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**KNOWLEDGE NORMS:  
ASSERTION, ACTION, AND BELIEF**

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and approved by**

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### **Knowledge Norms: Assertion, Action, and Belief**

**by Matthew Aaron Benton**

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Over the last decade epistemology has seen an explosion of interest in the idea that knowledge provides a normative constraint on some action or mental state  $\varphi$ . Typically, appeal is made to a norm of permission such that knowledge is required, as a necessary condition,<sup>1</sup> for permissible  $\varphi$ -ing: that one must  $\varphi$  only if one knows a relevantly specified proposition.

The three most prominent proposals have been that knowledge is the norm of *assertion*, the norm of *action*, and the norm of *belief*. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 center on assertion: chapter 1 considers the literature for and against the Knowledge Account of Assertion (KAA), on which one may assert that  $p$  only if one

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<sup>1</sup>Though some philosophers have also argued that it provides a *sufficient* condition on assertion (e.g. DeRose 2009; cf. Brown 2011 and Lackey 2011 for rebuttals); I focus primarily on the necessary condition.

knows that  $p$ . I argue for it and defend it against prominent objections. Chapter 2 examines how we should understand the nature of KAA's knowledge-norm by contrasting the early 'descriptivist' view of Moore and Unger with the recent 'prescriptivist' and constitutive view of Williamson. Chapter 4 considers the assertability conditions for epistemic modals such as "might" and "possible."

Recently some philosophers have argued that knowledge normatively governs actions more generally: that is, that one may act on a proposition  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ . I take up this view in Chapter 3, alongside a related and interesting 'action-rule' for assertion.

Finally, knowledge as a norm of belief has been lately endorsed by several prominent philosophers; on most formulations of the view, one may believe that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ . I argue against (most versions of) this view in Chapters 5 and 6.

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I should acknowledge that small portions of Chapter 1 (parts of sections 1.3, 1.6, and 1.7 of that chapter) have already been published in *Analysis* and *Philosophical Studies*: for citations see the Bibliography or my Vitae on the final page. I own the copyright for the *Analysis* publications; and *Philosophical Studies* allows authors to reprint published material in one's dissertation.

## **Dedication**

This volume is dedicated above all to Laura, without whom not...

...and to my grandmother Pauline, who wanted a scholar in the family.

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## Chapter 0

### Prelude

Knowledge is a cognitive performance.<sup>1</sup> Knowing involves an agent employing his cognitive abilities, the exercise of which aims at a goal, and manifests the agent's competence or skill; that is, their cognitive performance achieves that goal through their competence or skill.<sup>2</sup> The goal of such a performance is typically that the agent's belief be true,<sup>3</sup> and true as a result of the agent's exercised competence. In Sosa's (2007, 2009b) terminology, the cognitive performance of knowing may, like the archer's performance of shooting an arrow at a target, be evaluated along multiple dimensions. It can be evaluated for its **accuracy**: the belief can be true or false. It can be evaluated for its **adroitness**: the believing may manifest, to varying degrees, the agent's epistemic competence. And it may be evaluated for its **aptness**: whether the belief is accurate

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<sup>1</sup>See especially Ernest Sosa 2007, 2009b, as well as Alvin Plantinga 1993, John Greco 2010. Austin 1946, repr. 1961b: 67 uses the terms "performed" and "cognition." Cf. also the related theme in those who think of knowing as a complex cognitive activity (R.G. Collingwood 1924: 77–79, 1939: 24–32, 1940: 106) or a kind of ability (e.g. Stephen Hetherington 2006, Christopher Hookway 2006).

<sup>2</sup>Invoking agency, aims, and performances needn't require invocation of a conscious attempt: the cognitive systems which involve us in believing and knowing, such as our sensory capacities, conceptual processing, and memory storage, can be plausibly construed as largely subpersonal. These cognitive systems are akin to the autonomic nervous system, which operates involuntarily, though an agent's deliberate use of certain of these capacities can be manipulated consciously, in the same way that one's breathing is governed by the autonomic system even though it works in concert with the personal level, the conscious mind.

<sup>3</sup>This is not to deny that sometimes believing aims at some goal other than truth; but arguably knowing requires the aim of true belief, that is, that the cognitive performance endeavors to attain truth. See Sosa 2011, chap. 2.

*because adroit.*<sup>4</sup>

Assertion is likewise a cognitive performance.<sup>5</sup> Asserting involves an agent employing his cognitive and linguistic abilities in concert, the exercise of which manifests the speaker's competence or skill, through which she aims to achieve a goal. The goal of her cognitive-linguistic performance is standardly to impart her knowledge to another listening subject or group of subjects. Assertion can likewise be evaluated on similar dimensions, concerning whether a speaker's assertion that *p* is accurate, whether adroit, and whether apt, that is, whether accurate because adroit.

Evaluation of an assertion's aptness, because it invokes adroitness, involves an epistemic-doxastic component. The competence involved in making an assertion is not just the syntactic and phonetic competence of uttering the well-formed sentences characteristic of language fluency. Rather, the cognitive-linguistic skill for which one typically evaluates an assertion has to do with its contextual propriety, where the contextually relevant evaluative dimension concerns the speaker's epistemic and doxastic standing with respect to the asserted proposition. Was speaker *S* appropriately epistemically positioned concerning *p* to assert that *p* in the way that she did? Assuming *S* believed what she asserted, what were her epistemic or evidential grounds for believing it? These are the kinds of questions we often ask of our interlocutors.

All of this is to be expected if knowledge is intimately connected with assertion. If knowledge is the *norm of* assertion, in the rough sense that one should

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<sup>4</sup>There are obviously situations in which the agent's envisioned goal is something other than having a true belief aptly arrived at: knowing that *p* may be *instrumental* to achieving some other aim, for example, acting on *p* so as to  $\phi$ . Still, in such cases, knowing is the immediate goal, and  $\phi$ -ing the mediated goal.

<sup>5</sup>By *assertion* I mean the speech-act of stating or declaring something to be the case, which puts forth a proposition as true: usually this is a sentence in the indicative mood which contains no qualifiers or hedges, e.g. "It is raining in Seattle," or "John left his office at 3:00 p.m."

not flat-out assert what one does not know, then our epistemic evaluation of a given assertion refers us to whether the speaker knew what it was she asserted. Evaluating the cognitive core of an assertion performance depends crucially on evaluating the speaker's epistemic performance.

Yet the evaluation of a speaker's epistemic performance is multilayered. For we may consider not just the asserter's epistemic position with respect to some proposition *p*; we may also evaluate the epistemic aspects of the asserter's decision whether, and how, to assert that *p*, which examines the speaker's reflective awareness of her epistemic performance. A *hunter's* archery skills are evaluable in the same way as the competitive archer's, according to its accuracy, adroitness, and aptness; but they are also evaluable in concert with the hunter's higher-order performance of his decision-making with regard to his shot-selection.<sup>6</sup> A hunter who hunts prey for food must take care in his shot-selection, especially given his practical limitations: a small quiver of arrows, finite time in which to catch his prey, and so on. Such a hunter's ability at shot-selection is a developed decision procedure which requires the hunter's attention to, and a stance on, how accurate a shot he typically is under certain environmental conditions. A hunter who is an extremely accurate shot under all sorts of conditions can get away with more risks in indiscriminate shot-selection than would—and than *should*—a less experienced or less accurate hunter: the less accurate hunter, however, by being fully aware of his poor aim, can make up for it through assiduous attention to his shot-selection, by taking a shot only when the prey is close enough, in plain view, under mild weather conditions, etc., thereby raising his accuracy rate. This reflective stance on his own shot-competence enables the hunter with poor aim to become more accurate: awareness of his subpar shot skill makes for increased competence

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<sup>6</sup>See Sosa 2007, 90, 2011, and 2010 ms. Cf. also Turri 2010a, 87 n. 17.

at shot-selection. This reflective competence can even be put into practice diachronically, in that the hunter can employ a specific policy regarding his shot-selection, which can be adjusted as his success increases or decreases.

Thus we may compare two hunters at both levels of competence. We may evaluate their object-level skill of being an accurate shot: how often and under what conditions their shots are apt, that is, accurate because adroit. But we may also evaluate their higher-order reflective competence in their shot-selection under varying conditions, and how this interacts with their object-level accuracy. A hunter with poor aim and a hunter with excellent aim may each hit their prey 90% of the time, but only because the less accurate hunter shows extreme care in his shot-selection, being less indiscriminate than his highly accurate counterpart.

The hunter metaphor provides an illuminating parallel with the knower who has a reflective, epistemic stance on his beliefs. Sosa distinguishes between animal and reflective knowledge: animal knowledge consists of apt beliefs, those beliefs which are true due to the epistemic skill of the knowing subject, including the competence of its sensory systems and cognitive capacities. But humans have a special ability to attain an epistemic stance on their own apt beliefs; and when a person acquires a higher-order true belief owing to a reflective epistemic competence, she has an apt belief about an apt belief. Reflective knowledge is “apt belief aptly noted” (2009b, 32).

The hunter metaphor likewise applies to the knower *qua* asserter. Our epistemic practice concerning what, when, and how to assert in conversation parallels the shot-selection ability of the reflectively aware hunter. It seems plausible that having reflective knowledge makes for the best epistemic position from which to assert, and it thereby explains what’s so important about having

reflective knowledge over and above animal knowledge:<sup>7</sup> namely, it positions the agent for being able to assert with full epistemic confidence.<sup>8</sup>

So assertion is an epistemically-laden performance, insofar as the cognitive-linguistic performances involved standardly aim to impart one's knowledge; and if on a given occasion the assertive performances do *not* have that aim, they appear to generate an obligation to hedge one's assertion in an appropriate way (more on the importance of hedges will emerge in Chapters 1, 3, and 5). But action more generally, and (outright) belief, though cognitive performances, are not so epistemically-laden: not all actions aim at imparting or expressing knowledge, nor do beliefs. Furthermore, as I hope to make clear in Chapters 3, 5, and 6, non-assertive actions and beliefs need not be based upon knowledge-level justification, nor do we require this of them (in the normative sense) very much of the time. This is fully consistent with a sense in which knowledge is the "aim" of belief, and with a sense in which a belief, or an action, would invariably be better epistemically if it were (based upon) knowledge. But there are principled reasons why these do not result in knowledge-norms governing action and belief, though there is such a norm on assertion.

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Sosa 2004, 291.

<sup>8</sup>All of the foregoing is compatible with knowing involving, because its performance results in, a factive mental state; but it requires, I think, denying Williamson's (2000, 21) claim that knowing is "*merely* a state of mind."



# Chapter 1

## Asserting and Knowing

A recent tradition going back to G.E. Moore suggests that the primary norm governing assertion is tightly connected to knowledge. There is much to commend this claim, commonly called the Knowledge Account of Assertion (KAA). Varieties of KAA have been proposed and defended recently by Peter Unger (1975), Timothy Williamson (2000), and Keith DeRose (1996, 2002, and 2009, chap. 3).<sup>1</sup> This chapter considers the case that has been made for KAA, and assesses some criticisms and counterarguments that have been leveled against it. Chapter 2 will examine more carefully the two main formulations of the KAA, and the relationship between them.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Stalnaker (1984, 144), John Hawthorne (2004, 23), Jason Stanley (2005b, 10–11 and 2005a, 129), and Jonathan Schaffer (2008) also endorse versions of KAA (though Stanley 2008 appears to retract his endorsement). David Lewis (1979, repr. 1983, 242) also gestures at KAA when he says “But I have no way of knowing [that my cat Albert in New Zealand has gone upstairs], so I have no business saying that he has.” Cf. also Lewis 1980, repr. in 1998, at p. 22.

Kant seems to gesture at KAA in the *Critique of Pure Reason* when he says “I cannot *assert* anything, that is, declare it to be a judgment necessarily valid for everyone, save as it gives rise to conviction”; though he goes on to define *conviction* as “subjective sufficiency... (for myself)” as opposed to “objective sufficiency [which] is termed *certainty* (for everyone),” the above quote, concerned as it is with validity “for everyone,” seems to get at knowledge, which for Kant is had “when the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively” (A821–22/B849–50).

See also Williamson 1994, 14–16, highlighting KAA’s role in the Stoic response to the problem of vagueness. Ancient Biblical sources also gesture at KAA: Proverbs 27:1, and James 4:13–16 tie knowledge (in James: *ἐπίστασθε* = *epistasthe*) to the propriety of assertion. Thus the idea behind KAA is *very* old.

## 1.1 Assertion and “Representing Oneself”

The idea that knowledge is somehow connected to assertion has a distinguished, if little noticed, ancestry: Moore, Frank Ramsey, J.L. Austin, Max Black, and (arguably) Paul Grice all link knowledge with assertion before Unger’s 1975 defense.

### 1.1.1 Early Inspiration and Early Sympathizers

#### Moore

Moore connected knowledge with assertion as early as his 1905–06 paper “The Nature and Reality of Objects of Perception,” where he reflects on the significance of the “How do you know?” challenge (see the repr. in his 1922, esp. 33–36). By the time of his 1912 book *Ethics*, he began to fill out the picture more carefully:

The truth is that there is an important distinction, which is not always observed, between what a man *means* by a given assertion and what he *expresses* by it. Whenever we make any assertion whatever (unless we do not mean what we say) we are always *expressing* one of two things—namely, either that we *think* the thing in question to be so or that we *know* it to be so. ... and even where I do not mean what I say, my words may be said to *imply* either that I think [it] or that I know it, since they will commonly lead people to suppose that one or the other of these things is the case. Whenever, therefore, a man asserts ... , what he expresses or implies by these words will be either that he thinks it to be so or that he knows it to be so (1912 [1961], 78)

Moore's later writings also connect knowledge and assertion, by way of reflection on Moorean paradoxical sentences, discussed below in §1.2.

### **Ramsey**

Ramsey's (1931, 259) mention of their relation is less overt, but instructive nonetheless. He hints at it in his short (posthumously published) paper "Knowledge," where he connects saying and knowing, without invoking mere belief:

we cannot without self-contradiction say  $p$  and  $q$  and  $r$  and ... and one of  $p, q, r \dots$  is false. (N.B.—We know what we know, otherwise there would not be a contradiction.)

Ramsey's parenthetical appeal to the KK principle serves to help explain the problem as KAA would: he's thinking in preface-paradoxical terms, and seems to think that knowing that one knows positions one for "saying" or asserting a proposition. But notice that no such appeal is required for a "self-contradiction": the limiting case of such a list invokes just one member, e.g.  $p$ , plus adding that it is false. This would be straightforwardly self-contradictory, without invoking knowledge or KK principles.

### **Austin**

J.L. Austin anticipated much of the modern discussion in his "Other Minds" (1961b, 45):

When we make an assertion, such as 'There is a goldfinch in the garden' or 'He is angry', there is a sense in which we imply that we are sure of it or know it ('But I took it you *knew*', said reproachfully), though what we imply, in a similar sense and more strictly, is only that we *believe* it. On making such an assertion, therefore, we are

directly exposed to the questions (1) ‘Do you *know* there is?’ ‘Do you *know* he is?’ and (2) ‘*How* do you know?’ If in answer to the first question we reply ‘Yes’, we may then be asked the second question, and even the first question alone is commonly taken as an invitation to state not merely *whether* but also *how* we know. But on the other hand, we may well reply ‘No’ in answer to the first question: we may say ‘No, but I think there is’, ‘No, but I believe he is’. For the implication that I know or am sure is not strict: we are not all (terribly or sufficiently) strictly brought up.

And later Austin (1961b, 67) reiterates this last point:

When I say ‘S is P’, I imply at least that I believe it, and, if I have been strictly brought up, that I am (quite) sure of it ... If I only believe that S is P, I can add ‘But of course I may (very well) be wrong’ ... If I say ‘S is P’ when I don’t even believe it, I am lying: if I say it when I believe it but am not sure of it, I may be misleading but I am not exactly lying.<sup>2</sup>

And with regard to the epistemic grounds required for asserting, Austin elsewhere claims that “there are very many things which, having no knowledge of, not being in a position to pronounce about, you just can’t state” (“Performative Utterances,” in 1961b, 236). Somewhat incredibly, almost none of the later defenders of KAA cite these passages as precedent.

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<sup>2</sup>He goes on to say that an assertion prefaced by ‘I know...’ is relevantly stronger: “saying ‘I know’ is taking a new plunge. But it is *not* saying ‘I have performed a specially striking feat of cognition, superior, in the same scale as believing and being sure, even to being merely quite sure’: for there *is* nothing in that scale superior to being quite sure. ... When I say ‘I know’, I *give others my word*: I *give others my authority for saying* that ‘S is P’ ” (ibid.). Cf. DeRose 2009, 104ff. and Turri forthcoming for related discussion.

## Black

Black 1954 took the explanation a bit further, spelling out in a Moorean spirit that the problem with paradoxical constructions such as “Oysters are edible, but I don’t believe it” stems from the sincerity implicit in linguistic communication using assertions:

When the words “Oysters are edible” are pronounced assertively, the tone of voice used, together with the choice of the appropriate copula (“are,” not “may be,” or “conceivably might be” or one of the other alternatives available) is a *conventional sign* of what we might call “good faith.” In order to use the English language correctly, one has to learn that to pronounce the sentence “Oysters are edible” in a certain tone of voice is to *represent oneself* as knowing, or believing, or at least not disbelieving what is being said. (To write a check is to represent oneself as having money in the bank to honor the check.) ... whether the man who asserts “Oysters are edible” in fact believes what he is saying or is deliberately lying, he signifies that he knows, or believes, or at least does not disbelieve what he says. (If this were not so, lying would be more difficult than it is. A liar trades upon the conventional signification of his linguistic act to produce a deceptive impression.) (1954, 54–55)

## Grice

Finally Grice, in his William James lectures of 1967 (published in his 1989, esp. 22–57), put forth a theory of communication that centered on a pragmatics derived from his “Cooperative Principle.” Of the four maxims (pp. 26–29) which he thinks fall under that general principle, the maxim of *Quality* is most

important to our purposes here: its “supermaxim” is “Try to make your contribution one that is true,” of which two more specific maxims are articulated:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence (27).

He later points out that these, as with the other maxims inherent in his Cooperative Principle, are part of his avowed aim to treat “talking as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational behavior,” and as such, adherence to Quality implies that one’s contribution is “genuine and not spurious” (28).

Significantly, Quality is the only maxim that seems particular to assertion: its submaxims are the only ones for which he uses “say” (and thus by “say” he may just mean “assert”), and such sayings are special in that they are subject to truth and falsity. So it is natural to think that Quality applies primarily to assertions; it does not naturally apply to other utterances such as questions, imperatives, etc. Given only the above, we might think that Grice endorses an account of assertion that requires one to believe, and have adequate evidence for, what is asserted. This would not yet require truth, for the supermaxim indicates that one should *try* to make one’s assertion one that is true; and it is consistent with this that one assert something false (so long as one believes it on the basis of adequate evidence). Thus it may appear that Grice doesn’t go in for the KAA.

But elsewhere Grice invokes knowledge in connection with the maxim of Quality. His Group B examples demonstrate how one can violate a conversational maxim in a way explainable by supposing that the maxim violated *clashes* with another maxim: he gives the case of someone answering a question in a less than informative way. If A asks, *Where does C live?*, and B answers *Somewhere in the south of France*,

this infringement of the first maxim of Quantity [*make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)*] can be explained only by the supposition that B is aware that to be more informative would be to say something that infringed the second maxim of Quality, “Don’t say what you lack adequate evidence for,” so B implicates that he does not *know* in which town C lives. (32–33, emphasis mine)<sup>3</sup>

Now of course, one could lack adequate evidence, and for that reason fail to know; but what Grice says here is that B’s responding as he does is to be explained by B’s sensitivity to the demand of Quality: it is *because* B doesn’t know that he opts for the hedged claim. Grice’s appeal to B’s lacking-knowledge implicature indicates that knowledge, and not some weaker epistemic position (such as merely having adequate evidence), is connected closely to whether one is in a position to assert. At any rate, given that Grice here indicates that not knowing is the relevant thing implicated by not being able to fulfill the adequate evidence submaxim, there is textual evidence that Grice would have favored the KAA.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>In his unpublished papers (1947–1989, carton 1, folder 23), Grice has some notes which consider the response one might make in conversation by saying “I don’t know whether *q*” to be a “specific apparent failure (clash)” under the category of Quantity: the clash would have to be with Quality, and the only way to make sense of its relevance is that knowledge, and not something weaker, is required to satisfy Quality.

<sup>4</sup>Relatedly, see Cappelen 2011, 39 n. 20; Cappelen notes that Jason Stanley maintains that one could argue (even if Grice did not) that the maxim of Quality just is the core idea of KAA, and that this argument would proceed by noting that Quality cannot be derived, in the appropriate way, from the Cooperative Principle alone (in the way that the other maxims could be so derived). Presumably this is because the Cooperative Principle does not have the resources to explain why Quality, to the tune of knowledge, counts as cooperative behavior in the case of assertion.

## Unger and beyond

However, Peter Unger (1975) was the first to formulate and defend the KAA thoroughly. Unger hypothesized that acts of assertion invariably involve the speaker in *representing oneself as knowing* what is asserted. Stated most fully, this hypothesis contends:

(RK) If S asserts, states, or declares that *p*, then he not only represents it as being the case that *p*, but he represents it as being the case that he *knows* that *p*.<sup>5</sup>

Unger's support for such a thesis comes from two areas (echoing the earlier points from Moore and Austin) : *problem sentences* and *conversational data*.

### 1.2 Problem Sentences: Moore's Paradox

Chief among the problem sentences have been Moorean paradoxical conjunctions where the second conjunct disavows knowledge, such as

(1) # Dogs bark, but I don't know that they do.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously both conjuncts of (1) could be true; but if uttered aloud it sure *sounds* inconsistent. Moore's own diagnosis of the inconsistent sound is that "by asserting *p* positively you *imply*, though you don't assert, that you know that *p*."<sup>7</sup> RK also handles the original belief version of the Moorean sentence,

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<sup>5</sup>Unger 1975, 251. Unger goes so far as to say that this condition is "analytically correct" (p. 259).

<sup>6</sup>In my symbolism, '#' signals a felt clash or dissonance in the assertion.

<sup>7</sup>Moore 1962, 277; cf. also 1942, 542–43. Moore also appears to rely implicitly on such a principle in "Proof of an External World," where he maintains that "I have, no doubt, conclusive reasons for asserting that I am not now dreaming" (1959, 149), as well as in the opening



namely

(2) # Dogs bark, but I don't believe that they do.

Since knowing involves believing, RK predicts that such assertions are likewise unutterable: only if the second conjunct is false can one know the first conjunct.<sup>8</sup>

Moore's only extended discussion of the paradox comes in an unpublished, incomplete manuscript, circa 1944 (published by Thomas Baldwin: see Moore 1993, 211–12, n. 1); there he cites the relevance of knowledge even for the belief-version of the paradox, noting that the “natural reaction” to anyone uttering a such a sentence as (1)

would be ‘What a nonsensical thing to say! How can you *know* that it really is raining, when you don't believe it?’.

When a person says a thing assertively we often ask ‘How do you know that?’—as if by saying it he *implied* not only that he believed it but that he *knew* it. And *very* often we do. And I think it's again true that in the immense majority of cases where people assert a thing positively they do know it. (1993, 211)

So the sense of inconsistency arises from the utterance's first conjunct implying or representing some bit of knowledge which is then denied by the second conjunct. Since the first conjunct represents it as being the case that one

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paragraphs of “Certainty” where he says that “by asserting them in the way I did, I *implied*, though I did not say ... that I myself knew for certain ... that what I asserted to be the case was, at the time I asserted it, in fact the case” (1962, 227). In the Appendix to Chapter 1 below (see fn. 75) I note that A.M. MacIver (1938) may have been the first in print to consider such conjunctions; and so it might more accurate to call it MacIver's paradox.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Williamson 2000, 254.

knows some  $p$ , and the second conjunct represents, by saying outright, that one does not know that  $p$ , then one represents oneself as both knowing and not knowing that  $p$ . It has often gone unnoticed that the order of the Moorean conjuncts doesn't seem to matter, for a statement like the original but with commuted conjuncts is similarly infelicitous.<sup>9</sup> For example, upon being asked whether or not  $p$ , it sounds quite bad to reply with

(3) # I don't know, but  $p$ <sup>10</sup>

where the second conjunct is flatly asserted without qualification.<sup>11</sup> DeRose notes that the RK explanation of these problem sentences

is attractive because it supports our sense that *some* inconsistency is responsible for the clash involved in asserting the conjunction, while, at the same time, happily removing that inconsistency from the realm of what's asserted: the conjunction asserted is itself perfectly consistent, but in trying to assert it, one gets involved in a contradiction between one thing that one asserts and another thing that one represents as being the case.<sup>12</sup>

Other variants of Moorean sentences also seem to be best explained by the

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<sup>9</sup>Though Moore himself notices it (1993, 207): there he begins with the commuted pair "I don't believe it's raining, but as a matter of fact it is," and "Though I don't believe it's raining, yet as a matter of fact it really is raining."

<sup>10</sup>Of course, no one speaks in schemas with variables standing in for propositions; what would be uttered would be the schema filled in with a familiar sentence that expresses a proposition. Throughout, for ease of use, I shall talk of asserting such numbered sentence types, when of course what is meant is that one would utter a token sentence with the variables replaced by sentences expressing propositions.

<sup>11</sup>Just as bad is a more precise version of this statement that isn't prompted by being asked whether or not  $p$ : uttering "I don't know whether or not  $p$ , but  $p$ " sounds just as inconsistent. See more below in section 4.4 on criticisms of Weiner 2005.

<sup>12</sup>DeRose 2009, 96–97.

RK account. If someone declares “It is raining,” but then proceeds to clarify that she didn’t mean to represent it as being the case that it is in fact raining, we will most likely consider her to be *taking back* or *retracting* something she had represented as being so. Consider the paradoxical nature of the assertion

(4) # *p*, though I’m not representing it as being the case that *p*.

Likewise, if she declares that it is raining but then maintains that she didn’t mean to imply that she *knows* it to be raining, we would similarly view her as somehow backpedaling or retreating to some weaker claim; and it would be natural for us to respond with a query as to why she didn’t qualify or hedge her initial statement to weaken it, such as that she merely “believes” or “thinks” it is raining, or that it is “probably” raining.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that the representation that one knows which accompanies an assertion is not merely a conversational implicature, for such implicatures are cancelable.<sup>14</sup>

The Moorean kinds of problem sentences considered thus far highlight a feature of assertion which RK seeks to explain. But other non-Moorean constructions can also be explained by RK. Certain redundant sentences can reveal an obvious entailment between them; consider the following, which highlights

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Unger 1975, 255–56.

<sup>14</sup>Slote (1979, 179), Williamson (2000, 248), and Jessica Brown (2008, 92) agree that it is an uncancellable implicature; on cancelability see Grice 1989, 44. But terminological issues arise concerning whether these are best understood as “conversational” (rather than conventional), or even as “implicatures” in Grice’s sense of these terms. In 1989, 41–42, Grice defines “implicature” as excluding commitments that are *trivially* generated by the presupposed adherence by the conversational participants to his Cooperative Principle (and its submaxims); e.g. Grice thinks when I say that *p*, I don’t conversationally implicate that I believe that *p*, “for to suppose that I believe that *p* is just to suppose that I am observing the first maxim of Quality on this occasion” of utterance (p. 42). So whether one counts it as an implicature in Grice’s sense turns on whether one classifies the representation of knowing posited by RK as trivial or non-trivial. For some details on these points, see DeRose and Grandy 1999, 417–18 n. 13, and 419 n. 19.

the factive nature of knowledge, that it entails truth:

(5) ? I know that Bill came to the party. In fact, he did.<sup>15</sup>

Though RK doesn't posit this kind of entailment, and so the feeling of redundancy isn't as pronounced, we can nonetheless use the redundancy test to see what it reveals about the connection between knowledge and assertion. Asserting the following sounds a bit odd:

(6) ? Bill came to the party; actually, I know he did.<sup>16</sup>

It is only *a bit* odd, but whatever oddity there is can be plausibly explained by the redundant nature of what is conveyed by an assertion of (6): in asserting the first conjunct the speaker represents herself as knowing it, and in asserting the second, this knowledge is claimed as such. But we don't really learn much from the second conjunct that we couldn't already ascertain from the first. (Of course, (6) isn't entirely redundant: according to RK we learn from it that the speaker takes herself to know the first conjunct's proposition, and thus that the speaker has a kind of higher-order or reflective knowledge. But RK predicts this, since the second conjunct represents her as knowing that she knows that Bill came to the party.<sup>17</sup>)

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<sup>15</sup>See Stanley 2008, 40–41.

<sup>16</sup>I've substituted "actually" for "in fact" as a connective because "in fact" might obscure things: it may signal that the speaker is trying to communicate something stronger in the second conjunct than in the first. To my ears, "actually" doesn't pose the same problem.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. DeRose 2009, 104ff..

### 1.3 Conversational Data

So RK's ability to handle problem sentences constitutes one form of support for RK; data from our standard conversational practice provides the other. One striking example, as we've seen was observed by Moore and Austin, is the common challenge to someone's assertion that *p* which asks, "How do you know?" It is thought to be especially revealing that we deem it appropriate to issue such challenges even though the asserter may have said *nothing at all* about *knowing* the *p* in question (Unger 1975, 263–64). Moreover it seems that the asserter, when thus challenged, cannot get off the hook by claiming "I never said I knew that *p*." And asserters do not typically respond in this way; rather, they often will either substantiate how it is they know *p* (in which case the assertion is usually permitted to stand), or implicitly agree that they don't know by way of "retreat and replace": the asserter may qualify the original claim, replacing it with a new assertion to the effect that *p* is merely believed. (Although this assertion also falls under RK, such that it represents oneself as knowing it, we generally allow that someone can know such a thing.<sup>18</sup>) Unger, in promoting RK, recognizes the significance of our attitudes toward such conversational maneuvers:

Why do we think of a man's later saying what he believes as a *retreat* from his assertion that [*p*]? Why are the two placed in the *same scale*, with the former weaker than the latter? For they seem to be about entirely unrelated topics: one about [*p*], the other about what he *believes*. Our condition [RK] explains these feelings.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Unger 1975, 264. On why we allow that others know this, see Davidson 1984.

<sup>19</sup>Unger 1975, 264.

Unger calls this a “triple strand of evidence” supporting RK. As I read him, the three strands result from RK’s ability to explain why (i) the “How do you know?” challenge is apt, (ii) the retreat/replace strategy is effective in responding to it, and (iii) the scale of strength makes it a *retreat* to a weaker claim.

Also relevant here is our usual attitude of reproach toward those who assert without knowing. Our response to assertions by individuals who, we later discover, do not know the proposition asserted, tends to be one of criticism. This lends support to the idea that if a subject doesn’t know the thing in question, he shouldn’t assert it. Unger says: “It is not simply whether the thing he says is true which is at issue. Nor is his being justified in thinking it true enough to get him off the hook.” If someone takes himself to know but in fact doesn’t, and yet asserts, then he is “unduly incautious,” whereas if he recognizes his lack of knowledge but asserts anyway, his false representation amounts to dishonesty.<sup>20</sup>

It has gone unnoticed how the data from problem sentences is connected to some of the conversational data.<sup>21</sup> Unger’s discussion, and Williamson’s which followed (see sect. 1.4 below) separated the data into these two camps (see §§3 and 4 of Unger’s 1975 chapter 6), and thus the evidence from each has been presented in independent fashion. But no one in the literature seems to have remarked on the connection between the evidence from the Moorean paradoxical construction

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<sup>20</sup>Unger 1975, 261–62. This criticism seems to apply also to related epistemic terms other than “knows”. If someone asserts “I’m sure/certain that  $p$ ,” but it becomes clear that not- $p$ , that individual seems liable to reproach and also will feel inclined to retract or qualify the assertion that had been made. (These utterances appear to be ones in which “sure” or “certain” are used in a factive sense; but there are arguably other senses of these terms which are used to signal gradations of certainty, i.e. degrees of confidence. Cf. Stanley 2008.)

<sup>21</sup>Although the passage cited above from Moore (1993, 211) implicitly connects them, since he mentions the “How do you know?” challenge on the heels of discussing the belief-version of the paradox.

(7) # It is snowing and I don't know that it is

and the evidence from the “How do you know?” challenge. They seem to be related, in that the “How do you know?” challenge can elicit a *de facto* Moorean paradox within a conversational context:

A: It is snowing.

B: How do you know?

A: Oh, I don't.

B: Huh??

A: Still, it's snowing.

B's challenge effectively puts A into a potential Moorean predicament. Williamson notes in passing that the arguments from Moorean constructions “apply only to utterances of the conjunction within a single context,” since the standards for knowledge might well become elevated between utterances (2000, 254); yet the above dialogue doesn't seem like it elevates any epistemic standards (and if, to your ears, it does, try to hear B's question as being merely a question, rather than a challenge). Keeping the epistemic standards fixed across the conversation, it still sounds bad for A to respond as she does. The lesson here, I take it, is that any explanation of the Moorean conjunction ought to be able to explain why the “How do you know?” challenge is so apt, and vice versa: and even better, they ought to be given the *same* explanation. KAA does just that.

### 1.3.1 Slote on Expressing Belief

Michael Slote, having discussed such matters with Unger, argued for similar conclusions in his 1979 (though he isn't, like Unger, a skeptic about knowledge). Slote's 1979 paper, originally published in a collection that has proved difficult to obtain, has been reprinted in his 2010.

Slote argued against two commonplace assumptions, namely that "there is, in general, nothing wrong with asserting what we believe[,] and that the form of words used to assert that *p* will always be apt for expressing the belief that *p*" (2010, 94). Like Unger, he argues that the Moorean conjunction (7), which disavows knowledge rather than belief, tells in favor of the fact that an assertion that *p* represents its speaker as having *more than belief* that *p*, for it represents its speaker as knowing and being sure that *p* (2010, 95). Slote also is the most explicit in spelling out how a *normative* conclusion derives from the purely descriptive fact mentioned in Unger's (RK):

Now if asserting that *p* conventionally and uncancellably represents one as knowing that *p*, then there is something **linguistically improper** about making an assertion when one does not think one knows the proposition asserted—and something even more improper when one is definitely convinced that one *does not* know that proposition. (ibid., 96; bold emphasis is mine)

There are two new and important strands in Slote's discussion. The first is that he defends the view that one may reasonably believe that *p* without believing that one knows that *p*, or that one is in a position to know it. He cites the examples of sending mail to a friend overseas, or taking a plane flight, as cases where we fully believe that the mail will arrive, or that the plane will arrive safely, even though, presumably, don't know either of these, nor do we think



we know them: “Where there are *very small* but *well-known* and *unavoidable* chances of failure, it may be reasonable to believe in success while doubting or denying that one knows that one won’t fail.”<sup>22</sup>

Second, Slote considers how we ought to assert in order to express such a reasonable belief, which we don’t know (and which we think isn’t known by us), given that assertions represent their speakers as knowing the thing asserted. “I believe that *p*” looks like the obvious candidate; and indeed, this is just what Unger had said about what we’d retreat to and replace with when an assertion is challenged. But Slote is careful to distinguish between the form

(8) I believe that it’s raining

which could also be used merely for *ascribing* belief to oneself rather than expressing it, and a form which he thinks unambiguously serves to *express* a belief: the *parenthetical* constructions

(9) It is, I believe, raining

(10) It is raining, I believe

where the doxastic hedge “I believe” is slotted in the middle or the end, seem designed to do just that. So the parenthetic use of “*p*, I believe” will always be available to express mere belief, though often enough, the non-parenthetic

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 96. See also his instructive discussion of why we indeed believe this about the airplane case, and why (i) we don’t know this, nor (ii) do we believe something weaker, like that it is *very likely* that the plane won’t crash.

form used in (8) will serve to do this as well.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.3.2 An Argument from Parenthetical Position

Slote did not go on to point out, nor has anyone else seemed to notice, the striking fact that although we can use “I know” in the prefaced construction akin to (8), it doesn’t naturally take on a parenthetical position. Compare (11) with (12) and (13):

(11) I know it is raining

(12) ? It is, I know, raining

(13) ? It is raining, I know

I think that KAA is in a good position to explain why. If parenthetical uses serve to express a mental state, then the fact that we don’t, or can’t, use a parenthetical construction with “know” as in (12) or (13) must be because, as KAA maintains, the flat-out assertion already serves to express one’s knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 97. Slote goes on (p. 98) to claim that “I think...”, which also takes on these parenthetical positions, could also serve a similar role, but that in his view “think” is generally weaker than “believe,” in that it often doesn’t express the “full measure of belief.” This seems right at least in that we can use tonal emphasis to stress the weaker notion, as in “I *think* there’s a bathroom in that building”—such intonation serves to signal something as weak as a mere inkling or hazy recollection, and so nothing as full bodied as belief.

<sup>24</sup>Someone may in fact hear (12) or (13) as natural, along the lines of

(12a) It is, I now know, raining.

(13a) It is raining, I now know.

(12b) It is, as we all know, raining.

(13b) It is raining, as we all know.

(12c) It is, to my knowledge, raining.

So our language doesn't need parenthetical uses of the form exhibited by "It is, I know, raining" or "It is raining, I know" because the flat-out "It is raining" does already serve to express one's knowledge that it's raining.

### 1.3.3 Irks and Perfs

Rhys McKinnon and John Turri have pointed out to me<sup>25</sup> that this argument from parenthetical position is importantly incomplete: for in claiming that the unnaturalness of the parenthetical constructions (12) and (13) is well-explained by the KAA, I appeal to the expressive redundancy of the 'know' clause. But as McKinnon and Turri note, when expressively redundant clauses—which they dub *ERCs*—appear parenthetically in some other sentences, a similar irksome infelicity is not present:

(14) Why, I ask, should we do that?

(15) She will enter the competition, I claim.

(16) You will, I command, do X.

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(13c) It is raining, to my knowledge.

What I think this shows is that the original (12) and (13) really are unnatural enough that they must be reinterpreted. In (12) and (13) 'know' is an expressively redundant parenthetical adjunct, but in the (a) and (b) variants it is made nonredundant by conveying something else beyond (one's knowledge of) the proposition it parenthetically modifies: for (12a) and (13a) the point is to convey a contrast with an earlier time at which it wasn't known; for (12b) and (13b), it's to convey that a salient group knows. Contrast the (c) examples, which sound somewhat *hedged*, more akin to 'It is, as far as I know, raining,' which isn't a flat-out assertion that it's raining: indeed, the latter seems much like 'It might be raining,' or 'I don't know it's not raining.'

