

《國立政治大學哲學學報》 第三十七期 (2017 年 1 月) 頁 33-74

©國立政治大學哲學系

# Knowledge Is (Still) the Norm of Assertion

Kok Yong Lee

Department of Philosophy, National Chung Cheng University

Address: No.168, Sec. 1, University Rd., Min-Hsiung Township, Chia-Yi  
County 62102, Taiwan

E-mail: kokyonglee.mu@gmail.com

## Abstract

In this paper, I defend the thesis that knowledge is the norm of assertion. I first examine three prominent “counterexamples”: false assertion, selfless assertion, and assertion based on mere justified true belief. I argue that they all fail to square well with our ordinary intuitions. However, the contemporary debate over the norm of assertion depends heavily on the method of counterexamples, whose crux is to prompt our intuitions regarding the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of a certain kind of assertions. This method has its limits as sometimes the debate

---

投稿日期：2016.04.07；接受刊登日期：2016.08.24  
責任校對：劉鑑銘、劉又仁

simply boils down to a clash of intuitions. I think we can do better. In the second part of the paper, I construct a positive argument for the knowledge norm, showing that the knowledge norm can be derived from the general account of the conversational role of assertion. I argue that in order for assertion to play the role it plays in conversation, the knowledge norm must hold.

**Keywords: Assertion, The Norm of Assertion, Selfless Assertion, Conversational Role, The Knowledge Norm ,The Most General Factive Attitude**

# Knowledge Is (Still) the Norm of Assertion\*

Some assertions are praiseworthy such as asserting something true with adequate reasons. Some assertions are blameworthy such as lying. Assertions, thus, are governed by evaluative norms. Recent literature has seen an emerging interest in the norm of assertion, specifically the question whether knowledge is the norm of assertion. While a case can be made that knowledge is the norm of assertion, many had argued that the norm of assertion is something weaker than knowledge.

In this paper, I defend the thesis that knowledge is the norm of assertion. I first examine prominent counterexamples to the knowledge norm. I argue that they all fail to square well with ordinary intuitive judgments. Hence, the knowledge norm remains the most intuitively plausible account on the table. The contemporary debate over the norm of assertion depends heavily on the method of constructing ordinary stories that prompt our intuitions regarding the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of a certain assertion. This method has its limits as sometimes the debate simply boils down to a clash of intuitions. I think

---

\* I want to thank Peter Markie, Matthew McGrath, and Duen-Min Deng for helpful comments and discussion on earlier versions of the present paper. An earlier version of this paper had been presented in the Second Taiwan Metaphysics Colloquium (TMC-2015) at National Taiwan University. I also want to thank the participants for their objections and suggestions. Finally I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their comments. The present work has received funding from the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) of Taiwan (R.O.C.) (MOST 104-2410-H-194-106-MY2).

we can do better. In the second part of the paper, I construct a positive argument for the knowledge norm, showing that the knowledge norm can be derived from the general account of the conversational role of assertion. I argue that in order for assertion to play its role in ordinary conversations, the knowledge norm must hold.

The following consists of seven sections. Section 1 introduces the knowledge norm of assertion. Section 2 to Section 4 examine and reject several prominent objections to the knowledge norm. Section 5 and 6 derive the norm of assertion from the conversational role of assertion. I argue that the knowledge norm is dictated by the unique role assertion plays in the ordinary conversation. Section 7 considers some potential objections to my view and takes stock.

## **I. The Knowledge Norm of Assertion**

Assertions can be praised or criticized in various ways. An assertion can be praised as true, sincere, polite, useful, relevant, etc., or be criticized as false, insincere, rude, not helpful, irrelevant, etc. Appraisals are conducted based on evaluative norms. Hence, assertions are governed by various norms. Some norms govern the act of assertion only contingently while others necessarily. The norm of politeness, for instance, is applicable to assertions only on some occasions; the norm of truthfulness, by contrast, is applicable to assertions on all occasions. Some norms are norms of assertion *qua* assertion, while others are norms of assertion *qua* general behaviors or social institutions. The norm of sincerity, for instance, is not specific to assertion, but rather a norm of the act of communication in general. Let us call the norms that constitutively

govern the act of assertion *qua* assertion *the constitutive norms (of assertions)*<sup>1</sup>.

Following Timothy Williamson (2000: 241), I take the form of the constitutive norm of assertion to be the following:<sup>2</sup>

The C Norm (CN): One must : assert that *p* only if C.

The relation ‘must’ stands for “the kind of obligation characteristics of constitutive rules” (Williamson 2000: 241). Although we may talk of *a* constitutive norm of assertion, CN in effect represents *the* constitutive norm of assertion, since C can be a complex condition.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, C

---

<sup>1</sup> Constitutive norms must be distinguished from what Rescorla calls ‘constitutive requirements’ (2009 : 101). Constitutive requirements determine whether an act is the performance of a certain kind of act. For instance, getting into the basketball court is a constitutive requirement of playing basketball, since there is no way one can play the game without even getting into the court. Contrary to constitutive requirements, constitutive norms do not (at least not necessarily) determine the necessary conditions, nor do they jointly determine the sufficient conditions, of performing an act. Rather, constitutive norms determine the *propriety* of performing an act. If one violates the constitutive requirement of playing basketball, one fails to play the game. By contrast, if one violates the norm of playing basketball, one does not play the game correctly, but one does not (at least not necessarily) fail to play the game. Playing the game incorrectly is still playing the game (Rescorla 2009; Williamson 2000).

<sup>2</sup> For a different proposal, cf. Rescorla (2009). Rescorla argues that the norm of assertion should take the ‘non-restrictive’ form:

(NR): If one asserts *p*, then *p* has C.

Because of the limitation of space, I will not discuss Rescorla’s proposal here.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, suppose that one thinks that assertions are subject to exactly *two* constitutive norms:

The Truth Norm (TN): One must : assert that *p* only if *p* is true.

The Belief Norm (BN): One must : assert that *p* only if one believes that *p*.

Be that as it may, we can still say that assertion is subject to *the* constitutive norm:

is a condition that assertion, and only assertion, satisfies; no other speech acts are subject to the condition C. We call the account of assertion that regards CN as the constitutive norm of assertion *The C account*.

The recent debate of the norm of assertion has centered on the question whether *the knowledge norm* is the constitutive norm of assertion.<sup>4</sup>

The Knowledge Norm (KN): One must: assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*.

Some linguistic data strongly support the knowledge account (cf. Williamson 2000; Unger 1975). First, it is common to ask “How do you know?” or “Do you know that?” to challenge an assertion. This indicates that asserters have to know the content of their assertions. Second, it is also common to express one’s incapacity to answer a question by saying “I don’t know”. Since an answer to a question is an assertion, that failing to answer is related to the lack of knowledge suggests that assertion requires knowledge (cf. Williamson 2000: 84; Reynolds 2002: 140). Third, it seems wrong or odd to assert “*p*, but I do not know *p*”. A natural interpretation of this phenomenon is that asserting that *p* and asserting that one does not know that *p* are incompatible, indicating that assertions

---

The True Belief Norm (TBN): One must: assert that *p* only if one believes that *p* truly.

