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Assertion: An Introduction and Overview

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1 Introduction

This volume originated in a conference on assertion held at the Arché Philosophical Research Centre, St Andrews, Scotland in June 2007. The aim of the conference and of this resulting volume was to bring together new work on assertion by leading epistemologists and philosophers of language. Although the topic of assertion is central to both epistemology and the philosophy of language, work in these two areas is insufficiently integrated. One main aim of the volume is to foster increased interaction between epistemologists and philosophers of language working on assertion.

The primary focus of much work on assertion within the philosophy of language has been to provide an account of assertion understood as a certain type of speech act. A variety of potential accounts has been offered, including the ideas that assertion is individuated by certain norms, or by its effects (for instance, on the common ground of the conversation), or by its commitments, or by its causes, such as the mental state it expresses. A second related issue is how to understand the speech act of assertion if relativism about truth is correct. Some have used relativistic views to defend one or other account of assertion. Others have used the difficulty in providing an account of assertion within a relativistic framework as an argument against relativism.

Within epistemology, assertion is central to debates concerning testimony and the nature of knowledge. Epistemologists have been especially interested in the idea that assertion is governed by a norm that imposes epistemic requirements on appropriate assertion. A recent influential defense of this view is provided by Williamson, who argues that assertion is distinguished from other speech acts by being subject to the following unique constitutive rule—one must: assert *p* only if one knows that *p* (Williamson 1996). According to a more recent development, the knowledge norm governs not only assertion but also practical reasoning (e.g. Hawthorne 2004; Hawthorne and Stanley 2008). If knowledge is the norm for either assertion or practical reasoning, then one criterion for an account of knowledge is that it should respect these links between

knowledge, assertion, and practical reasoning. In this way, the knowledge norm is at the center of contemporary debate about the nature of knowledge and, in particular, the debate between contextualists and invariantists about whether *know* is a context-sensitive term. Further, since one main use of assertion is in the transmission of knowledge by testimony, the debate in the philosophy of language about the nature of assertion has implications for debates about the epistemology of testimony. In the next two sections, we sketch the main lines of the debate about assertion in the philosophy of language and epistemology before turning, in Section 4, to summarize the individual chapters in the collection.

2 Assertion in the Philosophy of Language

The notion of assertion has played an important role in the philosophy of language over the last 100 years. In what follows, we briefly survey some of the central debates involving assertion.

2.1 Assertion as an Illocutionary Speech Act: An Overview of Theories

In *How to Do Things with Words* (1975), Austin distinguished between *locutionary* and *illocutionary* acts. The notion of a locutionary act is introduced as follows:

the utterance of certain noises, the utterances of certain words in a certain construction and the utterance of them with a certain “meaning” in the favourite philosophical sense of that word, i.e. with a certain sense and with a certain reference. The act of “saying something” in this full normal sense I call, i.e. dub, the performance of a locutionary act . . . (Austin 1975: 94–5)

This notion—that of *saying something* in its “full normal sense”—is relatively clear. By comparison, the notion of an illocutionary act, under which assertion falls, is less clear. Austin introduces it by examples: he says that making a wish, giving an order, asking a question, and making an assertion are examples of illocutionary acts. It is important to note that, according to Austin, all illocutionary acts are *also* locutionary acts: whenever you make an assertion or ask a question, you are also performing a locutionary act—that is, you say something. The various illocutionary speech acts are, so to speak, built on top of locutionary acts, or sayings.

One question that arises for those interested in assertion is this: how do we single out that subset of sayings¹ that are assertions? Only some locutionary acts are assertions, and we are looking for a theory to tell us which ones. We can think of the proposed answer to this question as falling into five rough categories (all of which can be combined in various ways):²

¹ Typically, the focus is on the saying of declarative sentences. Williamson (2000: 258), for example, says: “In natural language, the default use of declarative sentences is to make assertions.”

² For an overview of various theories, see Cappelen (this volume), MacFarlane (this volume).

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- (i) Assertions are those sayings that are governed by certain norms—the norms of assertion.
- (ii) Assertions are those sayings that have certain effects.
- (iii) Assertions are those sayings that have certain causes.
- (iv) Assertions are those sayings that are accompanied by certain commitments.