So these alternatives aren't all that similar to (12) and (13), which are supposed to be sentences in which one uses parenthetical position *simply* to express one's knowledge of the proposition (and nothing else). Thanks to John Turri here.

<sup>25</sup>In correspondence and in an unpublished reply to my 2011.

So the behavior of ERCs looks to irk my proposal, at least without further supplementation on my part, because the infelicity of (12) and (13) cannot solely be due to an idle ERC. I acknowledge the force of the examples, and the need for supplementation; such an account is not far to seek.

Taking a cue from Austin (1961a, 228–230; 1962a, 32–33, 56–66), we may distinguish between performatives and other verbs such as ‘know’.<sup>26</sup> Explicit performatives (*perfs* for short), like those in (14)–(16), are used in the first-person/singular/active/indicative (‘I  $\varphi$ ’<sup>27</sup>) to perform the  $\varphi$ -ing in question without stating or reporting that it is being done; and when one moves to other persons/tenses/moods, the  $\varphi$  clause fails to so perform. However, ‘know’ (like ‘believe’) is not similarly performative in that first-personal construction,<sup>28</sup> nor does it pattern with the  $\varphi$  uses when we leave the first-person/singular/active/indicative.

The ‘I know’ clauses, whether prefaced or (irksomely) parenthetically positioned, amount to a knowledge-claim for the speaker; likewise ‘I  $\varphi$ ’ utterances as in (14)–(16) explicitly ‘perform’ the  $\varphi$  in question by expressing the mental state or performing the relevant speech act. But moving to the third-personal

(17) Janet knows that  $p$

*also* ends up claiming knowledge for the speaker: for a speaker can’t properly assert (17) unless he also knows that  $p$  (that’s why ‘Janet knows that  $p$

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<sup>26</sup>We need not buy into Austin’s theory to accept the point I draw on here.

<sup>27</sup>Where  $\varphi$  can stand in for the perfs *ask*, *claim*, *command* of (14)–(16), and more besides.

<sup>28</sup>That is, one does not, in uttering an ‘I know  $p$ ’ claim, thereby know that  $p$ . Urmson (1952, 490) notes that Austin is careful not to say that ‘know’ is a performatory verb.

but I don't know it' is absurd). Thus knowledge-claims, regardless of the person or tense, are transparent to—they transparently require knowledge of—their speakers. Yet perfs don't work like this. When we move off the first-person/singular/active/indicative of (14)–(16) we get these, for example:<sup>29</sup>

(18) Janet asks whether it will rain tonight.

(19) Janet claims that it will rain tonight.

(20) Janet commands that I do X.

(21) I asked whether it will rain tonight.

(22) I claimed that it will rain tonight.

(23) I commanded that he do X.

In uttering (18) or (21), one doesn't thereby ask whether it will rain tonight; in uttering (19) or (22), one doesn't thereby claim that it will; likewise, in uttering (20) or (23), one doesn't command.<sup>30</sup> So 'know' is importantly different than the perfs of the above examples: the former is transparent to its speaker even outside the first-person/singular/active/indicative, whereas the latter are not

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<sup>29</sup>These examples use prefacing rather than parenthetical position, but this is irrelevant to the performative point I'm arguing here; note, however, that the parenthetical construction is often not available in other persons/tenses, or if it is, it typically does not serve to express one's mental state. Cf. Urmson 1952, 488–489.

<sup>30</sup>A point easily seen when one notes that for each of the 'I' versions, one could follow up with a cancelling '...but I now I know' / '...but I take it back' / '...but I canceled the command' (etc.).

similarly transparent.

How exactly does this help explain why ‘know’ irks, whereas perfs, even when ERCs, do not? Because when in the first-person/singular/active/ indicative, perfs serve to *perform* the action in question: in Austin’s terminology, they *show* rather than state (or better: they show in addition to stating), and in particular, such perfs clarify exactly how the speaker views the performance which the utterance actualizes. This clarification still occurs in sentences like (14)–(16), because different perfs could have been used instead: the proposition of (14) could have been *wondered* or *demanded* rather than merely *asked*; the proposition of (15) could have been *guessed* or *supposed* rather than *claimed*, and so on. But the parenthetically positioned ‘I know’<sup>31</sup> of (12) or (13) fails to clarify, in any meaningful way, the expressed mental state: it irksomely expresses nothing beyond that already expressed by the outright assertion ‘It is raining.’

## 1.4 Constitutive Rules and the Authority to Assert

Though Unger was the first to argue extensively for KAA, Williamson recently provided a rather exhaustive defense (2000, 238–69). Unique to Williamson’s discussion are his claim that knowledge is *constitutive* to the practice of assertion and his explanation of it in terms of possessing epistemic authority:

The knowledge account [of assertion] subsumes the Unger-Slote thesis [RK] under more general principles. In doing anything for

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<sup>31</sup>Again, this is to be distinguished from the prefaced (non-parenthetical) ‘I know it is raining,’ which amplifies the claim beyond the flat-out assertion that it is raining: on KAA, such an amplified assertion requires knowing that one knows.

which authority is required (for example, issuing orders), one represents oneself as having the authority to do it. To have the (epistemic) authority to assert  $p$  is to know  $p$ . The Unger-Slote thesis [RK] follows. (2000, 252)

Thus Williamson moves from the representational terminology of RK, on which an assertion represents one as knowing, to an account on which knowing is the epistemic position one must be in to satisfy the standard of authority operative in the practice of assertion:

One can think of the knowledge rule as giving the condition on which a speaker has the *authority* to make an assertion. Thus asserting  $p$  without knowing  $p$  is doing something without having the authority to do it, like giving someone a command without having the authority to do so. Characteristic standards of authority thus play a constitutive role in the speech act of assertion, as they do in other institutions. The distinction between having warrant to assert  $p$  and reasonably believing oneself to have such warrant becomes a special case of the distinction between having the authority to do something and reasonably believing oneself to have that authority. Someone who does not know  $p$  lacks the authority to assert  $p$ , and therefore cannot [in the case of testimony] pass that authority on to me by asserting  $p$ , no matter how plausibly he gives me the impression that he has done so. (2000, 257)

Williamson's emphasis on the constitutive role of knowledge as the norm for assertion complements the point noted above, that representing oneself as knowing appears to be an uncancelable feature of flat-out assertions. But for present purposes we may remain neutral on the constitutive element of his

claim, that knowledge provides the *fundamental* rule governing the practice of assertion, from which all other assertion norms can be derived (2000, 241). (I consider the role of Williamson's constitutive claim in Chapter 2: "Priority, Constitutivity, and Normativity.")

Williamson also elaborates on nature of the "How do you know?" request. As a standard response to an assertion, the "How do you know?" question

presupposes that it has an answer, that somehow you do know. If not only knowledge warrants assertion, what makes that presupposition legitimate? ...the questioner does not always believe the presupposition of the question, for it is sometimes (not always) intended as a challenge to the assertion. Nevertheless, it is an implicit challenge: the questioner politely grants that the asserter does know  $p$ , and merely asks how, perhaps suspecting that there is no answer to the question. (2000, 252–53)

Williamson also notices a "less standard and more aggressive response" to an assertion, the "Do you know that?" question. The knowledge account captures why this response is more aggressive than its "how" counterpart, for "it calls into question" the speaker's warrant for the assertion. "On the hypothesis that not only knowledge warrants assertion, the aggressiveness of the question is hard to understand, for the asserter might truthfully answer 'No' and still have warrant for the assertion" (2000, 253). We shall revisit this point in due course.

Though Williamson and Unger both appeal to the place of knowledge in questions aimed at challenging an assertion, neither notice that knowledge also figures in the natural wording of our questions when seeking information: "Do you know whether  $p$ ?" is a common request, and it seems fairly interchangeable with the bare "Is  $p$ ?" (cf. Turri 2010c). And, we rarely use the



weaker “Do you believe/think that  $p$ ?”, except in cases where the asker presupposes that her interlocutor may not know (as may be presupposed when the  $p$  in question concerns controversial topics, say in politics, or religion, or—gasp!—philosophy). These facts are striking, and ones that KAA is in a position to help explain. And these are facts that would be all the more puzzling if knowledge weren’t the norm of assertion, or if the aim of communication weren’t to share knowledge.

## 1.5 Implied Epistemic Position

DeRose explains that Unger’s RK thesis and Williamson’s constitutive rule version of KAA are just

two sides of the same coin: If one represents oneself as knowing that  $p$  by asserting  $p$ , then, to avoid falsely representing oneself, one should follow the rule of asserting only what one knows; and if assertion is governed by a rule that one should assert only what one knows, then one will represent oneself as knowing that  $p$  when one asserts that  $p$ . (2009, 93)

Important to both formulations of KAA is that assertions imply the speaker’s strength of epistemic position. DeRose endorses a version of KAA which is compatible with, but neutral with regard to, his contextualism about knowledge attributions. He calls it the *Relativized* Knowledge Account of Assertion:

(KAA-R) A speaker,  $S$ , is well-enough positioned with respect to  $p$  to be able to properly assert that  $p$  if and only if  $S$  knows that  $p$  according to the standards for knowledge that are in place as  $S$  makes

*her assertion.*<sup>32</sup>

This articulation of KAA captures the spirit of Unger's and Williamson's accounts in that, by asserting some proposition, one implies one's epistemic position with respect to it, and in particular, it specifies that the epistemic position required for proper assertion is that of knowing the proposition asserted.

KAA-R's invocation of epistemic position seems to be further supported by a variant of the "how" request used in conversation. Sometimes someone asserts something in our presence, but we consider him or her to be implausibly positioned with respect to the claim; and a natural response in this case is to query "How do *you* know that?", with particular emphasis on the "you," indicating suspicion that he or she is unlikely to be appropriately situated so as to justify the assertion.

It is an underappreciated fact that competent English speakers tend quite naturally to omit hedge terms like "probably," "likely," and "I think that" when their strength of epistemic position is sufficient for knowing the proposition asserted. We tend to make flat-out assertions when we know, and tend to qualify them when we don't. But we qualify them with hedge terms precisely in order to make an assertion of comparable content when we recognize that we fall short of knowing. This data supports KAA, since it suggests that whether we know operates as a standard which influences how we make our assertions, even in cases in which our epistemic position isn't satisfactory for knowledge.

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<sup>32</sup>2009, 99. This formulation is neutral with regard to contextualism because the invariantist about knowledge attributions can likewise endorse it: see pp. 100–101.

### 1.5.1 Asserting the Stronger

A brief detour to consider another norm of assertion may shed some additional light on KAA. A general conversational rule is operative in most conversational contexts, which has been called the “Assert the Stronger” rule. According to DeRose’s explication of this rule, “when you’re in a position to assert either of two things, then, other things being equal, if you assert either of them, you should assert the stronger of them.”<sup>33</sup> Quine, Frank Jackson, and Grice also endorse this rule, or something quite similar.<sup>34</sup> This rule by itself could explain why we typically omit hedge terms when we know: “*p*” seems stronger, or at least conveys more confidence, than the weaker “I think that *p*.” And it also makes sense of why we opt to make such hedged claims when we have some justification for the proposition in question: in cases where we justifiedly believe but recognize that we don’t know, we usually assert the stronger by making a hedged assertion like “I believe that *p*,” or “Probably *p*” instead of denying knowledge and leaving it at that.

Here is an example of the Assert the Stronger rule at work, provided by DeRose, in the context of a discussion about the proper account of the epistemic modal phrase “It’s possible that  $P_{ind}$ ,” where the subscript “*ind*” indicates that the proposition *p* is in the indicative mood:

When someone ... knows that *p*, they’re in a position to assert that *p*—and they’re often in a position to assert even that they know

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<sup>33</sup>DeRose 2009, 87.

<sup>34</sup>Quine 1959, 15–16 and Frank Jackson 1979, 566. See Grice and White 1961, 132, where Grice gives a “first shot” at such a principle: “One should not make a weaker statement rather than a stronger one unless there is a good reason for so doing.” In the reprint of 1961 in Grice 1989, he excises the section containing this statement, perhaps indicating that he soured on the principle, or that he thought it superseded (see 1989, 229–30) by his published lectures “Logic and Conversation,” also repr. in 1989. The latter is more likely; in an early draft (ca. 1957) of those lectures (1947–1989, carton 1, folder 22), Grice seemed to accept something like this rule, thinking that it followed from Quantity considerations.

that  $p$ . Thus, by the “Assert the Stronger” rule, they should assert one of those stronger things rather than the needlessly weak “It’s possible that  $P_{ind}$ .” To assert that weak possibility statement is then unwarranted and generates the false implicature that the speaker doesn’t know that  $p$  by the following Gricean reasoning, which is based on the assumption that the speaker is following the “Assert the Stronger” rule: “If he knew that  $p$ , he would have been in a position to assert something stronger than ‘It’s possible that  $P_{ind}$ ,’ and thus would have asserted some stronger thing instead. But he did assert ‘It’s possible that  $P_{ind}$ ,’ not anything stronger. So he must not know that  $p$ .”<sup>35</sup>

Such Gricean reasoning captures something important about how we decide (often unconsciously) what to assert, how we word it, and how we process the assertions of others. However, one might wonder why KAA is defended when a more general conversational rule like Assert the Stronger seems to be true. Part of the answer lies in the fact that Assert the Stronger clearly cannot explain most of the other data marshaled thus far: it cannot make sense of the Moorean problem sentences discussed, nor some of the conversational data (recall Unger’s triple strand of evidence above).

The foregoing has considered much of the evidence in favor of KAA, as put forth by its key proponents.<sup>36</sup> The juxtaposition of the different versions

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<sup>35</sup>DeRose 2009, 87. For his more detailed discussion of epistemic possibility, see his 1991. I consider the assertion of epistemic modals more thoroughly in Chapter 4: “Assertability and Epistemic Modals.”

<sup>36</sup>One bit of data that we haven’t mentioned yet, but will consider below, is that KAA accurately predicts, and explains, our reluctance to deny that a given lottery ticket will win, even though it is highly probable; this has been much discussed by DeRose 1996, Williamson 2000, 246ff., and Hawthorne 2004. However, see Turri 2011, fn. 1.

of KAA as found in Unger, Williamson, and DeRose demonstrates how similar in spirit each of them are, their differences in emphasis and terminology notwithstanding. Recent work by John Turri (2010c, 2011, and 2010b), which has emerged during the time this dissertation was in progress, also extends the case for the KAA. Turri does so by (i) noting further conversational data from appropriate prompts to assertion, data which are amenable to, and well explained by, the KAA; (ii) articulating an “expression” version of the KAA which requires properly basing an assertion on one’s knowledge, such that the assertion *expresses* one’s knowledge; and (iii) and by tying the normative role of knowledge to a successful solution to the value problem(s) in epistemology.<sup>37</sup>

So the KAA is solidly supported. And remarkably, it has been endorsed by philosophers from all walks of epistemology: the skeptical Unger (and Unger when in his less skeptical moods: 1986), the contextualist DeRose, the subject-sensitive/interest-relative invariants Hawthorne and Stanley, the knowledge-firster Williamson, the knowledge ‘first-and-last’-er Jonathan Sutton (2007; cf. also Alexander Jackson forthcoming), the contrastivists Jonathan Schaffer and Martijn Blaauw, the evidentialist Jonathan Adler (2002, 2009), the invariantist speech-act pluralist Turri, the virtue epistemologist Sosa, (2011, Ch. 2) and the virtue sympathizer Christoph Kelp (forthcoming) *all* agree that the KAA, in its broad contours, is correct. That is an amazing consensus across epistemologists who disagree on so much else.

But the KAA does have some important recent detractors. To them we now turn.

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<sup>37</sup>To be thorough, I should also mention my own published work, as well as Blaauw 2012.

## 1.6 Some Objections and Rivals

There are two main options available to the KAA-dissenter: claim that KAA is too strong, or too weak. I briefly consider and dismiss an objection due to David Sosa to the effect that KAA is too weak.<sup>38</sup> I then go on to consider three critics who argue that KAA is too strong, and who also suggest another (weaker) norm as more qualified (in Chapter 3 I evaluate Maitra & Weather-son’s (2010) interesting counterarguments and their proposed “Action-Rule” of assertion). I shall concentrate only on what I take to be the most important criticisms and counterproposals.

### 1.6.1 Iterated Knowledge Conjunctions

David Sosa (2009a) argues that the supporter of the Knowledge Account of Assertion has to explain not only the infelicity of asserting Moorean conjunctions of the form

(24) #  $p$  but I don’t know that  $p$

but also conjunctions including iterated claims, as in

(25)  $p$  but I don’t know whether I know that  $p$ .

Sosa considers KAA faulty in that it does not generalize to handle assertions such as (25) without appealing to controversial principles such as the “KK” principle (according to which if  $S$  knows that  $p$  then  $S$  also knows that  $S$  knows

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<sup>38</sup>Subsection 1.6.1 is a version of my forthcoming. Stanley 2008 also suggests that KAA is too weak, but I do not consider it here.

that  $p$ ), and that this presents a problem for KAA. This is thought to be particularly problematic because recent defenders of KAA such as Williamson, Hawthorne, and DeRose, deny the plausibility of KK.

Sosa (2009a, 270) maintains that the adequacy of KAA's explanation of (24) "is challenged by the oddity of (instances of)" (25): "The knowledge account does not generalize satisfactorily. We do not adequately understand what is wrong with" (24) "if our explanation does not account for what is wrong with" (25).

However this claim overreaches, given two important differences between (24) and (25); and these differences will be of interest even to those who reject KAA. First, knowing-that-one-knows-that- $p$  is plausibly a different thing from knowing-that- $p$ . If so then (25) appears to have the form

(26)  $p$  but I don't know whether [that]  $q$ ,

and it's not clear why such constructions should be thought to admit of, much less require, the same explanation as that given for the Moorean (24). And moreover, sentences like (25) don't seem to *clash* in the same way that pure Moorean constructions do, even though they definitely sound clunky.<sup>39</sup> Second, (25) can be known<sup>40</sup> whereas (24) cannot. So because (24) is Moorean in form and (25) is not, and because (24) cannot be known but (25) can, it's quite unclear that Sosa is correct that KAA's explanation of (24) is inadequate if it cannot generalize to account for (25); for (25) is different from (24) in ways that matter.

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<sup>39</sup>On the distinction between clunks and clashes, see DeRose 2009, 208 n. 17.

<sup>40</sup>As Sosa himself notes (2009a, 270). That its conjuncts can be known provides the KAA-theorist with a good explanation for why (25) would only clunk but not clash: because it can be known, it shouldn't clash as does (24).

Such differences reveal how some contexts can make it appropriate (even if clunky) to assert instances of (25) even though those same contexts do not render it appropriate to assert (24). One common enough case is when one suspends judgment on whether one's belief that  $p$  amounts to knowledge, which can arise in cases of disagreement: if I believe, and in fact know, that the Giants won the 1954 World Series, but you disagree—perhaps by claiming, “No, I think they won in ’56”—your disagreeing with me may lead me to suspend judgment on whether I know. I may thereby lose confidence that I know while nevertheless remaining quite confident that they won in ’54;<sup>41</sup> in such a case it may be thought acceptable (though perhaps clunky) to assert in reply “The Giants won in ’54, but I don’t know whether I know that,” but this same situation would not make it acceptable to assert “The Giants won in ’54 but I don’t know that they did.” Thus (24) and (25) warrant different treatment.

But even if we suppose that I’m wrong about those differences between (24) and (25), the KAA-theorist can tackle Sosa’s concern head-on by showing what is wrong with assertions of (25), and can do so without appealing to principles such as KK; in fact, the problem can be handled twice over. And again, because the conjuncts of (25) can be known, we should expect that the KAA-theorist, whilst still assuming KAA, may have to look beyond its resources to help account for (25)’s infelicity.

First, according to the RK version of KAA,<sup>42</sup> by flat-out asserting the first conjunct of (25) a speaker *represents herself as knowing that  $p$* . And then in asserting the second conjunct, she expresses outright that *she doesn’t know whether she knows that  $p$* . But because representing something as being so involves representing that thing as being true, in conversational contexts we will

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<sup>41</sup>Note that Williamson’s anti-luminosity argument shows that one could know this without knowing that one knows it; see especially Williamson 2005, 230–233.

<sup>42</sup>See the views of Moore, Unger, and DeRose set out above.



tend to find it *irresponsible* for someone to use an outright assertion to represent something as being true if she explicitly claims that she doesn't know whether that thing is true: after all, why, unless she is intentionally trying to mislead, would one make a claim which represents something as being the case when she doesn't know that it's the case? So, absent special contextual factors that might lead hearers to think otherwise, someone's asserting something of the form (25) raises the question of her being epistemically irresponsible in doing so: she uses an outright assertion which represents something as being the case, but then explicitly claims not to know whether that thing is the case. This solution makes use of a general principle about what happens when we represent things as being a certain way: generally, one's representing to others that  $q$  is true will tend to lead others to think that one knows, or is in a very good epistemic position concerning,  $q$ .

Second, even without appealing to such a general principle as the one just sketched, the KAA-theorist can handle the infelicity of (25) by adopting the *Express Knowledge Account of Assertion* (EKA), according to which one may assert that  $p$  only if one's assertion *expresses* one's knowledge that  $p$  (Turri 2011). Tokens of (25) cannot hold up given the EKA, and are easily explained by it: a speaker appropriately asserts its first conjunct only if by doing so she expresses her knowledge that  $p$ ; but then, in asserting the second conjunct, she expresses her ignorance about whether she in fact knows that  $p$ . Now we are presupposing the falsity of the KK principle; so it is a perfectly possible state of affairs that one know a proposition, express it through speech, yet nonetheless fail to know that one knows it. But a hearer would be given to wonder why one would engage in a speech act meant to express one's knowledge if one is ignorant of whether they have that knowledge; for often enough, when permissibly  $\varphi$ -ing involves expressing an attitude or mental state which, as far as the agent can

tell she may not possess, then she'll be in danger of impermissibly  $\varphi$ -ing by going ahead and  $\varphi$ -ing. Thus asserting (25) is apt to strike its hearer as unduly incautious.<sup>43</sup>

But note that this second strategy is also available to the KAA-theorist unwilling to adopt EKA. For even on the simple knowledge account, wherein knowing a proposition is what positions one for permissible assertion, it is still odd—again, because careless—to *acknowledge explicitly* that one doesn't know whether one is permitted to make an assertion while at the same time making that very assertion.<sup>44</sup>

The appeal to carelessness, whether on the simple KAA or on EKA, can be explicated by deploying the distinction, drawn by DeRose<sup>45</sup> (2002, 180; 2009, 93–95) between primary and secondary propriety. The knowledge account's norm requiring knowledge of its asserter specifies the primary dimension of propriety: S's assertion that  $p$  has primary propriety iff S knows that  $p$  (and, on EKA, the assertion expresses that knowledge). A speaker who does not know yet reasonably believes that she knows and for that reason asserts, violates the norm (her assertion is primarily improper) but nevertheless acts in a secondarily proper way: her assertion is appropriate in the sense that it was made in

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<sup>43</sup>As Unger 1975, 262 had put it.

<sup>44</sup>Note that these sorts of explanation can also account for the oddity of similar iterated conjunctions provided by Sosa 2009a, 271, e.g.

- (27) #  $p$  but I doubt that I know that  $p$
- (28) #  $p$  but I believe that I don't know that  $p$
- (29) #  $p$  but I have no justification for believing that I know that  $p$
- (30) #  $p$  but I have (sufficient) justification for believing that I don't know that  $p$

KAA predicts that flat-out asserting the first conjunct as in (27)–(30) represents the speaker as knowing that  $p$ ; but it's irresponsible and misleading for a speaker to assert so as to represent herself as knowing while also calling into question that she in fact knows. Such a speaker, in asserting the second conjunct, shows that she shouldn't have flat-out (rather than hedgingly) asserted the first conjunct.

<sup>45</sup>And also by Williamson (2000, 256), though he labels the dimensions "permissibility" and "reasonability".

a reasonable attempt to conform to the norm. One who asserts (25), perhaps because one has suspended judgment on whether one knows that  $p$ , will typically be secondarily improper in doing so (even if  $p$  is known and the assertion is thereby primarily proper); and one who acknowledges this secondary impropriety, as the second conjunct of (25) seems to do, should typically likewise suspend judgment on whether outright asserting its first conjunct is primarily proper. This provides an account of why it could be careless to assert (25); and it also reflects the contrast noted earlier between the assertability of (25) compared with (24). For one who asserts a version of (24) must take it to lack both primary *and* secondary propriety.

Thus the friend of the KAA can account for the infelicity of the type (25) without appealing to the KK principle.

### 1.6.2 The Reasonable-to-Believe Norm

Jennifer Lackey 2007 critiques KAA and proposes the rival *Reasonable-to-Believe-Norm of Assertion* (RTBNA).<sup>46</sup> She presents three cases of “selfless assertion”

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<sup>46</sup> I omit consideration of Lackey’s (2007, 603–608) counterarguments leveled at DeRose’s (2002, 2009) “spurious” claims about secondary propriety in attempting to adhere to KAA in cases where one asserts because one reasonably takes oneself to know, but in fact doesn’t. Lackey’s discussion is overly focused on the single dimension of whether one violates the norm (primary propriety); she does not fully appreciate that secondary propriety applies to the attempt to conform to the norm, and not to the assertion which manifests that attempt (though she does apply the terms “excuse” and “blameless” to such a dimension). One of her examples is of a football referee who would be unimpressed by a quarterback’s pleas for understanding after he is penalized for crossing the line of scrimmage before attempting a pass (having done so because his contact lens fell out and he couldn’t see where the line was); the referee is unimpressed because it is his job to enforce that rule, by flagging violations of it (of primary propriety), and thus the example is rigged in Lackey’s favor (that a quarterback would never plead with a referee for this kind of mistake shows how rigged the example is). But note that the quarterback’s coach would temper his criticism of his quarterback for having committed this violation, because the coach cares about secondary propriety as well: the coach cares about attempts to conform to the rules, as well as whether one in fact follows the rules.

That there is more than one dimension of propriety in epistemic evaluation is fairly uncontroversial—e.g. see Ernest Sosa’s 2007, 22ff. virtue theory metaphor distinguishing between accurate and adroit archery shots. Given this, why wouldn’t the same be true of assertions tightly connected to our epistemic states?

by which she argues that KAA is too strong to be the true norm of assertion. Each case involves an individual who is presented with excellent evidence for some true proposition  $p$ , but for non-epistemic reasons is unable to come to believe  $p$ ; the individual recognizes the probative force of the evidence, however, and based on this makes an assertion to the effect that  $p$  even though he or she doesn't believe, and so does not know, that  $p$ .

I shall focus here only on her first case, that of the RACIST JUROR. In brief, Martin was raised by racist parents in a narrow-minded community, and grew up with such views himself. Through some college education he has come to recognize some of the causes and consequences of racism, though he still has some residual racist tendencies. He is called to serve on a jury for a case trying a black man for the rape of a white woman. The prosecution's evidence is flimsy, whereas the defense presents strong exculpatory evidence. Martin recognizes that the evidence clearly does not support the conclusion that the defendant committed the crime; but he can't shake the feeling that the defendant is guilty of having raped the woman. Martin suspects that this feeling may be the result of his racist tendencies, and "concludes that even if he can't quite come to believe that the defendant is innocent himself, he nonetheless has an obligation to present the case to others this way." After leaving the courthouse, he happens upon a childhood friend "who asks him whether the 'guy did it'." Despite the fact that he does not believe, and hence does not know, that the defendant in question is innocent, Martin asserts, "No, the guy did not rape her." And this is true: he did not commit the crime.<sup>47</sup>

Lackey maintains that in RACIST JUROR, as in her other two cases DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR and CREATIONIST TEACHER, the subject makes "an assertion in the absence of knowledge and is not subject to criticism in any

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<sup>47</sup>2007, 598.

relevant sense,” which ought to show that no norm of assertion has been violated. In particular, in such cases of selfless assertion, “even though the person in question may be subject to criticism qua believer, she is nonetheless subject to praise qua asserter,” for the person has heroically transcended the limitations of the non-epistemic conditions precluding her own belief in order to assert in accordance with the probative evidence.<sup>48</sup>

I find these selfless assertion cases unconvincing. First, I am unconvinced that such assertions are not subject to criticism in any relevant sense. In the case of the RACIST JUROR, it is easily argued that the assertion Martin makes is improper. For it seems obvious that given Martin’s total doxastic and evidential state, his assertion would have been more proper had it been along the lines of “The evidence clearly showed that he did not rape her”—such an assertion by Martin would surely *not* be subject to censure. And if one has the intuition that his actual assertion is proper, it can be argued that this is because it is actually elliptical for this more appropriate “The evidence showed that” assertion.

But bare judgments of propriety aside, I think we can show how absurd Martin’s assertion in RACIST JUROR really is. Consider again how it concludes: Martin’s childhood friend asks him afterward whether the accused man did it, and he responds, “No, he did not rape her.” Now imagine that in the next moment, a reporter approaches right on the heels of his friend, and who, because she didn’t hear Martin’s reply to his childhood friend, asks Martin, “Do you believe he did it?” It appears that Martin’s response, if it is to be honest, must be, “Yes, I believe he did it.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>2007, 599–600.

<sup>49</sup>This also suggests that RTBNA doesn’t have the resources to explain why, from the perspective of the inquirer, “Is *p*?” and “Do you think/believe that *p*?” tend to be largely synonymous in these conversational contexts.

Consider how bizarre this conversation is: the childhood friend, who has now heard both answers, will undoubtedly ask Martin again, expecting him to clarify his response. And Martin's position is that the man is innocent, and that he himself does not believe that the man is innocent. But this just has the form of the problematic Moorean assertion which we considered above:

(31)  $p$  and I don't believe that  $p$ .

So all we can fairly conclude from the case of the RACIST JUROR (and our expanded version of it), is that Martin is a very conflicted guy: he has been irrational in not proportioning his own belief to the evidence, but has somehow been rational in judging both the probative force of the evidence and the irrelevant source of his inkling about the defendant; likewise, he has been irrational in basing his belief about the accused upon his racist inkling, but rational, we are told, in basing his assertion upon his belief about the evidence instead of his belief about the defendant. (Whew!)

But why should we join Lackey in thinking that some part of this exonerates his assertion? After all, if Martin is unable to allow such clear evidence that  $p$  to affect his belief regarding  $p$ , why should we regard him as responsible enough to judge in which direction the evidence points? Just because he's judging the evidence appropriately for someone unaffected by racism doesn't at all show that Martin's own assertion of  $p$  is proper. What makes Martin different from his fellow non-racist competent jurors is precisely this: whereas they accurately grasp the evidence favoring  $p$ , thereby believe (and come to know) that  $p$ , and assert accordingly, Martin does not believe that  $p$  and hence cannot know it, and so cannot properly assert  $p$  flat-out. The only relevant proper assertion available to Martin in the envisioned conversational context is to tell

what the evidence showed, or what he believes; and both of these things are known to him.

Notice, furthermore, that Lackey's own RTBNA account *permits* Martin's Moorean conjunction encountered above. Both conjuncts are reasonable for Martin to believe: it is reasonable for him to believe that *p* (that the accused didn't rape her), and it is reasonable for him to believe that he doesn't believe that *p*. The latter seems especially reasonable for him to believe because he had already reflected on why he continued to view the defendant as guilty, and he settled on the suspicion that it had to do with his residual racism; and surely such higher order reflection results in it being reasonable for Martin to believe that he doesn't believe that *p*. This is quite an unwelcome consequence for the proponent of RTBNA, since, far from being able to account for the peculiarity of such Moorean sentences, it does even worse: it sanctions them.

Lackey recognizes this,<sup>50</sup> and seeks to deflect this problem by appeal to a norm of assertion having to do with not misleading others in conversation: the *Not Misleading Norm of Assertion* (NMNA).<sup>51</sup> But this move misses the point, for two reasons. First, given RTBNA, a Moorean assertion such as Martin's above isn't misleading at all: it communicates two conjuncts, both of which are true and reasonable for him to believe. The utterance may not be very *helpful* to his hearers, but let's not confuse unhelpfulness with misleadingness. Second, assertions that are misleading are typically not transparently strange to the hearer: in cases of intentional deception, they are easily understood and taken at face-value, and in non-deceiving cases they mislead in virtue of failing to communicate relevant facts of which the speaker is aware. Yet Moorean

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<sup>50</sup>2007, 613ff., though she does not consider it set in a conversational context, as we have done above.

<sup>51</sup>2007, 615; she also introduces a modification of it at p. 617, NMNA\*\*, which we needn't consider here. NMNA reads: "S should assert that *p* in context C only if it is not reasonable for S to believe that the assertion that *p* will be misleading in C."

sentences *are* transparently strange to hearers; and more than merely sounding strange, they “clash,” sounding flatly inconsistent, and this for reasons beyond mere misleadingness. An adequate account of Moorean sentences must go beyond explaining why we won’t assert them; it must also account for this clash.<sup>52</sup> This the NMNA fails to do.

Lackey also appeals to NMNA to save RTBNA from another obvious counterexample. In standard lottery situations in which I own a ticket and there will be a winner, it is, given my probabilistic grounds, quite reasonable for me to believe that I will not win. But most epistemologists agree that I do not know that I won’t win.<sup>53</sup> And at any rate it seems to be improper for me to assert flat-out “I will not win,” or, once the lottery has been held but the winner not yet announced, to assert “I did not win.” KAA advocates cite this as important evidence in favor of their norm. Up until now, we have not focused on lottery assertions, which is just as well, given that the KAA can be forcefully defended without appeal to them (see especially Turri 2011). Lackey submits that what makes such assertions improper is their violation of NMNA: they are misleading because they permit an inference that the asserter has some kind of inside information, apart from the probabilistic grounds available to all which make it reasonable to believe that a given ticket-holder will not win. As she says, it “would be natural” for such a hearer “to form a *false* belief” about the asserter having such inside information when a lottery-winning denial is made.<sup>54</sup> What this appeal fails to notice is that, arguably, the very reason it

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<sup>52</sup>See DeRose 1991, 597–98, and 2009, 96–97 n. 19.

<sup>53</sup>E.g. see Harman 1973, 161 and 1986, 21, DeRose 1996, Lewis 1996, 557, Cohen 1998, Williamson 2000, 246–49, 2004, 8, 21ff.. See Reed 2010 and Turri 2011 for dissent.

<sup>54</sup>Lackey 2007, 618. Cf. also Williamson 2000, 246. To be precise, Lackey invokes NMNA\*\* here, which includes a clause about the assertion being misleading “relative to the purposes of the exchange in question.” But this seems superfluous, since the invocation of a “context C” can capture those conversational purposes.



is *natural* to form that belief is precisely because assertions, especially of this kind, represent that the speaker *knows* what has been asserted. Probabilistic grounds supporting the claim are already present in lottery assertions; so what exactly signals to your listener that you must have something more, like inside information? A plausible answer is provided by RK: such an assertion represents the speaker as knowing, and this prompts the idea that the speaker has some inside information by which he knows. The natural inference proceeds thus: If he had inside information, he would know; his assertion suggests that he has inside information, so he must know. Again, Lackey's explanation is less plausible and doesn't explain all that one would hope.

Moreover, Lackey does herself a further disservice in leaning on NMNA: the very cases of selfless assertion which she marshals against KAA strike me as violating NMNA, for they are themselves misleading. Martin asserts "No, he did not rape her" when it would be less misleading for him to say instead "The evidence showed that he did not rape her." Why then doesn't the former response, which Lackey puts into Martin's mouth, transgress her NMNA?

However, even if Lackey's appeals to NMNA enable her to escape such problems, there is still a cost. It remains the case that the knowledge norm of KAA is able to do more with less: it can explain the infelicity of Moorean sentences *and* denials of winning the lottery without appealing to other norms, and thus it is stronger and theoretically simpler (for more on this point, see section 1.7 below). So KAA appears to be a better theory than RTBNA.

### 1.6.3 The Rational Credibility Norm

Another contender is Igor Douven's (2006) *rational credibility* account (RCA) of assertion, according to which

(32) One should assert only what is rationally credible to one.<sup>55</sup>

Douven's approach is to compare how well RCA and KAA fare with regard to both the empirical conversational data (discussed above) and judgments of a priori and a posteriori simplicity. Douven's "claim is that the rational credibility account does empirically just as well as the knowledge account but is more reasonable to adopt than the latter because it appears to be the simpler of the two."<sup>56</sup> Thus, much of his case hinges on an argument he gives for the greater a priori simplicity of RCA.

The first premise of that argument is as follows.

(33) You should  $X$   $Y$  only if it is rational for you to  $X$   $Y$ .

(33) seems unobjectionable. The second premise is called by Jonathan Adler (2002) the *Belief–Assertion Parallel* (discussed more in Chapter 6.2). Douven writes that it "is the claim that belief is a species of assertion, to wit, subvocalized assertion, or in Adler's words, 'assertion to oneself'."<sup>57</sup> Douven then proceeds to derive (32), the norm of RCA, from (33). He begins with (34),

(34) You should assert  $\varphi$  only if it is rational for you to assert  $\varphi$ ,

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<sup>55</sup>Douven 2006, 449, though my (32)–(35) are his (2)–(5). Douven does not give a full theory of rational credibility, but argues that it must minimally meet three adequacy conditions: see 457–459.

<sup>56</sup>2006, 451.

<sup>57</sup>Douven 2006, 452–453. Douven cites as "basically the same" Williamson's (2000, 255) claim that "occurently believing  $p$  stands to asserting  $p$  as the inner stands to the outer." I discuss this view in Chapter 6.

by instantiation of (33). He then claims to derive

(35) You should assert  $\varphi$  only if it is rational for you to believe  $\varphi$ ,

from (34), by reason of the belief-assertion parallel. Douven says, “In Adler’s terms, if it is rational for you to assert  $\varphi$ , then *a fortiori* it is rational for you to assert  $\varphi$  to yourself, that is, given the belief-assertion parallel, it is rational for you to believe  $\varphi$ .”<sup>58</sup> But Douven has helped himself to too much: he overlooks the fact that the belief-assertion parallel is, given the quotes given from Adler, only about assertion *to oneself*. So the derivation from (34) to (35) should result instead in

(36) You should assert  $\varphi$  *to yourself* only if it is rational for you to believe  $\varphi$ .