<sup>4</sup> Proponents include Williamson (2000), Hawthorne (2004), DeRose (2009), Unger (1975), Reynolds (2002). Opponents include Weiner (2005), Douven (2006), Kvanvig (2003; 2009), Lackey (2007), Williams (2002). Sometimes the debate is about whether or not knowledge is *a* constitutive norm instead of *the* constitutive norm of assertion.

go hand in hand with knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, knowledge is regarded as justified true belief not suffering from Gettier Cases. Let us call justified true belief constituting knowledge *K-justified true belief*,<sup>6</sup> while justified true belief falling short of being knowledge, *mere justified true belief*. Against the knowledge account, some argued that the constitutive norm of assertion is something weaker than knowledge. Given that knowledge is K-justified true belief, objections to KN come in three main forms: the proposals that truth is not a constitutive norm of assertion, that belief is not a constitutive norm of assertion, and that K-justification is not a constitutive norm of assertion. The following three sections deal with them respectively. None of them, as I will argue, stands up to close examination.

## II. Assertion and the Truth Condition

It is widely agreed that one should assert only what is true. Paul Grice has called it a supermaxim of conversation: “Try to make your

---

<sup>5</sup> It has also been argued that the knowledge account can explain the lottery case—the asserter is not allowed to assert that a lottery ticket does not win, because the asserter does not know it. However, this explanation of the lottery case presupposes a controversial claim that “no probability short of 1 warrants assertions” (Williamson 2000: 250).

<sup>6</sup> Some philosophers have argued that there is no noncircular analysis of K-justification, namely, the concept of K-justification depends on the concept of knowledge (Williamson 2000). The analysis of knowledge is not my focus here. Nor is it relevant to the present discussion. However, proponents of the unanalyzability of knowledge should not find the thesis that knowledge is K-justified true belief hard to accept, since K-justification as used in the present work needs not be conceptually independent of knowledge.

contribution one that is true” (1987: 27). “We may equally say that assertions are supposed to be true,” Bernard Williams says, “or...that they are expected to be true” (2002: 66-7). “There is no gap,” John Searle says, “between making a statement and committing oneself to its truth” (2001: 184).

In general, an assertion is subject to criticism if it is false, or if the asserter believes that it is false. Consider retraction, which is a reliable indicator of a violation of the norm of assertion. If one asserts something, and later discovers its falsity, one should retract what is asserted. By contrast, even if one asserts something based on a blind guess, so long as it turns out to be true, one has no incentive to retract the assertion, though one may have an incentive to apologize for *asserting* it (cf. Kvanvig 2003; 2009; also see Section 4). Moreover, an asserter is subject to criticism if she asserts what she believes to be false. A typical case is lying. An asserter *qua* asserter is blameworthy if she tells a lie.<sup>7</sup>

Some philosophers argue that proper assertions need not observe the truth condition. *Imprecise* and *false* assertions offered in the evil-demon world, according to Jennifer Lackey<sup>8</sup> (2007: 607-8), are cases in point. Concerning the former, Lackey writes that:

---

<sup>7</sup> A more interesting question is whether an asserter, without an intention to lie, can legitimately assert something she does not believe. For more on this point, see Section 3.

<sup>8</sup> In later works (2011; 2016), Lackey even argues that knowledge is not enough for the norm of assertion. For brevity's sake, I will not deal with this view here. Notice, however, that this last claim, as Lackey (2016) correctly notes, is not incompatible with her view presented below.

[S]uppose that you ask me how tall I am and I assert that I am 5 feet, 4 inches. Strictly speaking, however, suppose that I am 5 feet, 3½ inches. My assertion about my height, then violates [the truth condition] since it is false that I am 5 feet, 4 inches tall. Similar cases abound... In all of these cases, the assertions in question are false because they are not absolutely precise, but they nonetheless seem perfectly proper. (Lackey 2007: 607-8)

Arguably, imprecise assertions prevail over daily conversations. But are they *perfectly* proper? Notice that the truth condition can be overridden by pragmatic considerations. In emergencies, for instance, it is proper to assert something although you are not sure of its truth. For instance, seeing that you are about to eat a colorful mushroom, I shout, “That is poisonous!” even though I do not know that it does (cf. Williamson 2000: 256). My assertion may be proper in the sense that it serves my current purposes (i.e., to save your life), but improper as an assertion *qua* assertion, since were I to know that the mushroom is not poisonous, I would have the incentive to retract my assertion.

To reply, Lackey argues that cases of imprecise assertions cannot be explained by the factor of emergency, since imprecise assertions do not necessarily involve emergency situations (Lackey 2007: 608). I am doubtful about Lackey’s reply as other pragmatic considerations may be involved here. For instance, it is obvious that imprecise assertions are proper *vis-à-vis* the convenience and/or efficiency of conversation. Suppose that one knows that one is exactly 5 feet 3½ inches. It might still be proper for one to assert, say, “I am 5 feet, 4 inches” instead of “I am 5 feet, 3½ inches”, provided that one wants to save communication cost and that asserting such a slight falsehood does not matter much for the present

purposes. But in this case, the asserter is well aware that she has just been speaking *loosely* and is ready to admit that, *strictly speaking*, her assertion is incorrect. In general, imprecise assertions can be proper when we intend to speak loosely for the sake of the convenience and/or efficiency of conversation. Conversational convenience aside, however, imprecisely assertions are still improper *qua* assertion.

Let us look at false assertions offered in the evil-demon world. According to Lackey:

[I]f my twin, who is the unfortunate inhabitant of an evil demon world, acquires on the basis of experiences indistinguishable from my own the same sorts of beliefs as me, then her beliefs should be regarded as reasonable [provided my belief is reasonable]. Given this, my 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)

For the sake of argument, let us agree with Lackey that her twin *as an asserter* is not subject to criticism for offering the same assertions as Lackey does, even though her assertions are false. But this does not show that her assertions are not defective in other aspects.

Some philosophers propose the distinction between *primary* and *secondary propriety/impropriety* in order to show the impropriety of such cases (DeRose 2009; Weiner 2005). An assertion is primarily proper (or improper) if it observes (or fails to observe) the norm of assertion. An assertion is secondary proper (or improper) if the asserter reasonably believes (or fails to reasonably believe) that her assertion observes the norm. In Lackey's twin-assertions case, the twin's assertion is primarily

improper since her assertions are in fact false, though it is secondarily proper.