The fifth category rejects the assumption that there is a unique, correct way of picking out assertions from sayings:

- (v) There is no one set of sayings (of declaratives) that is correctly characterized as the set of assertions. Sayings are governed by variable norms, come with variable commitments, and have variable causes and effects. There can be no substantive debate about which of these subsets are the assertions.

Some brief remarks on these options. (Keep in mind that all of (i)–(iv) can be combined in various ways.)³

(i) *Assertion Individuated by Norms* Some theorists think that assertions are those sayings that are governed by some kind of norm. Williamson, for example, says that a theory of assertion has as its goal “that of articulating for the first time the rules of a traditional game that we play.” The norms for sayings are the rules of this game. Among those who endorse this view, there is disagreement about what the rules are. Proposals include (but are not limited to):

<i>Truth rule</i>	One must: assert p only if p is true
<i>Warrant rule</i>	One must: assert p only if one has warrant to assert p
<i>Knowledge rule</i>	One must: assert p only if one knows p
<i>Belief rule</i>	One must: assert p only if one believes that p

Those who endorse such views vary in how they think about the nature of the norms and what it means to say that we follow these rules.

(ii) *Assertion Individuated by Effects* In Robert Stalnaker’s work, the notion of an assertion is taken as primitive—in that assertion is seen as not reducible to more basic notions. Instead, what Stalnaker says about assertion is focused on its effects. Here is Stalnaker summarizing his view in a recent paper:

The essential effect of an assertion is to add the content of the assertion to the information that is henceforth to be presupposed—to eliminate from the context set those possible situations that are incompatible with the content of the assertion. On this account, one might think of an

³ For example, Pagin’s and Kölbel’s proposals in this volume do not fall neatly into one of these categories, but combine elements.

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assertion as something like a proposal to change the context set in that way, a proposal that is adopted if it is not rejected by one of the other parties to the conversation. (Stalnaker 2005: 4)

This illustrates a general strategy: characterize assertions as those sayings that have a particular kind of effect. For Stalnaker the relevant effect is on what is presupposed in the conversation, but logical space obviously leaves room for a very wide range of theories about what the relevant effects are and what the effects are *on*.

(iii) *Assertion Individuated by Commitments* Some philosophers individuate assertion as those sayings that come with certain commitments. Robert Brandom and John MacFarlane have proposed such theories. Here is an illustration of the kinds of commitments such theorists have in mind.⁴

- (W) Commitment to withdraw the assertion if and when it is shown to have been untrue.
- (J) Commitment to justify the assertion (provide grounds for its truth) if and when it is appropriately challenged.
- (R) Commitment to be held responsible if someone else acts on or reasons from what is asserted, and it proves to have been untrue.

On such views, a saying is an assertion just in case it is accompanied by the relevant set of commitments—for a speaker to assert is for that speaker to undertake the right kinds of commitments.

(iv) *Assertion Individuated by Cause* Other theorists take assertions to be the sayings that have certain causes. Bach and Harnish (1979: 42) exemplify this approach. They say that a speaker, S, in uttering *u*, asserts that *P* if S expresses:

- (i) the belief that *P*, and
- (ii) the intention that H believe that *P*.

If we take “express” to be at least in part a causal notion, this is an illustration of a view that, at least in part, individuates assertions by their causes.

(v) *Debunking Views* According to debunking views (e.g. Cappelen, this volume), there is no one correct way to characterize the extension of *assertion*. *Assertion* is largely a philosophers’ term, and we can, for different purposes, use it to pick out different subsets of sayings. Sayings (of declaratives) are governed by *variable* norms, commitments, causes, and effects. No one subset of these is correctly characterized as assertions. You can slice it up in many different, equally good ways depending on your theoretical interests. No one subset has a pre-theoretic claim to being the real assertions.

⁴ This is from MacFarlane (2005): MacFarlane ultimately endorses more complex characterizations of the commitments. These are just the starting points for his discussion and are included here for illustrative purposes.

2.2 Assertion, Semantic Content, Presupposition, and Implicature

The centrality of the notion of assertion to the philosophy of language is brought out by the close connection in which it is often thought to stand to the notions of *semantic content*, *implicature*, and *presupposition*. These connections are controversial, and a great deal of literature is about how to spell them out. Here are some of the issues central to these debates.