But given (36), Douven has no clear and uncontroversial path by which to derive (32). Douven arrived at his *a fortiori* claim without realizing that the argument goes the other way: he needs to get from a principle about assertion to oneself to a principle about assertion to others, not vice versa.<sup>59</sup> This mistake costs him the ball game, for his entire case for the superiority of RCA over KAA rests on this argument showing RCA to be a priori simpler.

(Even if Douven found a way to make the a priori argument work, it would remain objectionable due to its reliance, in (32) through (35), on the ambiguous

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<sup>58</sup>2006, 454–55. And of course, from (35) to (32) is a very short step; but we needn’t consider it here.

<sup>59</sup>It turns out that the belief-assertion parallel is more substantial a view than Douven lets on in his 2006; he relies on the direction of the parallel that spells out belief as asserting to oneself, without realizing that for his argument, he needs the part of the parallel that puts asserting outwardly on a par with asserting inwardly. But this part of the parallel seems controversial; I discuss it in Chapter 6, in connection with the Knowledge Rule of Belief.

term “should.” Terms like “should” and “ought” are very semantically flexible,<sup>60</sup> and so any argument that deploys them will have to give a satisfactory account of what, exactly, such normativity amounts to.)

#### 1.6.4 The Truth Norm

Matthew Weiner (2005) argues that general Gricean conversational principles, in conjunction with his rival Truth Norm (TNA), can explain the infelicity of Moorean sentences and lottery claims as well as KAA, but contends that KAA does not successfully account for proper assertions made in the absence of knowledge, focusing particularly on *predictions* and *retrodictions*.<sup>61</sup> He submits the following prediction: “Captain Jack Aubrey has had long experience of naval combat against the French Navy. He and young Lieutenant Pullings have been watching ships maneuver off Mauritius all day. At 2 p.m., Aubrey says to Pullings,

(37) The French will wait until nightfall to attack.”<sup>62</sup>

Weiner points out that intuitively, Aubrey does not know what is asserted by uttering (37), even if the assertion turns out to be true. But if instead Aubrey’s basis for asserting (37) had been that one of his spies had intercepted the French orders, it would be natural to affirm that Aubrey does know. Nevertheless Aubrey’s assertion of (37) in the case given seems proper even though

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<sup>60</sup>See DeRose 2000, 698.

<sup>61</sup>Retrodictions being “inferences to past unobserved happenings.” Weiner seems to think that Moorean sentences and lottery claims exhaust the data supporting KAA (2005, 230); this overlooks the conversational data appealed to initially by Unger, and which we considered above in sections 1–3.

<sup>62</sup>Weiner 2005, 230, though my (37) is his (3).

he doesn't know it.<sup>63</sup> Partly on the basis of cases like these, Weiner goes on to argue that truth is the only norm governing assertion.

This is an important objection, and it raises complex issues about knowledge and future-oriented assertions (and, perhaps, past-oriented ones as well). There are multiple avenues of response available to the KAA proponent, which Weiner considers: one might argue that such predictions (and retrodictions) are not really flat-out assertions, or that the speakers really do know what they assert, or that such utterances are not really permissible. But for now, I would like to register a few points in favor of KAA that arise from Weiner's example.<sup>64</sup>

First, notice that Aubrey's future-oriented (37) doesn't seem that different from the hedged assertion

(38) I think the French will wait until nightfall to attack.

(38) doesn't appear to be a weaker claim than (37), or if so, it is not much weaker. Contrast this with the differently hedged

(39) The French will probably attack before nightfall.

(39) seems, to me at least, importantly weaker than both (37) and (38): it is at least weaker insofar as (39) can be true even if it turns out that the French don't attack that night, whereas the same cannot be said for (37).<sup>65</sup> Weiner

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<sup>63</sup>2005, 231.

<sup>64</sup>See my 2012 for more pointed objections to Weiner.

<sup>65</sup>More precisely, once it turns out that the French don't attack that night, one can appropriately respond to utterances of (37) and (38) by saying to Aubrey, "you were wrong." (Though Aubrey's utterance of (37) would then clearly be *false*, an utterance of (38) wouldn't, strictly

recognizes that (39) differs from (37) in that asserting the former “would convey a lack of confidence rather than the (already obvious) fact that Aubrey’s grounds are insufficient for knowledge” (2005, 237). But (38), to my ears at least, doesn’t similarly project this same lack of confidence. If this is right, then on first pass, we may provisionally conclude that something funny is going on when our unhedged assertions are future-oriented.

Second, Weiner maintains that predictions (and retrodictions) “are generally acceptable in the absence of knowledge precisely because the most likely and satisfactory warrant for believing in their truth is not sufficient for knowledge. Indeed, predictions and retrodictions can be maintained while knowledge is explicitly disclaimed.” To show this, Weiner considers the following continuation of the conversation: suppose that after Aubrey asserts (37), Pullings—perhaps given his KAA sensibilities—asks, “How do you know the French will attack at nightfall?” and Aubrey responds with

(40) I don’t *know* they’ll attack—we haven’t intercepted their orders—  
but my prediction is that they will.

Weiner thinks that “Here Aubrey is still asserting that the French will attack at nightfall,” and hence this demonstrates that, strange Moorean formulations notwithstanding, “it is possible to conjoin an assertion with a denial of knowledge.”<sup>66</sup> But this can be contested. As DeRose points out, though many predictions are assertions, it doesn’t follow that “my prediction is that *p*” must be an assertion of *p*. Thus (40), as formulated, seems to cheat in ways that matter: the second conjunct ought not contain “my prediction is that” (and neither

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speaking, be judged false: instead, what one could claim about (38) is that Aubrey’s *belief* or *thought* about what the French will do was false.)

<sup>66</sup>2005, 238; my (40) is his (13).

should “know” be italicized). Instead, the cleanest formulation would be

(41) # I don’t know that they’ll attack at nightfall, but they will.<sup>67</sup>

But (41) sounds quite bad, and seems about as paradoxical as our commuted Moorean conjunction considered in §1 above. So it’s not clear that Weiner has provided an example of a case where one can felicitously assert a proposition and disclaim knowledge of it in the same sentence.

Still, let us grant that the conversation from (37) to (40) is a quite natural one. What can we learn from this? First notice how natural it is for Aubrey to concede, in (40), that he doesn’t know what was asserted in (37). And second, the latter conjunct of (40), where he says “but my prediction is that they will,” sounds importantly like a retreat by way of qualification, what we called in §1.2 the “retreat and replace” strategy. These features subtly support KAA: they affirm that the initial (37) was either an assertion plausibly subject to KAA, or a prediction not (perhaps) subject to it. Or if, as is made clear via (40), (37) was a prediction, and is explicitly stated as such, it sounds weaker than a flat-out assertion, itself a significant discovery.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>DeRose 2009, 97–98 n. 20. DeRose emphasizes not italicizing “know” because he thinks it crucial to avoid any unusual stress or emphasis when checking for clashes in conjunctions: see his 1998, 70–72.

<sup>68</sup>One thing worth noting is that if we accept that Weiner’s (37) is an assertion which expresses a prediction, it nevertheless seems to be stronger than the fully explicit

(42) My prediction is that they’ll wait until nightfall to attack,

as follows: asserting (37) seems to *represent it as being the case that* the French *will* wait. (This is just an instance of the uncontroversial point, made by Unger, that one’s assertion that *p* at least represents it as being the case that *p*). But it is unclear whether we should understand (42) as representing it as being the case that the French will so wait, rather than as representing it as being the case that the French will *in all likelihood* wait (in addition to representing it as being the case that one’s prediction is that they’ll wait). Given this, it may be that predictions issued through flat-out assertions, as with (37), really should be understood as subject to KAA, and so impermissible if not known. I argue this point more fully in my 2012.

I tentatively conclude then that none of the rival accounts proposed by Lackey, Douven, and Weiner have done enough to show that KAA is false or counterintuitive; the counterexamples deployed are problematic as they stand, and unpersuasive when clarified.

## 1.7 Abductive Appeals and Unifying Data

Jessica Brown 2008 and others argue against KAA by claiming that other norms, such as those put forth by Weiner, Lackey, and Kvanvig (2009, not discussed above), have their own ways of “handling” all the data to which KAA theorists appeal, and infer that KAA is not demonstrably true. There are two difficulties with this move, with which we will close this chapter.

First, it is unclear that the Truth norm, or Reasonable-to-Believe Norm, or any justification norm, can in fact adequately handle *all* the data. Sure, defenses of their respective accounts can *address* each of the data points offered up by KAA theorists; but doing so doesn’t show that those accounts are superior. In particular, most discussions of alternative norms center on how they can account for Moore’s paradox and the unacceptability of lottery assertions. But these don’t exhaust all the data which KAA explains! In particular, most philosophers who aim to attack KAA and replace it with their favored norm neglect entirely the conversational data adverted to in §1.3;<sup>69</sup> in doing so they reveal themselves to be uninterested in actually accounting for *all* the data.

Second, even if it were the case that a rival norm could handle all the relevant data, there would still be abductive considerations that require us to consider the unity and simplicity of the KAA over its competitors. Because

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<sup>69</sup>E.g. Weiner 2005, 230, MacFarlane 2011, 85 n. 8 and Cappelen 2011, 37–40 mention only lotteries and Moorean paradoxes; Maitra and Weatherston (2010, 104–105) also neglect the conversational data, and thereby fail to address in full an obvious objection to their discussion; I level this objection in Chapter 3.



KAA can handle all the data by appealing to the same thesis, it is more unified and more elegant; this was shown vividly in §1.3 above concerning the unified explanation of both the evidence from challenge questions like “How do you know?” and the evidence from the knowledge-version of Moore’s paradox. The two strands of evidence are related in a way that only KAA is well-positioned to explain. For the ‘How do you know?’ challenge can elicit a *de facto* Moorean paradox within a conversational context:

A: It is snowing.

B: How do you know?

A: Oh, I don’t.

B: Huh??

A: Still, it’s snowing.<sup>70</sup>

B’s question effectively puts A into a potential Moorean predicament. The lesson we drew was that any explanation of what is problematic about the Moorean conjunction ought also to explain why the challenge questions are so apt, and vice versa; even better, they ought to be given the *same* explanation. KAA does just that: because assertions represent their speakers as knowing, A’s assertion invites the supposition that A knows; likewise, because assertions represent their speakers as knowing, any flat-out asserted conjunct of a Moorean sentence invites the supposition that its asserter knows it.

This is significant because KAA’s competitors fare poorly at providing a unified account of the challenge questions and the Moorean conjunctions; indeed, they handle the data in a fragmented way, citing distinct considerations

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<sup>70</sup>Maitra and Weatherston (2010, 110-11) appeal to a conversation (discussed in Chapter 3.3 below) wherein such responses are (they think) non-defective. Though I find their case unconvincing, it nevertheless does not cast doubt on my point here, for it is not used to argue that no challenge questions in conversation could put one in a Moorean predicament.

for each. For example, Douven's (2006) Rational Credibility norm accounts for the prevalence of challenge questions by noting that "it seems not unreasonable to assume what we rationally believe is mostly knowledge" (2006, 469–70). But Douven concedes that given the Rational Credibility norm, someone "could warrantably assert: ' $\varphi$  but I do not know  $\varphi$ '." He then tries to soften the blow by pointing out that this would be "counterproductive" from a conversational standpoint: asserters will "tend to have overriding pragmatic reasons for still not asserting them" (2006, 474–75). So for Douven, pragmatic considerations are used to explain why we don't assert Moorean conjunctions (though we *can* sensibly do so), whereas the assumption that our rational beliefs tend to be knowledge is what accounts for challenge questions being both prevalent and relevant.

Similarly Kvanvig (2009), in advancing his rival Justified Belief norm, attempts to explain the absurdity of Moorean conjunctions by appealing to very different considerations than those he adverts to concerning challenge questions. For Moorean conjunctions he appeals to a special notion of 'epistemic' justification, "the kind that puts one in a position to know" such that, "if ungettiered and combined with true belief yields knowledge" (2009, 149; cf. 2011, 245). Yet regarding our challenge questions Kvanvig notes that other questions (such as "Are you certain?") can also be conversationally appropriate, and claims that all such questions are in fact after the reasons the asserter has for thinking the asserted proposition true; once those reasons are given the questioner is satisfied (143).<sup>71</sup> But clearly, the special 'epistemic' justification relied on to explain what's wrong with Moorean conjunctions need not be the kind of justification had when one thinks a proposition to be true: one can

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<sup>71</sup>Williamson (2009, 344) points out that Kvanvig's attempt to explain the conversational propriety of challenge questions does not go far enough in accounting for Williamson's actual argument concerning the range of aggressiveness (again, see Turri 2010c).

have reasons for thinking  $p$  true that do not provide ‘epistemic’ justification in the favored sense.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, Weiner’s (2005) defense of the Truth Norm accounts for the absurdity of Moorean conjunctions by claiming that sentences like (7), or

(1) # Dogs bark but I don’t know that they do,

are paradoxical because they appear to violate the requirement that one have some warrant or evidence for its truth, which is itself plausibly derivable from the Truth norm (see Williamson 2000, 245). This, in combination with Gricean rules of conversation, explains the unacceptability of such sentences:

The person who asserts [(1)] must have some warrant for believing that dogs bark, or she has committed secondary impropriety with respect to the truth norm. This assertion is about the habits of dogs as they are now. By far the most likely warrant for such an assertion is having seen and heard dogs bark or having been told that dogs bark by a trustworthy informant, and either of these warrants is sufficient for knowledge. If the speaker’s situation is so unusual that she has some other warrant for believing that dogs bark, she should say so. Similarly for sentences such as [(7)]... someone who asserts these while disclaiming knowledge is admitting that she does not have the most likely and most satisfactory warrant for the truth of her assertion. (2005, 237–38)

And though Weiner does not mention the data from conversational patterns,

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<sup>72</sup>Compare Lackey (2008, 135–37), who in defending her *Reasonable to Believe Norm of Assertion*, must appeal to an entirely different Gricean principle (her NMNA / NMNA\*\*) to account for Moorean conjunctions; she does not discuss challenge questions. Cf. also Stone 2007.

we can imagine how his explanation of challenge questions might go. In conversation one asks, e.g., how the asserter knows, because one is interested in how strongly positioned the asserter is with respect to its truth: in particular, one wants to confirm that the asserter has some warrant for thinking the asserted claim true. But again, this explanation of the challenge questions would be different than the explanation given for Moorean conjunctions: no appeal to Gricean rules is required in attempting to account for challenge questions.

Here's another way to put the matter.<sup>73</sup> There is a very general schema for explaining the Moorean conjunctions, one which any normative account of assertion can deploy: it's impossible to assert properly "*p* but I don't *X* that *p*" if

- (a) The norm of assertion is *Y*; and
- (b) It is impossible to *Y*<sup>74</sup> that: *p* and I don't *X* that *p*.

I argue that only by substituting 'know' for *X* and 'knowledge'/'know' for *Y* will one be in a *good* position to explain the aptness of the challenge questions, because only by doing so will one be able to explain both them and the Moorean paradoxes by appeal to the same notions.

In sum: opponents of KAA have wrongly assumed that rival accounts need only show that they too can handle the data supporting the knowledge account. In fact, the burden is to show that they can handle it *as well as*, or even better than, KAA. One way of doing this is to give an elegant and unified explanation of some of the data; but at least with respect to challenge questions and Moorean paradoxes, this standard has not yet been met.

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<sup>73</sup>Thanks to Brian Weatherson here.

<sup>74</sup>Or 'Y-fully assert (with a point)', if the favored account is the Truth norm.

## 1.8 Appendix: Moore's Paradox, Moore's Solution

Many philosophers have proposed solutions to what Wittgenstein called “Moore's Paradox,” namely conjunctive assertions of the forms

(31) #  $p$  and I don't believe that  $p$

(43) #  $p$  and I believe that not- $p$ <sup>75</sup>

(31) and (43) have come to be called the *omissive* and *commissive* versions, respectively; Moore himself contemplated both versions.<sup>76</sup> These conjunctions sound absurd, and seem paradoxical. Solutions to them have involved explaining what makes asserting them paradoxical, given that they could be true.<sup>77</sup>

Moore himself, and Wittgenstein following him, considered the paradoxes at the level of assertion. But recently many philosophers working on the subject have been concerned to provide a solution which explains not only what is paradoxical about asserting such conjunctions, but also what is paradoxical about *believing* or *judging as true* their conjuncts.<sup>78</sup> For example, Mitchell

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<sup>75</sup>Amazingly enough, Lazerowitz's 1942 paper entitled “Moore's Paradox” does not consider such conjunctions; nor, for that matter, does Moore himself in his response to Lazerowitz (1942, 675). This suggests that early on, Moore and his contemporaries viewed the paradox as the conjunction of a philosopher's stated view with what the philosopher knows to be true; only later did it become encapsulated into the conjunctive sentence. Indeed, such conjunctions, including the knowledge versions of them, appear to have originated not with Moore but with A.M. MacIver 1938.

<sup>76</sup>Moore 1959, 175 and 1993, 207.

<sup>77</sup>This is exactly how Moore himself put the matter: “It is a paradox that it should be perfectly absurd to utter assertively words of which the meaning is something which may quite well be true—is not a contradiction” (Moore 1993, 209).

<sup>78</sup>The literature is rife with such approaches: see, e.g., Goldstein 2000, 86: “we not only cannot assert Mooronically but also cannot believe Mooronically”; and Hájek 2007, 219: “But Moore's paradox is as much a puzzle for *belief* as it is for *assertion*.”

Green and John N. Williams go so far as to urge it as a constraint on an adequate account of Moorean paradoxes that it handle the absurdity of Moorean judgments: “Moorean absurdity arises when a person does not *assert* an omisive or commissive Moorean proposition, but rather *judges* that it is true.”<sup>79</sup>

Sorenson (1988, 19) and Shoemaker (1996) are largely to credit for the movement toward diagnosing Moorean paradoxes primarily at the level of belief or judgment. As Shoemaker writes,

What seems to me too little noticed is that there is something paradoxical or logically peculiar about the idea of someone’s *believing* the propositional content of a Moore-paradoxical sentence, whether or not the person gives linguistic expression to this belief. What really needs to be explained is why someone cannot coherently *believe* that it is raining and that she doesn’t believe that it is, despite the fact that the conjuncts of this belief can both be true. If we can show that such beliefs are impossible, or at least logically defective, and if we can come up with an explanation of this, then an explanation of why one cannot (coherently) assert a Moore-paradoxical sentence will come along for free, via the principle that what can be (coherently) believed constrains what can be (coherently) asserted. (1996, 75–76)

This last principle has come to be called *Shoemaker’s Principle*: what can be (coherently) believed constrains what can be (coherently) asserted, whereas the converse is not true.<sup>80</sup> Plausible as it sounds at first, I don’t understand exactly how it is supposed to work: for example, an avowed atheist cannot

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<sup>79</sup>See their Introduction to Green and Williams, eds., 2007, 10; cf. also Williams 1994, 165, Adler 2002, 30, and Huemer 2011, 6–7.

<sup>80</sup>See Green and Williams 2007, 12.

coherently believe that there is a God, but can surely coherently assert that there is a God.

It seems to me a bit much to require an explanation of something which Moore himself did not even see fit to discuss; and it seems misplaced to apply “Moore’s Paradox” to the problem of believing the conjuncts of (31) or (43) when Moore himself thought the paradox obtained at the level of *asserting* such conjunctions. In this appendix I consider why it might be that Moore (and Wittgenstein) did not consider the problem of believing Moorean propositions; and I evaluate more seriously than most Moore’s own solution to (his own) paradox.

### 1.8.1 The Obvious Problem with Moorean Belief

I suspect the reason that Moore did not consider the problem of believing his paradox is that it is obvious what is objectionable about believing the conjuncts of (31) or (43): believing such conjuncts guarantees that one believes a falsehood, and this is something that any minimally reflective person should be able to appreciate. And given that Moore thinks that what is paradoxical about *asserting* (31) or (43) is that in doing so one might well assert a truth, we see at once that believing a Moorean conjunction is not, in Moore’s sense, paradoxical.

How is it that believing (31) or (43) guarantees belief in a falsehood? First take the omissive (31). Suppose that Bertie believes both conjuncts of (31); if so, then Bertie believes that  $p$  and also believes that: Bertie does not believe that  $p$ , that is:

Bertie’s (31):  $B(p) \ \& \ B(\sim B(p))$

The latter meta-belief is false, given Bertie's belief that  $p$ . Thus one cannot believe (31) without it resulting in a false belief.

Now for the commissive (43). Suppose that Bertie believes both conjuncts of (43); if so, then Bertie believes that  $p$  and also believes that: Bertie believes that not- $p$ , that is:

Bertie's (43):  $B(p) \ \& \ B(B(\sim p))$

This latter meta-belief can be true or false; if true, then Bertie has the object-level belief that not- $p$  as well [namely  $B(\sim p)$ ], and as a result, Bertie has contradictory beliefs (that  $p$  and that not- $p$ ), one of which (given the law of noncontradiction) must be false. Or, if the meta-belief is instead false, because Bertie in fact does not believe that not- $p$ , then it remains the case that one of Bertie's resultant beliefs—the meta-belief attested to in the second conjunct, namely  $B(B(\sim p))$ —is false. Thus one cannot believe (43) without it resulting in a false belief.<sup>81</sup> And notice that for both the omissive (31) and the commissive (43), it matters not what the truth-value of  $p$  is: the false belief results simply from the structure of the conjunctions.

What Moore thought paradoxical is the fact that it would be absurd to assert something which could be true: for then the paradox cannot be due to its being self-contradictory. But if one could not believe truly either the commissive or the omissive conjunctions, yet one *could* assert it truly,<sup>82</sup> this puts pressure on the disciples of Shoemaker to explain why we should care at all about

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<sup>81</sup>This is in effect the story given by Williams 1979.

<sup>82</sup>A recipe for asserting (31) truthfully: select any proposition you don't believe, plug it in for  $p$ , and then assert the conjunction; if luck has it that the unbelieved proposition you selected is in fact true, then you will have succeeded in asserting (31) truly.



dealing with the paradox at the level of belief. For even if Shoemaker's principle is plausible (on certain interpretations of the "(coherently)" qualifiers), it cannot be a route to explaining the paradox of asserting a Moorean conjunction if it does not in turn account for why my believing something would be false but my asserting it could be true.

### 1.8.2 True 'Moorean' Constraints

Moore himself gave us the two most important constraints when it comes to handling his paradoxical conjunctions: the first constraint, as already noted, is that one's explanation account for both the omissive (31) as well as the commissive (43).<sup>83</sup> But the second, often neglected constraint is that one's explanation also be able to handle *knowledge* versions of his paradox, namely assertions of the forms

(24) #  $p$  and I don't know that  $p$

(44) #  $p$  and I know that not- $p$

This is because Moore recognized that (24) is just as paradoxical to assert (1962, 277). And though he doesn't entertain the commissive (44), we can safely assume that he also would have thought it paradoxical.<sup>84</sup>

Given these two constraints—that one's account of asserting the Moorean

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<sup>83</sup>This constraint was brought out forcefully by Williams 1979.

<sup>84</sup>Some philosophers maintain that these knowledge conjunctions are neither paradoxical nor absurd. But conversational patterns suggest otherwise; I myself have never heard someone attempt to assert (24) or (44) in conversation. Nor do we tend to find it acceptable for one who has outright asserted some proposition to respond to a query such as "How do you know?" with "I don't know" (as noted above in Chapter 1.7). Because we here seek Moorean constraints, and because Moore thought (24) sounds absurd, we shall follow his lead.

paradoxes be able to explain both the omissive and commissive versions, *and* that it explain both the belief and knowledge versions—what account can do it all?

Note well that many of the accounts of Moorean absurdity that advert to *believing* the paradoxical conjuncts will have trouble when it comes to the knowledge versions (24): for one can, it seems, believe these conjuncts without any obvious paradox.<sup>85</sup> It does not seem absurd to believe or judge as true (24); and these in turn give the lie to Shoemaker's principle, for one can coherently believe these conjunctions yet one cannot, it seems, coherently assert them.<sup>86</sup>

So again, which account can do it all? Moore's own, unsurprisingly: the *knowledge account of assertion*, on which one's outright assertion represents or implies that one knows. As he says in the opening paragraphs of "Certainty": "by asserting them in the way I did, I *implied*, though I did not say ... that I myself knew for certain ... that what I asserted to be the case was, at the time I asserted it, in fact the case" (1959, 227). And, in diagnosing his knowledge conjunction 'Dogs bark, but I don't know that they do,' he explains that it is absurd "because by asserting *p* you positively *imply*, though you don't assert, that *p*" (1962, 277). In short, the conjuncts of (24), and (44), can't be known together: for (24), if one knows that *p* then one cannot know that one doesn't know that *p*; and for (44), one cannot know both *p* and not-*p*, because knowledge is factive and (we're assuming) the law of noncontradiction holds.

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<sup>85</sup>Obviously, it will beg the question to claim that this shows that the knowledge conjunctions aren't true Moorean paradoxes whereas the belief conjunctions are. Because Moore thought the knowledge conjunctions just as problematic as the belief conjunctions, they deserve to be handled as well.

<sup>86</sup>Nor will *Evans's Principle*—If I am justified in believing that *p*, then I am justified in believing that I believe that *p*—championed by Williams (2004, 2007), be of much help when it comes to the knowledge conjunctions.

Moore also thinks that knowledge is instrumental in accounting for the belief conjunction (31), because he thinks that the “natural reaction” to anyone asserting such a belief conjunction such as (31) “would be ‘What a nonsensical thing to say! How can you *know* that it really is raining, when you don’t believe it?’ ” (1993, 211). However, this reply is incomplete when it comes to the commissive (43). One could, it seems, know that  $p$  and simultaneously know that one believes that not- $p$ ; but given that knowledge entails belief, this would involve one in believing both  $p$  and not- $p$ , a contradiction. So for the commissive (43), the knowledge account must resort to explanation at the level of belief.

Is this a drawback? Not at all, given the Moorean constraints laid down, and the proffered explanation of what’s wrong with Moorean belief given in §2 of this appendix: for the knowledge account of assertion only stoops to the level of belief when needed. And this is in fact a virtue of the account, for it appeals to the incongruity of belief only for those conjunctions that are clearly irrational to believe. For as we’ve already noted, it can be sensible to believe the conjuncts of the knowledge conjunctions (24).

In sum, Moore gave us the most important constraints for theorizing about the paradoxical conjunctions worthy of his name: first, an account of Moore’s paradox(es) should prioritize what is paradoxical about *asserting* them; second, it must handle both the commissive and omissive forms; and ideally, it should handle both the belief *and* knowledge conjunctions in similar fashion. Moore’s own approach, the knowledge account of assertion, looks to be the best way of respecting all the constraints, and furthermore is independently motivated by a great deal of data apart from Moorean conjunctions.

## Chapter 2

### Priority, Constitutivity, and Normativity

In Chapter 1 we saw that G.E. Moore, J.L. Austin, Max Black, Peter Unger, and Michael Slote each endorsed a plank of what has become known as the *Knowledge Account of Assertion*. For each, and for many that followed,<sup>1</sup> that plank was a kind of **descriptive** thesis concerning what assertions *do*. In diagnosing the inconsistent sound of paradoxical conjunctions such as

(1) # Dogs bark, but I don't know that they do

Moore originally put the point thus: “by asserting *p* positively you *imply*, though you don't assert, that you know that *p*” (1962, 277).

Less well-known is that Moore even diagnosed the belief-version of his paradox, namely

(2) # Dogs bark, but I don't believe that they do

by way of the same account. In his only extended discussion of the paradox,<sup>2</sup> Moore cites the relevance of knowledge for (2), noting that the “natural reaction” to anyone uttering a such a sentence

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<sup>1</sup>See DeRose 1991, 597–98 and 2009, 93ff., Stalnaker 1984, 144, Hawthorne 2004, 23, Turri 2010c, 547 and 2011, 38, and Benton 2011.

<sup>2</sup>In an unpublished, incomplete manuscript, circa 1944 (published by Thomas Baldwin: see Moore 1993, 211–12, n. 1)

would be ‘What a nonsensical thing to say! How can you *know* that it really is raining, when you don’t believe it?’.

When a person says a thing assertively we often ask ‘How do you know that?’—as if by saying it he *implied* not only that he believed it but that he *knew* it. And *very* often we do. And I think it’s again true that in the immense majority of cases where people assert a thing positively they do know it. (1993, 211)

Austin, Black, Unger, and Slote continued the terminology of this descriptive claim:

When we make an assertion, such as ‘There is a goldfinch in the garden’ or ‘He is angry’, there is a sense in which we imply that we are sure of it or know it (Austin 1961b, 45)

In order to use the English language correctly, one has to learn that to pronounce the sentence “Oysters are edible” in a certain tone of voice is to *represent oneself* as knowing, or believing, or at least not disbelieving what is being said. (To write a check is to represent oneself as having money in the bank to honor the check.) (Black 1952, in 1954, 54–55)

If S asserts, states, or declares that *p*, then he not only represents it as being the case that *p*, but he represents it as being the case that he *knows* that *p*. (Unger 1975, 251)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Unger goes so far as to say that this condition is “analytically correct” (p. 259).

And doesn't the oddness of such examples [as Moore's paradoxes] indicate that when we state or assert something, we represent ourselves as being sure and having knowledge about it, not merely as believing what we have asserted? It seems to me that it does. (Slote 1979, repr. in 2010, 95)

As in Chapter 1, let's call this descriptive claim the 'RK' thesis: represent their speakers as knowing.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the recent literature on the knowledge account, beginning with Timothy Williamson (1996 and 2000, Ch. 11),<sup>5</sup> exchanges this descriptive terminology concerning what assertions imply or represent about their speakers, for the **prescriptive** terminology of an epistemic *norm* or *rule* governing assertion. And Williamson defends the following rule as *constitutive* of the speech act of assertion:

NORM One must: assert *p* only if one knows *p*. (2000, 243, 249)

Further, on this view, knowing is the epistemic position one must be in to satisfy the standard of authority operative in the practice of assertion:

One can think of the knowledge rule as giving the condition on which a speaker has the *authority* to make an assertion. Thus asserting *p* without knowing *p* is doing something without having the authority to do it, like giving someone a command without having the authority to do so. Characteristic standards of authority thus

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<sup>4</sup>We could've adopted Kvanvig's (2009) recent moniker, the 'BUMS' thesis, for Black, Unger, Moore, and Slote; but that seems too lowbrow.

<sup>5</sup>However, see Chisholm and Feehan 1977, 151: "the concept of assertion is essentially *normative*. We can explicate it only by reference to *justification*. And the justification in question is epistemic, the type of justification that is implied by knowledge and evidence."

play a constitutive role in the speech act of assertion, as they do in other institutions. The distinction between having warrant to assert  $p$  and reasonably believing oneself to have such warrant becomes a special case of the distinction between having the authority to do something and reasonably believing oneself to have that authority. Someone who does not know  $p$  lacks the authority to assert  $p$ , and therefore cannot [in the case of testimony] pass that authority on to me by asserting  $p$ , no matter how plausibly he gives me the impression that he has done so. (2000, 257)

Most have followed Williamson's use of this terminology.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, most of the criticism that has been levelled at the knowledge account has been aimed the so-called knowledge-*rule* or knowledge-*norm*, specifically Williamson's constitutive version of it, to the neglect of his predecessors.<sup>7</sup>

Keith DeRose is one of the few who notes the difference between these descriptive and prescriptive sides of the knowledge account:<sup>8</sup>

For our current limited purposes, these are just two sides of the same coin: If one represents oneself as knowing that  $p$  by asserting  $p$ , then, to avoid falsely representing oneself, one should follow the rule of asserting only what one knows; and if assertion is governed by a rule that one should assert only what one knows, then one will

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<sup>6</sup>E.g. Hawthorne 2004, Stanley 2005a, 2005b, and 2008, Schaffer 2008, Goldberg 2009, Turri 2010c and 2011, E. Sosa 2011, 47ff., Smithies forthcomingb, and Kelp forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup>E.g. Weiner 2005, Lackey 2007, Douven 2006, D. Sosa 2009a, Kvanvig 2009, Maitra and Weatherson 2010. This is especially pronounced in Brown and Cappelen's 2011 collection, wherein many of the essays set themselves toward arguing against Williamson's constitutive account: see especially Cappelen 2011, esp. §3, Kvanvig 2011, Maitra 2011, and MacFarlane 2011, esp. §2.

<sup>8</sup>Pagin (2008, §5.5) notices the more general distinction—concerning “the status of the notion of correctness involved. Is it an inherently *normative* notion, or is it just descriptive?”—only to set it aside.

represent oneself as knowing that  $p$  when one asserts that  $p$ . (2002, repr. 2009, 93.)

I am interested here, however, in investigating the other, outlying purposes beyond those “limited” ones, concerning what difference, if any, there is between the descriptive claim and the prescriptive claim, or whether they ultimately come to the same thing. In particular, we shall consider whether there is any sense in which one principle is *prior* to or more fundamental than the other, and from which the other arises: ‘Descriptivism’ favors the priority of the RK thesis, whereas ‘Prescriptivism’ prioritizes the NORM. Another way to think about these matters is to ask: From what or where does assertion’s relation to knowledge derive? Discussion of these overlooked issues will shed light on the motivation for Williamson’s strong claim of *constitutivity* for the NORM, and will lead into deeper issues regarding the value of knowledge for both assertion and action.

## 2.1 Majorities and Frequencies

First consider the question of the source or origin of assertion’s involvement with knowledge: *why* do assertions represent their speakers as knowing, or why are they normed by knowledge? We begin with a non-starter.

Moore and Black each gave indications that the answer was to be had in commonness or frequency, namely the very high percentage of occasions where speakers assert when they know. In the quote above, Moore appealed to the “immense majority of cases where people assert a thing positively they do know it.”<sup>9</sup> But he is yet more explicit. Moore thinks that when you assert something you imply that you believe or know it:

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. his earliest mention of it, where Moore explained why something like RK would hold: my asserting “A is B”:



that you do imply this... *simply arises from the fact*, which we all learn by experience, *that in the immense majority of cases* a man who makes such an assertion as this does believe or know what he asserts: lying, though common enough, is *vastly exceptional*. And this is why to say such a thing as “I went to the pictures last Tuesday, but I don’t believe that I did” is a perfectly absurd thing to say... (1942, 542–43; italics mine)

Elsewhere Moore makes the point based on generality:

That we *imply* it means only, I think, something which results from the fact that people, in general, do not make a positive assertion, unless they do not believe that the opposite is true: people, in general, would not assert positively “he has not gone out,” if they believed he had gone out. (1944, repr. 1959, 176)

Moore then repeats this “in general” qualifier four more times in explicating his point.

Black follows Moore in understanding RK as arising from the common frequency of assertions being made by believers/knowers. Moorean paradoxical assertions like (1) or (2) are “not self-contradictory, but only wildly implausible and contrary to what experience would lead us to expect,” and thus their absurdity is a “*factual* absurdity” (1954, 49).

These attempts to locate the source of epistemic representation or normativity in the common or frequent occasions where assertions are known (or

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will always also *express* either the fact that *I think* that A is B, or the fact that *I know* it to be so; even where I do not mean what I say [i.e. am insincere], my words may be said to *imply* either that I think that A is B or that I know it, since they will commonly lead people to suppose that one or the other of these two things is the case. (Moore 1912 [1961], 78)

believed) seem to misfire. First, it proves too little. Appealing to mere high percentages to justify an all-encompassing principle neglects the fact that high percentages that fall short of 100% allow for—indeed, *require*—exceptions. Yet the connection between knowledge and assertion posited by both RK and the NORM seems much tighter than that; indeed, that connection can seem to be exceptionless. Instances of Moore’s paradox, or of weaker cancelling such as in

(45) Dogs bark, but they might not

would provide occasions on which one should be able interpret them as exceptions; but they don’t.

Let us compare questions: there is an essential connection between the speech act of questioning and the epistemic state of ignorance (where ‘ignorance’ involves lacking knowledge). However, it doesn’t follow from most cases of questioning being ones in which the asker doesn’t know the answer that there is anything normative or prescriptive forbidding questions when one knows.<sup>10</sup> And likewise, one needn’t represent oneself as being ignorant when asking a question, for there are all kinds of scenarios wherein one asks simply to see whether an interlocutor knows the answer, or just to see how they’ll respond, and so on. So the counterparts of RK and NORM for questioning wouldn’t, even if true, follow from the commonness or frequency with which questioners are ignorant.

Second, it proves too much. If the preponderance of occasions where asserting flows from knowing undergirds RK or the NORM, then we should expect it

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<sup>10</sup>The slogan “ignorance is the norm of questioning” notwithstanding. See Hawthorne 2004, 24, who means rather that ignorance is the default epistemic position, since it is the “the paradigmatic case.”

to demonstrate other theses as well. It is, presumably, statistically more common for speakers to assert only when they think an assertion is worth making, or relevant in the context, or at least minimally interesting, and so on. But not all assertions need to represent these as being the case (nor is there anything as strong as a norm requiring them). And this is borne out by Moorean tests, since the following conjunctions just don't have the same Moore-paradoxical sound to them:<sup>11</sup>

(46) It's not really worth mentioning, but *p*.

(47) It's not really relevant to the current discussion, but *p*.

(48) *p*, although that's not the least bit interesting.

Thus, appealing to majorities and frequencies alone is unlikely to explicate the relationship between knowledge and assertion posited by RK or the NORM.

## 2.2 Priority

So let us begin again. We seek an explanation or an account of how it is that assertion is intimately related to knowledge. Is either RK or the NORM *prior* to the other?

The sense of priority in view could be construed as a kind of conceptual priority, though it concerns the metaphysical dependence relation (if any) that obtains between the descriptive and the prescriptive. What is at issue is precisely whether the epistemic is embedded within the speech act of assertion in

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<sup>11</sup>Thanks to John Turri for pointing this out.

such a way that RK is dependent on the NORM, or vice versa. It's possible for two facts to be so connected that they are true at exactly the same worlds, but nonetheless one fact is prior to the other. Aristotle called this kind of priority "by nature": the two facts of Plato's existence on the one hand, and the truth of the proposition *Plato exists* on the other, exhibit this kind priority, for the former fact is prior to the latter (*Categories* 14b10–22; cf. Schaffer 2010, 345–46). If it becomes plausible that the priority concerned is "by nature," this may lend support to the notion that knowledge in some sense constitutes the act of assertion.

