be certain. Malcolm is one of those philosophers. He says that certainty applies to different statements in different senses. It applies to sense statements in the sense of "being incorrigible", it applies to a priori statements in the sense of "having a contradictory negative" and he concludes that it should apply to empirical statements in a different sense.

In the second chapter of the thesis I worked on Malcolm's definitions of certainty and claimed that certainty does not apply to these three statements in three different senses. Though we agree with him that sense statements and a priori statements can be counted as certain, we can see that "being incorrigible" and "having a contradictory negative" are not different senses but only two ways of satisfying certainty and they carry a hidden criterion for certainty which is "the absence of the possibility of doubt". My claim in the present study was that we needed a new definition for certainty, which could apply to all statements in the same sense and somehow relate to "indubitability".

After investigating different types of statements which certainty applies to in relation to Malcolm's theory, I started to work on different forms of statements which contain "certainty". Stanley claims that there are basically two different forms of sentences which contain certainty; "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p". He reflects the general inclination by claiming that in these two forms of sentences certainty expresses two different senses. Stanley calls them "subjective certainty" and "epistemic certainty" respectively. Though the other philosophers who share his view give them different names, they agree on the general idea with him. Stanley

claims that the truth of a subjective certainty claim does not depend on the truth of p, whereas the truth of an epistemic certainty claim does. For instance, suppose that someone goes to the zoo and sees an animal that has some features which are very similar to cats and some features which are very similar to dogs. She says "I am certain that this animal is a cat". According to Stanley and other philosophers who claim that certainty expresses two senses, the truth of this proposition does not depend on whether the animal in question is really a cat. The truth of this proposition only requires her confidence in the truth of that proposition. By contrast, the truth of the proposition "it is certain that this animal is a cat" requires the truth that the animal in question is a cat. In relation to this point he claims that subjective certainty is relative to the subject whereas epistemic certainty is not.

In this work I have tried to show that certainty does not express two different senses in the statements "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p". My claim was that they are only two different forms of statements in which certainty is used. I have tried to prove my claim by showing that the truth of the proposition "I am certain that p" also requires the truth of p, contrary to what is thought by some people. I have also tried to show that epistemic certainty, expressions in the form of "it is certain that p", also have an aspect which is relative to the subject. I have concluded that subjective certainty and epistemic certainty express two forms of certainty rather than two senses of it. As a result, I have pointed out that we need a definition of certainty which applies to all statements in the same sense, including empirical statements, and which is in a degree relative to the subject who utters the sentence.

If we claim that certainty does not have two senses but it only expresses two different forms in the statements "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p", then we have to account for expressions such as "I am certain that p, but it is not certain

that p". If subjective certainty and epistemic certainty have the same sense, then the statement "I am certain that p, but it is not certain that p" expresses a contradiction, therefore it becomes false. However, we use such expressions and they make sense to us. My claim was that this expression seems odd because certainty is a context sensitive term and it is used in two different contexts. According to the context sensitive understanding of certainty, context determines the requirements for certainty. That is, a proposition may be certain in one context whereas it is not in another context. For instance, the proposition "it is certain that there are no aliens" is certain in the everyday context whereas it may not be certain in a context in which skeptical arguments are considered, since the level of the requirements for certainty is determined by the context.

I have suggested a contextual account for certainty because I think that we use certainty in a way that it is relative to the context. In our everyday speeches we sometimes use it in such a way that it does not refer to Cartesian certainty at all. Cartesian certainty points to the absence of the possibility of doubt concerning a proposition. However, there is always the possibility of doubt concerning empirical propositions. In the everyday context when we make certainty claims, we disregard the doubts which arise from the possibility of being in a dream, the possibility of being deceived by an evil demon and the possibility of being a brain in a vat. These kinds of doubts are irrelevant to the context. So, we do not need to refute them in order to have certainty. Considering this point, I have defined certainty as the absence of the possibility of doubt which is relevant to the context.

In the third chapter, I investigated the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty. I divided them into two categories; the direct and indirect implications of this view. The expressions "I know p, but I am not

certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p" can be counted as the direct implications of this view whereas the expressions "I know p, but I may be wrong" and "I know p, but it possible that ~p" may be counted as its indirect implications. These expressions seem odd even to the people who think that knowledge does not require certainty though they think that they are true and that they make sense to us. In this part of the thesis, I discussed some accounts which were about the oddity of these expressions and considered whether the contextual understanding of certainty could present an explanation of their oddity.