- *The connection between assertion and semantic content.* Many philosophers take it to be a constraint on a semantic theory for a language *L* that the content it assigns to a sentence, *S*, relative to a context, *C*, be what is asserted by an utterance of *S* in *C*. On this view, the contents a compositional semantic theory assigns to sentences (relative to contexts) are constrained by what is (or can be) asserted by those sentences. A semantic theory that systematically assigns contents to sentences that diverge from what that sentence is used to assert is, on this view, deficient. Those who endorse this view can use our intuitions about asserted content as evidence for (or against) a semantic theory: if a semantic theory, *T*, attributes a content to *S* (relative to *C*) different from what is, intuitively, asserted by *S* in *C*, that counts against *T*. Many philosophers of language have argued against this constraint on semantics. A classic paper opposing this view is Nathan Salmon (1991). The alleged connection is rejected by all those who think semantic contents are non-propositional and that asserted contents are propositional (see, e.g., Sperber and Wilson 1986; Bach 1994; Carston 2002; Soames forthcoming).⁵
- *Assertion, implicature, and presupposition.* The notions of presupposition and implicature play an important role in philosophy of language. There is a great deal of disagreement concerning the correct characterization of these phenomena. However, one common core in most theories of both implicature and presupposition is that they *contrast* with assertion. What is asserted is not presupposed and it is not implicated. Insofar as this is a constraint on theories of implicature and presupposition, the notion of asserted content is at the core of those debates.
- *Pluralism, monism, and contexts of interpretation.* According to some theorists, an utterance can assert many distinct propositions simultaneously. Call such theorists *Assertion Pluralists*. Others think an utterance can assert only one proposition. Call such theorists *Assertion Monists*. No matter how assertion is characterized, the choice between Pluralism and Monism is an important one. Note that, if you think asserted content is semantic content and you are a pluralist about asserted content, you are committed to there being multiple semantic contents. A closely connected issue is whether an utterance can assert distinct propositions relative to different contexts of interpretations. Cappelen (2008) and Egan (2009) both

⁵ The connection is rejected across the board in Cappelen and Lepore (2004).

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consider the possibility that one utterance can assert different contents relative to distinct interpreters.

2.3 *Assertion used to Define (or Characterize) Meaning and Truth*

So far we have proceeded as if a theory of assertion is built on top of theories of truth and meaning, so to speak—that is, as if theories of truth and meaning are theoretically prior (in some significant sense) to a theory of assertion. That, however, is not a universally accepted view. Many theorists treat the notion of assertion as more fundamental than those of truth and meaning. Here are some illustrations of the work assertion has been put to in constructing theories of meaning and truth.

- *Three illustrations of theories that use assertion to give a theory of meaning/content.* Some theories of what meaning is make use of the notion of assertion. There is a wide range of such theories, and they have very little in common other than what can loosely be described as relying on the notion of assertion when giving a theory of what content or meaning is. Three examples. (i) The view that the meaning of a sentence is given by the conditions under which it is warranted to assert it (its so-called assertability conditions) is sometimes attributed to Michael Dummett (1976). In such theories, the goal is to use the notion of an assertion when giving a compositional meaning theory. (ii) According to Robert Brandom (1994), the meaning or content of a sentence is identified with the commitments speakers make when uttering it. If assertion is identified with the relevant kinds of commitments, theories such as Brandom's can be understood as using assertion to build up the notion of content. (iii) Dynamic conceptions of semantics spell out semantic content in terms of the effect utterances have on the communicative situation. Again, if assertion is defined by the relevant effects, we can see such theories as treating the notion of assertion as more fundamental than the notion of semantic content (in this case as substituting for the notion of a proposition) (see Groenendijk and Stokhof 2000 and Dever 2006 for some discussion).
- *Three illustrations of theories that use assertion to give a theory of truth.* (i) Anti-realism about truth is often characterized as the view that truth is warranted assertability. So understood, anti-realism is an example of a theory that uses the notion of assertion to define truth. (ii) At the core of redundancy theories of truth is the claim that this equivalence schema tells us (more or less) everything there is to say about truth (see, e.g., Strawson 1949, and, for more recent development, Grover et al. 1975):

To assert that ϕ is true is just to assert that ϕ

Again, note that in such theories, assertion is used to give an account of truth (though, in this case, there is not much to say), not the other way around. (iii) John MacFarlane's work on relativism provides a final illustration of (something like) this strategy. According to MacFarlane, what is needed in order to make a relativistic truth predicate

intelligible is an account of what it is to assert relative propositions. MacFarlane (2005: 337) says: “We have given an account of assertoric commitment that settles just what one is committing oneself to in asserting an assessment-sensitive proposition. By doing this, I suggest, we have made relativism about truth intelligible.”