### 2.2.1 Slote and Unger for Descriptivism

Slote and Unger each seem to derive the normative aspect of the knowledge account, suggesting the priority or primacy of RK. Slote thought it obvious that if the descriptive/representational thesis were correct, that it would give rise to an impropriety characteristic of the prescriptive:

Now if asserting that *p* conventionally and uncancellably represents one as knowing that *p*, then there is something **linguistically improper** about making an assertion when one does not think one knows the proposition asserted—and something even more improper when one is definitely convinced that one *does not* know that proposition. (2010, 96; bold emphasis mine)<sup>12</sup>

Strictly speaking, Slote's claim is that the impropriety in question attaches when one asserts that *p* when lacking the second-order belief that one knows *p*,

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<sup>12</sup>Notice that these two dimensions identified by Slote correspond to DeRose's distinction (discussed in Chapter 1.6.1, and fn. 46 of 1.6.2) between primary and secondary propriety.

and all the more so when one lacks it because one believes one doesn't know.<sup>13</sup> But surely if asserting conventionally and uncancellably represents that one knows, then one will, in the typical case, by asserting without knowing, misrepresent oneself, whether accidentally or intentionally. And insofar as there is some more general (perhaps moral) normative injunction against misrepresenting oneself, a prescriptive 'ought not' emerges from RK.

Unger also seems to explain the prescriptive 'ought' or 'should' in terms of RK. In considering conversational situations, wherein someone asserts a proposition without knowing it, we are, he thinks, entitled to feel some resentment. That resentment is due to the fact if one doesn't know some proposition, then one "shouldn't assert, state, declare, swear, or claim that" it is so (1975, 261). He later considers the case of a colleague who, having submitted a paper to a journal, asserts that his manuscript had just been accepted for publication. Unger writes that if "our colleague *doesn't know* that, he *shouldn't assert* that his work has been accepted. In asserting it, he falsely represents himself" (261). Here the latter claim about falsely representing himself is meant to *explain* the prior sentence's normative "shouldn't".

On this approach the descriptive claim is primary and fundamental, and from it a norm arises such that, in order not to mislead our hearers, we ought not assert unless we know. But notice the qualifier concerning "in order not to mislead our hearers"; compare DeRose's qualifier above, "... to avoid falsely representing oneself...". These qualifiers, though they provide a nice deliberative justification for the resulting normativity, prove inadequate if built into the epistemic norm of assertion: the norm still holds even for those bent on

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<sup>13</sup>Compare: "For if someone who asserts that *p* automatically implies that he knows that *p*, but it is possible to believe what one is not entitled to assume that one knows, then we are not always entitled to assert what we believe and the precise form of words '*p*' will sometimes be inappropriate for expressing our belief that *p*, because to use it will be to make an assertion that misrepresents (our own opinion about) the true state of our knowledge" (2010, 97).

deception, who intend to mislead by misrepresenting their epistemic position. So the Descriptivist can't very well generate the needed normativity simply by appeal to Gricean considerations such as not wanting to mislead hearers, because the norm must hold even for those who do aim to mislead.

One could construe the Descriptivist priority claim by considering the plausibility of the following practical inference:

My assertion that  $p$  will represent me as knowing that  $p$ . (RK)

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So: I ought to assert only if I know. (NORM)<sup>14</sup>

Compare the oddity of the reverse inference, the Prescriptivist's counterpart:

I ought to assert only if I know. (NORM)

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So: My assertion that  $p$  will represent me as knowing that  $p$ . (RK)

The oddity comes from the fact that we cannot normally conclude anything about how an individual would represent herself by  $\varphi$ -ing from the fact that there is a norm governing  $\varphi$ -ing. Compare:

I ought to  $\varphi$  only if  $\psi$ .

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?? So: My  $\varphi$ -ing will represent me as  $\psi$ .

The inference seems strange because obviously  $\psi$  need not involve the acting agent. (Under some circumstances, arguably, one could infer to the  $\varphi$ -ing

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<sup>14</sup>However, see David Sosa 2009a, 270 n. 3 for important discussion.

agent representing herself as *believing* that  $\psi$  holds, but this depends on knowing something about the agent's grasping the norm in a way that informs her decision over whether to  $\varphi$ , and perhaps also on whether observers will need to know this as well to pick up on the representation.)

The Descriptivist approach also finds support in order-of-inquiry considerations. With regard to asserting, or any action  $\varphi$ , if we suspect that  $\varphi$ -ing is constrained by some norm(s) which tells us under what conditions it is permissible to  $\varphi$ , we have to inquire what the norm is that might apply. Yet in discerning such a norm, we also need a grip on what  $\varphi$ -ing involves us in (the descriptive notion), since our understanding of what  $\varphi$ -ing is seems important to figuring out under what conditions it *counts* as  $\varphi$ -ing rather than some other action. But then can we discern how we ought to proceed in  $\varphi$ -ing before determining what  $\varphi$ -ing will involve us in? It seems that in general, the answer is 'no'. The idea that we could first discern the prescriptive side, concerning how or when to  $\varphi$ , and that discerning this would, second, help us understand the descriptive side of what  $\varphi$ -ing involves us in, seems odd; so the descriptive seems importantly prior to the prescriptive. Notice, additionally, that the other direction seems fine: once I have a grasp of what  $\varphi$ -ing involves us in, I am in a position to inquire after the prescriptive side, as to the conditions under which one may permissibly  $\varphi$ .<sup>15</sup>

### 2.2.2 Williamson for Prescriptivism

Contrast Williamson, who maintains that the descriptive thesis derives from the prescriptive thesis he champions.

The thesis defended by Unger and Slote is that, in asserting  $p$ , one

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<sup>15</sup>However, this approach may face worries about deriving an 'ought' from an 'is'.

*represents* oneself as knowing  $p$ ... These authors say little about the general notion of representation, which this chapter scarcely employs. The [constitutive] knowledge account subsumes the Unger-Slote thesis under more general principles. In doing anything for which authority is required (for example, issuing orders), one represents oneself as having the authority to do it. To have the (epistemic) authority to assert  $p$  is to know  $p$ . The Unger-Slote thesis follows. (2000, 252 n.)

Here Williamson prioritizes the norm by noting that what one represents about oneself issues from what is “required”; and his use of “follows” makes clear the order of priority.

Williamson’s view is that assertion as a speech-act is *constituted by* its normative relation to knowledge, much as the rules of a game are constitutive to it being that game.<sup>16</sup> Since constitutive, the rule is not a convention. A constitutive rule that one must  $\varphi$  makes it *necessary* that one must  $\varphi$ : “More precisely, a rule will count as constitutive of an act only if it is essential to that act: necessarily, the rule governs every performance of the act” (2000, 239). But importantly, constitutive rules

do not lay down necessary conditions for performing the constituted act ... when one breaks a [constitutive] rule of assertion, one does not thereby fail to make an assertion. One is subject to criticism precisely because one has performed an act for which the rule is constitutive. (2000, 240)

And the kind of normativity involved is constitutive, “not moral or teleological.” As with the constitutive rules of a game, cheating, by knowingly breaking

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<sup>16</sup>Though he does not indicate this, Williamson’s discussion seems to owe something to Searle’s (1969, 35–42) distinction between regulative and constitutive rules.



a rule, may be a morally objectionable act; but such faults are made possible only by the non-moral rules that make up the game. Thus, though one may incur moral criticism for knowingly asserting a falsehood, “perhaps for having betrayed the hearers or inflicted false beliefs on them, such a faults are made possible only by the specific nature of assertion, which is not itself constituted by moral norms” (ibid.).

### 2.2.3 From Priority to Constitutivity?

One might think that Williamson’s constitutivity claim amounts to, in part, just the priority of the NORM over RK: because the nature of the epistemic authority essential to assertion is knowing, the knowledge-norm is primary, and the fact that speakers represent themselves as knowing when they engage in assertion it itself derivative from the normative fact.

But this claim is too quick. For the prescriptivist’s claim that the norm is prior to the RK thesis could be true even if the norm were not constitutive but (say) conventional in nature (recall that Slote speaks of assertions “conventionally” representing their speakers as knowing). Lewis (1969 and 1975) argued that the conventions of truthfulness and trust that arise in a language community would be regularities, that, arguably at least, could possess the force of norms; and statements he makes elsewhere suggest that the truthfulness convention could require knowledge of asserters:

The foremost thing we do with words is to impart information, and this is how we do it. Suppose (1) that you do not know whether A or B or ... ; and (2) that I do know; and (3) that I want you to know; and (4) that no extraneous reasons much constrain my choice of words; and (5) that we both know that the conditions (1)–(5) obtain. Then I will be truthful and you will be trusting and thereby you will come

to share my knowledge. I will find something to say that depends for its truth on whether *A* or *B* or ... and that I take to be true. I will say it and you will hear it. You, trusting me to be willing and able to tell the truth, will then be in a position to infer whether *A* or *B* or .... (Lewis 1980, in his 1998, 22)<sup>17</sup>

At any rate, Prescriptivism seems conjoinable with a kind of conventionalism about the nature of the norm. So Prescriptivism doesn't entail the constitutivity claim; some further argument is needed to establish it even if Prescriptivism is correct.

Notice that whereas the Descriptivist considers assertion under the more general idea of representing oneself in a given way, the Prescriptivist views it in the more general terms of the authority required. For each, when asked "but why do assertions represent their speakers as knowing?", or "but why do assertions require knowing for that authority?", the answer from each is presumably: "they just do." But subsuming their views under more general principles doesn't exactly settle the matter: for one may agree with the Williamsonian Prescriptivist that the epistemic authority required for asserting is knowing, but nonetheless maintain with the Descriptivist that this is *because* assertions represent their speakers as knowing. Or conversely, one could object to the Descriptivist that the reason why assertions represent knowledge by their speakers is *because* asserting requires epistemic authority, and that requirement just amounts to the norm that one ought not assert unless one knows. So at least with respect to adjudicating the priority claim between Prescriptivism and Descriptivism, it seems we have really gotten nowhere.

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<sup>17</sup>Lewis (1979, repr. 1983, 242) also appeals to the relevance of knowledge when he says "But I have no way of knowing [that my cat Albert in New Zealand has gone upstairs], so I have no business saying that he has."

## 2.3 Constitutivity and Normativity

How then shall we understand the relationship between RK and the NORM? On the one hand, the practical inference that derives the NORM from RK seems like a plausible way to reason at the most general level about why, or why not, to engage in asserting some claim. But on the other hand, to the extent that some kind of epistemic authority is required for proper assertion, it seems as though the NORM captures the prescriptive requirement inherent in that authority, whereas RK simply spells out how one, given that expected authority, will appear to others upon asserting.

Consider now these two questions: Could RK be true while the NORM false? And vice-versa, could the NORM be true while RK false? Might the two in fact be independent?

A linguistic community could have a language—call it ‘RiK’—that includes a speech act of assertion. Speakers of RiK, upon asserting, represent themselves as knowing; but there there is no epistemic or social norm whatsoever by which they require knowledge of asserters. RiK speakers are not held accountable through criticism or censure when they assert without knowing, but nonetheless, all such assertions represent their asserters as knowing the claims asserted. The RiK community is a bit like a costume party where someone is dressed like a police officer: by wearing a police uniform, that individual represents himself, in a certain respect, as a policeman. But no one at the party considers charging him with impersonating a police officer; they understand what is going on: there is representation without epistemic requirement.

In RiK, speakers can acceptably assert Moorean conjunctions like (1), because RiK speakers just don’t care whether, epistemically speaking, asserters represent themselves faithfully; but if you ask them, they’ll admit to finding

such sentences a bit odd. They also can and do assert sentences like

(49) Dogs bark but I don't know whether I know this.<sup>18</sup>

(50) Dogs bark but I may not know this.

This is because in RiK, asserting the first conjunct asserts that, and represents its speaker as knowing that, dogs bark, but the second conjunct doesn't conflict in the relevant way: for (49), the second conjunct represents its speaker as knowing that she doesn't know whether she knows that dogs bark, and for (50), the second conjunct represents her as being unsure, because it's epistemically possible, that she doesn't know that dogs bark. But since it is perfectly possible for one to know without knowing whether one knows, RiK speakers take tokens of (49) and (50) to indicate that a speaker thinks she knows some fact, but isn't certain of this.

Contrast RiK with another language community, which speaks 'Normt'. Normt also has a speech act of assertion, and in Normt there is an epistemic norm on assertion, which speakers and hearers enforce: they should only assert if they know. But engaging in Normt assertions does not represent a speaker as knowing; it merely represents the speaker as having some minimal amount of evidence, an amount which often does not even suffice for believing the proposition it supports. Normt assertions merely represent their speakers as not guessing.

In Normt, speakers understand Moorean assertions such as (1) or (2), and why one might assert them, but their enforcement of the NORM shows that they

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<sup>18</sup>Thus, the RiK community is one wherein David Sosa's 2009a objection to the knowledge account doesn't take.

find them unacceptable. Likewise, Normt speakers find it unacceptable to assert

(51) Dogs bark, but I'm not in a position to know that.

However, they find acceptable

(52) Dogs bark, but I'm not representing myself as knowing they do.

Normt speakers often use sentences like (52) to assert with humility.

Do the RiK or Normt communities seem possible? I find it hard to fathom how they'd actually operate; but I find the RiK community a bit more plausible, for they just don't care about holding speakers accountable to what they represent about themselves. And given this, it just seems silly to say that they *do* have a NORM which they never enforce. Rather, it seems right to say they just don't have such a NORM.

It is difficult to conclude much of anything from such considerations, but we can venture at least two very tentative conclusions. First, consideration of the RiK and Normt languages may give us reason to think that RK and NORM are independent in *some* sense (e.g., they don't logically depend on one another). But second, to the extent that we find it hard to fathom in practice the independence of the RK and the NORM, they are to that extent conceptually intertwined *for us*. Which is to say: our concepts of knowledge and assertion relate them in a way that includes both the normative and representational aspects.

## 2.4 From Normativity to Value

Earlier we considered the question of why it is that knowledge and assertion might be related as they are; and we rejected Moore's and Black's appeal to how our expectations of sincerity and knowledge are shaped by the frequency of our sincere and knowledgeable interactions. Williamson sought to ground the normative aspect in the very nature of assertion itself, such that as a speech act it is constituted by this relationship to knowledge. But we have been dancing around the antecedent question concerning *why* assertion would be constituted *like that* (e.g., why wouldn't assertion be constituted instead by its relation to belief?).

Here I will argue that the normative relationship between knowledge and assertion must be grounded in the *intrinsic value* of knowledge for speakers and hearers. This answer is satisfying, for it is more stable than Moorean appeals to majorities or frequencies; and it goes some way toward explaining both the centrality of assertion for communication, and why knowledge, rather than some other epistemic/doxastic state, is so deeply linked to the concept and practice of assertion.

## 2.5 Evaluating Assertions, Valuing Knowledge

Ernest Sosa (2011, 48–52) and John Turri (2010b (ms)) have recently argued that the normativity inherent in the knowledge account of assertion is related to, and even equivalent to, the distinct value of knowledge. Both attempts are admirable and headed in the right direction. But both have the following feature, which I consider a drawback: they tie the value of knowledge to assertion by way of understanding its value for actions more generally.

Such approaches will find favor with those who have argued for a knowledge-norm of action, e.g. Hawthorne & Stanley (2008), especially their *Action Knowledge Principle*:

(AKP) Treat the proposition that  $p$  as a reason for acting only if you know that  $p$ . (577)

I find their arguments for such a norm unconvincing, and subject to problems (see Chapter 3 below). But our present purposes allow us to focus only on how we should relate the value of knowledge to its normative status for assertions and actions more generally. The main difficulty, I submit, with a norm like AKP, is that it runs afoul of the original considerations given in the *Meno* which raised the value problem in the first place.

### 2.5.1 Socrates's Objection to Hawthorne & Stanley

The *Meno* dialogue oriented philosophy when it came to considering the distinctive value of knowledge over and above mere true belief. But Socrates puts the matter in terms of how knowledge is no better than true belief when it comes to guiding actions:

SOCRATES: If someone knows the way to Larissa, or anywhere else you like, then when he goes there and takes others with him he will be a good and capable guide, you would agree?

MENO: Of course.

SOCRATES: But if a man judges correctly which is the road, though he has never been there and doesn't know it, will he not also guide others aright?

MENO: Yes, he will.

SOCRATES: And as long as he has a correct opinion on the points about which the other has knowledge, he will be just as good a guide, believing the truth but not knowing it.

MENO: Just as good.

SOCRATES: Therefore *true opinion is as good a guide as knowledge for the purpose of acting rightly*. That is what we left out just now in our discussion of the nature of virtue, when we said that knowledge is the only guide to right action. There was also, it seems, true opinion. (97a–c, italics mine)<sup>19</sup>

The problem then is this: we cannot very well illuminate the nature of the relation between knowledge and action (including assertion) by appealing to the distinctive value of knowledge, given that the value problem was itself posed in terms of knowledge being no better a guide to action than mere true belief.

In Socrates's day, and since, we have presupposed that knowledge is more "highly prized," in Meno's phrase, than mere true belief, even though they are equivalent in respect of guiding action. But if knowledge is *required* for right action, it is hard to see why knowledge is more highly prized, for true belief is likewise required for right action. If knowledge were required as AKP says, it is puzzling why Meno didn't just answer along those lines. Thus if Hawthorne & Stanley are right that knowledge, and nothing short of it, licenses action, it threatens to dissolve the value problem in Socrates's sense, and we shall require a new story about what exactly the value problem is. Put differently: if knowledge is *required* for right action, then either (i) knowledge and true belief are not equivalent bases for action, since knowledge is a better

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<sup>19</sup>Hamilton/Cairns translation, from *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (1961).



basis—and that’s what Meno should’ve said, or (ii) we needn’t prize knowledge over true belief (*or* (iii) knowledge is just true belief). None of these options are palatable, since they each deny a crucial, and plausible, assumption: first, that knowledge will get you to Larissa just as well as true belief; second, that knowledge is importantly better than true belief; and third, that knowledge is different than true belief.

### 2.5.2 Knowledge’s Special Role in Assertion

Given these problems, it is desirable to ground knowledge’s normative status in the practice of assertion in its inherent value, yet in such a way that the value of knowledge reveals how it is constitutive of assertion while not being so for actions more generally. Because knowledge has a distinct role in the practice of assertion which it does not have for other actions, its value explains why it is essential to assertion.

Such an approach is founded upon distinguishing the paradigmatic *function* of assertion: to impart or share knowledge, typically by way of *expressing* one’s knowledge.<sup>20</sup> If the function of assertion is to share or impart knowledge, then it is at once clear why knowledge normatively constitutes the speech act of assertion while not having that same status for actions more generally: such non-communicative actions do not, paradigmatically, impart knowledge (indeed, they do not even require a recipient who would gain knowledge as a result). Though they may, in the best of circumstances, be based upon knowledge, such actions put knowledge to work rather than having (further) knowledge as its function or point. And why would sharing knowledge be the point

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<sup>20</sup>See Turri 2011 for the importance of expression. However, we needn’t require that the function is (typical though it may be) to share *one’s own* knowledge, since it may be that an assertion can, under the right circumstances, bring about knowledge in a hearer even when the testifier doesn’t know what’s asserted: see Lackey 2008.

of assertion? Because its stability yields both instrumental value for the one seeking to act, and inherent value for reflective creatures like us; and it is plausible that it possesses this instrumental value for the one undertaking an action precisely because of its inherent value given the actor's reflective capacity to deliberate about how to proceed.

In this way we acknowledge that knowledge rests high on the spectrum of epistemic evaluation for actions more generally, such that it is better to base a means-end action on knowledge rather than some weaker epistemic state (see Sosa 2011, 44–48), without endorsing knowledge as *normatively required* for such actions as it is for assertions. Thus we may account for our typical evaluative practices concerning action,<sup>21</sup> while preserving the framework in which the Meno problem was posed.

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<sup>21</sup>On which Hawthorne & Stanley rested much of their account: see 2008, 571–73.

## Chapter 3

### Knowledge, Assertion, and Action

#### 3.1 Connecting Knowledge, Assertion, and Action

What is the relation between knowledge, assertion, and action? Some philosophers have concerned themselves in particular with whether knowledge is the norm of assertion, or the norm of action. Some claim that knowledge is the norm of both assertion and action (Stanley 2005b, Hawthorne & Stanley 2008). Others have maintained that knowledge is neither the norm of assertion nor of action, and that action itself can explicate a norm governing assertion (Maitra & Weatherson 2010). At least one philosopher initially affirmed that knowledge governs both assertion and action, but later reversed course to argue that though knowledge is the norm of action, it is too weak to be the norm of assertion (Stanley 2005b, 2008). I am inclined to agree that knowledge is the norm of assertion, but I doubt that it is the norm of action; in this chapter, however, I will focus primarily on knowledge and action. In particular, while I side with Hawthorne and Stanley on knowledge being normatively connected to assertion, I argue in §2 that their principles tying knowledge to action are inadequate, revealing that the case for their Action-Knowledge Principle is less than compelling. Then in §3, I show that Maitra and Weatherson's argument against the knowledge norm for assertion suffers from some fatal defects. §4 argues that their own proposal, the Action-Rule for assertion, is implausible, and §5 points to difficulties encountered by both views concerning lottery

propositions.

Some clarifications before proceeding. First, by the “*E* is the norm of” locution, I mean that *E* (knowing, for example) is the requisite state upon which the action or assertion is based. More precisely, “norm of” here designates that certain conditions make a given action  $\phi$  epistemically proper or permissible: condition *E* provides a constraint on epistemic propriety for the action in question, and there is a rule or norm that *E* must obtain in order for the action to be epistemically acceptable. A subject’s being in this state, or her  $\phi$ -ing’s fulfillment of these conditions, forms the basis for, and makes epistemically appropriate, that subject’s  $\phi$ -ing. This is still a rough characterization, but it will do for our purposes.

Next, to make an assertion is itself, of course, to engage in a kind of action: asserting is a particular type of action, since speaking is an action, and asserting is a particular kind of speech act. So the distinction between assertion and action employed throughout this chapter is one distinguishing assertion from other types of actions that do not, or need not, involve the use of speech. You can act on your knowledge or beliefs in various ways: for example, if you know that the book you need is up on the top shelf, you may act on this by reaching up there to get it. And if you recognize that shelf to be out of reach, you may act on this recognition by standing on a sturdy step-stool or chair so you can get to it. If you know that you are late for your class, you may hurry or even run to get there sooner than you would if you had taken your time. These examples exhibit actions that (i) do not involve assertion, or even speech, (ii) are based on some epistemic mental state, and (iii) seem appropriate or proper given your epistemic state (plus your desires and background presuppositions, etc.). So the actions in view here are limited to those not involving assertions, but are nonetheless subject to some kind of epistemic propriety.

### 3.2 The Knowledge Rule for Action

Hawthorne and Stanley (2008) improve upon an earlier suggestion<sup>1</sup> according to which knowledge is normatively connected to action. The intuitive support for the general idea is grounded in our everyday appraisals of others' actions, which imply a close conceptual tie between the concept of knowledge and the rationality or propriety of our actions.<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne and Stanley's refinement leads them to adopt the

*Action-Knowledge Principle:*

Treat the proposition that  $p$  as a reason for acting only if you know that  $p$ . (577)

"When someone acts on a belief that does not amount to knowledge, she violates the norm, and hence is subject to criticism. That is why we use epistemic vocabulary in criticizing the actions of others" (577). On their view, "Knowing that  $p$  is necessary for treating the proposition that  $p$  as a reason for acting," but it is not quite sufficient; to get a sufficient condition they "need some restriction to choices for which the proposition that  $p$  is relevant." Thus they define what they mean by a choice being " $p$ -dependent":

Let us say that a choice between options  $x_1 \dots x_n$  is  $p$  dependent iff the most preferable of  $x_1 \dots x_n$  conditional on the proposition that  $p$  is not the same as the most preferable of  $x_1 \dots x_n$  conditional on the proposition that not- $p$ . (578)

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<sup>1</sup>Made by Fantl and McGrath 2002. I omit discussion of Fantl and McGrath's more recent 2009 account, which is tightly embedded in a fallibilist-impurist (i.e. pragmatist) framework.

<sup>2</sup>See the several examples discussed by Hawthorne and Stanley 2008, 571–73; cf. also DeRose 2009, 241–42.

This in turn leads them to formulate their

*Reason-Knowledge Principle (RKP):*

Where one's choice is  $p$ -dependent, it is appropriate to treat the proposition that  $p$  as a reason for acting iff you know that  $p$ . (578)

My interest in prior chapters has been the necessity direction of such norms, so my focus will be on AKP. But if AKP is false, so is RKP. The next two sections provide reasons to doubt AKP, and thus RKP.

### 3.2.1 Little Parallel Support

First, it is worth contrasting the support enjoyed by the knowledge account of assertion with that for the RKP account of action. Hawthorne and Stanley motivate AKP and RKP by making intuitive appeals to our evaluative judgments about actions. But this isn't adequate grounds for maintaining, as they do,<sup>3</sup> that there is a *conceptual* link between knowledge and action. Or at least, the grounds supporting a normative connection between knowledge and action seem to be far more flimsy than those that are regularly cited for the normative link between knowledge and assertion: the knowledge-action connection has no real analogues to the support we find for the knowledge norm of assertion.

Knowledge-Assertion advocates typically cite three or four strands of evidence to support the theory that knowledge normatively governs assertion. Following Schaffer's (2008) handles, these strands are *Challenge*, *Defect*, *Authority*, and *Critique*.<sup>4</sup> Regarding *Challenge*: There is no "How do you know?" challenge that is as apt, or natural, in the case of action as there is in the case

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<sup>3</sup>2008, 571–73.

<sup>4</sup>Drawing on the evidence highlighted by Unger and Williamson.

of assertion; and the more typical “Why did you do that?” query doesn’t automatically carry an implicit challenge with it. Nor (*Authority*) are such questions obviously requests for one’s “epistemic credentials” or one’s authority for so acting: the ‘why?’ question can be variously treated as a request for the actor’s motivation, intended effects, and so on, but not necessarily a request for one’s epistemic reasons upon which one based the action. *Defect*: There is no obvious comparable Moorean paradoxical construction which the knowledge-action theorist needs to explain, and thus it cannot be appealed to for support.<sup>5</sup> *Critique*: One who acts on a proposition that isn’t known is not, on that basis alone, subject to criticism. Such criticism may be appropriate given the practical stakes involved, which, if high enough, could require knowledge in order for proper action; but there are numerous actions we undertake every day that do not require knowledge, and which are nonetheless fully appropriate. Finally, some knowledge-assertion advocates note the impropriety of lottery assertions, such that a ticket-holder cannot acceptably claim “I won’t win the lottery,” a strand of support which seems to conjoin *Defect* and *Authority*. There is a subtle difficulty here of what it is to act, and to act properly, on a ‘lottery proposition,’ a difficulty which will be further discussed below in §5. But for now we may note that the RKP theorist will, to be consistent, have to claim either that a ticket-holder does indeed know that she won’t win (if it is the case that she won’t), or that she doesn’t know this and acts properly only when the action under consideration in no way relies upon the proposition that she won’t win. Thus, the only kind of analogous support the RKP theorist can glean from lottery considerations will be the impropriety, parallel to that

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<sup>5</sup>Is there perhaps a Moorean construction that could do the trick? Suppose that S says “I am speaking, but I do not know that I am speaking.” If *a* symbolizes the (indexically loaded) act of speaking, then we have, in effect, “*a* but I do not know that *a*.” Yet such a construction seems like it could be as easily handled by appeal to the knowledge-assertion norm.

of asserting lottery propositions, of acting upon lottery propositions. More on this later.

This brief comparison shows that however compelling the knowledge-action connection is at an intuitive level, it does not appear to enjoy the same kind, or amount, of support which knowledge-assertion theorists have marshalled in motivating their view. Now on to a problem for RKP.

### 3.2.2 Appropriately Acting without Knowledge

The Reason-Knowledge Principle implies that, when a choice is  $p$ -dependent, it is inappropriate for one to treat the proposition that  $p$  as a reason for action, when one does not know that  $p$ . But when construed in this way, the RKP seems intuitively incorrect: as Descartes himself noticed, “in practical life, it is sometimes necessary to act on opinions as if they were indubitable, even when one knows they are quite uncertain.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the RKP implies that in cases where one has some excellent grounds for believing that  $p$ , grounds which in other circumstances would make for knowledge, that one cannot (properly) treat those grounds as a reason for action; and if the principle does imply this, it seems *prima facie* implausible.

Suppose you park your car daily on 2nd Street, about two blocks from your workplace, because you can never seem to find parking closer than that. At the end of every workday you walk the two blocks back to your car; you’ve done this for months. This week is no different, except that when Friday comes around, you walk back and find your car gone.

It seems most plausible to say that on the other days leading up to Friday you know where your car is, which is why you walk there—by walking

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<sup>6</sup>*Discourse on Method*, Part IV; AT VI 31.



to that spot you're acting on the proposition ( $p$ ) that your car is there where you left it, two blocks from your work; but on Friday, you fail to know this, because it's been towed or stolen or whatever. So it turns out that on Friday, in taking  $p$  as your reason for walking to that location, you've done something inappropriate, violating the Action-Knowledge principle. More specifically, you've transgressed RKP because your walking to that location is  $p$ -dependent in the relevant sense, and you've treated  $p$  as a reason for walking there, even though you didn't know that  $p$ . But it seems absurd to think that you've acted improperly or done something inappropriate in walking to your car on Friday.

It would be ad hoc, I think, for the RKP defender to say that instead you're acting on a different proposition, e.g.  $q$ : that *this is where I parked my car & things tend to stay put, etc.* If I had been walking with you on Friday to catch a ride, and I had asked you why we're walking so far, or asked you where your car is, you'd reply with something like "My car is two blocks down, on 2nd Street," not "Well, this morning I parked it two blocks down on 2nd, and it's usually there when I return." Moreover, if the RKP defender claims that one is acting on the known proposition  $q$ , this cannot make sense of the *surprise* one feels upon finding one's car is gone; indeed, it cannot explain why that surprise is linked to your realization that you were *wrong* about where your car is presently located.

The RKP defender should instead invoke the primary/secondary propriety, or impermissible/reasonable, distinction.<sup>7</sup> This would enable an explanation of what's wrong with the action (it has violated RKP), as well as what's appropriate about it: walking to that location is secondarily proper or reasonable because you take yourself to know its location, and are doing as best you can in adhering to RKP. But the RKP defender isn't off the hook yet, because this case

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<sup>7</sup>See DeRose 2009, 93ff. and Williamson 2000, 256.

tells us something further about the propriety of acting on epistemic grounds of varying strengths.

The case above compares your action of walking to your car after work on, say, Thursday, when you do know its location, with your action of walking to your car on Friday, when you don't know its location.<sup>8</sup> Notice that when you walk there on Friday, your inductive base for believing that *p* is *stronger*, however slightly, than it is when you walk there on Thursday—because you have one more day to add enumeratively to your inductive base. So if epistemic propriety walks in lockstep with the strength of one's epistemic grounds, and the strength of those epistemic grounds figures importantly in whether you know, these cases show that the epistemic propriety of one's actions doesn't depend on knowing—you act more appropriately, in the sense of acting on stronger epistemic grounds, when you walk to your parking location on Friday even though you don't know your car is parked there, than you do when, on the basis of slightly weaker grounds, you know where it is and walk to your car on Thursday. Thus one can have *stronger* epistemic grounds for  $\phi$ -ing while not knowing (on Friday), than when one  $\phi$ -s with knowledge (on Thursday). But surely  $\phi$ -ing on the basis of stronger epistemic grounds is more (epistemically) appropriate than  $\phi$ -ing on the basis of less strong epistemic grounds: and this principle makes trouble for the very idea that one is in fact acting (primarily) improperly. So the RKP's necessary condition AKP is flawed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Notice that a variant on this case—one focusing on the *first* day you park your car there, and then walk back toward it after work—calls into doubt an alternative norm put forth by Ram Neta 2009, the *JBK-Reasons Principle*, according to which, “When S's choice is *p*-dependent, it is rationally permissible for S to treat the proposition that *p* as a reason for acting iff S justifiably believes that S knows that *p*.” Arguably, on the *first* day you park at some new location, you have *no* belief, let alone a justified one, about whether you know its location at the end of that day, even though you have more general inductive grounds for thinking that parked cars are typically there when their drivers return.

<sup>9</sup>Why shouldn't we regard this kind of counterexample as posing an identical problem for the Knowledge Account of Assertion? Because, as I claimed in §§2.5.1–2.5.2 above, sharing

Thus the main difficulties with Hawthorne and Stanley's RKP are twofold. First, there is not much in the way of parallel support to that cited for the knowledge norm of assertion, and one would expect there to be some such parallels if indeed there is, as they claim, a *conceptual* connection between knowledge and action. Second, it cannot explain the fact that a subject S may appropriately take a proposition *p* as a reason for action on the basis of her strong epistemic grounds, even though she doesn't know that *p* because *p* is false, and it wrongly predicts that S's taking *p* as a reason for action would be more appropriate in the case where she knows that *p* but on the basis of *weaker* epistemic grounds.

### 3.3 Assertions of What to Do

Given the worries just presented, it seems doubtful that knowledge is the norm of action. But what if the knowledge norm for assertion is wrong, and rather that our understanding of the relation between action and assertion can illuminate what is the right norm of assertion? Ishani Maitra and Brian Weatherson (2010) argue that a certain class of statements, namely those concerned with what is "the thing for one to do," form an important exception to the idea knowledge is the norm of assertion. Maitra and Weatherson's "boldest statement" of their position is that "if an agent should do X, then that agent is in a position to say that they should do X" (2010, 100). This core idea forms the

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or expressing knowledge (or aiming to express it) is arguably the paradigmatic function or point of asserting, whereas it cannot be the function or point of actions more generally; what would it mean to say that the function of an action such as walking to my parking spot is to *express* my knowledge of where my car is parked? (It may be plausible to say that walking there expresses your belief that it's parked there: see Finkelstein 2003. But it would be implausible to say that the function or point of your walking there is to express your belief that it's there.) So any principle, such as AKP or RKP, which attempts to govern *all* action, will be subject to counterexamples that do not apply to special actions (such as assertion) which seem more fundamentally connected to knowledge.

backbone of their Master Argument against the knowledge rule of assertion, and it underlies their motivation to formulate what they consider to be a better candidate for the norm governing assertion, the Action Rule. We will first consider, and reject, their argument against the knowledge norm of assertion, and then evaluate their Action Rule proposal.

Maitra and Weatherson's (corrected) Master Argument against the knowledge rule of assertion is as follows:

1. If doing *X* on basis *B* is what to do for agent *S*, then *S* can properly, on basis *B*, assert that *X* is what to do (assuming it is relevant to the conversation).
2. It is possible that doing *X* on basis *B* is what to do for agent *S*, even though *S* is not in a position to know, and certainly not in a position to know on basis *B*, that *X* is what to do.
3. So, it is possible that *S* can properly assert that *X* is what to do, even though she does not know, and is not even in a position to know, that *X* is what to do. (pp. 105–106)

They support premise 1 by appealing to two cases, *Going to War* and *Buying Flood Insurance*.<sup>10</sup> However, premise 1 is false, and the considerations that follow undermine any support provided by those two cases.

### 3.3.1 Undercutting Support for a Crucial Premise

In Maitra and Weatherson's *Going to War* vignette (p. 101), Indalia finds itself in a situation where “the thing for it to do,” given the evidence available to its

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<sup>10</sup>They support premise 2 by appealing to Williamsonian anti-luminosity arguments: see Williamson 2000, chap. 4.

leaders is, by hypothesis, to go to war against an enemy. But it's "a close call"—"while going to war is the thing to do, the leaders of Indalia can't know this." Indalia's Prime Minister decides to launch the war, but the occasion of her speech to the House of Commons is supposed to make trouble for the KAA's knowledge norm, for while she can properly assert all of the reasons or evidence for going to war, she cannot, on the knowledge rule, conclude "and thus we should go to war," for this isn't known. That is, while their

(53) So, the thing to do in the circumstances is to go to war

seems to them like a perfectly proper assertion with which to conclude the speech, the knowledge norm of assertion doesn't permit it.

Likewise in Maitra and Weatherson's case of Nik and Raj in *Buying Flood Insurance* (pp. 101–102): in this dialogue, after Nik asks directly whether they should buy insurance for their business, Raj has the awkward and implausible lines, "I don't know. Hold on; I'm on the phone," and then, when Nik asks who he's calling, answers "The insurance agent. I'm buying flood insurance." Maitra and Weatherson contend that given the knowledge rule for assertion

there's little else he can do. It would be a serious norm violation to say nothing in response to Nik's question. And given that he can't say 'Yes' without violating The Knowledge Rule, he has to say 'I don't know.' ... So, given The Knowledge Rule, he's doing the best he can (102).

They make similar claims, *mutatis mutandis* for the Prime Minister's assertion in the *Going to War* case.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>This is made explicit in their "quite different argument" given in the subsection 2.5 *Argument Three: "What else could I do?"*. See Premise 2 which reads, "There is no better way for

But of course, Raj doesn't *have* to say only one of these three things: in such a close call case, and given his calculations, while he fails to know it, he definitely *believes* that they should buy the insurance. And the knowledge rule licenses the epistemically more adequate (because weaker) response of "I think so" or "I believe we should." Consider instead this revised dialogue:

Nik: Should we get flood insurance?

Raj: I think so. Hold on, I'm on the phone.

Nik: Who are you calling?

Raj: The insurance agent, to buy flood insurance.

Of course, it is common practice for us to opt for such hedged assertions as "I think that *p*" or "Probably *p*" or "It's almost certain that *p*," rather than the flat-out assertion of "*p*", particularly in cases where it's unclear whether we know. And this is often cited in support of, or in discussion of, the knowledge rule.<sup>12</sup>

Maitra and Weatherson address this objection by contending that hedged assertions prefaced by "I believe that...", "It seems to me that...", or—as in the case of the Prime Minister's speech—"I've decided that..." *still* violate the knowledge rule, and thus they are no refuge for the knowledge rule advocate. They still violate it because on their view an utterance of "I think that *p*" asserts "the same thing" as the flat-out assertion of "*p*":

someone who utters *I think that S* typically asserts both that they  
have a certain thought, and the content of that thought. We can see

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the Prime Minister to end the speech without saying something that she does not know to be true" (p. 104).