Lackey argues that the notion of secondary propriety/impropriety is spurious (2007: 603-7). The notion of observing/violating a norm, Lackey argues, does not leave room for secondary propriety/impropriety. If an act violates a norm, it does not make sense to say that it is proper in a secondary sense. Similarly, if an act observes a norm, there is no way it will be secondarily improper. Lackey thus concludes that:

[E]ither a speaker is behaving appropriately and is not subject to criticism *qua* asserter, in which case she has not violated a norm of assertion, or she is behaving inappropriately and is subject to criticism *qua* asserter, in which case she has violated a norm of assertion. There is simply no room for acts being secondarily proper or improper. (Lackey 2007: 604)

I feel sympathetic to Lackey's view that *an act* can only observe or violate a norm, leaving no room for it being secondarily improper or proper. But this does not debar something similar to the distinction between primary and secondary propriety/impropriety from applying to assertion, since assertion like other propositional attitudes such as belief, knowledge, perception, etc. manifests an *act/object ambiguity* (cf. Williams 2002: 67). The term 'belief', for instance, may denote either the *act* of believing or the *content* believed. When one says, "S's belief is false," the predicate 'is false' clearly applies to the *content* of S's belief. By contrast, when one says, "S's belief is irrational," the predicate 'is rational' can be correctly used to describe not the content of S's belief, but S's *act* of believing. Likewise, the term 'assertion' may denote either the *act* of asserting or the content asserted.

Even if we discard the notion of secondary propriety/impropriety, the act/object ambiguity of assertion remains. The idea most people share, contrary to Lackey, is that assertions can be subject to criticism in two ways: an assertion may be subject to criticism due to the act of asserting or the content of the assertion. For instance, if an asserter intentionally asserts something she believes to be false, her assertion is subject to criticism since the act of asserting is subject to criticism *qua* assertion (this is true even if the assertion turns out true in the end). Moreover, if one asserts something false unintentionally, and later finds out her mistake, she will have an incentive to retract her assertion, indicating that an assertion may be subject to criticism due to its content being false, regardless of whether the act of asserting is subject to criticism or not.

Jonathan Kvanvig (2003; 2009), also an opponent of the truth condition, is well aware of the act/object ambiguity of assertion. He points out that there are “two quite different things a person might be doing in taking back an assertion. The person might be taking back only *what is said*, or she might be taking back *the saying of it*” (2003: 25). However, Kvanvig further argues that only the saying itself (i.e., the act of asserting) is relevant to evaluate an assertion; what is said (i.e., the content of an assertion) has nothing to do with the norm of assertion:

Only when the speech act itself is at fault, do we have reason to think that some norm of assertion is at work; when only the content of the assertion needs to be taken back, the assertion itself is not at fault...norms of assertion are norms governing a certain type of human activity, and thus related to the speech act itself rather than the content of such an act. (Kvanvig 2009: 147)

False assertions, according to Kvanvig, do not violate the norm of assertion.

Kvanvig's claim is puzzling since it cannot explain an asserter's incentive to take back her assertion, when proven false. If an asserter wants to take back what she says, this shows that her assertion is defective in some ways. But if it is not for the violation of the norm of assertion, what is the reason for doing so? Another problem is that even if we agree with Kvanvig that the norm of assertion governs only "a certain type of human activity", it still does not follow that the constitutive norm of assertion is not related to the content of assertion, for it is obvious that false assertions prompt the act of retraction in a way that true assertions do not. Moreover, Kvanvig's idea that the norm of assertion is the norm "related to the speech act itself rather than the content of such an act" is mistaken. As Bernard Williams correctly points out, although the content of an assertion might be shared by other speech acts, only false assertions are subject to objection (2002: 67-8). For instance, the content of an assertion can be identical to the content of a supposition or denial. However, in cases where the content is false, only assertions, rather than suppositions or denials, are subject to objection. This shows that the constitutive norm of assertion is not only related to the speech *act* itself, but also to its *content*.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Kvanvig also argues that if you need to apologize, then a certain norm is violated. By contrast, if you only need to take back assertion, without the need to apologize, then no norm is violated (2009: 146ff.). This point is implausible, as the violation of a norm is not always manifested by the act of apology. For instance, there is no need to apologize if a basketball player violates the three-second rule.

### III. Assertion and the Belief Condition

Many philosophers have argued for an internal relation between assertions and beliefs. Kent Bach says, “an assertion essentially is the expression of a belief” (quoted from Hindriks 2007: 394). Similarly, Donald Davidson says, “[w]hat we do in making an assertion is represent ourselves as believing what we say” (2005: 123). Frank Hindriks formulates this idea as: “To assert that P is to utter a sentence that means that P and thereby express the belief that P” (2007: 400). Williams further thinks that not only a speaker expresses his belief via assertion, but he also “intends the person addressed to take it that he believes that P” (2002: 74). If assertions essentially express the asserter’s beliefs, the commonly held idea is tantamount to the claim that the belief condition is a constitutive norm of assertion.

Igor Douven (2006) has proposed two reasons against taking the belief condition as a constitutive norm of assertion.<sup>10</sup> Firstly, Douven argues that the belief condition, according to Grice, is already a maxim of conversation—the maxim is: “Do not say what you believe to be false”<sup>11</sup> (Grice 1987: 27). Accordingly, “there is no need to build that as a requirement into the rule of assertion” (Douven 2006: 460), since the maxim of conversation is enough for explaining why assertions require beliefs. I find Douven’s reason untenable. Just because the belief

---

<sup>10</sup> Douven does not specify which response he prefers. But it seems that he is leaning toward the second one.

<sup>11</sup> Douven takes a stronger interpretation of this maxim as “not to say what we do not believe to be true” (2006: 460).

condition is a norm of conversation in general it does not mean that it cannot be a constitutive norm of assertion; in fact, if the belief condition is a norm of conversation, and if to assert is take part in a conversation, the belief condition should be a constitutive norm of assertion, since it essentially governs assertions.

Douven's second reason is that, in some cases, asserting without believing is legitimate *qua* assertion. He describes the following situation:

You are responsible for the safety of the population in a given area, and one of your superiors informs you of an imminent threat. The reported threat is of a nature so terrible that you cannot right away get yourself to believe it (you are, as some would say, still "in denial"). The situation calls for immediate evacuation of the area, though, and it is now your main duty to inform the authorities responsible for that. Still numbed by the message you received and still not being able to believe it, you nonetheless do manage to inform them, more or less by repeating what you were just told. (Douven 2006: 461)

Douven argues that your assertion that informs the authorities in this case is legitimate *qua* assertion, since the assertion is "perfectly credible to you", you have justification for it, and you are doing "what you ought to do under the given circumstances" (Douven 2006: 461).

Similarly, Lackey argues for what she calls *selfless assertions*. She describes a case of selfless assertion as follows:

A devoutly Christian teacher Stellar believes the falsity of evolutionary theory. However, Stellar notices that there is overwhelming evidence against her belief and she knows that

her belief of the falsity of evolutionary theory is entirely based on personal faith on creationism. However, she thinks that as a teacher, she needs to teach materials that are well supported by evidence. Hence, she asserts to her students in the classroom:

(3) Modern day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*.  
(Lackey 2007: 599)

Lackey concludes that Stellar, *qua* asserter, is not subject to criticism in any relevant sense, and she goes even further to claim that, as an asserter, Stellar is “appropriately subject to praise” due to asserting what she thinks is well supported (Lackey 2007: 559). Douven’s example is on a par with Lackey’s selfless assertions, for these cases, at their core, consist of three components listed by Lackey:

[F]irst, a subject, for purely non-epistemic reasons, does not believe (and hence does not know) that *p*; second, despite this lack of belief, the subject is aware that *p* is very well supported by all of the available evidence [or in Douven’s term “perfectly credible”]; and, third, because of this, the subject asserts that *p* without believing and, hence, without knowing that *p*. (Lackey 2007: 599)

However, to say that the selfless asserter *qua* asserter is not subject to criticism at all is implausible, let alone that the asserter *qua* asserter is subject to praise. For one thing, a selfless asserter disbelieves that *p* for purely non-epistemic reasons, regardless of all of the available evidence supporting *p*. This seems to challenge seriously her status as an epistemic agent, whose aim is to obtain truths and avoid errors, given that evidence seems to bear no weight on (the forming and sustaining of) her beliefs. If

the selfless asserter is not a proper epistemic agent, there are qualms to take selfless assertions as genuine data. Just as the dementia's actions should not be considered as data for a moral theory, selfless assertions should not be taken as data for a theory of the norm of assertion.

