Asserting as Commitment to Knowing

An Essay on the Normativity of Assertion

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An Essay on the Normativity of Assertion

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Abstract

In this thesis, I propose and defend a theory according to which committing oneself to knowing the proposition expressed counts as an assertion of that proposition. A consequence of this view is the knowledge account of assertion, according to which one asserts that *p* correctly only if one knows that *p*. In support of this approach, I offer a strategy of identifying an assertion's "normative consequences", types of act that normally take place as a result of one's making an assertion incorrectly. I outline two such phenomena: retraction and disavowal of knowledge. In continuation, I put the theory to test and critically examine four sets of objections against it, arguing that it can convincingly defuse them. Finally, I discuss two related issues: I maintain that by performing "aesthetic assertions" one also normally performs a non-assertoric speech act of recommendation, and argue for the possibility of "non-linguistic assertions", whose content is expressed by gestures in appropriate contexts.

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Part I

Groundwork

1

Introduction

"Assertion" picks out a robust, commonplace phenomenon, performed in one's *reporting* that a cat is on the mat or *describing* Cadaques as being beautiful. As a first approximation, the speaker is thereby claiming something to hold (Pagin 2014) or to be true (Wright 1992).

Although the feature of truth-aptness proved to be useful in distinguishing assertion from other speech acts,[1] it may have also clouded some of its other central properties. For example, in the early writings of J. L. Austin (1961), assertion was classified as a constative and contrasted with performatives such as betting or baptizing. This rendition left out a key feature of asserting, that of being an *act* in a full-fledged sense. What helped Austin to revoke the distinction in his later writings and regard assertion as an act, was the observation that assertions can be "infelicitous" in the ways parallel to those in which performatives can be. To introduce Austin's thought and, more generally, the significance of viewing

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[1] More generally, truth-aptness can serve to describe a whole class of *assertives*, including acts other than assertion such as guessing, conjecturing or swearing. Discussion on assertives can be found in: Schiffer (1972), Searle (1979), Bach & Harnish (1979), and Alston (2000) among others.

assertion as an act, it may be useful to think of assertion as a form of "perceptual experience by proxy".[2]

First, as both perceptual experience and assertion present things as being a certain way, they can be veridical or true, respectively. The simile, thus, manages to capture the trait of truth-aptness. Secondly, it also helpfully illustrates two further aspects of assertion, namely the representational and the normative one. To see this, let us assume that by offering a "perceptual experience by proxy", the agent is recognized as doing so and hence is seen as performing an act whose features and purpose are well-known to her linguistic community. By asserting *that a cat is on the mat*, the hearer is likely to form the matching belief as if she observed it with her own eyes (Dummett 1973, Millikan 2004). The asserted content would thus amount to a representational device, while the agent would represent herself as being related to the representational content. In so doing, the speaker plausibly undertakes a certain responsibility towards her audience (Jary 2008:105), which leads us to the normative aspect of the act.

In introducing the normative aspect, it might be useful to start off by considering an act of promising, as it is more uncontroversially held to be normative. For instance, we can agree that uttering "I promise I will help you out but I don't intend to do so" is infelicitous or somehow wrong; as such, the infelicity signals the existence of certain *requirements* (such as honesty) which arguably need to be fulfilled when making a promise. A task for the normative theorist of assertion is to see whether similar such requirements exist when it comes to assertion—i.e.,

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[2] I use "perceptual experience" in place of Jary's "perception" (2010) given that the latter term is factive, unlike assertion. Note also that the "perception by proxy" view, defended in Dummett (1973), McDowell (1980), and Millikan (2004), develops further claims, which I am not endorsing. Accordingly, my point here is merely to show how the very metaphor can prove useful in presenting the normative approach to assertion.

whether one can similarly fall short of being "in a position to assert" (a phrase which, interestingly, dates as early as to Plato's *The Republic*[3]).

As Searle and Vanderveken (1985) pointed out, the kind of infelicity to which promises might give rise is indeed common to assertion, and in fact to most illocutionary acts.[4] Roughly put, there is an expectation that one believes what one asserts. Accordingly, if one were to assert *that it is raining but I don't believe that it is raining*, one would clearly perform an infelicitous act—the speaker would admit her lack of belief in the content and offer the content to others in the same breath.[5]

Similarly, even if one doesn't utter a Moorean sentence but it is discovered one didn't believe the asserted content, or have adequate evidence for it, the same problem arises. By using our metaphor, one puts forward the content as a veridical perceptual experience without being in a position to ensure that it really is true. In such a case, the hearer seems to have some *right* to reproach the speaker for offering such an assertion: they performed an act for which they lacked authorization, so to say. The subsequent criticism wears normativity on its sleeve: "you *shouldn't* have asserted that". Such criticism is widespread in linguistic practice: when learning the "assertion game", we master the conditions under which such criticism is called for, just as we learn any other aspect of asserting. It is because the appropriateness of such criticism in situations of this kind is integral to assertoric practice that the very act of assertion has a normative dimension.

A further aspect of assertoric practice, and another point of interest for the normative theorist, are so-called "conversational challenges", most notably centered

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[3] "Haven't you realized that our soul is immortal and never destroyed?" He looked at me with wonder and said: "No, by god, I haven't. Are you really *in a position to assert* that? I'd be *wrong* not to, I said, and so would you, for it isn't difficult" (Plato, *Republic* 608d, italics added). A further point of interest can be found earlier in *The Republic*: "Perhaps we shouldn't assert this dogmatically, Glaucon. What we *can* assert is what we were saying just now" (416b, italics added).

[4] Searle called it the sincerity condition and explained it in terms of the psychological state which the illocutionary act is meant to express.

[5] Cf. Green and Williams' introduction and survey of explanations of Moorean sentences.

on the notions of knowledge and certainty—e.g., "How do you know that?", "Are you certain about that?" and so on. It is noteworthy not only that we can respond to assertions by such challenges *appropriately* or *naturally*, but also that it wouldn't make any sense so to respond to most other speech acts.[6] (A person venturing a guess, if challenged, could reject the question by retorting: "I never said I knew".) It should be clear that such challenges are *normative* in character: for, if it turns out that the speaker cannot answer a challenge and offer a satisfactory reply to it, she will be criticized. (Further, this also has consequences for the contents asserted, and not only for the asserter: such contents will not be accepted in the conversational score, acted upon, etc.) The normative character of these challenges—which could be seen as *demands* just as well—points out to the normative character of assertion.

Plausibly, then, assertion should not be viewed as "a normatively neutral act type", to use Cappelen's useful term (2011), although it remains to be seen whether we have further evidence in support of normative accounts and can substantiate in more detail the points sketched in this introduction. It also needs to be explained what the norms governing the act of assertion are.

Challenges and criticism are conceptually tied to the conditions of correctness: we challenge the correctness of an act and criticize an act when it is shown to be incorrect. And, as a normative kind, assertions are either correct or incorrect. But how do we decide what the scope of such "correctness" is? What does it mean to say that an assertion is correct? This is a fundamental question that I try to answer in Chapter 2, outlining two competing accounts of "correct assertion". On the view I label *reasonabilist*, the speaker's immunity to criticism is deemed both necessary and sufficient for the correctness of her assertion. On the opposing, objectivist approach, the requirements for correctness go beyond speaker's being free of criticism. This much makes the latter approach controversial as the doubts have been raised more than once as to what further normative aspect there could be. In

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[6] The only exception that I am aware of is that of presupposition, as I will discuss at length in Chapter 4.

defense of objectivism, I introduce the notion of "normative consequence", a type of act typically occurring as a result of one's making an assertion incorrectly. In particular, I focus on those consequences which give us reason to think that assertions that cause them were faulty precisely because such consequences eventuated. As I will argue, the speaker's liability to criticism is only one such normative consequence. In addition, we can identify at least two other—retraction in the light of recognized falsity and disavowal of knowledge. As one of the key distinctions between reasonabilists and objectivists is that the former opt for a non-factive and latter for a factive norm, I will argue that the appropriateness of retractions and disavowals favors the objectivist approach.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the concepts of constitutive rule and of commitment, in terms of which the objectivists construe their accounts of assertion. I first contrast two frameworks of constitutive rules, offered in the works by John Searle and Timothy Williamson, respectively, arguing that they are both susceptible to a number of problems, and suggest how these shortcomings should be resolved. I then go on to challenge Searle's conception of commitment, focusing on its defect to *define* assertion, a task Searle seems to have undertaken and which a normative theory of assertion should strive to fulfill anyhow.

All this serves to set the stage for the hybrid view of assertion that I aim to defend. Instead of choosing between capturing assertion in terms of *commitment* (as most notably did Peirce, Searle, and Brandom) or in terms of *constitutive rules*, I propose a hybrid view that characterizes assertion in terms of both these concepts. I undertake this task in Chapter 4, where I defend assertion as a commitment to knowing the proposition expressed (CK for short), and propose that an assertion counts as correct only if one knows the proposition asserted (the knowledge account of assertion). In the rest of Part II of the dissertation, I go on to defend such a view, examining four sets of objections against it. First, I discuss arguments (i) against commitment views in general which, due to the fact CK has not been proposed in the literature, are rather scarce and seem to narrow down to Pagin's (2004)

argument. I then move on to objections (ii) against the knowledge account of assertion (henceforth KA). Three of these arguments are of special importance—with regard to Lackey's "twin argument" and the objection from gettiered assertions, I try to show that KA is well-equipped to handle this kind of cases, by appealing to the framework of "normative consequences" mentioned above; however, the argument from presupposition, offered by García-Carpintero, motivates a departure from KA in my view. In reply, I avoid KA by reverting to CK—instead of individuating assertion as an act subject to KA, I define asserting as a commitment to knowing the proposition expressed.

In Chapter 5, I turn to two arguments (iii) against speaker-centered norms, such as KA, offered by Pelling (2013a) and Lackey (2007, 2008), respectively, meant to show that these accounts unjustifiably rule out the role of the audience. Although I find these arguments faulty, and KA in a good position to resolve them, I also note that CK does make an implicit reference to the audience, insofar as the illocutionary commitment is undertaken vis–à–vis our interlocutors.

In the sixth chapter, and the last chapter of Part II, I discuss conversational challenges, a type of linguistic data mentioned above, and evaluate objections (iv) against the thesis that KA and CK can accommodate conversational challenges better than their rivals. As I will try to show, they indeed manage to do so better than the competing views.

The third and the last part of the dissertation explores some broader issues related to assertion, even though CK is still invoked as the default view. Thus, Chapter 7 examines a class of "aesthetic assertions", taking as a paradigmatic example attributions of the form "x is beautiful". In making this statement, I submit, one asserts correctly only if one knows that relative to one's own aesthetic standards, x is indeed beautiful. However, the resulting naïve contextualism can hardly account for the desiderata of normativity and disagreement. In turn, I will suggest, one doesn't merely report, in attributing beauty or other aesthetic property, but is also recommending that the audience comes to accept such a judgment.

Finally, Chapter 8 examines the possibility of non-linguistic assertions. By arguing that a proposition can be expressed by a gesture performed in appropriate contexts, I will maintain that we can assert non-linguistically, by committing ourselves to knowing such a proposition.

2

Two Accounts of "Correct Assertion"

A normative account of assertion is an instance of a *rule schema*: "it is correct to assert that *p* only if *C* obtains".[7] In search of the correctness condition *C*, theorists have relied for the most part on interpreting a set of linguistic intuitions, taken from ordinary practice, hypothetical scenarios and thought experiments. As it turns out, since Williamson's seminal 1996 paper, which revived the interest in the normativity of assertion, there have been as many as twenty different accounts[8] about the nature of this condition.

Such a large number of competing theories is likely to invite skepticism about the role assigned to our intuitions, suggesting a change of heuristic. A more radical

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[7] For the sake of simplicity, I don't take here into account somewhat more complex views, such as that of Searle, which invoke a cluster or rules, rather than only an instance of the mentioned schema.

[8] Different taxonomies might be possible and could yield a different number of accounts. For more details, see the appendix at the end of this chapter.

response would be to abandon the normative approach to assertion altogether.[9] I do not find such worries justified, however. For, in this case, the disagreement "*omnium contra omnes*" reflects to a considerable extent epistemological subtleties surrounding certain choices of the norm, and introduces more external, epistemological issues to the debate. It thereby remains largely hidden from view that theorists actually often agree in their intuitions and about the questions that lie at the foundations of the normativity of assertion as such. It is by pointing to these kinds of intuition that one may seek to answer the initial skepticism and argue that the normative approach is more promising than it may initially seem.

A fundamental question we should ask ourselves is *what it means to say that an assertion is correct*. Attempts to solve this problem have assumed a surprisingly minor role in the literature, if any at all. In this chapter, I set out to show that there are two and only two types of intuition concerning the meaning of "correct assertion"— corresponding to the *reasonabilist* and *objectivist* approach to the normativity of assertion, respectively.

The importance of the question *what it means to say that an assertion is correct* derives from the fact the term "correct" appears in the rule schema mentioned above, "it is correct to assert that *p* only if *C* obtains". However, as the rule schema can be phrased differently so can be our central question. For one thing, a number of theorists have used other evaluative adjectives interchangeably with "correct", such as "accurate", "appropriate", "authorized", "(epistemically) proper", "licensed", "non-defective",[10] "properly positioned", and "warranted". In the rest of the thesis, I

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[3] Although a number of authors opt for such a position, including Boghossian (2003) and Sosa (2009), among others, it was Pagin's "Problems with norms of assertion" (2015) which directly prompted the writing of this chapter.

[10] Some philosophers, such as Searle (1969), use the notion of "defective" to refer to the phenomenon of uninformative assertion. As such, the notion is used in a wider sense since, as I will argue later, an uninformative assertion is not *eo ipso* an incorrect one. In the recent contemporary literature, the term is given a more restrictive meaning in Williamson (2009:342), Maitra and Weatherson (2010:102) and others.

will stick to the pair "correct"/"incorrect", although nothing hinges on this choice.[11] Further, the rule schema can dispense with adjectives altogether and take the form of the prescriptive "one should assert that *p* only if *C* obtains".[12] In this case, the relevant question would become *what does it mean to say that an assertion should only be made under condition C*".

A general point behind insisting on spelling out such varieties is to stress that whichever option we go for, we will find only two fundamentally distinct ways of thinking about them, reasonabilist and objectivist. The main idea of this chapter, thus, is to show that there are *two* senses in which an assertion may be said to be *correct*. Arguably, the twenty accounts referred to above will fit either one of the two camps, suggesting that there is a principled divide, affecting the core of the debate.

2.1 The Reasonableness Theory

I start by presenting what I shall call the reasonabilist[13] view, interpreting Lackey's (2007) "Norms of Assertion" as the representative of this approach. To answer the fundamental question, (i) what it is for an assertion to be correct, I will start by

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[11] If it is of any interest, the term "correctness" already appears in Midgley's (1958) pioneering work on the game analogy, and also ties the present topic to the debate in the normativity of meaning where the same term is used (e.g., Kripke's 1982). Unlike some authors (Barker, 2004: 8) I do not wish to use the syntagm "correct assertion" to describe *successfully* made assertions—in my usage, "successful" is redundant as applied to "assertion": "successful assertion" just means "assertion".

[12] Strictly speaking, the form "one should Φ only if C" follows from "it is correct to Φ only if C" only by adding an additional premise that "one should Φ only if it is correct to Φ", but this is uncontroversial. I postpone discussion of "should" until section 2.5.

[13] To quote Austin, "this is rather an ugly word, and a new word, but there seems to be no word already in existence to do the job" (1961/1970: 235).

asking (ii) what are the *normative consequences* of violating the norm of assertion, a term of art I sketched in the *Introduction* and which I will expand on shortly. The question (ii) is mostly related to the evidence we can use in answering the first question. By the same token, this will bring us closer to answering (iii) whether the norm of assertion is a factive concept.

Once we have answered (i)–(iii), it may also be sufficiently clear how to think about (iv) the status of the "secondary correctness" of assertion, another term of art I will talk about later in this chapter. For the most part, I will intend to show that the difference between the reasonabilist and the objectivist can be found in their answers to question (i), and that this answer has repercussions for the remaining three questions.

2.1.1 Normative Consequences

The possibility of asserting incorrectly suggests that the correctness conditions are not necessary for asserting itself: one can manage to assert without doing so correctly. In fact, normative theories often proceed by examining cases of incorrect assertions. It may be said that once we have a complete grasp of what incorrectness consists in, we will understand what the norm of assertion is. As Lackey writes:

> [W]hen theorizing about norms of assertion, we are often trying to figure out what the norms themselves are. Because of this, it is fairly common[14] for those working on this topic to take our intuitions regarding whether we feel that asserters are subject to criticism as *evidence* for concluding that a norm of

[14] Being one of the first proponents of what I call "the reasonableness theory", it is unclear to whom Lackey refers when she observes "fairly common" features for "those working on the topic". Her claim could be read more appropriately as what *should* be the case.

assertion has been violated. Thus, if an asserter seems appropriately subject to criticism *qua* asserter, then this is taken to be a good reason to conclude that a norm of assertion has been violated (Lackey, 2007: 595; original emphasis).

This passage contains the main idea behind what I will call "the reasonableness theory". Before moving on, however, it may be useful to dwell briefly on the strategy of normative accounts of assertion which Lackey mentions.

One of the landmarks of normative approaches to assertion is the so–called *game analogy*,[15] the claim that the rule of assertion bears resemblance to the rules of games. While the main point of the analogy is to shed light on the concept of *constitutive rule*,[16] I would like to stress the importance of a further analogue—*normative consequence*. To introduce the term, think of the following effects: once a chess player touches one of her figures, she is *required* to play with it; once a basketball player commits five personal fouls, she is *forbidden* from playing the game; once a tennis player hits a net post, she *loses a point*; once a soccer player (other than a goalkeeper) touches the football with a hand in the penalty area, the opposing soccer team is *awarded a penalty kick*. Of course, these are only few examples of the great variety of normative consequences we find within games. And, just as we can understand a certain game only after learning each one of its normative consequences, the same should follow for the assertoric practice, too.

In the quoted passage above, Lackey recognizes this point: if assertion is governed by *rules*, there should likewise be normative consequences of breaking these rules. Lackey goes on to specify one such normative consequence: *the speaker's*

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[15] As mentioned above, the analogy is introduced in the philosophy of language by Midgley (1958), and is applied for the first time in the speech act theory by Searle (1969). Further developments are made in Lewis (1979), and the interest in it revived by Williamson (1996). For criticism, see Maitra and Weatherson (2010) and Maitra (2011) among others.

[16] I analyze the concept in Chapter 3. Most accounts in the literature (*pace* Stone 2007, Levin 2008, Carter and Gordon 2011) posit a single constitutive norm of assertion. For the sake of simplicity, I will proceed with the same assumption, before offering arguments for it.

liability to criticism (henceforth SLC). The claim that SLC is a normative consequence strikes as a rather uncontroversial normative claim—it contends that if an agent is subject to criticism[17] for her assertion, then she has *thereby* violated the assertoric rule. It is easy to agree that the absence of SLC is a *necessary* condition for the correctness of assertion: if the speaker is subject to criticism when asserting p, then p is asserted incorrectly[18]. For the sake of convenience, I will rephrase SLC in terms of *reasonableness* and say that if the speaker is liable to criticism for making an assertion, her assertion is unreasonable, and otherwise reasonable.

In spite of being somewhat cumbersome, the term "reasonableness" was chosen here for several reasons. First, it appears to be more *neutral* than other terms in the ballpark such as "permissibility" and "blamelessness". For, unlike with the latter two concepts, reasonabilists and objectivists may agree about the criteria of "reasonableness", and this allows us to explain the similarity between the two approaches with more ease.

Secondly, as non-objectivist accounts come in many flavors, we need a heading under which we can subsume all of them. And while "reasonabilism" is not the only term that can be employed, it appears to be broad enough to serve the purpose.

Thirdly, as I will discuss at length in section 2.4, the term is all-important in characterizing the "secondary correctness", a concept of some importance for properly understanding what correctness is. As we will see, the objectivists invoke precisely the notion of reasonableness in order to cash out secondary correctness.

We should think of the notion of reasonable assertion as relative to the evidence available to the speaker and as judged by the relevant linguistic community. As this

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[17] As I clarify in section 2.1.1.1, the relevant notion of criticism pertains solely to the act of asserting, rather than to external considerations such as those of morality, politeness, and others.

[18] Note, however, that this doesn't follow if we put forward truth as the norm of assertion. On this approach, an assertion can be correct even if the speaker is liable to criticism in the relevant sense. In order to explain the speaker's liability to criticism, the proponent of this account will appeal to "secondary correctness", as I will discuss in section 2.4.

characterization leaves the notions of relevant community and relevant evidence unspecified, let us consider the following scenario so as to pin down how these notions should be understood:

> On a December morning, Amy looks out the window and sees the snow-like flakes. At this time of year, it is usually snowing in her town, and so she asserts to her family that it is snowing. Unbeknownst to her, however, the film crew on the top of her building is spraying the artificial snow.[19]

It is highly intuitive, I think, to accept that Amy is not liable to criticism and that her assertion is *reasonable*. In accordance with this, the relevant evidence would be the one available to Amy, as her act is deemed reasonable precisely in the light of this evidence. Consequently, a larger body of evidence, such as the one available to the movie crew, should count as irrelevant when evaluating the reasonableness of Amy's assertion. In turn, the relevant body of evidence is not automatically the most extensive one.[20]

As far as the scope of the relevant community is concerned, we can submit that if anyone *competent* were to assess Amy's assertion, they would not criticize her for making it. In other words, a relevant judge will appraise Amy as having done what was in her epistemic powers, and as such as having acted reasonably.

Returning to Lackey's passage, I would like to dwell on its more controversial part, the claim that SLC is *the only* normative consequence of incorrect assertion.[21]

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[19] Adapted from Williamson (1996: 509).

[20] I wish to submit that, had Amy made the same assertion in front of the movie crew, or if some of its members have eavesdropped, her assertion would still be reasonable. In such circumstances, the salient body of evidence would not shift to the most extensive one, either. In other words, Amy's assertion would be reasonable relative to this enlarged body of evidence, too.

[21] See also Lackey (2008: 137).

Observe that this much would give us the *sufficient* condition for the correctness of assertion: if the speaker is not liable to criticism when asserting *p* then *p* is asserted correctly. Hill and Schechter (2007), Stone (2007:100), and Levin (2008: 368–9), among others, endorse this claim.[22] In Levin's example, when the speaker tells her son he will do well on the test next day, it is *in virtue* of the fact that she is not "to be criticized for making this assertion" that her assertion is correct (2008:368). For these authors, no further consideration matters for the sufficiency conditions. In effect, this is the reasonableness theory: the view that reasonableness is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for correctness of assertion.

2.1.1.1 "Liability to Criticism"

To understand reasonableness and flesh out the concept Lackey uses for it—*the lack of the speaker's liability to criticism*—there are three points to be made.

First of all, it is irrelevant for the reasonabilist whether the agent is being actually *criticized* for the statement she made or not. The very fact that one is reproached for asserting does not license the inference to the normative conclusion that the agent has thereby violated the norm of assertion: a criticism could be made on insufficient grounds, or might be instead erroneously missing. What we are interested, instead, is the modal property of the speaker being *liable* or *subject* to criticism. Such a liability is typically accompanied by a feeling of resentment against the speaker (Weiner, 2005: 231-2; Lackey 2008:137).

Secondly, assertion is a multifaceted act and is subject to various rules of etiquette, prudence, ethics, and relevance, among others. Although by violating

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[22] More generally, Kvanvig (2009:141) treats the possibility that "the norm is violated and yet we do not view the assertion as deserving of criticism" as detrimental to any normative account of assertion.

either one of these rules one would make oneself liable to *some* kind of criticism, the type of criticism we are after is of a different kind. For instance, think of an impolite assertion – the fault cannot lie with the assertion itself, but rather with the way it was made. Thus, the rules of etiquette do not govern assertion *per se*, but conversation generally speaking.

In contrast, making a statement while lacking any evidence for its content will deserve a reproach in the intended sense and pertain solely to the act of asserting. Thus, as a first approximation, the rule of assertion is related to the body of evidence against which the act is being made. At this point, however, I cannot make these conditions any more precise as this would imply opting for one reasonabilist approach rather than another. But I take it that the idea is sufficiently clear.

Thirdly, as remarked above, we need to put a finger on the criterion of *relevant* "linguistic community", the concept we invoked to describe the assessment of assertion with respect to its reasonableness. The scope of the "relevant linguistic community" is up for grabs, but it roughly corresponds to a kind of "mastery" one has in playing the assertion game: e.g., one needs to know when an assertion should be accepted and when its speaker should be challenged; when the answer to the challenge should be rendered satisfactory and when one should require a withdrawal or hedging of the statement; and so on.

It should be noted that even though the "relevant linguistic community" includes the speaker, it is wrong to infer that the speaker's judgment must be authoritative in assessing the correctness of assertion. This point is sometimes lost sight of. When presenting Lackey's account, Pelling maintains that an assertion will be evaluated as correct so long as it is "made on what the asserter himself or herself recognizes to be strong evidence" (Pelling, 2013b: 3786). But this condition is obviously too weak. We can imagine a scenario where the speaker's judgment is impaired and fails to comply with the standards of rationality of her audience. We could not deem his assertion authoritative on the pain of losing the fine distinction Wittgenstein draws

in his *Investigations* between one's belief that one follows the rule and one's actual following the rule (§ 202). It is thus mistaken to allow for the speaker's judgment as to whether her evidence marks her assertion reasonable to be sufficient across the board.

Lackey is indeed more nuanced in her writings. As she specifies, "in order for it to be *reasonable* for a subject to believe that *p* in the sense required by the reasonableness norm, there needs to be epistemic support available to the subject that makes it in the actual world, as a matter of objective fact, likely that it is true that *p*" (Lackey, 2007: 610; italics added). Her insisting on "a matter of objective fact" seems to oblige one to take into consideration a bigger picture, instead of focusing solely on the speaker. In consequence, in order to understand the import of "reasonable" we should consult the standards of the community.

Observe, however, that the fact that we should take into consideration the whole community does not entail that there will be no situations in which *only* the speaker will be authoritative, and the rest of the community would not. It is quite probable, for instance, that before circulating the manuscript with the outline of his revolutionary ideas, Copernicus was the only one who comprehended that the Earth revolves around the Sun. This would, in turn, establish his epistemic position as the standard for evaluating the heliocentric claims. These cases are rare, however, but illuminating as they show that while the speaker's opinion diverged from that of the community, it is the speaker who should be considered as authoritative.

2.1.2 The Meaning of "Correct Assertion"

Having specified the reasonabilist's set of normative consequences—which consists only of the speaker's liability to criticism—the reasonabilist can now specify what it means to say that an assertion is correct. Roughly, an assertion is correct if and only

if it is *reasonable* relative to the evidence available to the speaker and as judged by the relevant linguistic community. Or more succinctly, an assertion is correct if and only if it is reasonable.

2.1.3 Factivity Conditions

Given that the *reasonableness* of assertion is both necessary and sufficient condition for its correctness, it should straightforwardly follow that the norm of assertion, on this approach, cannot be a factive notion.

A general way to make this point would be to say that we are bound to have cases—such as the one of the snow scenario, described earlier—in which the speaker earnestly asserts a false proposition, despite having what seems to be perfectly good evidence. Since such an act is indeed reasonable, and given that on the present view correctness of assertions requires nothing more than their reasonableness, it follows that these assertions are correct, even though their content is false. In conclusion, the reasonabilist norm of assertion cannot be factive.

Perhaps it might be urged that certain unreasonable assertions seem to favor factive over non-factive norms. It is, for instance, unreasonable to assert that "it is raining, but I don't know that it is raining", because one is liable to criticism for offering a clearly defective statement. Isn't the speaker's denial of knowledge the key consideration in ruling such statements as unreasonable? On one approach to Moorean sentences,[23] when asserting the first conjunct, "it is raining", the speaker represents herself as knowing that it is raining; yet, the second conjunct directly contradicts such a condition, by explicitly stating that the agent lacks the relevant

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[23] Unger (1975) and DeRose (2002) put forward this kind of explanation. For a useful introduction and survey of other approaches, see Green & Williams (2007).

knowledge; hence, the assertion is unreasonable as its content contradicts the condition the speaker represents herself as satisfying by asserting what she does.

So-called lottery propositions seem to pull in the same direction.[24] Imagine that I bought a ticket in a big lottery (with chances of winning as small as that of one in a million). Before the results are even being announced, my friend tells me that my ticket did not win, lacking of any inside information. We have an unshaken intuition that her assertion is unreasonable. Again, one may think this supports certain factive norms, such as knowledge or safety. For, as the argument goes, even if the content turns out to be true there is still "something wrong" with making such a flat-out assertion unless the asserter is in possession of some new information. Again, the factive norms could be used to account for the unreasonableness of such actions.

In reply, I don't think these objections go very deep. The reason why it is incorrect to assert "*p* but I don't know that *p*", the reasonabilist may urge, is simply because one cannot justify such a claim. As regards the lottery propositions, the worry can be resisted by biting the bullet and insisting that these assertions are after all *reasonable*.[25] Accordingly, our intuitions need to be supported by data from linguistic practice, plausibly that of normative consequences.

Finally, although the reasonabilists agree that the relevant norm is *internal*, and can be followed more or less infallibly,[26] they may well part ways when it comes to specifying the nature of such a non-factive norm. As I tried to argue, they will consist in different ways of cashing out what it is for an assertion to be reasonable:

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[24] See Williamson (1996; 2000) and Hawthorne (2004). In contrast, Hill and Schechter (2007) advocate the contrary view on which we can know the lottery proposition.

[25] Lackey (2007), Whiting (2013).

[26] The qualifier is added to accommodate for the cases discussed above when the speaker may misjudge the force of her evidence.

Douven's (2006) *rational belief*, Lackey's *reasonableness*[27] (2007, 2008), Hill and Schechter's (2007) *justified belief*, or Kvanvig's (2009, 2011) *justification*.[28]

To summarize, the reasonabilist holds that: (i) an assertion is correct if and only if it is reasonable relative to the evidence available to the speaker and as judged by the relevant linguistic community; (ii) the only normative consequence of violating the norm of assertion is the speaker's liability to criticism; and (iii) the norm of assertion is bound to be a non-factive notion. As mentioned, we will discuss their view on (iv) the concept of secondary correctness later on, in section 2. 4.

2.2 The Objectivity Theory

In the remainder of the chapter, I will present and motivate the alternative to the reasonabilist approach; we may call it the objectivity theory and its proponents objectivists.

In contrast to the reasonableness view, I will not focus on any work in particular when presenting objectivism, as I find the discussion of the objectivist's conception of normative consequences and their account of "correct assertion" insufficiently developed in the literature.[29] In developing the objectivist view, I will present the

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[27] The norm Lackey adopts is somewhat more complex: it is not merely that it is correct to assert that *p* only if it is reasonable for one to believe that *p* – in addition, "if one asserted that *p*, one would do that at least in part because it is reasonable for one to believe that p" (ibid, 608).

[28] Alternatively, we can say that most reasonabilists adopt the norm of justification, while disagreeing as to how justification should be fleshed out. Then again, as I was insisting, "justification" could be understood as a way of cashing out reasonableness of an act.

[29] MacFarlane (2014) addresses some points of interest I turn to discussing later. However, he takes a different stance on two phenomena I later describe as normative consequences: the *retraction*, for which he develops a different rule (see section 4.3.2) and the *disavowal* which he doesn't consider as a normative consequence.

answers to the same questions as I did with the reasonabilists: (i) what it is for an assertion to be correct; (ii) what are the normative consequences of violating the norm of assertion; and (iii) is the norm bound to be a factive concept or not?

As mentioned at the outset, the reasonabilists and objectivists are in the business of elaborating two different kinds of intuitions. Our task here is to see which of these two kinds of intuition, if any, can be better supported. A suspicion I had about reasonabilism was that it overemphasizes the role of SLC when it proclaims its absence to be both the necessary *and sufficient* condition for correct assertions. Interestingly, no argument in support of this claim was given (at least not to my knowledge) and it is surprising that reasonabilists do not seem to even consider the possibility that reasonableness might not be the sufficient condition.

That seems to be a weak point. As SLC is the most noticeable example of normative consequences in general, it is not unlikely that a more subtle consequence might have simply escaped the reasonabilist's eye. That notwithstanding, Lackey seems to be willing to settle on this result merely by appealing to intuitions, as the following passage testifies:

> [T]here are cases in which a speaker asserts that *p* in the absence of knowing that *p* without being subject to criticism in any relevant sense, thereby showing that knowledge cannot be what is required for proper assertion (Lackey, 2007: 595).

This argumentative void, related to the possibility of there being further normative consequences is probably the weakest point of the reasonabilist account. For, granted that SLC is one such normative consequence, the reasonabilist still owes us an argument why it is the *only* such consequence. Mere intuition would not do.

Leaving this aside for the moment, the objectivist takes "correctness" to be more demanding than her reasonabilist rival does. For, while the objectivist judges an

unreasonable assertion to be incorrect, she also adds a further layer: the agent's act can be reasonable and still fail to be correct. On this approach, we can break the norm despite manifesting the highest sensitivity to normative considerations and without being liable to criticism.

2.2.1 Normative Consequences

As mentioned, the objectivist departs from the reasonabilist's view by denying that reasonableness is the *sufficient* condition for correct assertions. To illustrate this, going back to the snow scenario, the objectivist will agree that Amy acts reasonably but will still deny that she made a correct assertion. In so doing, the objectivist will resort to a lingering intuition that it is "somehow bad" to assert the false (Williamson, 1996: 496), [30] regardless of the intuitions we share about reasonableness.

Unfortunately, the reasonabilist is not sharing the latter intuition. In order for objectivists to avoid reaching an impasse with the reasonabilists, and talking past each other while explaining two different sets of intuitions, the objectivist can try to offer something in support of her intuitions. The objectivist should not pause at Williamson's insistence that certain assertions are "somehow bad" (Williamson, 2009: 345) nor at noticing that many people in fact share this kind of intuition (Turri, 2010a: 3). For, as we have seen, the reasonabilists report having a different type of intuition. This is why we need further support to the claim that "false assertions are automatically improper" (ibid: 3). To obtain it, we will look at our linguistic behavior hoping to gather the data beyond our armchair intuitions. It might be that these data would need to be backed up by some further intuitions, but it would still allow us to weigh the strength of the two competing views.

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[30] Williamson (2005:109) applies the same intuition to the case of belief.

2.2.1.1 Retraction

Just as the reasonabilist found the support for her intuitions about SLC in features of assertoric practice, so should the objectivist base her argument on such features. In order to support the claim that false assertions[31] are indeed incorrect, let us consider a somewhat extended snow scenario. Thus far, we have granted that Amy's act is reasonable, in the sense that it is not liable to criticism. As argued, the standards of reasonability should not be set any higher: it would be too demanding to require from the speaker to rule out every possible relevant alternative before making an assertion. For all we know, this might distort our linguistic practice, pushing us either into pairing each asserted proposition with a suitable evidential or not asserting at all.

Fortunately, the objectivist doesn't need to go this far in order to flesh out Williamson's intuition that there is "something wrong" with Amy's assertion. It suffices to observe that if Amy were to find out that it was not snowing, she would *retract* her previous assertion *in normal conditions*.

Given that the retraction is a *different* speech act, with norms of its own,[32] the qualifier "normal conditions" is in place as it would be wrong to insist that retraction must occur *whenever* an assertion is found to be false. This would deem one speech act, retraction, *constitutive* of another speech act, assertion, a result we may find questionable. It is thus important to fine-tune the role of retraction for our

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[31] Given the act/content ambiguity of the term "assertion", MacFarlane (2005) argued that as long as we refer to assertion as an *act*, we cannot attribute truth or falsity to it (ibid: 322), but instead propriety or impropriety (or some of its synonyms, applicable to acts). In reply, Hanks (2015:66–73) convincingly shows that "truly" and "falsely" are verb modifiers, and we can apply them to acts in felicitous constructions, such as: "Obama truly stated that Clinton is eloquent" (ibid: 68). I will, accordingly, be using the expressions "true assertion" and "false assertion".

[32] In effect, this is one of the central claims of MacFarlane's 2014 normative account of assertion.

purposes: what matters for us here is that in *normal* cases, we can expect false assertions to be retracted *because* they are recognized to be false.[33] That being said, retraction may not occur in certain cases; perhaps the phenomenon depends on what is at stake in a given context: if the assertion itself is about something insignificant, it might not require additional retraction despite its content being known to have been false.

Also, the very act of retraction does not necessarily erase the *responsibility* or commitment "all-things-considered". If your speculation leads someone to lose most of his savings on the stock market, a mere retraction won't make you less culpable. The retraction merely amounts to taking back a *speech act*, and the one who retracts only stays clear of further illocutionary commitment. The consequences of this are that the speaker cannot be challenged any further, nor would there be any sense in acting upon her testimony, and so on.

Until this point, I have left a number of things about retraction unspecified and the argument for objectivism unfinished. This particularly applies to showing that retracting really is a full-fledged normative consequence. I postpone the discussion until Chapter 4. If it turns out that the obligation to retract is a normative consequence in its own right, it would support the view that there is more to the normativity of assertion than the mere demand of reasonableness. Accordingly, we could concur that reasonabilists have oversimplified assertoric practice and thus given too weak a conception of the constitutive norm of assertion.

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[33] One can retract even when the assertion is not false, as when one mistakenly thinks that her assertion was false or in order to clear oneself of any further commitment. However, a more frequent reason for retracting is when the speaker realizes the content was *false*.

2.2.2 The Meaning of "Correct Assertion"

For the purposes of this section, I will assume that reasonableness is not a sufficient condition for correctness, arguing for this claim at a later stage. If this proves to be right, then the assessment of assertion cannot be constrained by the evidence available to the speaker when making the assertion. At times, we would need to consider a larger body of evidence than the one in the light of which the speaker made her statement.

The objectivist's account of "correct assertion" can be formulated along the following lines: an assertion is correct if and only if it does not lead to any negative normative consequence in contexts in which the competent audience is given full information.[34]

On such realist views, assertion is correct relative to the facts which need not be accessible at the context in which the assertion is being made.[35] The view is labeled "objectivist" as it evaluates assertion *objectively*, as it were, rather than against the evidence available when the assertion is made. By the same token, the mere fact that our assertion is excusable cannot render it correct on its own. Yet, to spell out what "correct assertion" means, we would need to decide on which normative consequences there are.

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[34] I insist on such "ideal" contexts, as opposed to those which merely contain "larger" bodies of evidence, having in mind Williamson's consideration of "lost knowledge" (Williamson, 2000) and the possibility that despite having more information we would actually lose knowledge. They are ideal in the additional sense that we need not be aware that we are occupying them (an assertion is "objectively correct" not necessarily because of our capability of recognizing it as such, but from "God's point of view", as it were, "*sub spaecie aeternitatis*" etc.).

[35] In some cases, we would not need such further contexts, however. This applies to Moorean sentences, among other examples.

2.2.3 Factivity Conditions

If the evidence available to the asserter is not always sufficient to judge whether her assertion is correct, but one must also consult contexts in which further evidence is available, the least demanding objectivist account would require truth as the norm of assertion. [36]

(**TA**)   It is correct to assert that *p* only if *p* is true (Weiner, 2005; Whiting, 2013, MacFarlane, 2014[37]).

The claim that truth is a necessary condition for correct assertions has reached orthodoxy among normative theorists. To name but a few, Wright (1992) insists that asserting that *p* amounts to claiming that *p* is true; Greenough (2011) refers to it as to "a common view" and Whiting (2013) declares it as a "merest platitude".

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[36] Some authors disagree that such considerations validate the conclusion that truth is a norm of assertion. Teichmann (1995) discusses a case where despite having a "full warrant" to assert that "Patricia is in pain" (one sees her stubbing her toe and wincing), one could still assert *incorrectly*, provided that Patricia is actually not in pain but is only rehearsing for a play after receiving a local anesthetic. In Teichmann's view, this example illuminates "the nature of certain concepts" (83), revealing that "the criteria for 'X is in pain' are *defeasible*". And since such a concept can be used in non-assertoric speech acts, this example does not confirm that truth is the norm of assertion. However, Teichmann falsely singles out the concept of "pain" as being in any way special: his defeasibility feature is shared by pretty much any other concept, including "snow" in the example discussed above. Accordingly, Teichmann's "rules governing the concept 'pain'" (84) indeed picks out a broader type of rule.

[37] The TA admits of further subtleties and the formulation referred to here is aiming to be sufficiently general. For instance, on MacFarlane's (2014) version, the TA rule is relativized to the context of use, which results in a peculiar approach to the problem of future contingents, different from Weiner's (2005) version where TA is not relativized in the said manner.

There are more demanding objectivist theories, however. The view that appears to be the most prominent is the *knowledge account of assertion:*

(**KA**)   It is correct to assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*.