With this aim, first I investigated the expressions "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p". Philosophers who think that knowledge requires certainty explain the oddity of these statements by saying that they express false propositions. Unger claims that "I know p" entails that "I am certain that p". In these sentences one implies that he is certain that p by saying that he knows p, and then he goes on to deny it. It can be understood that people who think knowledge requires certainty find these propositions false. It is harder to explain why they seem odd when it comes to those who think that knowledge does not require certainty because the propositions express exactly what they claim. They find these statements problematic because what is said in the second part seems to violate what is said in the first part. The general inclination is to say that though they are semantically true, they express contradictory implications. Stanley gives an account of their oddity by saying that they violate the norms of assertion. He claims that there are two norms of assertion; subjective certainty norm for assertion and epistemic certainty norm for assertion. The statement "I know p, but I am not certain that p" violates the first one while the statement "I know p, but it is not certain that p" violates the second one.

I have stated that Stanley's account concerning the oddity of the direct implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty has some problems in it as all the other pragmatic explanations have. First he limits the oddity to utterance, but I think the oddity does not only belong to the level of utterance. Second, the two norms of assertion are very high requirements. If we set them as norms for assertion, then we put ourselves in an awkward position where we know something but we cannot assert it.

After investigating the direct implication of the view that knowledge does not require certainty, I worked on the expressions "I know p, but I may be wrong" and "I know p, but it is possible that not-p". These express the content of fallibilism. First I tried to find out whether they are instances of the expressions "I know p, but I am not certain that p" and "I know p, but it is not certain that p". With this aim I worked on the relation between certainty and possibility. It seems that there is a general inclination to define certainty in terms of possibility. Intuitively, we think that "it is certain that p iff it is not possible that ~p". In order to find out whether this definition is true or not, I presented different definitions of possibility. Considering these definitions, we have seen that certainty cannot be defined in terms of possibility. Since fallibilism can be thought of as an implication of the view that knowledge does not require certainty, we should deal with its implications too.

The expressions "I know p, but I may be wrong" and "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" are also thought as odd by people who think that knowledge does not require certainty. Different accounts have been suggested for their oddity. Austin gave a pragmatic explanation for the oddity of "I know p, but I may be wrong" and he compared the expression "I know p" with the expression "I promise". He claimed that knowing is very similar to promising in the way that when we promise we imply

that we will not break our word and when we say we know we imply that we cannot be mistaken. He ascribed the oddity to the violation of some conversational rules. A similar account was given for the oddity of "I know p, but it is possible that not-p" by Rysiew. He claimed that the sentence is not contradictory in itself; it just seems contradictory because of what is implied in it. In the first part of the sentence we imply that we have a confidence in the truth of p, and then we deny it in the second part by saying that it is possible that ~q. As we have said, pragmatic approaches bind the oddity to the violation of some conversational norms. It seems that they cannot present a complete account since the oddity has a kind of relation to semantics too. Therefore it cannot be solved only at the level of conversation. So, it seems that we are going to need a different explanation.

Lastly, I considered whether the contextual understanding of certainty could provide an explanation for the oddity of the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty. We have said that context determines the degree of the requirements for certainty. So, when "I am certain that p" and "it is certain that p" can be true in one context, they can be false in another. I claimed that the oddity of the direct and indirect implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty is caused by the intuition that knowledge indeed requires certainty in a contextual way. That is why all the accounts which try to explain their oddity assuming that knowledge does not require certainty face some problems. Though they claim that knowledge does not require certainty, they cannot explain the oddity of these utterances within the limits of their claims.

Lewis pointed out that people are inclined to adopt fallibilism in order to get rid of skepticism. When we define certainty as the absence of all the possibilities of doubt, it becomes beyond reach. If we make certainty in this absolute sense as a

condition for knowledge, then we run into skepticism. It seems that people are inclined to deny the view that knowledge requires certainty since it is a way of denying skepticism. On the other hand, if we define certainty in a contextual way, then the view that knowledge requires certainty does not lead us to skepticism.

When we appeal to the contextual account of certainty, we can say that the first part of these statements entails that p is certain in one context while the second part entails that p is not certain in another context. It seems that in order to utter such expressions one should be aware that certainty is a context sensitive term. This point can be disputed by claiming that this kind of awareness cannot be ascribed to everyone who utters these expressions. It is reasonable that everyone who utters these expressions cannot have this kind of awareness but I think at least they may have an intuition concerning it. The intuition that certainty is a context sensitive concept can give rise to the utterance of the statements which we have investigated in the thesis.

Consequently, I think that these expressions are uttered as a result of the intuition that knowledge requires certainty in a context sensitive way. We at least intuitively know that we may be certain in one context while we may not be certain in another. It seems that when we appeal to the idea that knowledge requires certainty together with the view that certainty is a contextual concept, the oddity of the implications of the view that knowledge does not require certainty can be explained.

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