For another thing, it is widely accepted that if one disbelieves that  $p$ , then one does not believe that  $p$  is true, since belief aims at truth (admittedly, this claim is vague. Also see Valleman 2000). Hence, if a selfless asserter asserts that  $p$  without believing that  $p$ , she asserts something she does not believe to be true (if she believes that  $p$  is true, then she believes that  $p$  is true without believing that  $p$ , which is worse). However, this is problematic, since if one does not believe that  $p$  is true, one should assert "Some think that  $p$ " or "It has been argued that  $p$ " rather than " $p$ ". Asserting something that you do not believe to be true *flat-out* is generally subject to criticism.

#### IV. Assertion and the K-Justification Condition

Proper assertions require some sort of evidential norms. As Williamson points out "[i]t is somehow better to make an assertion on the basis of adequate evidence than to make it without such a basis" (2000: 245). An assertion is subject to criticism if the asserter is making a wild guess. No one, as far as I know, contends that assertions do not abide by evidential norms of some sort. Some theorists even argue for a certain evidential norm as the constitutive norm of assertion (e.g., Lackey 2007; Douven 2006). According to the knowledge account, assertions observe the norm that one must assert that  $p$  only if one has K-justification for  $p$ , since knowledge implies K-justification. However, some theorists argue that assertions do not require a condition as strong as K-justification; a

weaker justification condition is all we need.

One account is that assertions can be legitimate even if the asserter's evidential basis for what she asserts is less than K-justified. Matthew Weiner argues that *predictions* and *retrodictions* embody this feature:

Predictions and retrodictions are generally acceptable in the absence of knowledge precisely because the most likely and satisfactory warrant for believing their truth is not sufficient for knowledge. (Weiner 2005: 238)

The idea is that some predictions or retrodictions are acceptable even if the asserter apparently lacks K-justification. For simplicity's sake, let us focus on retrodiction.<sup>12</sup> Weiner's example is about Sherlock Holmes being in a crime scene. Holmes scans the scene and asserts:

(4) This is the work of Professor Moriarty! It has the mark of his fiendish genius. (Weiner 2005: 231)

Suppose that (4) is true and that Holmes's retrodiction is based on a hunch (i.e., Holmes' justification for (4) is not sufficient for knowledge). Weiner argues that retrodictions like (4) are counterexamples to the knowledge account, since they are ordinary sentences uttered in an ordinary setting, and "their evidential bases should not determine whether we count them as assertions" (Weiner 2005: 231)—in other words, since retrodictions like (4) are assertions, KN is false.

Weiner's argument, however, confuses constitutive norms with

---

<sup>12</sup> The following discussion also applies to prediction, the other kind of assertion on which Weiner's paper focuses.

constitutive *requirements* (cf. Rescorla 2009). The constitutive norm of assertion determines whether or not an assertion is a good one (or whether or not an assertion is subject to criticism), while the constitutive requirement determines whether or not an act counts as a performance of assertion (also see footnote 1). The debate of the norm of assertion is not about the constitutive requirement, but the constitutive norm. Specifically, the debate is not about whether or not (4) is an assertion, but whether or not (4) is proper (or whether or not (4) is subject to criticism). Proponents of the knowledge account will probably agree with Weiner that (4) *is* an assertion, but they will deny that (4) is not subject to criticism, since Holmes's assertion of (4), at any rate, is not based on proper evidence.

Perhaps Weiner would reply that not only are retrodictions like (4) genuine assertions, they are indeed proper assertions. This reply is not convincing, since Holmes's assertion is in an intuitive sense subject to criticism. Suppose that we ask Holmes, "How do you know?" Holmes might reply, according to Weiner, "I don't know that Professor Moriarty did it—I don't have any direct evidence for that—but my retrodiction is that he did it" (cf. Rescorla 2009: 238). However, this reply does not exempt Holmes from criticisms, since we may still feel being cheated knowing that his assertion is simply based on a hunch. We may complain: "If you don't know it, you shouldn't say it. Or you should tell me that *you think* that is the work of Professor Moriarty."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Another reply is to argue that in this case, Holmes does know (4), since in such cases, it is not unusual for Holmes to simply assert (4\*) instead:

(4\*) I know that this is the work of Professor Moriarty! It has the mark of his fiendish genius.

Lackey (2007: 611) and Kvanvig (2009: 146-7) have argued that some assertions based on mere justification are not improper. They make two distinct claims : <sup>14</sup> first, the mere justification condition is enough for assertions, and second, mere justified true belief is the constitutive norm of assertion. The problem of the first claim would become obvious once we notice a crucial difference between K-justification and mere justification. That is, mere justification is defective in the sense that it essentially depends on epistemic accidentalities in a way that K-justification does not. It follows that an act of assertion based on mere justification is inherently defective, and is thereby subject to objections. The same cannot be said of assertions based on K-justification.

The second claim might seem plausible, for an asserter would have no incentive to retract her assertion of *p* if she realized that she does not know that *p* but merely justifiably believes *p* truly. Assertions based on mere justified true belief pass the retraction test. However, this does not necessarily entail that mere justified true belief is the norm of assertion. The retraction test is solely about the content of one's assertion. But assertion can be subject to criticism even if what is asserted is true. As noted, the act of asserting a true proposition can sometimes be blameworthy. If one asserts that *p* while merely believing truly that *p*, we (the third-party who are aware of the defectiveness of one's epistemic

---

Cf. DeRose (2009, 98, footnote 20). Thanks to Matthew McGrath for pointing out this material.

<sup>14</sup> In his (2011), Kvanvig further argues that the defeasible character of the norm of assertion provides further support for the view that assertion observes the norm of justification. For simplicity's sake, I will not address this argument here.

position with respect to  $p$ ) will still find one's assertion inappropriate. Smith justifiably believes that Jones will get the job, and he knows that Jones has ten coins in his pocket (cf. Gettier 1963). Smith thus asserts, "The man with ten coins in his pocket gets the job." Unbeknownst to Smith, he is the one who will get the job, and he also has ten coins in his pocket. Intuitively, it seems that Smith should not have asserted, "The man with ten coins in his pocket gets the job." Smith is not blameworthy *qua* asserter, but still, something seems objectively wrong in Smith's act of asserting.