These are but some illustrations of how some theorists start with the speech act of assertion and build a theory of meaning or truth on top of it. This contrasts with theorists who see the notion of an illocutionary act as one that can be explicated only after we know what meaning and truth are. In the literature on assertion, and in philosophy of language more generally, these two distinct approaches mark a particularly deep divide—a divide that shows up in a wide range of important debates.

3 Assertion and Contemporary Epistemological Debate

Much contemporary epistemological discussion of assertion focuses on the idea that assertion is governed by a norm that imposes epistemic requirements on appropriate assertion. For instance, Williamson (1996) argues that assertion is governed by the knowledge norm: one must assert *p* only if one knows that *p*. The suggestion that assertion is governed by the knowledge norm is central to two contemporary epistemological debates: the epistemology of testimony, and the nature of knowledge. Before turning to consider these debates, we will outline Williamson’s key arguments for the knowledge norm.

Williamson (1996) defends the knowledge norm for assertion by three main considerations—namely, data concerning lottery propositions, Moorean statements, and the way in which assertions are challenged. An assertion may be challenged by the question “How do you know?” or “Do you know?” The legitimacy of such challenges is easily explicable if assertion is governed by the knowledge norm. It seems paradoxical to utter a Moorean statement of the form “*p* but I do not know that *p*.” The absurdity of such statements can be explained by the knowledge norm. By the knowledge norm, one is in a good enough epistemic position to assert the conjunction “*p* but I do not know that *p*” only if one knows both conjuncts—that is, one knows that *p* and knows that one does not know that *p*. Since knowledge is factive, one knows that one does not know that *p* only if one does not know that *p*. But that contradicts the claim that one knows that *p*. Thus, according to the knowledge norm, one cannot meet the conditions for appropriately asserting statements of the form “*p* but I do not know that *p*.” Lastly, consider lottery propositions. Suppose that I have bought a ticket in a fair lottery with many tickets and one winner. The draw has taken place and in fact my ticket has not won, although the result has not yet been announced. It seems inappropriate for me to assert “My ticket has lost,” even though it is highly likely on the evidence and true. The impropriety of my assertion is explicable on the knowledge norm, since, in the described circumstances, it also seems intuitive that I do not know that my ticket has lost.

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Williamson makes the further claims that the knowledge norm is constitutive of assertion and is not derived from any general rules governing conversation. As we will see later, these further claims do not affect the main purposes to which the knowledge norm for assertion has been put in epistemology. As a result, much of the epistemological literature discusses only the idea that knowledge is the norm for assertion and not the further claims that this norm is constitutive and non-derivative.

3.1 *Assertion and Testimony*

A central use of assertion is in testimony. It is widely agreed that testimony allows the transmission of knowledge from a speaker to a hearer (although there are different accounts of how this is so). As a result, we may try to use the epistemology of testimony to illuminate the notion of assertion or, alternatively, use our best account of assertion to illuminate the epistemology of testimony.

Illustrating the first direction, we may try to explain the existence of the practice of assertion with the features it has by appeal to the transmission of knowledge by testimony. For instance, Williamson (2000: 267) suggests that we can explain why we have the practice of assertion by the fact that “we need assertion to transmit knowledge.” According to a simple model, that a speaker knows that *p* is both necessary and, in conducive circumstances, sufficient for a hearer to come to know that *p* from the speaker’s assertion that *p*. More formally, we might suppose that the following two principles govern the transmission of knowledge by testimony:

Necessity: for any speaker, *A*, and hearer, *B*, *B*’s belief that *p* is known on the basis of *A*’s testimony that *p* only if *A* knows that *p*.

Sufficiency: for any speaker, *A*, and hearer, *B*, if (1) *A* knows that *p*; (2) *B* comes to believe that *p* on the basis of the content of *A*’s testimony that *p*; and, (3), *B* has no undefeated defeaters for believing that *p*, then *B*’s belief that *p* constitutes knowledge.⁶

These principles combined with the idea that a central use of assertion is in testimony may be used to motivate epistemic constraints on appropriate assertion. For instance, if a central use of assertion is in the transmission of knowledge by testimony, and *Necessity* holds, then this may suggest that a speaker’s assertion of *p* is appropriate only if she knows that *p*.⁷

According to the second direction of illumination between assertion and testimony, we might appeal to our best account of assertion to illuminate the epistemology of testimony. Suppose that on grounds independent of the debate about testimony we have shown that assertion is governed by the norm: one must assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*. We might then try to use the knowledge norm for assertion to support certain claims about the epistemology of testimony. This strategy is exemplified by

⁶ Adapted from Lackey (2006: 6).