<sup>12</sup>See Black 1954, 51; Moore 1959, 227f.; Austin 1961b, 45; Unger 1975, 263–64; Slote 1979, repr. 2010, 95–98; Williamson 2000, 247–48; Hawthorne 2004, 22; and DeRose 1996, 568, and 2009, 94 n. 16, 107, and 110.

that this is so by noting that we can properly challenge an utterance of *I think that S* by providing reasons that *S* is false, even if these are not reasons that show that the speaker does not (or at least did not) have such a thought. In the context of her speech in the House of Commons, even if the Prime Minister were to end with one of the [hedged] options above, she would still assert the same thing that she in fact asserts by uttering [(53)] in the circumstances. (pp. 104–105)

This claim is surprising given that so many theorists sympathetic to the knowledge rule<sup>13</sup> have maintained that qualified or hedged assertions enable one to conform to the knowledge rule. But more than just surprising, their claim that the two statements assert “the same thing” is downright implausible. First, looking to how we challenge such hedged assertions is not especially illuminating, because hedged assertions can be denied with a “No” by an interlocutor without thereby representing a disagreement with what was asserted. Von Fintel and Gillies (2008, 82–83) provide a nice example:

A: I think it’s raining out.

B: (i) No, it isn’t/No, it can’t be.

(ii) No, you don’t.

B may felicitously deny A’s utterance with (i), but (i) represents no disagreement with the proposition expressed by A’s utterance: that is what (ii) is designed to do.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>See the previous footnote. I note in passing that Wittgenstein’s (1997) discussion of Moore’s paradox, Part II, sect. x, begins by contemplating the “same thing” view for hedged assertions beginning with “I believe...” (p. 190), only to have him back away from it (p. 191).

<sup>14</sup>This is because, as Simons (2007, 1035, 1041) points out, even though a hedged assertion’s main clause (its “I think” in A’s utterance above) can have an *evidential* function, it nevertheless

Apart from denials and disagreement in discourse, we can see that an utterance of “I think that  $p$ ” does not assert, with the same force, the same thing as the flat-out assertion of “ $p$ ”; for if it did, asserting each of the following conjunctions ought to sound equally bad:

(54) #  $P$ , but it’s possible that not- $p$ .

(55) I think that  $p$ , but it’s possible that not- $p$ .

Yet these don’t sound equally bad: (54) sounds quite bad, and seems like it could not be felicitously asserted;<sup>15</sup> whereas (55) is entirely felicitous, as is any variant of (55) that is similarly hedged with the prefacing qualifiers mentioned above. Indeed, G.E. Moore in “Certainty” notes that an instance of (55) is acceptable, and makes much of the fact that such hedged claims are only acceptable when one lacks knowledge: they sound out of place and downright ridiculous in a context in which it’s clear to all in the conversation that the speaker knows that  $p$ , because appending the hedge “I think that...” serves to express oneself “doubtfully” by highlighting the fact that the speaker doesn’t know the  $p$  in question.<sup>16</sup> So this defense of Premise 1 from the “same thing” view about hedged assertions seems unpromising.

Relatedly, notice that utterances like (55) also imply a related utterance, namely

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contributes to what is asserted, such that what is asserted by  $A$ , namely that  $A$  *thinks it is raining out*, is distinct from the embedded proposition, which likely has “main point status” in the discourse. Maitra & Weatherson’s contention conflates what is asserted with what is the “main point.”

<sup>15</sup>As recent work on epistemic modals has noted: see DeRose 1991, 600, and Yalcin 2007, 983. Epistemic modals are discussed at length in Chapter 4.

<sup>16</sup>Moore 1959, 227–28.



(56) I think/believe that  $p$ , but I don't know it

which undermines another contention of theirs. Maitra and Weatherston argue (pp. 109–110) that while the knowledge rule explains well what is wrong with Moorean paradoxical assertions—“ $P$  but I don't know that  $p$ ”—this support doesn't count in favor of that rule if there is some other rule that can likewise explain their unacceptability. The *Undefeated Reason Rule* does just this:

*Undefeated Reason Rule:* Assert that  $p$  only if you have an undefeated reason to believe that  $p$ .

This rule can explain Moorean assertions, they say, because “in every case in which it is unacceptable to both assert  $q$  and assert that you don't know  $q$ , the speaker's undefeated reason to believe that they don't know  $q$  will be a defeater for her belief that  $q$ .” However, given their own view that a hedged assertion of  $q$  asserts the same thing as the flat-out assertion “ $q$ ,” (56) comes into play as a Moorean construction. But the fact that there are many circumstances in which you'd be inclined to utter (56) tells us that either their “same thing” view about these assertions or their explanation accompanying the *Undefeated Reason Rule* can't be correct. I've already argued above against the former; here's a case to doubt the latter. Suppose I believe that  $q$  on the basis of two reasons,  $R1$  and  $R2$ .  $R2$  is the really decisive one, and because of it, particularly in combination with  $R1$ , I take myself to know that  $q$ . But then I get an undercutting defeater for  $R2$ , call it ‘ $U$ ’:  $U$  is a reason which tells against the reliability of  $R2$ , but doesn't itself tell against  $q$ .  $R2$  is then compromised since  $U$  undercuts it, thus robbing me of knowledge that  $q$ ; and my recognition of ( $R2 \ \& \ U$ ) give me an undefeated reason to think that I don't know that  $q$ . But I still have  $R1$ , which is adequate reason on its own to believe that  $q$ . Thus,

having an undefeated reason to think that I don't know that  $q$  need not itself be a defeater for my belief that  $q$ : it's quite plausible for me to believe, on the basis of an undefeated reason (R1), that  $q$ , even though I also believe, on the basis of a different undefeated reason (R2 & U) that I don't know  $q$ .

### 3.3.2 Counterexamples to Premise 1

More devastating for Maitra and Weatherson is that Premise 1 of their (corrected) Master Argument is subject to a crucial set of counterexamples. Recall that premise 1 of that argument is:

1. If doing  $X$  on basis  $B$  is what to do for agent  $S$ , then  $S$  can properly, on basis  $B$ , assert that  $X$  is what to do (assuming it is relevant to the conversation).

A counterexample to Premise 1 will be in the offing when  $S$  ought to do  $X$  “on basis  $B$ ”<sup>17</sup> but nonetheless can't properly assert this.

Here is a candidate: an example where basis  $B$  makes doing  $X$  the thing to do for  $S$ , but  $S$  does not believe this. That is,  $S$  considers whether  $X$  is the thing to do, but fails to believe that it is the thing to do, because  $S$  does not believe that  $B$  is sufficient grounds for making  $X$  (rather than  $Y$ , say) the thing to do; or alternatively,  $S$  does not believe that  $B$  is sufficient grounds for believing that  $X$  is the thing to do; or thirdly,  $S$  does not consider  $X$  at all—she takes note of the reasons provided by  $B$ , but fails to see that they make  $X$  the thing for her to do. In each of these three cases,  $B$  fails to ground  $S$ 's belief that  $X$  is the thing

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<sup>17</sup>Maitra and Weatherson use this locution because they want to focus on “cases where people do the right thing for the right reasons ... we'll talk about actions having a basis. As well as there being a thing to do in the circumstances (or, more plausibly, a range of correct bases), there is also a correct *basis* for doing that thing (or, more plausibly, a range of correct bases). What we care about is when  $S$  does  $X$  on basis  $B$ , and doing  $X$  on basis  $B$  is the thing to do in  $S$ 's situation” (p. 105).

to do. And in such a case, S surely cannot *properly* assert that *X* is the thing for her to do. She would be asserting something which she doesn't even believe.

Such examples are easy to find when we deploy Maitra and Weatherston's non-luminous, "close call" cases: just take a case where basis *B* does make it the case that *X* is the thing to do for S, but where S's evaluation of *B* results in her decision to *suspend judgment* on whether or not *X* is the thing to do. It's just too close to call, and being cautious, she withholds belief. So she thereby does not believe that *X* is the thing to do. So she can't properly assert it. (If you doubt that it would be improper for her to assert it, just consider how bad it would sound for her to assert the Moorean construction "*X* is the thing for me to do, but I don't believe that it is the thing for me to do.")

The above considerations suggest that Maitra and Weatherston's Master Argument against the knowledge rule is flawed: not only does their premise 1 seem implausible on its own, but the knowledge rule theorist can reject it by appealing to hedged or qualified assertions as the more appropriate substitute given any "close call" case where *p* but one fails to know that *p*.

### 3.4 The Action Rule for Assertion

Even if their argument against the knowledge rule fails, Maitra and Weatherston's proposed Action Rule deserves consideration. They claim that there is a puzzling asymmetry between what suffices to make appropriate assertions of what to do, like the Prime Minister's (53) above, and what suffices to make other, more mundane kinds of assertions appropriate. In particular, they think that the mere truth of assertions like (53), at least when accepted on the right basis, makes it properly assertable, because given that basis, its appropriateness is guaranteed by its truth (pp. 111–112).

Maitra and Weatherson offer the Action Rule as a norm that distinguishes between such claims, and thus can explain the asymmetry:<sup>18</sup>

*The Action Rule:* Assert that  $p$  only if acting as if  $p$  is true is the thing for you to do.<sup>19</sup>

They go through some formal derivations to show that the Action Rule generates this asymmetry between assertions of what to do and assertions of other propositions (pp. 115–116). These derivations purport to show that the Action Rule collapses into the Truth Rule for propositions concerning what one should do, though it does not do so for other propositions. That is, an agent  $S$  can properly assert that  $X$  is the thing for  $S$  to do only if  $X$  is the thing for  $S$  to do: in their formal apparatus,

$$\text{Assert}(X_{Agent}, \text{ThingToDo}(X)) \rightarrow \text{ThingToDo}(X).$$

This is because their derivations rely on an equivalence (57) according to which “acting as if  $X$  is what to do (in your circumstances) is simply to do  $X$  (in those circumstances). And in doing  $X$ , you’re acting as if  $X$  is what to do (in your circumstances),” that is,

$$(57) \text{Act}(X_{Agent}, \text{ThingToDo}(X)) \leftrightarrow \text{ThingToDo}(X).$$

But, they point out, the biconditional of this equivalence doesn’t hold where  $p$  is an arbitrary proposition and  $S$  is an arbitrary agent. The upshot is of this is that the Action Rule doesn’t collapse into a general Truth Rule according to which  $\text{Assert}(S, p) \rightarrow p$ , and so the asymmetry is respected.

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<sup>18</sup>I myself am suspicious of the alleged asymmetry, though I do feel the pull of the idea: if correct, it is an interesting discovery.

<sup>19</sup>2010, 114. Compare the norm of assertion given by Jim Stone 2007, 101.

Maitra and Weatherson's case clearly hinges on the equivalence (57). However, before evaluating (57), we should note a major drawback of the Action Rule as stated. Notice that the Action Rule appears to be consistent with the propriety of asserting falsehoods, for values of  $p$  that don't concern what to do. This is a fascinating result, since Maitra and Weatherson expend great effort in showing that the Action Rule collapses into the Truth Rule for propositions concerning what one should do. But if the Action Rule has truth as a governing factor for those propositions, yet it also licenses false assertions of other propositions, it has some explaining to do! In particular, it will need to explain why factivity seems so important to the propriety of assertion, for pretty much *all* values of  $p$ . That is, if the Action Rule is correct, and if it's also correct that it does license false assertions for everyday assertions yet prohibits them for what it is one should do, then we should expect some error theory as to why we've been wrong this whole time about the impropriety of false assertions for normal  $p$ 's.

Now for the equivalence (57), considering in particular the left-to-right direction which has it that "acting as if  $X$  is what to do (in your circumstances) is simply to do  $X$  (in those circumstances)" (p. 116). Though Maitra and Weatherson claim that (57) is "quite resilient," it falls to some counterexamples—namely, cases where one is unable to do  $X$ , but nonetheless can "act as if"  $X$  is what to do by asserting that it is. Suppose  $S$  is lost and begins to panic, but  $S$  realizes that the thing for  $S$  to do is to *stay calm*. But she can't stay calm even though she keeps asserting—perhaps aloud to herself, or to a companion, who is also starting to freak out—that "The thing to do in this situation is to stay calm." In this case she's not doing  $X$ , but she's still properly asserting, right? Or consider a smoker who knows that quitting is the thing for her to do; she can properly assert that quitting is the thing for her to do, but nonetheless be

unable to quit. By asserting these things, doesn't the speaker thereby act as if  $X$  is the thing to do, even though they haven't done  $X$ ? Such cases provide reason to deny (57).

### 3.5 The Problem with Lottery Propositions

Finally, it is a drawback of the Action Rule that it appears to license assertions of lottery propositions like "I won't win the lottery" when one is holding a ticket, whereas the knowledge rule explains why we find such assertions to be improper. But even if the knowledge rule didn't have this kind of support, the Action Rule would still be in trouble: given that most of us have the intuition that it's improper to flat-out assert such lottery propositions, the Action Rule theorist has to answer for the fact that it permits such assertions.

Maitra and Weatherson, however, think that the Action Rule

offers a nice explanation of why it's often defective to assert lottery propositions. In a lot of cases, it isn't rational for us to act on  $p$  when we have only purely probabilistic evidence for it, especially when acting on  $p$  amounts to betting on  $p$  at sufficiently unfavourable odds. (p. 116)

The import of this last point is unclear, since acting on the proposition that one will lose the lottery, if it amounts to betting on it, is based on astoundingly *favorable* odds. Nevertheless, they go on to point out that in the case where you come upon a lottery ticket for a future lottery, for "which you know you have very little chance of winning," it would be irrational to throw it out; and "In such a case, to act as if the ticket for the future lottery will lose would be to throw it out" (p. 116).

But of course, there are many other ways in which you might "act as if" that

ticket will lose: you will, before hearing the winning ticket announced, carry on your normal spending habits, keep your day job, make plans in line with your small budget, worry about your debts, and so on. Given that there are all these appropriate actions which seem to count as “acting as if” one won’t win the lottery, it doesn’t help that Maitra and Weatherston have shown us how the Action Rule predicts that the particular action of tossing the ticket is irrational. To focus on the solitary act of discarding the ticket is too convenient, and neglects the real issue here for the Action Rule proponent: you can’t properly assert that you won’t win, but you can, in so many ways, properly act as if you won’t. In other words, the lottery case is precisely one in which the propriety of assertion and the propriety of action diverge. We might put this divergence in terms of there being two conflicting *things for S to do* in such a case: on the one hand, S is to *Act as if S won’t win the lottery*, yet on the other hand, S is to *Refrain from (flat-out) asserting that S won’t win the lottery*.

Maitra and Weatherston agree with Hawthorne and Stanley 2008, 572 in disputing the claim that I can properly act on the belief that I won’t win the lottery.<sup>20</sup> On their view, “It is not acceptable to act on one’s belief that one will not win the lottery,” a claim which they often repeat.<sup>21</sup> But the point I’m

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<sup>20</sup>One might plausibly think that this is a case where one doesn’t outright believe *that p*, but believes rather that *it is highly likely that p*. But I think that’s wrong, as do, apparently, Hawthorne and Stanley :

There are clear differences between cases in which we act upon our belief that there is a high probability that *p*, and cases in which we act on the belief that *p*. Suppose I believe that there is a high probability that it will rain. On these grounds, I decide to bring an umbrella on my walk. This is a case in which I am treating my belief that there is a sufficient chance of rain as a reason for my action of taking my umbrella. But if I had believed that it *will* rain, I would have cancelled my walk. ... If I believe it will rain, I will act differently than if I believe that it is very likely that it will rain. (582-3)

This distinction aids the view according to which I act on the belief that *I will lose the lottery*, since for nearly every relevant action, I act the same as I would if I believed instead that *In all likelihood I will lose the lottery*.

<sup>21</sup>“It is not acceptable to use the proposition that one will lose as a reason for acting” (575);

pressing here is not that one can properly use that belief as a basis for just *any* action, but that one can use it, and properly so, as the basis for a great many actions. Hawthorne and Stanley also focus on the action of discarding one's ticket, and overreach by taking the absurdity of the following practical reasoning as the basis for their claim: "You are offered a cent for a lottery ticket that cost a dollar, in a 10,000 ticket lottery with a \$5,000 first prize and reason as follows:

I will lose the lottery

If I keep the ticket, I will get nothing

If I sell the ticket, I will get a cent

So I ought to sell the ticket."<sup>22</sup>

But one should think that all this syllogism shows is that it is unacceptable to act *in that way* upon that belief, not that it is unacceptable to act upon it *at all*.

Compare what looks like a more prudent practical syllogism, when you're considering whether to save for retirement or purchase a speedboat:

I will lose the lottery

If I will win the lottery, I can afford to buy a speedboat

If I will lose the lottery, I ought to save for retirement

So I ought to save for retirement.

What's the difference between these cases of reasoning? Arguably, the first case deployed by Hawthorne and Stanley is a bad piece of reasoning not primarily

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... "it is not rational to act on the proposition that she will not win because she does not know that she will not win" the lottery (576).

<sup>22</sup>Compare Hawthorne 2004, 29.



because one doesn't know the key premise, but rather because such reasoning involves jettisoning the very grounds by which one would win the lottery, i.e. giving up one's ticket. A related issue arises concerning which propositions we can permissibly take some evidence to be evidence *for*: I can have evidence by way of a radio report for the proposition that the Sox won yesterday's game. But in the absence of other reasons to think the Sox won, I can't use this evidence as evidence for the proposition that the radio report is accurate, as in "The Sox won, and they did, so the radio report is accurate"<sup>23</sup>—I can't use the very evidence that  $p$  as grounds for thinking that evidence to be good evidence. Similarly, I can't use my belief (while holding a ticket) that I will lose the lottery, as grounds for dismissing the very means by which I could win the lottery, because holding that ticket is part of my overall evidential state concerning me and the lottery situation. This is because I typically can't use the belief based on my evidential grounds either to assess the quality of, or to modify, those evidential grounds.

In sum, one can agree with Hawthorne and Stanley that one shouldn't utilize their practical reasoning case above (and with Maitra and Weatherson that one shouldn't toss out a ticket for an upcoming lottery), and nonetheless maintain that for a great range of other actions, "the thing for one to do" is to act as if one won't win. And this latter claim is all that is needed to generate the above complaint concerning Maitra and Weatherson's Action Rule, and against Hawthorne and Stanley's claim that it is impermissible to act on the belief that one will lose a lottery.

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<sup>23</sup>This kind of case is taken from DeRose 2000, 704–05. Cf. also Schaffer 2005, 237–38.

### 3.6 Conclusion

I have argued that the knowledge-action principles articulated by Hawthorne and Stanley are undersupported and succumb to some important counterexamples concerning appropriate actions based on less than knowledge. Likewise, I have given considerations that disarm Maitra and Weatherson's master argument against the knowledge rule for assertion, and have posed some significant problems for their proposed Action Rule for assertion. This suggests, first, that the case for knowledge being intimately connected to action is weaker than it has been made out to be, and second, that certain norms governing action do not serve to explain the norms governing assertion.

## Chapter 4

### Assertability and Epistemic Modals

#### Introduction

Assertions of simple sentences involving epistemic modals, such as “It might be that  $p$ ,” “It could be that  $p$ ,” or “It’s possible that  $p$ ,” where the embedded  $p$  is in the indicative mood, seem to depend for their propriety on their speakers being ignorant, in some way, concerning the truth-value of  $p$ . This chapter concerns the assertability of epistemic modals, with particular interest in which epistemic facts play a role in determining why a speaker would use such sentences, and under what conditions their use is optimal for communication.

Most of the literature on these “bare”<sup>1</sup> epistemic modals has been concerned with giving a *semantic* account of such terms, with the aim of accommodating a variety of judgments concerning their truth and falsity. In particular, there has been considerable effort spent on constructing a semantics that can deliver the true/false judgments of audience members concerning a speaker’s epistemic modal statement, with the goal of capturing more judgments as we widen the circle of listening agents and the information within their epistemic reach.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Our focus is only these “weak” epistemic modals, leaving aside others like *must*, *probably*, etc., and primarily on “bare” or “simple” constructions like those listed above. I often abbreviate the targeted construction as *MIGHT- $p$* . Our concern is with *epistemic* modality here, though I grant that statements of the targeted form can in the appropriate circumstances—typically philosophical contexts—be used to invoke metaphysical or logical possibility, among others.

<sup>2</sup>See especially Moore 1959: 241 and 1962: 279 and 402, Hacking 1967: 148ff., DeRose

But such efforts have neglected important data points about the assertability of epistemic modals. First, consider the response of the unconvinced: **Assertive** asserts  $p$  flat-out, by declaring “ $p$ .” **Diffident**, though she has heard Assertive’s claim, responds with “Maybe” or “Perhaps.” Responding in this way seems to challenge something about Assertive’s claim, and at least registers Diffident’s doubt that  $p$  is known by either herself or Assertive. But this needs explaining, for unless Diffident knows that not- $p$ , the possibility of Diffident’s “Maybe” looks to be secured, if not *entailed*, by the truth of  $p$ .

Next, consider two subjects in an everyday conversational context: **Iggy** is *ignorant* of<sup>3</sup> whether it is raining, that is, he does not know the truth value either way. **Knox**, however, *knows* that it is raining. Now consider the following two bare epistemic modal claims:

(58) It might be raining.

(59) It might not be raining.

Both (58) and (59) seem to be assertable for Iggy, even if he asserts it to Knox. But neither (58) and (59) seem assertable for Knox: (58) seems unassertable because it would be misleading given that Knox does know that it’s raining; and (59) seems even *more* unassertable for him, because, as many people judge, it seems *false* for him to assert it.

Notice that (58) and (59) both seem assertable for Iggy, even though many

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1991 and 1998, Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2005, Egan 2007, Yalcin 2007, Hawthorne 2007, Huemer 2007a, Dietz 2008, von Fintel and Gillies 2008 and 2011, Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009, and MacFarlane 2011 and ms (esp. chap. 10).

<sup>3</sup>“Ignorance of,” here and throughout the chapter, means only that one lacks knowledge, not that one is entirely uninformed or unaware.

semantic treatments claim that Iggy's assertion of (59) to Knox would be false. It would be false on the classic *contextualist* semantics for such statements:

S's assertion "It is possible that  $p$ " is true if and only if (1) no member of the relevant community knows that  $p$  is false, and (2) there is no relevant way by which members of the relevant community can come to know that  $p$  is false,

where the speaker is always included in the relevant community (see DeRose 1991, 593–4, and 1998, 75). And on a *relativist* semantics,

S's epistemic modal statement "It might be that  $p$ " is true relative to an assessor's context  $C$  iff  $p$  is compatible with what the people in  $C$  know. (Egan et al. 2005, 152; cf. MacFarlane 2011, §6)

it would be false from Knox's perspective. So these semantic accounts owe an explanation of why a claim that is (or can be judged) false seems so assertable for Iggy.<sup>4</sup>

Yet much of the literature is rife with claims about when it would be natural for a speaker to assert a bare epistemic modal (or retract it), claims made without specifying exactly what makes for epistemically permissible assertion of "MIGHT- $p$ ". Should a speaker simply have the possibility that  $p$  raised to salience? Or should the speaker have some reason or evidence, however slight, in favor of  $p$ ? Should the speaker simply be ignorant of whether  $p$ ? Or should the speaker believe, or even *know*, that she is ignorant of whether  $p$ ? Or something else altogether?

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<sup>4</sup>Handling the unassertability of (58) and (59) for Knox is easier: (58) seems misleading because it implicates that Knox doesn't know either way whether it's raining (or at least because it violates the "Assert the Stronger" rule); for more, see the next section, as well as Chapter 1.5.1 above.

Pursuit of the epistemic state, if any, required of a speaker for permissible assertion, is a project recently dominated by debates over the *Knowledge Account of Assertion*: according to the rule or norm version of it, one should assert that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ . Though it is plausible that knowledge is the norm of assertion more generally, some philosophers have contended that the knowledge-norm won't apply in the case of epistemic modals.<sup>5</sup> This chapter shows how it can.

Here I want to investigate the plausible idea that the assertability of epistemic modals largely goes by a *solipsistic semantics*, that is, that speakers tend to assume it as a guide to epistemic assertability. On the solipsistic account of G.E. Moore (compare Stanley 2005a, 128 and 2008, 46),

S's assertion of "It's possible that  $p$ " or "It might be that  $p$ " is true only if S doesn't know that  $p$  is false.<sup>6</sup>

Solipsism helps make sense of why both (58) and (59) seem assertable for Iggy, and why (59) seems particularly unassertable for Knox. But as we shall find, solipsism cannot be the whole story about assertability, for Knox surely seems adequately positioned epistemically to assert (58); if his asserting it would mislead Iggy, this wouldn't be due to inadequate epistemic position.

Solipsistic semantic accounts have been much-maligned and superseded by contextualist and relativist alternatives. Because our interest here is primarily with assertability, we shall not be defending solipsism as the correct semantics for epistemic modals. However, assuming solipsism as a starting point for

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<sup>5</sup>See von Fintel and Gillies 2008, 95–97, Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2005, 156, 160, and Swanson 2011, sect. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Moore stresses that this is only a necessary condition: see his "Certainty," in Moore 1959, 241; cf. "Moore's Principle" in DeRose 1991, 596, which has more of an "iff" ring to it. See also Stalnaker 1970, repr. in 1999, 35–6, and Stalnaker 1984, 143, Hawthorne 2004, 26, and Dorr and Hawthorne unpub, all of whom appear to endorse versions of solipsism.

pursuing assertability will, in due course, enable us to account for a host of problems, including many of the objections levelled against solipsist semantics in the first place.

Here's how we will proceed: §1 highlights a conversational implicature characteristic of “bare” epistemic modals, in which a speaker's ignorance of the embedded proposition (or *prejacent*) plays the prominent role. That implicature explains much, but does not on its own provide an epistemic norm governing its assertion. Thus in §2 I propose an account of the structure relating ignorance and knowledge of epistemic possibilities which explains the linguistic data (for which see the Appendix, §7) concerning epistemic modals, and which enables an articulation of how it is that knowledge normatively governs their assertion. §3 addresses a difficulty for the proposed account, and §§4 and 5 consider a potential rival which could explain, along different lines, the norm of epistemic modal talk.

## 4.1 The “DKEW” implicature

To see why bare epistemic modal assertions seem to require ignorance on the part of the speaker, we begin by adopting a feature of the solipsist framework which it has in common with both contextualism and relativism, a feature which makes for the speaker's own acceptance of what is asserted: the speaker *S* must not know that *p* is false when asserting “It's possible that *p*”; if *S* does know *p* to be false, then the assertion comes out false.<sup>7</sup> So *S*'s not knowing that *p* is false at the time of utterance is implied by *S*'s assertion that “It's possible that *p*.” But such an assertion typically also *pragmatically implicates* that *S* does not know that *p* is *true*; so an assertion of a simple epistemic modal

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<sup>7</sup>Relativist semantics deliver this result when the true/false judgments are relativized to the speaker's own context of assessment at the time of utterance.

tends to convey that its speaker doesn't know the truth-value of the embedded  $p$ , *not knowing either way*. Call this the "Don't Know Either Way (DKEW) implicature."<sup>8</sup> By accounting for both sides of what an asserted epistemic modal conveys, the DKEW can provide the most extensive account of the ignorance in which epistemic modals standardly traffic.

The DKEW implicature is derivable from Grice's "Cooperative Principle" and its maxims of conversation, as follows. One who hears a speaker  $S$ 's assertion of "It might be that  $p$ " can reason as follows (though this may not be conscious):

If  $S$  knew that  $p$  is false, then it's not epistemically possible for  $S$  that  $p$ ; but if  $S$  knew that  $p$  is true, then  $S$  would've been in a position to assert something stronger than 'It might be that  $p$ ', and so would have asserted something stronger—such as asserting  $p$  flat-out—instead. So  $S$  must not know  $p$ 's truth-value either way.<sup>9</sup>

What has gone unnoticed, however, is that the DKEW implicature is what Grice called a *generalized* conversational implicature: "Sometimes one can say that the use of a certain form of words in an utterance would normally (in the absence of special circumstances) carry such-and-such an implicature or type of implicature" (1989, 37). Such an implicature can be either explicitly canceled, or *contextually* canceled:

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Rysiew 2001, 493, though he does not offer an account of the underlying epistemic facts from which the implicature arises. DeRose 2009, 86–8 discusses a DKEW view of the *semantics* of epistemic modals, rejecting it in favor of his "Don't Know Otherwise" (DKO) semantics developed initially in his 1991; the labels DKO and DKEW are his. Moore 1962, 184 also mentions a DKEW view: "I *may* go out this evening = I don't know that I shan't nor yet that I shall = It's possible that I shall, but also possible that I shan't."

<sup>9</sup> Compare DeRose's (2009, 87) similar derivation defending against a 'DKEW' semantics. This derivation relies on the very general "Assert the Stronger" rule: see Chapter 1.5.1 above.



a generalized conversational implicature can be canceled in a particular case. It may be explicitly canceled, by the addition of a clause that states or implies that the speaker has opted out [of the Cooperative Principle], or it may be contextually canceled, if the form of utterance that usually carries it is used in a context that makes it clear that the speaker is opting out. (1989, 39)

The DKEW implicature's contextual cancelability explains why special cases of epistemic appropriation, such as teaching scenarios, don't implicate that a speaker doesn't know; such cases are discussed in §3 below.

Moreover, the DKEW implicature is nondetachable: it is typically "not possible to find another way of saying the same thing (or approximately the same thing) which simply lacks the implicature"; and "one may expect a generalized conversational implicature that is carried by a familiar, nonspecial locution to have a high degree of nondetachability" (1989, 43, 39). With epistemic modals this is evidenced by the fact that each of the following utterances tends to communicate the same thing, and each carries the DKEW implicature: "It's possible that *p*," "It might be that *p*," "It could be that *p*," "It may be that *p*," "There's a chance that *p*." Insofar as these appear to be the only comparable ways of conveying epistemic possibility, the DKEW implicature is nondetachable.<sup>10</sup>

Given how entrenched the DKEW implicature is, a speaker's ignorance of the truth-value of the embedded *p* appears to figure centrally in the propriety

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<sup>10</sup>Grice points out (1989, 43–4) that nondetachability is not a necessary condition, nor cancelability a sufficient condition, for the presence of a conversational implicature. But given that DKEW meets both, we can be confident that it is an implicature (generalized conversational) in his sense. I am unsure whether DKEW arises at the sub-sentential level when modals are embedded, though its being a generalized implicature may, given what Grice says about them (1989, 37–38, using indefinites like "...a woman"), indicate that it would arise even in embeddings; for some discussion of the broader issues see Recanati 2003.

of simple assertions involving epistemic modals. This in turn suggests that ignorance is importantly normative for their assertion; but recall that a knower such as Knox does seem epistemically positioned (in fact, *over* positioned) to assert (58). What we need is an account detailing how it is that both ignorant Iggy and knowing Knox can both seem epistemically situated for permissibly asserting (58), and why Iggy but not Knox can be positioned for permissibly asserting (59). The knowledge account of assertion suggests that the assertability conditions for “MIGHT- $p$ ” are knowing that it’s epistemically possible for one that  $p$ . Though some philosophers have already advocated inquiry into a different norm or norms governing proper assertion of bare epistemic modals,<sup>11</sup> the theory of modal knowledge sketched in the next section enables us to retain the knowledge norm of assertion and to explain the DKEW implicature, all in one stroke.

## 4.2 A Hypothesis Linking Ignorance and Knowledge

Any account of bare epistemic modals and an epistemic norm governing them will have to provide plausible answers to the following questions: Why is the DKEW implicature so pronounced? What epistemic facts can explain why our use of epistemic modals carries this implicature? And if those facts support some other epistemic norm, how do they do so?

The hypothesis proposed here is that a subject’s being epistemically positioned to assert typically—as in the case of Iggy—involves a special kind of ignorance on the part of the subject: in the typical case she will not know the truth-value of the embedded proposition  $p$ , not knowing “either way.” And

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<sup>11</sup>See von Fintel and Gillies 2008, 95–97, and Swanson 2011, 18ff. Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2005, 153 stump for a truth (in the utterance-context) norm for epistemic modals, which is, in its essentials, compatible with the account developed below, though they do not consider whether any other epistemic features are required.

more specifically, the hypothesis contends that the subject's realizing her ignorance in this sense *suffices for her knowing* that  $p$  is epistemically possible, as well as that not- $p$  is epistemically possible.

Realized ignorance thus makes for knowledge: if one recognizes that one doesn't know whether a proposition  $p$  is true or false, then one thereby knows both that it's possible that  $p$  and that it's possible that not- $p$ .<sup>12</sup> This should be unsurprising, since the competence exhibited in reflectively realizing that one fails to know is itself a knowledge-making competence.<sup>13</sup> But—as the case of Knox makes clear—such ignorance of a proposition isn't *necessary* for knowing an epistemic possibility: one who knows that  $p$  is true likewise knows the weaker claim that it is epistemically possible that  $p$ , because knowing  $p$ 's truth also suffices for knowing its possibility (if one knows that  $p$  is false, then one likewise knows that it is epistemically possible that not- $p$ , because knowing  $p$ 's falsity suffices for knowing not- $p$ 's possibility).

So three interrelated theses comprise our hypothesis (illustrated below by the triadic diagram, and figs. a, b, and c):

(I) SUFFICIENCY: in a person with basic rationality, realizing one's ignorance of the prejacent suffices for knowledge of both the possibilities MIGHT- $p$  and MIGHT-[not- $p$ ].

(II) NOT-NECESSARY: realizing such ignorance is not needed for knowing a possibility MIGHT- $p$ , since one may know this in virtue of knowing the truth of  $p$ .

(III) STRUCTURAL: (I) and (II) combine to specify the conditions for

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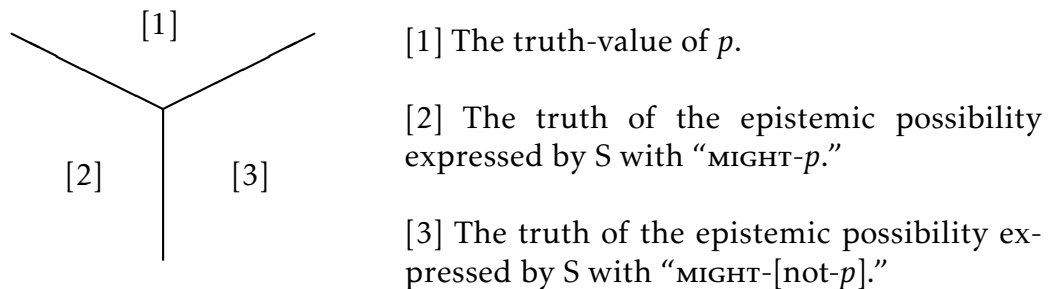
<sup>12</sup>Some may object that such a person could fail to know such epistemic possibilities by lacking the relevant *belief*, failing to form the belief that it's epistemically possible that  $p$  (or that not- $p$ ). I reply: such a subject indeed has these beliefs *tacitly*, though they may not be occurrent.

<sup>13</sup>See Sosa 2007, 2009b, and 2011.

modal knowledge, and adds that *knowledge of any two tierces precludes knowing the third*.<sup>14</sup>

The SUFFICIENCY claim ties the DKEW implicature to the fact that bare epistemic modals are typically used by speakers to communicate their ignorance of the embedded proposition's truth-value, and it claims that in so doing, they impart *knowledge* of these possibilities.<sup>15</sup> When the hypothesis is conjoined with the knowledge account of assertion, we get the result that knowing epistemic possibilities is needed, epistemically speaking, for permissible assertion. Hence the hypothesis answers the crucial questions about the DKEW implicature and the norm governing our use of bare epistemic modals by linking what it takes to know an epistemic possibility with being epistemically positioned to assert an epistemic possibility claim.

STRUCTURAL (III) may be depicted with a pie chart containing thirds or “tierces” for when a subject *S* considers a proposition *p*; if *S* either knows [1] or recognizes that she doesn't know [1], then she knows exactly two of the thirds on the chart:

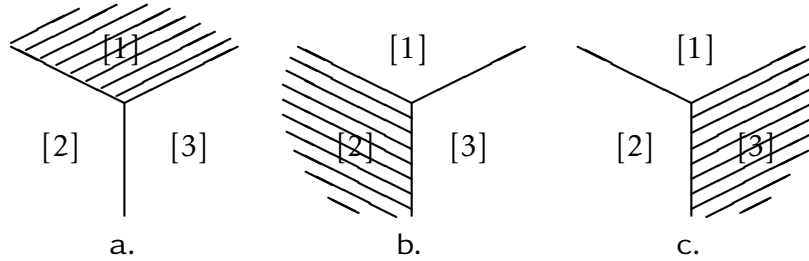


We may picture the chart as containing a darkened area covering the unknown

<sup>14</sup>The hypothesis thus addresses a worry posited by Egan and Weatherson: “it isn’t clear what it is to have *de re* attitudes toward possibilities, such that we know a particular possibility does or doesn’t obtain” (2011, 1).

<sup>15</sup>*Contra* Swanson 2011, §4, and Yalcin 2007, 1010, according to whom “A speaker who says  $\Diamond\phi$  is not expressing a proposition believed (known, etc.), but rather is expressing the compatibility of her state of mind with  $\phi$ .”

(or known-to-be-false) tierce, which “swings around” as one’s knowledge changes (figs. a–c below):



By knowing [1], a subject thereby knows the truth-value of  $p$  to be either true or false.<sup>16</sup> If  $p$  is known to be false, then  $S$  knows [3] but also knows the falsity of [2], as in fig. b; and if  $p$  is known to be true, then  $S$  knows [2] and knows that [3] is false, as in fig. c. Given this triadic structure, if a subject either knows, or realizes her ignorance of, a proposition’s truth-value, she thereby knows two of the tierces at a given time. If  $S$  knows both [2] and [3] (fig. a), namely that both  $\text{MIGHT-}p$  and  $\text{MIGHT-}[not-p]$ , it is precisely because  $S$  recognizes her ignorance of the truth-value of  $p$ .<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Knowing that a proposition is true, or false, can be understood in Stalnakerian fashion as knowing that the actual world is in a given set of possible worlds denoting the value true (if  $p$  is known to be true), or that the actual world is in the set denoting the value false (if  $p$  is known to be false).