## V. Assertion and Conversation: Part I

Despite alternative accounts that emphasize on conditions weaker than knowledge being the norm of assertion, the knowledge account remains the most prominent view on the market. The aforementioned discussion depends characteristically on intuitive judgments. I have shown that the truth condition, the belief condition, and the K-justification condition are supported by our intuitive judgments. However, opponents of the knowledge account also appeal to our intuitive judgments. In all alleged counterexamples, there is a crucial step of showing that assertions without knowledge can be "intuitively" proper. I have argued that no such proposal holds. Particularly, all alleged counterexamples are subject to criticism in one way or another.

One might complain that what we have done so far is to argue against the opponents' intuitive judgments by resorting to *our* intuitive judgments. But this presupposes that our intuitions are correct. A question thus naturally arises: can we explain the correctness of *our* intuitions? In

the following two sections, I offer such an explanation. The general approach is to give a genealogical story of the function assertion plays in ordinary conversations, and then ask what norm this function dictates. The argument below substantiates the plausible thesis that assertion aims at improving the conversational participants' understanding of the world (this will become clear as we proceed). If successful, the argument will offer a nice complementary justification for the knowledge account.

Ordinary conversation is norm-bound. By this, I do not mean that ordinary conversation consists in a finite application of a set of strictly defined norms. As Davidson (1986) points out, successful communications are generally not *determined* or *predicted* by norms; there is no 'interpretation algorithm' the application of which suffices for successful communication.<sup>15</sup> The norm-governed character of conversation that I have in mind consists in the unique role each type of speech act plays. A speech act that fails to play its role is subject to criticism. For the present purposes, I will focus on assertion.

A variety of tasks can be accomplished in ordinary conversations. One of the most important tasks is to convey or exchange *correct* information regarding the reality. The main tool for accomplishing this task is assertion. By asserting that *p*, the speaker commits herself to the truth of *p* (cf. Searle 1976: 10-11) and invites the hearer to accept *p* as

---

<sup>15</sup> The core idea is that to grasp what the speaker says usually demands more than linguistic knowledge (Davidson 1986: 107; see also Pietroski 1994: 109). Linguists have long held, in a similar spirit, that understanding of what is said requires 'on-line interpretation', interpretation that requires both linguistic as well as non-linguistic (especially contextual and/or encyclopedic) knowledge.

being the case. The speaker is held accountable for what she asserts such that she is blameworthy if asserting falsehoods, or that she is required to retract her false assertion. When one wonders and asks the question whether or not that  $p$ , her question can be answered by asserting  $p$  or the denial of  $p$ . Such characteristics are specifically not shared by other speech acts. For instance, asking a question is neither an act of conveying information nor an act of commitment to a certain truth. One is not required to retract one's question if it turns out that the question is wrongly framed. Nor is the inquirer held accountable for the question she asks.

How exactly does assertion play the role of conveying or exchanging correct information? A helpful model is to regard asserting that  $p$  as having a determinative role in shaping what the conversational participants' picture of the world (i.e., what they deem as true, false, or up-for-grabs). That is, assertion improves the picture of the world.

Robert Stalnaker's pioneering work on conversation (1978) has offered much we need for the present discussion. The following is based on Stalnaker's model with slight modifications. Let us say that, in a conversation, each participant has *presupposed* a set of propositions (viz. background information) and is *ignorant* of another set of propositions. I will call the set of propositions constituting what a conversational participant takes for granted "BACKGROUND". The set of propositions incompatible with BACKGROUND is called "MISTAKE". MISTAKE consists solely of propositions that the subject regards as false. In contrast to BACKGROUND and MISTAKE, there is the set that I will call "IGNORANCE", which contains propositions that the subject regards as "live options", i.e., she does not know whether they are true or false.

IGNORANCE consists solely of propositions that are compatible with both BACKGROUND and MISTAKE. Members of IGNORANCE represent issues about the world of which the subject is ignorant. In an intuitive sense, IGNORANCE, together with BACKGROUND and MISTAKE, gives rise to the subject's *understanding* or *picture of the world*.

In the ideal case, BACKGROUND, MISTAKE, and IGNORANCE are shared by different conversational participants, or the sets of BACKGROUND, MISTAKE, and IGNORANCE of different participants largely overlap. For simplicity's sake, I will talk about the shared BACKGROUND, MISTAKE, and IGNORANCE of a group of conversational participants. Nothing hinges on this convenient stipulation; the argument below will still hold if one opts for distinguishing the speaker's BACKGROUND, MISTAKE, and IGNORANCE from the hearer's.

Assertion plays a crucial role in shaping, improving indeed, the conversational participants' understanding of the world (viz., IGNORANCE, BACKGROUND, and MISTAKE). Suppose that  $p$  is asserted, and the hearer accepts it. If  $p$  is already in BACKGROUND, then nothing changes—asserting that  $p$  does not provide new information as  $p$  has already been taken for granted. Suppose that before the assertion,  $p$  is in the set of ignorance. After the assertion,  $p$  will then be “extracted” from IGNORANCE and put into BACKGROUND, meaning that  $p$  is now regarded as true by the speaker and the hearer. When BACKGROUND receives a new member  $p$ , it must be so adjusted such that propositions in

BACKGROUND and/or IGNORANCE that are incompatible with  $p$  together with BACKGROUND have to be put into MISTAKE.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the logical consequences of  $p$  and BACKGROUND, if they are not already in BACKGROUND, must also be put into BACKGROUND. In real life, however, people sometimes fail to see the incompatibility among the propositions they take for granted and/or the propositions they remain ignorant of, and they often fail to see what follows logically from  $p$  and BACKGROUND. This just shows that people are cognitively limited agents. But even cognitively limited agents *should* “update” their picture of the world in a way that preserves consistency and is closed under logical inference.<sup>17</sup>

Consider the following example. Suppose that BACKGROUND consists of the propositions *Obama is the President*<sup>18</sup> and *Obama likes ice cream*, and that IGNORANCE contains the propositions *Obama is a male*, *Obama is not a male*, *There is a male who likes ice cream*, and *No male likes ice cream*. Suppose that the speaker asserts that Obama is a male, and the hearer accepts it. The proposition *Obama is a male* will then be extracted from IGNORANCE and be added to BACKGROUND. By contrast, the proposition *Obama is not a male* will be put into MISTAKE for it is incompatible with *Obama is a male* and BACKGROUND. Likewise, IGNORANCE will be further reduced such that the proposition *There is a male who likes ice cream* is to be put into

---

<sup>16</sup> The incompatibility relation includes logical as well as conceptual incompatibility.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Williamson (2000: 192ff.) for a nice discussion of how one can follow a rule even one is not always in a position to know that the rule has been obeyed correctly.

<sup>18</sup> Throughout this paper, propositions will be italicized.

BACKGROUND, while the proposition *There is not a male who likes ice cream* will be added to MISTAKE.<sup>19</sup> Altering the sets of BACKGROUND, MISTAKE, and IGNORANCE in such a way seems to improve the conversational participant's understanding of the world, for in an intuitive sense, the participants are no longer ignorant of whether or not Obama is a male or whether or not there is a male who likes ice cream.