⁷ Williamson (2000: 267) endorses this idea as “probably right” while admitting that further work needs to be done, since a truth norm of assertion could also explain the transmission of knowledge by testimony.

Goldberg's contribution to this collection, where he appeals to the idea that there are epistemic constraints on assertion to explain two features of testimony, what he calls "buckpassing" and "blame."

3.2 *Assertion and the Nature of Knowledge*

The debate about the nature of assertion is relevant not only to the epistemology of testimony, but also to debates concerning the nature of knowledge. In this latter connection, two further developments of the knowledge norm are especially relevant. First, some have defended a bi-conditional version of the knowledge norm for assertion (e.g. DeRose 2002). Second, some have suggested that the knowledge norm governs not only assertion but also practical reasoning, or reasoning about what to do. For example, Hawthorne and Stanley (2008) defend a bi-conditional version of the knowledge norm for practical reasoning. They defend the knowledge norm for practical reasoning by appeal to the way in which we criticize and defend actions and the unacceptability of certain chains of reasoning. Hawthorne and Stanley note that we routinely criticize actions by pointing out that the subject did not know the relevant proposition. For instance, a mother may criticize her teenage daughter's behavior, saying, "You shouldn't have left the party so late. You didn't know there would be a bus at that time." A second argument focuses on certain cases of intuitively unacceptable reasoning (Hawthorne 2004: 174–5). For instance, suppose that you have bought a £1 ticket in a lottery in which there are 10,000 tickets and the prize is £5,000. The draw has taken place, although it has not yet been announced; in fact, your ticket has lost. You truly believe that your ticket has lost on probabilistic grounds. Someone offers you 1p for the lottery ticket. It seems intuitively unacceptable for you to reason as follows: I will lose the lottery; if I keep the ticket, I will get nothing; if I sell the ticket, I will get 1p; so, I ought to sell the ticket. By contrast, the reasoning would seem acceptable if you had heard the announcement of the lottery.

Formulating the sufficiency direction of the knowledge norm for assertion or practical reasoning norm raises problems not faced by the necessity direction. First, it requires distinguishing epistemic propriety from other notions of propriety. A wide variety of norms applies to assertion and practical reasoning. For example, an assertion may be criticized as rude, immoral, imprudent, or irrelevant. In many senses of propriety, that one knows that *p* is not sufficient for the propriety of asserting *p* or relying on *p* in one's practical reasoning. For instance, even if one knows that one's boss is bald, it may not be polite, prudent, or relevant to point this out to him. So, one might instead phrase the sufficiency claim as the claim that, if one knows that *p*, then one is in a good enough epistemic position to assert that *p*. This leaves it open that one's assertion is incorrect on grounds other than epistemic ones—for instance, that it is rude, imprudent, irrelevant, and so on. It merely claims that, if one knows that *p*, then there is nothing epistemically wrong with asserting that *p*. Second, even if one is in a strong epistemic position with respect to *p*, *p* may be irrelevant to some contemplated action. One solution is to restrict the relevant proposition in some way (e.g., Hawthorne and

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Stanley 2008 restrict the sufficiency direction of the knowledge norm for practical reasoning to what they call “p-dependent choices”; for an alternative solution, see Fantl and McGrath 2009).

If knowledge is the norm for either assertion or practical reasoning, then one criterion for an account of knowledge is that it should respect these links between knowledge, assertion, and practical reasoning. In particular, the idea that knowledge is a norm for assertion and/or practical reasoning has been used to defend so-called shifty views of knowledge, according to which the truth of knowledge ascriptions depends on the stakes and/or the salience of error. Such shifty views encompass both contextualism and impurism. Contextualists claim that *know* is a context-sensitive term whose contribution to truth conditions depends on the attributer’s context (e.g., Cohen 1988; DeRose 1992). Impurists deny the contextualist thesis of context sensitivity. They argue that whether a subject knows that *p* depends not only on such traditional factors as whether she truly believes that *p*, and her evidence, but also on her stakes, or the practical costs for her of being wrong (e.g., Hawthorne 2004; Stanley 2005; Fantl and McGrath 2009). By contrast, classic invariantists deny that the truth of knowledge ascriptions depends on the stakes and/or the salience of error. Notice that, for the contextualist, there is no single knowledge relation expressed by *know*. Thus, contextualists endorse a modified version of the knowledge norm for assertion and practical reasoning, according to which the standard for one’s being in a good enough epistemic position to assert that *p* or to rely on *p* in practical reasoning is that it is true for one to say “I know that *p*” (e.g. DeRose 2002).