KA goes back at least to Unger's 1975[38] claim that by asserting that *p* one represents it as being the case that one knows that *p*. Some writers point out to Moore's (1912) *Ethics*[39] as proposing an intimate relation between knowledge and assertion. As Benton (2012) observes, Moore does claim that in asserting "we are always expressing…either that we *think* the thing in question to be so or what we *know* it to be so" (1912/2005: 63). However, one shouldn't read Moore as proposing KA. For, in continuation, Moore goes on to affirm that "it is quite possible" that we are "never expressing *knowledge*" and "never really *know*" that an act is right or wrong when making assertions about it. Austin, on the other hand, came closer to formulating the KA, when he observed that "there are very many things which, having no knowledge of, not being in a position to pronounce about, you just can't state" (Austin 1961/1970: 249). Still, reading KA into this passage should of course be tentative.

The canonical formulation of the view, however, is found in Williamson (1996; 2000). Subsequently, the view was endorsed by a number of authors, including

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[38] Strictly speaking, Unger only offers the "representational" KA (crediting Slote) on which "if someone asserts…that something is so, then it follows that he *represents* himself as *knowing* that it is so" (1975: 253, italics added). Moore's claim that "by asserting *p* positively you *imply*, though you don't assert, that you know that *p*" is sometimes interpreted in the same key (Sosa, 2009:270f) whereby "implies" is to be understood as "represents oneself".

[39] Benton (2012) offers a useful historical survey of KA proponents, where he includes Moore as an "early sympathizer". Somewhat surprisingly, however, Benton adds Grice to the list, even though Grice is recognized as one of the strongest figures in the descriptivist, non-normative camp.

DeRose (2002); Reynolds (2002); Hawthorne, (2004); Engel (2008), Schaffer (2008), Turri (2010a), and Benton (2013),[40] among others.

Alternatively, objectivist theories may take the form of a safety account, a transfer of knowledge account, or a certainty account.

(**SA**) It is correct to assert that *p* only if *p* is safe. (Pritchard, 2014)

(**TK**) It is correct to assert that *p* only if one's audience comes thereby to be in a position to know that *p* (García-Carpintero, 2004)

(**CA**) It is correct to assert that *p* only if one has epistemic certainty that *p* (Stanley, 2008).

2.2.4 A Case for Objectivism: Strict Liability

The objectivist account of "correct" is realist in the following sense: if we ascribe both correctness values (correct and incorrect, that is) to the same assertion, one of these evaluations is necessarily invalid.

To illustrate how an act can be reasonable and yet incorrect, consider the legal concept of "strict liability".[41] It is defined as a standard according to which a person can be legally responsible for an action even if she is not culpable, as long as it can be shown that the plaintiff suffered "strict liabilities", by being injured, having

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[40] In the original version, KA is formulated as an obligation: "one must: assert that P only if one knows that P" (Williamson, 1996: 494). For the reasons laid out at the beginning of this chapter, I will continue employing the "it is correct" format throughout the dissertation and for all normative accounts discussed.

[41] The alternative name is "absolute liability", which fits our purposes better, as it points at the factual character of the legal norm. Thanks to Scott Soames for the discussion.

suffered a loss, damage of property and so on.[42] That is, even though the agent need not be unreasonable, blameworthy, or have had the intention to inflict harm, she will still be "liable" and thus be prosecuted.

The case of strict liability, we may remark, identifies an action which is not unreasonable in any sense as an action which is objectively wrong and punishable. The conditions of reasonableness have no bearing on the conditions of correctness. This type of intuition is what the objectivist about assertion has in mind: appealing solely to the reasonableness of a subject's assertion when deciding whether it is correct, seems to leave out something crucial.

2.3 Tree Problems for the Objectivist

So far, we have gone through some basic features of two normative approaches, reasonabilism and objectivism. I now proceed to discussing three problems facing the objectivist solution, which the reasonabilist seems to handle with more ease: (a) the guidance problem, (b) validity of our assessment, and (c) accounting for the social norm.

a. The Guidance Problem

If norms are prescriptive in character and give us guidance in performing the relevant actions they govern (Glüer & Wikforss, 2009: 32), the guidance problem asks: how can an *individual member* or a *group* within the linguistic community be *successfully* guided by the objectivist norm?

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[42] Some examples include manipulations with wild animals, assault weapons, explosives and so on.

The reasonabilists have an easy way around the problem: our acts of asserting are guided insofar as we know when it is reasonable to perform such an act. And since the correctness condition they postulate just is that of reasonableness, the problem doesn't arise.

As we have already remarked, for most objectivists (*pace* the advocates of TA), reasonableness is a necessary condition for correctness of assertion and so they can account for the guidance, too. It only remains to be seen how reasonableness fits their preferred norms of assertion. When it comes to TA, however, things are somewhat more complex as reasonableness is clearly not a necessary condition for truth. If the norm of truth is to be guiding, it should be possible for an agent to know whether the proposition she wishes to assert is true or not (Glüer & Wikforss, 2009: 44). But as we are sometimes surely ignorant of that, we cannot expect TA to provide us with such guidance always.

To answer these worries, the proponent of TA has two strategies. On one line of reasoning, she may point out that one can be guided by a norm without this guaranteeing success. Say, we can be guided by the truth norm insofar as we would strive to assert the truth and avoid falsehood; to assert only the content we are convinced of; to make reference to our sources of information; to try to be as precise as possible, and so on. On another line of reasoning, she may invoke the concept of secondary correctness: an assertion that *p* will be secondarily correct only if it is reasonable to believe that *p* (is true). Thus, as long as the proponent of TA can legitimately invoke secondary correctness, no problem will arise: her conditions of secondary correctness will mirror the conditions for *reasonableness*.

b. Validity of our assessments

Another positive feature of the reasonabilist view is that we do not need to consult future contexts to make sure that our assessment of assertion's correctness was *justified* or *valid*. The reasonabilist is likely to hold that the competent linguistic community can infer that the assertion is correct based on the fact they assessed it as such.[43] For the reasonabilist, then, proclaiming an assertion to be correct is understood as "marching in step" of the relevant community (Wright, 2007: 485) i.e., those that possess the mastery of the assertoric practice and the relevant body of information. That being said, we do not need any retroactive assessment because the normative fact can be read off from the context of use at the context of use.

Although the objectivists could do the same, there will be exceptions, when due to not knowing whether the content is true at the original context, we would not be able to evaluate an assertion *validly* at that context. That is, the objectivist may judge that an assertion is correct, but unless we appeal to subsequent contexts for confirmation, the contexts that would make larger bodies of evidence available, there would be no way of *knowing* whether our judgment was correct. At least in these cases, we would be engaged in the normative practice without necessarily being able to assess whether this practice is done correctly or not.

Again, objectivist accounts *pace* TA can simply rely on reasonableness: they will be in a position to evaluate an assertion at the context of use, although we still need to see reasonableness fits in their normative account. As for proponents of TA, they can invoke secondary correctness which amount precisely to reasonableness.

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[43] Again, barring the counter-examples of the type just discussed.

c. Accounting for the social norm

The third problem in this set is that the objectivist cannot readily account for some fairly intuitive normative features. Normally, an incorrect act can be reproached and criticized; one can insist that things should be done in another way; that the agent could and should have acted differently; and so on (Graham, 2015). Yet, if following the objectivist we allow for the possibility that everyone could make the same, incorrect assertion these fine points seem to be lost.[44]

If we could depart from the norm for no fault *of our own*, this kind of sanctioning loses most of its initial appeal and sense. Relatedly, a crucial aspect of a social norm is that we typically know what we're supposed to do (Graham, ibid.) which is why the objectivist needs to explain how the assertoric norm could be social in nature. It is not even clear that people would criticize each other knowing they would do exactly the same if in their position. And yet, if such a criticism would take place, it is difficult to see whether it would be ever rational for the addressee to accept such a reproach.

Again, just as with the previous cases, the social aspect of the normativity of assertion can be accommodated at the level of reasonable assertion, or else by invoking secondary correctness, in the case of TA. In sum, the objectivist can introduce a whole new dimension that was deemed exclusively reasonabilist.

Finally, let us summarize the objectivist response to the three questions: (i) an assertion is correct if and only if it does not lead to any negative normative consequence in contexts in which the competent audience is given full information; (ii) the normative consequences of violating the norm of assertion are the speaker's liability to criticism, retraction in the light of recognized falsity and (for some

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[44] Some philosophers think there is such a sense. Hawthorne (2004: 23) writes: "if someone asserts *p*, it is proper to criticize that person if she does not know that *p*". Such a general claim is clearly too strong.

objectivists, as we will see in Chapter 4) disavowal of knowledge; (iii) the norm of assertion is bound to be a factive notion.

In continuation, I discuss the fourth question concerning the concept of secondary correctness.

2.4 Secondary Correctness

While discussing the snow scenario, it was pointed out that Amy's assertion strikes us as being correct in *some* way. We have seen that the reasonabilist explains this intuition by tying up the correctness of assertion with its reasonableness. The objectivist, on the other hand, rejects this explanation, owing us a story in which sense Amy's statement is correct, or alternatively, an explanation why our intuitions are pulling in the wrong direction.

A framework that may serve the objectivist to achieve both tasks is Williamson's (2000: 497–8) distinction between primary and secondary correctness (dubbed by DeRose, 2002: 180).[45] An assertion is said to be *primarily* correct if and only if it actually obeys the norm, and *secondarily* correct if and only if it is reasonable to think that it obeys it. By plugging in the norm of truth, we get that an assertion is primarily correct if and only if its content is true, and secondarily correct if and only if it is reasonable to think its content is true. By means of illustration, TA rules that Amy's assertion is primarily incorrect, secondarily correct.

Before moving on, let me make a brief remark about the phrase "reasonable to think" from the definiens of secondary correctness. On Weiner's proposal, "secondary propriety is determined by whether the agent has reason to believe that the act conforms to the norm" (2005:239). However, this seems too weak. As

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[45] Actually, the terms DeRose uses are primary and secondary *propriety*. For the sake of consistency, I stick with the term *correctness* instead.

argued above, with respect to Pelling's characterization of Lackey's view, there will be circumstances in which it may be reasonable for the speaker to think her act conforms to the rule, although these reasons need not be shared by the rest of her community. A baffling consequence of such characterization is the ensuing dilemma: either one and the same act is both secondarily correct and secondarily incorrect, or else the speaker's reason, despite being defeated by the community, still counts as the relevant one in determining whether the act is secondarily correct. Given that both horns are unacceptable, the standards of what is "reasonable to think" should be determined by taking into account the whole community.[46]

2.4.1 The reasonabilist's arguments against the secondary correctness

In Lackey's view, DeRose's introduction of secondary correctness is his attempt at "saving the phenomena": roughly, since "there is clearly something proper about assertions" which are reasonable and yet fail to satisfy the objectivity norm (2007: 622–623, fn. 26), DeRose wants to capture this by introducing the notion of secondary correctness. This way, the objectivist can insist both that the assertion is correct insofar as it is merely reasonable, as well as incorrect in a further, objectivist sense. I turn to some reasonabilist's arguments against the viability of DeRose's distinction.

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[46] In relation to this, one should however bear in mind the Copernicus example mentioned in 2.1.1.1.

2.4.1.1 The redundancy claim

Consider a definition of primary and secondary correctness where the norm is that of rational belief:

PRIMARY   *a* is ∂_P only if it is rational to believe that C (*a*).

SECONDARY*   *a* is ∂_S only if it is rational to believe that it is rational to believe that C (*a*).

For the sake of brevity, let "*a*" stands for an act of assertion, "∂" for correctness, and the indices $_P$ and $_S$ for correctness in the primary and secondary senses, respectively. We may assume that the reasonabilist is prepared to accept that if it is rational to believe that it is rational to believe that *p*, then it is rational to believe that *p*. If so, secondary correctness is merely an iteration of primary correctness. As such, it serves no role as there is no situation where an assertion would be primarily incorrect but secondarily correct.

In contrast, the objectivist may profit from the notion of secondary correctness by accommodating for those cases when an assertion is primarily incorrect but secondarily correct. Accordingly, the reasonabilist may try to resist introducing secondary correctness, as is the case with Lackey's (2007) and Kvanvig's (2011) arguments to which I now turn.

2.4.1.2 Lackey's argument from the game analogy

Lackey's (2007) argument rests on the game analogy. Imagine a football player, Toby, who has lost his contact lens while playing, making him falsely but reasonably believe that his pass was proper. Lackey asks:

> Would we then say that Toby's pass is secondarily proper, despite the fact that it is primarily improper? No. Given the rules of professional football, there is no sense in which Toby's pass is *proper* (2007: 605).

At most, Lackey concludes, Toby would have an *excuse* for making an improper or incorrect pass, but this still wouldn't amount to the pass itself being correct.

Lackey's argument not only aims to show that the notion of secondary correctness is *redundant* for the reasonabilist (as I tried to point out) but that it is altogether *irrelevant*, that it "cannot be invoked" (ibid, 608), and that "there is no [such] sense" of propriety. Lackey's thought seems to be the following. Once we have established whether a quarterback's pass is correct (i.e., correct in the *primary* sense), there is nothing further left to decide. We may take notice of the fact that Toby sincerely believed he was playing by the book, but this is still of no avail when it comes to assessing his pass.

One of the problems with Lackey's argument is that it doesn't succeed in showing that the notion of secondary correctness is really "non-existent". In Weiner's view (2007: 193), although it is true that Toby's pass is incorrect in the primary sense, it is still not "proper to criticize" Toby for making such a pass, due to his condition. If the phenomenon "in which the actor should not be criticized for the impropriety of his act" is a description of secondary correctness, then it is difficult to see that secondary correctness does not exist.

Weiner's reply is not as helpful as it may initially seem. For, Lackey's argument can be understood in more general terms, as denying any *relevance* to the concept of secondary correctness. As I read her, Lackey can reply that "secondary correctness" is an unnecessary substitute for an already familiar notion of reasonableness. Since on Lackey's view reasonableness *is* a condition for being correct, the point comes down to the one already discussed: once we accept the reasonabilist reading,

"secondary correctness" becomes a redundant notion.[47] Thus, if all there is to the correctness of an assertion is its reasonability, the notion of secondary correctness should be dispensed with. Later, I will deny the premiss that reasonableness equals correctness (in Chapter 3). I now turn to Kvanvig's argument.

2.4.1.3 Kvanvig's objection

Kvanvig (2011) writes:[48]

> What we do not want and cannot tolerate is multiple answers to the questions of what to do and what to think. If a theorist says, "well, if you do A you'll be justified in so doing, and if you refrain, it will be excusable," the appropriate reply is simply to repeat the request: tell me what to do. The conjunctive reply, distinguishing primary and secondary notions, is simply non-responsive.

First, it should be observed that when Kvanvig uses the pair "justified"/"excusable" in this passage, he is referring to the "primarily correct"/"secondarily correct" distinction. What are we to make out of Kvanvig's worry that by adopting both the primary and secondary senses of correctness, one is forced to give multiple answers to the central normative question of what one ought to do? Is it true that this precludes us from having a clear directive by which we can be *guided*?

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[47] As García-Carpintero (2011) argues, Kvanvig's norm of *epistemic* justification does admit of DeRose's distinction. In Kvanvig's case, the agent A can rationally believe that she is epistemically justified, and yet fail to be, instead merely having *alethic* justification. DeRose's distinction requires that the former epistemic state be stronger, which it is, as only epistemic though not alethic justification can prevent a true and ungettiered belief from failing to count as knowledge.

[48] Although this passage is from the draft of Kvanvig's 2011, it did not enter the published version of the paper. I discuss it here as it raises a worry I find important to address.

I do not find this objection particularly cogent. As I will be defending the view close to the knowledge account, I will try to formulate how a KA theorist can reply to Kvanvig's "tell me what to do" question. Roughly, the answer is that, before asserting that *p*, one ought to ask oneself "do I know that *p*?". If the answer to the questions is affirmative, it is reasonable for the speaker to assert that *p*.[49]

One may think that this answers only part of the question; for, the assertion can still turn out to be incorrect on KA, if *p* is false or the agent "gettiered". Accordingly, how should we act, knowing such consequences are possible? The answer is the same: *before* asserting, one only has to answer the guiding question whether one knows that *p*. As long as we do not know that the proposition is false or that we are "gettiered", we can sincerely answer the question "Do I know that *p*?" affirmatively and reasonably assert. If it turns out that our answer was wrong, the "tell me what to do" question can now be repeated at the later context. If *p* is false, the answer to the question is: retract your assertion; if the agent is "gettiered", disavow your knowledge. (The latter point is discussed in chapter 4). But once again, these actions are not taken into consideration when we assert in the original context.

2.5 Normativity of assertion and two notions of "should"

At the beginning of the chapter, I mentioned that instead of opting for the rule schema "it is correct to assert that *p* only if *C* obtains", one could present normative accounts of assertion as instances of the rule "one should assert that *p* only if *C* obtains", thus avoiding the use of evaluative adjectives altogether.

[49] Of course, this kind of procedure won't yield expected results for an irrational speaker, but then again, the same will hold for whichever "guiding question" Kvanvig's theory would posit.

Using this latter schema, we can distinguish two normative approaches to assertion as follows: while the reasonabilist fleshes out the normative "should" in the *subjective* sense,[50] the objectivist conceives it in its *objective* meaning. In other words, the reasonabilist would claim that the correctness of an assertion is sensitive to the agent's epistemic circumstances: if relative to the evidence I am given it is perfectly reasonable for me to assert that *p* then there is a sense in which I *should* assert it. This is the subjective reading. On the other hand, acts can be objectively wrong, regardless of the information available to the agent. Thus, the mere fact that I subjectively ought to assert *p* does not entail that I ought to assert *p* objectively.

Just as the objectivist can capture two senses of correctness (i.e., primary and secondary), so she can accommodate for both subjective and objective senses of "should". The same type of priority we posited with respect to correctness (primary over secondary), applies now, as the objective sense of ought is prior to the subjective one. To be sure, this doesn't show that the subjective sense is less significant for our linguistic practice (cf. Dorsey, 2012: 4), but it does show that to capture the notion of "should" we need to consider, in the order of priority, the objective and the subjective "ought".

2.6 Final remarks

In continuation I offer an appendix, listing 20 normative accounts of assertion defended in the literature. Yet, regardless of what such a discouraging number may

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[50] These remarks are not meant to defend the plausibility of "subjective ought", however. In fact, as Broome (1999) remarks, the term "subjective ought" seems to be wrongly relativized to a subject as opposed to the *fact*, such as the state of belief. Broome extends his critique to those cases in which, due to having inconsistent beliefs and intentions, it might happen that we subjectively ought to both F and non-F, which appears to be a contradiction. To circumvent these difficulties, Broome suggests using the concept of "normative requirement".

suggest, the normative theorists seem to principally divide into two camps, those of reasonabilists and objectivists.

One point in favor of objectivism over reasonabilism is that it is better fit to explain the *representational* nature of assertion. For, if, with Lackey, we identify reasonable assertion with correct assertion, we would put assertion on a par with all other acts. The game analogy heuristics has surely influenced this way of thinking. Unfortunately, such normative account gives primacy to the reasonability of the speaker over the representational aspect of the speech act. The objectivist view, on the other hand, separates assertion from some acts, such as games, insofar as reasonableness is no longer sufficient, but now requires to call in as much information as possible in order to bring a valid assessment.

2.7 Appendix: the list of normative accounts of assertion

A. The knowledge account of assertion:

(1) Unger's KA**51**: By asserting that *p* one represents it as being the case that one knows that *p*.

(2) *Williamson's* KA: One must: assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*.

(3) *DeRose's* R-KA ("*Relativized Knowledge Account of Assertion*"): 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* (DeRose 2009: 99).

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[51] Although DeRose (2009:93) claims that (1) and (2) are two sides of the same coin, it is often claimed that Unger's view is a "version" of KA. A reader who is unwilling to allow for a great deal of normative accounts listed here, can assume that I am in the business of outlining *versions* of such normative accounts.

(4) Schaffer's KQ: *S* ought: assert that *p* in context *c* only if *S* knows the answer (*p*) to the question under discussion in *c*. (Schaffer 2008: 10)

(5) Turri's EKA: One may assert that *p* only if one's assertion expresses one's knowledge that *p*. (Turri 2010b: 5)

(6) Fricker's BKA: One should not assert that *p* unless one's epistemic position is such that one may properly believe oneself to know that *p*. And one who asserts that *p* thereby represents herself as knowing that *p*. (Fricker 2006, 594)

B. Other factive accounts:

(7) *The truth account*: It is correct to assert that *p* if only if *p* is true. (Weiner 2007: 190)

(8) *Reflective truth account*: It is correct to assert that *p* at C only if *p* is true at C. (MacFarlane 2014)

(9) *Safety account*: It is correct to assert that *p* only if one asserts *p* safely. (Pelling 2013b, Pritchard 2014)

(10) *Transfer of knowledge account*: It is correct to assert that *p* only if one's audience comes thereby to be in a position to know that *p* (García-Carpintero, 2004)

(11) *Certainty account*: It is correct to assert that *p* only if one has epistemic certainty that *p* (Stanley, 2008).

C. Non-factive accounts:

(12) *The belief rule*. It is correct to assert *p* only if you believe *p*. (Bach 2008: 77).

(13) Lackey's *reasonableness norm*. It is correct to assert *p* only if (i) it is reasonable for one to believe that *p* and (ii) if one asserted that *p*, one would assert that *p* at least in part because it is reasonable for one to believe that *p*. (Lackey 2007: 608)

(14) Kvanvig's *justification norm*: It is correct to assert that *p* only if you a proper justification for *p*. (Kvanvig 2009: 145)

(15) Madison's *justified to believe norm*: It is correct to assert that *p* only if one is justified in believing one knows. (Madison 2010).

(16) Pelling's *knowledge provision account* – It is correct to assert that *p* only if it is fit to give a hearer knowledge that *p*. (Pelling 2013a)

(17) *The Evidence Responsiveness Rule* – It is correct to assert that *p* only if your attitude towards *p* is properly responsive to the evidence you have that bears on *p*. (Maitra and Weatherson 2010)

(18) *The Action Rule* – It is correct to assert that *p* only if acting as if *p* is true is the thing for you to do (Maitra and Weatherson 2010)[52]

D. Pluralist accounts:

(19) The correctness of asserting that *p* depends only on one's circumstances and interests (Stone, 2007; Levin, 2008).

(20) The correctness of asserting that *p* depends only on a perspective relative to which the norm is relevant (Greenough, 2011).

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[52] Note, however, that Maitra and Weatherson do not in the end decide between (17) and (18).

3

On Constitutive Rules and Commitment

In the previous chapter, I have tried to specify what it means to say that an assertion is *correct*. In so doing, I argued there are two principled ways to understand the relevant notion of correctness, thus distinguishing two approaches to the normativity of assertion—reasonableness and objectivity views.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the notion of a *constitutive rule*, critically appraising two influential theories: the orthodox approach and Williamson's account, pointing out some problems with these frameworks. In the second part of the chapter, I aim to motivate an approach which conceives of assertoric practice in terms of *commitment*. For this reason, I examine Searle's prominent analysis of this notion, and raise objections to it trying to arrive at a more satisfying account.

3.1 Constitutive rules

In order to keep things simple, I have avoided mentioning constitutive rules in the previous chapter. Instead, I talked more loosely about the *rule schemas*, such as:

SHOULD: One should assert that *p* only if C obtains.

CORRECT: It is correct to assert that p only if C obtains.

In effect, these are the schemas for constitutive rules where the C term stands for the correctness condition, such as "*p* is true" or "one knows that *p*",[53] the obligation to comply with which is constitutive of the act it governs. While the former schema introduces a modal auxiliary emphasizing the prescriptive nature of the rule, the latter schema mentions the notion of "correctness" and highlights the conditions of the evaluation of the acts.

3.1.1 The performance condition

Despite many differences between the two accounts of correctness, both reasonabilists and objectivists agree that the constitutive rule of assertion conforms to the general "performance condition":[54]

PC: By violating the constitutive rule R, one does not thereby cease to perform the act R constitutes.

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[53] It is misleading (although not uncommon) to talk of "C" as being a *norm*. For, a failure to satisfy C does not prevent one from asserting, but only from asserting correctly. When the "C" term is understood as a property of a proposition (Williamson, 2000:241), an account positing one such condition is labeled "simple account of assertion". Note, however, that such an account may still have two (or more) necessary conditions, as Lackey adds that when one asserts *p* correctly one does so at least in part because the relevant condition C obtains. In what follows, I will assume that a simple account of assertion is on the right track.

[54] I have in mind only the views developed in the wake of Williamson's 1996 paper. Some theorists which would be classified as objectivists on this taxonomy, such as Searle (1979), dispense with the PC condition on constitutive rules.

There are three separate ways a theory of constitutive rules may relate to the performance condition (PC)—i.e., that *all*, *some* or *no* constitutive rule conforms to PC, each of which found its proponents in philosophical circles. Thus, on the traditional approach favored by Rawls (1955), Anscombe (1958) and Searle (1969, 2010), often called the *orthodox view*,[55] there is *no* constitutive rule conforming to PC. Applying this to the case of assertion, by violating its constitutive rule one fails to perform the speech act. In contrast, Pollock's (1982) account, emerging as a critique of the orthodox approach, maintains that some types of an act A may be governed both by a constitutive rule which conforms to PC and by a constitutive rule which doesn't. Lastly, Williamson (1996; 2000) proposed the hypothesis on which constitutive rules of *all* practices (and not just that of assertion) conform to PC. I start off with Williamson's view and then go on to discuss the orthodox account.

3.1.2 Williamson's account of constitutive rules

The three main tenets of Williamson's general account of constitutive rules[56] can be summarized as follows.

Essentiality. Constitutive rules are *essential* to the act they constitute, governing each and every performance of an act *necessarily*. As such, constitutive rules are not conventions,[57] as they are neither contingent nor replaceable (490).

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[55] Strictly speaking, the view is baptized as the "orthodox theory about institutions" (Pollock, 1982: 210) where "institution" refers to a system of rules defining a certain practice, such as a language. Although these rules encompass both constitutive and regulative ones, I will be interested only in its analysis of the *constitutive* rules.

[56] Although the majority of normative accounts are grounded in Williamson's adherence to PC, no one seems to defend a *further* step and extend the analysis to constitutive rules in general (i.e., outside of the assertoric practice).

[57] See Bach & Harnish (1979:121-2) for contrast between rules and conventions.

Sui generis. The normativity of constitutive rules is *sui generis* in nature. As aptly illustrated by Rawls on the case of promising, the *sui generis* normativity is distinct from *all-things-considered*[58] normativity of moral or teleological rules. We can imagine a case where one's breaking of a promise may be morally admirable, and this still wouldn't change the fact that the promisor did *something wrong*—namely, have violated the *sui generis* norm for promises. Thus, although moral or teleological considerations apply to an act (say, one can be criticized for violating such a norm, or praised for following it), they should be carefully distinguished from the intended *sui generis* norms constitutively governing the act.

Performance Condition. Finally, Williamson maintains that *all* constitutive rules satisfy the PC condition: by violating the constitutive rule of whichever act, one does not thereby cease to perform the act this rule constitutes. As the first two features are also shared by the orthodox account, I turn to discussing this third, distinguishing feature of Williamson's approach.

On Williamson's hypothesis about the relation between PC and constitutive rules, the latter "do not lay down necessary conditions for performing the constituted act" (1996:491). The generality with which Williamson takes PC to apply to all constitutive rules is meant as an argument from analogy, proceeding from observations about games and languages:

 [W]hen one breaks a rule of a game, one does not thereby cease to be playing that game. When one breaks a rule of a language, one does not thereby cease to be speaking that language (Williamson, 1996: 491).

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[58] I find this label somewhat misleading—we can conceive of a scenario where two agents violate the same *sui generis* rule for two different reasons: one to obey a moral norm, another to follow an aesthetic norm. While we would say that each of them is following one *all-things-considered* norm, each of them is by the same token violating one "all-things-considered" rule.

The generality of this claim might be put to test. One may urge that a soccer player (who happens not to be a goalkeeper) would stop playing soccer if she intentionally threw a ball in the goal using her hands. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to consider her as playing handball instead. But if this were true, we wouldn't expect that her act of throwing the ball get penalized by the rules of soccer, while it certainly would be. In addition, if she really played handball, her act should have counted as scoring, although in reality it does not. Such considerations strongly suggest in favor of Williamson's general claim.

The observation that follows from Williamson's adherence to PC is that constitutive rules are "should" or "must" statements,[59] so as to allow to be broken. Further, in order to comply with PC, these imperative statements would need to allow an act (Y) to be performed, without it thereby fulfilling the set of conditions (X) considered to be mandatory by rules governing that act. The ensuing rule, thus, takes the following form:

(1)   One must: Y only if X.

Rules which are instances of (1) satisfy PC and can be called, following Pollock's taxonomy, *prescriptive rules*. As far as assertion goes, Williamson adds a further requirement, often called the "simple account of assertion":

(2)   There is only one constitutive rule of assertion.

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[59] While both "should" and "must" can play the role in the formulation of the constitutive rule, Williamson considers only the latter, as it "expresses the kind of obligation characteristic of constitutive rules" (1996: 492). In contrast to obligation or requirement expressed by "must", Gibbons (2013) claims that "should" expresses the idea of a reason: "If you're required not to bury people unless they're dead, then you have some reason not to bury them unless you have some evidence that they're dead. This certainly gives the impression that this reason can be outweighed… But the claim that you have a reason to wait for evidence is simply weaker than the claim that you're required to wait" (ibid, 81).

Once we have (1), (2) and "Essentiality" (i.e., the claim that constitutive rules govern each and every performance of an act necessarily), we can conclude that:

(3)   Necessarily, assertion is a speech act whose unique rule is "One must: Y only if X".

Let us add the claim that if two types of acts have a single constitutive rule, and they have it in common, they are identical. If assertion is distinct from other speech acts, we can see that the "Uniqueness" or "Individuation" feature follows:

(4)   Necessarily, assertion is the unique speech act type whose unique rule is: "One must: Y only if X".[60]

As mentioned, in order to infer (3) and (4) from (1), it is crucial to assume that there is a single constitutive rule governing assertion, i.e. (2). This is why Williamson offers a somewhat stronger claim that the envisaged account of assertion takes the X rule to be individuating (492), which suggests that constitutive rules of other acts need not be individuating. To see this, observe that the rule "Don't look at your opponent's cards" is constitutive of both poker and bridge, although it is clearly not individuating of either of them.[61]

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[60] Among further features of the assertoric rule is that it is a *prima facie* rule, rather than an *all–things–considered* one. For instance, if one lacks knowledge of *p* when asserting its content, one's assertion is only *prima facie* incorrect: for, if the speaker's statement can be justified by a practical reason which overrides the linguistic rule due to what is at stake in the context, her assertion can still be deemed correct *all–things–considered*.

[61] In response, it may be observed that the *conjunction* of all the rules are constitutive of an act is individuating of it.

The *individuation* feature (4) carries a lot of weight in a normative theory of assertion,[62] as a failure to meet this requirement is detrimental to an account. This is how Williamson attacks a rival truth norm: as he points out, rightly in my view, conjectures are governed by the truth norm;[63] assuming the simple account of assertion, the truth norm cannot be the norm we are after, as it fails to distinguish assertion from conjectures and thus to individuate it. Unlike the truth rule, Williamson's argues that his knowledge rule (KA) fares better on this score:

(5)   One must: assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*.

The idea behind KA is that the only illocutionary act individuated by knowledge is assertion.[64] Finally, by employing the "being subject to the rule" locution, KA can tell us what the assertion *is*:

(6)   One performs an assertion with content *p* iff one is thereby being subject to the rule: "one must assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*".

Although (6) can be deduced from Williamson's account, we shouldn't maintain that it is a constitutive rule for two reasons: (i) we have already stated that (5) is a constitutive rule and (2) prohibits there being two such rules; and (ii) (6) doesn't comply with Williamson's PC and might be better viewed as a specification of what assertion is.

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[62] It will be of special importance for us in Chapter 4, section 6, where it will be argued that KA falls short of individuating assertion.

[63] This hypothesis neatly explains why we are ready to confess we were wrong once the conjecture proves to be false. In addition, *weaker* proposals don't fare that well – one might think that conjectures can be correct just as long they are sincerely believed, but what remains to be explained is the impression that only one conjecture about the given topic can be *right*.

[64] I postpone examining an argument against this claim until section 4.6.

3.1.3 The orthodox view

On the orthodox approach, *all* constitutive rules embed the "counts-as" locution, taking the form "X counts as Y in I".[65] In the jargon of orthodox theorists, X stands for a *brute* fact, such as moving the castle-looking figure vertically or horizontally, one or more fields on the board. This move counts as the institutional, Y term, namely playing with the rooks, while the "I" term[66] refers to the "context of the institution",[67] i.e., chess.

In contrast to Williamson's conception, the orthodox account maintains that PC does not apply to any constitutive rule. The breach of a constitutive rule will never yield an *incorrect* act: instead, the act will not be made to begin with. To motivate the orthodox approach to constitutive rules, we may think of the utterance "I hereby baptize this ship Queen Elizabeth". A number of authors would agree that such an act would either *count as* a baptism or not, i.e., the act will be either performed or will *misfire*, to use Austin's taxonomy. Accordingly, if it so happens that the person pretending to perform the christening is not authorized to do so, or

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[65] This entails that no constitutive rule would have the prescriptive form although Searle, somewhat intriguingly, (1969:34–5) says that "within systems of constitutive rules" some will have the "if Y do X" form. Unfortunately, Searle never gives any example of such a constitutive rule. A failure to address this point in any detail, as well as its incompatibility with the rest of *Speech Acts* has lead Bach & Harnish (1979: 395f) to describe the passage as mysterious and Lycan (2002: 185f) to claim that Searle's usage of the terminology is inconsistent. The mystery is resolved in Searle's (1999: 123f) where it is claimed that "constitutive rules always have the same logical form", that of "X counts as Y".

[66] I use "I" (as short for "institution") instead of the Searle's original "C" to avoid confusion, as I have previously referred to "conditions" by using "C".

[67] We have defined institution as a system of rules defining a practice, which comprises both regulative and constitutive rules. The addition of the "I" term is important among other reasons because X can count as Y in the context of a given institution, but not necessarily in another (e.g., different acts will count as goals in soccer and handball).

else the ship has already been baptized, it is not as if baptism will be performed incorrectly and would thus be an *abuse*—instead, no baptism will take place.

Compared to Williamson's "one must: Y only if X", a failure to satisfy X simply falls short of performing Y.

Following Pollock's taxonomy, let us call the rules of the form "X counts as Y in I" *definitive* and as such contrast them with the prescriptive "One must: Y only if X" type of rule.

Both Williamson's account and the orthodox view postulate only one kind of constitutive rule, characterizing it by an appeal to PC: while the former takes PC to apply to all constitutive rules, the latter urges it applies to none. How can we overcome this tension between the two views?

Could it be that one of the rules, be it Williamson's "One must: Y only if X" or the orthodox "X counts as Y in I" are not strictly speaking rules? This option has been suggested for the latter proposal, with the explanation that propositions of the form "X counts as Y in I" are akin to *definitions*.[68] On its own, however, this does not yet prove there is any antagonism between a proposition being both akin to a definition and being a rule. As Pollock writes:

> What would it mean, for example, to talk about breaking the rule that carrying the football across the goal line counts as making a touchdown (in a certain context)? That is just a *definition* of what it is to make a touchdown. Such rules do not prescribe courses of action. Rather they *define* various roles…of the institution. (Pollock, 1982: 213; italics in the original).

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[68] Searle (1969: 34), Lewis (1979: 343);

Accordingly, Pollock recognizes this type of proposition as *definitive rules*. It might be observed that the "counts-as"[69] locution sounds quite natural:[70] e.g., in common parlance, we say that the action of lifting one's finger in an auction house *counts as* making a bid (Smith, 2003: 7). In this particular case, the X term ("lifting one's finger") would "count as" the Y term ("making a bid") because of some previous *declaration* that tied the two together. The last bit is not crucial, however: it is not that my uttering "it is raining" counts as the assertion of the content of that sentence because of some previous declaration.

The lingering intuition that definitive rules might not be rules after all can be expressed by saying that something is a rule only if it can be *broken* (and not only *followed*).[71] In line with this, the proposition expressing a rule would also embed some modal auxiliary, such as "ought", and this feature is missing in the case of definitive rules. Searle himself notes that "non-imperative constitutive rules are likely to strike us as extremely curious and hardly even as rules at all" (1969:34).

This type of intuition is at odds with definitive rules altogether. Following Searle, I will stay clear from it, recognizing that "X counts as Y in C" propositions can be both analytic truths about the given Y term as well as rules. My worry with Searle's position, instead, will be that definitive rules cannot be the only type of constitutive rules. I now turn to this objection.

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[69] As an alternative, some orthodox theorists use the "is" of identity: "A set of events is the ordering and supplying of potatoes, and something is a bill, only in the context of our institutions" (Anscombe, 1958: 70).

[70] Searle's (2010) alternatives are "X becomes Y" and "X was turned into Y". I take these to sound awkward when applied to assertion, although they sound pretty natural within institutions that require declaration; e.g., it is fine to say that the oldest son was turned into a king (1999:98) according to a given constitutive rule, existing in many monarchies throughout European history.

[71] Thanks to Sven Rosenkranz for a discussion on this point.

3.1.1 Problems for the orthodox view

Possibly following the lead of Pollock (1982), Williamson emphasized that the possibility of cheating underscores the existence of constitutive rules. If one can cheat within the institution I, it should follow that there is some constitutive rule of I one would thereby break while still performing the act in question.[72]

To be sure, cheating cannot be thought of as a mere moral offence, given that the norm of assertion is *sui generis*. As Williamson stresses, "cheating at a game… is made possible only by the nonmoral rules that constitute the game" (1996: 492).[73]

The orthodox account cannot accommodate cheating,[74] and this can be seen as one of its biggest flaws. Apart from the constitutive rules, the orthodox theorist recognizes only regulative rules; in Searle's words, these rules "regulate antecedently or independently existing forms of behavior", such as: "Officers must wear ties at the dinner". In contrast to constitutive rules, the lack of a regulative rule does not prevent us from making an accurate description such as "an officer wore a tie at the dinner". Yet, we could not describe one's behavior as "playing with the rooks" in the absence of the rules of chess. For our purposes, regulative rules are important insofar as they seem to be the only candidates for the sort of rules we break while cheating–

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[72] Williamson locates cheating in both assertion and games. See Goldberg's (2015: 26–7) attempt to clarify what action amounts to cheating in assertoric practice.

[73] Against the "*sui generis*" feature of assertion described above, assertion could be normative in the *derived* sense, if its norm was moral in nature. It is thus important for Williamson to underline that while cheating in chess is morally blameworthy, this does not entail that chess itself is constituted by moral norms. The mere existence of certain normative consequences, as I will argue, shows that there are defects of assertion which cannot be traced back to the infringement of any moral rules (one such case is that of retracting false assertions, as discussed in Chapter 2.) In these cases, no relevant moral norm seems to be broken. Indeed, it is unlikely that there is any moral norm applying to assertoric practice apart from the sincerity rule. Scanlon's (1998) *What We Owe to Each Other* (chapter 7) analyzes the case of promise and gives an alternative answer.

[74] Pollock 1982 (chapter 10) develops this criticism, by crediting Ziff and Rosenberg and extending their objections.

–after all, constitutive rules cannot be ever broken. I now move on to test the possibility that when cheating, we are thereby breaking some regulative rule.

a. Two types of regulative rules

Before doing so, I would like to sort out an important issue concerning regulative rules. Supposedly, the rule such as "one should not disturb the opponent while the opponent is playing" is regulative of chess. Yet, friends of the orthodox account might object to this reading—if the mentioned rule were indeed regulative of chess, it wouldn't *apply* to so many other games in addition, but would be *introduced* precisely for the game of chess. Thus, instead of being regulative of chess, the rule governs a higher-level institution of fair-play.[75] In continuation, I try to spell out the inference that I find contentious:

(1)   The rule R is regulative of x.

(2)   For all rules R, R can be regulative of a type of act x, only if there is no type of act y distinct from x, such that R applies to y.

(3)   R is a rule of a higher-order practice P.

(4)   P applies to a set of lower-order practices G.

(5)   G has as its instances x and y.

(6)   R applies to x and y. (from 3, 4, and 5)

(7)   Therefore, R is not regulative of x. (from 2, 6)

As to the third premiss, we may think of P as being *constituted* by the rule R. For instance, the practice of fair-play, P, seems to be constituted by a set of rules, one of which is the rule R, not to disturb your opponent while making a move. As to the

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[75] Thanks to Neri Marsili who pressed me on this point.

fourth premiss, since the fair play P applies to all board games G, this makes P a higher-order practice, and G the lower-order one.