The issue is more complicated as (accepted) false assertions also have a similar effect. But only true assertions can help the conversational participants gain (correct) information about the world. Even though false assertions may reduce IGNORANCE in as much the same way as true assertions do, they generally will do so in a way that fails to improve the participants' understanding of the world. For instance, suppose that IGNORANCE contains the propositions *Obama is a male* and *Obama is a female*. If the speaker asserts that Obama is a female, and the hearer accepts it, IGNORANCE will thus exclude both *Obama is a male* and *Obama is a female*—the former will be put into MISTAKE, while the latter, BACKGROUND. In a sense, the conversational participants are no longer “ignorant” about whether or not Obama is a female. But, in another sense, the participants are really ignorant about this fact, since they have mistakenly regarded Obama as a female. False assertions do not really reduce our ignorance, if reducing ignorance implies a better understanding of the world. Accordingly, if assertions play the role of improving the conversational participants' picture of the world, their role

---

<sup>19</sup> Stalnaker thinks that an assertion only has the effect of reduction, i.e., reducing IGNORANCE (1978: 86ff.). But I think the opposite can happen as well.

is fulfilled only if they are true. It is thus not surprising that Grice calls it a *supermaxim* of conversation that one should try to make one's contribution to the conversation by asserting something true (cf. Grice 1987: 27).

That said, the conversational role of assertion dictates *the truth norm* to be a constitutive norm of assertion:

The Truth Norm (TN): One must : assert that  $p$  only if  $p$  is true.

This explains why many find TN attractive and why one generally has the incentive to retract her false assertions (provided that she does not intend to deceive).

TN does not exhaust the constitutive norm of assertion. As noted above, assertion like other propositional attitudes manifests the act/object ambiguity, too. TN naturally governs the content-related facet of assertion. False assertions are subject to criticism in a way that true assertions are not. But assertion also has a speech-act-related facet. An act of asserting something can be subject to criticism even if what is asserted is true. If one intends to deceive but fails, one's assertion is still objectionable—not because of what is asserted, but because of the act of asserting. In the next section, I will turn to the speech-act-related facet of assertion, namely, the asserter has to be held accountable for what she asserts.

## **VI. Assertion and Conversation: Part II**

Although, as noted, accepted false assertions are able to reduce IGNORANCE and thereby extend BACKGROUND and MISTAKE, they

can do so only at the expense of undermining (the accuracy of) the participants' picture of the world. If assertion is to play the role of improving the picture of the world in ordinary conversations, a certain mechanism that prevents false propositions from entering into BACKGROUND must be installed. To this end, the asserter is held accountable for what she asserts. The act of assertion is objectionable if the asserter is ignorant about what she asserts. Holding one accountable for what one asserts, then, is an effective way to prevent false propositions from being presupposed.

Some might claim that to hold the asserter accountable for what she asserts is to require the asserter to be able to defend what she asserts (cf. Brandom 1983). When one asserts that  $p$ , it is often appropriate for the hearer to ask, "How do you know that  $q$  (which is an alternative to  $p$ ) is not the case?" Perhaps, one does not need to be able to defend one's claim against *all* challenges. But it does seem that one is obligatory to defend one's claim against *reasonable* challenges.

Is the asserter always obligatory to defend what she asserts, if reasonable challenges arise? Not really. For one thing, one's ability to grasp the truth of  $p$  may exceed one's ability to offer proper justification for  $p$ . I heard my mother's voice on the radio and immediately recognized that she was on the radio. I then said, "My mom is on the radio." If someone were to challenge me how I know that, I might not be able to defend my claim appropriately except by pointing out the fact that it sounded like her to me. Still, it seems that my act of assertion is not subject to objections. Furthermore, one's assertion may not be objectionable even if one is not in a position to offer justification for what one asserts at all. A chicken sexer asserts that the chick in the basket is a male. When challenged, however, she is unable to give reason for her

claim. Suppose that the chicken sexer's ability to distinguish the gender of chicks is reliable and that she does not intend to deceive, it seems that her act of asserting is immune to criticisms. Therefore, what we need is not that the asserter's ability to defend what she asserts, but rather that the asserter has a strong epistemic position with respect to what she asserts. If the asserter's epistemic position with respect to  $p$  is weak, she is somehow blameworthy if she decides to assert that  $p$ . I check the magic 8 ball and learn that the President is in Taipei. I then assert that the President is in Taipei. If it turns out that the President is in fact in Taipei, I am not required to retract my claim. Still, my act of asserting *that* is objectionable.

As a first approximation, one's epistemic position with respect to  $p$  consists in the propositional attitude one has toward  $p$ . It seems plausible that the asserter being held accountable for what she asserts dictates the following norm:

The Attitude Norm (AN): One must: assert that  $p$  only if one  $\Psi$ s that  $p$  (where  $\Psi$ -ing stands for propositional attitudes).

Not all propositional attitudes are suitable. Doubting that  $p$ , for instance, is not a constitutive norm of asserting  $p$ . More precisely, AN should be constrained by TN, which is a constitutive norm of assertion. That is, not only does one have to  $\Psi$ s that  $p$ ,  $p$  also needs to be true. As a result, the propositional attitude in play in characterizing the constitutive norm of assertion has to be *factive*:

The Factive Attitude Norm (FAN): One must: assert that  $p$  only if one  $\Phi$ s that  $p$  (where  $\Phi$ -ing stands for factive propositional attitudes).

FAN has to be further restricted, as there are two kinds of factive

attitudes (Williamson 2000: 32ff.). Some factive attitudes such as seeing, remembering, knowing, etc. are semantically unanalyzable—the terms that denote such attitudes are not synonymous with any complex term whose meaning depends on the meaning of its parts (or such attitudes cannot be analyzed non-circularly by other concepts). Some attitudes are semantically analyzable in this sense such as believing truly, guessing correctly. Call them *semantically unanalyzable factive attitudes (SUFAs)* and *semantically analyzable factive attitude (SAFAs)* respectively.<sup>20</sup> SUFAs, as Williamson points out, can be *syntactically* analyzable. ‘Could feel’, for instance, is an SUFA (Williamson 2000: 37).

SAFAs are not the suitable candidate for the norm of assertion. In order to be held accountable for  $p$ , the asserter’s epistemic position with respect to  $p$  must be relatively strong. However, bearing an SAFA toward  $p$  does not guarantee strong epistemic position. Consider guessing correctly. If S makes a wild guess that  $p$  and gets lucky, S guesses that  $p$  correctly without having a strong epistemic position with respect to  $p$ . The same holds for other SAFAs such as believing truly, supposing correctly, etc.