<sup>17</sup>Does the above structure hold true when the value of  $p$  is an epistemically modalized proposition like  $\text{MIGHT-}p$ ? It does: because on the one hand, if  $S$  knows the truth-value of  $\text{MIGHT-}p$ , it is either true or false: if true, then [2] holds for it ( $\text{MIGHT-}[\text{MIGHT-}p]$ ), and if false, then [3] holds for it ( $\text{MIGHT-not-}[\text{MIGHT-}p]$ ). Thus  $S$  would know [1] and [2] together if  $\text{MIGHT-}p$  is true, or [1] and [3] together if it is false. On the other hand, if  $S$  realizes she’s ignorant of  $\text{MIGHT-}p$ , then  $S$  knows it might or might not be that  $\text{MIGHT-}p$ . Thus iterated epistemic modalities don’t collapse into a single modality, because given that such knowledge can be based on either ignorance or knowing a  $p$ ’s truth-value, knowledge of  $\text{MIGHT-}[\text{MIGHT-}p]$  isn’t equivalent to knowledge of  $\text{MIGHT-}p$ : one could know the former without knowing the latter. But that’s what we should have expected, because the modality we’re considering is an epistemic one, and in general, we can know  $p$  is possible without knowing that  $p$ . (Relevant here is the debate between Sorenson 2009 and Yalcin 2009 on iterated epistemic modals.)

In general,  $\Diamond\Diamond p \rightarrow \Diamond p$  (like  $\Box p \rightarrow \Box\Box p$ ) is a controversial modal principle, and thus only S4 and S5 validate it. Since Williamson’s 2000 attacks on luminosity, iterated modalities such as the KK principle have fallen out of favor; and thus a logic deriving from a system weaker than S4, e.g. system T or a system built up from T, is probably the best candidate for an epistemic

This hypothesis, combined with the DKEW implicature, illuminates a number of puzzles, of which four are worth highlighting.

### Concessive Knowledge Attributions

First, the STRUCTURAL thesis gives a straightforward explanation of what's wrong with *concessive knowledge attributions* like

(60) # I know it's raining but it's possible that it's not raining

(61) # I know that Harry is a zebra, but it's possible that Harry is a painted mule

(62) # John knows that Harry is a zebra, but it's possible for John that Harry is a painted mule.

Many have argued that such claims must be false; our hypothesis not only predicts this, but gives an account of the epistemic structure which shows why they're false. STRUCTURAL easily handles the blatant (60) because if the former conjunct is true, it maintains that S cannot know the latter epistemic modal claim: a subject cannot know both the truth of  $p$  and the epistemic possibility that not- $p$ . And this explanation can be extended to examples like (61) above, where the embedded proposition under the epistemic modal is some  $q$  other than "not- $p$ ", but where  $q$  obviously entails not- $p$ . Since any such entailment means that S also cannot know the epistemic possibility that  $q$  if S knows that  $p$ , our hypothesis likewise handles any  $q$ -versions, such as (61) above (*mutatis*

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logic, however an idealization it may be. (Williamson himself endorses a T-like system for modelling epistemic logic in 2000, Appendix 2.)

*mutandis* for third-person attributions like (62), though these will be complicated by their being epistemic possibilities for the third person referenced).<sup>18</sup>

### Moorean clashes and Epistemic contradictions

Second, and relatedly, STRUCTURAL shows why conjunctive clashes not containing knowledge attributions, like

(63) # It's raining and it's possible that it's not raining

are problematic. Fantl and McGrath (2009, 21) note<sup>19</sup> that *either* the knowledge account of assertion, on which a flat-out assertion that *p* represents its speaker as knowing that *p*, *or* a proposal on which such assertions conversationally impart that there's no significant chance that not-*p*, would explain such clashes. Our STRUCTURAL thesis does one better, by showing *how these two explanations are related*—an assertion both 'represents' that one knows *p* and thereby conversationally imparts what it does because knowing a proposition *p*'s truth brings with it the falsity of MIGHT-[not-*p*]. Thus there is no epistemic

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<sup>18</sup>The recent literature on this topic stems from Lewis 1996, who put his original point about infallibilist knowledge by citing the "commonsensical epistemologist," who says, "I *know* the cat is in the carton—there he is before my eyes—I just *can't* be wrong about that!" Lewis 1979, repr. in 1983: 247. He later pushed for infallibilism by motivating it as follows:

If you claim that *S* knows that *p*, and yet 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 possibility of error, just *sounds* contradictory. (Lewis, 1996, repr. 1999: 419)

Our hypothesis thus respects Lewis's formulation of infallibilism about knowledge, which hinges on the implausibility of any claim of the form *S knows that p, but it's possible for S that not-p*. Yet our hypothesis is nonetheless consistent with the fallibilist conception of evidence, which, according to Stanley 2005a is "the doctrine that someone can know that *p*, even though their evidence for *p* is *logically consistent* with not-*p*."

<sup>19</sup>Citing the need to supplement Dougherty and Rysiew's 2009 account. For discussion of some related conjunctions, see the third and fourth sections of this Chapter's Appendix, §7.

possibility for the asserter that not- $p$ , and so the second conjunct of (63).

This STRUCTURAL point can be extended to suppositions as well, thereby dealing with a problem raised by Yalcin (2007, 2011). Yalcin notes that ‘epistemic contradictions’ involving such modals, like (63), differ from Moorean paradoxes such as

(64) # It’s raining and I don’t know that it’s raining

in that the latter, but not the former, can felicitously embed under “Suppose...” or “If...”; so whatever infelicity infects Moorean conjunctions can’t be exactly what infects epistemic contradictions, and the problem is to explain the difference. Our STRUCTURAL thesis can do so: supposing or entertaining  $p$ ’s truth involves knowing that  $p$ , *within the supposition*, which brings with it the falsity of the (epistemic) possibility that not- $p$  for the one doing the supposing. (This is precisely why Ramsey’s enduring claim about how we suppose using “If  $p$ ,  $q$ ” talks of adding  $p$  hypothetically to one’s stock of *knowledge*.<sup>20</sup>) So, whereas both Moorean conjuncts of (64) could be true together and thus are conjointly supposable, your entertaining the proposition that it’s raining temporarily rules out for you, within the supposition, the possibility that it’s not.<sup>21</sup>

## Lotteries

Third: our hypothesis adds to a satisfying explanation of *lottery assertions*.

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<sup>20</sup>Frank P. Ramsey 1931, 247 n. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Of course, the spirit of (63) it can be made to work if the supposition is made more objective by explicitly identifying a subject—even oneself—as the one *for whom* it’s possible that it’s not raining: this sentence would go “Suppose that it’s raining and it’s possible for you that it’s not raining...” The “for you” qualifier makes all the difference here, since it inserts your hypothetical self into the supposition and stipulates that self’s epistemic situation as being third-personal; but the non-hypothetical you, the supposer, still knows that it’s raining within the supposition.



Many philosophers have appealed to the impropriety of flat-out asserting that a ticket-holder in a fair lottery won't win, along with the intuition that in a large enough lottery this is something that couldn't be known on purely probabilistic grounds, as evidence in favor of the knowledge-norm.<sup>22</sup> Our hypothesis provides a persuasive account of exactly *why* this would be: its STRUCTURAL thesis predicts that if it's epistemically possible for one that a ticket-holder *X* wins the lottery, then one cannot know that *X* won't win. That is, the truth of MIGHT-*p* for some *S* precludes *S*'s knowing the falsity *p*. And since in standard lottery scenarios, one is epistemically positioned to assert both "MIGHT-*X* wins the lottery" and "MIGHT not-*X* wins the lottery"—because one knows each of these—one is not epistemically positioned to assert flat-out that *X* won't win. This story lends support to the idea that the possibility involved in lottery situations is *epistemic* in character.<sup>23</sup>

## Retraction

Fourth: our hypothesis plus the DKEW implicature can illuminate the puzzling phenomenon of retraction, which some have cited as evidence in favor of a relativist semantics.<sup>24</sup> Some conversational situations involve what looks like retraction on the part of a speaker who, having asserted an epistemic modal, comes to learn the falsity of the embedded proposition:

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<sup>22</sup>See e.g. DeRose 1996, Williamson 2000, 246–9, and Hawthorne 2004, 8, 21ff.; note that Turri 2011, n. 1, who otherwise agrees with the knowledge account, demurs on the evidence from lottery assertions.

<sup>23</sup>Our hypothesis has more to be said in its favor—e.g., it can show why an assertion of "*p*" is *stronger* than the assertion of "It's possible that *p*." A bare assertion "*p*" represents its speaker as knowing the truth of *p*; knowing *p*'s truth is an epistemically stronger position than (merely) knowing the epistemic possibility that *p* because, as the NOT-NECESSARY claim maintains, knowing *p*'s truth suffices for knowing the epistemic possibility that *p*. But the reverse doesn't hold: knowing the epistemic possibility that *p* does not suffice for knowing the truth of *p*. (DeRose 2009, 86 puts this point by saying that the stronger "implies, but is not implied by" the weaker assertion.)

<sup>24</sup>See especially MacFarlane 2011 and ms.

*John:* It might be raining out.

*Jane:* No, I just came in from outside, and it isn't raining.

*John:* a. Oh, then I was wrong.

b. Oh; well, it might have been raining.

The conversation ending with (a) is one in which John's initial assertion is rendered unacceptable—to the very speaker who asserted it—because the proposition embedded under the epistemic modal is found to be false: in such a dialogue the acceptability of  $p$  and of the modal claim in which it is embedded stand and fall together, and thus the (a) reply seems to retract or “take back” the initial assertion. But in other cases a speaker acknowledges  $p$ 's falsity by replying as in (b), which implies a commitment to the plausibility or correctness of the initial assertion, signaling no retraction; such a reply shows that often enough, the acceptability of the “might” assertion and of its embedded  $p$  don't stand and fall together. And what is remarkable is that whether the asserter's reply takes form (a) or (b), either one tends to be acceptable in that context. Given the DKEW implicature alone, the (a) retraction seems odd: John's initial assertion of “It might be raining out” implicated that John didn't know whether or not it was. But then what could John have been “wrong” about?

The STRUCTURAL thesis of our hypothesis provides the basis for an error theory: though strictly speaking it's false, the (a) reply serves to acknowledge that the possibility put forth, the embedded  $p$ , is no longer an epistemic possibility. When one comes to learn that not- $p$  after having uttered “It might be that  $p$ ,” one switches from being ignorant of the truth-value of  $p$  (thus knowing both MIGHT- $p$  and MIGHT-[not- $p$ ]), to knowing  $p$ 's falsity, and one thereby *loses* knowledge that MIGHT- $p$ : one's ignorance swings from the top tierce as in fig. a down to the left tierce as in fig. b. The (a) retraction highlights John's losing his

knowledge that MIGHT-*p*: what he knew earlier is no longer known, and so, having updated accordingly, John judges the earlier statement as somehow wrong. This is to be expected, because whenever we *lose* knowledge we're inclined to judge our earlier statements as inapt; and in the above case that inclination is reinforced by the better epistemic position John gains with respect to *p*. Yet it isn't losing knowledge in general that's at issue, but its loss *combined* with the fact that one gains the very knowledge which one lacked, namely knowledge of the prejacent's truth-value: together these conspire to lead John to judge his earlier position as inferior. Imposing an error theory such as this is only objectionable if there is no plausible account of why we are led into error. In this case, we should *expect* to be led into errors such as (a), given these facts about the consequences of losing and gaining the relevant bits of knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

As for the (b) response, John's move to the past-tensed "might have been" highlights the epistemic facts—his knowledge—relevant at the time of the initial utterance. By making those facts salient, the speaker reinforces the propriety of that earlier assertion without now being committed to its content. Hence our hypothesis can account for what seems right about each of the (a) and (b) responses, by referring to which epistemic facts are salient in each.<sup>26</sup>

Our hypothesis also predicts why a speaker *won't* use an (a)-style retraction when her initial assertion instead has the form [MIGHT-*p* or MIGHT-not-*p*], as in: "It might be raining, or it might not." Upon being informed that it is in fact raining, our speaker won't respond with "Oh; well, I was wrong," because one

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<sup>25</sup>Note that this error theory can do justice to the fact that it becomes less acceptable to use an (a) retraction, or for someone else to use an (a)-style accusation, as time passes (see von Stechow and Gillies 2008, 84–86): it can invoke how much more knowledge we gain and lose over time vis-à-vis the relevant *p*, such that the speaker's original epistemic position becomes cemented as the most pertinent for later evaluation.

<sup>26</sup>One little noticed fact is that the (b) response seems more apt given that it can trump an (a)-style correction. Imagine that Jane had added "so you were wrong" to her informative claim about it raining. John is then in a position to use the (b) response to deflect her added accusation, by saying "No I wasn't; given what I knew then, it might have been raining."

of her asserted disjuncts remains true, and known: learning  $p$ 's truth confirms her knowledge of its possibility, which is retained throughout. The combination of losing and gaining knowledge, to which we appealed to explain the (a) retraction, isn't the whole story in this case because the asserted disjunct MIGHT- $p$  is still known. As such, the whole disjunction remains true, and there is no salient assertion to retract.<sup>27</sup>

The hypothesis' SUFFICIENCY, NOT-NECESSARY, and STRUCTURAL theses provide an elegant account of the DKEW implicature and the linguistic data surrounding it. It also fits in tightly with the knowledge norm of assertion, enabling an explanation of how it is that assertions of epistemic modals are governed by the same norm as other assertions. The result is that epistemic modals do require knowledge for the propriety of their assertion, but that such knowledge is easily had because realizing one's ignorance of the embedded  $p$  suffices for the relevant knowledge. Thus the propriety of asserting simple epistemic modal sentences is handled in a way that retains rather than displaces the knowledge-norm.

### 4.3 Epistemic Appropriation

The DKEW implicature and our proposed hypothesis might appear to have trouble handling special cases involving epistemic modals. One type of case involves a speaker asserting an epistemic modal who does not thereby implicate ignorance of  $p$ 's truth-value. *Teaching scenarios* provide such contexts: a teacher instructing students on some problem may appropriately, given the

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<sup>27</sup>Interestingly, the same applies when the assertion is a conjunction, as in "It might be raining, and/but it might not." Our SUFFICIENCY thesis is in a unique position to identify why it makes sense as a conjunctive claim: both conjuncts are indeed known to the speaker who realizes her ignorance of whether it's raining. But our unwillingness to retract once learning whether  $p$  shows that the "and" here really means "or".

right set up, assert to the students both “It’s possible that the answer is  $x$ ” and also “It’s possible that the answer is not  $x$ ” in an effort to get the students to figure matters out on their own. In these cases, though the teacher knows the answer (and everyone in the context knows that she knows it) she still is allowed to assert such epistemic possibilities. Note that teaching scenarios also suspend the ignorance-norm of questioning: a teacher’s asking a question doesn’t implicate that the teacher doesn’t know the answer.<sup>28</sup> Related contexts where someone is playing a game, or knows some answer to a question, but uses epistemic modals to help someone else, or to be coyly evasive, function in the same way.<sup>29</sup>

Such cases involve the *contextual* canceling of the generalized DKEW conversational implicature: in Grice’s terms, “the form of utterance that usually carries” the DKEW implicature “is used in a context that makes it clear that the speaker is opting out” of the Cooperative Principle (1989, 39). But even if this explains why they don’t carry the implicature, the hypothesis sketched in §2 seems to suggest that the speaker is, strictly speaking, asserting something *false*. Isn’t this a problem for the proposed view?

Not at all. Such contexts cancel the DKEW implicature because in them the speaker is engaged in *epistemic appropriation* of the perceived epistemic facts of either her listeners or of some other subject whose context is relevant.<sup>30</sup> The teacher is speaking, as it were, from the students’ epistemic perspective; but

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<sup>28</sup>As Hawthorne 2004, 24 points out.

<sup>29</sup>Compare the examples in Hare 1967, 321, Hawthorne 2004, 27, and von Fintel and Gillies 2008, 83.

<sup>30</sup>This kind of phenomena makes sense of projective uses of modals, as in “If it might rain tomorrow, we should stay at home,” which looks forward to one’s future epistemic perspective. See Dorr and Hawthorne unpub, 25, prop. (40).

neither the students, nor a competent on-looker, will mistake her epistemic position as one of ignorance.<sup>31</sup> The speaker represents herself in such a way that her knowledge is not at issue, and so whether she knows either way regarding the proposition's truth-value isn't available to be implicated; and neither does her knowledge serve to falsify what she asserts.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.4 An Alternative Speech-Act?

To take stock: the hypothesis sketched in §2 shows how knowledge is the assertion norm for epistemic modals; and it, plus the pragmatics of §1's DKEW implicature, provide a full account of the epistemic conditions that make for their felicitous assertion. We now shift gears to consider a potential rival.

Some philosophers prefer the view that bare epistemic modal utterances are not, strictly speaking, assertions at all; accordingly, their felicitous utterance needn't invoke a norm of assertion.<sup>33</sup> On this idea epistemic modals are

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<sup>31</sup>Epistemic appropriation also explains cases where a speaker adopts the epistemic position of a third-party who isn't part of the conversation. See Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2005, 140, and Hawthorne 2007, 94 for examples.

<sup>32</sup>A related case concerns a speaker who, though she knows it's epistemically possible for her that *p*, nonetheless felicitously asserts "I don't know whether it's possible that *p*." DeRose 1991, 584–5 discusses such an example: in his Cancer Test Case 1B (CTC-1B), Jane's husband John has recently undergone some "filtering" tests to see whether his doctors can rule out cancer. If the test results are negative, then cancer is conclusively ruled out, but if positive, then John might, and might not, have cancer; in that event further tests would need to be run. In CTC-1B, the results have been seen only by the doctors; Jane and John are to hear the results in person from the doctors tomorrow. John's estranged brother calls and asks Jane, "I've heard that John may have cancer. Is that possible?" A natural response from Jane could be: "I don't know whether it's possible that John has cancer; only the doctors know. I'll find that out tomorrow when the results of the test are revealed." Our explanation can be naturally extended to handle cases like CTC-1B, wherein a speaker denies knowledge of an epistemic possibility which she does in fact know: Jane appropriates the epistemic context of the doctors in order to juxtapose her knowledge with theirs, which allows her to maintain that she herself doesn't know the possibility in question. These are cases where the assertability conditions of the speaker determine the relevant epistemic community by which the utterance is evaluated.

<sup>33</sup>Related to this view are "force modifier" accounts of epistemic modals, according to which a "MIGHT-*p*" utterance tempers or modulates the assertive force with which the speaker acts. I do not consider this approach here; however, see MacFarlane 2011, §4 and Swanson 2010, §2 for problems with such accounts.

used in constructions that sound a lot like assertions, but they are really some other type of speech-act: perhaps they merely express a speaker's epistemic state, or perhaps they're proposals, or suggestions, or *perhapsections*.<sup>34</sup> If a non-assertion view of epistemic modals is well-motivated, it could be in a position to explain how epistemic modals are properly used, but by appealing to some other norm. This section evaluates the rationale for such a view, which looks to be the most important competitor to the hypothesis advanced above.

Going in for some other speech-act when it comes to epistemic modals can seem appealing given the familiar picture of assertion we've inherited from Karttunen, Lewis, and Stalnaker, summarized by von Fintel and Gillies thus:

An (assertive) utterance of a sentence  $\varphi$  in a well-run conversation takes place against a background context, the set of worlds compatible with what has been established up to that point. The proposition expressed by the speaker's utterance of  $\varphi$  is constrained by the context. And, finally, that proposition is added to the context, changing it by reducing the uncertainty in it a bit.<sup>35</sup>

Against the assertion view of epistemic modals it may be objected (and in favor of some other speech-act it may be contended) that a bare epistemic modal sentence, when uttered in a well-run conversation, does not obviously reduce the context set of propositions because it does not really cut down the uncertainty in the conversation; epistemic modals merely introduce, or raise to salience, some possibility, which typically doesn't serve to rule out some worlds in the

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<sup>34</sup>See Schneider 2010 for an expressivist account, and MacFarlane 2011, §4.1 for discussion of "perhapsectioning." Cf. also Unger 1975, 255–6 (discussed below), as well as Williamson 2000, 244 on conjecturing, and Ross 1968, 24–31 on "fabulating".

<sup>35</sup>von Fintel and Gillies 2007, 46–7, drawing on the work of Karttunen 1974, Lewis 1979, and Stalnaker 1974 and 1978.

set.<sup>36</sup> If epistemic modal sentences do not assert propositions, or are not assertions in the standard sense, this will accommodate the above objection.

In fact, it has gone unnoticed that Unger (1975, 255–6) had gestured at a suggestion speech-act for epistemic modals in the context of arguing for the knowledge norm of assertion: when one asserts, states, or declares that *p*, one represents oneself as knowing that *p* (253ff.), and thus one shouldn't assert, state, or declare that *p* unless one knows it. The difference between asserting and merely suggesting is that with the latter, one typically qualifies the proposition put forward, with "I suggest" or a "perhaps" or a "might be." Yet the speaker can still be said to represent something as being so with such an utterance:

Even if someone only suggests that *p*, it may follow that there is *something* that he represents as being the case, though it will (at least generally) not be the same thing as that which he suggests. I suggest that what might be thus always represented is this: that it might be the case that *p*; that it is possible that *p*. Perhaps that is why it sounds inconsistent to say "I suggest that it was raining, but I'm not saying that it was possible." In any event, there is a clear enough contrast between actually asserting something and just suggesting it. The contrast is clear enough, I think, to make the point that, of the two, only the former requires that one represent that very thing as being the case. (256)

Here then is Unger's idea: by merely suggesting that *p*, one represents that it

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<sup>36</sup>One may want to claim that it does add *some* information to the common ground, perhaps that the speaker has some evidence for, or reason to think true, the embedded proposition; see Portner 2009, 151. But this is presumably what happens when the epistemic modal used is "must" rather than "might"; how then ought we to treat the weaker "might" as contributing to the context set? It won't do to say simply, as Portner does, that "something similar" goes for the latter as it does for the former, for it's not clear what the similar thing would be.



is possible that  $p$ ; and by uttering “It is possible that  $p$ ” (or its equivalents “It might be that  $p$ ” etc.), one (merely) suggests that  $p$ . The plausibility of this is further bolstered by the fact that one cannot very easily, if ever, cancel the suggestive implicature generated by an epistemic modal statement: “It might be that  $p$ , but I’m not at all suggesting that  $p$ ” sounds crazy.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, by treating epistemic modals as suggestions rather than assertions, the suggestion-theorist can perhaps explain how ignorance figures prominently in a norm governing their utterance, without endorsing the knowledge norm of assertion for such modals, and therefore without having to appeal to an elaborate theory of modal knowledge of the kind sketched in §2.<sup>38</sup> One way the suggestion-theorist could do this would be by adopting a semantics that mimics Moore’s solipsistic account considered above (see fn. 6), though corrected so as not to stipulate on the left hand side that the speech-act is an assertion. For example,

$S$ ’s *suggestion* of “It’s possible that  $p$ ” or “It might be that  $p$ ” is true  
iff  $S$  doesn’t know that  $p$  is false.

I take it that the suggestion-theorist will want to adopt some such minimal semantics in order to explain what’s so bad about concessive knowledge attributions like (60) above; and doing so would permit the suggestion-theorist to expropriate the pragmatics of the DKEW implicature. Thus the suggestion-theory could establish itself as a proper rival to our hypothesis, contending to explain all that our hypothesis does.

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<sup>37</sup>Unger, whilst “hazarding to be more specific,” goes further by tying suggestions to knowledge of an epistemic possibility and to knowledge of one’s ignorance of the embedded proposition (1975, 267–68); he thus comes quite close to our hypothesis sketched in §2.

<sup>38</sup>This approach may also sit comfortably with the view that simple epistemic modal statements do not put forth complete propositions at all, but some other incomplete thing which is not truth-evaluable—see e.g. Bach 2008 and 2011; and there is some plausibility to the idea that in merely suggesting that  $p$ , what one utters is not, strictly speaking, true or false. But going the no-truth-conditions route for epistemic modals is problematic: see Papafragou 2006.

## 4.5 Against Alternative Speech-Acts

However, two worries confront anyone who wants to theorize about epistemic modals by multiplying speech-acts. First, such a move cannot easily account for the compositionality of such utterances: epistemic modals seem to play nice with other types of utterances, and can be embedded under negation, within conditionals, and so on. But it isn't clear that a suggestion speech-act behaves similarly. Second, the suggestion view canvassed above will likewise need to multiply norms of utterance to account for their usage; and even if a norm governing only epistemic modals is forthcoming, an explanation of how it interacts with other norms such as the knowledge-norm of assertion, and perhaps the ignorance norm of questioning, etc., will be required.

The following examples highlight the first difficulty. How does the alternative speech-act view, such as the suggestion theory, explain the infelicity of certain statements containing an epistemic modal? Consider the conjunction

(54) # *P*, but it's possible that not-*p*.

On the suggestion theory, (54) is a mixed case: it first asserts that *p*, and then suggests that not-*p*. Now the suggestion-theorist can plausibly handle (54) by adopting a solution given by followers of the knowledge-norm. On Unger's formulation, when one asserts the first conjunct of (54), one represents oneself as knowing that *p*. But then to have said something true in uttering the second conjunct, given some plausible truth-conditions (such as the solipsistic version sketched at the end of §4) for such sentences, the speaker must not know that not-*p* is false—that is, the speaker must not know that *p* is true. So the second conjunct requires for its truth that the speaker not know that *p*. But this would

conflict with what the speaker represents by asserting the first conjunct. So the inconsistency arises from what the speaker represents as being the case (that she knows that  $p$ ), and a truth condition for her suggestion that not- $p$  (that she not know that  $p$ ). Thus the suggestion-theorist could explain what's wrong with (54).<sup>39</sup>

But notice the lengths to which the suggestion-theorist had to go to explain (54)'s conjunction! Can similar moves help with suggestions embedded under negation? Consider:

(65) It's not possible that it's raining.

Is this an assertion, or a suggestion? It sure sounds like a declarative utterance that would make for an assertion; the speaker isn't merely putting out there the negated possibility that it is raining. Rather, the speaker seems to be asserting flat-out the (epistemic) *impossibility* that it's raining. So (65) seems to admit of only two readings, based on whether the negation takes wide or narrow scope. On the former, (65) says *I'm not suggesting that it's raining*, whereas on the latter, it says *I'm suggesting that it's not raining*. But the first seems more like an assertion than a mere suggestion, and the second doesn't seem like what (65) is getting at.

How will the suggestion-theorist account for divergent speech acts when an epistemic modal is embedded in a conditional command? For example:

(66) If there might be snipers hiding in the trees, clear away the foliage

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<sup>39</sup>Or, more swiftly, she might appeal to a Moorean principle (see fn. 6 above) to argue that ignorance is the norm of suggestion, and claim that this, when coupled with the knowledge norm of assertion, yields an inconsistency in what is represented by utterances of the conjuncts of (54): its speaker represents herself as both knowing that  $p$  and being ignorant of whether not- $p$ .

with flamethrowers.<sup>40</sup>

Suggestions generally don't square well with commands: the former is too tentative to do the work that a command is meant to do. So what could it mean for a commanding officer to utter (66)?—that the officer suggests (now) that there are snipers in the trees, and is (now) calling on them to torch the trees? Or that *if* the officer suggests (then) that there are snipers in the trees, to (at that time) let the flame fly? But how would this be implemented if the officer isn't there at that time to make the suggestion? Similarly, suggestions don't work well within other imperative conditionals:

(67) If it's possible that you left the stove on, you should go check it.

(68) # If I suggest that you left the stove on, you should go check it.

Matters are worse. Epistemic modals can embed under attitude predicates, and under explicit performative verbs. But the suggestion-theorist's replacement fares very badly with some examples:

(69) I think it's possible that they've planted this evidence.

(70) # I think I suggest that they've planted this evidence.

Compare also how the suggestion view embeds under explicit suggestions:

(71) a. I suggest that it's possible that they've planted this evidence.

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<sup>40</sup>From Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2005, 138.

b. I suggest that they might have planted this evidence.

(72) # I suggest that I suggest that they've planted this evidence.

Finally, and perhaps most embarrassingly, the suggestion theory has problems with epistemic modals in conjunctions. Epistemic modals can typically conjoin felicitously with hedged assertions,<sup>41</sup> or with their complements; yet the corresponding suggestions sound terrible:

(73) I believe that it's raining, but it might not be raining.

(74) # I believe that it's raining, but I suggest that it's not raining.

(75) It might be a girl, and it might be a boy; I don't know.

(76) # I suggest that it's a girl, and I suggest that it's a boy; I don't know.

These are problems for the suggestion-theorist, but they generalize to any view that wants to use another speech-act to handle epistemic modals.<sup>42</sup> Yet even if such a theory could be made to work given these compositionality concerns, the view will inevitably be less elegant: it will have to invoke multiple norms and speech-acts to handle all the data. Our hypothesis, by comparison, is simpler and more elegant, and yields the antecedently plausible knowledge-norm governing the assertion of epistemic modals.

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<sup>41</sup>See some in this Chapter's Appendix, below.

<sup>42</sup>See von Stechow and Gillies 2007, 43ff..

## 4.6 Conclusion: Theory of Modal Knowledge

Our emphasis on a speaker's epistemic assertability conditions led us to consider what sort of epistemic position permits the assertion of a bare epistemic modal. The DKEW implicature generated by such assertions provided a constraint on how to theorize about their use: any account of the epistemic facts referred to by such modals needed to explain why the DKEW implicature is so pronounced. The triadic structure proposed by our hypothesis gave such an account: it held that a subject's realization of her ignorance (lack of knowledge) concerning a proposition  $p$  *suffices* for her knowing the epistemic possibilities  $\text{MIGHT-}p$  and  $\text{MIGHT-}[\text{not-}p]$ ; but it also handled the fact that such ignorance isn't *necessary* for this knowledge, and its *structural* thesis postulated that knowledge of any two tierces of the triad precludes knowledge of the third. This hypothesis sheds light on a wide range of epistemological puzzles and linguistic data, presenting a way to accept bare epistemic modal utterances as assertions, and enabling them to fall under the purview of the knowledge-norm. And it outperforms any rival speech-act approach, such as the suggestion view considered above.

Additionally, it offers a diagnosis of what is going on in some of the skeptic's attempts to convince us that we know less than we do. Sometimes the skeptic's gambit involves exploiting the modal relationships in the epistemic structure uncovered by our hypothesis. The skeptic's strategy in this gambit is to get a subject  $S$  who knows that  $p$  to agree to the epistemic possibility that  $\text{MIGHT-}q$ , where  $q$  entails  $\text{not-}p$ .<sup>43</sup> If the skeptic succeeds,  $S$  concedes that it's possible that  $\text{not-}p$ . But once done, the epistemology of such possibilities dictates that the subject doesn't know that  $p$ ; and upon realizing this,  $S$  rightly

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<sup>43</sup>E.g., see Unger 1975, 248 and Lewis 1979, §6, repr. 1983, 247, or variants on the argument from illusion discussed in Kaplan 2006, §1.

feels compelled to agree that he lacks the knowledge he thought he had. The triadic structure of our hypothesis explains all this, but it also shows that we nonetheless have a lot of knowledge: *even if*, as some philosophers contend, the skeptic's occasional success means that our knowledge comes and goes, we still know quite a lot. Our knowledge of many epistemic possibilities remains, and thus any arguments for a total and global skepticism, such as that of Unger 1975, must be wrong.

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## 4.7 Appendix

Notice that the important upshot of our hypothesis—that a speaker epistemically positioned to assert a bare epistemic modal *knows* that epistemic possibility—is compositionally competent when it goes beyond the bare constructions on which we've focused: it can make sense of how these modals figure in complex, embedded constructions. Consider how epistemic modals embed under attitude predications:

(77) Brenda thinks that there might have been a mistake

or in questions, and their answers:

(78) Where might you have left your keys?

(79) The keys might be (might have been left) in my bookbag

or under causal operators, or quantifiers:

(80) She's checking the stove because it might have been left on

(81) He interviewed every witness who might have seen the suspect's face.<sup>44</sup>

The structural claim of our hypothesis delivers a nice account of why we use doxastic attitude predications like (77)'s "thinks that" or "believes that" (these being more colloquial than "knows that"), a fact that would be puzzling if the possibilities expressed by bare epistemic modals weren't believed or known. It well explains what knowledge the asker of (78) is after, and why knowing a given possibility, such as that expressed by (79), provides one with a good answer to that question—moreover, the hypothesis makes sense of the fact that one will respond to (78) with "I don't know" when one has no knowledge of any relevant possibilities. And with regard to (80) and (81), our hypothesis is supported by the fact that an interpolated "s/he knows that" fits right in under the casual operator or the quantified clause: in each, that knowledge explains the action of the subject's checking or interviewing. Also, our hypothesis predicts why such modals play nice with the past tense "might have been" of (77)–(81) above: just as one can have knowledge of past facts, one can know epistemic possibilities of what has been.<sup>45</sup>

§2 above mentioned some of the support (from *concessive knowledge attributions*, *Moorean clashes*, *lottery assertions*, and *retraction*) for our hypothesis and the DKEW implicature to which it gives rise. The following highlights some

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<sup>44</sup>I've borrowed these kinds of examples from von Fintel and Gillies 2007, 43.

<sup>45</sup>Strawson 1979 argues that such past tense modals are fundamentally epistemic rather than metaphysical. Cf. DeRose 1998.



more linguistic data showing the DKEW implicature at work.

### Conversational Practice

Direct support for the DKEW implicature arises from several features of our conversational practice.

*Explication:* In cases where someone asks S, “Is it the case that  $p$ ?” or “Do you know whether  $p$ ?”, then if S doesn’t know, it is perfectly natural for S to respond: “I don’t know: it might be that  $p$ , and it might not.”<sup>46</sup> The acceptability of this response shows how well ignorance of the truth-value of  $p$  fits with assertion of either, and especially both, the epistemic modal constructions “MIGHT- $p$ /MIGHT not- $p$ .”

*Cooperation:* Conversely, when the question posed is disjunctive, as in “ $P$  or not- $p$ ?” or “Is  $p$  or is  $q$ ?”, the terms of the question dictate what the eligible answers are, such that a reply of “It might be that  $p$ ” alone will usually be viewed as unhelpful, being not much of an answer at all.<sup>47</sup> The DKEW implicature predicts why it’s unhelpful: a person asking such disjunctive questions already conveys that she doesn’t know either way, and so a simple “MIGHT- $p$ ” reply merely serves to implicate the responder in that same ignorance.

*Conjunction:* For any assertion by a speaker of “It is possible that  $p$ ,” one can ask the speaker about whether it’s also possible that not- $p$ , and typically thereby elicit an affirmative response. This is because the standard evidential conditions under which a speaker S will assert an epistemic modal highlighting the epistemic possibility that  $p$  are likewise conditions under which S will

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<sup>46</sup>The prompts provided by an interlocutor are important for what sounds natural in reply; and this is especially important when considering how the prompt can elicit replies which reveal ignorance, knowledge, or some other epistemic credentials. See DeRose 1991, 584–5, and Turri 2010c.

<sup>47</sup>See Hare 1952, 23.

also affirm the possibility of the contrary as well: one who asserts “It is possible that  $p$ ” will typically also agree that “It is possible that not- $p$ .”

*Censure:* Finally, the DKEW implicature is borne out by our evaluations of such assertions after the fact. If  $S$  asserts “It might be that  $p$ ” in a given context of which we are a part, and we subsequently discover that  $S$  knew that  $p$  is false,  $S$  is subject criticism on the grounds that  $S$  said something *false*. And alternatively, if we come to learn subsequently that  $S$  knew that  $p$  (is true),  $S$  is subject to criticism for having *implicated* that he didn’t know it.<sup>48</sup>

Compare the related DKEW implicature generated by an asserted disjunction like “ $p$  or  $q$ ”: here the ignorance implicated involves not knowing which of the two disjuncts is true. I think the disjunctive-DKEW is related to the MIGHT-DKEW in at least the following way—one can (abductively) infer the latter from an assertion of the former, and then infer to ignorance:

$S$ : “ $p$  or  $q$  or ...  $n$ ”

So: It might be that  $p$ , or it might be that  $q$ , or ... it might be that  $n$

So:  $S$  doesn’t know whether  $p$  or  $q$  or ...  $n$

*Mutatis mutandis* for other ignorance implicatures, such as that generated by “somewhere”: an utterance like “John spends his winters somewhere in Florida” implicates that its speaker doesn’t know where in Florida he spends them.

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<sup>48</sup>I’m ignoring special playful or teaching contexts in which it is understood that the speaker knows the truth-value of  $p$ , but, for example, she uses epistemic modal sentences to give hints about whether  $p$ , such that she can to guide the listener without giving the game away. Cf. Hawthorne 2004, 27 and von Fintel and Gillies 2008, 83, 90. I considered such contexts in Chapter 4.3 above.

### Conjunctions and Cancelability

The DKEW implicature also explains the following data from assertions wherein the speaker knows  $p$  is *true*. Consider each of the following conjunctive assertions:

- (82) a.  $P$  and it's possible that  $p$ .
- b. It's possible that  $p$  and  $p$ .
- (83) a. I know that  $p$  and it's possible that  $p$ .
- b. It's possible that  $p$  and I know that  $p$ .

Each of the conjunctions in (82) and (83) sound strange, though not necessarily unacceptable. The DKEW implicature can explain what is infelicitous about each of them: an utterance of “It’s possible that  $p$ ” conversationally implicates that its speaker doesn’t know the embedded proposition’s truth-value. But when conjoined with the flat-out assertion of the embedded  $p$  in (82), or the stronger “I know that  $p$ ” in (83), a tension arises between what the epistemic modal implicates and what, given the KAA, the bare “ $p$ ” or “I know that  $p$ ” represent as being the case.