What is contentious about the argument (1)–(7) is the second premiss and its attempt to establish that a (constitutive) rule of a higher-order practice cannot be regulative of a lower-order practice due to its *applying* to more than one type of act. I find the second premiss to be right only if we change "regulative" for "constitutive". In fact, we might be in need of yet stronger substitution, as the constitutive rule also has to be *individuating* for the argument to go through.[76] Without this substitution, the argument is not sound—as long as a (regulative) rule *applies* to a given practice, it thereby *regulates* this practice.[77] Insisting that it is not regulative *of that* practice, would push us towards introducing a third category of the chess rules: aside from its constitutive and regulative rules, we would have rules that merely "apply" to chess. In conclusion, the proposal lacks the simplicity found in the orthodox approach and may strike us as too revisionary. Further, no mention of such a maneuver was made either in Searle's work or that of other proponents of the view. Consequently, one may doubt how "orthodox" this approach really is.

b. Change of regulative rules and identity of acts

The hypothesis at work is that when cheating we are breaking the *regulative* rules. A salient feature of these rules is that by changing or deleting them, we would not thereby change the game itself, at least not profoundly so. Having argued that the rule "one should not disturb the opponent while the opponent is playing" is regulative of chess, we can note that by changing this rule, or even deleting it, we

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[76] For, as we have seen above, a rule can be constitutive of A without being individuating of it (at least if it is not the conjunction of all constitutive rules).

[77] Williamson seems to accept this claim when he takes regulative rules to be rules of a "higher-order" practice. (1996: 489)

surely wouldn't be changing the game. For, if there were two pairs of chess players, where only one pair followed this rule, we would not be inclined to say that they are playing different games. Instead, they would be merely behaving differently while playing the same game. In contrast, this does not hold for the constitutive rules. On the orthodox account, by changing constitutive rules we would thereby "completely alter the nature of the institution" (Pollock, 1982: 212).

To test our hypothesis, let us consider the rule of Go that allows for cheating, such as: "place only one stone at the time". If our hypothesis is correct, this rule would be regulative and, in accordance with what is said above, its change would minimally affect the nature of the game. But this is false. By changing the mentioned rule (and allowing two stones to be moved at the time, say) we could create a different game. One could describe the new game, Go*, as being similar to Go except for the fact that you are now allowed to place two stones at a time. The same conclusion would follow, even more obviously so, if we changed the rule in a more flagrant way (now allowing three stones to be moved) or in games with even smaller set of rules. In conclusion, the rule "place only one stone at the time" seems essential to the game, which is why it cannot be regulative, but constitutive.[78] This goes along Williamson's way, although I will shortly try to pinpoint problems for his approach, too.

c. Breaking regulative rules

I want to mention another problem for the hypothesis that regulative rules cannot allow for cheating. Since KA can be infringed by cheating, the orthodox theorist would treat KA as a regulative rule of assertion, not as a constitutive one. Yet, there

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[78] On its own, this doesn't show that there could be no constitutive rules of Go on this account: the set of propositions describing the correct position of a stone or their capturing would count as constitutive.

are strong reasons to think that KA is significantly different from regulative rules of assertion.

To show this, imagine someone asserting a Moorean "*p* but I don't know that *p*". It is fair to say that such an assertion could not be accepted in the conversational score, used in further conversation, acted upon, and so on. Now, the same doesn't seem to follow with respect to other rules of assertion, such as those of relevance or politeness. Surely, a rude or irrelevant assertion may incur criticism for violating the rule of etiquette or relevance,[79] but there is nothing inherently wrong in asserting "*p* is uninformative, but *p*" or "*p* but I am shouting that *p*". For, although the speaker's behavior would be awkward and perhaps misleading (as it may lead others to believe that after all there is a *reason* why she is asserting this) there would be nothing wrong with the assertion itself. We are perfectly epistemically positioned when knowingly asserting non-informative propositions.

How are we to capture the difference between the rule of knowledge and the rule of informativeness and etiquette, when applied to assertion? Claiming that all of them should be deemed regulative seems problematic for the reasons we mentioned——the set of regulative rule becomes too heterogeneous, as these rules differ in important ways with regard to the success of the act they are governing.

3.1.5 Problems for Williamson's theory: success Y-terms

As noticed above, Williamson's conception of constitutive rules is general in character and applies to practices other than that of assertion. In fact, since

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[79] To my knowledge, normative accounts of assertion have not yet offered any (normative) rule of relevance. A descriptivist account of relevance is provided by Roberts (2004: 216): "A move *m* is RELEVANT to the question under discussion *q* iff *m* either introduces a partial answer to *q* (*m* is an assertion) or is part of a strategy to answer *q* (*m* is a question subordinate to *q* or an imperative whose realization would plausibly help to answer *q*).

Williamson's heuristics relies on the game analogy, introduced in the previous chapter, the most natural place to test Williamson's view would be games and their rules.

Recall the PC condition: "by violating the constitutive rule R, one does not thereby cease to perform an act of the type that R is constitutive of". We have presented Williamson as holding that all constitutive rules take the form of "One must: Y only if X".

Many, even if not all games, contain a Y term which we can call a success term, such as checkmate or goal. While some of them mark the winning condition, such as "checkmate" other terms such as "goal" do not. Be that as it may, we can raise two initial objections to Williamson's general account of rules. First, the rules governing success terms are not susceptible to PC. Secondly, such rules cannot take the form: "One must: Y only if X".

The former objection contends that one cannot violate the constitutive rule of checkmate and yet succeed in checking the opponent's king. Even if the opponent fails to see that the move did not amount to a checkmate, it is still absurd to say there was one.[80] In reply, it may be argued that this objection rests on a misinterpretation of PC. For, PC is ambiguous between two readings, PC_1 and PC_2:

PC: By violating the constitutive rule R, one does not thereby cease to perform the act R constitutes.

PC_1:   By violating the constitutive rule R, one does not thereby cease to perform the *specific move* R constitutes.

PC_2:   By violating the constitutive rule R, one does not thereby cease to perform the *general practice* R constitutes, although one does cease to perform the *specific move* R constitutes.

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[80] This does not entail that one cannot *cheat* with respect to the rules governing the success terms. E.g., one can still cheat and check her opponent, by putting a new figure on the table, which was not among those the two players played with.

If we interpret PC as having the meaning of PC_2, then the problem disappears: although failing to observe the rule of checkmate prevents one from checking the opponent, one doesn't thereby stop playing chess.

However, this reading is unmotivated. To show this, recall that for Williamson PC must apply to assertion. Yet, PC_2 is clearly false, as it predicts that by violating the knowledge rule one ceases to assert.

A general idea behind the second objection is that we cannot formulate the constitutive rule of checkmate (or other success terms) by employing the form of a prescriptive rule.

Let us assume that the checkmate rule could take the form of "One must: Y only if X". As we have seen, the "must" particle presupposes that it is possible to perform Y without satisfying X. But this clearly would not work in the case of checkmate: a failure to satisfy X precludes Y from taking place.

Neither can we help ourselves to "One must: make a move such that it does not either place or leave the king in checkmate", where "the king in checkmate" phrase would be further specified by a set of X terms. For, the "must" clause would fall short of conveying the obligation or requirement in any strict sense—a failure to conform to this rule would not lead to a sanction of any kind, but would instead mark the end of the game.

Insisting that the checkmate is a regulative rule would be a non-starter for the reasons already outlined above: changing or deleting the rule of checkmate would result in changing the game itself. (In fact, changing the winning conditions of a game appears to be a more flagrant change than any other).

To remedy the problem, in addition to the prescriptive "One must: Y only if X", I suggest, we should introduce the orthodox "counts as" type of rule. On the one hand, this would help accommodate for the rule of checkmate and other success Y-terms. Namely, it would enable us to state: "attacking the opponent's king in such a way that no move will leave it unattacked *counts as* checkmate". On the other hand,

the counts-as type of propositions would be useful when it comes to assertion, too, as we would be in a position to *define* the speech act.

3.1.6 The "counts-as" rules and assertion

As regards the latter point, I would like to pinpoint an important difference between the game of chess and assertoric practice. Imagine that we specify the positions occupied by, say, the bishop or offer a description of the figure's shape. The ensuing characterization, coupled with the relevant prescriptive rule, does seem to tell us all there is to know about playing with the bishop in chess. Would the same kind of information suffice in the case of assertion?

Arguably, one may find the prescriptive rule for assertion *insufficient*; for, unlike with the game of chess, where all the moves are confined to the game, asserting is a more public phenomenon, involving interpersonal relations and social commitments: others make decisions on our statements, act on them, reproach or praise them, require the asserters to provide epistemic grounds, and so on. One may think, accordingly, that since asserting is a much more complex endeavor than the game of chess, it should be specified further than by mere prescriptive rule.

One candidate for achieving such a task might be the individuation rule of KA: "Necessarily, assertion is the unique speech act type whose unique rule is: "One must: Y only if X". Yet, while we may agree that such a rule is extensionally correct, one may wonder whether it reveals all there is to the normativity of asserting. For instance, does it predict that I can be challenged when offering an assertion? Does it predict that other agents can act on what I sincerely state? This would depend on how we understand the phrase "being subject to". In any case, I don't wish to deny such a possibility. My point is, rather, that even if we agree that such points could be

distilled, we can still provide an alternative rule that would more obviously capture both the normative dimension of *acting* as well as the *social* status asserting has.

This project can be viewed as an upgrading of KA which would provide a more clear "analysis of what it is to participate in the institution" (Pollock, 1982: 218). I now turn to this task, helping myself to the notion of *commitment* and the "counts-as" type of rule. True enough, the notion of commitment itself stands in need of further clarification, and it will be provided later.

3.2 The commitment

In the remainder of the chapter, I will leave aside the prescriptive KA rule, assuming it is correct.[81] As for now, I would like to focus on the *definitive*, "counts-as" rule, and examine a particular formulation of this rule in terms of *commitment*.

A number of influential theories of assertion have characterized the assertoric illocutionary force in terms of commitment: such accounts are developed in the writings of Peirce (1934),[82] Searle (1969; 1976; 1979), Brandom (1983, 1994), Searle and Vanderveken (1985), Wright (1992), and MacFarlane[83] (2003, 2005), among others. My starting point will be Searle's account of assertion, in particular his analysis of commitment.

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[81] The set of objections to it will be addressed in Chapter 4.

[82] This appears to be the first articulation of the account (see: Goldberg, 2015:11) although Peirce uses the notion of responsibility more frequently than that of commitment.

[83] MacFarlane's 2014 marks a departure from the commitment view, endorsing the constitutive rule approach instead, on which the norm of truth governs assertions.

3.2.1 Searle's account of commitment

Following the work of Austin, Searle offers a taxonomy of speech acts. Of five classes, the same number Austin attributes, Searle observed that only assertives express propositions that can be true or false and have proposed to define them as undertakings of commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed.[84]

The proposal seems intuitively appealing: we clearly commit ourselves to the truth when offering conjectures or assertions, say, because we are prepared to admit we were *wrong* if they turn out false. One may still worry whether the commitment to the truth offers a *sufficient* condition for individuating before different assertives. I now turn to examining Searle's way of distinguishing among different assertives, i.e., between different sorts of commitment to the truth.

3.2.1.1 "Degrees of commitment"

In Searle's view, making distinct assertives is likely to incur different *degrees* of commitment to the truth. For instance, by conjecturing that *p*, the speaker commits herself to the truth of *p* with *a weaker degree of strength* than one does in flat-out asserting the same content (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985:20). This is not the only sense in which two assertives can differ, though—complaining will also typically involve the additional *sincerity condition*, expressing the speaker's dissatisfaction. There are also cases where two assertives may differ without necessarily differing in degrees: e.g., testimony differs from assertion in terms of its *mode of achievement* (ibid: 20) as the status of the speaker differs, e.g., while testifying in court, and yet it may well be that their degrees of commitment are equal.

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[84] Note that Searle used the notion of "commitment" also in his 1969, but only to describe the class of *commissives*, not that of *assertives*.

On this view, commitment is perceived as a matter of degree. *Prima facie*, the concept of "degree" captures the intuitive thought that assertives can typically be compared to each other as being weaker or stronger in *some* sense. Surely, guessing is weaker than asserting, and asserting is weaker than swearing. Searle aims to capture this thought and explain in *which sense* they are to be compared—in the sense of to what extent their speakers are thereby committed to the truth of the content. I want to argue that this way of understanding commitment is quite unhelpful. I start by pointing out some drawbacks of introducing the notion of "degree", arguing that we should seek for an alternative strategy if we attempt to further clarify the central concept of commitment.

1. *Definition*. One of the appealing features of the "commitment to truth" view is that it provides a *definition* of the assertive class. Yet, a complete theory of speech acts should be capable of defining illocutionary acts *within* such classes, such as that of *assertion*, say. A recent revival of the normative theory of assertion showed more interest in identifying the *necessary* condition of the speech act than in defining it. That notwithstanding, providing a definition of assertion does seem to be an attempt of Searle's and is, after all, a requirement for any *theory* of assertion in general.

To reconstruct Searle's definition of assertion, we would arguably begin by offering its *genus* in terms of commitment to truth, and then proceed to establishing the *differentia* in terms of degrees of commitment. The assertion, thus, would be defined as the commitment to truth to a *certain degree* or alternatively, the commitment to truth within an interval between two degrees. For convenience sake, Searle and Vanderveken attach numbers to degrees (as opposed to more vague comparison of illocutionary acts in terms of "greater/lesser degree").

Unfortunately, the notion of degree represented by a number is quasi-technical: the reader has no grasp of the particular the degree numbers. Sure enough, Searle and Vanderveken (1985: 42) make notice that the ascriptions of degrees may be more or less arbitrary, but this still does not help in defining the illocutionary acts.

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We may contend with Searle that guessing is less committal in degree than swearing is, but this still would not *define* either guessing or swearing.

It is therefore surprising that some authors, such as Jary (2010:11) attribute to Searle a definition of assertion. In any strict sense of the word, Searle's theory *cannot* define assertion. This is the first reason I will try to replace Searle's "degrees" with a different analysis of the notion of commitment.

2. *Recognition*. Although guidance is typically expected from prescriptive rules, the definition of assertion should be able to give us at least some idea how to recognize an instance of the act. At the very least, by knowing the definition of assertion one should be in a position to know whether one is performing an assertion rather than a similar act, such as guessing.

To raise a worry, imagine a community of asserters who have *practices* of guessing and swearing but lack the adequate words for describing the practice, such as "guess", "swear" and their inflections. If someone from this community were to learn a foreign language, such as English, she could not learn what the words "guess" and "swear" applied to if all they were given were Searle's instructions. For, they could not rule out that "guess" may correspond to their practice of *assertion*, say, or that it denotes a practice this community did not develop.

3. *Zero and negative numbers*. Finally, even by allowing for "degrees", it seems problematic to assign them some of the numerical values Searle and Vanderveken allow for. For one thing, it is difficult to make sense of incurring the commitment that can "reach zero" (Searle, 1979: 13) when performing an assertive. At this point, the worry is not that there is something wrong with the *explanation* itself – namely, that we are given mere intuitions instead of a more robust theory; rather, it is not comprehensible how one's *commitment* can ever reach the zeroth degree.[85] For, if it is most suitably represented by zero, what makes it a commitment rather than the lack

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[85] Searle (p.c.) seems to understand "reaching zero" in the sense that by "hazarding a guess" one is not committed to truth of the proposition expressed.

of commitment? It might be suggested that such acts are limiting cases. That notwithstanding, it seems that the notion of commitment would not apply to all cases and we would have to endorse the "exception to the rule" strategy.

Similar point applies to the characterization in terms of negative numbers. This move seems even more confusing. The set of integers, note, is introduced to achieve the desideratum of getting "the relations of greater and lesser strength correctly ordered, and thus the set Z of integers can be used to mark the relation of greater and lesser" (42). Further, the authors specify:

> We use the set Z of integers to measure the degrees of strength with which illocutionary points are achieved because there is no theoretical finite lower or upper limit on the strength of most illocutionary points (1985: 42).

This feature of Searle's and Vanderveken's approach is puzzling in at least two senses. First, it is unclear how one's committal to the truth can ever be correctly represented by a *negative* number. For, on Searle's view, what the degrees measure is the assertive illocutionary point, which a speaker succeeds in achieving "on a proposition P in a context i…iff in that context he represents the state of affairs that P as actual in the world of utterance w_i." Secondly, there seem to be a more sensible approach according to which commitment takes values between 0 and 1, where 1 is a *full* commitment and 0 is a lack of commitment. This would at least avoid somewhat counter-intuitive claims that commitment can reach zero or that it can be represented by a negative number. However, this option is not mentioned.

Be that as it may, I will not be employing the notion of degrees, not just their awkward, quasi-mathematical characterization. Accordingly, I will propose a different way of understanding the notion of commitment.

3.2.2 An alternative conception of commitment

I have tried to argue that the notion of "degree" is not very helpful in elucidating different types of commitment and the role of commitment in the normative theory of speech acts. Thus, although assertives may well exemplify weaker and stronger degrees of commitment to the truth, the difference between such commitments should be explained in an alternative way.[86]

The ordinary concept of commitment seems to be relational in three senses: first, it is undertaken by a speaker; secondly, the speaker commits herself to obtaining a certain condition, be it one's own epistemic state (*knowledge*), doxastic state (*belief*, *justifiability*, *reasonableness*), or truth; and thirdly, one commits oneself in front of an *audience* who *recognizes* it as a commitment of the specific type.

Although I think this way of understanding commitment is more promising than Searle's attempt, I will not try to develop a full theory of assertives, as Searle did, but will confine myself to the case of assertion. At most, I will offer a definition of some assertives, such as *proffering* and *presenting* (in Chapter 5). That being said, the brief presentation of Searle's theory of assertives only served to introduce an important, though faulty, conception of commitment, which will be helpful for our own definition of assertion.

3.3 Final remarks

In this chapter, I analyzed the most prominent theories of *constitutive rules* and *commitment*, two concepts in terms of which I aim to develop a theory of assertion in

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[86] This is not to say that the theory of assertives in terms of commitment would not have as its consequence that assertion is stronger in degree than guessing is, say, but the point is that this needs to be explained on independent grounds.

the next chapter. As to the former, I argued that both Williamson's approach and the orthodox theories face certain problems, as they are unable to accommodate for the success Y terms and the acts of cheating, respectively. As to the latter, I maintained that Searle's conception of commitment relies on unnecessary concept of degree and that his theory of assertion, employing the notion of commitment, fails to define the speech act, contrary to what is often assumed to be the case.

Part II

A Theory of Assertion

4

Asserting as Commitment to Knowing

In the previous chapter, I suggested three constraints on an account of assertion, namely: (i) to offer a definition of assertion; (ii) to capture assertion in more decidedly *social* terms, such as that of commitment; and (iii) to think of commitment as a ternary relation between the speaker, a certain state of the world, and an audience.[87] In addition, I will plug in KA and see whether the results will be satisfying.

A way of satisfying these requirements, while staying faithful to KA, might be by defining assertion in terms of the "X counts as Y" locution, while appealing to the norm of knowledge, so as to reach:

(CK)   Committing oneself to knowing the proposition expressed counts as asserting.

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[87] A number of authors defending KA interpret the view in terms of commitment, such as Fricker (2012: 62–3), Hinchman (2013:613), and García-Carpintero (MS1), among others.

It is important to observe that the phrase "commitment to knowledge" suffers from ambiguity. On the stronger reading, by committing oneself to knowing that *p*, the agent commits herself to knowing that she knows that *p*. But this is unduly strong for our purposes. When asserting, we undertake the weaker commitment to *defend* what we take to be knowledge. Thus, if my assertion is challenged, the commitment incurred obliges me to be able to explain why I took this content to be part of what I know. Yet, this is different from committing myself to knowing that I know this content (or: to be able to explain that I know that I know the given content). The former commitment is weaker and so should be the repercussions in case the agent fails to stand up to her commitment. A similar claim is found in Unger[88] who insists that by asserting that *p* one thereby *represents* oneself as knowing that *p*. Although in the same ballpark, the "commitment to knowing" seems to be a more accurate description of the case at hand than Unger's.

The most important reason to choose the notion of commitment is because it is a robustly *social* concept. Again, the proposal remains faithful to KA, in the sense that we can distill the relevant notion of commitment by a careful analysis of KA and its individuation feature: "Necessarily, assertion is the unique speech act type whose unique rule is: "One must: Y only if X."" The following remarks capture some aspects of such a commitment.

Acting upon. In Dummett's view, "it is essential to the understanding of assertions that we know what it is to act on an assertion" (Dummett 1973:302). Note that the same applies to many other illocutionary forces: one does not grasp the nature of orders or questions unless one knows how to act on them. We *understand* an order "in this house we take off our shoes" only when we

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[88] This is perhaps of no more than historical interest, but it was Black (1952) who proposed that "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."

understand how we are supposed to react. Acting on an assertion, however, is different from acting on a question, say, in a way that has relevance for the speaker. There seem to be very little, if any, commitment the speaker undertakes when posing a question. Yet, in most cases, the content we assert serves as a warrant for those acting upon it. Namely, assertions are relied on in the process of decision-making and acting.[89] The audience relies on the speaker's telling the truth. If you ask me whether the library is open until 9 in the evening, and I affirm that it is, then your subsequent action will rely on my assertion as its *warrant*. Our audience is indeed entitled to conclude that we know what we assert (McGlynn, 2014:99), and moreover, that we are thereby *committed to knowing* what we say, as a basis for subsequent actions that may rely on our assertions.

Testimony. A similar point applies to the case of testimony – one is licensed to use the speaker's assertion as a testimonial uptake, again placing the commitment to knowing the proposition expressed on the speaker.[90] The same point can be made about the hearer's acquiring the mere belief on the basis of one's assertion, without ever using it in any way (e.g., acting upon it or repeating it in a conversation).

Reproaching. Imagine that it turns out that the library closes at 8. In such an event, the hearer has a right to reproach the speaker for giving the original answer. Such a reproach presupposes that the speaker has committed herself in a certain way. To show that this is a commitment to *knowing*, it may be sufficient to observe that the speaker cannot excuse herself by insisting that she did not *know* what she said. Such a commitment to knowledge, although never *asserted*, is quite

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[89] There is also a weaker sense of acting, as when one uses the testimony of others in further conversation.

[90] Fricker (2006:600) adds the following twist: "once a hearer forms the belief that P on a teller T's say-so, she is consequently committed to the proposition that T knows that P".

clearly *implied*, to use a Moorean term. This point can be strengthened by observing that the speaker will attempt to show it was reasonable for her to think she *knew* the content. Only such replies will be deemed satisfactory.

Retraction. Further, such a faulty assertion will typically be retracted. As we saw in the previous chapter, the phenomenon of retraction need not always manifest itself when the speaker is found unable to live up to her commitment: its occurrence may depend on what is at stake when the assertion was made. Otherwise, this would entail that the norm of retraction is *constitutive* of assertion. Be that as it may, so long as the retraction takes place, the theorist who endorses CK has a credible story to tell;[91] if we are *committed* to knowledge of *p* when asserting it, then it makes perfect sense to criticize the speech act, and our commitment with it, if *p* turns out to be false. We cannot make the same assertion any longer *because* we cannot rightly commit ourselves to knowing it. I deal with the phenomenon of retraction in detail later in this chapter.

Hedging. Suppose one was reluctant to assert that the building is open until 9, because she wasn't sure. This reluctance is explained by one's unwillingness to commit one to knowing this content. As an alternative to offering a straightforward assertion of the content, we may *hedge* the content instead, as in: "*I think* it is open until 9", thus committing ourselves to a weaker content. The practice of hedging can thus also be seen as supporting CK. For, the speaker chooses to assert only what she can more safely commit herself to knowing, where this commitment is again understood, *inter alia*, as involving the assuming of responsibility for possible actions that may rely on the assertion.

Challenging. It is important to note that the commitment "begins" already with the act of asserting (rather than, say, only once the speaker is being reproached). It is accordingly appropriate to challenge the speaker upon making an assertion if we doubt that she has the relevant epistemic grounds to live up to

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[91] Goldberg (2015: 18) renders the commitment view's explanation of retraction "a very simple, and highly plausible".

her commitment. Perhaps the most frequently used conversational challenge is "How do you know that *p*?", found in a number of languages.[92] Although I will be discussing such challenges at length in Chapter 6, observe here that if we assume that asserting commits one to knowing the content asserted, it makes perfect sense to inquire how one knows what one asserts. Such challenges, thus, show that asserting is intimately related to the commitment to defend that the content is part of what is known.

Prompting. As assertions are often offered as answers to questions, it is of interest that instead of posing a straightforward question ("Where is the train station?") one can instead ask "Do you *know* where the train station is?" (Turri, 2010a). The propriety of formulating questions in this way, again, seems to explain why it is correct to think of the assertion as a commitment to knowing. For, by answering the question, one straightforwardly accepts such a commitment.

One should note that each of these aspects of commitment *indicates* that the commitment took place: as such, their lack does not entail the lack of commitment itself. Thus, it is possible that asserting that *p* commits one to knowing that *p* even if the act itself is not acted upon, reproached, subsequently hedged, challenged or offered as a reply to a relevant prompt.

In fact, not only does asserting fail to imply a defense of our commitment, one may assert without thereby addressing the audience,[93] as when one writes a secret diary (Owens 2006: 117) or fails to be heard by the intended audience.

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[92] Such languages include, among others, Catalan, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Iranian, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, and Swedish.

[93] Here I don't have in mind the case of *soliloquy* although it is sometimes considered as an uncontroversial way of asserting (Pelling 2013a: 296). In fact, as Schiffer (1972: 79-80) contends, such cases are not without audience as the speaker herself is the audience. The same possibility is mentioned in Grice (1989:112–3), but contested by some authors, such as Fricker (2006:598f) with whom I tend to side on this point.

This may strike one as somewhat controversial; if compared to the act of promising, more obviously captured in terms of commitment, the same feature does not hold: if no one heard the alleged promise, the subject did not promise but merely *tried* to promise.[94] Why wouldn't the same apply to the assertion?

One reason may be sought in the argument structure of the verb "to assert"—given that it does not include the hearer, but only the speaker and the content (as in: *x* asserts that *p*), it seems to allow the possibility of asserting without such a content being heard (Pagin, 2014). This contrasts both with the case of promising as well as with the act of telling, a sub-type of assertion analogous to promising (Owens, 2006; Lackey, 2008; Pelling 2014) as both verbs, "to promise" and "to tell", have the speaker-hearer-content argument structure (*x* promises that *p* to *y*; and *x* tells that *p* to *y*).

To sum up, while we may hold that if the assertion goes unheard the speaker will not exhibit any signs of commitment, the relevant claim for us is modal: had someone heard the utterance, the same aspects of commitment would be manifest.[95]

4.1 The contrasting cases

I now put to test the CK view, indicating how it is supposed to distinguish assertion from closely related phenomena (such as on-stage assertions, non-literal

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[94] This can be contested. Alston (2000:53) urges that asking questions such as "Didn't you hear me when I promised to take you?" *presuppose* that the speaker promised, albeit her addressee did not realize it. Yet, as Alston observes, such a promise may still be deemed *defective* (Searle, 1969). Moran (2005: 355-6) construes assertion, wrongly in my view, precisely by modeling it on the case of a promise.

[95] Green (1999).

assertions, and presuppositions)[96] as well as how it captures certain "kinds" of assertion, such as indirect assertions.

a. On-stage & non-literal assertions

A constitutive rule account of assertion, just like any other, needs to provide a principled way of distinguishing assertions from non-assertoric utterances of declarative sentences. Among the cases which deserve to be considered are those of "on-stage assertions", performed by using declarative (and in some cases non-declarative) sentences by an actor on stage, and non-literal assertions, where the speaker seems to be asserting a different content from the literal one.

The CK has a simple answer to both phenomena. As to the former, we don't take an actor on stage to be committing herself to knowing what she utters: we do not take her to be sincere, we do not act on what she utters, challenge her while on stage, and so on. Consequently, we should not take her to be asserting either, nor perform any illocutionary act for that matter. The CK thus captures our pre-theoretic intuition that these utterances are not assertions and it can be used to explain a broader class of such cases, including practicing the pronunciation, testing a microphone, reciting poetry and so on.

Equally straightforward explanations can be given of non-literal assertions. To revisit Nunberg's (1979: 149) example, in uttering "The ham sandwich is sitting at table 20", the waitress seems to be committing herself to knowing that the person sitting at table 20 ordered a ham sandwich. According to CK, this

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[96] The list is far from exhaustive as other phenomena could be added, such as that of conditional assertions. My preferred solution would be that what is asserted is the consequent, provided that the antecedent obtains.

would likewise be the content asserted, although in more complex examples of non-literal assertions, one might need to work out what the content really is.

b. Indirect assertions

Cases of asserting by using sentences in a mood other than the indicative one[97] are somewhat trickier. Let us consider assertions indirectly made by the use of sentences in the interrogative mood,[98] such as Davidson's example: "Have you noticed Jane wore a blue hat today?".[99]

Uncontroversially, the speaker manages to assert that Jane wore a blue hat today, and one needs to explain in virtue of what does such commitment take place. The answer cannot be that it is because the proposition *that Jane wore a blue hat today* is thereby expressed. For, if the question were "Had Jane wore a blue hat today?", we would express precisely that proposition but would not be inclined to say that one thereby asserted such content. The reason why only the former utterance can be used to assert is due to the occurrence of the factive verb "to notice". By uttering "Have you noticed that *p*?", the speaker conveys the knowledge of the subordinate clause ("that Jane wore a blue hat"). The mere employment of the interrogative mood does not carry much weight. Indeed, the questions are plausibly governed by the norm of ignorance (Hawthorne 2004:

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[97] This is not to say that one cannot assert indirectly by using a sentence in the indicative mood. On the contrary, I will argue for this claim in section 4.2. Hooper & Thompson (1973) took the same stance on the issue with regard to utterances such as "It is true that *p*" or "I'm certain that *p*".

[98] However, I don't wish to disprove the possibility that one can assert indirectly by using sentences in the imperative mood.

[99] Dummett (1993) disagrees with Davidson (1984: 110) that these utterances should be viewed as assertions, as they should be understood as (mere) communication (Stainton 1997: 61).

24)[100] which cannot be plausibly attributed to our speaker. Upon making such an utterance, she can be challenged (e.g., "Are you sure, though? I am pretty confident she doesn't like hats at all") and the commitment incurred cannot be avoided by insisting that one only meant to ask a question.

c. Presupposition

At least since Strawson's (1950) criticism of Russell's (1905) "On Denoting", it has been a desideratum in pragmatics to carefully distinguish the concepts of assertion and presupposition. *Pace* Russell (and most Russellians), in uttering "The present king of France is bald" a speaker wouldn't be *asserting* but only *presupposing* that there is one and only one king of France.[101]

In the previous section, we needed to explain the mechanism by which the assertoric commitment was incurred by using a sentence in the interrogative mood, as opposed to a more standard, if not default, a declarative one. The problem with presupposition is somewhat the opposite: we need to explain why despite using a declarative mood, the incurred commitment is not assertoric in nature.[102]

Consider to this extent a sentence "Jane stopped beating her husband". By assertorically uttering this sentence, the speaker seems to commit herself to knowing two propositions: *that Jane stopped being her husband*, and *that Jane used to*

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[100] In Hawthorne's view, "at least in the normal case, we shouldn't ask a question if we already know the answer" (2004: 24), where the qualifier excludes cases in which a teacher asks a student an exam question, and so on.

[101] See: Alston (2000:115).

[102] I am not suggesting, of course, that one cannot make a presupposition by using a non-declarative sentence, but merely focusing on cases which appear to be more common.

beat her husband. The worry with CK is that, unlike with the former content, we are unwilling to accept that the latter content is asserted. How do we distinguish, then, between the two propositions? Why is only one of them asserted?

My solution will consist in claiming that assertions are those commitments which are related to *expressed* propositions. However I postpone unpacking the notion of "expressed proposition" until section 4.6.3.

4.1.1 Objections

In this chapter and the next two, I turn to discuss a set of objections to CK. Since the position has not been proposed in the literature, the existing arguments against it are scarce. However, given the similarities between CK and the knowledge account, it will be convenient to examine counter-arguments against the latter position, even more so as not all of them have been addressed in the literature.

I will discuss four sets of arguments against CK: in this chapter I will examine objections to (i) commitment views in general and four problems for (ii) the knowledge account of assertion. In chapter 5, I will try to block the arguments (iii) against speaker-centered norms, such as KA and, finally, in chapter 6, (iv) against the thesis that KA and CK can accommodate conversational challenges better than their rivals.

In this chapter, I start out with Pagin's (2004) argument against the commitment view, applying it to CK as a special case. I then turn on to discuss four arguments against KA, three of which deserve special attention. The first is *the twin argument* (section 4.3) reminiscent of Williamson's snow scenario, which is in my view one of the central objections the reasonabilist can address against the objectivist proposal in general. The ability to accommodate for such a worry, rather than merely proclaim its central case *incorrect* on the basis of intuitions (as

done by Williamson and DeRose) is fundamental to any objectivist proposal in my view. The second and more specific argument I find even more puzzling raises a worry concerning gettiered assertions (section 4.5), which likewise failed to receive due attention in the literature. In answering both arguments, my main motive will be to test how cogently we can pursue the strategy of *normative consequences* introduced in the second chapter. Finally, the third objection I will be discussing in more detail is the argument from presupposition (section 4.6). In contrast to the first two, I find Williamson's version of KA less equipped to answer this challenge, which may motivate the departure from the orthodox defense of the knowledge norm.

In addition to these three objections, I will discuss the argument from imprecise assertions (section 4.4). Although I find it less puzzling, it raises an interesting issue and has not been addressed in the literature. Finally, let me add that while further arguments against KA and CK are analyzed in Chapters 5 and 6, all this hardly covers a large industry of producing counterarguments to KA. Yet, a considerable portion of these arguments has been already replied in the literature.

4.2 Commitment as a social act

If asserting commits ourselves to knowing the proposition expressed, it thereby changes our social status: by asserting, we take certain responsibilities we did not previously have. All it takes is to pronounce the right words in the right circumstances (Stainton, 1997: 59).

In Pagin's (2004) terminology, such analyses take assertion to be a "social act". Although Pagin discusses a number of social accounts, I focus on the consequences his criticism has for CK—committing oneself to knowing the

proposition expressed counts as asserting. While asserting may indeed incur certain commitment, [103] Pagin's worry is that a mere committal to the proposition expressed need not always suffice for asserting. [104]

Pagin contends that for each social analysis of assertion − "to assert that p is to Φ (p)", there will be a corresponding construction of an explicit performative "I hereby Φ (p)". [105] By means of example, (1) yields an explicit performative of the form:

(1)   I hereby commit myself to knowing that p. [106]

By allowing that uttering (1) involves a commitment to knowing the proposition expressed, [107] CK classifies an earnest utterance of (1) as an assertion of p. What Pagin's argument sets out to show is that while the asserter commits herself to knowing p by uttering (1), she does not manage to assert that p. In support of this claim, Pagin gives three arguments: (i) an argument from *logical incompatibility*; (ii) an argument from the *irrelevance* of the indirect assertion models; and (iii) an argument from what he calls the *inferential integration test*.

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[103] At least in some cases, Pagin does not object that when asserting that p, the speaker incurs a commitment. True enough, he considers commitment to truth, rather than knowledge (in Pagin's words, we put our "authority behind the proposition" and if the proposition turns out false, we retract the speech act).

[104] I will address a similar worry in Chapter 8, as applied to non-linguistic assertions.

[105] The strategy is somewhat reminiscent of Davidson's observation that "whatever is conventional about assertion can be put into words, or somehow made an explicit part of the sentence…It is easy to see that merely speaking a sentence in the strengthened mood cannot be counted on to result in an assertion" (Davidson 1979: 113, "Moods and Performances, reprinted in 1984).

[106] Pagin also considers the following alternative: "I hereby commit myself to knowing what is expressed by this proposition: P" (2004: 840).

[107] At this point, Pagin remarks that (1) would "surely…leave most audiences perplexed, but this would most probably be because of failing to understand the philosophical jargon" (2004: 849).

a. Logical incompatibility

The first argument centers on the notion of "logical incompatibility" and the expression "what I say". In Pagin's words, "when I assert that *p* what I say implies that *p*; it is logically incompatible with the falsity of *p*" (2004: 839). In contrast, Pagin believes, "what I say [by uttering (1)] *is* logically compatible with the falsity of *p*." (ibid). Consequently, one cannot manage to assert *p* by uttering (1). Of course, Pagin allows that one would still make an assertion, namely *that one hereby commits oneself to p*, but not an assertion *that p*. Instead, the content *that p* is better viewed as a *declaration* on the speaker's stand on the issue (Pagin, 2014) which could be accurate even if *p* is false.

We can understand the central notion of logical incompatibility as follows: if an assertion of *p* is logically incompatible with the falsity of *p*, the conjunction of *p* and its negation would yield a contradiction, as in (2):

(2)   *p* and ¬*p*.

By contrast, if we replace the first conjunct of (2) by the explicit performative (1), the resulting proposition would not yield any inconsistency.

(3)   I hereby commit myself to knowing *p*, and ¬*p*.

This, I take it, is Pagin's point behind questioning the social analyses of assertion with the notion of "logical incompatibility." From the logical point of view, nothing about the proposition (3) strikes us as odd. Both conjuncts can be true. What's more, there are ways in which the proposition could plausibly also be *asserted*, as when we phrase (3) in the past tense:

(4)   I thereby committed myself to knowing *p* but *p* was false.

The same should hold if we changed the occurrence of "I" and "myself" for that of a term in the second and third person singular and plural.

In reply, the worry with Pagin's argument is that *asserting* (3) is simply infelicitous.[108] To explain this, García-Carpintero (2013:13) proposes to understand the expression "what I say" as meaning "what I state". Accordingly, Pagin's contention that "what I say [by uttering (1)] *is* logically compatible with the falsity of *p*" (839) would turn out to be false: (1) is not compatible with ¬*p*, because what (1) states just is *p*.

b. Irrelevance of indirect assertion models

If by uttering "I hereby commit myself to knowing that *p*" one asserts that *p*, such an assertion must be *indirect* (2004: 850). Pagin contends, however, that there is no model of indirect assertion which can deliver such a result. In so doing, Pagin starts off with the Gricean model.

To work out the conversational import of (1) on Gricean proposal, we start by assuming that the speaker complies with the cooperative principle, in particular the maxim of relevance. If so, her intention cannot be to convey that she commits herself to knowing that *p*, as this would be irrelevant for the present purpose. Instead, she is uttering (1) because she wants to convey that *p*. In turn, we can conclude, the speaker implies that *p*. Although this is still a far cry from showing that *p* gets *asserted*, it can serve in mounting the following argument.

Let us start by considering the utterance of (1) in a larger context. Since (1) is an assertion, it would be natural to hear replies such as "You're wrong" or

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[108] I say "infelicitous" here to signal there is something wrong in asserting (3).

challenges such as "How do you know that?". And, if by uttering (1) we assert only (1), it should be clear that these accusations and challenges target precisely (1). Yet this is false: one cannot be sensibly challenged by asking "How do you know you commit yourself to knowing *p*?", let alone be accused for offering the same content. In contrast, such replies are perfectly appropriate when targeting *p*.

How can we explain the fact that *p* can be challenged? If *p* is merely implied but not asserted, it should follow that other implicatures which do not get asserted can be challenged. Invoking Grice's famous handwriting scenario should show us that this is not the case. As the example goes, when writing a recommendation letter, a professor praises only the student's handwriting. By doing so, the writer implicates that the student is a poor candidate for the position. Granted that such an implicature is not asserted, observe that the writer cannot be either challenged or accused—if one were to raise the "How do you know that?" challenge, the question would be clearly out of place; on the most charitable reading, the challenge would not target the implicature (that the student does not have a good record) but instead the *statement* that she has a nice handwriting. Since, as we have seen, such a challenge does target the implied content of (1), namely *p*, this suggests that *p* is not *merely* implied, but also asserted.

Of course (1) is not a solitary case where a single proposition is both implied and asserted. To use another of Grice's examples, imagine that upon asking a local resident where to get some charcoal, they reply that there is a garage around the corner. By asking "Are you sure?", one would be targeting the implicature (that one can get charcoal in the garage around the corner) and this would suggest that the implied content is also indirectly asserted.

Thus, returning to (1), while it clearly *implies* that *p*, the propriety of conversational challenges targeting the content of *p* suggests that *p* is not merely implied, but also indirectly asserted.

c. The inferential integration test

The last argument in support of the thesis that by uttering (1) one does not assert *p*, directly or indirectly, comes in the form of the inferential integration test.

According to this test, indirect assertions "should integrate inferentially with other assertions of the speaker" (2004: 851); that is, "if I perform an indirect assertion that *p* … then inferentially it should be as if I had performed a direct assertion. And so it is, I think, with irony and with rhetorical questions, to the extent that these are used for indirect assertions" (ibid: 851).