DeRose (2002) explicitly appeals to a bi-conditional version of the knowledge norm for assertion to defend contextualism. The argument combines the knowledge norm for assertion with what he calls “the context sensitivity of assertion.” the claim that the standards for being in a good enough epistemic position to assert a proposition vary with context. For instance, it seems that one would need to be in a stronger epistemic position to assert the claim that smoking causes cancer in a conference of health professionals than in a bar room. DeRose (2002: 147) presents his argument as follows:

The knowledge account of assertion provides a powerful argument for contextualism: if the standards for when one is in a position to assert warrantably that *p* are the same as those that comprise a truth-condition for “I know that *p*,” then if the former vary with context, so do the latter. In short: the knowledge account of assertion together with the context-sensitivity of assertion yields contextualism about knowledge.⁸

Although DeRose uses the knowledge norm for assertion to attempt to defend contextualism, impurists argue that the knowledge norm in fact favors their view rather than contextualism. For instance, Hawthorne (2004) argues that his version of impurism outperforms rival accounts of knowledge on a list of criteria that includes the idea that knowledge is the norm for assertion and practical reasoning. In particular, he

⁸ For objections to DeRose’s argument see, e.g., Blackson (2004), Brown (2005), Leite (2007).

argues that contextualism cannot honor the links between knowledge, assertion, and practical reasoning (Hawthorne 2004: sect. 2.4). For a contextualist, the truth of an attribution of knowledge by an attributer A to a subject S depends on A's context, whereas the propriety of S's assertion and practical reasoning seems to depend on S's own context. As a result, the impurist alleges, the contextualist divorces facts about knowledge and facts about the propriety of assertion and practical reasoning. If contextualism is true, an attributor in high stakes may truly say of a subject in low stakes, "S does not know that p but S would not be criticizable for asserting p," and an attributor in low stakes may truly say of a subject in high stakes, "S knows that p but S is not in a strong enough epistemic position to assert that p." Similar points apply to practical reasoning. (See DeRose 2009 for his reply.) Other impurists also appeal to the knowledge norm to support their view (see Stanley 2005 and Fantl and McGrath 2009).

Notice that the various ways in which the knowledge norm is used to support shifty views detailed above rely only on the idea that knowledge is the norm for assertion and not on the idea that the knowledge norm is constitutive of assertion and non-derivative. Thus, the focus of epistemological discussion has been on the claim that knowledge is the norm for assertion. Although the knowledge norm for assertion and practical reasoning has been used to defend shifty views, many authors question the knowledge norm for assertion or practical reasoning in one or both directions. A number of authors have objected to the necessity direction of the knowledge norm for assertion. Some challenge Williamson's defense of the knowledge norm by challenging his description of the data and/or by attempting to accommodate the data by proposing that assertion is governed by a standard weaker than knowledge, such as truth (Weiner 2006), or justified belief (e.g. Douven 2006; Lackey 2007; Kvanvig 2009). Others argue that the epistemic standard for assertion is context sensitive (e.g. Davis 2007; Levin 2008; Brown forthcoming). Objections have also been raised to both directions of the knowledge norm for practical reasoning (see Hill and Schechter 2007; Brown 2008; Neta 2009; Reed forthcoming). Three of the chapters in this collection offer further contributions to the debate about the knowledge norm. Kvanvig argues against the necessity direction of the knowledge norm for assertion. Lackey argues against the sufficiency direction of the knowledge norm for assertion. Brown considers and rejects the suggestion that infallibilism about knowledge could provide a motivation for either the sufficiency direction of the knowledge norm or "commonality," the idea that knowledge is the common standard for assertion and practical reasoning.

4 Summary of the Collection

The chapters in this collection are arranged into two parts. The first part examines the question of what is an assertion, whereas the second examines the idea that there are specific epistemic norms governing assertion.