The second conjunct of (83b) amounts to an explicit cancelling of the DKEW implicature: for the  $S$  who knows  $p$  is true, asserting only the first conjunct of (83b) would be misleading, for it would implicate that  $S$  doesn’t know the truth-value of  $p$ . DKEW also explains the feeling of retreat accompanying the second conjuncts of (82a) and (83a), after having heard the first conjunct. If the semantics for epistemic modals, requiring that the speaker not know the embedded  $p$  to be false, were the whole story to tell about the usage of such modals, then it’s puzzling why (82a) and (83a) should sound odd.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Moreover, if one hears (82a) and (83a) as generating a metaphysical reading of the possibility adverted to in their second conjuncts, DKEW has an explanation for this: given that

One might object to the DKEW view by pointing out that “It might be that *p*” is consistent with knowing that *p* is true. Suppose that B has no information either way about whether Jones will be at the party, and C knows Jones will be at the party. Then consider the following exchange.

A: Might Jones be at the party?

B: Yes.

A: Do you agree C?

C: Yes, in fact I’m sure he will be at the party.

If ‘might’ implicates ‘not know’, then C should disagree. But C doesn’t, and shouldn’t, disagree. Indeed, if ‘might’ implicates its speaker in not knowing either way, then C’s answer should sound inconsistent. But it doesn’t.

Reply: The above conversation highlights a circumstance in which the assertion (if that’s what the “Yes” of C’s response is) of an epistemic modal “MIGHT-*p*” is consistent with the asserter knowing that *p*; indeed, it’s just a version of (83b) above. But notice that there would be something quite inappropriate and misleading about C’s response if all C said was “Yes,” without going on to clarify that C knows or is sure that Jones will be at the party; this supports the notion that DKEW is a pragmatic implicature, because it is explicitly cancelable by C’s further clarification about knowing or being sure.<sup>50</sup> And DKEW’s cancelability brings with it an obligation that a speaker ought to so cancel if she does know the embedded *p* to be true. In C’s case, a solitary “Yes” of agreement would be improper on C’s part: we let it slide in the

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their first conjuncts lead a hearer to think the speaker knows that *S*, the modal claim which follows, if not to be redundant, is best interpreted as a metaphysical rather than epistemic modality, making the conjunction an instance of the plausible principle that actuality entails possibility.

<sup>50</sup>See Grice 1989, 39–40, 44ff. on cancelability.

above case only because it is followed immediately by the more appropriate assertion of the stronger  $p$ , or, in this case, the even stronger “I’m sure that  $p$ ,” which serves to cancel the DKEW implicature. Such a case seems to parallel that of a speaker who, knowing that  $q$ , says, for effect, “I don’t *believe* that  $q$ , I *know* it.” If such a speaker had just left it at “I don’t believe that  $q$ ,” she’d have done something misleading and inappropriate—indeed, when in the context of the full sentence which clarifies that she knows, we count that denial of belief as being ironic, or perhaps elliptical for “I don’t *merely* believe...”, though outside the full sentence, it seems plain false given that she knows.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, it is worth considering whether, in a context where it is clear to all the participants that everyone in the conversation knows that  $p$ , one of those participants may felicitously assert “It might be that  $p$ .” Suppose that Bob and Alice are on a break at work, and, having poured a cup of coffee in the break room, are standing together at the window watching the snow fall outside. It would be exceedingly strange, and somehow misleading, for Bob, under these circumstances, to say to Alice, “It might be snowing outside.”<sup>52</sup> The strangeness of such an assertion doesn’t stem merely from Bob’s utterance having stated the obvious, in the way that “It’s snowing out” would. His epistemic modal statement “It might be snowing outside” instead seems more strange than this: it sounds improper because it suggests Bob’s doubt about something which both Bob and Alice *know*, and take each other to know. And there is clearly a pragmatic, and not a semantic, impropriety to Bob’s statement: it is, strictly speaking, consistent with what Bob and Alice know that it might be snowing outside, because they don’t know that it’s false that it is snowing outside. But Bob’s assertion seems quite strange because an uttered

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<sup>51</sup> Assuming, plausibly, that knowledge entails or presupposes belief.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. a similar case in von Fintel and Gillies 2007, 38, though theirs involves the modal “must”.

epistemic modal implicates that one doesn't know either way: given what is common ground in the conversational context, Bob's assertion comes off as 'defective' in Stalnaker's sense,<sup>53</sup> for it suggests that different presuppositions are operative in their conversation, leading Alice to think that perhaps Bob doesn't know that it's snowing out, even though he's staring at the snow falling outside.

### Conjoined with Hedged Assertions

Of course, the DKEW implicature also handles the fact that one cannot assert an epistemic modal when one knows the embedded  $p$  to be false (as predicted by our hypothesis' structural thesis). Notice that doxastically hedged assertions are compatible with "MIGHT- $p$ " assertions, whereas unhedged, and even epistemically "amplified" ones, are not. Compare the first three examples (84) through (86) with the remaining sentences:

(84) # I'm certain that  $p$ , but it's possible that not- $p$ .

(85) # I know that  $p$ , but it's possible that not- $p$ .

(86) #  $P$ , but it's possible that not- $p$ .

(87) I believe that  $p$ , but it's possible that not- $p$ .

(88) I think that  $p$ , but it's possible that not- $p$ .

(89) I'm inclined toward  $p$ , but it's possible that not- $p$ .

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<sup>53</sup>See Stalnaker 1978, repr. 1999, 32.

(90) It seems that  $p$ , but it's possible that not- $p$ .<sup>54</sup>

(91) I doubt that  $p$ , but it's possible that  $p$ .

(92) It is unlikely that  $p$ , but it's possible [that  $p$ ].<sup>55</sup>

As noted at the outset, the absurdity of sentences like (84), (85), and (86) has been much discussed by philosophers interested in giving a semantic account of epistemic modals. But the likes of (87) through (91) have largely gone undiscussed.<sup>56</sup> The felicity of these kinds of sentences suggests, first, that hedged assertions prefaced<sup>57</sup> by “I think ...”, “I believe ...”, “Probably ...”, and so on, do not assert, or implicate, the exact same thing as the flat-out assertion of “ $p$ ”, as attested by the difference between (86) and (87), or between (86) and (88). But second, they also support the idea that ignorance, in the sense of lacking knowledge, is required for proper assertion of simple epistemic modal clauses.<sup>58</sup> In other words, it is largely because (mere) believing, thinking, inclining, and doubting are all compatible with not knowing, that (87) through (92) are felicitous sentence types. Because the hedged assertion typically signals that the speaker doesn't know the embedded  $p$ , it conjoins well with an

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<sup>54</sup>J.L. Austin notes that “seems” is generally compatible with both “might” and “might not”: see 1962b, 38.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Malcolm 1963, 31–2

<sup>56</sup>Though see Karttunen 1972, 4.

<sup>57</sup>Or in some cases, parenthetically positioned, as in “ $P$ , I think.”

<sup>58</sup>Thus knowledge forms the “upper bound” on the range of admissible epistemic/doxastic states one may be in to properly assert an epistemic modal. Is there also a “lower bound,” some minimal epistemic state one must be in to make such an assertion? The oddity of “I have no reason at all to think that  $p$ , but it's possible that  $p$ ” may lead us to think that one must have *some* reason to think that  $p$ . But perhaps not: maybe all that's required is that some proposition be raised to salience. I do not consider this matter here.

epistemic modal by complementing the DKEW implicature which the modal generates.<sup>59</sup> In the terminology of linguists, such hedges in English serve an “evidential” function which complements how modals function as epistemic hedges: see Simons 2007, and von Fintel and Gillies 2007, 36ff..

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<sup>59</sup>As Moore 1959, 227–8 points out in “Certainty”, the first conjunct of a construction like (88), wherein a speaker begins by hedging with “I think...”, indicates or suggests that the speaker does not know *p*.



## Chapter 5

### Knowledge Norms in Conflict

Several philosophers endorse both the Knowledge Norm of Assertion ( $\kappa_{NA}$ ) as well as a Knowledge Norm of Belief ( $\kappa_{NB}$ ).<sup>1</sup> This chapter presents some arguments that it is problematic to endorse both norms; the first argument derives from acceptable expressions and conjunctions which one should find problematic if both norms hold. The second argument points out that some of the evidence supporting the  $\kappa_{NA}$  gets undermined by adding the  $\kappa_{NB}$ . These arguments show that it is problematic to try to derive the  $\kappa_{NA}$  from the  $\kappa_{NB}$  plus additional premises. As such, the best position, if one is attracted to each, is to adopt a knowledge norm for either assertion or belief, and endorse a truth norm for the other. In closing, I briefly argue that given the problems raised, the most plausible of these options will be the  $\kappa_{NA}$  and the truth norm of belief.

#### 5.1 Troublesome Hedges

Let's assume that these norms take on the simple schema used by Williamson 2000, 241:

$\kappa_{NA}$  One must: assert that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ .

$\kappa_{NB}$  One must: believe that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ .

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson 2000, Huemer 2007b, Sutton 2007, Bach 2008, and A. Jackson forthcoming.

If both  $\text{KNA}$  and  $\text{KNB}$  are true, we should expect there to be problems arising from any assertion that can be known but which nevertheless expresses a belief that is not known.<sup>2</sup> The most obvious such construction takes the form:

(93) I believe that  $p$ .

We shall assume throughout that assertions of this form (and its parenthetical variants “It is, I believe, the case that  $p$ ,” and “ $p$ , I believe”) can, and often enough does, express an outright belief. Henceforth, I shall assume a scenario wherein an outright belief is expressed (in the next section 5.1.1, I argue against the view that “I believe/think that  $p$ ” cannot or does not express outright belief, but instead always express mere partial belief or high credence).

A claim such as (93) is surely known by its speaker when she realizes that she outright believes a proposition. And such a construction can be used to hedge against the  $\text{KNA}$ ’s requirement of knowledge: a speaker will typically opt for a claim of form (93), or some other hedged construction, instead of the flat-out “ $p$ ,” when she takes herself not to know that  $p$ .<sup>3</sup> But a speaker who opts to assert (93) for this reason will, if she fails to know, run afoul of the  $\text{KNB}$ , making (93) improper. This would be surprising, for two interrelated reasons: first, the supposed reason for our speaker opting for the more acceptable (93) rather than the outright assertion “ $p$ ” was precisely because she took herself not to know; yet using (93) to express her full belief under those conditions

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<sup>2</sup>The converse problem of satisfying the  $\text{KNB}$  without satisfying the  $\text{KNA}$ —namely, having a belief amounting to knowledge, but in asserting the believed proposition somehow fail to know it—seems incoherent. (However, on Turri’s 2011 *Express Knowledge Account*, a related problem could arise: for one could know that  $p$  but one’s assertion that  $p$  might not *express* one’s knowledge; see his Random Randy case. At any rate, I don’t discuss this problem here.)

<sup>3</sup>As Unger 1975, 264 and Slote 1979 pointed out.

implicates her in having violated the  $\kappa_{NB}$ . And second, if the both  $\kappa_{NA}$  and  $\kappa_{NB}$  hold, it is mysterious why we in fact take asserting that one believes that  $p$  to be a *weaker* way of putting forth  $p$  than outright asserting it without hedges of any kind. For if they both hold, asserting either way commits one to knowing the proposition at issue.

Similarly, we should expect to find conjunctions like the following problematic:

(94) I believe that it is raining but I don't know that it is

(95) I believe that it is snowing but it might not be

These can be acceptable things to say. Yet the  $\kappa_{NA}$  and  $\kappa_{NB}$  together conspire to make (94) and (95) unacceptable. For on (94) one is admitting that though one believes that it is raining, one does not know this; and on a natural interpretation of (95), the epistemic modal deployed in the second conjunct conveys that one does not know whether it is snowing.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, things are worse than this. For the  $\kappa_{NA}$  and  $\kappa_{NB}$  together would provide grounds for predicting that *any* conjunction of the form (94), namely

(96) I believe that  $p$  but I don't know that  $p$

sounds improper in the same way that Moorean paradoxical conjunctions do. But most speakers find statements of this form quite acceptable. The importance of this is seen when we realize that statements of the form (96) would

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, fallibilists may deny this, for they think that "might not  $p$ " claims need not entail that one doesn't know that  $p$ ; I find this counterintuitive, given the view of such modals defended in Chap. 4.

express a situation which  $\kappa_{NA}$  and  $\kappa_{NB}$  together rule out as not rationally possible: to believe a proposition yet feel (justifiedly) as though one is inadequately positioned for asserting it outright.

All of the foregoing, however, mainly impugns the plausibility of  $\kappa_{NB}$ : for the problems stemming from the hedged constructions (93)–(95) appear to be difficulties for  $\kappa_{NB}$  *regardless of what is the correct norm of assertion*. For example, if one were instead to endorse a Rational Credibility or Rational Belief Norm of Assertion (Lackey 2007; Douven 2006), and combine it with  $\kappa_{NB}$ , it will remain problematic for one to assert something of the form (93) or (96): because on those norms, one will be positioned to assert these only if it is rationally credible for one, or if one rationally believes, that one believes that  $p$ , respectively. But the  $\kappa_{NB}$  says that one ought not to believe without knowing; so one ought not believe that one believes that  $p$  unless one *knows* that one believes that  $p$ . And if one knows this, then given the  $\kappa_{NB}$ , one also should not believe that  $p$  without knowing that  $p$ . Similar considerations apply if one conjoins the Truth Norm of Assertion ( $\tau_{NA}$ ; see Weiner 2005) with the  $\kappa_{NB}$ : given the  $\tau_{NA}$  one should not assert (93) unless it is true that one believes that  $p$ . But if it is true that one believes that  $p$ , then the  $\kappa_{NB}$  requires that one knows that  $p$ . However, the whole point of hedging with (93) instead of the outright asserted “ $p$ ” was to hedge against the requirement of knowing  $p$ .

### 5.1.1 On Huemer’s Way Out

One might evade the worries posed by hedged Moorean conjunctions through Michael Huemer’s way out: he maintains, without argument or independent motivation, that such hedged utterances deploying ‘think’ or ‘believe’ *do not* express full or outright beliefs, but rather “refer” only to high degree of belief:

in those contexts where one says something of the form ‘I *think* that *p*, but I may be wrong’ or ‘I *believe* that *p*, but perhaps  $\sim p$ ’, ‘think’ and ‘believe’ refer merely to having a high degree of belief, not outright belief. This is why these statements escape Moore - paradoxicalness’ (Huemer 2007b, 153; cf. Adler 2002, 11).

So Huemer’s position is that flat-out assertions of “*p*” express full and outright belief, and assertions hedged as “I think/believe that *p*” express only high degree of belief (what he also calls “partial” belief).<sup>5</sup> But there are several difficulties attending this approach.

First, because Huemer’s view has it that the hedged “I believe that *p*” cannot express an outright belief but refers only to high degree of belief, a *negation problem* emerges: for presumably “I don’t believe that *p*” (and “It’s not the case that I believe that *p*”) *denies* that one has high degree of belief. But then what shall we make of the infelicity infecting the original belief-version of Moore’s paradox?—

(97) # It is raining and I don’t believe that it is.

If the second conjunct simply denies that one has a high degree of belief that it’s raining, then (97) should have a felicitous reading on which the second conjunct’s denial of high degree of belief is utterly appropriate because the first conjunct (given KNA) represents one as knowing, and so *outright* believing, that it’s raining; because “I don’t believe that *p*” denies that one has *only* a high degree of belief (and no more), the denial should make perfect sense.

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<sup>5</sup>Alexander Jackson, in commenting on an earlier version of this chapter presented at the APA–Central Meeting (Chicago 2012) endorsed a similar strategy: he claimed that “I believe” assertions of the kind in question express mere “tentative” belief and not outright belief (compare his forthcoming). I am in debt to his comments for sharpening my thoughts here.

This reading is easiest to hear by commuting (97)'s conjuncts and hearing it as akin to metalinguistic negation: "I don't merely have a high degree of belief that it's raining, it *is* raining [I *know* it]." But I take it that (97), commuted or not, has no such felicitous reading; if it did, generations of philosophers who have studied Moore's paradox have been wrong in thinking it unambiguously infelicitous! It is a tricky matter whether hedged readings are preserved under negation; often enough, it seems they are not. The important point here is that views like Huemer's, which build the hedging function into the meaning or reference of expressions like "I think" or "I believe", carry the liability of predicting preservation under negation.<sup>6</sup>

A different way to motivate Huemer's move is by claiming the following difference between outright and tentative/partial belief:

If one has a *flat-out* belief that *p*, one expresses oneself *by asserting that p*.

One makes a hedged assertion because one has a tentative rather than a flat-out belief.

The informative speaker would assert that *p* (rather than "I believe that *p*") if they had such a flat-out belief.<sup>7</sup>

The problem is that these claims require argument. It may be that often enough, one's outright belief is expressed by way of flat-out assertion; but that wouldn't

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<sup>6</sup>In sum, then, taking Huemer's approach lands one in an embarrassing circle: Moorean-paradoxical conjunctions like (64) and (97) lead him to posit the knowledge norm for belief. Leaning on such conjunctions yields a difficulty with hedged Moorean constructions like (94), which, given the knowledge norm of belief, one should expect to sound just as infelicitous as the likes of (64). Since they aren't infelicitous, Huemer is led to claim that hedged constructions beginning with "I believe/think ..." express high degree of belief rather than full belief. But doing this leaves it puzzling what was really wrong with (97) in the first place.

<sup>7</sup>I owe these conditionals to Alex Jackson's comments, as noted above.

make it universally true, such that “I believe” assertions do not or cannot express outright belief.

I agree with the fairly uncontroversial claim that

*If one flat-out asserts that  $p$ , one expresses an outright belief.*

What I question is the converse conditional, that

*If one outright believes that  $p$ , one will (or must) express this with flat-out assertion.*

There are plenty of examples in which it is plausible that one uses “I believe...” to express outright belief. Suppose that I flat-out believe that the sun will rise tomorrow. I now say: “I believe that the sun will rise tomorrow.” In doing so, haven’t I expressed my flat-out belief? Or suppose that a pollster enters the room and asks how many of us believe that Romney will win the upcoming Republican nomination: some of us, who outright believe this, then raise our hands and say “I believe he will get the nomination.” Or suppose we’re in Chicago, and you ask me the utterly obvious question, “Do you believe we are in Chicago?” I may answer “Of course I believe we’re in Chicago.” Or, suppose you and I are on a nice long vacation, the kind in which one is liable to forget what day it is. I say “Today is Wednesday,” and you reply “No, today is Tuesday.” I might sum up our situation by saying: “So I believe that today is Wednesday, and you believe today is Tuesday.” Aren’t these occasions on which one uses “I believe...” to express one’s outright belief?

And of course, we have in English ways of trying to make it clear that one outright believes: we can say that one “fully” or “whole-heartedly” believes.

But

(98) I don't know that the burger place is on 5th, but I fully believe it is

(99) I don't know that there's a God, but I whole-heartedly believe there is

don't sound bad in the way we would expect if Huemer's approach were correct. And moreover, if that approach were correct, then upon someone uttering "I believe that *p*," it would make sense to ask in reply: "Why don't you fully believe that *p*?" But to my mind, such a question seems to make an illicit assumption, namely that I *don't* fully believe it.

Thus, the big-picture worry I have about Huemer's move is two-fold: on the one hand, it just seems implausible to think that I cannot express a flat-out belief by using that construction. And on the other hand, it seems to assume the spirit of  $\kappa_{NB}$ , by assuming that outright or flat-out belief is the kind of state that commits one to knowing. After all, given the  $\kappa_{NA}$ , which we both accept, this very assumption—that outright belief commits one to knowing—seems like just the kind of notion that would undergird the claim that *If one has a flat-out belief that *p*, one expresses oneself by asserting that *p*.* For if flat-out belief committed you to knowing, then you'd feel well-enough positioned to assert outright, given the  $\kappa_{NA}$ .

Here is a different way to put my worry: a view like the one being considered suggests that in opting for such hedged constructions, a speaker hedges against flat-out belief. But plausibly, given the  $\kappa_{NA}$ , the point of such hedged claims is to hedge against the requirement of knowledge for flat-out *assertions*. It seems to me an extra claim that one is also thereby hedging against full belief; and it is an extra claim in need of argument or defense.



## 5.2 One Norm Giveth, the Other Taketh Away

A major difficulty for the theorist who is attracted to both the  $\kappa_{NA}$  and  $\kappa_{NB}$  is that some of the original conversational data marshalled in favor of the  $\kappa_{NA}$  is a bit undermined by the addition of the  $\kappa_{NB}$ .

Unger (1975, 263–64) and Slote (repr. 2010, 97–98) noticed early on that doxastically hedged assertions like (93) are typical and acceptable when one takes oneself not to know that  $p$ , and that this explains why, when one's flat-out assertion that  $p$  has been challenged, it can be acceptable to retreat to the hedged (93). But supposing  $\kappa_{NA}$  and  $\kappa_{NB}$  are both true, if one's epistemic credentials for having flat-out asserted are called into question and one begins to doubt whether one in fact knows it, why would it be acceptable to retreat to the hedged (93)? For given the  $\kappa_{NB}$ , expressing one's outright belief by asserting (93) commits one to knowing.

Likewise, if  $\kappa_{NA}$  and  $\kappa_{NB}$  are both true, the hedged (93), just as much as the outright assertion " $p$ ," ought to be amenable to questions like "How do you know?", "Do you know that?", and rejections such as "You don't know that!", because it similarly conveys that one knows. But such challenges typically seem out of place in response to (93). Indeed, if they were in place, conversations like these should seem common rather than bizarre:

*John:*  $p$ .

*Jane:* How do you know?

*John:* Well, I believe that  $p$ .

*Jane:* # How do you know?

In most scenarios, however, Jane's second "How do you know?" will strike

John, and other listeners, as unreasonably demanding.<sup>8</sup> Note that the conversation will seem more bizarre if Jane's response is instead the aggressive rejection "You don't know that!"—

*John:* *p*.

*Jane:* You don't know that!

*John:* Well, I believe that *p*.

*Jane:* # You don't know that!

Finally, as John Turri (2011, 38) has pointed out, when one does not know, one can respond to a prompting question such as "Is *p*?" or "Do you know whether *p*?" with "I don't know," but one can also without loss respond with either "I can't tell," or "I can't say" (and  $\kappa_{NA}$  has the resources to explain why these make sense). Yet sometimes one is in a position to respond in a cautious but still helpful way: one way is just the commuted (94), namely

(100) I don't know, but I believe that *p*

but others serve just as well:

(101) I can't say (for sure), but I believe that *p*

(102) I can't tell (for sure), but I believe that *p*

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<sup>8</sup>It will seem demanding in presupposing that John knows that *p*, as well as if it is interpreted to be asking how John knows that he believes that *p*; because the latter would be an extremely odd thing to ask—since we usually grant that subjects are in excellent position to know most of what they believe—I take it that the natural reading in the above conversation is Jane's continuing to ask how John knows that *p*.

These are intuitively acceptable things to say in reply to a prompt; indeed, we often regard them as highly responsible. Yet the combined  $\kappa_{NA}$  and  $\kappa_{NB}$  will find these unacceptable, just as with (94) and (95).

Thus some of the conversational data that seems to support  $\kappa_{NA}$  will need to be squared with the demands of the  $\kappa_{NB}$ , requiring new interpretation or entirely new data; and a plausible version of either of these does not suggest itself.

### 5.3 Problems for Deriving $\kappa_{NA}$ from $\kappa_{NB}$

The foregoing difficulties present a particular problem for Bach (2008),<sup>9</sup> who has argued that one can in fact derive the  $\kappa_{NA}$  from the  $\kappa_{NB}$  plus a belief rule of assertion. According to Bach, “general considerations about speech acts” lead him to think that “the only relevant rule on assertion is belief: For assertion essentially *is* the expression of belief.” He then argues that

If [knowledge is the norm of belief] (I won’t try to defend it here), then we can derive the knowledge rule on assertion by combining the knowledge norm on belief with the belief rule of assertion. This suggests that there is really nothing special about the knowledge requirement on assertion. It has no independent significance but is, rather, the combination of the knowledge norm on belief and the belief rule on assertion. (2008, 77)

Bach’s stated view, of course, inherits all the problems I have been at pains to establish; that Bach did not see this is particularly surprising given that he endorses the same points I made above, that the point of hedging one’s

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<sup>9</sup>See also Smithies forthcominga.

assertion is to hedge against knowledge (2008, 73–74). Those very data points, and others besides, point to something stronger than a belief rule on assertion.

However, much other evidence beyond that discussed here favors the  $\kappa\text{NA}$ .<sup>10</sup> So if the  $\kappa\text{NA}$  is well supported, and it can itself easily explain why assertions serve to express belief (because belief is required for knowledge), then the problem with Bach’s derivation is that it assumes without argument the  $\kappa\text{NB}$ .

## 5.4 Toward Abandoning $\kappa\text{NB}$

Some have acknowledged that conjoining the  $\text{TNA}$  with  $\kappa\text{NB}$  will permit one to account for much of the data that motivated the  $\kappa\text{NA}$ . MacFarlane (2011, 85 n. 8) points out that Williamson is in an unenviable position: for given the  $\kappa\text{NB}$ —which Williamson (2000, 255–56 and 2009, 359) already accepts—the  $\text{TNA}$ -theorist can explain (i) why we should not outright assert of a lottery ticket that it will not win, and (ii) what is paradoxical about asserting Moorean conjunctions like

(24)  $p$  but I don’t know that  $p$ .

On the envisioned combination of  $\text{TNA}$  and  $\kappa\text{NB}$ , one should not assert the lottery proposition because one knows that one does not know that the ticket will win; and by the  $\kappa\text{NB}$ , one ought not believe that it won’t win. It follows, MacFarlane says, that one ought not believe one would be satisfying the  $\text{TNA}$  in asserting that it won’t win. And the explanation of (24) is easy: with minimal reflection one can see that one cannot know both of its conjuncts together, and

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<sup>10</sup>See Chapter 1.

so by  $\kappa_{NB}$  one should not believe them. So one ought not believe one would be satisfying the  $\tau_{NA}$  by asserting (24).

If MarFarlane is right about the plausibility of these explanations, then the  $\kappa_{NA}$  advocate, insofar as she wants to oppose the  $\tau_{NA}$ , should *not* endorse the  $\kappa_{NB}$ : for in doing so, she gives her rival the resources to make a case against her favored norm of assertion. But we have already seen independent reasons, noted earlier in this chapter, for questioning the position that marries the  $\tau_{NA}$  with  $\kappa_{NB}$ : it will have trouble accounting for the acceptability of asserting the hedged claims (93)–(102), and it will have to explain why in general we take the assertion of “I believe that  $p$ ” to be somewhat weaker than the outright asserted “ $p$ ”.<sup>11</sup> The position which suggests itself as a better, and perhaps the best, combination is the  $\kappa_{NA}$  plus the (fairly traditional) Truth norm of belief.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Though it is not without its detractors, the  $\kappa_{NA}$  has been thoroughly defended and has lately received even more support; as such, if we are attracted to both the  $\kappa_{NA}$  and the  $\kappa_{NB}$ , but have to jettison one of them, the problems raised here support abandoning the  $\kappa_{NB}$  rather than the  $\kappa_{NA}$ .

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<sup>11</sup>Again, while allowing that “I believe that  $p$ ” can be used to express one’s outright or full belief.

## Chapter 6

### Belief Fallibilism

Belief is better if it amounts to knowledge; but according to some, believing without knowing isn't just worse, it's improper. This chapter examines the motivation for such a view, makes some needed distinctions, and argues that we can embrace the evaluative claim while dismissing the impropriety claim.

#### 6.1 Is Knowledge the Norm of Belief?

Talk of a “knowledge norm of belief” has increased in recent epistemology.<sup>1</sup> The idea has been variously formulated in terms of rational commitment,<sup>2</sup> mental affirmation,<sup>3</sup> and as a rule constraining acceptable belief; we may call this broad family of views *Belief Epistemicism*. According to Tim Williamson,

It is plausible, nevertheless, that occurrently believing  $p$  stands to asserting  $p$  as the inner stands to the outer. If so, the knowledge rule for assertion corresponds to the norm that one should believe

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<sup>1</sup>See Williamson 2000, 47, 255–56, Sutton 2005 and 2007, Huemer 2007b and 2011, Bach 2008, 77, E. Sosa 2011, 41–53, A. Jackson forthcoming, and Smithies forthcomingb; it is also gestured at by Fantl and McGrath 2009, 18 n. 14 and seems to be assumed by Douven 2006, 453–55. Cf. Forrest 2011, 339, who criticizes religious belief thus: “A virtue faith may be, but not an epistemic one. It is not a cognitive state in any identifiable sense, but an act of volition, a decision to believe when one lacks the requisite cognitive capability and evidence to be able to say one knows.”

<sup>2</sup>Huemer's version is: “if one believes that  $p$ , one is thereby *rationally committed* to taking one's belief to be knowledge” (2007b, 145).

<sup>3</sup>See Sosa 2011, 41, 52, to be discussed below in §§6.2–6.3, and the Chapter 6 Appendix (§6.8).

$p$  only if one knows  $p$ . Given that norm, it is not reasonable to believe  $p$  when one knows that one does not know  $p$ . (2000, 255–56)

It is natural to interpret Williamson’s “should” norm as a principle of *guidance*<sup>4</sup> or *permission*: it is rule-like in dictating that, when it comes to some (attempted) act  $\varphi$ ,

(RULE) *One should attempt to  $\varphi$  only if one will succeed in  $\varphi$ -ing.*

In earlier chapters I did not distinguish between this kind of rule and other norms; but this permission rule schema needs to be distinguished from the normativity inherent in the standards of correctness used for assessing performances more broadly (that they need distinguishing will become clear in §6.3 below). For example, Ernest Sosa’s account of epistemic performances appeals to *assessment norms* operative for performances generally, which rely on an evaluative spectrum applicable to those performances. On this approach assessment norms (hereafter just ‘norms’) set a standard for apt performance:

(NORM) *If one attempts to  $\varphi$  without succeeding, one’s attempt is flawed.*

For Sosa such NORMS enable assessment of a belief, or an assertion, for its epistemically good-making properties (what he calls aptness, adroitness, and accuracy), but in such a way that these do not translate into right-making, or permission-granting properties of the kind designated by permission rules (I

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<sup>4</sup>Sosa 2011, 50 uses the term “guiding principle” for this sense of “norm”.

consider this approach more fully in §6.3 below, and also this Chapter's Appendix, §6.8).

Thus we may use Williamson's simple rule schema from his rule of assertion<sup>5</sup> and formulate the targeted view as the permission rule

(KRB) One must: believe *p* only if one knows *p*.

KRB forbids believing without knowing, a prohibition which provides the resources for positing epistemic defects when a belief isn't knowledge.

However, KRB seems quite controversial, for it makes improper or defective *all* cases of believing without knowing. If knowledge provides a rule on belief in this sense, then an agent who outright believes without knowing is epistemically defective; and an agent who outright believes while also holding the meta-belief that her belief isn't knowledge, is even *more* defective.

In contrast to KRB, a traditional view in epistemology is that one can, in some situations, permissibly believe a proposition without knowing it: if *S* believes that *p* on the basis of probative epistemic grounds supporting *p*, but *S* nevertheless fails to know,<sup>6</sup> *S*'s belief need not be considered defective, or in violation of a rule, or blameworthy, etc. Call this view *Belief Fallibilism*.<sup>7</sup> Most simply for our purposes, Belief Fallibilism opposes a specific version of Belief

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<sup>5</sup>According to which "One must: assert *p* only if one knows *p*" (2000, 243).

<sup>6</sup>Fill in the details however you like: *p* is false, or *S* is Gettiered, or *S*'s evidence justifies *S* in believing but doesn't raise it to knowledge, or *S*'s outright belief isn't confident enough, etc. On the latter, attitudinal requirement, see DeRose 2009, 186 n. 1; to the extent that endorsing KRB comes close to endorsing outright belief as 'the attitude of knowledge,' without requiring confidence or personal certainty as part of the attitudinal requirement, then to that extent KRB would mesh with the tradition of giving an analysis of knowledge. Yet KRB still introduces a stronger regulative principle than the tradition has heretofore countenanced.

<sup>7</sup>Not to be confused with plain 'fallibilism', typically understood as the view that one can know that *p* though there is some recognized chance (whether logical, or epistemic) that one is wrong. See Lewis 1996, repr. 1999: 419, Stanley 2005a, and especially Fantl and McGrath 2009 for statements of the view.



Epistemicism by denying KRB:

(Belief Fallibilism) KRB is false.

The remainder of this paper argues for Belief Fallibilism over against KRB, whose permission RULE is both implausible and undermotivated; but it leaves room for a NORM that is more plausible and independently motivated.

### 6.1.1 Moorean Considerations

To begin, we first explore one point that has given KRB some appeal. Consider: what is the difference between the following two conjunction schemas?

(31) #  $p$  and I don't believe that  $p$

(24) #  $p$  and I don't know that  $p$

Moore originally formulated his paradox in its belief version, (31). But he later recognized that his paradox extends to knowledge versions like (24) (Moore 1962, 277). Moore himself, and others that followed (e.g. Unger 1975, 258–59), diagnosed the paradox in terms of the *Knowledge Account of Assertion*: the paradox arises from a conflict between what one represents in asserting the first conjunct (that one knows the proposition asserted), with what one explicitly disavows in the second conjunct. This treatment of (31) and (24) gives a unified explanation of what is wrong with *asserting* each of them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>I shall assume the Knowledge Account—to be labelled KRA in §6.2 below—which has been ably defended: see Chapters 1 and 2 above.

But again, is there a subtle difference between them? Some have noticed that (31) cannot be consistently *believed*, because believing the first conjunct (believing that  $p$ ) falsifies the second conjunct. So believing (31) is inconsistent.<sup>9</sup> Yet (24) can be consistently believed, for one might believe a proposition  $p$  while nonetheless also believing of this belief that it doesn't amount to knowledge.

This difference notwithstanding, some KRB theorists insist on offering a uniform explanation at the level of *belief* in diagnosing the paradoxical nature of both (31) and (24): on this view, the problem results from believing, rather than asserting, both conjuncts.<sup>10</sup> Locating the paradox at the level of belief would appear to disrespect the distinction just noted between (31) and (24). Yet this approach often proceeds by noting that yes, although (31) cannot while (24) can be consistently believed, nevertheless there is something *epistemically defective* about doing so. Because the KRB is true, this story goes, one ought not believe what one fails to know (and *a fortiori* what one takes oneself not to know). On this view the impropriety of believing both conjuncts simultaneously explains the absurdity of (31) and (24), and it is this deeper impropriety that in turn explains the problem in asserting either of them. If correct, KRB's uniform explanation of Moorean conjunctions like (31) and (24), and its ability to diagnose other epistemically defective conjunctions, would provide it with strong support.

But another difference emerges between (31) and (24), one important for

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<sup>9</sup>At least where one is believing the  $p$ 's in the same way: this exempts Kripke's Puzzling Pierre from the difficulties we're targeting with (31) and (24). So-called 'commissive' versions, like "not- $p$  and I believe that  $p$ ," or " $p$  and I believe that not- $p$ ," require a bit more explaining, since believing one conjunct doesn't falsify the other: such explanations add a coherence principle tying first-order beliefs to meta-beliefs.

<sup>10</sup>A trend due to Sorenson 1988 and Shoemaker 1996; see the Appendix to Chapter 1 above. However, here my interest is in those who use this approach to motivate the KRB, such as Huemer 2007b.

evaluating the plausibility of KRB. (24) accepts a modification which (31) does not:<sup>11</sup> (24) can take a modification to its first conjunct, as shown by the acceptability of the sentence schema

(96) I believe that *p* but I don't know that *p*.

But (31) clearly does not admit of such modification, for it yields the straightforwardly contradictory

(103) # I believe that *p* but I don't believe that *p*.

If (96)'s first conjunct commits its speaker to a full, outright belief,<sup>12</sup> and where KRB is thought to govern such full belief, we should find it puzzling why, if KRB is true, (94) sounds acceptable in a way that (24) does not. So KRB-theorists owe an explanation of the difference between (94) and (24), particularly if they want to use (24) as evidence for their rule.<sup>13</sup>

Note that Belief Fallibilism aptly handles the distinctions between (31) and (24), and the resultant (94): it respects the difference between the first pair by allowing that (24), though not (31), can be consistently believed. As such, it allows that (94) could be acceptably asserted, for (94) could thereby express beliefs in (24)'s conjuncts. In this way, Belief Fallibilism already has an explanatory leg up on KRB.

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<sup>11</sup>Noted by Baldwin 1990, 227.

<sup>12</sup>It at least commits its speaker to some kind of belief, in virtue of having asserted that one believes that *p*; this is compatible with both the main clause "I believe" having an evidential function, and the embedded *p* having "main point status" in the discourse: see Simons (2007, esp. 1041).

<sup>13</sup>One way of trying to do this is Huemer's way out, from Chapter 5; but I there gave reasons to question that approach.

## 6.2 The Belief–Assertion Parallel

Apart from such Moorean considerations, many have been tempted to the KRB by starting with the Knowledge Account of Assertion, particularly Williamson’s rule

(KRA) One must: assert  $p$  only if one knows  $p$ ,

and deriving the KRB by way of the analogy Williamson used (above in §6.1) of how the “inner stands to the outer.” This kind of view has been called the *Belief–Assertion Parallel*: if knowledge provides an epistemic permission-rule on assertion, as KRA contends, then, if assertion and belief are “on a par” in that we understand belief as a mode of inner assertion, then knowledge plausibly provides an epistemic permission-rule on belief as well, that is, KRB.

Adler 2002 coined the term, and for him the belief–assertion parallel conceives of belief as assertion *to oneself*: belief “is a species of assertion, to wit, subvocalized assertion” (Douven 2006, 452–453).<sup>14</sup> We may compare also Sosa’s *Affirmative Conception of Belief*, which encodes the belief–assertion parallel:

Consider a concept of *affirming that  $p$* , defined as: concerning the proposition that  $p$ , either (a) *asserting it publicly*, or (b) *assenting to it privately*. ... belief [is in this sense a]... disposition to affirm. (2011, 41)<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Adler summarizes the points of parallel at 2002, 274–277, but many of the points are contentious or underdeveloped. Nonetheless, he deploys the belief–assertion parallel throughout his book, maintaining that it is “not tendentious as methodology” (2002, 14). (Cf. Adler and Armour-Garb 2007, which presents a somewhat different specification of the parallel.) Wright (1996, 935), in discussing Williamson’s remarks, accepts the parallel, but Wright thinks it supports the idea that neither KRA nor KRB is true.