Pagin goes on to contrast two acceptable inferences, (5) and (6), with that of (7) which he comes to reject:

(5)   If 73 is a prime number, we cannot share the stones equally. (Assertion)

73 is nicely divisible. (Ironic premiss)

So, we cannot share the stones equally. (Assertion)

(6)   If 73 is a prime number, we cannot share the stones equally. (Assertion)

Is 73, perhaps, divisible? (Rhetorical premiss)

So, we cannot share the stones equally. (Assertion)

(7)   If 73 is a prime number, we cannot share the stones equally. (Assertion)

I commit myself to knowing that 73 is a prime number. (Commissive premiss)

So, we cannot share the stones equally. (Assertion)

It might be helpful to note a disanalogy between the second premisses in (5) and (6) on the one hand, and the second premiss in (7) on the other. While the latter is labeled "commissive" merely because it contains the performative verb "to commit", labeling the former two "ironic" and "rhetorical" respectively requires further assumptions. For, there is nothing on their syntactic surface that makes their utterances an ironical statement or a rhetorical question.

In order to spell out these additional assumptions, let us assume that the first premiss in each (5)–(7) is uttered by one speaker, A, and the second premiss in each (5)–(7) is uttered by another, B. To my mind, A could infer the conclusions in (5) and (6) only if she assumes *both* that B is fully cooperative and that B has some minimal mathematical knowledge[109] (for, B might be wrong despite being fully cooperative). But if A is willing to grant as much, she could infer the conclusion in (7), too. For, assuming that B complies with the cooperative principle in uttering the second premiss of (7), her cooperation consists precisely in allowing A to reach the conclusion and settle whether to divide the stones or not. Once we assume that B acts cooperatively, her contribution cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of the performative verb she uses: the cooperation should be read off the whole sentence. On a plausible reading, she asserts that 73 is a prime number.

In other words, the strategy that would make clear why the second premisses in (5) and (6) are ironical statement and a rhetorical question, respectively, would also make clear why the second premiss in (7) is an assertion. It is for this reason that I find Pagin's contention that (7) is not "intuitively correct" ungrounded. Pagin notices that for the inference in (7) to go through, we would

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[109] García-Carpintero (2013:15) makes a similar point, insisting that if the speaker were known to be arithmetically incompetent, the second premiss in (5) would not be taken to be ironical, contrary to Pagin's assumption.

need an additional premiss, such as "If I commit myself to knowing that 73 is a prime number, then 73 is a prime number." But, as I suggested, this step is just an explicit, verbal formulation of B's concession to cooperate, which he would need to grant to (5) and (6). Indeed, if A were to reply impatiently to B's utterance of "I commit myself to knowing that 73 is a prime number" by saying "So, are you saying that 73 is a prime number or that it is not?", B could simply retort "If I commit myself to knowing that 73 is a prime number, I thereby say that 73 is a prime number".[110]

4.3 The twin argument

This finishes the discussion of the arguments against CK and other commitment views. In continuation, I turn to a more general task of analyzing the arguments against objectivism, broadly construed. I start out with Jennifer Lackey's (2007; 2008) "twin argument", whose structure can be represented as follows:

(i)   For some proposition p, an agent A asserts p at the context C *reasonably*.

(ii)   If A asserts p at C *reasonably*, then A asserts p at C *correctly*.

(iii) p at C is false.

(iv)   Therefore, A asserts that p at C *correctly* even though p is *false*.

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[110] MacFarlane (2011: 93) offers an insightful response. Assume, as we did above, that A and B utter the first and the second premiss of (7), respectively. Imagine, further, that A is skeptical of what B says. In this event, A would accept that B commits herself to knowing that 73 is prime, but would reject the assertion that 73 is a prime: i.e., A would regard the whole argument as "needing a further premise connecting… [B's] commitment with the primeness of 73". And, MacFarlane contends, such a further premiss is needed only when what the hearer rejects is precisely the assertion that 73 is a prime number. In conclusion, the fact that we cannot always substitute the second premiss for a single assertion, that 73 is prime, namely, can be explained by assuming that the second premiss expresses the two assertions just mentioned.

In developing this argument,[111] Lackey (2007) asks us to imagine the following scenario. My twin inhabits the possible world in which she is manipulated by the Cartesian evil demon; despite the fact that in such a world cats fly, my twin will form the belief *that cats do not fly* as the evil demon manipulates her brain, making her experiences indistinguishable from my own and her beliefs and perception non-veridical (Lackey, 2007:607).

How should we treat my twin's *assertion* that cats don't fly? Lackey's reasonabilist starts by considering the case of belief. If *our* belief, in *this world,* that cats do not fly is reasonable, then my twin's beliefs "should be regarded as reasonable", too (ibid: 607). This much is fairly acceptable:

> In the world run by the Cartesian Demon, our thinker is no less judicious and no less scrupulous in attending to (what he blamelessly takes to be) relevant considerations than he is in our world. Because of his unfortunate circumstances, however, his beliefs embody a radically false picture of his environment. Granted that the thinker's beliefs about his environment are false, are they any less justified than in our world? Is the thinker himself any less rational? Many philosophers maintain that the thinker's beliefs are equally well-justified and that the thinker himself is equally rational in the two worlds (See e.g., Cohen 1984 and Pryor 2001). Apparently, there is strong intuitive resistance to the idea that a thinker whose underlying dispositions and habits of thought remain unchanged might become *less rational* simply in virtue of being located in less fortuitous circumstances. (Kelly, 2007)

In fact, if someone in the evil demon world were to think that cats *do* fly, based on the exact same evidence available to my twin (i.e., phenomenological

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[111] The argument is originally posed as a problem for the truth account.

experience) one would intuitively find this person's belief subject to criticism. Once we agree on this, the next step is to adopt the claim that beliefs are "internal analogues" of assertions.[112] This link should establish that if a belief that *p* is not liable to criticism, an assertion of *p* should not be liable to criticism, either:[113]

> [M]y twin also should not be subject to criticism for offering the same assertions as me, even if the truth value of our respective assertions varies significantly (Lackey, 2007: 607).

The second premiss of the argument ties together a reasonable assertion with a correct assertion. As discussed in the second chapter, this is part and parcel of the reasonabilist's program: an assertion is correct if and only if the speaker is not liable to criticism for making it. Finally, we need to be reminded that the asserted proposition is actually false. This creates a difficulty for the advocates of KA and CK, as they cannot allow for cases where an assertion is correct but the proposition expressed is false.

4.3.1 The retraction data

The twin argument is problematic due to its premiss (ii): "if A asserts *p* at C *reasonably*, then A asserts *p* at C *correctly*". According to this premiss, we can always reason from "x is reasonable" to "x is correct". However, if "x is correct"

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[112] The proposal can be traced back as early as to Kant, who considered assertions as outward manifestation of an internal judgment. In contemporary literature, it was Adler (2002) who developed the "assertion-belief parallel" probably in most detail.

[113] The entailment in the other direction does not hold for Lackey, however. I discuss this feature in Chapter 5 in relation to the phenomenon of selfless assertion.

is ambiguous between "x is reasonable" and "x is objectively correct", as urged in the second chapter, the inference fails — an assertion can be both reasonable and incorrect. In what follows, I will try to undermine premiss (ii) by examining the phenomenon of retraction in more detail. The thought will be that once my twin is told cats do fly in the evil demon world, it is likely she would take back her original assertion. In turn, her retraction would signal that her assertion was faulty. In arguing for this case, I will run through a set of worries the Lackeyan reasonabilist might have about the role of retraction. As a result, I hope to show that retraction is a normative consequence in its own right, which would support the objectivist intuitions empirically.

a. Is retraction replaceable?

I have tried to portray a normative consequence as a robust phenomenon, an act we can expect to take place in certain conditions, as a reaction to an incorrect assertion. [114] On one line of thought, however, retraction is completely *replaceable*—as long as the asserter admits she said something *false*, there is no further need to *retract* the given speech act. Recognizing that falsity is not a normative concept, the objection goes, my twin's concession that she said something false will not be a normative act, either.[115] In turn, retraction is not a normative consequence and there is no further normative consequence effected by making false assertions. The reasonabilist's inference from "x is reasonable" to "x is correct" is reclaimed.

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[114] For more in-depth discussion on retraction, see: Ferrari & Zeman (2014), MacFarlane (2014), Marques (2014, 2015).

[115] I developed this objection in conversation with Scott Soames, although I cannot say he would defend it.

In replying to this argument, we should not contest the initial premiss: in the context described, it would indeed suffice that my twin admits she said something *false*, without performing the retraction in addition to it. That notwithstanding, the argument works under the assumption that an act of retraction will necessarily involve uses of some normative term. Such an assumption can be resisted, however. For, an act is considered to be a retraction if it brings about changes both in the normative status of the retracted assertion as well as between the speaker and her auditor. For instance, upon retraction, the assertion would not be acted upon nor could the speaker be appropriately challenged. But if this is the right rendering of retraction, it is not essential to use any normative terms in order to retract. By merely admitting one's assertion was false, the same effects take place. Indeed, upon such an admission, the retraction would be superfluous, just as asserting "I said something false, but I'm not taking it back" would be unacceptable.

In sum, the fact that falsity is not a normative concept is of no avail, because the very act of calling an assertion false can still be normative in character.

b. Inference across contexts

Granted that retraction induces changes in the normative status of both the assertion and the asserter, as well as signals the incorrectness of the speech act, this would still not show that my twin's speech act *was* incorrect. At best, the reasonabilist may insist, it shows that my twin's assertion *is* incorrect at the context in which it has been retracted. Accordingly, Lackey might prohibit the objectivist's conclusion (iv) by denying the premiss (iii):

(i)   The assertion *A* made at the context of use, C_U, is retracted at the context of assessment, C_A.

(ii)   Since retraction signals incorrectness, *A* is incorrect at C_A.

(iii)   If *A* is incorrect at C_A it is incorrect at C_U.

(iv)   *A* is incorrect at C_U.

In denying premiss (iii), Lackey may insist that while it *was* reasonable (= it *was correct*) to assert that cats don't fly at C_U, it *is not* reasonable (= it *is not correct*) to assert it any longer, at C_A. Accordingly, my twin's retraction should not be viewed as her attempt to deny the correctness of the assertion as performed at C_U—if anything, this would entail that her speech act was unreasonable, contrary to the facts.

How are we, then, to explain the intuition that my twin would retract? A natural response for a Lackeyan would be that the assertion is not reasonable any longer. I find this unconvincing for two reasons. On the one hand, this proposal suggests that the norm of reasonableness is violated, which in turn legitimizes the retraction. But it is confusing what act breaks this norm. For, no assertion is being made after the original one. On the other hand, it seems that when we retract, we do more than merely signal that an assertion is no longer reasonable. Namely, our retractions seem to refer to past actions. We remark that we *shouldn't have said* that, or that it *was wrong* to make such an assertion. This much suggests that there was something incorrect with the assertion when it was made, not only when we realize it is incongruous with the governing norm. In sum, *contra* Lackey, by retracting we seem to make manifest that an assertion *was* incorrect in the context in which it was made (see: Davis 2007: 399).

c. Pragmatic blindness

Another option for the reasonabilist is to bite the bullet here, insisting that the normative significance of retraction at C_A cannot outweigh the normative significance of the agent's being reasonable in making the assertion at C_U. In so doing, the reasonabilist would advocate a sort of error theory: she would be forced to describe speakers as being systematically misled into retracting perfectly correct assertions. The reasonabilist who adopts such an error theory faces two problems.

First, her error-theoretical proposal is clearly inferior to the objectivist's capability of accounting for these data. The way I portrayed normative theories of assertion, a discovery that an assertion was incorrect should have consequences on anyone's account. Since the objectivist claims that false assertions are *eo ipso* incorrect, she *predicts* that realizing that the assertion was false will have normative consequences.

Secondly, the reasonabilist fails to explain the following asymmetry. By her own lights, retraction amounts to a normative consequence in certain cases. For instance, when a subject fails to respond to the evidence and yet goes on to make the assertion, she may be required to retract the speech act, which would signal its incorrectness at the context in which it was made. If so, why wouldn't the act of retraction at a later context also signal its initial incorrectness? The reasonabilist seems to lack resources to explain away such an asymmetry.

4.3.2 Retraction as a normative consequence

Retraction in the light of recognized falsity[116] is a first normative consequence we discussed so far that is not shared by the reasonabilist. In order for the objectivist to explain this normative consequence, we need to postulate a larger context, which allows for our assertions to be assessed from a better informed perspective and as such, to recognize its falsity. The ensuing rule capturing the normative consequence of retraction can be phrased as follows:

RET: For all assertions that *p*, once it is known that *p* is false at C_U, one ought to retract its assertion at C_A, thereby signalling the incorrectness of the assertion made at C_U.

Notice, first, that "ought" is defeasible: there might be considerations which trump the obligation to retract. In addition, observe that the second part of the rule is decidedly objectivist: the reasonabilist would not allow that a retraction indicates the incorrectness of assertion, as long as the original assertion was reasonable. This rule of retraction gives the expected predictions: Amy from the snow scenario and the twin ought to retract their assertion as their contents are false relative to the original context.

4.3.2.1 MacFarlane's rule of retraction

Before moving on to the next argument, I wanted to briefly touch upon an alternative rule of retraction offered by MacFarlane, and offer some reasons why

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[116] One may also choose to retract even if one merely *believes* the asserted content may be false, regardless of what is really the case.

I think it is not the best option for the objectivist. His rule of retraction is formulated as follows:

RR   An agent in context C_A is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of *p* made at C_U if *p* is not true as used at C_U and assessed from C_A.[117]

The RR and MacFarlane's notion of assessment are part and parcel of his radical relativism.[118] Generally speaking, RR will give the same predictions as the rule I outlined above: as applied to the twin case, it will rule that my twin is obliged to retract, given that her assertion is false when used at C_U (the evil demon world) and assessed at C_A (the context of the twin's "return"). However, RR will give more peculiar results about certain uses of language, such as predicates of personal taste. To illustrate this, consider the scenario in which Joey asserts that fish sticks are tasty at C_U and Bob reminding Joey ten years later of having said that. If Joey no longer likes fish sticks, RR predicts that Joey is *required* to retract the assertion made at C_U (MacFarlane, 2014:109–110; 145).

While RR gives a normative significance to the context of assessment, there is a lingering worry as to how well it fits the overall account of assertion.

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[117] I have changed MacFarlane's notation for the context of use/context of assessment, using C_U/C_A instead of his c1/c2.

[118] On radical relativism, the truth of a proposition is relativized both to the context of use as well as to the context of assessment. Accordingly, RR is markedly relativist, as it makes use of the argument place for such a context of assessment, giving it a normative rule, unlike the rule for *making* assertion which does not mention it. As we will shortly see, radical relativism allows one's assertion of, say, "fish sticks are tasty" to be both true and false, relative to these two contexts, which in turn accommodates for both the "assertion condition" (that one is warranted in offering such a statement) and the "retraction condition" (that one will retract the claim, once one's opinion changes). In addition to MacFarlane's *radical* relativist's RR, there is an alternative, moderate relativist proposal I will not consider here. For discussion, see Ferrari & Zeman (2014) arguing why the moderate version of RR fails to capture what is essential about the act of retraction.

To start, one just does not feel the intuitive pull of the claim that Joey is compelled to retract.[119] In fact, MacFarlane himself concedes that this "may seem odd" (2014: 110).[120] Interestingly, in defending this claim, MacFarlane insists that such an oddity cannot lie merely in the fact that Joey's assertion was perfectly permissible[121] to be made. As he reminds us, there are cases where a perfectly reasonable assertion *must* be retracted despite its speaker not being *at fault* – as both the snow scenario and the twin argument testify. Unfortunately, this seems to be beside the point: for the objectivist, such as MacFarlane, "reasonable" is not tantamount to "correct". Accordingly, MacFarlane needs to show that there are cases where one is required to retract the assertion which is correct in the objectivist sense. We can be rightly skeptical that this is possible.

To conclude, in addressing MacFarlane's RR, we do not need to deny that Joey may say that he changed his mind about the tastiness of fish sticks. Similarly, we don't need to question that his reasons may be those outlined by MacFarlane's relativist. Nonetheless, it seems that Joey's putative action would

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[119] Marques (2015) convincingly argues that speakers are not under the obligation to retract in the sense conceived by MacFarlane. She also discusses the results of the experiment conducted by Knobe and Yalcin (2014), which further show that even when retraction is in place, it is not motivated by the falsity of assertion. That being said, Knobe and Yalcin's work focused only on epistemic modals, rather than on the taste predicates discussed here.

[120] MacFarlane actually offers a different story at the beginning of his book, where he writes: "Now that I have exposed my palate to a broader range of tastes, I think I was wrong about that; I've changed my mind about the tastiness of fish sticks" (MacFarlane, 2014: 13-14). On this stronger thesis, we are given the answer about the source of the normative strength (that Joey *must* retract, namely). In other words, it is because our tastes change that "we may say that we were *mistaken* in saying that the food was "tasty"" (2014:13, emphasis added).

[121] MacFarlane uses "permissibility" in the low-key sense, akin to the meaning of "reasonableness" I outlined in the second chapter. On this reading, Joey was appropriately sensitive to MacFarlane's norm of truth, and has made an assertion he had "every right to make", and was "perfectly reasonable" in so doing (2014:110).

be a more elaborate version of, if not entirely different from, the speech act of retraction as witnessed in the ordinary language. Accordingly, this kind of act is at odds with the empirical data by appeal to which relativists had hoped to strengthen their position.

4.4 The argument from imprecise assertions

The next argument centers on the so-called "imprecise assertions". As Lackey notices, we are accustomed to using them in everyday speech:

> [T]he weatherman asserts that there is a 40% chance of rain tomorrow, when in fact there is only a 39.96% chance; a friend asserts that she is 28, when in fact she is 27 years, 364 days old… a friend asserts that it is 6:00 PM, when in fact it is 6:01 PM, and so on. (Lackey, 2007:607)

Lackey develops the argument from imprecise assertions as having the same form as the previous argument:

(i)   For some proposition p, an agent A asserts p at the context C *reasonably*.

(ii)   If A asserts p at C *reasonably*, then A asserts p at C *correctly*.

(iii) p at C is false.

(iv)   Therefore, A asserts that p at C *correctly* even though p is *false*.

To examine her argument, imagine someone uttering (8) at 6:01 PM:

(8)   It is 6 PM.

With Lackey, we can contend that the first premiss is uncontroversial, and that asserting (8) in such circumstances would be "perfectly proper". Although, as I have argued, the objectivist will render premiss (ii) false, it is not a cause for concern in the present argument. Instead, the worry is how tenable premiss (iii) is. If it were in order, and (8) were false, the objectivist could not accommodate the data, [122] as any false assertion is incorrect, contrary to their stated view.

Fortunately, a way around this objection is to question a fairly controversial criterion of "absolute precision" which Lackey's reasoning trades on. Instead of appealing to such a stringent criterion, one could in turn invoke a Lewisian type of index consisting of a world, time, location and standards of precision. This would lead us to assigning a different truth-value to (8) depending on the circumstances in which it is uttered. To see how this could work, consider Lewis' (1979) remarks about the famous Austin's example:

> Austin's "France is hexagonal" is a good example of a sentence that is *true enough for many contexts*, but not true enough for many others. Under low standards of precision it is acceptable. Raise the standards and it loses its acceptability. (Lewis, 1979:352; emphasis added)

Unlike Austin, who denies that the sentence "France is hexagonal" can be evaluated in terms of truth and falsity (1962:142), Lewis allows for this possibility by introducing the *standards of precision* in the index.[123] Thus, "France is

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[122] As discussed in Chapter 2, Lackey blocks the possibility that asserting (8) can be secondarily correct, by rejecting the concept of secondary correctness as being "spurious".

[123] Lewis (1998) characterizes index as "an *n*–tuple of features", called *coordinates*, "of context of various sorts". A coordinate, such as a standard of precision, may differ from one context to another. In assessing "it is six o'clock", it is appropriate to introduce one such coordinate, and relativize its truth to such standards.

hexagonal" would be rendered true under a top-ranking general's standard of precision and yet false under the standards of a geographer—the former standard being low, the latter high. Similarly, a Lewisian approach can be applied to Lackey's example; in determining the truth-conditions of the sentence (8), we can say that (8) "is true enough for many contexts", particularly for everyday, low-stake contexts, although it might be false for some other contexts (e.g., if someone was setting the clock). Since Lackey's scenario features precisely one such low-stake context, we would get a different result than Lackey predicts, yielding that (8) is "true enough".

In reply, Lackey might resist introducing precision standards as a new coordinate. For, if the speaker *could* be precise, why should we introduce standards of precision each time she fails to be precise? As Lackey notes, "there need not be any practical circumstances" preventing the speaker of (8) from delivering a more precise report (2007:608).

Here the suspicion may be that Lackey falsely assumes that as long as the practical circumstances allow for absolute precision, we *should* act in accordance with such a possibility, delivering absolutely precise reports. On this proposal, it would be appropriate to introduce the precision coordinate only when one is not in a position to be absolutely precise. Unfortunately, this mischaracterizes our linguistic practice. Following Grice's maxim of quantity, we ought not to make our contribution more informative than it is required (Grice 1989: 26). Indeed, such absolutely precise reports would mislead someone into believing that there is a *reason* for providing such information, when in reality there is none, thus creating confusion (ibid.). The reason we choose to round the number to 6 as opposed to offering a more precise report, is because we know that our interlocutor didn't *ask* for anything more precise. Our assertoric competence is here reflected in our sensitivity to contextual features, such as the standards of precision: one's mastery in asserting involves responding adequately to what is at stake. At the contexts which require only lenient, "true enough" reports, a

competent speaker will offer a proposition which is "true enough" at those contexts; at the context where the bar is set higher and the standard of precision more demanding, the said competence would require avoiding to assert (8) as it would count as a *false* report.

In conclusion, Lackey's proposal doesn't sit well with Grice's conversational maxims and should be abandoned.

4.5 The argument from gettiered assertions

Let us recap. So far, we have discussed Pagin's objection against CK and the commitment views in general, and two Lackey's arguments against the objectivist proposals. The following argument has a more specific target, as it addresses only some objectivist accounts, in particular those of KA and CK.

The argument is based on Gettier-type of cases, hypothetical scenarios where the subject has the belief that is both true and supported by the evidence, and yet which fails to be knowledge (Gettier, 1963; Goldman 1976; Turri 2011).

We will focus on an earnest expression of such a belief, a gettiered assertion. Although a number of authors consider gettiered assertions to be perfectly in order,[124] they are rendered incorrect by the advocates of KA, as their contents do not qualify as part of what is known. A further reason for concern is that certain objectivist views can allow for gettiered assertions to be correct.[125]

I will consider a gettiered assertion from Goldman's barn scenario:

Henry is driving in the country-side with his son. For the boy's edification

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[124] Madison, 2010; McGlynn 2014:112; Wright 2014: 255–256, to name but a few.

[125] The truth account treats gettiered assertions as being both primarily correct (for being true) as well as secondarily correct (as it is reasonable to think that they are true).

> Henry identifies various objects on the landscape as they come into view. 'That's a cow,' says Henry, 'That's a tractor,' 'That's a silo,' 'That's a barn,' etc. […] Suppose we are told that, unknown to Henry, the district he has just entered is full of papier-mâché facsimiles of barns. […] They are so cleverly constructed that travelers invariably mistake them for barns. Having just entered the district, Henry has not encountered any facsimiles; the object he sees is a genuine barn. (Goldman, 1976: 772–773)

As Goldman writes, we are disinclined to say that Henry knows[126] the object is a barn (1976:773) as he cannot rule out the relevant alternative that he is actually pointing at a barn facsimile. We might also say that there is too much of epistemic luck surrounding the case. For, in a nearby possible world, Henry forms the same belief on the basis of there seeming to be a barn in front of him, although his belief is now false as there is no real barn (Madison, 2010).

There are two types of data that needs to be accounted for: that Henry's assertion seems correct and that, contrary to the appearances, it is not. In McGlynn's view,[127] the main strategy the advocates of KA have used in dealing with gettiered assertions appeals to the notion of secondary correctness. Namely, as Henry reasonably believes he knows the given content,[128] his assertion is *secondarily* correct. As far as this goes, the proponent of KA appeals to the same

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[126] Some authors, such as Sutton (2007), argue that Henry also lack justification. On Sutton's view, one is justified in believing that *p* iff one knows that *p*.

[127] McGlynn (2014:112) attributes this strategy to Williamson (2000:257) and DeRose (2002: 80). As Williamson writes: "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", i.e., a special case of the distinction between primary and secondary correctness.

[128] Another strategy may be to outright resist Gettier's conclusion, arguing that Henry in fact knows the asserted content. Weatherson (2003) makes such a point, although for reasons independent of KA, arguing for the "justified true belief" theory of knowledge. For a survey of different solutions to the Gettier problem, see Turri (2011).

explanation as her reasonabilist counterpart. As a result, a KA theorist needs to accommodate for the second datum and explain why Henry's assertion is *incorrect*. Merely repeating that KA judges it as such would only sweep the problem under the carpet, and the reasonabilist would be right to protest that a friend of KA owes an explanation.[129]

4.5.1 Disavowing knowledge

Let us recapitulate the main strategy used so far in determining whether a given assertion is incorrect. Roughly, we tried to identify certain types of data which typically coincide with assertions we deem faulty. In so doing, we have proclaimed the *speaker's liability to criticism* as the most common type of normative consequence. By means of example, if one were to make an assertion in a situation where it would be only appropriate to hazard a guess, one would be liable to criticism for making the assertion instead of a guess. Likewise, if one's statement was irrational, inconsistent, or unjustified, the same normative consequence would manifest itself. Another normative consequence we discussed was *retraction in the light of recognized falsity*. I argued that, in Williamson's snow scenario, Amy ought to retract once she learns there was no snow. Both types of consequences are normative in character: whenever the speaker is liable to criticism for making an assertion, and whenever the speaker ought to retract, the relevant assertion is faulty.

This brings us to gettiered assertions. If we were to proceed with our strategy and assess gettiered assertions as incorrect due to there being a normative consequence related to it, what consequence would it be? The

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[129] The same can be said of Williamson's and DeRose's treatment of the snow scenario—there is no story as to why Amy's assertion is *incorrect*.

phenomenon of retracting in the light of recognized falsity wouldn't help, as gettiered assertions are true by definition. The speaker's liability to criticism cannot be invoked, either: the agents in Gettier-type of cases seem perfectly reasonable in making their statements.[130] What is, then, a distinct, normative phenomenon we can link to gettiered assertions, if any?

I believe that there is a cluster of related phenomena that ought to occur as a consequence of making a gettiered assertion. I will label them "disavowing knowledge".

In presenting the first of these cases, let us consider two scenarios, A and B. In A, Henry knows that he is in Barn Façade County. Thus, when he utters a sentence "That's a barn", he immediately asks one of the residents whether he *guessed correctly*. In this scenario, we can understand Henry's question as *appropriate* under the assumption that his speech act was a *guess*. To support the claim that Henry's act can be viewed as guess, consider the following passage from Austin:

> [S]o often there are things you cannot state – have no right to state – are in no position to state. You cannot now state how many people there are in the next room; if you say 'There are fifty people in the next room', I can only regard you as guessing or conjecturing. (1962: 138)

As applied to our case, Henry's audience would not regard him as asserting, either, precisely because he cannot tell real from fake barns. Thus, in posing such a question, Henry represents his original utterance as being a guess.

Moving on to scenario B, Henry utters the same sentence, "That's a barn", with the sole difference that Henry doesn't know about fake barns and

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[130] Not everyone agrees on this, though: Schaffer (2008:8) stresses the subject is "open to censure. He does not know what he is talking about". In relation to the notion of reasonableness glossed in Chapter 2, I disagree with Schaffer and look out for a further normative consequence.

strongly believes that the object in front of him is a real barn. Once Henry learns that he is in Barn Façade County, he goes on to ask one of the residents whether he *guessed correctly*. Unlike in A, I submit, Henry was *not* making a guess when he uttered "That's a barn". Instead, he performed a flat-out assertion as he was by all means epistemically positioned to make such an act.

What needs to be explained is why Henry's question sounds appropriate in B. We have already seen that Henry's question sounds natural in A because Henry was merely venturing a guess. But since Henry makes a confident assertion in B, we need to look for the answer elsewhere.

My proposal starts out with a commonly accepted thesis that the standard for correct assertion is more demanding than the standard for correct guessing. To support this claim, imagine that Henry in A does not know about the existence of fake barns. If his subsequent question "Did I guess correctly?" were appropriate (e.g., he has only a vague idea how a barn might look like), we would consider his first utterance rather awkward. More intuitively, Henry should have hedged the content, thereby saying something along the lines of "This *might* be a barn". In this case, his question whether he guessed correctly *would be appropriate* because the act is a guess, rather than a flat-out assertion. That being said, if Henry question "Did I guess correctly" in B is natural or appropriate, then he thereby seems to distance himself from the earlier act and *admits* that his grounds for making an assertion were insufficient.[131]

Given that Henry lacked knowledge, this piece of data supports KA and CK. But it likewise supports the *safety* and *certainty* accounts, as Henry fails to be in these states, too. To wrap up, I want to make three final remarks. First, one important result is that the argument just described motivates objectivism over

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[131] I don't wish to claim that the strategy which relies on guessing extends over Gettier-type of cases in general. The original "Ford" scenario, for instance, cannot be explained by appealing to it. Nonetheless, in my view, a more general disavowal maneuver applies equally well.

reasonabilism, as Henry's assertion in B seems to satisfy all non-factive norms, contrary to the conclusion that it was incorrect. Secondly, the argument avoids Williamson's and DeRose's strategies in dealing with gettiered assertions, which I argued to fall short of explaining why such assertions are *incorrect*.[132] Thirdly, the "disavowal of knowledge" can presumably be achieved more directly. Once he learned about the existence of fake barns, Henry might have disavowed his authority by retorting that he lacked *knowledge*. The fact that we wouldn't normally mention *safety* or *certainty* in such a case might lend some further support for KA and CK. At least when it comes to *certainty*, this is of interest as we sometimes use this notion in assertoric practice to challenge a speaker's statement by uttering "Are you certain?" (in Chapter 6, I do, however, argue that we shouldn't understand such data as supporting the certainty account). But if someone were to distance herself from her previous assertion by remarking "I wasn't certain after all", we would not accept the implication that such high standards were appropriate for determining correctness of her assertion.

4.6 The argument from presupposition

In the previous chapter, I have mentioned the *individuation* feature of KA, according to which assertion is individuated by the knowledge rule. It was precisely on these grounds that Williamson (1996, 2000) attempts to disqualify the truth account, taking truth also to govern the speech act of *conjectures*. In a recent argument, García-Carpintero (MS1) aims to establish that the individuation feature turns on itself: the knowledge norm seems to govern the

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[132] In his recent defense of a safety account, Pritchard (2014) follows Williamson and DeRose and pursues the same strategy.

"ancillary"[133] speech act of *presupposing* which, if true, would entail that it cannot be individuating of assertion. Instead, García-Carpintero (2004) argues, we should think that the norm of assertion is transfer of knowledge, ruling an assertion that *p* to be correct only if one's audience comes thereby to be in a position to know *p*.

Williamson (1996, 2000) discusses three motivations for KA, based on lottery propositions,[134] Moorean sentences, and conversational challenges. As García-Carpintero (MS1) attempts to show, each of these points may apply equally well to the knowledge account of presupposition. If so, they would fail to secure the core, individuation thesis which was one of the main tenets of Williamson's conception of constitutive rules, as we saw in Chapter 3.

Let us start by considering the argument from lottery propositions,[135] as used in support of KA. Imagine you bought a ticket in a large lottery, with the chances of winning as low as one in a million. The drawing has already taken place, but we still don't know who is the winner. If I were to assert on probabilistic grounds that "your ticket did not win", I would be acting inappropriately[136] even if, in fact, your ticket *is* a loser and the probabilistic grounds are excellent.[137]

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[133] The characterization of speech acts as "ancillary" goes back at least to Searle (1969) who deemed referring a propositional act (1969: 24), occurring within another speech act. To give an example, by uttering "Sam smokes habitually" one refers to Sam when making a statement about him. Another such propositional act is *predicating*.

[134] While two other type of data were already noticed by Unger (1975), Williamson seems to be the first to introduce the lottery propositions, probably influenced by the lottery paradox.

[135] The original argument is presented in Williamson (1996, 2000) and further developed in Hawthorne (2004). Weiner (2005), Hill & Schechter (2007) and Lackey (2007, 2008) offer Gricean solution to the problem, although the details of their accounts differ. McGlynn (2014) is sympathetic to Weiner's proposal. Pritchard (2014) claims norms weaker than KA, such as his "safety norm" accounts for the data.

[136] Lackey (2008:137) disagrees with this, emphasizing that a reasonable assertion is *eo ipso* correct. In line with my reply to the twin argument, one can consider a case where a lottery assertion turns out to be false, which would in turn give rise to a retraction.

Imagine someone uttering, in the exact same conditions, "your losing ticket fell on the ground". The utterance still strikes us as incorrect, although it is now the presupposition that the ticket is a loser which is to blame, and the presupposition is not an assertion. Just as with the assertion, the needed authority seems to be missing: it seems inappropriate to presuppose that the ticket is a loser if one doesn't know that this is so. This appears to be the first case for the knowledge account of presupposition.

Moving on to Moorean sentences, it has been widely argued that asserting "*p* and I don't know that *p*" is deeply problematic.[138] As it happens, the knowledge account of presupposition is equally strong: if one was to utter "My brother is coming to town, but I don't know that I have a brother", the act would come across as absurd. As the possessive triggers the presupposition that I have a brother, I cannot go on to deny I know it, despite not having asserted it.

Finally, it is often pointed out that conversational challenges, in particular "how do you know that *p*?", support KA.[139] Undeniably, KA is in an excellent position to explain the appropriateness of raising such a challenge: by stressing that one must know that *p* when asserting it, it makes perfect sense to inquire whether one has the needed authority. In turn, García-Carpintero argues that there is an *analogous* type of data for presupposition—von Fintel's "hey, wait a minute, I did not know this" test.[140] The test is said to distinguish between presupposition and assertion: while it would be appropriate to reply to the utterance above by saying "hey, wait a minute, I didn't know you have a brother", it would be inappropriate to retort "hey, wait a minute, I didn't know

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[137] Excellent probabilistic grounds for believing a true proposition can be argued to count as knowledge. See Hill and Schechter (2007) and Reed (2010) for the view that lottery assertions can be known. The first pair of authors, in addition, go on to discredit KA.

[138] I discuss these data in more detail in the next chapter.

[139] Chapter 5 examines this type of linguistic data.

[140] von Fintel gives credit to Shannon (1976).

you are going to pick him up at the airport". Such a question overlooks that the point of asserting is precisely to provide the new information, which is why the speaker will typically make statements her addressee would not know.

4.6.1 Challenging the presuppositions

I would like to make two remarks about García-Carpintero's argument. First, it is not obvious that we need to introduce von Fintel's test, at least not judging from the way the dialectic has been set up. For, the main idea was to show that the three types of data Williamson offers for the knowledge account of assertion apply equally well to the knowledge account of presupposition. Having seen that both Moorean sentences and lottery propositions can motivate knowledge account of presupposition, all it takes to complete the argument is to show that presuppositions can be conversationally challenged. And given that this can indeed be shown, von Fintel's test (which is not a conversational challenge) is not strictly speaking necessary.

When Jane's sister announces that Jane has stopped beating her husband, she can be rightly challenged: "How do you know that Jane used to beat her spouse?". Few remarks are in place. If the challenge raised was only "How do you know that?", it would target the assertion, rather than a presupposition. But this is as it should be – for, once again, we are trying to show that Williamson's data apply equally well to *both* assertion and presupposition. Indeed, in order to challenge the presupposition naturally, it only takes to make the challenge more explicit: "You are presupposing that Jane used to beat her husband. How do you know that?". Further, challenges such as "Are you sure Jane used to beat her husband" can be counted in as a datum. Of course, this will not work for all

presuppositions. But nor would it work for all assertions, either. The same applies to von Fintel's test to which I now turn.[141]

4.6.2 von Fintel's objection

While it is undeniable that the parallel drawn between conversational challenges and von Fintel's test holds, it is not obvious that there is the "same pattern" emerging among these phenomena. As a matter of fact, we can found more similar patterns in some other objections, or so I will argue.

To observe the similarities between conversational challenges and von Fintel's test, it is instructive to look at the cases when the speaker is making an "informative presupposition", the content of which is not in the common ground.[142] In asking von Fintel's question, one is asking both "whether the speaker knew the presupposed proposition" and "whether or not it is common knowledge". Should the presupposition indeed turn out to be informative, the speaker would make an incorrect presupposition.[143]

In reply, one may point to disanalogies between conversational challenges and von Fintel's test, and urge that the occurrences of "know" in "how do you know that?" and in "hey, wait a minute, I didn't know that!" play rather different roles. To show this, compare the consequences of failing to reply satisfactorily to a conversational challenge and to von Fintel's test. In the former case, a failure to offer an adequate reply, while sticking to the same assertion, amounts to an implicit Moorean sentence "*p* but I don't know that *p*", and leads to rejection of

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[141] Thanks to Sven Rosenkranz for discussion.

[142] On García-Carpintero's account, a proposition *p* is in the common ground of a group G iff *p* is common knowledge in G, where *p* is common knowledge in G when everybody in G accepts *p*, everybody accepts that everybody accepts *p*, and so on.

[143] The correctness conditions are phrased in terms of a biconditional: a presupposition that *p* is *correct* iff it is mutually known that *p*.

the assertion challenged. Yet, the same hardly applies to von Fintel's "hey, wait a minute" test. Under the assumption that the speaker's concession that *p* was not in the common ground counts as an unsatisfactory reply,[144] the consequences would typically be milder. This, I want to suggest, is a feature of von Fintel's test, which need not occur if we used an analogous challenge. Before exploring such a possibility, notice that von Fintel's test need not even signal one's ignorance about the content presupposed. For, in uttering "hey, wait a minute, I didn't know you have a brother", one thereby affirms that one learned I have a brother. Oftentimes, one thereby only indicates that one lacked the relevant knowledge *before* the presupposition was discerned.

Instead of relying on von Fintel's test, it would be more helpful to consider alternative ways of questioning one's presupposition. As said, von Fintel's objection rarely amounts to a rejection of the presupposition, and it seems we need precisely this feature if we want to pursue the analogy with conversational challenges.

Consider a case in which we venture to presuppose what others won't have reasons to think that we know, or even believe. This would introduce the content that was not updated in the conversational score, and would amount to an incorrect presupposition. It seems that, at least in some cases, it would be less natural to use von Fintel's objection, in place of stronger objections such as "hey, wait a minute, I never *accepted* that" or "hey, wait a minute, I'm not *sure* about that". Not only that they exhibit the "same pattern" outlined above, but they can actually challenge the presupposition and, in case of an inadequate answer, reject it without accommodating it.

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[144] An *adequate* reply to such a test can take several forms. One of them is to point out that the addressee was in fact informed of the presupposed content: "what do you mean, I have told you I have a brother. You must have forgotten". Another one is to admit the addressee is right and now *assert* the presupposed content: "well, I have a brother, and I need to pick him up at the airport".

Unlike von Fintel's objection, the "accept" and "sure" variants are not useful as a test for distinguishing between presupposition and assertion. For instance, replying "hey, wait a minute, I never *accepted* that" can be used to demand from the speaker to further justify her assertion. But this shouldn't worry us as long as they can be appropriately used to challenge presuppositions. The two objections exhibit "the same pattern" mentioned above, addressing both the speaker's knowledge of the presupposition as well as challenging whether it was the common knowledge. To see this, consider García-Carpintero's example, where one is asked for the opinion about the philosophy talk one just attended, and replies: "You know, as usual with this guy, premised on the typical Fregean confusion of semantics with psychology". If we do not share such "confusion" to begin with, the presupposition can be challenged with "hey, wait a minute, I never accepted that". In sum, I think that the data from conversational challenges can be compared to the available objections to presuppositions, and the similarity can be observed more easily with the "accept" and "sure" objections.

4.6.3 Distinguishing assertion from presupposition

The argument from presupposition, as we have seen, threatens to undermine the claim that knowledge is *individuating* of assertion: Williamson's motivation for KA presents equally good reasons to regard knowledge as being constitutive of *presupposition*, too.

An obvious reply is that the argument challenges only *Williamson's defense* of KA. To remedy this problem, one need not abandon KA: it would suffice to offer further arguments in its favor. As I am interested in defending an alternative, CK approach to assertion, I will leave this possibility aside.

Another line of thought might be to argue that the norm of presupposition is stronger than that of assertion. This way, knowledge would remain individuating

of assertion, while it would form a part of the presupposition norm. This kind of manoeuver might extend to other speech acts: e.g., the condition of knowledge enters the constitutive norm of *swearing*, although the rule of swearing is stronger than that of knowledge. This hypothesis would hardly work, however. At least on the given prescriptive account, a presupposition is incorrect because it is not yet in the common ground, and the way its content enters the conversational score is precisely by means of an assertion. Notice, further, that there is no additional constraint on the correctness of presupposition. Its norm does seem to be intimately linked to knowledge, and it is not stronger than it.