SUFAs, by contrast, do not face the same problem. If S bears an SUFA toward  $p$ , it seems that S’s epistemic position with respect to  $p$  is relatively strong. Consider seeing. If one sees that  $p$ , then S’s epistemic

---

<sup>20</sup> Williamson calls what we here call semantically unanalyzable factive attitudes (SUFAs) ‘factive mental state operators (FMSOs)’. While he also discusses what we here call semantically analyzable factive attitudes (SAFAs), he does not give them a label. Since Williamson has his own account of mental states, to which I want to remain neutral, I have opted for the present terminology.

position with respect to  $p$  is strong. The same holds for other SUFAs such as perceiving, remembering, knowing, etc. Viewed in this light, FAN should be circumscribed by SUFAs. That is:

The Factive Attitude Norm' (FAN'): One must: assert that  $p$  only if one  $\Omega$ s that  $p$  (where  $\Omega$ -ing stands for SUFAs).

FAN' satisfies the conversational role of assertion, as it implies that what is asserted is true. Moreover, by requiring the asserter to bear a certain SUFA  $\Omega$ -ing toward  $p$ , FAN' also implies that the asserter has to be in a strong epistemic position with respect to  $p$ .

One question naturally arises: how strong one's epistemic position with respect to  $p$  has to be in order to satisfy FAN'? The answer, quite surprisingly perhaps, is that it has to be as strong as *knowledge*. That is, as long as one's epistemic position with respect to  $p$  is strong enough for S to know that  $p$ , one is in a position to satisfy the norm of assertion.<sup>21</sup> The reason is that all SUFAs imply knowledge (Williamson 2000: 33ff.). Seeing that  $p$ , recalling that  $p$ , regretting that  $p$ , lamenting that  $p$ , etc. all imply knowing that  $p$ . To follow Williamson's terminology, knowledge is the most general SUFA (cf. Williamson 2000: 39). Why is it the case? Some SUFAs manifest one's ways of knowing that  $p$ . John knows that he had put the milk back in the refrigerator *because* he remembers that he had put the milk back in the refrigerator. Mary knows that the cat is on the mat *because* she sees that the cat is on the mat. Some SUFAs manifest

---

<sup>21</sup> One may have epistemic position with respect to  $p$  strong enough for knowing  $p$  without actually knowing that  $p$ . For instance, one can have such a strong epistemic position with respect to  $p$  without believing that  $p$ . By the same token, one can be in a position to satisfy the norm of assertion without actually satisfying the norm.

one's attitudes towards what is known. Jason regretted that he had come along *because* he knew that he had come along. John hates that Jeremy made fun of him *because* he knows that Jeremy made fun of him. Either way, SUFAs imply knowledge. To claim that one SUFA  $\Omega$ s that  $p$  while admitting that one does not know that  $p$  sounds paradoxical. It sounds odd for one to claim, for instance, "I remember that he was our teacher, but I don't know that he was our teacher." Such assertions sound as odd even with a third-person singular term as the subject. Consider the assertion "John regrets that he'd come along, but he does not know that he'd come along."

The fact that knowledge is the most general SUFA is of particular importance here. For FAN' together with this fact implies the knowledge account:

The Knowledge Norm (KN): One must: assert that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ .

It may not be obvious initially, but it appears quite plausible, once it is pointed out, that KN is what is needed in order for assertion to play its conversational role. Given that the conversational role of assertion is to improve the accuracy of the conversational participants' picture of the world, assertion must adhere to KN. For one thing, KN implies that what is asserted must be true; it embodies the ideal that only truths go into the picture of the world. This explains why the asserter generally has the incentive (or is required) to retract false assertions. For another, in order to prevent false propositions from entering into the picture of the world, the norm of assertion must hold the speaker accountable for their assertions. KN guarantees that the asserter has a sufficiently strong epistemic position with respect to what she asserts. This explains why it is usually proper to challenge someone's assertion by asking "How do you

know?" and why the asserter *qua* asserter is often subject to criticism if she asserts something she does not really know.

## VII. Taking Stock

I have completed my positive argument for the knowledge account. Let us briefly consider some possible objections. First, I have argued that altering BACKGROUND, MISTAKE, and IGNORANCE in the aforementioned way is the unique role assertion plays in the game of conversation. Against this view, some might object that other speech acts could play the same role as well. For instance, supposition is also intended to have the same effect on BACKGROUND, MISTAKE, and IGNORANCE (Stalnaker 1978: 87). On closer examination, however, supposition does not satisfy the aforementioned conversational role. To suppose that  $p$  is to put  $p$  into BACKGROUND *tentatively* or *hypothetically*. Supposing that  $p$  thus gives rise to a hypothetical reasoning of some sort. The hypothetical nature of supposition implies that one is free to suppose something false and that one does not (at least not necessarily) have to retract one's supposition if it turns out to be false. If so, supposition does not always improve the participants' understanding of the world, a crucial role, as we have seen, that assertion plays in ordinary conversations.

Second, following Williamson (2000), I take knowledge to be the most general SUFA. Some might disagree. Kvanvig (2003) argues that *understanding* is factive, but does not imply knowledge. Arguably, understanding is also semantically unanalyzable. If so, understanding seems to be a counterexample to the thesis that knowledge is the most

general SUFA. To reply, notice, firstly, that it is not clear that that understanding is factive, as clearly one can understand a false theory. The phlogiston theory, for instance, can still be understood nowadays. Secondly, it is not even clear that understanding is a propositional attitude. The natural objects of understanding are subject matters or theories, not proposition. For instance, it is normal to say that someone understands mathematics, but a bit odd to say that this person understands that  $1 + 1 = 2$ .<sup>22</sup> Hence, the status of understanding being an SUFA remains dubious.

Matthew McGrath had suggested (in conversation) that foretelling is an SUFA that does not imply knowledge. To foretell that  $p$  implies that  $p$  is true; one cannot not foretell something that does (will) not happen. But to foretell that  $p$  does not imply knowing that  $p$ . For instance, it is proper to assert, “Although John foretold that  $p$ , he didn’t really know it.” But foretelling is really not an SUFA, as it is semantically analyzable—‘foretell’ is synonymous with ‘predict correctly’ (or foretelling can be analyzed as predicting correctly). Hence, foretelling is really an SAFA instead.

I do not know if there are genuine SUFAs that fail to imply knowledge. But, perhaps, the claim that all (ordinary) SUFAs imply knowledge is unnecessarily too strong for the present purposes. As a

---

<sup>22</sup> The phrase ‘S understands Q’ where ‘Q’ stands for a sentence often means that S understands the *meaning* of Q. For instance, when someone says, “I understand  $1 + 1 = 2$ ,” the statement has a natural interpretation that the subject understands what ‘ $1 + 1 = 2$ ’ means (another natural interpretation is that the subject understands the underlying ‘mechanism’ that renders one plus one equaling two, indicating that the object of understanding are subject matters rather than propositions). This interpretation of ‘understand’ suggests that ‘understand’ does not denote a propositional attitude, for a propositional attitude is directed to the proposition  $p$ , rather than to the meaning of ‘ $p$ ’.

generic category, SUFAs capture one's epistemic position with respect to  $p$ , which sanctions one to assert that  $p$ . The aforementioned discussion can be regarded as a Carnapian philosophical *explication* (cf. Quine 1951: 25) of the notion of SUFAs. The general approach adopted here is to identify the conversational role of assertion, and then ask what norm it dictates. SUFAs have been pointed out as the kind of attitudes suitable for playing the role. Even if ordinary SUFAs do not always imply knowledge, it suffices to say that SUFAs that specify the conversational role of assertion do imply knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