<sup>15</sup>The Affirmative Conception is motivated by its outperforming the Threshold Conception

This approach, which enjoys antecedents in Frege's *Begriffsschrift* (1970, 1–2) and Ramsey's "Facts and Propositions" (1931, 144),<sup>16</sup> places on a par one's affirmative *inner judgment*, typically an occurrent belief, with one's affirmative *outward assertion*, typically vocalized with an utterance in the declarative mood.

From this it is but a short step to the spirit, if not the letter, of the KRB, given the KRA: one could simply argue to the KRB from knowledge's regulative role in assertion plus the parity approach encapsulated by the Affirmative Conception of Belief.<sup>17</sup> But arguably, using the Affirmative Conception (or any other version of the belief–assertion parallel) to argue for KRB begs the question against Belief Fallibilism, for it characterizes belief in such a way that it is subject to the same epistemic permission-rule as public assertion; as such, it doesn't allow for the idea that knowledge may give a rule constraining permissible assertion, whereas some other status may give the conditions permitting belief.

What is there to recommend the belief–assertion parallel (or the assumption of Sosa's Affirmative Conception, which treats with parity one's internal affirmation that *p* with one's outward assertion that *p*)? Apart from Williamson's

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of Belief: the Affirmative view better respects what Sosa calls the *Knowledgeable Answer*, the *Justified (Competent) Answer*, and the *Apt-Belief* Platitudes (pp. 39–41).

<sup>16</sup>As well as in Peirce 1903 and Geach 1957, ch. 18; for more see McGlynn forthcoming, fn. 14.

<sup>17</sup>Sosa entertains such an approach, though for him, 'norm' = assessment-norm (not a RULE in our sense):

If knowledge is the norm of assertion, it is plausibly also the norm of affirmation, whether the affirming be private or public. Affirmation that *p* moreover seems epistemically proper and worthy if, and only if, the disposition to so affirm is then epistemically proper and worthy... Where the propriety of the former might even derive from the propriety of the latter, in the way skillful performance derives from the relevant ability or disposition of the agent to issue such performances; a performance might of course be skillful even when it happens to fail, perhaps due to unforeseeably unfavorable circumstances. (2011, 48–9, incl. fn. 5).

nice analogy, and certain points of (loose) comparison noted by Adler,<sup>18</sup> there is little to be said for it; as far as I can tell, it has been *methodologically assumed undefended*. But there are reasons to question the belief–assertion parallel: if the KRA is understood along the lines laid down by Moore and Unger, then an outward, publicly vocalized assertion that *p* represents the speaker as knowing that *p* (recall the ‘RK’ thesis from Chapters 1 and 2). And it is unclear why we should say the same thing for one’s inner, mental affirmation: why should one’s internal judgment represent oneself (to oneself!) as knowing that judgment?

Moreover, if both Belief Fallibilism and the KRA are true, then both the KRB and the belief–assertion parallel are false. Here our concern is primarily with KRB; but given that the KRA is independently motivated and has been forcefully defended, and the belief–assertion parallel is (so far) not, it may fall along with the KRB.

### 6.3 Support for KRB?

So what, exactly, have been the arguments supporting a rule like the KRB? Williamson connects the KRB with the KRA, as seen in his quote above (§6.1). But he provides no argument for the “plausible” analogy between occurrently believing and asserting, and it is the belief–assertion parallel that is carrying the load. Yet as just noted, this load cannot be borne by a methodological assumption.

The only other motivation linking the two is based on teleological considerations:

If believing *p* is, roughly, treating *p* as if one knew *p*, then knowing is in that sense central to believing. Knowledge sets the standard

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<sup>18</sup>At Adler 2002, 276ff.; for apt criticism, see McGlynn forthcoming, §5.

of appropriateness for belief. That does not imply that all cases of knowing are paradigmatic cases of believing, for one might know  $p$  while in a sense treating  $p$  as if one did not know  $p$ —that is, while treating  $p$  in ways untypical of those in which subjects treat what they know. Nevertheless, as a crude generalization, the further one is from knowing  $p$ , the less appropriate it is to believe  $p$ . Knowing is in that sense the best kind of believing. Mere believing is a kind of botched knowing. In short, belief aims at knowledge (not just truth). (Williamson 2000, 47)

The antecedent of the first line's conditional, however, assumes the spirit of KRB; or at least, it leaves little room for the Belief Fallibilist who thinks of believing as something that need not involve treating a proposition as if it is known. A similar approach is taken by Sosa (2011, 43–46) in his argument from performance normativity, but Sosa's arguments only lead to an assessment-norm, not a permission-rule such as the KRB (see the Appendix, §6.8, for discussion).

However, the Belief Fallibilist can agree with the teleology invoked, and with the evaluative spectrum according to which knowledge is better than mere belief. So these do not yet constitute *arguments* for KRB, unless there is a way to derive a permission-rule from assessment-norms.<sup>19</sup> An attempt at this might go as follows. Recall that the difference between such rules and norms is this:

(RULE) *One should attempt to  $\varphi$  only if one will succeed in  $\varphi$ -ing.*

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<sup>19</sup>This point seems to be overlooked by Sutton (2007) and Smithies (forthcomingb), who think that KRB follows from belief's aim being knowledge; cf. also Jackson (forthcoming, §5), who comes close to making the same assumption.

(NORM) *If one attempts to  $\varphi$  without succeeding, one's attempt is flawed.*

One could try to argue to a permission-rule from an assessment-norm by way of another rule forbidding flawed performances: if it is the case that

(NO FLAWS) *If one's attempt to  $\varphi$  is flawed, then one should not have attempted to  $\varphi$ .*

then clearly, from (NORM) plus (NO FLAWS) we get (RULE). Yet such a derivation that relies on (NO FLAWS) seems implausible for two reasons. First, as a general rule (NO FLAWS) seems too prohibitive: one could never attempt any new actions without sometimes violating it. And in general, it is not incoherent to attempt something *even under conditions where you believe it unlikely to succeed*. Second, when it comes to the epistemic enterprise where  $\varphi$  is believing, (NO FLAWS) just encodes the KRB if “success” and “flawed” are defined in terms of whether a belief is knowledge. But the difference between the Moorean paradoxes (31) and (24) suggests that while there is something positively incoherent about believing the conjuncts of (31), there is nothing incoherent about believing the conjuncts of (24). Thus (NO FLAWS) is itself flawed.

### 6.3.1 Metacoherence

Huemer (2007b) argues for his version of the KRB as follows (summarized by Littlejohn 2010, 91):

Consciously believing  $p$  rationally commits you, upon reflection, to comprehensively, epistemically endorsing your belief that  $p$  (MCP).



Knowledge attribution is the most comprehensive epistemic endorsement (ETK). If you believed  $p$  it would be wrong to have that belief without endorsing it as knowledge. But, you should not endorse that belief as knowledge unless it is knowledge. Therefore, you ought not to believe  $p$  unless you know  $p$ .<sup>20</sup>

Huemer's argument, in Sosa's terminology, claims that consciously believing (at the animal level) that  $p$  requires one ("upon reflection") to have the corresponding reflective belief endorsing one's animal belief; reflective belief endorsing one's animal-level belief amounts to holding a reflective belief that one's animal belief is an apt one. So, one ought not to believe a proposition at all unless one takes that belief to be known.

Huemer takes his metacoherence principle MCP to be *less* controversial than ETK. About it he says the following:

It is not hard to see why Metacoherence [MCP] should be true. It seems reasonable that if I cannot endorse my belief that  $p$ , even in the minimal sense of holding it to be epistemically *acceptable*, then I ought, epistemically, to withdraw that belief. (2007b, 149)

That seems right as far as it goes; but it doesn't do enough to motivate MCP, for it doesn't defend the crucial "comprehensively" qualifier. Why think that I am rationally committed to *comprehensively* epistemically endorsing a (and *every*) belief that I hold? Arguably, all that would be rationally required of me concerning a belief that I hold is that I endorse it as *true*, and also adequately supported or 'justified'; these are both epistemic endorsements, and they suffice for endorsing my belief such that I needn't, epistemically, worry about

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<sup>20</sup>Huemer articulates and defends his Metacoherence principle (MCP) and his Endorsement Theory of Knowledge (ETK) at (2007b, 148–49).

withdrawing my belief. Why should *comprehensive* epistemic endorsement, to the tune of *knowledge*, be rationally required? However, if MCP just ends up committing one to the KRB, then one cannot use MCP in an argument for KRB, on pain of circularity. Given these difficulties with MCP, Huemer's argument fails.

### 6.3.2 Objection from Gettier Cases

Finally, a striking feature of the KRB is that it prohibits belief when one is Gettiered. But this seems strange: subjects who are Gettiered have, by definition, justified true beliefs. If their beliefs are *justified*, and *true*, then why, exactly, should they not believe as they do?

A believer's doxastic performance in a Gettier case cannot plausibly be subject to criticism or accusation of impropriety: for it is only due to unforeseeable, but luckily favorable, circumstances that the believer arrives at the truth. But if this is due to forces beyond the believer's control and ken—as it would be had the circumstances been both unforeseeable and *unfavorable*, resulting in a false belief—it's not clear why the performance as such should be considered defective, and *a fortiori* unclear why one should consider it a performance that should not have been undertaken.

Gettier cases cut differently against the KRB than against the Knowledge Rule on Assertion (KRA), and thereby impugn the belief–assertion parallel. For it is plausible to think that epistemically speaking, the function or point of belief is to discern truth from falsehood, thus the slogan that *the aim of belief is truth*; but arguably, the function of assertion is to impart, share, and express one's *knowledge* (cf. Williamson 2000, 266–69; Reynolds 2002; Owens 2006). The KRA has seemed correct to many philosophers precisely because an

assertion that doesn't express one's knowledge seems for that reason defective and improper. But a belief cannot similarly be said to express, or impart, or share one's knowledge, and *a fortiori* these cannot be its function or point.

The issue arguably extends beyond Gettier cases. We judge one's doxastic performance as defective primarily because it fails on one of two dimensions: a belief is defective when false, or when baseless, that is, lacking adequate evidence. Failure or doubt on these dimensions are the grounds for withholding belief.<sup>21</sup> But if it is possible for one's belief to be true and well-founded but nonetheless not amount to knowledge for other epistemic reasons (e.g. because the practical stakes are too high, or because one's evidence or strength of epistemic position suffices for believing but falls short of that required for knowing), then one will be inclined to evaluate the belief as appropriate even though there are epistemic senses in which it could be better. Gettier cases are particularly vivid examples, but these needn't be the only ones that support the point emphasized here. For there may be cases where S's belief is well-founded yet false, but nonetheless is a belief that S *ought* to hold. Consider from a third-person perspective a non-Gettiered subject S and whether S is right to believe as she does. If S's belief is well-founded or adequately supported by the available evidence, then even if that belief is false, you can typically still maintain that S *ought* to believe as she does.

I conclude then that the KRB is undermotivated. The next section demonstrates, in contrast, how well-motivated Belief Fallibilism is.

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<sup>21</sup>A point made well by Littlejohn 2010, 89–90.

## 6.4 The Plausibility of Belief Fallibilism

We noted earlier that Belief Fallibilism aptly handles the distinctions between (31) and (24), and the resultant (94). In addition, Belief Fallibilism finds support in several strands of evidence: in particular, everyday cases of reasonable, well-founded belief, lotteries, and inquiry.<sup>22</sup> We consider these in turn, and then in §6.5 consider several objections to them.

### 6.4.1 Everyday Beliefs

The first strand of support comes from mundane situations where we seem to believe on the basis of solid evidential grounds, where we nevertheless take ourselves not to know. Consider the following from Michael Slote (1979):

it is sometimes maintained as an epistemic principle that if one is justified in believing, one is ipso facto in a position to know or justified in believing that one knows. But this further, stronger claim is, I think, mistaken. There are occasions when reasonable beings believe, but do not believe that they know or that they are in a position to know, and epistemologists have sometimes noted the existence of such cases. Thus, to borrow from H.H. Price, if I send a letter to a friend overseas, I believe that the friend will get the letter, but may not believe—or be willing to claim—that I know the letter will arrive safely. Similarly, when I fly from Chicago to Boston, I most certainly believe that the plane won't crash, but do I think that I know that it won't crash? Presumably not. Where there are *very small* but *well-known* and *unavoidable* chances of failure, it may be

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<sup>22</sup>This marks an improvement upon McGlynn forthcoming, who also argues against KRB but only appeals to lottery cases.

reasonable to believe in success while doubting or denying that one knows that one won't fail. (repr. 2010, 96)

Such inductive cases are commonplace, and they are ones wherein it would often be perfectly natural to utter a sentence of the form (94). Similarly, it seems plausible to suppose that what the defect is in one's belief that, say, one's car is where one parked it, on the unfortunate day that one's car has been stolen, is simply that it's false rather than that, because false, it fails to be knowledge. We don't regard one who continues to believe falsely, on inductive grounds, that one's car is there as doing so *impermissibly*; what would be impermissible would be to continue believing this after having been apprised of its theft.

### 6.4.2 Lotteries

Second, a paradigmatic case of having excellent grounds for believing a proposition which it seems one nonetheless doesn't know is a (fair) lottery where one considers a given ticket and believes of it that it will lose.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Kyburg's original lottery paradox doesn't get traction unless we think that one can acceptably believe of a particular ticket that it will lose.

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<sup>23</sup>See especially DeRose 1996, Williamson 2000, 246–48, and Hawthorne 2004, Ch. 1 and 135.

Reed 2010, and Turri 2011, think we can know a ticket's a loser. Yet this view seems implausible insofar as it seems that one genuinely learns something when one hears the winning ticket announced and discovers that one has lost: that is, one's belief has been elevated to knowledge. But on this view, one already knows the ticket has lost; so it's unclear what exactly one could learn by hearing the winning number, and unclear why ticket-holders would bother to check the announced winner. Moreover this view will have trouble, I think, explaining why anyone would buy a lottery ticket, and more substantially, why lotteries would've begun in the first place (picture the inventors now: A: "We'll sell a bunch of tickets, only one of which wins a cash award! The more tickets we sell, the larger the prize we'll have to award, but then also, the more money we'll make!" B: "Wait, we can't make it *too* large, because then everyone will know their ticket will lose, and no one will buy tickets...").

### 6.4.3 Inquiry

A third strand of support comes from how inquiry and action can depend on an outright belief. If I believe that this is the way to Larissa, but recognize that I don't know this, and have no other way of discerning the truth, I will, absent other relevant options, have to act on my belief in order to gain knowledge of the way to Larissa. If my friend Meno wants to know the way to Larissa, I can acceptably reply, "I don't know exactly, but I believe this road gets us there. Let's take this road that way and we shall find out." But if believing without knowing is epistemically improper, then I am presumably also acting improperly in taking this road toward (what I take to be) Larissa in order to gain knowledge about whether this road is the way; and if believing this and so acting on it is epistemically defective, presumably Meno shouldn't come along. Yet it seems eminently plausible that, given the right evidential grounds, I should so believe, and in the absence of other alternatives, we both should so go.

Such cases as these motivate Belief Fallibilism and pose important counterexamples to KRB; in the next section we dismiss several avenues of response.

## 6.5 *Distinguo Doxa*

### 6.5.1 Belief Outright and Partial

A common reply to these kinds of counterexamples to KRB marshalls a doxastic distinction in order to account for them. One move in particular argues that in these cases—the everyday inductive scenarios, the lottery situations, and for some inquiries—what one actually holds is a kind of *partial* belief rather than an *outright* one, where partial differs from outright belief in degree. The difference between partial and outright beliefs has been aptly summarized by

Williamson thus:

What is the difference between believing  $p$  outright and assigning  $p$  a high subjective probability? Intuitively, one believes that  $p$  outright when one is willing to use  $p$  as a premise in practical reasoning. Thus one may assign  $p$  a high subjective probability without believing  $p$  outright, if the corresponding premise in one's practical reasoning is just that  $p$  is highly probable on one's evidence, not  $p$  itself. Outright belief still comes in degrees, for one may be willing to use  $p$  as a premise in practical reasoning only when the stakes are sufficiently low. Nevertheless, one's degree of outright belief in  $p$  is not in general to be equated with one's subjective probability for  $p$ ; one's subjective probability can vary while one's degree of outright belief remains zero. Since using  $p$  as a premise in practical reasoning is relying on  $p$ , we can think of one's degree of outright belief in  $p$  as the degree to which one relies on  $p$ . (2000, 99)

The move made in defense of KRB, then, is to claim that KRB is really about outright belief, and that when one holds a partial belief or subjective credence—understood as both a partial belief to degree  $n$  that  $p$ , and an outright belief that the chance or probability that  $p$  is  $n$ —these, it is thought, are or can be known.<sup>24</sup> Having drawn this distinction, one could then claim that the acceptability of (94) is explained by its first conjunct referring only to partial beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>See Stanley 2005b, 10 for this more general claim (though he is not there using it to defend KRB); Hawthorne and Stanley (2008, 581–83) deploy this move in defense of their knowledge norm of action, the Reasons-Knowledge Principle. See Cresto 2010 for some specific problems encountered by their appeal to knowledge of chances. Sutton 2007 and Huemer 2007b likewise appeal to (outright) beliefs in probabilities or to partial beliefs.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Huemer 2007b.

In particular, some commentators have thought that when it comes to lotteries one should not, strictly speaking, believe fully or outright that a given ticket will lose; instead one should hold the partial belief that it is *overwhelmingly likely* that a given ticket will lose.<sup>26</sup> That is, one should believe of a given lottery ticket *t* (104) rather than (105):

(104) *t* is almost surely a loser.

(105) *t* is a loser.

But I think we should resist this temptation, for two reasons. The first reason stems from worries that this move is both ad hoc and too convenient. It's ad hoc because it's not at all clear why the probabilistic grounds supporting many other propositions don't similarly force a mere probabilistic belief in cases where we quite naturally hold an outright belief. My beliefs that the sun will rise tomorrow, and that I won't die of a heart attack today, are probabilistically based; but why think that I actually (or ought to) believe a probability rather than use that probability to believe outright? And it's too convenient because the very theorists pushing for outright belief in (104) over (105) endorse KRB, and—low and behold!—(104) is intuitively known whereas (105) is not.

Second, there is a positive reason to think that the lottery case involves outright belief rather than probabilistic belief: most rational agents who hold a ticket act, and are disposed to act, in virtually every way as if their lottery ticket will lose. They rely on the proposition that they will not win in practical

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<sup>26</sup>See Williamson 2000, 256, Nelkin 2000, and Sutton 2007 and 2010ms. Many before them have dealt with Kyburg's lottery paradox by using such a move, thereby preserving a conjunction or multi-premise closure rule whilst abandoning the Lockean notion that very high probability can justify outright belief.



reasoning concerning their finances, which, as Williamson indicates above, is to be expected given that the stakes involved (with regard to *my ticket will lose*) are sufficiently low. (That is, the costs of being wrong about your holding a losing ticket are sufficiently low for you: it will not affect your finances adversely to be wrong about *that*; indeed, it will greatly *improve* your financial situation if you are wrong about it.)

Hawthorne and Stanley (in arguing for their knowledge norm on *action*) provide a principled distinction to help us discern the difference between such partial and outright beliefs, one which in fact cuts against the view they want to take about believing that a ticket is a loser:

There are clear differences between cases in which we act upon our belief that there is a high probability that *p*, and cases in which we act on the belief that *p*. Suppose I believe that there is a high probability that it will rain. On these grounds, I decide to bring an umbrella on my walk. This is a case in which I am treating my belief that there is a sufficient chance of rain as a reason for my action of taking my umbrella. But if I had believed that it *will* rain, I would have cancelled my walk. The proposal is certainly not that every time I act on the belief that *p*, I am really acting on the belief that there is a high probability that *p*. If I believe it will rain, I will act differently than if I believe that it is very likely that it will rain. (2008, 582–83)

This distinction aids the view on which I act upon the outright belief that *I will lose the lottery* instead of a probabilistic belief like *In all likelihood I will lose the lottery*, since for nearly every relevant action, there aren't the clear differences noted: I act (if I'm prudent) the same as I would if my ticket's a

loser—I *won't* buy that new sportscar or put down the deposit for that summer-long African safari, but I *will* save for retirement, buy life insurance, etc.<sup>27</sup>

This appeal to how one does in fact act, as well as to how one would act had one instead merely believed a high probability, echoes Slote's forceful reply in anticipating the same objection to his airline travel case. He acknowledges that "it might be held, for example, that when one flies, one doesn't believe one won't crash; one only believes that it is very likely that one won't." But, he thinks, this seems implausible: "I don't know about you, but if that we all *I* believed, I don't think I would fly in planes so often." Then he asks you to imagine you are seated on a plane before take-off and the pilot gets on the public address system, announcing that the plane currently has a minor technical defect; but that "since even with the defect it is still very unlikely that the plane will crash," he will proceed with the the flight on schedule and not waste time with repairs. How would you respond?

I, for one, one would be clamoring to be let off that plane. But most of the people who would be doing the clamoring—and how many

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<sup>27</sup>It is irrelevant that I won't sell my ticket for a penny, for, given the fact that both outright and probabilistic belief in *p* are compatible with recognizing the chance that *p* is (or will turn out) false, it's not at all obvious that outright belief that this ticket's a loser would push me to sell it any more than the probabilistic belief that it's overwhelmingly likely. For more, see Chapter 3 above.

Thus I am unimpressed by Sutton's (2007, 53–57) "modesty argument," and its prefiguring in Nelkin (2000, 399–400): first, because, as the rain example from Hawthorne and Stanley, and the examples from Slote in the next paragraph show, Nelkin and Sutton are just wrong that nothing is gained here by holding an outright instead of an explicitly probabilistic belief. And second, because it is inapt to characterize a categorical belief that a given ticket will lose as "irrationally overconfident": many people refrain from playing lotteries precisely because they believe that playing will not lead to winning, and we regard such a policy as rational. Sutton (2007, 54) thinks it telling that one who categorically believes that one's ticket will lose can be subject to the rhetorical question, "If you believe that your ticket will lose, why did you buy it in the first place?" But this shows little, given that (i) someone can be irrational for so buying a ticket (people often do irrational things for fun), and (ii) outright belief is compatible with acknowledging a chance that one is wrong, and when one takes a doxastic risk where the financial payoff is so great, it is because under those circumstances one doesn't mind holding a false belief.

passengers, really, would not be clamoring in such circumstances?—would in other circumstances be willing to grant that one can't ever know or be sure that a plane won't crash. So if the pilot's bizarre message in the above imaginary case makes one want to get out of the plane, it cannot be because it changes one's mind about whether one knows for sure that the plane won't crash. The reason, rather, is that it makes us no longer *believe* that it won't crash, substituting for that belief the weaker assumption that it is (merely) quite unlikely that a crash will occur. (2010, 96)

Slote handles the objection by noting that it's implausible to suppose that one began with (merely) a high-likelihood belief that the plane won't crash, because this is exactly the belief one is thought to have *after* the pilot's announcement: he says it's still very unlikely. But then it's difficult to explain your new-found urge to get off the plane, having retained the same high-probability belief throughout. A better explanation of your sudden clamoring to get off is that you've moved from outright belief to (mere) partial belief, and in such circumstances that change significantly affects your actions.<sup>28</sup>

### 6.5.2 Two Kinds of Belief?

So drawing a distinction between outright and partial beliefs looks like it won't help. However, some have entertained the idea that there is a difference in *kind*, and not just degree, between a belief that amounts to knowledge and a belief

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<sup>28</sup>Slote can be interpreted here as also opposing the stubborn objector who wants to insist that one really does know, given the high probability, that the plane won't crash: the most natural transition to appeal to would be that one has moved from knowing to merely believing (outright) that it won't crash. But if that transition leaves one with an outright belief, it's puzzling how to explain the shift in disposition to act.

(or some similar doxastic-like mental state) that falls short of knowledge.<sup>29</sup> Let's call the former "knowledgeable beliefs," and the latter simply "mere beliefs." On this view, the idea that knowing *entails* believing really only amounts to the idea that knowledge involves knowledgeable beliefs.

But appealing to this kind of distinction won't help either, since it threatens to trivialize the point of the KRB. For if KRB governs *both* kinds of belief, it seems there can be no sense in which one could actually conform to the KRB with the weaker, mere belief that doesn't amount to knowledge. And if instead the KRB governs only the knowledgeable beliefs, it's obvious that one cannot fail to believe unless one knows: for one only has such knowledgeable beliefs when one does know.

### **Epistemic Possibilities and Mere Beliefs**

Besides, there is a plausible analogy which suggests that the belief held before, and then after one knows, is the same in kind. The analogy is between outright mere beliefs (which fall short of knowledge) and beliefs in epistemic possibilities, as they can be put to use in inquiry. Sometimes, as in the Larissa case above, one can be said, plausibly, to have a mere (outright) belief on which one could act by inquiring after its truth: having a mere belief that *p*, one endeavors to make it knowledge if one can (and if one instead finds out that the mere belief is false, one will then know that  $\sim p$ ). And sometimes one believes that *p* is (epistemically) possible, and would like to discover (come to know) whether *p*.

Here then is the analogy. A subject Sam's mere belief that *p* where he fails to know that *p* (and believes truly that his belief isn't knowledge) stands to Sam's

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<sup>29</sup>See Prichard 1950, 86–8 and Vendler 1972, 90–112 for inspiration; cf. also discussions by Chisholm 1957, 17f., Moore 1962, 115, Jones 1975, Dretske 1990, and Williamson 2000, 41–7.

potential belief where instead his belief that  $p$  is knowledge, in *just the same way* as: a subject Jane's belief that it's (epistemically) possible that  $q$ , where she realizes she's ignorant of whether  $q$ , stands to Jane's belief that it's (epistemically) possible that  $q$  where she instead knows that  $q$ .<sup>30</sup>

The relevant similarity between Sam's mere belief that  $p$  and Jane's belief, when not knowing  $q$ , that  $q$  is possible, is that each of them can seek knowledge of what they don't know: Sam can endeavor to learn, by coming to know, whether  $p$ , just as Jane can endeavor to learn whether  $q$ .

Now if either Sam or Jane undertake an inquiry aimed at gaining the relevant knowledge, each of them risks losing their respective beliefs. Should Sam come to learn that  $\sim p$ , he will (if he is rational) straightaway lose his belief that  $p$ ; and should Jane come to learn that  $\sim q$ , she will (if she is rational) straightaway lose her belief that  $q$  is possible. The crucial point is that if, alternatively, Sam or Jane discovers, by way of epistemically conclusive confirming evidence, that their believed proposition is true, then intuitively, each of them *retains* their original belief: in coming to know  $p$  Sam continues to believe that  $p$ , and in coming to know  $q$  Jane continues to believe that  $q$  is possible.

So two features of the parallels in inquiry support the idea that there is only one kind of belief operative: first, an inquiry where one moves from "mere" belief to knowledge seems to involve the same doxastic state *retained throughout*. Second, the rationality of giving up the belief that  $p$  (or that  $p$  is possible) upon learning that  $\sim p$ , is better explained by a single doxastic kind: for if there were two kinds, we'd need special principles of epistemic rationality for each doxastic kind (and of their relation), forbidding (e.g.) one from holding a mere belief that  $p$  when one knows that  $\sim p$ . It is much easier and economical to

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<sup>30</sup>See Chapter 4 above for the view that realizing one's ignorance (lack of knowledge) of a proposition's truth-value suffices for knowledge of the proposition's epistemic possibility.

suppose that epistemic rationality governs one doxastic kind, which in these cases needs only appeal to logical consistency.

So I conclude that attempting a distinction between doxastic kinds is an unpromising approach.<sup>31</sup>

## 6.6 Belief Reflective and Animal

Perhaps instead one could motivate something a bit like the two-kinds move by locating it in a more thoroughgoing and independently motivated epistemology. Sosa (2007, 2009b, 2011) defends a two-level theory of knowledge on which there is an animal level and a reflective level. Animal knowledge is had when a cognizer competently forms a true belief where the belief's truth is due to this competence: such a belief is *apt*. Reflective knowledge, apparently unique to humans, is had when an apt (animal) belief is reflectively recognized as such by a competent meta-belief: reflective knowledge is "apt belief aptly noted" (2009b, 32).

On such an approach one could endorse the KRB, on certain disambiguations, *and* endorse Belief Fallibilism, by noting that conjunctions such as

(96) I believe that *p* but I don't know that *p*

whether believed or asserted publicly, can refer to different levels: if the belief of the first conjunct concerns animal belief, but the second conjunct's denial of

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<sup>31</sup>Gendler 2008 may provide a way to have the wanted distinction of doxastic kinds: there are beliefs, and then there are *aliefs*. Gendler's work could perhaps provide a rationale for thinking that one's believing a certain way may not be discernible at all by looking to how one behaves, for one may have a *belief-discordant alief* which is itself responsible for one's actions and unmanifested dispositions. But more argument would be needed for the KRB theorist to deploy Gendler's aliefs: for starters, an argument is wanted that supports the notion that what one has when one fails to know is alief rather than belief.

knowledge concerns reflective knowledge, we could make sense of its plausibility thus:

$$B_A(p) \ \& \ \sim K_R(p)$$

But nevertheless, it could be maintained that the KRB does forbid as impermissible belief without knowledge when we hold fixed the level to either animal or reflective. That is, KRB would forbid the following combinations, though it allows the one noted above:

$$\# \ B_A(p) \ \& \ \sim K_A(p)$$

$$\# \ B_R(p) \ \& \ \sim K_R(p)$$

Is this a way to have one's cake and it eat it too?

I doubt it. If this were correct, we should expect similar phenomena for the outright Moorean paradoxes (31) and (24): asserting, and believing, their conjuncts would, on this two-level approach, allow for an acceptable conjunction where the first conjunct involves the animal level, and the second involves a reflective disavowal. That is, there should be an acceptable disambiguation available for (31) whose first conjunct represents one as animal knowing, but whose second conjunct disavows a *reflective* belief, as in

$$p \ \& \ \sim B_R(p)$$

and one for (24) where the second conjunct denies reflective knowledge:

$$p \ \& \ \sim K_R(p)$$

But far from finding this, there in fact don't seem to be any such acceptable disambiguations.

Time to take stock. Belief Fallibilism respects the intuitive distinctions delineated at the outset between (31) and (24), as well as the difference between (96) and (24); and it provides for the plausibility of being reasonable or 'justified' in holding a belief which one nonetheless takes not to be an item of knowledge, such as in the everyday, lottery, and inquiry scenarios discussed above; and furthermore, the Belief Fallibilist seems able to object decisively to the *distinguo* moves resorted to above.

Given all this, and given the problems arising from the KRB interpretation of Belief Epistemicism, it is high time to consider abandoning the KRB in favor of a different version of Belief Epistemicism, one that involves endorsing an epistemic *NORM* of assessment. On this approach, the epistemicism involved can maintain that a belief is better, indeed, *best*, if it is knowledge (for one such approach, see the Appendix, §6.8). But this last claim is compatible with Belief Fallibilism.

## 6.7 The Challenge for Belief Fallibilism

We noted in §6.1.1 that the KRB-theorist owes us an explanation of the difference in acceptability between asserting (24) and asserting (94), since the KRB devotee aims to explain the impropriety at the level of belief: if the infelicity in asserting arises from a problem with believing its conjuncts, then it's puzzling why an assertion of (24) sounds irredeemably bad, yet an assertion of (96), which can seem to refer to the same beliefs as (24), does not.



It might be thought that the Belief Fallibilist has her own complementary burden: she owes us an explanation of the difference between *believing* the conjuncts of (24) as contrasted with (94):

(24) #  $p$  and I don't know that  $p$

(96) I believe that  $p$  but I don't know that  $p$

But the Belief Fallibilist in fact faces no such similar burden: for according to Belief Fallibilism, there need not be anything obviously wrong with believing (24)'s conjuncts. Belief Fallibilism allows that one may well be evidentially positioned to believe without knowing, and such that one also realizes this. (Recall that the Belief Fallibilist can clearly explain the difference between asserting them by appeal to the Knowledge Account of Assertion.)

Nevertheless, the Belief Fallibilist should attempt a story of why it can *seem* wrong to token a proposition mentally as one does when one occurrently considers an outright belief, and at the same time judge that belief as falling short of knowledge. For many philosophers sympathetic to KRB have thought that there is something epistemically or doxastically defective about trying to make both judgments simultaneously.

Here is a plausible sketch of such a story: when one outright believes some  $p$ , one often enough does take oneself to know it, or at least, if not considering the matter, one is disposed to judge that belief as knowledge. On such occasions, one's occurrent belief that  $p$  can be less than ideal if it does not amount to knowledge. But its status is less than ideal not because it fails to be knowledge, but because one's reflective capacities are either on auto-pilot, not attending to that belief's epistemic status, or because one's reflective judgment

that it is knowledge is just wrong. And if one's reflective capacities fail in these ways, either due to lassitude or to mistake, we tend to judge that one should reconsider whether one ought to believe, at the object-level, that *p*.

Yet in the case where one's reflective capacities are instead delivering the *right* verdict, namely that one's belief that *p* isn't knowledge, that reflective competence may also properly judge that one's evidence for *p* is still quite substantial, and that one has no relevant defeaters, and so on. In such scenarios, one *is* properly positioned to go on believing *p* even in the face of the non-knowledge judgment: and this because one's reflective capacities are functioning well.

Those who have thought that one's reflective judgment of non-knowledge ought to issue in a change in one's belief that *p* have mistaken the former kind of case for the latter. One's belief that *p* may fail to be knowledge and, due to lassitude or mistake, one's reflective capacities don't catch that it isn't knowledge; but this does not tend to show, or even support, the idea that when one's reflective capacities *aren't* suffering from such maladies and are in fact performing competently, that one should always, in these optimal reflective situations, not believe that *p*. Indeed, in these situations, given the right evidence for believing, and the right reasons for why one fails to know, one should trust one's reflective judgment that one should continue to believe.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>So Huemer's metacoherence principle had it *almost* right: often enough one does need to endorse one's belief by reflecting on its epistemic credentials, but this needn't take his "comprehensive" form of requiring endorsement as knowledge.

## 6.8 Appendix

Sosa's argument for an *assessment-norm* of knowledge on both assertion and belief stems from performance normativity. On his approach, believing is a cognitive performance evaluable along three dimensions: whether accurate (if the belief is true), whether adroit (performed such that it manifests a skill or competence of the agent), and finally, whether apt, that is, whether accurate *because* adroit. Believing has accuracy as its intended aim, in the same way that performances generally have success as their aim: as such, belief's paradigmatic goal is truth.<sup>33</sup> This yields a means-end structure to one's performance of believing: a belief is an act the endeavor of which is to achieve the truth. This is an instance of the more general schema on which one *X*'s "in the endeavor to *Y*, as a means to *Y*'ing, with the aim of *Y*'ing." The core premise of the argument is then the following:

A means-end intended action is constituted by a means-end belief. And if the intended action is successfully carried out, then the carried-out means-end action essentially involves that means-end belief. (2011, 44)

And then the argument runs as follows: If one believes that *p* as a means to thereby believe that *p* with truth, this essentially involves the relevant means-end belief, that is, the belief that believing that *p* is a means to thereby believe that *p* with truth. And this belief is equivalent to the belief that *p*. Accordingly, if that means-end belief needs to amount to knowledge in order for the means-end action (of so believing) to be apt, then in order for the means-end action (of believing that *p* with truth) to be apt, the agent must know that *p*. In this way, knowledge is the norm of belief: believing is a special case of performing, and any performance (with an aim) that is inapt is thereby *flawed*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Holding truth to be the aim of belief, rather than knowledge (as Williamson suggests) may make for a better abductive account of our evaluative procedures: see Littlejohn 2010, §3.

<sup>34</sup>Sosa does not articulate this argument in exactly this way for belief, but rather for assertion (2011, 48); the above summarizes his implicit argument given on pp. 43–46. One

### Objections from Constrained Performances

However, this will not yet suffice for a *RULE* like KRB, even though it supplies a relevant *NORM*. Compare the following analogues of constrained performances.

A basketball player, normally quite adept and skillful at making shots, must take a shot—perhaps the shot-clock is about to expire, or the game is about to end and they are only down by 1, or she has left her feet and has no one available to whom she can pass—but she is some 30 feet from the hoop. Nonetheless she must shoot, given the game's circumstances: she competently attempts her shot, even in her compromised position, and the shot is on target, but just rims out. There is *no sense* in which she should not have taken the shot: she is commended as having done the right thing, admirably and skillfully attempting the shot.

A baseball hitter is facing a 1-ball, 2-strike count, and he knows that this particular pitcher always throws a slider when the pitcher is ahead in the count with 2 strikes. The batter also knows that he himself is rather poor at hitting sliders. As the pitch is on its way, the batter sees that it will be in the strike zone, so he will strike out if he doesn't swing. Thus, drawing on all his practice with hitting sliders, he manages a competent swing—whether he makes contact or not, no one will regard him, knowing his full situation, as having done the wrong thing: there is no sense available in which he shouldn't have swung.

A football quarterback faces 4th down and long with the game on the line; he has dropped back and is ready to pass, but feels the pressure of the pass rush and knows he must make his throw. He is forced to step to his left, which makes it harder to make the pass he wants, but given that taking a sack will mean a sure loss for his team, he attempts his best pass as the defensive ends close in on him; it wobbles a bit but is accurate enough to get to his targeted receiver . . . who then drops the ball—game over. Yet there is no sense in which the quarterback should not have attempted the pass.

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difficulty with his approach, however, is that it assumes the belief–assertion parallel implicit in his Affirmative Conception of Belief. If the arguments of this chapter are correct, we do not yet have adequate reason to accept that parallel in that precise form (and we may now have reason to abandon it).

Constrained performances like these show that we often do not evaluate for aptness, but for competence and skill: it is better if the shot is made, the ball is hit, or the pass completed, but even if success isn't attained it remains the case that they *should have* performed as they did. The athletes themselves may even hold the reflective belief that their shot, or swing, or pass is *unlikely* to succeed; nonetheless, they ought to have attempted the performance they did. Thus there is no RULE according to which they ought not have performed as they did.

Arguments from performance normativity appeal to the graded scale of positive evaluation: apt beliefs (and performances more generally) are best, being better than a merely adroit and accurate belief, which is itself better than a belief that is merely adroit or merely accurate, each of which is better in turn than a belief that is neither accurate nor adroit. But the problem for KRB is that we cannot properly ground such a RULE of permission in the scale's optimal threshold, for not all performance occasions are optimal. Aptness, which makes a performance *optimal*, is not required for *non-defective* performance.

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