The third approach might be to contend that knowledge is central to assertion, but for different reasons than those outlined by KA. This way, we could keep knowledge as constitutive of presupposition and introduce a further variation on normative account of assertion, namely CK. To motivate this strategy, start by noticing that presupposition is not a speech act on a par with other illocutionary forces (apart from referring, perhaps). [145] Instead, as mentioned, it is an ancillary speech act we use in performing other illocutionary acts. Its closest kin is arguably assertion, at least for the following reason: when an incorrect presupposition is objected to, the speaker replies to it by now *asserting* the same content (something she should have done initially). The same content can now enter as a presupposition, on the grounds already met by the performance of correct assertion. How are we to capture this normative relation between the two speech acts?

One tempting way to do this is by noting that before responding to von Fintel's objection and asserting the content previously presupposed, the speaker *committed* herself to *knowing* its content. On this approach, the difference between asserting and presupposing would consist in that, in the former case, one is committing oneself to knowing the *explicitly* expressed content, while in the

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[145] See Searle (1969)

latter case, one is committing oneself to knowing the *implicitly* expressed content.

(CK*) Committing oneself to knowing the proposition explicitly expressed counts as asserting.

This would be too quick, however, as presuppositions can also be explicitly expressed. Consider the following utterance:

(9)   Julie doesn't know that she will have a surprise party.

In asserting (9), the speaker is presupposing the content of the subordinate clause, namely *that Julie will have a surprise party*. Given that the speaker appears to be committing herself to knowing this content, it would follow that the content is asserted, rather than presupposed. This was Geach's (1965) proposal, according to which the speaker performs a "double-barreled" assertion: in uttering (9), she asserts both *that Julie doesn't know that she will have a surprise party* and *that Julie will have a surprise party*. Geach's approach doesn't survive the scrutiny, however, as the proposition expressed by the subordinate clause satisfies key tests for presuppositions. As to the phenomenon of projection ("the hallmark of presuppositions", Beaver and Geurts, 2011), when (9) is embedded under negation, as an antecedent of a conditional or in a question among other contexts, the proposition *that Julie will have a surprise party* will still be present. Likewise, von Fintel's test applies equally well ("Hey, wait a minute, I didn't know Julie will have a surprise party"). Thus, CK* cannot be the right interpretation of CK.

In turn, I suggest, we can specify the relation "to express" from CK in the following manner: a proposition *p* is expressed iff there is a sentence *s* of which the speaker makes a free-standing use such that *p* is, or is part of, the truth

condition of *s*. In (9), the speaker does use sentence "She will have a surprise party". However, it is not free-standing, but occurs as a subordinate clause of a larger sentence. Accordingly, the speaker does not assert that Julie will have a surprise party.[146]

To motivate this kind of approach, note once again that presupposition is an ancillary speech act – as such, it is performed in the company of the main speech act, which in this case is that of assertion. The fact that we sometimes help ourselves to presuppositional contents, when making assertions, is reflected in our commitment to knowing such contents: due to the ancillary nature of presupposition, whenever we commit ourselves to knowing assertoric and presuppositional content, the assertoric content will be expressed by a free-standing, larger sentence.

On an alternative strategy, the difference between presupposition and assertion is reflected in the norms governing these acts. Unlike assertion, governed by the transfer of knowledge norm, the presupposed content need not be transferred knowledge in order to be correct. Instead, it ought to be already in the common grounds. Although such an approach is elegant and tailor-made to address the present issue, it is not without problems of its own. In particular, it is unclear why we should think of transfer of knowledge as a *norm* of assertion, rather than its *aim*. As Williamson suggests, (crediting McDowell, Evans and Recanati) assertion is needed in order for knowledge to be transferred within a linguistic community (2000:267). With this in mind, why would we conflate

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[146] Alston (2000: 116–20) offers a similar solution, according to which the proposition *that Julie will have a surprise party* is not "explicitly presented" by the declarative sentence (9)—and accordingly, not asserted—due to the lack of isomorphism between the sentence (9) and that proposition. Unlike CK, Alston maintains that asserting that *p* commits one only to the truth of the proposition, making the position vulnerable to worries against TA, such as Williamson's argument that the truth norm is not individuating of assertion (as it governs conjectures) and the problem that the assertion will be deemed correct even if the speaker is liable to criticism.

such a teleological point with a normative one? Or better, why should one and the same condition state both the aim of, and the norm of correctness for, a given act? What would be lost if, instead, we took transfer of knowledge to be the aim, and knowledge to be the norm of the illocutionary act?[147]

Another worry for the transfer of knowledge account, although less problematical in my view, was formulated by Pelling (2013a). Recall that according to this account, it is correct to assert that *p* only if one's audience comes thereby to be in a position to know that *p*. As Pelling argues, the concept of "being in a position to know", borrowed from Williamson, is worrisome:

> To be in a position to know p, it is neither necessary to know p nor sufficient to be physically and psychologically capable of knowing p. No obstacle must block one's path to knowing p. If one is in a position to know p, and one has done what one is in a position to do to decide whether p is true, then one does know p. The fact is open to one's view, unhidden, even if one does not yet see it. Thus being in a position to know, like knowing and unlike being physically and psychologically capable of knowing, is factive: if one is in a position to know p, then p is true (Williamson, 2000: 95).

To make sense of the worry, imagine that Camper makes the assertion so quietly that nobody can hear it. While the assertion would nevertheless be made correctly, the audience would not be in a position to know its content.

Pelling's worry, perhaps, might be allayed by avoiding Williamson's concept and pursuing a more dispositionalist account. Alternatively, following Pelling, one might simply reorient one's account of assertion, away from the speaker, and assign the central role to the hearer. On this approach, it is correct to assert that *p* only if it is fit to give a hearer knowledge that *p*. Since the assertion above is

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[147] Thanks to Janet Levin for helpful discussions on this point.

indeed fit to give a hearer such knowledge, no problem arises. In the next chapter, I discuss two arguments which pursue this line, and argue that they should ultimately be dismissed.

4.6.4 Final remarks

I have examined two sets of arguments against the hybrid CK view I set out to defend. While the first type of objection raised a worry about defining assertion in terms of commitment, the second type of objection questioned whether knowledge is the necessary condition for correct assertion. I hope to have shown that CK is indeed equipped to dismiss with such challenges. Further, I have introduced a new normative consequence, that of disavowing knowledge, and argued it supports the norms of knowledge (and perhaps safety) over the rival objectivist accounts. Finally, following the lead from Alston, I tried to explain how assertion is to be distinguished from presupposition in normative terms.

5

The Role of the Audience

The communicative aspect of assertion can hardly be overestimated: not only that it is "our main vehicle for transmitting the information",[148] but any further end it may be used for – to give advise or compliment, to warn or predict – assertions are directed towards the *audience*.[149] With such pre-theoretical characterization in place, it is to be expected of a normative theory to account for the role of the audience. Yet, as Pelling (2013a) observes, most views on the table have disregarded this aspect, portraying the correctness condition of assertion as depending "purely on the relation between the asserter and the proposition asserted" (2013a: 293). This kind of "epistemic relationism", as Pelling calls it, has been endorsed by a majority of theorists, in particular those espousing the norms of belief, justification, and knowledge.

Pelling's worry is important and rarely observed in the literature.[150] As a side remark, the extent to which it applies is somewhat more limited than Pelling takes it

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[148] Buckwalter & Turri (2014: 16).

[149] As noted before, there are cases where assertion lacks any audience whatsoever. I leave them aside as a relatively rare and plausibly derived phenomenon.

[150] To my knowledge, it has only been discussed by García-Carpintero (2004) who develops Evans' (1982:310) point that "communication is *essentially* a mode of the transmission of knowledge".

to be. For, it would seem that the justification account, on at least some of its versions, does not neglect the role of the hearer. Think again of Lackey's reasonableness condition. [151] As I insisted in Chapter 2, the criterion of "reasonableness" is plausibly determined by the linguistic *community* and not by the speaker herself. On this picture, I assert correctly only if what I assert is reasonable for both *me and my audience*. Thus, although the norm itself – "one asserts that *p* correctly only if it is reasonable for one to believe that *p*"[152] does not mention the hearer explicitly, the standard of "reasonableness" is determined by the competent audience, too. [153]

Unlike Lackey's norm, KA cannot plausibly be understood as making reference to the hearer. Instead, the hearer must be added to the picture, as in: "one asserts correctly only if one *knows* that *p* and the hearer thereby *learns* or is in a position to learn that *p*". This seems to be the most simple and straightforward solution. Yet, it is not KA anymore. On another proposal, pursued by Pelling, an assertion is correct only if it is fit to give a hearer the knowledge of its content. On Pelling's approach, the speaker is now *substituted* for the hearer. By failing to introduce the speaker, the strategy falls short of delivering an interpersonal account. I find this result somewhat surprising as one would expect the hearer to be introduced at a lesser cost. Just as we conceded that the hearer's importance has unjustifiably been ignored, Pelling's proposal is now guilty of leaving out the more obvious role of the speaker.

In supporting this kind of strategy, Pelling offers the argument from existentially known assertions (section 5.1) and uses for this purpose Lackey's argument from

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[151] I here assume that reasonableness just is a way of cashing out justification.

[152] This is one of the two necessary conditions Lackey posits, the other being that the assertion that *p* is made at least in part because it is reasonable for the speaker to believe that *p*.

[153] The exception are those cases when the speaker *is* the relevant community. For instance, it might be plausible that at one point in time, Copernicus was the only relevant assessor of the heliocentric claim.

selfless assertion (section 5.2). This chapter examines these two arguments in detail, and ends with a proposal of how KA and CK can accommodate the interpersonal nature of assertion.

5.1 Existentially known assertions[154]

There is a commonly made distinction between knowing the truth of a sentence and knowing what is expressed by that sentence (Donnellan 1979: 51). One may know that "quarks combine to form hadrons" is true, given the reliability of the source, without knowing what the sentence means. In such cases, it seems appropriate to describe one's knowledge as "existential":[155] one knows that the proposition expressed by the sentence "quarks combine to form hadrons" is true, without knowing which proposition this is. The main issue in this section will be how to characterize a speech act of uttering a sentence that expresses a proposition one only knows existentially.

Pelling (2013a, 2013b) argues that such speech acts should be understood as *assertions* which are existentially known. According to this proposal, *A* makes an existentially known assertion (henceforth: EK assertion) if and only if the following three conditions hold:

(i)   *A* knows that the sentence she uses to make the assertion expresses a true proposition.

(ii)   *A* makes the assertion based on that knowledge.

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[154] This section is published in *The Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (261): 813–821.

[155] See Pelling (2013a: 308) for the origin of the name. I avoid using Pelling's "for *some* proposition", as it may suggest that there may be more than one proposition expressed by a single sentence.

(iii)   *A* does not know, believe, or have a justification to believe the particular proposition she asserts (Pelling 2013a: 308).

When (i) − (iii) are satisfied, the speaker asserts the proposition expressed by the sentence she utters, such as that *quarks combine to form hadrons*. At first sight, Pelling's suggestion may seem uncontroversial and inviting. However, once we grant that EK assertions can be made *correctly*—which should appear as an equally natural assumption—we give up the fairly intuitive idea that a speaker's belief in, justification for and knowledge of a proposition are necessary conditions for the correct assertion of that proposition. Accordingly, Pelling's argument would undermine in one fell swoop the norms of belief (Bach 2007; Hindriks 2007), rational credibility (Douven 2006), reasonableness (Lackey 2007, 2008), justification (Kvanvig 2009), transfer of knowledge [156] (García-Carpintero 2004), certainty (Stanley 2008), and arguably the most prominent, the knowledge norm of assertion (Unger 1975; Williamson 1996, 2000; DeRose 2002; Hawthorne 2004; Schaffer 2008; Benton 2011):

(KA)   It is correct to assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*.

Although several views in the literature seem equipped to deal with EK assertions,[157] Pelling's own solution is revisory in a further respect. Pelling suggests, along the lines of García-Carpintero (2004), that we abandon the "speaker-centered" formulation, vital to KA, and shift the norm away from the speaker's epistemic state

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[156] On the face of it, the transfer of knowledge account—"one must assert *p* only if one's audience comes thereby to be in a position to know *p*" (2004: 156)—is compatible with the possibility that the speaker does not know the proposition expressed. However, on García-Carpintero's variant of the view, this possibility is excluded. See footnote 158.

[157] In addition to Pelling's (2013b) and Pritchard's (2014) safety account, the truth rule (Weiner 2005; Whiting 2013; MacFarlane 2014) is also equipped to address the issue.

and onto the hearer's. He thus proposes a "hearer-centered" view, the knowledge provision account:

(KP)   It is correct to assert that *p* only if asserting *p* is fit to give a hearer the knowledge that *p* (Pelling, 2013a: 294).

However, unlike García-Carpintero (2004), [158] Pelling allows for the possibility that an assertion can be correct even if the speaker does not know the truth of the proposition, so long as the assertion is fit to impart propositional knowledge to the hearer. This is in fact how Pelling accommodates EK assertions while still maintaining that the concept of knowledge is central to the constitutive norm of assertion. Hence, unless KA can offer an alternative solution for the class of EK assertions, Pelling's account would suggest we move towards his hearer-centered view.

In this section, I analyze two of Pelling's scenarios that he claims involve EK assertions: "TELLING THE TIME" and "POINTING WITHOUT SEEING". Since KA can be seen as a consequence of CK, my aim is to show that Pelling's argument against KA is inconclusive, as it relies on two assumptions, both of which can be resisted. I also offer alternatives to those two assumptions and show how KA can explain EK assertions. If my strategy turns out to be viable, it could be applied across the board to the other accounts mentioned, including those which invoke the norms of belief and justification.

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[158] KA is seen as an "illocutionary consequence" (134) of García-Carpintero's transmission of knowledge rule—"like Williamson's KR, the (transfer of knowledge) norm still requires…that the act be connected with the truth-maker so as to allow for knowledge. Thus, although both views are hearer-centered, García-Carpintero's account is a hearer-oriented variant of KA, unlike Pelling's proposal which departs from KA.

5.1.1 "Telling the time"

The first scenario in which Pelling introduces EK assertions is as follows:

> TELLING THE TIME: "French holidaymakers Sophie and Marc are visiting England. A stranger asks them the time. Marc doesn't speak English, and so doesn't understand the question. Sophie does speak English, however, and she knows it is exactly five o'clock. Sophie wants to be helpful, but since she is too shy to reply to the stranger herself, she tells Marc to say "it's five o'clock". Marc doesn't understand that sentence, so he doesn't know which proposition it expresses. This sort of thing has happened before, however, and Marc knows that the sentence must express some true proposition, or else Sophie would not have told him to say it. On the basis of that knowledge, Marc says to the stranger 'it's five o'clock'. Marc himself has no idea what the time is" (Pelling 2013a: 308).

In order for Pelling's argument against KA to get off the ground, we must grant the following three assumptions: (1) Marc is making a genuine assertion; (2) the propositional content of Marc's speech act is *that it is five o'clock*; and (3) Marc's speech act is normatively correct. Since Marc does not know the propositional content of his utterance, KA seems to have considerable difficulty in showing that Marc's assertion, if it is one, can be correct.

If KA is to be saved, at least one of the assumptions (1)–(3) has got to give. In what follows, I will grant the last assumption but argue that we have good reasons to resist both (1) and (2), which would yield Pelling's argument against KA inconclusive. In addition, I will offer two alternative assumptions, (1*) and (2*), and present them in the context of two strategies that support KA.

5.1.1.1 Asserting meta-linguistic content

Adopting one approach, the KA theorist may deny assumption (2) according to which by uttering the declarative sentence "It is five o'clock", Marc asserts *that it is five o'clock*. The other two assumptions, (1) and (3)—namely, that Marc makes a genuine assertion and that he does so in a normatively correct fashion—can be granted.

On the face of it, assumption (2) may not strike one as implausible; after all, *it is five o'clock* is the conventional meaning of the sentence Marc utters and people generally convey this proposition by uttering that string of words. Yet, although this seems to hold in the majority of cases, the role of the context described in "TELLING THE TIME" is peculiar and may lead us to a different reading in the end. To show this, observe that Marc is not a competent speaker of the language and does not understand what he utters. Instead, he merely reproduces the words Sophie whispers to him. Is it plausible to think, then, that (2*) Marc may be asserting the meta-linguistic content *that "It is five o'clock" is true*? Marc's linguistic and epistemic position, as well as his dependence on Sophie, makes an affirmative reply to this question a live option.

If we allow for (2*), namely that Marc does assert such meta-linguistic content in place of the conventional content, KA would be on safe ground: (1) Marc makes a genuine assertion, namely (2*) *that "It is five o'clock" is true*, and (3) he does so in a normatively correct way. Furthermore, Marc cannot fail to know that the proposition expressed by the sentence he utters is true: that much is secured by the scenario and Sophie's reliability. Since this option is not ruled out by Pelling's argument, unless we are given a good reason to think that Marc does not actually assert that meta-linguistic content, then KA seems well-equipped to handle this kind of objection.

5.1.1.2 The proffering strategy

A proponent of KA may adopt an alternative approach: instead of denying assumption (2), she may keep the propositional content intact, but now reject assumption (1) and insist that Pelling misidentifies Marc's speech act.

According to the scenario, Marc utters a declarative sentence which is generally used to make an assertion. That is why it is natural to think that Marc manages to assert, although it is less than obvious that he actually does; due to the peculiarity of the context, this assumption can be weakened.

On its own, an utterance of the declarative sentence "It is five o'clock" is not always used to convey the illocutionary act of assertion. Instead, one may use it when guessing what time it is. On such an occasion, the pragmatic mechanism at work would cancel the assertoric force of the utterance. Likewise, similar considerations may apply in Marc's situation and render his speech act different from assertion.

To examine what speech act Marc is performing, consider conveying a coded message. An agent utters a declarative sentence she does not understand, while being aware that the recipient of the message will grasp the information it contains. In such a setting, it would be unusual to say that the agent is *asserting* the content.[159] Instead, we should look for an alternative way to express the act of communicating the message. Let us call such a speech act *proffering*.[160]

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[159] If the speaker knew the meaning of the code, it would be more common to describe the situation as one of asserting.

[160] I borrow the term from von Fintel and Gillies (2007: 44). Note, however, that von Fintel and Gillies use the term in its ordinary sense, where "proffering" roughly means "offering for acceptance"; accordingly, all assertions would turn out to be a kind of "proffering", contrary to my intention here. Roberts (2004) uses it as "a cover term for what is asserted in an assertion".

If we introduce an alternative assumption (1*), according to which the illocutionary force of Marc's speech act is that of proffering rather than of assertion, it allows us to keep assumption (2), that the propositional content of Marc's speech act is *that it is five o'clock*. It is important to mention that the proffered content is *that it is five o'clock*, not that "It is five o'clock" is true. Consequently, having ruled out the assumption that Marc's speech act is an assertion, KA does not apply and thus the problem is avoided.

Although the phenomenon of proffering is too rare for it to have a name in ordinary language, it makes perfect sense to think of it as a distinctive kind of speech act different from asserting. For instance, if Marc declined to proffer upon Sophie's request, perhaps it would be strange to say that Marc refused to assert; if the Englishman reported the event, it would sound odd to describe Marc as having made an assertion, and so on.

Just as assertion is governed by knowledge, one may argue that proffering is governed by existential knowledge. Since Marc satisfies the epistemic requirement, he would perform the speech act correctly, in accordance with assumption (3). Furthermore, this proposal is in the spirit of a broader, normative speech act theory that assumes the truth of KA.

Finally, by arguing that Marc proffers rather than asserts, we also manage to save a rather plausible claim that all competent asserters are also competent speakers. KP on the other hand must abandon that claim; according to KP, Marc falls into the former but not the latter category.

This completes the second strategy for dealing with the "TELLING THE TIME" scenario. It is important to emphasize that in uttering "It is five o'clock", Marc is not performing two speech acts (namely, asserting *and* proffering) with the same content. This is not to say, however, that the two strategies cannot be combined: one may argue that Marc both *asserts* that "It is five o'clock" is true and *proffers* that it is five o'clock. Such a proposal introduces two speech acts with two distinct contents. By opting for this third solution, we would grant all three of Pelling's

assumptions: (1) Marc makes a genuine assertion (even though he performs an additional speech act); (2) the propositional content of one of Marc's speech acts is *that it is five o'clock* (although this content is not asserted, but proffered) and (3) Marc's speech act is normatively correct (in fact, both of his speech acts are). In summary, KA is consistent with (1)–(3) under the assumption that the content of (2) need not be conveyed by the speech act in (1), just as the speech act in (1) need not convey the content of (2).

5.1.2 "Pointing without seeing"

Let us now consider the second scenario which Pelling (2013a) introduces in his discussion of EK assertions:

> POINTING WITHOUT SEEING: "Although Bill knows there is a coloured object in the corner, he hasn't seen it himself. Without looking at the object, Bill points to it and says 'that object has that shade'. Bill *doesn't know the truth*[161] of the particular demonstrative proposition he asserts. Indeed he does not even grasp it: since he hasn't seen the object, he doesn't possess the relevant demonstrative concepts of either 'that object' or 'that shade'. Bill does know, however, that given the way in which the references of the demonstratives are fixed by his act of pointing, whatever proposition he asserts, it is one which *must be true*. Bill asserts what he does on the basis of that knowledge." (Pelling 2013a: 308) (italics added)

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[161] It would be more accurate to say that Bill does not know the meaning of the proposition, rather than that he does not know its truth because, according to the scenario, "Bill does know" that the same proposition "must be true".

Imagine that Bill is pointing to a chair and its brown shade. There are two options as to what Bill is asserting. On the one hand, he may be asserting a *general* proposition, along the lines of (1):

(1)   The object I am pointing to has the shade it actually does.

This option cannot be what Pelling has in mind, however, for Bill knows that he is pointing at a colored object as well as that all colored objects have the shade they actually have. Consequently, if Bill asserted (1), he would actually know its content, in accordance with KA. Instead, Pelling should demand that Bill asserts a *singular* proposition, such as:

(2)   That chair has that shade of brown.

Now, if Bill asserts the singular proposition (2) and his interlocutor Jill is looking at the salient object, then in order for Bill's assertion to be correct, he would have to *know* the exact same content Jill does. But how could he achieve this without knowing which object he is pointing at? It seems that Pelling only needs to show that Bill asserts (2) correctly in order to argue against KA.

5.1.3 Two strategies for saving the knowledge account

I want to argue that the proponent of KA can adopt two strategies to explain why Bill's utterance counts as a correct speech act. In turn, these strategies can be presented as two horns of a dilemma for Pelling.

Assume, on the first horn, that Bill grasps the proposition expressed. The advocate of KA can insist that the relevant object and its color property may appear under different modes of presentation or guises. For Jill, who perceives the chair, the

object and its color appear under a mode of presentation that allows her to entertain the proposition that *that chair has a brown shade* in just these terms. For Bill, in contrast, they appear under a different mode of presentation, i.e. that object has that shade: it is true enough that this mode of presentation is not very informative, but it still follows that Bill knows the same proposition as Jill does.[162] Given that Bill knows the proposition asserted, KA can successfully be defended from Pelling's challenge. What is more, according to this proposal, Bill does not merely have existential knowledge, as Marc did, but knowledge proper.

Suppose, on the second horn of the dilemma, that Bill does not grasp the propositional content. KA theorist can revert to the alternative strategy of proffering. For illustrative purposes, think again of signalling a code. Bill knows that by uttering a string of words he will manage to convey a certain message, without really knowing what the message is. Given the way we ordinarily use the verb, it would sound counterintuitive to say that Bill manages to *assert* the message. Instead, as I propose above, we should better describe him as *proffering* the message. Since Bill would not be making any assertion according to this proposal, the threat to KA would not arise either. In addition, one may argue that the norm of proffering is existential knowledge, in which case Bill would proffer correctly, as he knows that by uttering "that object has that shade", he will convey some true proposition.

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[162] Likewise, we may conceive of further cases: if Jill could identify the shade of brown as a chestnut shade, say, she may have entertained the proposition using the sentence "That chair has a chestnut shade", and so on. Again, the propositional content would stay the same and KA could explain how Bill knows the same assertion as Jill does.

5.2 Selfless assertions

I now turn to the second argument against the speaker-centered norms of assertion, put forward by Lackey (2007), who draws attention to the class of "selfless assertion". Let us say that an assertion that *p* is selfless if and only if:

(i)   a subject, for purely non-epistemic reasons, does not believe that *p*;

(ii)   despite this lack of belief, the subject is aware that *p* is very well supported by all of the available evidence; and

(iii)   because of this, the subject asserts that *p* without believing that *p*. (Lackey, 2007: 599)

If selfless assertions are a genuine class of speech acts, it is intuitive to think that they can be made correctly. Yet, according to premiss (ii), the speaker would be asserting correctly while lacking the relevant belief, and thus knowledge, contrary to KA. That notwithstanding, there are at least two initial reasons to be suspicious that selfless assertions could be made correctly. One worry is that such a possibility rules out the speaker's belief in *p* as a necessary condition for correctly asserting *p*—a claim agreed upon by most theorists within the normative tradition.[163] Another misgiving is that by conjoining a report of one's own attitude towards a selfless assertion, namely disbelief, one thereby utters a Moorean sentence: "*p* and I don't believe that *p*", and ends up making an assertion which is simultaneously both *correct* and *absurd*.[164]

   These worries might still fail to dissuade one from maintaining that selfless assertions can be made correctly. On the one hand, one may pursue a less canonical

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[163] Among others, this view is shared by proponents of the belief rule (Bach, 2007; Hindriks, 2007), the knowledge rule (Unger, 1975; Williamson, 1996, 2000; DeRose, 2002; Hawthorne, 2004), the transmission of knowledge rule (García-Carpintero, 2004) and the certainty rule (Stanley, 2008).

[164] Moorean absurdity is discussed in section 3 below.

account of assertion which does not require the speaker's belief as a necessary condition for correct assertion. For instance, Pelling (2013a) and Pritchard (2014) argue that selfless assertions are made correctly for reasons pertaining to safety;[165] Wright (2014) appeals to different, virtue-theoretic considerations,[166] while García-Carpintero (MS1) introduces epistemic obligations.[167] On the other hand, one may argue that while the assertions expressing Moorean absurdity are strictly speaking correct, they still fail to satisfy some further norm; to this extent, Lackey (2007) provides a Gricean strategy.

In section 5.2.1 I examine two defenses of KA, by Montminy (2013) and Turri (2014), and motivate a departure from such responses. I discuss Lackey's treatment of Moorean absurdity in section 5.2.2, where I claim that her argument rests on the false assumption that Moorean sentences are absurd solely due to being misleading. Section 5.2.3 develops two alternative takes on selfless assertions, both of which attempt to satisfy the following set of desiderata: (i) they should remain faithful to Lackey's intuition about the correctness of the speech act performed; (ii) they should stay clear of Moorean absurdity; (iii) they should preserve the orthodox approach to

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[165] Pelling (2013b) offers an alternative account that relies on the norm of knowledge provision.

[166] The relevant standard, according to Wright (2014), is "either what the intellectually virtuous person would believe or what the speakers would believe if they were more intellectually virtuous" (253). The protagonists of Lackey's scenario fit this description, so they are epistemically positioned to properly believe what they assert, despite their refusal to believe: "if the psychological blocks were removed the speakers would come to have the beliefs that reflect their assertions" (253). Finally, Wright claims, by being in an epistemic position to properly believe *p*, one is also in a position to correctly assert that *p*.

[167] According to this approach, selfless assertions are made in a *qualified* manner: when pertinent, an epistemic obligation is ascribed to the speaker and the correctness condition shifts relatively to it. To anticipate the first scenario, the epistemic obligation of a teacher in asserting *p* consists of knowing that *p* is true according to the best scientific evidence. Thus, despite a personal belief that *p* is false, the protagonist's epistemic state is sufficient to render the speech act correct: knowing that *p* is true according to the evolutionary theory and thus asserting *p* correctly *qua* teacher.

the necessity of belief for the correctness of assertion; and (iv) they should offer an account that obeys the knowledge rule. Although I remain neutral between the two views, I develop the approach which classifies "selfless assertions" as "presentations" in more detail; "presentations" are assertives[168] distinct from genuine assertions in both the commitment the speaker incurs as well as the characteristic intention one typically has when performing them. The proposal is further motivated by allowing for the expansion of normative approaches to other assertives, a feature we may be interested in, in the light of a recent wave of normative accounts of speech acts.[169]

5.2.1 Two responses to Lackey's argument

To introduce the phenomenon of selfless assertions, let us start by considering the following scenario:

> CREATIONIST TEACHER. Stella is a devoutly Christian fourth-grade teacher, and her religious beliefs are grounded in a deep faith that she has had since she was a very young child. Part of this faith includes a belief in the truth of creationism and, accordingly, a belief in the falsity of evolutionary theory. Despite this, Stella fully recognizes that there is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence against both of these beliefs. Indeed, she readily admits that she is not basing her own commitment to creationism on evidence at all but, rather, on the personal faith that she has in an all-powerful Creator. Because of

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[168] On Bach and Harnish's (1979) taxonomy, (simple) assertives include: affirming, alleging, asserting, averring, avowing, claiming, declaring, denying (asserting …not), indicating, maintaining, propounding, saying, stating, and submitting. Alston (2000: 34) adds admitting, agreeing, announcing, answering, complaining, conceding, disclosing, insisting, mentioning, predicting, remarking, reminding, reporting, and testifying.

[169] Such accounts are offered for commands (Alston, 2000), fiction-making (García-Carpintero, 2013), showing (Buckwalter & Turri, 2014), telling (Pelling, 2013c), etc.

this, Stella does not think that religion is something that she should impose on those around her, and this is especially true with respect to her fourth-grade students. Instead, she regards her duty as a teacher to include presenting material that is best supported by the available evidence, which clearly includes the truth of evolutionary theory. As a result, while presenting her biology lesson today, Stella asserts to her students (1), though she herself neither believes nor knows this proposition:

(3)   Modern day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*.[170]

Under the assumption that Stella asserts (3) correctly—the intuition Lackey's argument relies on—it is not obvious how accounts that posit norms of belief or knowledge could explain its correctness. I now turn to two proposals found in the literature,[171] that defend KA, which were offered by Montminy (2013) and Turri (2014), respectively.[172]

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[170] Adapted from Lackey (2007: 599)

[171] Engel (2008) argues that Stella does not make a genuine assertion but only *simulates* assertoric force (2008: 52). Engel describes Stella as *accepting* (1) due to the nature of her profession. By adopting a further premiss, according to which anyone who utters *p* merely on the basis of accepting it (without believing it) is only simulating assertion, Engel concludes that KA is inapplicable. It is left unspecified how one should develop the general claim concerning simulation of assertions. It may be objected that we seem to be acquainted with feigned acts of assertion, and would use the simulation talk to describe the speech in theater shows, but not so obviously in the classroom. And although Engel may try to explain the nature of Stella's simulation differently, it is of theoretical interest to offer a more positive account, thus avoiding the jargon of simulation altogether, and exploring other strategies to defend KA. Madison (2010) claims selfless assertions are not genuine, though I find his view even more shaky as he goes as far as to insist that lies should not be viewed as assertions.

[172] See also Turri's related (2015) experimental study.

5.2.1.1 Montminy

Although Montminy (2013) denies that Stella asserts (3) correctly due to her violation of the knowledge norm, he observes that Stella *chooses* to break the linguistic rule *in order* to obey a more salient, pragmatic rule and avoid acting against her professional obligations. Given that breaking the linguistic rule is a "minor" offense compared to violating the pragmatic one, Stella asserts correctly *all things considered*: "we think she makes the right decision: given her social role, teaching evolutionary theory to her students is what she should do" (Montminy, 2013: 47).

Montminy's approach suggests that Lackey's argument from selfless assertions simply restates the old problem of a pragmatic norm outweighing KA. Moreover, as Montminy reminds us, Williamson (1996, 2009) already provided a recipe for dealing with this sort of case. In Williamson's original scenario, someone shouts "that is your train" without really knowing it, concerned that her addressee may miss the train; yet, despite lacking the relevant knowledge, the assertion is made correctly given the "urgency of the situation" (1996: 508). The knowledge norm is *overridden* by a pragmatic norm; the fact one asserted something incorrectly is secondary compared to the importance of the practical matters at hand. The same happens, Montminy argues, with the "CREATIONIST TEACHER". The exact nature of the pragmatic norm may be different from that in Williamson's train scenario, but it likewise takes precedence over KA.

If Montminy is right and Williamson-style considerations do offer a solution,[173] then Lackey's argument is hardly "the strongest type of counterexample" to KA (Lackey, 2007: 598). It merely shows that KA is not an "all-things-considered" rule: if one had to make a choice between obeying KA and a norm of a pragmatic or moral nature, it would be correct to prioritize the latter. That notwithstanding, Lackey's argument still falls short of undermining or even addressing the *sui generis* normativity

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[173] Williamson himself (2009:343) seems to accept this strategy.

of KA, precisely the kind of normativity in which the proponents of KA are interested.

I part ways with Montminy's approach due to the intuitions he appeals to: as we have seen, Montminy assumes that Stella's speech act is *sui generis* incorrect. As this clashes with the intuition that Lackey's argument rests upon, the approach I advance is motivated by an interest in seeing whether KA can explain selfless assertions without having to tweak the foundations of Lackey's argument. That said, I find Lackey's intuitions more natural anyway. In addition, as we shall see later, a possible drawback with Montminy's proposal comes from "RACIST JUROR" scenario[174] (postponed until section 5.2.3.3), which is why it may be argued that Montminy's strategy does not cover all cases of selfless assertions.[175]

5.2.1.2 Turri

John Turri (2014) offers three responses to Lackey's argument. In his first response, Turri challenges Lackey's rendering of Stella's doxastic state:[176] contrary to what

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[174] As pointed out by Pelling (2013b: 307). The "RACIST JUROR" seems to be introduced precisely to deal with the kind of proposals Montminy advances. In fact, Lackey mentions Williamson's train scenario (2007: 596) but clearly does not consider it to be a threat to her argument.

[175] Pelling's general worry is the possibility of cases where we would not be able to "identify some particular pragmatic rule which is in play, and which conflicts with the epistemic rule of assertion" (2013b: 307). By means of example, we could "imagine cases of selfless assertion which do not involve a hearer", where it would be "particularly difficult to see what type of pragmatic rule might override the epistemic rule of assertion". While this last worry has a promissory character, in need of a specific example, Montminy would still have to broaden the scope of his argument.

[176] As a matter of fact, Turri (2014) formulates his replies against the background of a different scenario (namely "DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR", discussed in section 5.2.3.2 below). When applied to Stella's case, however, his response to Lackey seems less persuasive.

Lackey concedes, Turri remarks that Stella may actually believe (3); for, if Stella offers (3) as "what is most likely to be true"[177] (Lackey, 2007: 599), then, Turri suggests, she "mostly believes" that (3) is true. Further, Turri takes one's "mostly believing" that *p* as sufficient for knowing *p*. Thus, even if Stella does not believe (3) after all, her "mostly believing" could still be deemed sufficient for knowledge in this particular case.

Lackey seems to be aware of the possibility that Stella may be seen as "weakly believing" the proposition in question.[178] But in Lackey's defense, I find it disputable that Stella believes (3) even weakly; we have seen that Stella "regards her duty as a teacher to include presenting material that is best supported by the available evidence" (2007: 599). What this suggests is only that Stella believes that (3) is supported by the scientific data, but not that any positive degree of credence in (3) can be ascribed to her. After all, in all probability, Stella is skeptical of evolutionary biology precisely *because* it conflicts with Scripture.

According to Turri's second response, Stella makes a "double assertion"; in the order of explanation, Stella first makes an *individual assertion*, whereby she speaks only for herself (to be explained shortly) and it is *by means* of making this statement that Stella produces another, *communal assertion*, made on behalf of the community of science educators.

Turri then proceeds to demonstrate how KA can explain our ordinary intuitions about the permissibility of both types of assertions. As communal assertion is permissible according to Turri's view, KA is equipped to account for such an impression of correctness by highlighting that the scientific community, on whose behalf Stella asserts (3), does indeed know the proposition. This much is fairly uncontroversial, I take it. The worry for Turri's position comes from elaborating on Stella's individual assertion. In order to motivate the reader to accept that in such

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[177] The claim is somewhat hedged, as the quote comes from Lackey's discussion of a different scenario, "DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR".

[178] See Lackey (2007), page 620, fn. 14.

contexts the individual assertions are made impermissibly, Turri considers the following example:

(4)   Speaking just for myself here, modern day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*.

It is fairly easy to agree with Turri that if Stella had asserted the individual assertion (4), then she could not have done so permissibly: due to its *added* qualifier, we understand that (4) is a lie and thus incorrect. Strangely enough, Turri never shows that the content of (4) does in fact get *asserted*. He seems to accept that the individual and communal assertions share their content: that of (3). However, if Stella's individual assertion does indeed lack a prefixed qualifier, it is not a lie nor is it incorrect in any discernible way. Thus, although some aspects of Turri's second response seem to be along the right track, the argument is incomplete. It remains to be shown that Stella's individual assertion is different from her communal assertion, even though the two assertions are made by uttering one and the same sentence.

Finally, in his third response, Turri tries to support the claim that Stella is not *permitted* to assert (3), insofar as she does not believe its content, thus making her assertion incorrect. In so doing, Turri first appeals to the data from conversational challenges: the propriety of asking the speaker: "Why do you believe that?" seems easily explained by the hypothesis that when making an assertion, one represents oneself as believing the content. Similarly, more aggressive replies such as: "You don't really believe that!" as well as the impropriety of Moorean sentences "*p* but I don't believe that *p*", seem well handled by the same proposal.

Although the points on conversational challenges and Moorean sentences are widely acknowledged in the literature, Lackey does try to meet the challenge, at

least with regard to Moorean sentences. Since Turri does not discuss Lackey's reply, I now turn to examine her view and extend Turri's point.[179]

5.2.2 Lackey's treatment of Moorean absurdity

Arguably the most pressing worry for an advocate of selfless assertions comes from Moorean sentences: "*p* but I don't believe that *p*".[180] If the first conjunct is a selfless assertion, it seems that whenever we deem both the assertion of *p* and the assertion of "I don't believe *p*" correct, the assertion of whole conjunction should be evaluated as correct, too:

(5)   Modern day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus* but I don't believe it.

According to Lackey's account, (5) is correct as both of its conjuncts are *reasonable* for Stella to assert.[181] The result is problematic, as Moorean sentences are evaluated as extremely odd (Levin, 2008: 376), defective (Schaffer, 2008: 8) and even irrational (Almeida, 2007: 54). Recognizing the difficulty that Moorean sentences pose for her view, Lackey attempts to offer a broadly Gricean account of the incorrectness of asserting (5). According to this view, Stella would *mislead* her students by uttering (5), as they would either form false beliefs or no relevant beliefs at all (Lackey, 2007: 615). The fact that (5) is misleading is hence supposed to be explanatory of why it is impermissible to assert (5), although Lackey does not

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[179] Of course, I do not wish to suggest that explaining why Lackey's treatment of Moorean absurdity fails is sufficient to defend KA. I turn to these considerations in section 4 below.

[180] The same worry applies to the knowledge version of Moorean sentences.

[181] More precisely, Stella would not be subject to criticism as an asserter of (3) or as an asserter of "I don't believe (3)".

provide a detailed account of the relation between being misleading and being incorrect.

In developing her response, Lackey discusses the following scenario, where an assertion is misleading although not absurd in the Moorean sense:

> LOSING DRINKER: Nadia and Hank know both that their friend Nina tends to go to the bar only when she loses a tennis match and that this is a fact that is generally known by all of her friends. However, Nadia knows further that Nina went to the bar today to have a drink with her opponent despite having won her tennis match. Nevertheless, while discussing Nina's recent tennis matches, Nadia asserts to Hank, "Nina went to the bar earlier today after her tennis match" (Lackey, 2007: 614).[182]

Lackey contends that no normative account of assertion is equipped to assess Nadia's assertion as incorrect. For this reason, she insists, all normative accounts should adduce the "Not Misleading Norm of Assertion" (in one of its two versions) as "an additional norm governing assertion"[183] (2007: 615):

NMNA: 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.

NMNA*: S should assert that *p* in context C only if it is reasonable for S to believe that the assertion that *p* will not be misleading in C.

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[182] The additional scenario Lackey provides is omitted here, as it does not add anything to the discussion.

[183] Lackey responds to Williamson's argument from the lottery propositions by maintaining that they likewise fail to obey NMNA (2008: 137–8).

The two norms are suggested to be "at least akin to Grice's Maxim of Quantity", according to which one ought to make one's contribution as informative as required for the purposes of the exchange.

As applied to "CREATIONIST TEACHER", Stella would be offering "either *too little* or *too much* information" when uttering (5): too much for adding the second conjunct in the first place, or too little if she does not explain why she asserts (5) (Lackey, 2007: 616). Thus Stella, like Nadia, would be violating NMNA, which is why her assertion should be rendered incorrect.

Observe that Lackey's argument relies on two main claims: (i) misleading assertions should be evaluated as incorrect assertions; and (ii) asserting the conjunction of a selfless assertion and the reported disbelief in its content is absurd in the Moorean sense for being misleading.

