ABSTRACT. Contextualists claim two important virtues for their view. First, contextualism is a non-skeptical epistemology, given the plausible idea that not all contexts invoke the high standards for knowledge needed to generate the skeptical conclusion that we know little or nothing. Second, contextualism is able to preserve closure concerning knowledge – the idea that knowledge is extendable on the basis of competent deduction from known premises. As long as one keeps the context fixed, it is plausible to think that some closure principle can be articulated that will survive scrutiny. Opponents of contextualism often try to gain an advantage over it by claiming that their view mimics these virtues of contextualism as well as having other virtues. A recent example of the same is termed ‘contrastivism,” as presented by Jonathan Schaffer. I will argue that the representation made is chimerical, that in fact contrastivism has no hope of mirroring these twin virtues of contextualism.

First, we need a bit of background material on how contrastivism is constructed to yield an anti-skeptical motif as well as to preserve closure. According to contrastivism, all locutions of the form ‘S knows that p” are illiptical, relative as they are to some implicit contrast (i.e., some logical contrary of p). Thus, for example, no one knows *simpliciter* that they have hands. Instead, they have knowledge of such a claim relative to an implied contrast, formulable in terms of a question such as ‘Hands or stumps?’”, ‘Hands or artificial limbs?’”, and even ‘Hands or envatted brain stimulated to take their to be hands when there are none?’”. By specifying the requisite contrast, the contrastivist claims to be able to preserve the virtue of avoiding skepticism, for if the contrast is ‘Hands or stumps?’”, the skeptical considerations that bar knowledge relative to other
contrasts (such as ‘Hands or envatted and deceived brain?’) are not relevant.

Schaffer also claims that contrastivism can endorse certain closure principles, and it is important to note that the account in the last paragraph explaining how contrastivism can avoid skepticism plays an important role in determining the precise form of closure principle that a contrastivist must endorse. The simplest closure principle is this:

if p is known and p entails q, then q is known.

This inadequacy of this proposal is well-known: it implies that if we know anything at all, we are logically omniscient. Efforts to improve on this simple principle involve either strengthening the antecedent or weakening the consequent. One can strengthen the antecedent, for example, by requiring not only that p entails q, but that this entailment is known. One can weaken the consequent by replacing the claim that q is known with the claim that the person in question is in a position to know that q.

Neither of these proposals is adequate to avoid counterexample, nor is the conjunction of both sufficient to avoid counterexample. Nonetheless, it is still plausible to think that some closure principle is true. The approach I find most promising here is to strengthen the antecedent in the way suggested by Williamson and Hawthorne to include the idea that q comes to be believed on the basis of a competent deduction from p. Still more qualification will be needed – e.g., it will be important that additional defeating information regarding p and regarding q is not acquired in the process of deduction – but the prospects are good for a successful principle along these lines.

A successful refinement of a principle along these lines cannot be transplanted directly into a contrastivist theory, since that view requires that well-formed knowledge attributions always contain a contrast proposition. The needed alterations are fairly obvious, however. The simplest such principles that encode the needed contrast claim are formulated by Schaffer as follows:

\( \text{Closure Principle 1. If } S \text{ knows } p \text{ rather than } q, \text{ and } p \text{ entails } r, \text{ then } S \text{ knows } r \text{ rather than } q; \)