Let us take stock. The knowledge account is intuitively plausible, as testified by how well KN handles ordinary linguistic data (cf. Section 1). There are alleged counterexamples, but none has succeeded (cf. Sections 2-4). I have tried to contribute to the debate by constructing a novel argument, which offers a principled reason for the knowledge account. The idea is that the essential role that assertion plays in conversations is to improve the conversational participants' understanding of the world. I have argued that in order to fulfill this role, assertion must be governed by KN (cf. Sections 5 & 6). Knowledge is the constitutive norm of assertion. This argument, if succeeds, offers a nice reply to the worry that the knowledge account is theoretically unmotivated, which has occasionally arisen from the literature. For instance, when examining issues related the norm of assertion, Douven once criticizes that the knowledge account is not "a consequence of any of our commitment" (2006: 456) applicable to a wider context, insinuating that the knowledge account cannot be derived

---

<sup>23</sup> Admittedly, this just scratches the surface of a more general research program. But, for simplicity's sake, the project will not be carried on here.

from more general concerns. The previous analysis of the conversational role of assertions shows that Douven is wrong. The knowledge account can indeed be derived from a more general account of conversation.

In addition, the present argument and the method of intuitions, which has been widely used in the literature, complement each other well. While it is certainly legitimate, the method of intuitions has its own limitations. In particular, the method sometimes leads us astray and sometimes falls short. Sometimes opponents of the knowledge account fail to distinguish intuitive judgments regarding assertion *qua* assertion from intuitive judgments arise from other (usually pragmatic) considerations. Lackey's appeal to the propriety of imprecise assertion mentioned above (cf. Section 2) is a case in point. Sometimes appealing to intuitive judgments may end in stalemate, an irresolvable clash of intuitions. For instance, if someone were to challenge one of our previous conclusions that true assertions based on wild guesses are subject to criticism *qua* assertion (cf. Section 4) and claimed that she had found nothing wrong with such assertions, we would not be able to convert her to accept our conclusion by emphasizing how intuitively plausible the conclusion is to *us*. The present work, if correct, contributes a novel principled reason for the knowledge account, independent of and complementary to the method of intuitions.

Admittedly, many interesting issues have not been given enough discussion or have been left off entirely. A fascinating issue to which I have devoted no attention here is (mental) judgment. As widely agreed, there is a close connection between judgment and assertion. Assertion is like verbal judgment and judgment like mental assertion. Given that knowledge is the norm of assertion, does the same carry over to judgment

such that knowledge is also the norm of judgment? While I am sympathetic to the view of knowledge as the norm of judgment, a further development will be left for another occasion.

## 參考文獻

### 西文：

- Brandom, Robert. 1983. Asserting. *Noûs*, 17, 4 : 637-650.
- Davidson, Donald. 1986. A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs. In Davidson. 2005. *Truth, Language, and History*. 89-107. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- .2005. *Truth and Predication*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- DeRose, Keith. 2009. *The Case for Contextualism: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Context, Vol. 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Douven, Igor. 2006. Assertion, Knowledge, and Rationality Credibility. *Philosophical Review* 115, 4 : 449-85.
- Gettier, Edmund. 1963. Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? *Analysis*, 23: 121-3.
- Grice, Paul. 1987. Logic and Conversation. In *Studies in the Way of Words*. 22-40. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Hawthorne, John. 2004. *Knowledge and Lotteries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hindriks, Frank. 2007. The Status of the Knowledge Account of Assertion. *Linguistics and Philosophy* , 30: 393-406.

- Kvanvig, Jonathan. 2003. *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- .2009. Assertion, Knowledge, and Lotteries. In *Williamson on Knowledge*. Eds. by Patrick Greenough and Duncan Pritchard. 140-60. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- .2011. Norms of Assertion. In *Assertion: New Philosophical Essays*. Eds. by Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen. 233-250. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lackey, Jennifer. 2007. Norms of Assertion. *Noûs*, 41, 4: 594-626.
- .2011. Assertion and Isolated Second-Hand Knowledge. In *Assertion: New Philosophical Essays*. Eds. by Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen. 233-250. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- .2016. Assertion and Expertise. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 92, 2 : 509-517.
- Pietroski, Paul. 1994. A Defense of Derangement. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 24: 95-117.
- Quine, Willard Van Orman. 1961. Two Dogmas of Empiricism. In *From a Logical Point of View*. 20-46. New York: Harper & Row.
- Rescorla, Michael. 2009. Assertion and Its Constitutive Norms. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 79, 1: 98-130.
- Reynolds, Steven. 2002. Why We Should Prefer Knowledge. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 32: 79-93.
- Searle, John. 1976. A Classification of Illocutionary Acts. *Language in Society*, 5, 1: 1-23.

- . 2001. *Rationality in Action*. Cambridge, Mass.: the MIT Press.
- Stalnaker, Robert. 1999. Assertion. In *Context and Content*. 78-95. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Unger, Peter. 1975. *Ignorance: A Case for Skepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Valleman, J. David. 2000. On the Aim of Belief. In *The Possibility of Practical Reason*. 244-81. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Weiner, Matthew. 2005. Must We Know What We Say? *The Philosophical Review*, 114, 2: 227-50.
- Williams, Bernard. 2002. *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Williamson, Timothy. 2000. *Knowledge and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

# 知識依舊是宣稱之規範

李國揚

國立中正大學哲學系

地址：62102 嘉義縣民雄鄉三興村7鄰大學路一段168號

E-mail: kokyonglee.mu@gmail.com

## 摘要

本文將論證，宣稱 (assertion) 這個語言行為必須符合「知識規範原則」(the knowledge norm)，即某主體應該宣稱某一命題只有當該主體知道這個命題。本文的前半部將分析三個反對知識作為「宣稱之規範原則」(the norm of assertion) 的「反例」：錯誤宣稱、無私 (selfless) 宣稱以及基於純粹證成真信念 (mere justified true belief) 的宣稱。本文將指出這些例子並不構成知識規範原則的真正反例。然而，當代對宣稱規範原則的討論經常會演變成直覺 (intuition) 的較量：某方以直覺來支持自己的立場，而反對方亦以直覺作為反對的手段。訴諸直覺在方法論上無疑有其限制，當雙方都堅持自己的直覺時往往討論就會陷入僵局。為了克服這個限制，本文將在後半部分提出一個不直接訴諸直覺的論證來支持知識規範原則。這個論證從宣稱作為一種獨特的語言行為 (speech act) 出發。本文將指出，宣稱在語言行為中扮演提供我們正確的世界圖像 (訊息) 的角色，而為了要成功扮演這個角色，所有的宣稱都必須是知識，不基於知識的宣稱是應該受到批評的。

關鍵詞：宣稱、宣稱的規範原則、知識規範原則、無私宣稱、  
語言交流的角色、最普遍之事實性命題態度