As far as the first thesis goes, there are two strong reasons to be skeptical about it. First, Nadia's assertion is misleading because her audience is likely to form the false belief that Nina lost the match. However, a different audience need not form any false belief when hearing Nadia's assertion; her speech act might therefore be perfectly in order. Secondly, Nadia's assertion could also fail to mislead her actual hearers: if Nadia were asked whether Nina had indeed lost her match, then, assuming Nadia would tell the truth, the very same assertion would again fail to mislead her audience.

Therefore, NMNA cannot be aptly introduced as a rule of *assertion*; it is more appropriately viewed as an instance of a general rule of conversational exchange, which can be adapted to any illocutionary force. (One may substitute "assert" in NMNA for "ask" or "guess" and obtain equally good rules.) Assessing Nadia's behavior as violating an *assertoric* norm is thus beside the point: when making her statement, Nadia could not be epistemically positioned any better than she is; her fault lies only in her uncooperative behavior.

As far as the second thesis goes, the explanation behind the "LOSING DRINKER" falls short of clarifying what is truly problematic about (5); describing (5) as being

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misleading is a far cry from capturing what is *absurd* about Moorean sentences. Had Stella uttered (5), her act would not be odd due to its alleged effect on the audience, but because it would be self-refuting and irrational. Nadia, in contrast, merely acts carelessly.

In short, Lackey's treatment of Moorean absurdity as a pragmatic phenomenon is unsuccessful. The explanation that *whenever* a Moorean sentence is uttered, the ensuing act is absurd *because* it is misleading to the hearers and there is nothing further that is "absurd" about it, misses the point. The Moorean sentence (5) cannot be treated analogously to "LOSING DRINKER", as the differences between the two cases are striking.

5.2.3 In defense of the knowledge account

In the remainder of this chapter, I outline two responses to Lackey's argument on behalf of KA. Both responses retain the orthodox belief condition concerning the correctness of assertion, and neither response presents the speaker as committed to a Moorean absurdity. In addition, they both preserve Lackey's intuition that the illocutionary act performed is correct.

The two approaches attempt to explain how one gets into the situation where "selfless assertions" occur and are made correctly. We should observe that "CREATIONIST TEACHER" features utterances made by a "spokesperson" of a certain profession. As far as the teaching profession is concerned, *any* teacher uttering (3), whether they share Stella's convictions or not, seems required to *defend* only the following, hedged content:

(6)   According to the best available evidence, modern day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*.

To see this, note that if a teacher were challenged for uttering (3), it would not be necessary to defend evolutionary theory, but only (6). What is more, if any teacher were to add that they, personally, prefer an alternative to (3), the pragmatics of the ensuing assertion would not be odd. Finally, any attempt to press teachers to defend the stronger (3), rather than (6), would be out of place.

Through the act of teaching, we may say, it is due to certain contextual parameters that one conveys a weaker content than we may think simply by looking at the sentences uttered. Yet, once a teacher is out of the classroom, those contextual parameters are no longer in force, and uttering (3) would then commit that person to defending precisely (3), and not (6).

To explain these remarks, the first proposal contends that what is asserted is only the hedged content: (6). Prefixing the propositional content with the evidential[184] "according to the best scientific evidence" does double duty insofar as it explains that Stella's assertion is neither selfless nor incorrect: Stella firstly believes the content of (6) and secondly knows it.

Note that if such "contextual parameters" applied to all assertions across the board, the consequences would be counterintuitive: we would not be able to make flat-out assertions, but instead only guardedly express the content prefixed by the appropriate evidential ("I have read that p", "I was told that p", and so on). So what is it that prevents the proposed strategy from overgeneralizing?

First, notice that such contextual parameters can be cancelled within professional settings themselves; if Stella prefixed (3) by "in my opinion", she would assert precisely (3), not (6), despite addressing the audience as a teacher. The "in my opinion" would signal she is now committing herself to defending (3).

Secondly, assume by *reductio* that by uttering "it is 6 o'clock" one asserts the hedged content: "according to my watch, it is 6 o'clock". If we assume further that

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[184] Such evidentials are called illocutionary evidentials and are often phrased as parentheticals. See Murray (2010) for more on evidentials.

one's watch stopped working and it is actually 8 o'clock, the intuition we have is that the assertion would nonetheless be *incorrect*. However, if one indeed managed to assert the hedged content, "according to my watch, it is 6 o'clock", the assertion should be correct instead: it is both true and known by the speaker. Thus, in deciding whether one asserts the straightforward *p* or a hedged "evidential, *p*", a natural suggestion is to ask ourselves whether the speaker is *committed* to the former or only to the latter content.

At this point, one may object that the explanation of why Stella is committed to defending only (6) is a result of her *professional* role and does not alter the fact that she asserts (3). Accordingly, Stella is committed to (6) not because she *asserts* (6) but because it is her professional obligation to defend only (6) and not (3).

In reply, I find the remarks on the origin of Stella's commitment misguided. If Stella is indeed committed to knowing (6), i.e., if she licenses others to act on (6), if it is true that when challenged she must defend (6), and so on, then she indeed asserts (6). By clarifying the origin of Stella's commitment one does not show that (6) doesn't get asserted; instead, one only fleshes out the general idea of "contextual parameters" referred to above.

5.2.3.1 "Creationist teacher"

The second proposal attempts to account for the same intuition: that Stella is not *committed* to knowing (3) when she utters (3) in the classroom. The explanation is now different, however. According to this view, Stella is not making an assertion to begin with; instead she is performing a different illocutionary act. It is by focusing on the nature of this illocutionary act that we can explain why teachers are committed only to the weaker (6) in virtue of uttering (3).

In introducing "CREATIONIST TEACHER", Lackey describes Stella as "*presenting* material that is best supported by the available evidence" (599, italics added). According to my proposal, "presenting" denotes an illocutionary act that is different from assertion; in presenting that *p*, I submit, the speaker's obligation is different from that associated with assertion (and, arguably, other assertives). For, as discussed above, by presenting *p* one commits oneself to knowing that *p* is true according to the given source which, in Stella's case, amounts to the given scientific theory. What is important to note is that Stella in no way commits herself to knowing *p simpliciter*, as this would be the case with assertoric commitments.[185]

In support of the second approach, observe that Stella merely presents a theory (or a part of it, such as (3)) and can therefore deny that she is thereby asserting it. The motivation for this was already mentioned above: if challenged for uttering (3), Stella could reply by defending (6) as true without making the case for (3) etc. That said, since Stella must justify (6) and not (3), we may say that the illocutionary act teachers perform is one by which, in uttering a sentence *s*, they commit themselves to knowing that *p* (the proposition expressed by a sentence *s*) is true according to the given theory.[186]

Furthermore, as Pelling (2014) argues, if two illocutionary acts are different, then the intentions characteristically associated with them will probably be different too. This seems to be corroborated in the case of presenting *p* and asserting *p*: the speaker's communicative intention while presenting *p* (say, as a piece of scientific theory) is to undertake responsibility for the truth of p *relative* to such a scientific view, but *not* to defend *p* itself. The latter intention, to defend *p*, is characteristic of

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[185] As it is often claimed that in asserting *p* one "presents" *p* as being true, we should make clear that on such a use of the verb "to present" one has in mind the truth of *p per se*, while when talking about the illocutionary act of "presenting" we appeal to a weaker claim, the truth of *p* according to some source.

[186] Typically, in addition to being the theory presented, the theory will also be supported by "the best scientific evidence".

assertion, and in the present case is something we would expect an evolutionary biologist to have.

Here, the worry concerning overgeneralization reappears: if we claim that Stella is performing a different illocutionary act, one may wonder why our ordinary assertions should not also be viewed as presentations, that are made relative to the relevant sources. By means of example, it might be that by uttering "it is six o'clock" I am merely *presenting* that it is six o'clock according to my watch, but not straightforwardly asserting that it is six o'clock.

My reply here parallels the one given before: to settle on which illocutionary act is being made, we need to understand which content the speaker is committed to; even if my watch is broken, my act will be normatively *incorrect* (i.e., I will have to retract it, once I realize its content is false). This suggests that the content conveyed is not that associated with *presenting*; for, as argued above, one presents that *p* always relative to some source. Thus, if this were a case of presenting, our normative intuitions should be precisely the opposite from those they are. In contrast, even if (3) were false, Stella's speech act would still appear normatively correct, which might be due to the fact she only *presents* (3) relative to a given theory.

In short, while we *assert* (3) correctly only if we know that (3), we *present* (3) correctly only if we know that (6). By endorsing either of the two views proposed, we avoid the accusation that Stella asserts correctly what she does not believe. In keeping with the first proposal, Stella asserts (6) and does so correctly because she knows (6). In keeping with the second, Stella presents (3) and does so correctly because she knows that (3) is true according to the best available evidence. This is a normative account of presenting that we may find plausible, provided that we previously accept KA. Furthermore, in keeping with either of the two approaches, Stella is not committed to the Moorean absurdity (7) but only to the uncontroversial (8):

(7)   Modern day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus* but I don't believe that.

(8)   According to accepted scientific consensus, modern day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus* but I don't believe that *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*.

5.2.3.2 "Distraught doctor"

In the remainder of the chapter, I apply the second strategy to two further scenarios: "DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR" and "RACIST JUROR".

> DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR. "Sebastian is an extremely well-respected pediatrician and researcher who has done extensive work studying childhood vaccines. He recognizes and appreciates that all of the scientific evidence shows that there is absolutely no connection between vaccines and autism. However, shortly after his apparently normal 18-month-old daughter received one of her vaccines she was soon diagnosed with autism. While Sebastian is aware that signs of autism typically emerge around this age, regardless of whether a child received any vaccines, the grief and exhaustion brought on by his daughter's recent diagnosis cause him to abandon his previously deeply-held beliefs regarding vaccines. Today, while performing a well-baby checkup on one of his patients, the child's parents ask him about the legitimacy of the rumors surrounding vaccines and autism. Recognizing both that the current doubt he has towards vaccines was probably brought about through the emotional trauma of dealing with his daughter's condition and that he has an obligation to his patients to present what is most likely to be true, Sebastian asserts, "There is no connection between vaccines and autism." In spite of this, at the time of this assertion, it would not be correct to say that Sebastian himself believes or knows this proposition" (Lackey, 2007: 598-9).

To take a slightly different starting point, observe that while Sebastian's uttering of (9) would not strike us as redundant, his uttering of the evidential qualifier in (10) in the same circumstances would:

(9)   There is no connection between vaccines and autism.

(10)   According to the best available evidence, there is no connection between vaccines and autism.

Again, this is because, in asking for a professional opinion, we are interested in hearing precisely what the best available evidence suggests. Thus, analogously to the case of Stella, we can say that in *presenting* (9), Sebastian *commits* himself to (10), without asserting either of the two; like Stella, Sebastian is a "spokesperson" for his profession and has "an obligation to his patients to present what is most likely to be true" (2008: 599). In presenting (9), Sebastian is doing what every pediatrician should be doing in his place. Relatedly, Sebastian does not mention the rumors, nor express doubts motivated by what happened to his daughter. Finally, as in the case of Stella, Sebastian does not correctly assert what he disbelieves nor does he commit himself to a Moorean absurdity of any kind.

5.2.3.3 "Racist juror"

Lastly, let us work through "RACIST JUROR".

> RACIST JUROR. "Martin was raised by racist parents in a very small-minded community and, for most of his life, he shared the majority of beliefs held by his friends and family members. After graduating from high school, he started taking classes at a local community college and soon began recognizing some of

the causes of, and consequences of, racism. During this time, Martin was called to serve on the jury of a case involving a black man on trial for raping a white woman. After hearing the relatively flimsy evidence presented by the prosecution and the strong exculpatory evidence offered by the defense, Martin is able to recognize that the evidence clearly does not support the conclusion that the defendant committed the crime of which he is accused. In spite of this, however, he can't shake the feeling that the man on trial is guilty of raping the woman in question. Upon further reflection, Martin begins to suspect that such a feeling is grounded in the racism that he still harbors, and so he 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. Shortly after leaving the courthouse, Martin bumps into 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,

(11)   No, the guy did not rape her." (Lackey, 2007: 598)

Start by noticing that Martin utters (11) twice: once in a "high stakes" context (to his fellow jurors in the courthouse), and once in a "low stakes" context (to his friend over lunch).[187] While in the courthouse, Martin has an obligation to present the case according to what the evidence seems to suggest. This kind of obligation is common to all three scenarios, and so Martin's first utterance of (11) can be understood analogously to the two cases previously discussed—as a speech act of *presenting*. More precisely, since Martin must deliberate relative to the standard set of legal rules, which do not allow for a biased conclusion, by uttering a sentence *s* Martin commits

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[187] Lackey (2007: 601).

himself to knowing the content of: "according to the evidence presented at court, *s*".
Thus, in presenting (11), Martin commits himself only to the content of (12):

(12) No, according to the evidence presented to the court, the guy did not rape
       her.

The reason why Lackey introduces "RACIST JUROR" is to avoid tying selfless
assertions to professional settings; thus, unlike Sebastian and Stella who made
statements at their places of work, Martin speaks outside the courthouse and hence
lacks the obligations he would otherwise have as a juror (2007: 601). This should
make us rethink our strategy; even if we grant that Martin did not make any assertion
in the court, it seems that he must be doing so now (and moreover doing it *selflessly*).
To support this worry, note that adding the prefix to Martin's original assertion, as
in (12), would not be redundant as it was in the case of Sebastian.

   A point worth noting is that Martin *repeats* (11) during the lunch even though he
is now *not* under any obligation to do so. As far as I can tell, (11) is either a lie or it is
not a selfless assertion. To show this, note that in these particular circumstances,
both (12) and (13) seem to be better candidates:

(13)   Yes, the guy did it.

Lackey could still object that while (12) may confuse the hearer as to why Martin is
not offering his own view on the matter, (13) may require further justification which
Martin might not be prepared to offer. All this notwithstanding, if Martin were to
assert (rather than present) (11) in the given low-stakes context, his act should count
as *lying*. Martin asserts what he does not believe while there are no practical
considerations compelling him to do so. Lackey, however, disagrees that Martin is
lying:

> [T]here is absolutely no intention on the part of the asserter to deceive or otherwise mislead. Indeed, quite the contrary is true—the asserter in question *positively intends to not deceive or mislead her hearer* and, as a result, asserts what she herself does not believe. (Lackey, 2007: 602)

In support of her claim, Lackey calls attention to Augustine's two necessary conditions for lying: the speaker must (a) assert that *p* without believing it and (b) assert that *p* with the deliberate intention of deceiving.

This may be too quick, however. For one thing, (b) is arguably not a necessary condition for lying: as Carson (2006), Sorensen (2007) and Fallis (2009) have argued, bald-faced lies seem to pose a counter-example to Augustine's conception. Regardless of that, (b) in fact holds in Martin's case: although Martin does not mislead his friend about the decision made at court, he is still deceiving his friend about *his own belief*. Moreover, it is plausible that it is strictly the content of Martin's belief that his friend is interested in. Indeed, by repeating the judge's verdict, Martin would not count as answering "whether the guy did it" (as required by the scenario), but only what the final verdict was, what the *judge* declared concerning this issue. Hence, if Martin were really asked to give his own take on the issue, he would be lying by offering (11).

Assume, for the sake of the argument, that (11) is not a lie. In that case, it is most plausible to think that Martin chose to utter (11) to hide his racist views. In so doing, Martin would play along as if he was being asked about the court decision. But in this case, Martin would be presenting what he does not believe and hence would not be making a selfless assertion.

Finally, a potential concern may be that in uttering (13), Martin would be concealing the conclusion reached by the court. To prevent this, it is more pragmatically appropriate to offer a fuller reply:

(14)   According to the evidence presented at the court, the guy did not rape her. But if you're asking me what I think, I still think he did it.

As Martin believes both conjuncts, no selfless assertion is made by uttering (14), either.

5.2.4 Final remarks

This completes my answer to those accounts of assertion which set the speaker's epistemic situation aside. Both available arguments in their favor fail, or so I have argued.

As regards Pelling's argument from existentially known assertions, I have argued that it is inconclusive and does not pose a threat to the knowledge account of assertion. I have offered a pair of strategies to defend KA in each scenario. In replying to the first, "TELLING THE TIME" scenario, a strategy that fits neatly with KA is to see the content of Marc's assertion as meta-linguistic, in which case Marc would know the proposition asserted and KA would deliver the correct prediction. According to the alternative proposal, the KA theorist could stick to the conventional meaning, but now introduce a different speech act of proffering. Plausibly, the act of proffering may require only existential knowledge in order to be correct, thus rendering Marc's speech act correct.

In responding to the second, "POINTING WITHOUT SEEING" scenario, I considered two lines of thought. Along the first, we may understand Bill as asserting the singular proposition under a rather uninformative mode of presentation. In this way, Bill would know the same proposition as that entertained by his audience looking at the relevant object. Accordingly, we would not need to introduce the hearer-centred view to accommodate Pelling's worry. According to the second

proposal, we may appeal to the proffering strategy, maintaining that the singular proposition is proffered, rather than asserted.

In reply to Lackey's argument from selfless assertions, I have offered two alternative accounts of selfless assertions which would satisfy the following set of desiderata: (i) they should remain faithful to Lackey's intuition about the correctness of the speech act performed; (ii) they should stay clear of Moorean absurdity; (iii) they should preserve the orthodox approach concerning the necessity of belief for the correctness of assertion; and (iv) they should offer an account that obeys the knowledge rule. While I tried to stay neutral between these two accounts, I here expanded on the version according to which selfless assertions are best viewed as a type of assertive distinct from assertion, namely presenting. In so doing, I have argued that performing these acts commits the speaker to knowing the propositional content prefixed by a relevant evidential. Such an account is motivated by allowing for the expansion of the normative approach to other assertives, a feature of interest, in light of the recent wave of normative accounts of speech acts.

What this may suggest is that the best way to accommodate the hearer-oriented intuitions is by adding the hearer into the picture, rather than substituting the hearer for the speaker. For those who are concerned that this is done at the cost of "simplicity" or "elegance" of the resulting view, it might be noted that CK avoids all this. For, the notion of "commitment", as I argued above, has a relation to the hearer already *built in*, as it were—in asserting, one is committed *to the audience* who is, in addition, aware of such a commitment as well as the ways it ought to be discharged.

6

Conversational Challenges

The appropriateness of conversational challenges[188] is a feature[189] of assertions, broadly construed: they can be seen as a type of demand requiring the speaker to epistemically support their assertions both when their content is hedged as well as flat-out asserted.

Let us start with what we may call the K-challenge, such as "How do you know that?" or more aggressively "You don't know that!". [190] The K-challenge is typically used in addressing flat-out assertions such as "Caesar crossed the Rubicon". However, its scope appears to be limited, as it cannot be posed appropriately to hedged statements: the asserter of "Possibly, p" or "I think that p", can block the K-

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[188] Alternative names include "conversational patterns" (Williamson, 2000:252) and "justificatory challenges" (Faulkner, 2011:141).

[189] I use "feature" rather than a more common "mark" as the latter may imply that conversational challenges cannot be linked to any other speech act, the claim I have argued to be false in Chapter 4. The point is not merely that other illocutionary acts, such as presupposition, might have conversational challenges on their own, but that they can be challenged in the exact same way assertions can.

[190] The K-challenge, I think, need not deploy the notion of knowledge. As far as I can see, the question "How can you *tell*?" can equally well perform the function of the K-challenge.

challenge by retorting that she never represented herself as, or committed herself to, knowing that *p*.

What's more, the K-challenge does not always apply to flat-out assertions either, although for a different reason. For instance, it might be out of place to K-challenge the speaker when it is obvious what the source of her evidence is. Thus, I cannot sensibly K-challenge a person who asserts that she is tired or hungry, because it is clear that the source of her evidence is her first-hand knowledge.

Nothing hinges on the reports of the occurrent mental states, however: whenever it is already part of the context that it is known how the speaker has the evidence for asserting *p*, the assertion of *p* cannot be K-challenged. If you know that the speaker uttering "New York City avenues run north and south" lives in New York, it is typically redundant to inquire how she knows it. We can assume that the K-challenge inquires into the type of the evidence one has when making a given claim. [191]

The C-challenge – "Are you certain?" or "Are you sure?" – is quite different in nature. First of all, unlike the K-challenge, it can be naturally put to subjects even when it is obvious where their evidence derives from. For instance, by C-challenging one's claim that one is tired, the question need not come across as redundant but as doubting its veracity: "Are you sure? You've spent all day on the couch, how can you be tired?".[192] In this and many other cases, the C-challenge demands *justification* from the speaker. In contrast to the K-challenge, which cannot sensibly be posed on this occasion, the C-challenge is more obviously performing

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[191] As Adler (2002: 160) mentions, it is also possible to view the hearer's "how do you know?" as a mere expression of interest or curiosity rather than a challenge. I agree such cases can easily be construed. Of course, the mere fact that such questions can be posed in this sense doesn't eliminate the normative character that they otherwise have.

[192] In the given example, the C-challenge behaves like a criticism of sorts. That notwithstanding, Lackey's claim that conversational challenges are generally speaking "criticisms of assertions" (2007: 610) seems rather inadequate. As mentioned, they should be more appropriately conceived as demands.

the function of a challenge. Hence, the C and K challenges, at least on some occasions, differ in nature.

Further, just like the K-challenge, the C-challenge can sound unnatural, too. The less justification the speaker represents herself as having, the more likely it is that the C-challenge would be unsuitable. Whenever the hedge is as strong as in "I really don't know, maybe *p*", it would be out of place to reply with the C-challenge. However, no general rule applies to all qualifications. A weak claim such as "Arnaud might be in a bar" might still be greeted with a C-challenge and demanded justification, even though its speaker commit herself to much less knowledge than if she asserted that Arnaud *is* in a bar.

Finally, although the C-challenge is portrayed as requiring justification, it is not unreasonable to think that it can be used to enquire about the speaker's confidence or subjective certainty. I will turn to this discussion in section 6.3.1.

The two challenges have in common that they never apply to any other act apart from assertions, including any other assertive. This is not to say that if I am guessing, especially if offering an educated guess, I cannot have some sort of evidence. The explanation seems to be that, when guessing, I am not committing myself to knowing the content or having justification for it. At this preliminary stage, this need not be clear when it comes to the C-challenge, but it will hopefully get clear later.

In addition, K– and C– challenges might require the same output. If asking the questions "How do you know that is the solution?" and "Are you sure that is the solution?", addressed to a person who claims to have an answer to a mathematical problem, the two challenges arguably come to the same: they demand a list of steps that the speaker took to reach the solution.

The two challenges just mentioned are the ones most frequently posed.[193] The question I will try to answer is, provided that K and C challenges have a normative character, which of the normative theories of assertion is most apt to accommodate these data. In the first part of the chapter, I will argue that KA and CK are equipped to account for the K-challenge with ease. In so doing, I will assess the merits of Lackey's (2007) and Schieber's (2009) objections against such a proposal and try to dismiss them. In the second part, I will analyze the C-challenge: I will discuss the strategies offered by Unger (1975), Turri (2010a) and Egan (2012) in explaining how the C-challenge bolsters KA, and try to offer a diagnosis of each of these solutions, contrasting them with my proposal.

6.1 The K-challenge

The K-challenge has proved to be one of the most important data for the knowledge account of assertion, leading Unger (1975), Williamson (1996), and Turri (2010a), among others, to argue for this view. To motivate the normativity of the K-challenge, we can say that unless it is replied to satisfactorily, the content of the challenged assertion will not be added to the conversational score, used in the rest of the conversation, in decision-making, and so on. What remains unclear, as we will see, is how to unpack what a "satisfactory reply" amounts to. I now turn to Lackey's (2007) argument which offers a distinct, although in my view problematic, answer to this problem.

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[193] Other challenges question the speaker's belief ("Do you *believe* that?"). Although I focus on the K and C challenges here, I will discuss the belief challenge in section 6.2.2.

6.1.1 Lackey's argument

The following passage delivers Lackey's view on the K-challenge:

[I]mplicit in these challenges ["How do you know that?" and "You couldn't know that"] is the expectation that the asserter will respond with some *reason for believing* that the proposition asserted is true. A natural response to "How do you know that North Korea tested a nuclear bomb?" is "I read it in the *The New York Times*." Here, I am offering my reason for believing that such a nuclear bomb was tested in response to a question challenging my knowledge. Thus, the central way in which assertions are criticized—where the speaker is accused of lacking reasons for believing the proposition in question—is exactly what the RTBNA predicts [i.e., One should assert that p only if it is reasonable for one to believe that *p*.].

If Lackey is right, the defender of the reasonableness norm appears to be in equally good, if not better position than her KA/CK rival.

In reply, I wish to argue that Lackey's norm does not account for the K-challenge as her proposal suffers from two problems. First, by focusing solely on the *reply* to the challenge, it conceives of the conversational challenge data too narrowly, losing out of sight the effect the challenge might have on the assertion. Secondly, even on such a narrow reading, her predictions do not pan out as expected given that her reasonableness norm can still be countenanced on this score.

Starting with the second observation, let us revisit Lackey's North Korea example. In the passage above, it is assumed that the response "I read it in the *New York Times*" is accepted by the audience, which suggests that all that is needed to comply with the K-challenge is that the speaker offers her "reason for believing" the challenged assertion. However, this clearly depends on what is at stake: if the

audience is skeptical of North Korea testing a nuclear bomb, they need not accept an appeal to NY Times, or any other newspaper, as a good reason.

In addition, as mentioned, Lackey leaves out a crucial feature of conversational challenges—the effect such challenges might have for the assertion in question. Thus, there are at least two ways to think of the speaker's referring to the NY Times as the source of her challenged assertion. On the one hand, she might appeal to the source as a way of supporting her claim to knowledge that North Korea tested a nuclear bomb. On the other hand, the speaker might be portrayed as withdrawing the original assertion (1), and offering in turn a hedged statement, such as (2):

(1)   North Korea tested a nuclear bomb.

(2)   According to the NY Times, North Korea tested a nuclear bomb.

As it happens, Lackey's account has a hard time explaining such a withdrawal. For, given that it is still *reasonable* to believe (1), it should likewise be correct to assert it in the line with Lackey's reasonableness norm. So why shouldn't the speaker stand by the original assertion but instead offer (2)? Notice that KA and CK can account for this datum with ease: the speaker abandons (1) as she lacks the relevant knowledge and opts for (2) as she knows its content.

In reply to this worry, a Lackeyan could bite the bullet, stressing that a refusal to make a given assertion need not always be evidence for its incorrectness. As I urged in the previous chapters, we are disinclined to put forward an uninformative or irrelevant assertion even though it can be correct. Still, this doesn't seem to be the way out of the problem for Lackey. The worry is rather epistemic in nature: the mere fact that the content is reasonable to be believed doesn't seem to *suffice anymore*. Instead, a higher epistemic state is demanded. This is the reason why we revert from asserting (1) to a weaker claim like in (2).

Hence, the K-challenge seems to require (i) the source of the evidence and demands that this (ii) evidence confers knowledge. But when the response to the K-challenge—"I read it in the *New York Times*"—is given, it seems to deliver (in some cases) only the answer to the first requirement posed by the K-challenge, not the latter. Indeed, asking "And how do you *know* the *NYT* is reliable on this score?" is a general inquiry about the source of evidence. The main suspicion with Lackey's reply, hence, is that it does not give a satisfying account of the second requirement of the K-challenge, viz. that the evidence represents knowledge.

6.1.2 Lackey's reasonableness norm and the B-challenge

I have tried to argue that KA fares better than its rival, i.e., Lackey's reasonableness account, in accommodating the data stemming from the K-challenge. My worry is that Lackey's theory fails in explaining weaker challenges, too, such as that of "Why would you believe that?".[194] For the sake of brevity, let us call it the B-challenge.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Lackey argues that one need not believe a proposition in order to *correctly* assert it. Her argument was based on the class of "selfless assertions". To raise a different worry, recall the case of the creationist teacher who asserts (3) without believing its content:

(3)   Modern—day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*.

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[194] Lackey claims that her account "derives support" from such data, although she doesn't provide any argument to this effect which would counterbalance the worry I described above. She only maintains that "the expectation that the asserter will respond with some *reason for believing* that the proposition asserted is true" is "implicit in these challenges" (610). But if Stella were B-challenged for offering (3), it is quite implausible she would offer any reason for believing: instead, she would straightforwardly deny she believes (3) to be true.

In Lackey's view, the assertion of (3) is correct because it is reasonable to be believed. The worry here is whether such a rendition sits well with the main characterization of conversational challenges as *demands*. Namely, how could it be that Stella replies unsatisfactorily to the B-challenge (as she would, if challenged for (3)) and yet proceeds on making the challenged assertion correctly? What makes the B-challenge — *a challenge?*

The normative force of the challenge, thus, seems to be lacking: one can reply unsatisfactorily (i.e., denying one meets the condition that one is required to meet) and yet be seen as asserting correctly. Lackey might bite the bullet here, conceiving of the B-challenge in different terms than other types of conversational challenges. She may urge that, since belief and assertion go apart in some cases, it should be allowed that the B-challenge can be replied unsatisfactorily without this having any normative repercussions on the status of the assertion itself. One can be praised for asserting *p* while at the same time being criticized for believing *p*. In addition, it could perhaps also be argued that the B-challenge is not really a challenge as much as a *query* of a sort.

But then, the account becomes unattractive as it portrays the B-challenge as devoid of any strength attributed to other challenges. As such, it loses the uniformity in accounting for all conversational challenges in the same fashion.

That being said, we should keep in mind that the reasonableness norm might still be compatible with the thesis that belief is a necessary condition for correct assertion. In such a case, the reasonableness norm could explain the B-challenge, as KA and CK do so with ease. On the latter two accounts, given that knowledge entails belief, and knowledge is the norm of assertion, we can require one to believe what she asserts, just as much we would require the content asserted to be true or

justified. [195] Consequently, the B-challenge is no less a demand than other conversational challenges are.

6.1.3 Schieber's argument

Joseph Schieber (2009) offers a similar argument to the one given by Lackey, attempting to sever the link between KA and the K-challenge. Although he writes from a Stalnakerian perspective, his argument doesn't depend on this framework and can be evaluated independently from it.

6.1.3.1 "The rain scenario"

Schieber's stated purpose is to show that the knowledge norm is *artificial* and is not supported by the K-challenge. In so doing, Schieber offers two scenarios which I discuss in turn.

A_1: It's going to rain.

B_1: You don't know that.

A_2: Maybe not, but I'm pretty sure it will.

B_2: Oh. If it's going to rain I should take an umbrella, then. (Schieber, 2009: 172)

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[195] Observe that the B-challenge is sometimes concerned with the *justification*, rather than belief. In the given example, we already grant that the person *believes* the content in question and go on to inquire into the ways in which she would *justify* her belief.

After A's assertion "It's going to rain" is K-challenged, A offers a reply, A_2. In so doing, A should be understood as downplaying her original assertion to "I'm pretty sure it's going to rain". As the speaker is now only expressing her confidence that it is going to rain, she knows the content of A_2 which explains why she is no longer challenged. So far, KA has a ready reply to the phenomenon. The worry comes with B_2—it is unclear why the speaker B neglects A_2 and uses A_1, despite the fact A confessed ignorance about its content. Schieber's argument, thus, confronts the claim that K-challenge is indeed linked to knowledge, under the assumption that B_2 is a correct assertion.[196]

There are two points to be made. First, Schieber's argument seems primarily to target the knowledge account of *action*, rather than assertion.[197] Namely, "the rain scenario" is meant to cast doubt on the claim that one cannot appropriately act on the basis which falls short of knowledge. But this issue is orthogonal to KA and should be ignored.

The second point, however, is more pertinent. The proponent of KA might still be required to explain why B uses A_1 in her conditional assertion rather than A_2. If anything, it is A_2 that should be given priority, as it was made clear that its content is known.

In reply, note that in conditional assertions, such as B_2, it is not required that the speaker knows the antecedent in order for the speech act to be correct. If I realize on Saturday afternoon that I don't know whether supermarkets would be open on Sunday, I can still go on and assert "If supermarkets are closed on Sunday, then I should go buy groceries today". The fact that supermarkets turn out not to be closed on Sunday would not make my statement in any way problematic. The same goes for B's assertion: it is only if the speaker went on to offer a distinct consequent, as in

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[196] Schieber makes a more general point, denying the knowledge norm *tout court* rather than focusing merely on its prospects of accounting for the K-challenge data.

[197] For a defense of this view, see Fantl and McGrath (2002) and Hawthorne and Stanley (2008). The view came under attack in Maitra and Weatherson (2010) and Benton (2012), among others.

"If it's going to rain I should not take an umbrella", that the assertion would be problematic (assuming B's desire not to get wet, say).

6.1.3.2 "The Obama scenario"

A_1: Barack will win the nomination.

B_1: You can't know that.

A_2: No, but I think he will.

B_2: Good. We need a real change in this country. (Schieber, 2009: 172)

Arguably, the two dialogues have the same form: the speaker A is K-challenged and offers a weaker A_2 in reply; despite the fact that A knows the content of her latter claim, B goes on to use the former, challenged assertion when offering B_2. And if B_2 is correct, KA is clearly threatened: for, B_2 seems to presume the truth of A_1, which A confesses to lack knowledge of.

   The dialogue is described as a "perfectly natural example of conversation" (172). However, it is not an easy task to show that B_2 indeed presumes A_1 rather than A_2; neither part of B_2 seems to rely more obviously on A_1: "good" may refer to A's judgment in A_2 and "we need a real change in this country" may be completely independent of it, reporting the speaker's personal opinion. The interpretative work seems to depend on the right understanding of "good" and its link with the sentence "we need a real change in this country". On one reading, "good" can be seen as conceding that A_1 is true, which in turn warrants the further comment about the "real change". However, the speaker B is clearly not in a position to make such a point: the elections are yet to take place, and B lacks an inside information. In word, such an assertion would be incorrect. B_2 would follow more naturally after the past-

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tense version of A_1: "Barack Obama *won* the nomination". On another reading, B's "good" might be referring to A's opinion that Obama will win. Similarly, when B says that "we need a real change" she would be expressing her opinion which is clearly independent of the truth of A_1. Finally, as B is offering a personal judgment, her assertion is known and according to KA, correct. This second interpretation would sound more natural if the sentence read "*Good*. I share your view" or "I hope so. *We need a real change in this country*".

6.2 The C-challenge

In the previous two sections, I have analyzed two arguments by Lackey (2007) and Schieber (2009), respectively. The conclusion we reached was that neither of these arguments succeeds in showing that KA and CK cannot account for the K-challenge. In this section, I turn to the C-challenge ("Are you certain?"/"Are you sure?") and evaluate the prospects of KA/CK in accounting for it.

I have already argued above that the C-challenge typically demands the speaker's justification. Further, as the challenge mentions the term "certainty", it might be thought to be about *subjective* or *objective* certainty, which would further explain the nature of the justification required.

The idea that the C-challenge invokes the notion of objective certainty is not without its proponents, both within the KA camp (Turri, 2010a)[198] as well as within the camp of those who endorse the certainty account (Stanley, 2008).[199] By taking the C-challenge to demand objective certainty, we can nicely explain why we are entitled to pose the C-challenge *after* the K-challenge: that is, given that objective certainty is a stronger epistemic state than knowledge is, demanding the former by

[198] See the following section for the analysis of Turri's argument.

[199] Unfortunately, Stanley provides no details as to how the C-challenge should be actually captured on his approach.

the C-challenge is regarded as a stronger challenge. Yet, this is not the only explanation: as I have outlined in broad strokes above, we can describe the difference between the K– and C– challenges without imposing such a hierarchy.

The reason why a proponent of KA should abandon Turri's strategy is because it is not obvious that there are independent resources that KA can appeal to in accounting for the objective certainty challenge. More importantly, it can be shown that, *contra* Turri and Stanley, the C-challenge is not about objective certainty at all. First, objective certainty is typically ascribed to propositions. We say, for instance, that mathematical or logical truths are certain. That being said, the challenge from *objective* certainty would be phrased in the third person singular, as in: "Is it certain that the Sun will rise tomorrow?". The positive reply would entail that the Sun will rise tomorrow, as this type of certainty is factive. But the C–challenge is never posed in this form: instead of asking "Is it certain that *p?*" one typically asks "Are you certain that *p?*", "Are you absolutely sure that *p?*", and the like. So, if objective certainty can be phrased only in the third person singular, and if the C–challenge is generally posed in the second person singular, then the C–challenge does not seem to demand objective certainty.[200]

Secondly, the notion of certainty in the C–challenge does not assume factivity, either. The speaker is rarely required to demonstrate that her statement cannot turn out to be false and will rarely be blamed if the evidence she gives in support of the C–challenged assertion eventually proves to be false. On the other hand, this doesn't hold for the K-challenge, which is why the C-challenge cannot require the epistemic state higher than knowledge. We can, thus, agree that when the C-challenge demands certainty from the asserter, it is subjective, rather than objective certainty.

As argued above, we shouldn't lose out of sight that the C-challenge typically requires some kind of justification from the asserter. Yet, cases when the C-

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[200] Thanks to John Hawthorne for a discussion on this point.

challenge demands the speaker's confidence also exist. These two subclasses of C-challenges should be made clearly distinct. The contrast between the two cases is that when asking about the speaker's confidence, we are not demanding from the speaker further justification. Instead, a satisfactory reply could simply consist in claiming that one indeed is confident. This subclass of the C-challenge would fall short of being a true challenge, being more appropriately viewed as a request for assurance. I now turn to examine two such scenarios.

6.2.1 Two cases

Imagine Andy is trying to deactivate a bomb and has only 30 seconds left. His claim that "The red wire needs to be cut" may be replied to with a K—challenge of the form, "How do you know?". On the face of it, the challenge is less likely to arise in circumstances like these, as it would be too mild. But if posed, it seems that Andy's assertion could be further challenged with "Are you certain?" or "Are you absolutely sure?". The challenger may accept that Andy is an expert on bombs and yet demand from him the highest level of credence in his judgment.

In another case, Rodrigo is giving evidence in court and is being asked to describe the person who committed the crime. Contrary to all other witnesses testifying before him, Rodrigo says that the culprit did not wear a cap. The lawyer asks him if he is certain. Unlike the previous case, we would now be more inclined to treat the K—challenge as inadequate, rather than too mild. If the assertion was K—challenged, Rodrigo would simply stress that he saw the culprit, just as he did when giving evidence in the first place. To this extent, asking the witness about her confidence seems more appropriate in the given context.

In both cases, the C-challenge appears to demand subjective certainty, rather than mere justification. The point is not that Andy and Rodrigo cannot *justify* their statements. What we are interested in is how *confident* they are about their

judgments. We can understand the reports of their confidence as adding the further information we would not necessarily have if a mere justification was provided. Oftentimes, a report about the justification of an assertion can be enriched by adding that one is "100% sure", that one "can't be wrong about this", and so on.

6.2.2 Unger's argument

A classical account of the C-challenge is offered by Peter Unger (1975). In his discussion, Unger starts by claiming that the K-challenge has three features: (i) it is an appropriate response to an assertion; (ii) its central notion is knowledge; and (iii) a failure to reply adequately ensues in modifying or retracting the assertion altogether (Unger, 1975: 263–264). The same three features, with appropriate changes to the condition (ii), apply to the C-challenge.

To explain (i)–(iii) stated in terms of the K-challenge, Unger goes on to offer an inference to the best explanation.[201] He proposes that, once we understand asserting that *p* as representing oneself as *knowing* that *p*, we can straightforwardly explain otherwise puzzling features of the K–challenge.

In tackling the analogous problem of the C-challenge data, Unger assumes that the C-challenge singles out *subjective* certainty. Unlike what we said above about the C-challenge, Unger seems to understand the challenge as *always* demanding subjective certainty, rather than justification. His proposal consists, among other things, in claiming that knowledge entails subjective certainty.[202] Given this, the propriety of the C–challenge is explained by appealing to the propriety of the K–

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[201] Peter Pagin (2015) makes a related point in his discussion of the conversational challenges data.

[202] Following Moore, Unger (1975) argued that knowledge also entails objective or absolute certainty. However, as I will argue, the C–challenge demands subjective certainty, which Unger discusses appealing to a Moorean sentence: "It's raining but *I'm* not absolutely sure it is" (1975:258, my emphasis).

challenge, understood in this way. A similar explanation applies to other challenges such as "Why do you believe that?" and so on.

Unger's solution was not well received in the literature. His central premiss that knowledge entails subjective certainty, is now commonly rejected. Initially invoked for the purposes of his skeptical position defended in *Ignorance*, it is sometimes described as "closely associated with detrimental conclusions" (Stanley, 2008: 33).[203] For this reason, in what follows, I will be reviewing alternative approaches that KA theorists have offered in addressing the K-challenge.

It is worth noting that, despite the general reluctance among proponents of KA to accept Unger's strategy to account for the appropriateness of the C-challenge, the theory does explain the data elegantly. As applied to the bomb case, the challenger demands subjective certainty as a component of knowledge that she is most interested in. In all such cases, Unger's solution is uniform, stating that the C-challenge always occurs as a component of the K-challenge.

6.2.3 Turri's argument

On a different approach, Turri takes seriously the possibility that the C-challenge may be pointing to the fact that "something more than knowledge is required to authorize assertion" (Turri, 2010a: 457). If we understand that "something more than knowledge" should at least preserve factivity, Turri must have in mind objective certainty as the central notion of the C–challenge. In accordance with this, Turri intends to argue that KA is *compatible* with the C–challenge thus understood. In support, he offers the following analogy:

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[203] Hawthorne and Stanley (2008) also consider cases when one may know that *p* despite lacking sufficiently high subjective credence to warrant acting on the proposition that *p*.

Authorization to wed couples is one thing; it requires being licensed by the state. Being sure that you're authorized to wed couples is something else entirely; the state issues no license for that. The propriety of the stronger challenge here does not tend to show that being sure you're authorized is what authorizes you. Being licensed is what authorizes you (Turri, 2010a: 459).

Having authority to assert that *p*, according to KA, amounts to knowing that *p* (Turri, 2010a: 457). Given that Turri doesn't endorse Unger's entailment thesis (i.e., that knowledge entails subjective certainty), this analogy helps us see how an assertion can be "authorized" without the speaker's certainty of its content, merely on the grounds she knows it. The wedding analogy, hence, attempts to show that although the C-challenge can come across as natural, it is far from establishing certainty as the *norm* of assertion.

6.2.4 Egan's argument

Another option in explaining the appropriateness of the C-challenge is to discard it as being a relevant datum. The central feature of the K-challenge is that it asks *how* one knows what one claims. Thus phrased, the question presupposes that there is, or should be, an answer to it. Hence, when we inquire how one knows what one asserted, we presuppose that one should know, which is in turn explained by claiming that knowledge is the norm.

The C-challenge, however, lacks this feature. Although it is sometimes felicitous to ask "How are you certain?" (Williamson, 2009:344), this can hardly generalize. On this approach, it follows that certainty is not fundamental to the act of asserting: it may be useful to know whether someone is certain of something, but this doesn't have any normative implications.

On this view, one can easily explain why other questions that cannot be phrased in the adequate "how" form fall short of being challenges. For instance, "Where did you read that?" or "Who told you that?" (call them W-questions) lack the adequate "how" form. Consequently, they do not challenge the normative character of asserting, but are used out of more practical interests about the source of the speaker's information. The same conclusion, then, applies to the C-challenge: although we often pose it, its relevance is not normative in nature.

Note, again, that the peculiarity of challenges is that they are plausibly viewed as a type of *demand*: should one fail to answer them adequately, one could not continue asserting the same content. At this point, the argument has a weak link. It is simply false that the C-challenge behave in the same way as W-questions do. We can surely continue asserting correctly even if we acknowledge that we have not read or heard the given content. But the same cannot be true in the case of the C-challenge because it generates Moorean sentences, just as the K-challenge does in the same conditions. It would be inappropriate for Rodrigo to answer negatively to the C-challenge and yet continue asserting the same proposition. After unsuccessful reply to both the K– and C– challenges, the speaker would either need to modify or retract her assertion. Egan's prediction is, then, incorrect, as the two challenges behave in the same way.

In comparison to this pragmatic feature, the mere syntactic form in which a conversational challenge is issued is clearly irrelevant. The fact that the latter doesn't come in the "how" form shouldn't worry us more than the fact that the former cannot be rephrased by using the verb "to be".

6.2.5 Final remarks

Let us recap our discussion of the C-challenge. We started off by arguing that whenever the C-challenge demands certainty, it singles out subjective, rather than

objective certainty. We first discussed Unger's classical argument, showing that it explains the challenge with ease, although it doesn't recommend itself, due to the controversial assumption that knowledge entails subjective certainty. We then turned to Turri's argument, relying on the wedding analogy. The main worry with Turri's strategy was that it depicts the conditions demanded by the C-challenge as too high. Finally, we addressed Egan's proposal on which asking "Are you certain?" is not a challenge in its own right. However, the mere lack of syntactic features proved insufficient to ground such a strong conclusion and we concluded that the C-challenge is on a par with other challenges.

Finally, it is left to see how KA and CK can explain the appropriateness of the C-challenge. In the majority of cases, the C-challenge demands justification. The asserter's commitment to knowledge illuminates why it is natural to demand justification. In a smaller number of cases, we are inquiring into the speaker's confidence. In these circumstances, justification need not be offered. To see this, let us revisit the scenario when the witness is being asked if he is sure about his assertion that the culprit did not wear a cap. By posing the C-challenge, one is asking for the degree of confidence that the witness has in making the statement. Typically, this confidence will match the illocutionary act one performs. Thus, if Rodrigo flat-out asserts that the culprit did not wear a cap, he did so because his memory of seeing him without a cap is sufficiently vivid. One is prepared to commit one to knowledge proportionally to one's confidence about the given judgment.

Part III

Further Issues

7

Aesthetic Assertions[204]

In the first part of the dissertation, I tried to set the stage by answering what I took to be the most fundamental question in the normative theory of assertion—what does it mean to say that an assertion is correct. In so doing, I distinguished between two approaches, the reasonabilist and objectivist, and proposed a way to think about the concepts I found to be central for either type of account: those of constitutive rule and commitment. This helped me develop one such objectivist proposal in Part II, labeled *the commitment to knowing* view (CK). After elaborating on CK, I tried to put this account to test. I have examined four sets of arguments: (i) against commitment views in general; (ii) against the knowledge account of assertion (KA); (iii) against speaker-centered norms; and (iv) against the thesis that KA and CK can accommodate the conversational challenges better than their rivals.

The aim of the third and last part is to investigate some more general issues about assertion. This chapter in particular discusses the phenomenon of performing a non-assertoric speech acts by means of making one of a specific class of assertions, which I will call "aesthetic assertions". Although cases of indirect speech acts are

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[204] This chapter is a version of the paper written with Javier González de Prado Salas. Certain parts have been omitted.

well studied, the present topic should be distinguished from more familiar cases of indirect speech acts. To give an example, consider how by using an assertion we can indirectly perform a non-assertoric speech act as in (1), or how by using a non-assertoric speech act we may indirectly assert as in (2):

(1)   In this house, we take off our shoes.

(2)   Did you see he fell asleep during your talk?

On one approach, these cases are captured by saying that by uttering (1), the speaker *directly* asserts and *indirectly* commands, while in uttering (2) she *directly* asks and indirectly *asserts*. Of course, it is a context-dependent matter whether by using (1) and (2) the speaker would perform a command and an assertion, respectively. In contrast, as Ridge argues, there are context-independent cases when an indirect speech act is performed:

> [T]o assert that p is not only to express the belief that p; it is also to exert a kind of conversational pressure on one's interlocutor to adopt the belief that p…I can advise you to believe in God simply by asserting that God exists' (Ridge 2013: 58).[205]

If we can think of advice as a non-assertoric speech act, this would suggest that when we assert we rarely do only as much: exerting "a kind of conversational pressure", we manage to perform a non-assertoric act. In what follows, I will argue that we could now have specific content which triggers the same phenomenon.

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[205] Ridge quotes Gibbard who says that "conversation is full of implicit demands and pressures. Suppose I confidently expound astrology, and you give no credence. The result will be discomfort: in effect, I demand that what I say be accepted, and you will not accede." (Gibbard, 1990: 172).

That is, unlike Ridge's general point, I will argue that when we attribute aesthetic predicates, we typically perform both assertoric and non-assertoric speech act.

7.1 Taste predicates: a brief survey

I start by introducing a related class of predicates of personal taste. For over a decade now, there has been an extensive, and still ongoing, debate on the semantics and pragmatics of such predicates including "tasty", "delicious" or "fun". Consider the utterance of the following sentence:

(3)   Brussels sprouts are tasty.

There are four positions on the table as to what one manages to express by means of uttering (3)—objectivism, contextualism, relativism, and expressivism.[206]

For the *objectivist*,[207] in asserting that *Brussels sprouts are tasty* one ascribes a property to Brussels sprouts which they *objectively* have. In this sense, tastiness is no different from roundness or greenness: two people disagreeing as to whether Brussels sprouts are tasty would be talking about the same property. The truth of (3), hence, *does not depend on* the speaker, or on any third party. Instead, there is an objective matter of fact whether Brussels sprouts are tasty, as there is one objectively true standard of taste.[208]

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[206] For a useful survey, see: MacFarlane (2014, Ch. 1).

[207] Alternative names include "realism" (Schafer 2011, Zangwill 2005) and "absolutism". The semantic view objectivism comes with is referred to as "invariantism", according to which the semantic contribution of "tasty" does not vary across contexts.

[208] We may grant the plurality of standards for different areas of discourse, but as long as a single issue is concerned there should be a single standard, too.

A more careful objectivist will not rule out *indeterminacy* in the sphere of taste (culinary, aesthetic, or otherwise): as Schafer writes, "there are cases in which there is *no fact of the matter* about whether one work of art is more beautiful than another or about whether one of two dishes is more delicious" (Schafer, 275–6). In fact, this is what all "*sane forms* of aesthetic realism" predict (ibid.). Yet, if no indeterminacy is present, and if A and B disagree whether Brussels sprouts are tasty, then "at least one of these beliefs *must be false*" (Schafer, 268). Again, this is because Brussels sprouts are tasty or not, due to a *fact of the matter* which determines whether A or B will be right (Schafer, ibid).

In contrast, contextualism allows that the contents of both A's and B's assertions can be *true*. This is due to the feature that the property of tastiness ascribed in (3) need not be one and the same across different contexts as the semantic content of "x is tasty" can vary between contexts of use.[209] On some contextualist views, (3) contains a hidden argument place for the speaker. On other, "group-standard" accounts, "the salient standard might be the standard of some group, though that group will under most circumstances at least contain the speaker and other parties to the conversation" (Sundell, 2011: 282). In this case, A's and B's assertion can be true if they belonged to two different groups. On some other versions of the "group-standard" account, the speaker need not be included at all (DeRose, 1991). Further still, the predicates of personal taste are sometimes understood as triggering the presupposition of commonality, that the relevant standard is shared by the speaker and her interlocutor (López de Sa 2007, 2008).

On the relativist approach, the semantic content remains the same but the proposition can vary in truth value relative to a further parameter, such as the judge's standard of taste. Radical relativism makes a further step, relativizing

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[209] See: Baker 2012:108.

the truth now to the *context of assessment* yielding the context of use insufficient to determine the truth-value of the sentence/utterance.

As I have already mentioned some misgivings I had about radical relativism in Chapter 4, criticizing the possibility that one is obliged to retract an assertion which was correct when made, I will not go into any further detail here.[210]

The expressivist, finally, maintains that by uttering (3) we are not making any assertion about Brussels sprouts whatsoever: instead, I would be "just expressing my liking of its flavor—something I could have done nonverbally by smiling and licking my lips. This is different from saying that I like its flavor" (MacFarlane, 2014: 1). Recent expressivist attempts at accounting for predicates of personal taste can be found in Potts (2007) and Gutzman (2014).

7.1.1 Aesthetic predicates

In this chapter, I will be interested in the predicates of "aesthetic taste"[211] and the conversational import of our use of them. Although I will examine the paradigm case of ascribing beauty,[212] the discussion is meant at clarifying other aesthetic predicates, too: what speech acts do we perform, and with which content, when,

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[210] Of course, this does not exhaust the criticism of the radically relativist position. Among the most convincing objections is Evan's worry, addressed further by López de Sa (2007) and Marques (2014), and defended in Greenough (2011).

[211] I am using this syntagm in order to distinguish such predicates from taste predicates which latter further divide into those which are gustatory (such as "tasty") and those which are not (such as "funny").

[212] See McNally & Stojanović (forthcoming).

attributing aesthetic predicates in general, such as "*elegant*", "*graceful*", "*pompous*" or "*kitsch*"?[213]

It might be instructive to compare aesthetic predicates with taste predicates.[214] One of the earliest comparisons was made by Kant in his third *Critique* (5: 212–3). Consider:

(4)   Brussels sprouts are tasty *for me / to me*.

(5)   Van Gogh's Starry night is beautiful *for me / to me*.

In a somewhat contemporary-looking argument, Kant inspects the behavior of what is now called the *experiencer parameter*—the "for me"/"to me" clause—as attached to otherwise free-standing attributions of taste in (4) and beauty in (5). According to the intuition Kant subscribes to, the use of (4) is felicitous, while the use of (5) is not. On his view, whereas (4) concerns what is *agreeable* and is thus rightly relativized to a subjective standard of taste, (5) is odd-sounding due to the added parameter. In attributing beauty, the speaker does not assert "merely for himself", as in (4), "but for everyone" (CPJ, 214). Accordingly, in a no less modern-day fashion of speech-act vocabulary, Kant held that agreement with one's

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[213] Note that, in certain domains, the demarcation between aesthetic and non-aesthetic predicates may be somewhat blurry. To use examples given by McNally & Stojanović (forthcoming), while we may describe a sculpture as *provocative* and a theater performance as *astonishing*, we would encounter a wide range of cases where these predicates could be applied equally well without any aesthetic connotation. Accordingly, McNally & Stojanović distinguish between "aesthetic predicates" and those that "happen to be *used* in making an aesthetic judgment."

[214] To prevent a possible confusion, note that on my view, as it will become clear later, aesthetic predicates depend on personal taste, which is why they could be strictly speaking labeled "predicates of personal taste". However, we are using the label as it is introduced in the literature, referring to a well-known class of predicates including "tasty", "fun", and so on.

aesthetic judgment/assertion is *demanded*, and if not obtained, the speaker denies them taste and rebukes them for judging otherwise.

However, Kant's intuition doesn't seem to be preserved in modern-day English.[215] Both "to me" and "for me" phrases seem to be widely used in beauty attributions. As it would be costly to invoke any kind of "pragmatic blindness", I will try to do justice to Kant's claim that aesthetic assertions possess a normative, universal dimension in a different manner, and apply this idea within a larger framework.

7.2 The objection from testimony

Consider the following scenario. Having visited El Prado, I ask you to describe me the painting that left the biggest impression on you. You proceed by offering four propositions:

(6)   The painting depicts a lady with an ermine.

(7)   Its dimensions are 54 cm X 39 cm.

(8)   The frame is blue.

(9)   The painting is beautiful.

Intuitively, there appears to be *some kind of disanalogy* between the statements (6)–(8) on the one hand and (9) on the other. As a first shot at capturing such disanalogy, it seems obvious that one can *learn* (6)–(8) as a testimonial upshot, obtaining second-hand knowledge. In contrast, it is at least not that obvious that one can learn (9). For one thing, the hearer will typically be disinclined to reassert (9) if she did not observe the painting herself. Further, they may refuse to treat (9)

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[215] Yet, it seems to be captured in modern-day German. Thanks to Sven Rosenkranz.

as being true on their aesthetic standard, leaving the matter indeterminate for the time being. Finally, if they were to treat (9) as a piece of testimonial knowledge in reassessing it, their audience would be likely to regard their assertions as odd, provided that they know the speaker was not experientially acquainted with the painting. Indeed, they might regard (10) meant as a full, sincere report, as being absurd in the Moorean sense:

(10)   The painting is beautiful but I have never seen it.

On the face of it, (10) might appear odd insofar as its first conjunct implies that the painting has been perceived, the same claim that the speaker goes on to deny by means of the second conjunct. The same feature is exhibited by Moorean sentences like "It is raining but I don't believe that it is raining" — as the first conjunct implies precisely what is being denied in the next step.

In defense of invariantism, we cannot conclude much from these considerations. It is surely an unargued step to go on further and conclude that there is something distinctive about aesthetic discourse that makes knowledge transfer impossible. As a first shot, the invariantist may try to soften the blow, arguing that (10) is still different from a standard Moorean sentence. For, unlike the latter, we can actually make sense of (10) by adding a certain explanation. Think of two art fans sharing the same interest in a certain painter. For the sake of example, we can allow that they coincide in their aesthetic evaluation as far as possible: they have the exact same criteria for evaluation (with the same order of priority) and agree in how the previous paintings of this artist are to be ranked. Given this, it really is possible that one of them comes to *learn* that the new painting she has never seen is beautiful merely on the grounds that her peer said so, assuming her peer is reliable and all the conditions mentioned are met. In such a

case, the semantic content of "x is beautiful" appears to be invariant between the contexts of use of the two enthusiasts.

Unfortunately, this is still far from enough. As we have seen, the invariantist urges that beauty is perspective-invariant property just as colors or tastes are. If so, both "beautiful" and "blue" would pick out perspective-invariant properties, and the testimonial practices involving these terms would work identically. And yet they don't: going back to (8) above, it seems perfectly in order to reassert "The frame is blue" as a piece of second-hand knowledge. Further, when used to construct the analogue of (10) the result doesn't necessitate any further explanation (provided that the source is reliable):

(11)   The frame is blue, but I have never seen it.

The invariantist, thus, still fails to fully capture the disanalogy noted above between (8) and (9), or between (10) and (11) for that matter. We are still in need of an explanation why the two pairs exhibit dissimilarities if the properties they involve – "blueness" and "beauty"—are both perspective-invariant. Why is the experiential nature of aesthetic judgments (their "first-handness", as we may call it) a pervasive phenomenon, in contrast to color judgments?

One way for the invariantist would be to bite the bullet, and deny the importance of first-handness in attributions of aesthetic predicates. Thus, on the invariantist proposal advocated by Schafer (2011), the testimony of an expert can still lead one to reassess her appraisal of a work of art. However, this reply does not seem to bring us any closer to ruling out first-handness – for, in order to reassess one's original appraisal, there had to be assessment in the first place. What Schafer needs to show, hence, is that there was no first-handness involved in making the original assessment.

A further option for the invariantist would be to explain our reluctance in wholeheartedly accepting others' aesthetic judgments by stressing a great variability in such judgments. However, this approach is not without problems of its own. For, if the aesthetic judgments of others are so unreliable, why would anyone think they are in a better position with respect to such judgments? In order to avoid such aesthetic chauvinism, it seems one would have to become skeptical of one's own reliability in being a judge of aesthetic matters. Both options seem undesirable.

In any case, if the invariantist chooses to keep her semantics intact, she might still be able to explain the data in some further way, by adding epicycles to the pragmatics of "beautiful". However, the resulting picture would appear to be exceedingly complex. Accordingly, we leave invariantism aside, and proceed by examining an alternative option which suggests itself for its simplicity in accounting for these phenomena.

7.3 Naïve contextualism

In contrast to invariantism, the framework I wish to explore is perspective-sensitive: by positing a hidden indexical parameter for the speaker's standard of taste,[216] one's utterance of "x is beautiful" will convey that "x is beautiful according to the speaker's aesthetic standards". The view is sometimes called "naïve

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[216] Of course, as suggested above, more flexible contextualist views can be pursued. Aesthetic predicates could make an indexical reference to a contextually salient standard which need not be the standard of the speaker (Sundell, 2011). The relevant standard may be that of a *group*, too, or the shared standard salient to the conversation (defended by DeRose as "a single scoreboard contextualism") on which "x is beautiful" is close in meaning to "x is beautiful according to our shared standard" (see Baker 2012: 115).

contextualism" (alternatively, "individualized indexical contextualism"), [217] as it provides only an argument place for the speaker.

First-handness seems congenial to naïve contextualism: if one correctly asserts that *x* is beautiful, then given that such an assertion amounts to saying that *x* is beautiful relative to the speaker's standards of taste, the speaker will typically arrive at such knowledge upon experiencing *x*. [218] In other words, one normally learns that an object is beautiful for one upon observing it. Note, however, that naïve contextualism is able to explain a more important feature, the converse of first-handness, which we may call *Authority*: in virtue of having observed *x*, the speaker will typically be in a position to make a correct assertion that *x* is beautiful. That is, the naïve contextualist doesn't need to introduce the additional recognition of what is correct according to the aesthetic standards of a group, let alone recognition of any objective matters of fact about beauty in order to allow the speaker to arrive at the correct judgment: the speaker can know everything she needs to know by experiencing.

7.3.1 Two problems for naïve contextualism

Two large problems that the defender of naïve contextualism faces concern normativity and disagreement. It is due to its difficulty in accommodating these features that naïve contextualism is sometimes characterized as the "simple-minded" version of contextualism.

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[217] See: Baker (2012).

[218] A further source of context-sensitivity concerns the gradability of the adjective "beautiful" and its dependence on relevant comparison classes: e.g., some painting may be beautiful-as-painted-by-a-child but not beautiful-as-painted-by-a-MOMA-artist. We will not discuss this sort of context-sensitivity here.

7.3.1.1 Normativity

If by sincerely uttering "x is beautiful" one thereby asserts something equivalent in meaning to "x is beautiful relative to my aesthetic standard", the present account seems to run into some difficulties. For, under pretty much any norm of assertion, the illocutionary act will turn out to be correct in most cases. This has an odd ring to it: as Zangwill remarks, it is not the case that "anything goes"—there are some aesthetic judgments we ought to make and some that we ought not to make (Zangwill, 2005: 68).

The qualifier "in most cases" is added to account for those scenarios when the speaker may still be wrong in her judgment, even on the naïve contextualist picture; e.g., the attributor may *misidentify the property* in question, now judging the object to be beautiful when it would be more aptly viewed as "elegant", say. Likewise, the speaker may fail to observe some of the relevant features of the object: thus, while identifying the property correctly, she could still fail to make the right judgment even relative to her own aesthetic standard (due to favorable or unfavorable lighting conditions, for instance). Also, the speaker may be wrong about her own aesthetic standards. Yet, these cases are rather rare and most of the time we will assert correctly. This brings into focus our problem – naïve contextualism legitimizes "bad taste" judgments as correct, contrary to our intuitions. To quote Egan:

> If I maintain that some tune I've just idly pinged out on a piano is a more beautiful piece of music than Mozart's Requiem, … I have just got it wrong. There are a lot of cases in which the parties to the dispute *should* arrive at a common view—in which one of the candidate positions is clearly the one that

both parties to the dispute *ought* to endorse (Egan, 2010, 248–9, italics added).

Unlike the naïve contextualist, the realist has a rather easy way of accommodating the points made by Zangwill and Egan: as aesthetic assertions do not provide an argument place for the speaker, our aesthetic taste may easily fail the one true standard, allowing our aesthetic attributions to be more easily fallible.[219]

7.3.1.2 Disagreement

A further worry for the naïve contextualist comes from disagreement data. If the semantic content of "x is beautiful" is always indexed to the speaker's aesthetic standards, how do we ever come to disagree with other agents? As it is frequently observed, the naïve contextualist seems forced to view clear cases of disagreement as mere cases of talking past each other.[220] In MacFarlane's words, it would turn out that "we are no more disagreeing with each other than we would be if I were to say: "My name is John" and you were to say "My name is not John" (MacFarlane, 2007: 18).

Once again, we shouldn't forget that some other contextualist proposals do not face these proposals as dramatically as the naïve contextualist version does.[221]

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[219] While the objectivist accommodates for the intuitions about normativity, she seems to fail in capturing the intuition that our attributions of aesthetic (and taste) predicates are typically correct.

[220] See Lasersohn (2005: 649), MacFarlane (2007), and Barker (2012).

[221] Björnsson and Almér (2009) argue that agreement and disagreement sometimes does not target the content literally asserted, but rather the satisfaction of some other condition made salient by the utterance. In their example, the claim "I was amazed how much healthier Bob looked" may be met with the reply "Yes, so was I." In offering this reply, the speaker is not saying anything about the truth condition of the sentence uttered by the first

7.4 Recanati's analysis

Before presenting our view, let us assess Recanati's (2008) account and its success in capturing the desiderata of normativity and disagreement:

REC: "It is beautiful" means something like *It is beautiful for us*, that is, for the community to which the speaker and his audience belong. (58)

The relevant aesthetic standard changes on Recanati's approach: the aesthetic proposition is not evaluated merely in relation to the speaker, but against the standard of the relevant community. For the sake of clarity, this much does not entail that such an aesthetic standard will not precisely be the standard of a single individual (perhaps even the standard which only one person has and no one else does). Such an option is compatible with Recanati's point that something is *the* standard because it *represents* or *determines* the relevant communal standard or standards.

Recanati's manoeuver satisfies the desiderata of normativity and disagreement. As to the former, by introducing a more demanding standard, aesthetic claims are assessed as true or false in relative independence from the speaker's personal taste, suspending the "anything goes" verdict which Zangwill rejects. Disagreement is addressed, too – aesthetic disputes are now on the same page, as it were, with all the parties trying to track the common standard. Clearly, such a disagreement is not *faultless* as, barring indeterminacy, one party will be simply wrong, insofar as they dissent from the *communal standard*.

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speaker, namely whether she was amazed or not, but about the truth conditions of Bob looking healthier.

An important concern is how such a standard is actually determined on communal views, such as Recanati's. According to one line of thought, it could be established by the agreement of *all* of its members. But since such a consensus is rarely achieved, this would entail that most objects are neither beautiful nor ugly, marking this option as a non-starter. Alternatively, the standard could be determined by "counting": depending on what the majority of agents judge or say, a given attribution will be deemed correct or not. This doesn't seem to be an attractive option either. For, while the normative standard *can* emerge from mere counting, as it does in the case of jurying, our case is yet different: there does not seem to be any competent community (as in the case of jurying) which would lead to a number of counter-intuitive results: e.g., since Beethoven's listeners would be outnumbered by fans of popular music, it would already follow that the latter has more aesthetic quality. It is thus instructive to abandon this position, too. Finally, the third option, which Recanati seems to be appealing to, identifies the relevant standard with that of privileged group of critics with the relevant expertise, particular training, and refined taste.

7.4.1 A dilemma for Recanati's view

Although the strategy of introducing *privileged members* of the community is more satisfying than the first two options, it can be questioned, too. In particular, this view seems susceptible to the following dilemma—either (i) the speech act made by uttering "x is beautiful" is performed correctly, in which case it is often a *guess* rather than an assertion, or else (ii) the speech act is an assertion, but typically an *incorrect* one.[222]

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[222] Here it is presupposed that one is typically uninformed about the experts' judgment. To motivate this thought, note that even the art enthusiasts (who are not experts) would

To expand on this worry, it is useful to invoke the knowledge norm of assertion, although the weaker norms can deliver the point with similar cogency. If we need knowledge to epistemically warrant our aesthetic attributions, it would seem that "laymen" or anyone who is not an expert in aesthetic matters would typically make such statements incorrectly. For, the vast majority of non-experts (if not everyone) lack evidence about the experts' opinion (more obviously so if the evaluated object is a *new* piece of art, and there was no way of learning about the experts' opinion by reading their critiques, say). Of course, this is not to say that "laymen" will always lack epistemic warranty. However, their epistemic credentials would indeed not be significantly different from the credentials we have when offering educated, or even "wild", guesses.

Further, I wish to invoke another "article of faith", the claim that attributions of beauty to an object (just like attributions of color or tastiness) are usually warranted.[223] For, we attribute aesthetic predicates confidently, on a daily basis, and have the strong intuition that such judgments are well-grounded. But as we often lack knowledge (and perhaps even justification) about the experts' opinions on aesthetic matters, such attributions would easily turn out to be *incorrect*.

Clearly, both options are unacceptable: we cannot insist that the resulting speech act is a guess as it misidentifies the nature of the illocutionary act we typically perform when attributing beauty; we should insist that we perform the assertion but do so incorrectly, either—if we conceive of our assertoric practice in normative terms, it is more natural to assume that we perform such acts correctly,

lack such information for any *new* piece of art; further, the variety of beauty attributions they make will still be more widespread than their knowledge of experts', often very specific, fields of interest. The same should hold for "laymen", although to a greater extent.

[223] The assumption seems reasonable on the grounds that we make such judgments with certain conviction, frequency, and perhaps most importantly, autonomy, as we do not seem to rely on any further evidence in arriving at them.

rather than incorrectly.[224] In fact, we seem to be entitled to make aesthetic judgment even when we are aware that we disagree with the view prevalent among experts or relevant peers. It is thus not irrational or infelicitous to utter (12):

(12)   Despite being unanimously disliked by audience and critics, this painting is beautiful.

Unfortunately, for Recanati, (12) is bound to be an unwarranted statement, as the propositional content of "x is beautiful" would still refer to the standard of the relevant experts.[225] The mere fact that we disagree with the critics makes our judgment false.

Furthermore, we often witness that well-trained experts disagree about aesthetic matters. Recanati's account should offer a clear procedure to determine which of the two experts' standard is the relevant one. Unfortunately, Recanati doesn't say anything about this and it is not clear how he could devise such a procedure. All this suggests, I take it, that the assertoric content of "*x* is beautiful" does not refer to other people's aesthetic standards (be it experts or laymen).

Recanati is aware of some of these difficulties. In particular, he acknowledges that cases like (12) present a problem for his account. His paper ends with a tentative suggestion that in these cases, speakers are perhaps not appealing to the standards of the community as they currently *are*, but rather to the way those communal standards *should* be developed.[226] In what follows, such a normative twist will be explored in more detail.

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[224] See the previous foot-note.

[225] One may claim that speakers may systematically be mistaken about the sort of speech act they are performing, but it is preferable to keep the level of "pragmatic blindness" of the speakers at a minimum (it is one of our desiderata to avoid an error theory).

[226] Recanati (2008: 60–61).

7.5 Beauty attributions as double-speech acts

On the view to be defended here, by earnestly uttering "x is beautiful", one is performing a double such act.[227] Against the expressivist, we claim that one of these speech acts is an *assertion*, or more precisely a *report*[228] relative to the speaker's aesthetic standard. Another illocutionary act performed is that of a *recommendation*.

The role the assertion plays in the naïve contextualist framework is that it allows us to capture what was problematic about Recanati's view: namely, that attributions of aesthetic predicates are performed by means of assertions, and that such assertions are typically *correct* ones. The latter can be explained by the fact that the assertion in question is a kind of a sophisticated *report*: namely, by reporting on her aesthetic taste, the speaker surely *knows* her standard as she is acquainted with it. Of course, as mentioned above, I do not wish to exclude the possibility that aesthetic assertions could be in principle made incorrectly—the agent may fail to correctly identify the property she attributes, fail to make a good inference due to perceiving the object in a different setting, while being in a peculiar psychological state, and so on. Leaving aside such a possibility, the naïve contextualist will generally be well-positioned to explain why ascriptions of beauty turn out to be

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[227] The same goes for other aesthetic predicates and, more generally, all value terms ("brave", "boring", or what have you). An interesting view along these lines, but applied to epistemic modals, has been defended by Montminy (2012).

[228] The notion of "report" I have in mind here requires first-handness and thus aligns with Barker's evaluation of it as being "the most straightforward kind of assertion" (Barker, 2004: 9). It parts ways with Barker at other points—e.g., Barker contends that uttering "snow is white" counts as a report given that it can be "a stance-taking with respect to a commitment to representing how things are", admittedly even by those who have never seen snow and could not offer a report in this sense.

correct. And as "correctness" is conceived here in terms of KA/CK, the conclusion will *a fortiori* apply to any weaker conception.

7.5.1 Recommendation

Now, although naïve contextualism seems congenial to first-handness and able to cash out *Authority* easily (i.e., the claim that in virtue of having observed *x*, the speaker will typically be in a position to make a correct assertion that *x* is beautiful), she may face considerable difficulties in explaining both the *normativity* aspect as well as the intuitions about *disagreement*. At this stage, the second speech act of recommendation proves useful. As suggested above, by uttering "x is beautiful" one is typically doing more than merely reporting how a given object is evaluated against one's own aesthetic standards: one also implicitly *recommends* the audience to *accept* that x is beautiful.

The content of a recommendation is not truth-evaluable: we are not describing things as being a certain way. Nor are we advising one to perceive the object, for that matter: the recommendation is, instead, conditional upon such a perception; we are inviting the addressee to *do* something, namely exercise a sensibility that would lead them to accept our appraisal. The recommendation is complied with once the addressee does what is recommended. The recommendation extends to how the addressee should be using the relevant predicates; in Plunkett and Sundell's (2013) terminology, the recommendation is partly metalinguistic, insofar as it is "negotiating [the] appropriate use" (2013:15) of the aesthetic predicate in question.[229]

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[229] See also: Barker (2002: 2-3).

a. Motivation

A general motivation for interpreting utterances of "x is beautiful" as conveying a recommendation in addition to an assertion, is that there is a *residuum* of a sort that recommendation seems to explain nicely.

As a starting point, consider utterances of the type "x is rich". Richard (2004) offers an interesting view along the lines I pursued above:

> Suppose that I assertively utter 'Mary is rich', when it is not antecedently settled for conversational purposes whether Mary is in the term's extension. My statement, that Mary is rich, is as much an invitation to look at things in a certain way, as it is a representation of how things are. In saying that Mary is rich, I am *inviting you to think* of being rich in such a way that Mary counts as rich. If you accept my invitation – that is, if you don't demur, and carry on the conversation – that sets the standards for wealth, for the purposes of the conversation, so as to make what I say true. (…) [A]n assertion can be as much an invitation to conceptualize things in a certain way, as a representation of how things are (…). (Richard 2004: 226, my emphasis).

I do not wish to engage in the analysis of Richard's text here, nor commit myself to any position with respect to the attributions of the predicate "rich". The point of interest is that there is a non-assertoric act performed in attributing richness to an individual. The motivation to posit a similar non-assertoric act when speakers attribute aesthetic predicates seems even stronger. In aesthetic debates, we respond to disagreements by becoming more *involved*, both as speakers and as audience. Kant portrayed this kind of "involvement" by describing the opposing parties as often *denying taste* to each other and issuing rebukes. Regardless of whether we agree with Kant on this, it seems that discussions about most other

perspective-dependent properties are less involved: when disagreeing about aesthetic attributions, [230] our disagreement defies being captured by a mere divergence in our reports on what we like. There's something more to it.

To accommodate such data, Kant came up with the notion of *demands*, arguing that in offering an aesthetic claim, we are demanding from our audience to accept it. All three acts just mentioned – Richard's invitation, my recommendation, and Kant's demand, are *directives*[231] in Searle's taxonomy and are probably to be listed in this order if one is to start from the least strong to the strongest.

One might think that each of these directives might be performed when aesthetic attributions are made. If you venture to say that something is *absolutely ugly* you are hardly *inviting* someone to share your opinion, but are more obviously *demanding* that such an object be recognized as such. The cases to the contrary abound, too. But in order to pursue the simplest strategy, we will conceive of recommendations as being a middle ground, as it were: weak recommendations are tantamount to invitations, while strong recommendations can be seen as demands.

b. The correctness conditions

Just like assertions, recommendations are a *normative kind*, or so I shall argue. It is not clear, however, that recommendations are normative in the same sense as assertions are. As far as assertions go, we have argued that from the point of view

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[230] As mentioned, this feature is not necessarily confined to aesthetic values. Ethical statements, plausibly, should be accounted for in the similar manner. However, this would require much more space than I can allot to it here.

[231] An anonymous referee has suggested that the present account bears similarities to Hare's prescriptivism, according to which evaluative statements involve a universalized prescription. However, as with "demands" and "invitations", prescriptions likewise seem to differ from recommendations in "strength" (to use another Searle's term), as prescriptions seem to demand something to be done.

of their norm, they are always and only assessed as correct or incorrect. Yet, while recommendations can also be assessed by such a pair of adjectives, it seems natural to resist that the normative assessment of recommendations mirrors that of assertions, for at least two reasons.

First, when it comes to assertion, if asserting that *Rope is a great movie* is correct, then asserting the contradictory content is not, and *vice versa*. Unlike with assertions, we cannot judge that if a recommendation to watch *Rope* is correct, it automatically follows that recommending not to watch *Rope* in the same situation is thereby incorrect.[232] Secondly, the normativity of recommendations adds a further layer to what we had with assertions. While assertions can be only correct and incorrect, it seems that a recommendation can be *more correct* than some other recommendation, rendering the normativity of this speech act also *comparative*[233] in nature.

As regards the first of these points, imagine two people recommending to someone to watch *Rope* and not to watch it, respectively. What precludes both of these acts from being correct? In answering this question, note that in certain conditions a recommendation will be correct or not depending by and large on the addressee; e.g., if the addressee explicitly stated that she doesn't want to see any of Hitchcock's movies, the former recommendation would be incorrect. However, in normal conditions, when the assessment of recommendation does not depend to such a high extent on the addressee, the correctness of recommendations will more

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[232] As introduced above, I take it that the content of recommendation is not truth-evaluable and does not take the form "I recommend *that p*", which is why it cannot be contradicting the content of other recommendations.

[233] In addition to recommendations, *analogies* also seem to admit of both types of correctness: just as one analogy could be *more correct* than some other, another analogy can be simply *incorrect*.

obviously depend on the speaker, [234] and more particularly, on her aesthetic standard. If so, the mere fact that two recommendations are clashing with one another seems irrelevant: so long as there is no contradiction or incoherence among each speaker's set of beliefs about *Rope*, both of their recommendations may be correct.

c. The relation to assertion

How is this double speech act supposed to work? Is a recommendation *always* made when aesthetic predicates are attributed? And how exactly is it conveyed?

Assertion should be understood as the *first* speech act, and recommendation the *second*. The connection between the two acts is that when the assertion is made, the content of the recommendation is typically *conversationally implied*.

Recommendations can be absent, however, even when an aesthetic assertion is clearly being made. This happens when one relativizes aesthetic assertions to the subject as in "x is beautiful *for me*". Once such an argument is explicitly invoked, the recommendation is no longer made, as the original, free-standing assertion is being withdrawn.[235] In so doing, I am only reporting my own evaluation, without getting across any other recommendation that this evaluation be shared with others.

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[234] Of course, the criteria for a recommendation *can* exclusively concern the addressee: e.g., if I know you suffer from photosensitive epilepsy it would be incorrect to recommend to you watching a movie with many flashing lights.

[235] See, for instance, Smith (2012).

d. Accepting the recommendation

The correctness conditions of a recommendation (or any other illocutionary act, for that matter) should not depend on a perlocutionary effect, such as that of *accepting* the recommendation. Instead, the acceptance is a *point* of recommendation, to use Searle's terminology.

That being said, we still need to show that such a perlocutionary effect *could* take place, for otherwise it would not be clear that we have described the act correctly as a recommendation. A related worry one may raise is that unlike other recommendations, the addressee is not obviously in a position to accept or fulfill it. Indeed, we do not seem to have control over our aesthetic standards, especially not if we have already perceived the salient object and formed a different opinion. Could we say, then, that just as there is no sense in recommending someone to stop being allergic to dogs, say, there is no reason to think we could be recommending matters of aesthetic taste, either?

To prevent confusion, we need to explicate what effects recommendations are supposed to produce. Imagine that your addressee openly belittles the value of *x* but that, after your recommending *x* to another person, she *immediately* changes her mind. Normally, we would find this reaction unnatural and inappropriate. For, accepting another's aesthetic opinion (especially when it is at odds with one's own) cannot be achieved automatically, as it were. Instead, it is a *process*, involving more or less complex behavior exhibited over time: getting to know the object more closely, focusing on its details, trying to develop the sensibility for its positive assessment, etc. Ideally, the audience would be disposed to appreciate the object in the way the recommender does, thus coming to share the aesthetic appreciation. In conclusion, there is a sense of conceiving of aesthetic attributions as involving rec-

-ommendations, although one has to be careful how to flesh out the conditions under which such a directive is accepted.

e. The scope of recommendation

As a rule of thumb, recommendations address the actual interlocutors, but also anyone who can be reached by a testimonial chain.

This does not seem to be always the case, however. To use Prinz's (2014) example, the dissimilarity between two musical genres, and between their followers, oftentimes can be so great that the two parties are plausibly excluded from each others' recommendations. When punk fans recommend (on the present view) *London Calling*, are they addressing everyone, including those who openly deny any artistic value to punk?

There are two ways to go from here. One is to say that such a recommendation is in fact *constrained*: in claiming that *London Calling* is a masterpiece, the punker is not addressing anyone outside of the punk clique. On another approach, the scope of recommendation is universal whenever the aesthetic assertion is unqualified (i.e., whenever one does not introduce the experiencer argument "for me"/"to me").

I don't wish to choose between the two options, although I would like to notice that there are two further ways to proceed from the first point. On one approach, since punkers form a close-knit community, a punker would actually detest if someone from the "outside" were to praise *The Clash*: their songs are to be valued and understood only by a specific community, not by everyone. But to capture this type of attitude, we don't necessarily need to have the scope restricted: the attitudes described could be behavioral in a more crude sense, without being reflected in any illocutionary force. On another approach, the attitude is manifested both in the outward behavior as well as in illocutionary force.

This line of thought is more taxing, as it presupposes that our *intentions* play a role for which speech act is being conveyed. As such, it owes an explanation as to how it could be that merely in virtue of one's intention one manages to convey an additional speech act.

f. Recommending a lost object

One of the tasks for the present account is to explain why it would be plausible to recommend beauty to objects which have been lost or irreparably destroyed. For, although we attribute beauty to such objects, it is not clear why it would make sense to recommend appreciation of an object that the audience will never have a chance of encountering.[236]

One way of accounting for this worry would be to insist that recommendations are implicitly issued with respect to most, but still not all attributions of beauty. When attributing beauty to lost objects, it might be that we are only making an assertion without the additional recommendation.

Similarly, in uttering a relativized sentence "x is beautiful to me", the recommendation is also lacking. Such an utterance makes explicit that the speaker is making a claim exclusively about her own aesthetic standard, without making recommendations of any sort. On another, perhaps more sensible approach, the key point is that the relevant recommendation is conditional in nature: if the audience were to encounter the relevant object, they should develop certain dispositions outlined above, to appreciate the object in the way recommended by the attributor. If the antecedent is not satisfied, then no such dispositions need to be developed.

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[236] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

g. The correctness conditions, revisited

What is the rule of *asserting* "x is beautiful"? By plugging in CK, one would thereby commit oneself to knowing that x is beautiful for oneself (and knowledge would be secured by having access to one's own standard of taste). As suggested, one can still fail to comply with one's own standards of correctness by misidentifying the property or not fulfilling some preparatory conditions (such as observing all relevant lower-level properties of the object, and so on).

On the present account, whenever an aesthetic assertion is made correctly, the speaker will thereby make correctly the recommendation, too. That is, as long as one fulfills the standards for knowing that x is beautiful according to one's own aesthetic standards, one will thereby satisfy the conditions for a recommendation to be successful. Once again, this depends on whether the speaker's standards are salient for the assessment of a given recommendation, and the hearer's relevance are not made more salient by a certain contextual feature.[237]

7.5.2 Normativity and disagreement

We have seen how Recanati's account tries to satisfy the desiderata of normativity and disagreement. On the present account, these requirements could be handled primarily by means of the second speech act, recommendation. As far as normativity goes, we have mentioned above that the content of recommendation is that the addressee, and anyone who can be reached by the testimonial chain, adopts the speaker's aesthetic judgment. Accordingly, we have avoided embedding any "should" claim within the content. But justifiedly so: the

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[237] As when in the example with *Rope* (7.5.1 *b*) the hearer makes clear she doesn't want to watch any Hitchcock's movie.

"should" claim seems to be present in the very act of recommending. When recommending to someone to accept a given judgment, we see ourselves as insisting that they ought to do so. In this sense, among others, recommendation differs from assertions. Kant's insistence on the universal nature of aesthetic judgment is thus captured by the default, universal scope of aesthetic recommendations: in principle, any two individuals making aesthetic recommendations which clash with one another will be seen as being in a normative conflict. This solution avoids invoking any realist commitments, such as introducing aesthetic facts, as urged by one of our desiderata mentioned above.

Disagreement is being accounted for at the level of recommendations, too. What we disagree about (again, for the most part) is whether the given object should be viewed by others as beautiful (i.e., as mentioned above, this should follow even if the content does not contain the "should" phrase). Our proposal, thus, echoes the traditional expressivist strategy of accounting for disagreement as disagreement in (non-doxastic) attitudes, rather than in the descriptive content asserted. On the present account, two recommendations will be incompatible in the relevant sense when they cannot be both followed by the same individual. This will occur whenever their satisfaction requires the audience to appreciate an object in incompatible ways recommended or underwritten by incompatible standards or sensibilities.

7.5.2.1 The argument from disagreement

If the naïve contextualist is right and the semantic content of "x is beautiful" ought to be identified with "x is beautiful according to my aesthetic standard", then a person who disagrees with (13) could still accept (14) as true:

(13)   Barcelona is beautiful.

(14)   Barcelona is beautiful relative to my aesthetic standard.

If so, how could (13) and (14) have the same semantic content? I think here we should reply along the following lines: according to the account developed here, we could say that when we reject (13) we are rejecting what its speaker *recommends*, while, in accepting (14), we deem as true merely the speaker's *report*. By granting this, the initial worry seems to disappear.

7.5.2.2 Ways of disagreeing

Finally, let me briefly remark how aesthetic disagreements can be resolved.

(i) Perhaps the most intuitive way of resolving a disagreement is by (mutual) appeal to the *common-ground*. For example, one can try and justify the quality of a painting by emphasizing it has a good perspective, symmetrical balance, uses vibrant colors, and so on. The opponent will typically either claim that the object lacks the mentioned features (at least to a significant degree), or that the object lacks other, more salient qualities. In either case, it is common to appeal to whichever common-ground features are accepted in the culture and education to which the participants of the discussion belong.

(ii) If the parties to the debate belong to different cultures (or the dispute is not resolved for whichever other reason) the speakers might find themselves in the business of "aesthetic persuasion" – the agents now try to present the artwork in the most favorable light, hoping that their interlocutors will pick up on these features and recognize their importance, finally changing their minds.

(iii) And if no agreement seems forthcoming despite such attempts, the conflicting parties may simply *retreat* to a qualified assertion of the form "Well, I (don't) find it beautiful". These explicit speaker-relative reports signal the end of the debate, as they make clear that we are issuing almost a personal statement rather than offering a directive to the relevant audience.

7.6 Final remarks

Initially, the idea behind this chapter was to explore how the knowledge account applies to particular types of assertions, such as those attributing aesthetic predicates. One of the starting points was that these assertions are typically made *correctly*—as we so often seem to be convinced in their truth, and unshaken by the judgments of others. Unsurprisingly, KA fit seamlessly with naïve contextualism: in asserting that "x is beautiful", the agent *reports* that x is beautiful relative to her aesthetic standard, which she has knowledge of. Further, as I argued, naïve contextualism should be combined with the view that aesthetic attributions express recommendations, which allows one to account easily for the desiderata of normativity and disagreement.

8

Non-Linguistic Assertions

In Chapter 4, I have defined asserting as committing oneself to knowing the proposition expressed. In so doing, I have explained the property of "being expressed" *linguistically*—a proposition that *p* is expressed by a sentence *s* iff there is a sentence *s* of which the speaker makes a free-standing use such that *p* is, or is part of, the truth condition of *s*. Now, this invites the question whether a proposition can be also expressed *non-linguistically* and, further, whether we can commit ourselves to knowing it and thus assert it. In what follows, I discuss the possibility of such *non-linguistic assertions.*

There is an important ambiguity in the term "non-linguistic assertion". Most of us would allow for what might be called *partly* non-linguistic assertions; for example, when asked whether Jack Nicholson plays Torrance in *The Shining*, you may reply only by nodding your head (as you are having a breakfast, say). Arguably, your nodding would suffice for you to *assert* an affirmative answer to the question. For, the gesture you use in the given circumstance is relevantly linked to an explicitly formulated proposition in the question.[238] We may also point out that this gesture is

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[238] See: Fricker (2012: 74, 81).

likewise a conventional means of conveying assent, although this is not necessary to make the act have such assertoric force. For, even if one introduced a completely new gesture, an assertion could be performed by using it: it is only required that it becomes common ground which explicitly formulated proposition is attached to such a gesture as its meaning.[239] The key feature, thus, is the *explicitness*, not the conventionality of the gesture.

A philosophically more interesting problem is that of a *wholly* non-linguistic assertion: can one make an assertion if the act one performs does not rely on the explicit, linguistic expression of the propositional content at all? Call this condition "the linguistic criterion". The problem I will be tackling in this chapter, thus, is whether the linguistic criterion is necessary in order to perform an assertion.

Although this problem has been raised and discussed to some extent in the works by Schiffer (1972), Sperber and Wilson (1986), Rigotti & Greco (2009), and MacFarlane (2011), it was not until Elizabeth Fricker's (2012) "Stating and Insinuating", that a strong position on the topic has been defended. In particular, Fricker argued that a wholly non-linguistic act—labeled "one-off Grice" in her terminology—cannot count as an assertion. The example Fricker uses to introduce a class of one-off Grice is as follows:

> CAR KEYS. "Suppose you and I have been to a concert together, but arrived in our separate cars. As we leave, I am unable to find my car keys—if I can't find them you will have to drive me home. I go to my car, you remain distant. Then—having found the keys in my bag—I wave at you, and make a thumbs-up sign to you, being sure you see me do so. By this act I enable you to know that I have found my keys, and hence that you can set off home without more ado." (Fricker, 2012: 72)

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[239] In addition, certain contextual clues ought to be present so as to make it clear that the sign is used with assertoric, as opposed to some other force.

Although CAR KEYS clearly fails the linguistic criterion, and thus counts as an one-off Grice, one may wonder whether other uses of waving or showing a thumbs-up sign might be allowed the status of assertions more easily. That being said, although I will try to argue that even CAR KEYS contains an assertion, a significant part of the chapter will discuss more simple cases, which also appear to satisfy the linguistic criterion and yet more obviously fall under the heading of assertion.

In what follows, I try to argue against Fricker's view, maintaining that *some* instances of one-off Grice ("OOG" for short) can be viewed as genuine assertions. In this sense, OOGs can be viewed as being capable of transmitting *testimony*[240] as well as being instances of *telling*.[241] On its own, these claims do not exclude the possibility that other, non-assertoric acts can be performed by OOGs. For example, when a police officer holds her hand vertically while on the road, she is undoubtedly commanding you to stop your vehicle. On the other hand, this does not entail that every OOG will automatically count as some illocutionary act, assertion or otherwise. Instead, as I will argue, there are reasons to consider some OOGs as falling short of communicating any content at all.

I start out by making some general remarks about OOGs. In sections 8.2 and 8.3, I deal with Fricker's (2012) two arguments. I then proceed to outline some

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[240] It should be observed that Fricker oscillates between making a more guarded claim, pinpointing that OOGs do not amount to "explicit testifying" (65) or "full-strength testifying" (83), and stronger claims such as "one-off Gricean communication does not amount to testifying to any content so conveyed" (84). Although Fricker's argument slides between these two claims, she goes on to make the stronger claim *after* having made the guarded one.

[241] As mentioned in Chapter 4, telling is considered to be a species of assertion, the successful performance of which always has an addressee. For further discussion and examples see: Fricker (2006), Owens (2006), Lackey (2008), and Pelling (2014). Note, however, that on some accounts, telling cannot be a non-linguistic act by definition: in Fricker's words, telling is "linguistically explicit communication" (2012: 64).

positive considerations in 8.4, and explain how to draw a line between assertion and cases of non-assertoric OOGs in 8.5.

8.1 One-off Grice

Fricker characterizes "One-off Grice" (OOG) as an "entirely non-conventionally mediated act" (2012: 72) of Gricean non-natural meaning. According to Fricker, this means that an OOG cannot be taken to convey a unique propositional content. For instance, showing a thumbs-up on pretty much any occasion would give rise to at least a few equally good interpretations. Accordingly, the thumbs-up, and almost any other gesture, is deemed "non-conventional", no matter how commonly it is being used in a given community. In what follows, I will employ the adjective "conventional" and the adverb "conventionally" in a more standard way than Fricker does, as referring to what is commonly employed in a certain community to convey a certain meaning. (On this usage, showing thumbs up would clearly count as conventional).

OOGs come in many flavors. As I have already remarked, arguing that they can be used as assertions does not entail that they will always amount to asserting. The following OOG offered by Schiffer (1972) can be viewed precisely as an act of communication which does not amount to being a genuine instance of the assertoric act:

WIGGLING EARS. Suppose that at a not very lively party Mr. Smith manages to communicate to his wife that he is bored by wiggling his ears, and that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Smith know of any other occasion on which someone meant something by wiggling his ears (Schiffer 1972: 126).

Schiffer's WIGGLING EARS scenario is peculiar not only insofar as it does not rely on an explicitly formulated propositional content but also for its lack of a conventional gesture. Indeed, not even the Smiths recognize wiggling one's ears as a common way of communicating the mentioned content: it is something Mr. Smith comes up spontaneously while at the party. The fact that Mrs. Smith manages to understand her husband's message still doesn't prove that the informant *asserted* it, but only a platitude that the communication was successful. As far as this goes, I am inclined to agree with Fricker that no assertion takes place in WIGGLING EARS although, as I will expand on shortly, this is so for different reasons than the ones Fricker gives.

One of my primary goals in this chapter is to argue against Fricker's thesis that explicitly formulated propositions are *necessary* for an act to count as an assertion. To show that such a claim is too strong I will be interested in seeing how Fricker's reasoning sits with the type of gestures sometimes called "emblems" (McNeill 1992: 299),[242] such as a "thumbs-up" sign or a "ring"[243] sign to which a certain kind of content is being attached depending on the context. Throughout most of the chapter, I will rely on the following two tokens of OOG, arguing that in the circumstances described assertions are actually being made.

> TWO POINTS. A basketball player steps on the three-point line while shooting a ball. The referee who is standing nearby observing the player shows a two-fingers sign to the other referee.

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[242] McNeill (1992) taxonomizes gestures in the following manner: (i) *gesticulation* – a movement synchronized with and embodying the meaning of the speech; (ii) *speech-framed gestures* – a movement that is a part of the sentence itself, used instead of the words; (iii) *emblems* or conventional signs; (iv) *pantomime*, and (v) *signs* as those typically found in a sign language.

[243] The sign one performs by putting together the first finger with a thumb thus forming a circle, with the meaning of approval.

GOLF PLAYER. A golf player hits the ball, while his audience stands on the other side of the lake. Given that the spectators cannot hear the player, nor see the ball, the golfer shows thumbs up after the strike.

At least *prima facie*, one may find TWO POINTS and GOLF PLAYER to be closer to cases of assertion and telling than the gesture from WIGGLING EARS. Yet, Fricker denies that these OOGs are instances of telling, insofar as the messaging is achieved by *non-explicit* means. In order to recover the message, the recipient of these OOGs would need to explore what Fricker calls the "*knowledge-context*"—"non-linguistic", "mutually known relevant features of context plus other background knowledge" (73). Although OOGs are not the only cases where the knowledge-context needs to be deployed, it is "at its maximum" when interpreting OOGs. In sum, not only are OOGs never tellings, but these two classes ought to be described as "opposing limits" (72).

In employing such a knowledge-context with regard to OOGs, Fricker claims, the aim is to arrive at "a specific" or "the intended" message. However, we are left in the dark as to why one should think that there is such a specific message as well as how we determine that it exists. Interestingly, at other points, Fricker allows that there could be cases when "the utterer herself does not have a specific message in mind, but only something fuzzy in a general area" (80). I will interpret Fricker as not requiring there to be such an intended message, as her argument would seem less demanding.

8.2 Argument from the singularity of content

I now turn to Fricker's two arguments against the possibility of OOGs being cases of genuine assertion, and in particular, of *telling*. Both of these arguments have the following form: there is a feature F which assertions have and OOGs lack, or else, a

feature G which assertions lack and OOGs possess. Such a difference, the argument goes, draws the line between the two classes and makes them genuinely distinct.

Fricker's first argument brings into focus the lack of resources to fix the message conveyed by OOG in a *unique* way. Her reasoning can be reconstructed as follows: (i) in any given OOG, there are "several variant messages" with "approximate significance" which "could be equivalently stated, as the content of the intended message" (79–80). This entails that (ii) "the recipient can achieve at best *conjecture* that a specific message is what was intended" (80, my italics). Accordingly, Fricker argues, neither can the speaker (iii) assume "unambiguous responsibility for the truth of any particular message" nor can the recipient (iv) come to have *knowledge*[244] of the truth of the message. Finally, the act does not amount to an assertion, because no commitment to truth takes place, nor does the speaker render herself liable to criticism (80). It is better to view the act performed as an *indication* instead (79).

a. "Several variant messages"

We have already mentioned above that OOGs are surrounded by "several variant messages", each of which may serve as the right interpretation. What's more, not only can a message be ambiguous as far as its content is concerned (e.g., one may work out the WIGGLING EARS gesture equally plausibly as "I am bored" just as "I want to go home") but also with regard to its force (Mr. Smith's OOG might easily be construed as a *suggestion* to go home, say). Unsurprisingly, Fricker finds this feature inconsistent with the genuine illocutionary act of assertions.

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[244] Fricker's 2012 paper makes a number of qualified claims, making her overall position more difficult to assess. In this particular case, her reservation is that "in most, if not all, cases of OOG, a specific message cannot be known by the recipient to have been intended at all" (2012: 79).

We are thus faced with the following problem, at least *prima facie*—if we grant that a sender of OOG is asserting and is not doing anything else, how can we demonstrate that she asserts only *one* content, rather than a plurality of them or, as Fricker has it, a "fuzzy equivalence class of messages"?

Fricker is certainly right that there is a "plurality" of contents expressed by means of using an OOG. Granted that this is so, we can still get such "fuzzy sets" with linguistic assertions. Think of Stainton's *non-sentential assertions*:

(1)   (A letter arrives. The recipient looks at the envelope, and says) From Spain.[245]

I take it that (1) does not deliver "a single message", but instead "several variant messages" with "approximate significance" which "could be equivalently stated, as the content of the intended message" (79–80). Thus, the assertor may be expressing a number of contents, such as that "The letter arrived from Spain", "I got a letter from Spain", "Someone from Spain wrote to me" and so on. Hence, just like OOGs, (1) is offering us "a fuzzy set of similar messages", although we wouldn't be inclined to deny that the assertion is being made by uttering (1).[246]

This much shows, I take it, that the fact OOGs express a set of closely related propositions does not yet show that they are not assertions.

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[245] See Stainton (1997: 61)

[246] At this point, it might be argued that these contents ("The letter arrived from Spain", "I got a letter from Spain") do not actually differ, unless we are ready to adopt a fine-tuned theory of propositions, which can be resisted. In turn, there is a single content expressed and we are left with no real counterexample. To this worry, I reply in 8.4 when examining Fricker's own CAR KEYS example.

b. Conjecture only

Fricker (2006) conceives of a speech act of *telling* as a "paradigm case"[247] of how knowledge is transmitted from the speaker to her audience. In arguing that OOGs are not instances of telling, Fricker makes two general points, one about the speaker, another about the audience. When performing an OOG, we do not take responsibility in an "overt and undeniable" way (63) of what we put forward.[248] Granted that OOGs do not convey a single proposition (but a whole multitude of them instead), the hearer "can achieve at best *conjecture* that a specific message is what was intended" (80). This is why the hearer cannot have knowledge of the truth of this message, the argument goes, and OOG cannot be viewed as a case of assertion, or more specifically, telling.[249]

A little reflection should bring out two problems with this claim. First, as I mentioned above, the presupposition that there is such an "intended", "specific message" when we make OOG seems questionable. By Fricker's lights, "specific" seems to designate a *unique propositional content*, and it is far from clear that we ever intend to convey a fixed content when using OOG. Instead, there might be a vague cloud of interrelated propositions we mean to convey[250] ("something fuzzy in a general area"). Or else we might not have a single message "in mind" when issuing OOG. To motivate these options, observe that we typically use gestures in a more *immediate* fashion, as when expressing ourselves linguistically: it is not that we first

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[247] "When one person tells something to another in face-to-face communication, by means of a speech act made in a sentence of a shared language, used with its literal meaning" (2006: 593).

[248] This point is explored in Fricker's second argument, which is discussed below.

[249] This presumes the knowledge account Fricker subscribes too. I develop this point in section 8.3.

[250] I don't wish to suggest that an OOG could still not be regarded as a complex proposition, a conjunction unifying such interrelated contents. I am only denying that there is "a fixed content" in the sense of one conjunct that would exclude other plausible interpretations.

come up with the content we wish to express and then try to come up with an appropriate gesture to "translate" it with. Instead, the process is more immediate. I take this is what Fricker means when she says, about the language-use: "it is my brain, not me, that selects my utterance-type", (f. 16, p. 67). Fricker's claim above, thus, might perhaps work for sign-language, but as we have seen, OOGs are not exhausted by such gestures.

Secondly, Fricker insists that the recipient cannot have *knowledge* of the message. Before moving on, there surely is a trivial sense in which this is true – since there is *no* single message conveyed, there can be no knowledge thereof, either. But this won't take us far. As Fricker writes: "it can at best only be conjectured what exactly the utterer intended to convey by her act". Notice that this ignores the other option (mentioned above) that one need not intend anything precise, and as such, commits Fricker to a presupposition that there is indeed such a proposition "exactly intended". But the premiss is mistaken, or at best very questionable. Once we allow that there is no fixed message one intends to transmit, the golf player could come across as the informant of a set of *closely related* propositions, not the single proposition the interlocutor is supposed to decipher. What is important is that this whole "set of closely related propositions" can be *known* by the recipient – no matter how many propositions are actually contained in such a set, the spectators can come to *know* all of them. (In fact, most propositions in this set would be elliptical forms of each other, or paraphrases in terms of synonyms, although by all means this need not exhaust the set, as I discuss in the CAR KEYS scenario in 8.4) That being said, there is something suspicious in Fricker's claim that an OOG "requires more cognitively of the recipient" (73). On the one hand, the fact that the recipient does employ more cognitive resources does not prevent the act from being viewed as an assertion. On the other hand, if we grant that this condition puts a constraint on assertion, the claim still unnecessarily generalizes: while OOGs *might* be more requiring, they need not be. As a class, OOGs are far from being uniform in this respect.

More specifically, Fricker's argument fails for the following reason: the fact that there are "several variant messages" does not yet secure that the recipient cannot recover *all of them* at once. To see this, let us go back to the WIGGLING EARS case, and try to show that it is not just the mere presence of "several variant messages" that prevents Mr. Smith from asserting. Namely, among a number of possible interpretations of his gesture, here are two interpretations Mrs. Smith might come up with:

(2)   Mr. Smith wants to go home.

(3)   Mr. Smith is bored.

Fricker's point can be raised in the following manner: despite the fact that Mrs. Smith actually grasped the intended message, she does so by a mere conjecture that (2) is conveyed. She could have, instead, assumed that Mr. Smith tried to convey (3). Either way, whichever of the two contents she rightly takes to be correct, it does not follow that the other content is true. (One may want to go home for reasons other than being bored, and one can be bored without wanting to go home). This should make us see that there is something more going on in WIGGLING EARS than the existence of "several variant messages", as Fricker reports. The point is that (2) and (3) do not share certain epistemological relational properties, which I'll try to make clear by contrasting this case with that of TWO POINTS. As to the latter, some plausible readings of the referee's signal might be:

(4)   He scored two points.

(5)   It was two, not three points.

Note that in virtue of knowing either one of these messages, the audience will thereby know the other. This relation—that from "*A knows that P*" it follows that "*A knows that Q*" as long as *Q* is an element of the set *S* of plausible interpretations, just as *P* is—holds in the case of TWO POINTS and many other OOGs (although not in WIGGLING EARS). Accordingly, I believe, the audience does not seem to merely *conjecture* a part of or the whole message: they know it. No matter how many plausible interpretations there are, the audience can recover all of them, and obtain *testimonial knowledge*.

There is, however, a stronger claim Fricker makes. She invites us to consider an example where an agent is in the desert, and puts up a placard drawing on it "a happy face with an arrow pointing north"[251] (81). These two symbols underdetermine two readings—that "there is definitely water that way" and that "there may perhaps be water that way". Unlike (4) and (5), these two propositions do *not* form a set of *closely related* propositions (at least, not if we define *closely-relatedness* in terms of whether an agent can know *all* the propositions within the set merely in virtue of knowing *one* of them). Indeed, facing the indeterminacy between interpreting an OOG as saying that *p* and as saying that *possibly p* is a more pressing worry.[252]

It is fair to agree with Fricker that the possibility the speaker conveyed both "P" and "possibly, P" is out of the picture. That notwithstanding, I am not convinced that Fricker's example is suitable for the purpose at hand. Her other attempt, where by means of nodding to the question "Has the lecture been cancelled?" one's message can be interpreted as "the lecture is cancelled" as well as "the lecture may have been cancelled" is similarly dubious.

To argue against Fricker that only one of these contents has been conveyed (either "P" or "Possibly P") let us introduce the following "criterion of criticism": if it

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[251] Although this is not a gesture anymore, it can be still considered as an intentional "configuration of objects" and as such an *utterance*: in addition to oral utterances and gestures, Pagin (2014) classifies such configurations and inscriptions as utterances.

[252] See Hawthorne 2012: 104.

turns out that the speaker meant to convey the content A, and the audience is prone to criticize the speaker for misleading the audience, then the given OOG is used incorrectly to convey A. I believe this rules out both of Fricker's examples. For, if it turns out that the speaker only wanted to convey that the water is *perhaps* in the designated direction, she would be criticized for *misleading* the audience. The same applies, I believe rather obviously, to Fricker's other example. (Later on, I will provide further criticism criteria, though this one serves the purpose at the moment).

Even if Fricker could come up with an example, where by sending an OOG one could equally interpret the content as "P" and "possibly P", this possibility won't take us too far. For, the defender of "assertoric OOGs" doesn't need to demonstrate that every OOG is assertoric. As I will argue in section 8.5, an OOG can still be used in in way that does not amount to an illocutionary act. Yet, if an OOG is used in an *appropriate* fashion, i.e., *correctly*, we can make a strong claim there is a certain illocutionary act involved, be it assertion or otherwise.

c. Indication

Finally, Fricker contends that since the audience cannot have knowledge of the OOG message, the speech act cannot be that of assertion, but *indication* instead. I hope to have shown that the premiss according to which the audience cannot have knowledge is a non-starter. But regardless of this, I am here interested in making a small point about this alternative speech act of *indication*.

Fricker herself doesn't flesh out what such "indication" involves, although she offers some instances. "I may indicate to you that I am happy by deliberately smiling at you" (81). A more helpful example is given below:

Suppose you and I have been to a concert together, but arrived in our separate

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cars. As we leave, I am unable to find my car keys—if I can't find them you will have to drive me home. I go to my car, you remain distant. Then—having found the keys in my bag—I wave at you, and make a thumbs-up sign to you, being sure you see me do so. By this act I enable you to know that I have found my keys, and hence that you can set off home without more ado (ibid, 72).

In this case, the "recipient concludes that it is being indicated that it is fine for him to drive home" (ibid, 79). The indication *qua* speech act, in Fricker's usage, is contrasted with testimony.[253] Hence, while testimony can be achieved only by means of a statement (82), indication is something the recipient *infers* (81); e.g., "I have found the keys", "They were in a bag", and so on.

One worry with Fricker's hypothesis is that there is nothing incompatible with one and the same act being both an indication and an assertion. To show this, note that an indication is not an illocutionary act in the orthodox sense of the word (as assertions, commands, or questions are). Instead, we should understand indication as a sort of a "relational" illocutionary force: such speech act is parsed always as an indication *of* another, "genuine" illocutionary act.[254] For instance, one may indicate a warning, directive, pleading, or assertion. A similar, relational act is that of *insinuation* (see: Camp, MS), for these very same reasons. In conclusion, claiming that an act is not an assertion *because* it is an indication is thus misguided, and possibly a category mistake.

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[253] Following Owens' (2006) characterization of indication, we may say that by indicating, we "provide evidence for" as in "the wet side-walk indicates that it has rained" (2006: 106). This seems to be on the right track, albeit too broad – we are still interested in what kind of *speech act* indication amounts to

[254] This is why classifying indication among assertives, as proposed by Bach and Harnish (1979), seems likewise inadequate.

8.3 Argument from deniability

Turning to Fricker's second argument, it is crucial to note that she adopts some sort of the commitment-based view of *telling* (although not assertion, 2002:62, fn. 4) according to which in telling one that *p* the speaker incurs the commitment that one knows that *p* is true.

There are two broad ways one can deny having such a commitment: (i) we may emphasize that we did not *tell* anything in the first place (but instead voiced a "probable belief, conjecture or wish"[255]); in this event, one denies that one ever incurred such responsibility; (ii) alternatively, we can insist that, while we did assert, we asserted a different proposition than the one attributed to us. Either way, Fricker argues that insisting we have been misunderstood won't work for assertions in most cases. For, we typically recognize assertions and contents asserted pretty easily. For this reason, such attempts will be marked by "scant credibility" (83, f.27) and would be unconvincing (75).

One can deny OOGs in the same ways, by denying either the force or the content. In contrast, such denials would not be incredible as they were in the case of assertions. In the case of OOGs, we *could* say credibly that we did not intend to assert the given message, but instead only put it forward in terms of a guess. Or, that we were misunderstood as regards the precise content of our message. Given that these denials can be made *credibly*, in Fricker's mind, such a disanalogy shows that performing an OOG cannot amount to *asserting* (83).

As with the previous argument, I think Fricker assumes that the gap between assertion and OOG is bigger than it actually is. She argues that such denials do not apply to OOGs because "the identity of a precise message is not fixed" in their case (71) which is why they are "less unsuited to deniable messaging". But why should this

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[255] Note that "telling" here refers to a subset of assertion, rather than a blanket term for unspecific speech act.

bother us? Think of the golfer case again: although the precise propositional content is not fixed (because there is a plurality of them) this hardly means that the golfer can credibly deny she wanted to convey either of these messages. If the golfer were to insist that she *only* meant to convey "I scored" but *not* that the ball is in, there are few available options: (a) the recipient can reply that the two messages are, in effect, the same (in the sense that one cannot score unless the ball is in or *vice versa*); (b) it might be suggested that the signal used is too unspecified, it actually *conveys* more than one message, which is why the sender must have in mind that no such deniability of any specific message (such as "the ball is in" as opposed to a more favorable "I scored") would be credible. By sending such a signal, one cannot be favoring one of the possible interpretations over the others.

One might report having different intuitions. To prevent such a problem, we can look for a different criterion. For instance, imagine that the golfer used the thumbs up OOG in order to convey a different message, say, that he missed the hole. The test we put in front of ourselves is: would the recipient be authorized to *criticize* the sender of the message once they realize what message she intended to convey? The affirmative answer is in place here, the explanation for which is that there is a *convention*, shared by both the sender and the recipient, which is not respected in this case: the signal is used *improperly* or *incorrectly*. Consequently, Fricker is wrong when she says that OOGs are "not regarded by participants as subject to the K-norm" (81). The mere fact OOGs are made by a non-linguistic vehicle shouldn't prevent them from being governed by knowledge, as I tried to argue.

8.4 Positive considerations

It might be objected that both TWO POINTS and GOLF PLAYER contain an explicitly formulated proposition and fall short of being genuine OOGs. Indeed, even if the signs were never officially introduced in the games, they do not seem to

be "one-off" in any strict sense of the word: over time, these signs might have become conventional (especially in the former case) and it is not that the referee who is the recipient of the message employs anew any knowledge-context. Be that as it may, I am still far from confident that Fricker's considerations actually rule out these gestures from being OOGs, but I am happy to concede this point so as to see whether we make our case by employing more remote examples. Let us reintroduce Fricker's example of OOG mentioned in the first section:

> CAR KEYS. "Suppose you and I have been to a concert together, but arrived in our separate cars. As we leave, I am unable to find my car keys—if I can't find them you will have to drive me home. I go to my car, you remain distant. Then—having found the keys in my bag—I wave at you, and make a thumbs-up sign to you, being sure you see me do so. By this act I enable you to know that I have found my keys, and hence that you can set off home without more ado." (Fricker, 2012: 72)

As opposed to TWO POINTS and GOLF PLAYER, the set of plausible interpretations appears to be wider in the case of CAR KEYS. The sender might be interpreted as conveying both "I found the keys" as well as "You can go home now". But how does the mere fact these interpretations are possible rule out the act from being an assertion? Note that the speaker is committing herself to knowing both contents, in addition to perhaps some other contents. First, this makes the issuance of conversational challenges appropriate; the receiver can ask if the sender is certain that these are the right keys. Secondly, although a receiver's interpretation may deliver only part of such content, they can learn each and every of these interpretations, accordingly attaining testimonial knowledge. Thirdly, if it turned out that these were indeed the wrong keys, the sender would be liable to criticism. Even though the sign is used in "one-off" manner, they are nonetheless *conventional* (in our

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sense) and this makes a criticism of the sender appropriate. It is also due to this trait that the sender can *commit* herself to a message (or set of closely related messages) in the first place as well as that the audience can view her as being thus committed. Similarly, the conventionality of the signs used in the OOGs puts the audience in a position to work out the intended meaning and criticize the sender should the message turn out false.

Contra Fricker, I argued that the linguistic criterion (i.e., there being an explicit, linguistically formulated proposition the sender of OOG relies upon) is not a necessary condition for an act to be characterized as an assertion. Instead, it is both sufficient *and* necessary that there be the *commitment to knowledge* the sender undertakes and the receiver *recognizes* and can interpret its content. For this, indeed, no explicitly formulated proposition is really needed. As argued, in order for a receiver to reach the right interpretation we do not stand in need of any "single-proposition" requirement Fricker repeatedly imposes. It is enough that the audience can be epistemically positioned to know all the plausible interpretations of the message. As argued to this end, these interpretations should be similar to a certain extent.

8.5 Final remarks

Why is it the case that some OOGs which are made with the "assertoric meaning" are not assertions? Going back to Stainton's example (1), "From Spain", I have contended above that the utterance counts as an assertion because of the context where it is common ground that the speaker received the salient letter. Imagine now that there was no letter to begin with – we can construe an example where such an utterance does not amount to an assertion.

It can be argued that similar things happen with OOGs in general. As regards WIGGLING EARS, neither is the gesture conventional nor does the context give

sufficient clues as to how the gesture is to be interpreted.[256] In this case, the audience is not able to "work out" the meaning in the relevant context as the sender is either less than fully cooperative or less than fully competent. For, the sign Mr. Smith uses in the given context cannot be interpreted so as to reach the class of interrelated propositions such that from the fact that *A knows that P* it follows that *A knows that Q* as long as *Q* is an element of the set *S* of plausible interpretations. Due to too much guesswork involved, Smith may easily fail to communicate. Of course, all this may be due to limitations of the context, our resources in the pool of gestures, and so on.

In conclusion, propositions can be expressed *non-linguistically* by a gesture in an appropriate context. Whenever a subject commits oneself to knowing such a proposition, one thereby makes a non-linguistic assertion.

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[256] I don't wish to exclude a possibility that an assertion can be made without using a conventional device, as in the BOTTLE OF PILLS scenario, as long as the context provides sufficient clues as to how the message should be recovered.

9
Conclusion

After the introductory chapter, I set out to answer what I took to be the most fundamental question for normative accounts of assertion—*what does it mean to say that an assertion is correct?*—a question that has received, quite surprisingly, very little to none attention in the literature. My first proposal was that there are only two types of intuition, two essentially distinct ways of thinking about "correct assertion", which I labeled *reasonabilist* and *objectivist*, respectively.

There are three distinctive features of the reasonabilist program: (i) it considers the lack of the speaker's liability to criticism to be both a necessary and a sufficient condition for correct assertion; (ii) it posits a non-factive norm of assertion, and (iii) it discards the notion of "secondary correctness" as spurious or at best redundant. Due to the first of these features, the reasonabilist's framework aligns well with the game analogy, the heuristic typically adopted by normativist approaches to assertion, by putting the speech act on a par with moves in a games. This is whence it derives its initial appeal, in fact: if a move in a game is correct as long as the agent is not liable to criticism, why should an assertion be any different on this score?

The next task was precisely to challenge such a picture. Thus, in Chapter 3, I introduced the strategy of identifying "normative consequences"—i.e. types of acts

that normally take place as a result of one's making an assertion incorrectly. While the accusation of the speaker's liability to criticism is one such consequence, I argued that it is not the only one. On the one hand, I maintained that (demands for) retractions in the light of recognized falsity should be viewed as another normative consequence. Under the assumption that the latter normative consequence signals the incorrectness of *false* assertions, it thereby favors objectivism over reasonabilism. On the other hand, I introduced a further normative consequence, labeled *disavowal of knowledge*, and argued that it can be expected to occur in a Gettier-type of case once the agent learns that she was "gettiered". These data, I insisted, support not only objectivism but more specifically the knowledge norm as the necessary condition for correct assertion.

At this point, it was crucial to weigh these results in the light of two problems which the knowledge account seems to face. First, and more generally, I argued that its underlying theory of constitutive rules, as outlined by Williamson (1996), is too narrow. According to this approach, a failure to conform to the constitutive rule will always result in an incorrect act of the very type in question. However, this cannot generalize: by not following the rule of checkmate, say, one does not manage to checkmate incorrectly. Instead, one makes no move at all. Secondly, the knowledge norm cannot be *individuating* of the speech act, either, as it governs the act of presupposition, as convincingly argued by García-Carpintero (MS1). The knowledge norm, thus, could at best serve as *part* of the whole approach. Accordingly, I preserved the claim that knowledge is a necessary condition for correct assertion, but rejected the individuation feature, proposing instead a "definitive" rule on which committing oneself to knowing the proposition expressed counts as an assertion of that proposition (CK for short).

Subsequently, in Part II, I went on to defend such a combined view from four sets of objections. As to KA, it was most important to examine objections focusing on assertions made in "the evil demon world" and Gettier-type cases. Strangely enough, in treating these cases, no genuine explanation was offered as to why they

are *incorrect* (apart from mere contentions that KA rules them to be so). Instead, authors such as Williamson (2000) and DeRose (2002) have only tried to capture the intuition why they *seem to be correct*, by insisting that they are correct in the secondary sense. But for the reasonabilist who, as mentioned above, dispels with the notion of secondary correctness altogether and likewise deems these speech acts to be correct, this story could not be satisfactory. Thus, in defense of objectivism, I proposed the strategy relying on normative consequences: given that the subject will normally *retract* her assertion once she learns that she was in the evil demon world, and given that a "gettiered subject" will typically disavow her knowledge once she learns about the unfavorable environmental conditions, both assertions turn out to be incorrect, once we properly understand the normative character of these consequences.

As CK is a novel view, the extant literature does not contain any objection targeting it in particular. However, I discussed two important, general problems for such an approach. First, *contra* Pagin's (2004), I tried to show that by uttering "I hereby committing myself to knowing that *p*" in normal circumstances one does indeed assert that *p*. This was a key argument to be addressed in defending the CK biconditional as many theorists (including non-normativists, such as Pagin) do allow that by asserting that *p* one expresses a certain type of commitment to *p*. Secondly, I addressed a worry as to how to cash out the property of "being expressed" at work in CK, which has been discussed by Alston (2000) in relation to his own account. I held that a proposition *p* is expressed iff there is a sentence *s* of which the speaker makes a free-standing use such that *p* is, or is part of, the truth condition of *s*. Although not the most elegant proposal, it seemed to avoid difficulties which alternative proposals faced. In particular, García-Carpintero's (2004) account, which appeared to be tailor-made to capture the intuitive difference between assertion and presupposition, held the transfer of knowledge to be a *norm* rather than, what I took to be more plausible, the *aim* of assertion.

Chapter 5 was devoted to a class of arguments sometimes advertised as "the strongest type of counterexample" to KA (Lackey 2007: 598), which attempt to

establish that the speaker's belief is not necessary for an assertion to be correct. I have examined two such arguments, proposed by Pelling (2013a, 2013b) and Lackey (2007, 2008), and offered two pairs of solutions in reply, exploring the possibility that the illocutionary acts in question are not assertions but other *assertives* which I named *proffering* and *presenting*, respectively. Still, for those who prefer "desert landscapes" in speech act theory, alternative, more orthodox solutions were also put forward.

The goal of Chapter 6 was to explain how KA and CK can account for conversational challenges, and indeed, do the job better than rival accounts. While a lot of work has been done over the years on the so-called K-challenge, comparatively less has been said on the C-challenge, and that not very convincingly, in my view. Accordingly, I tried to argue that the C-challenge does not pose a threat to KA: it either really challenges the speaker's *justification* (rather than certainty) in which case it enters the conditions for knowledge, or else, when it is about subjective certainty, it merely invites the speaker to share information about whether she is confident about the act, rather than actually challenging her. Consequently, KA and CK seem to be in a good position to account for such data.

Part III examined broader issues. In Chapter 7, I had two goals: to portray the knowledge norm "at work" in application as applied to aesthetic attributions of the form "x is beautiful". In making this statement, I argued, one asserts correctly only if one knows that relative to one's own aesthetic standards, x is indeed beautiful. But this led to yet broader topics. For, the resulting naïve contextualism, as the name might already suggest, is not as sophisticated an account as would be needed in order to satisfy the desiderata of normativity and disagreement. Yet, it proved to be compatible with another inviting proposal, viz. that in making a report about x according to my aesthetic standards, I am thereby also recommending that the audience accept that x is beautiful. In conclusion, this turned out to be a case for the claim that by making an assertion with a particular content, we thereby also perform

a non-assertoric speech act of recommendation, which might seem intriguing on its own.

Finally, Chapter 8 discussed the possibility of non-linguistic assertions. One of the reasons to pursue this topic was the fact that we defined the property of "being expressed" within CK only in linguistic terms, clarifying what it means to say that a *proposition* is expressed by a *sentence*. But this might have presupposed, contrary to my intentions, that a proposition cannot be expressed by employing a non-linguistic vehicle. By arguing for such a possibility, in terms of a gesture performed in appropriate contexts, I examined cases where we can assert strictly speaking non-linguistically. In addition, the motivation also came from the fact that, apart from a few points made in passing, it was never argued that non-linguistic assertions are indeed possible.

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