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Part I What is an Assertion?

The chapters in this part address the question of what an assertion is. MacFarlane provides an overview of various possible theories and raises a number of questions about each of them. He leans towards a commitment view of assertion. Kölbel defends a view that combines a commitment approach with Stalnaker's "essential effect" as a necessary condition. Pagin proposes a new theory of assertion that does not fit any of the standard categories in any obvious way—it includes elements of the cause and effect theories. Cappelen promotes a debunking view according to which the category of assertion is superfluous. Robert Stalnaker shows how *de se* content can be incorporated into his theory of assertion.

Cappelen, "Against Assertion" Cappelen's contribution surveys various ways to divide sayings (of declaratives) into those that are assertions and those that are not. He concludes that the project might be misconstrued. There are many equally good ways of doing it. We might be better off, Cappelen suggests, sticking with only sayings, and variable norms, causes, effects, and commitments. No additional theoretical or explanatory work is done by singling out one subset of these sayings as "assertions." A complete theory of linguistic behavior, Cappelen proposes, will not need the category of assertion—all we will need are sayings plus contextually variable norms, commitments, causes, and effects.

Kölbel, "Conversational Score, Assertion, and Testimony" Kölbel's contribution is a development of Stalnaker's proposal that the "essential effect" of an assertion is to add the content of what is asserted to what is presupposed in the conversation. Stalnaker does not take this essential effect to provide more than a necessary condition for being an assertion. The speech act of supposing, for example, has the same effect. Kölbel presents a proposal for how to add elements that, combined with Stalnaker's essential effect, constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for an act being an assertion. The additional conditions are, according to Kölbel, best spelled out in normative terms. Kölbel draws on elements of Robert Brandom's work in developing the additional norms as rights and obligations incurred by speakers in a conversation.

MacFarlane, "What is Assertion?" MacFarlane's contribution is in part taxonomical and critical. He surveys four influential theories of assertion: (i) to assert is to express an attitude, (ii) to assert is to make a move defined by its constitutive rules, (iii) to assert is to propose to add information to the conversational common ground, (iv) to assert is to undertake a commitment. MacFarlane spells out the motivation for each of these and then evaluates them. His evaluation is focused in particular on the question whether the various theories can account for how we *retract* assertions. In earlier work, MacFarlane has advocated the fourth option. In this chapter he defends that view against various objections (several of them from Pagin). At the end of the chapter MacFarlane

acknowledges some remaining concerns about commitment-based views, but expresses optimism that these can be overcome by appeal to Brandom's idea of an asserter authorizing others to reassert the asserted content.

Pagin, "Information and Assertoric Force" Pagin's contribution develops a new theory of assertion. According to Pagin, assertion should not be characterized normatively. He also rejects the view that it should be characterized in terms of commitments, communicative intentions, or communal norms. Pagin's alternative is complex, rich, and does not lend itself to a quick summary. At the core of the view is a notion of an utterance being made "prima facie because it is true." Here is one of Pagin's examples: when Sue utters, "the milk is sour" in order to tell Harry that the milk is sour, her first-person characterization of why she is performing this act will appeal, *not* to her *belief* that the milk is sour, but to the milk being sour—that is, she "says that the milk is sour in part *because*, that is, *for the reason that*, the milk is sour; that is, she says it in part because it is true" (Pagin, this volume). This is but one element in a complex and interesting new proposal for how to understand assertion.

Stalnaker, "The Essential Contextual" Robert Stalnaker's contribution concerns how the theory of assertion he has developed over thirty years should represent self-locating information. In particular, he aims to show how the kind of phenomenon first highlighted in work by Perry, Castaneda, and Lewis can be incorporated into Stalnaker's theory of assertion. In Stalnaker's original framework, the context set is the set of possible worlds compatible with the conversational participants' (presumed) shared information. In such a framework, propositions are understood in terms of absolute truth conditions. In this chapter, Stalnaker addresses the question of how his framework can allow for the representation of self-locating information—that is, "information, not about what the world is like, but about where one is located in the world" (Stalnaker, this volume).

Part II Epistemic Norms of Assertion

The various chapters in this part focus on the idea that there is an epistemic norm of assertion. The contributions by Brown and Lackey question sufficiency: the claim that knowing that *p* puts one in a good enough epistemic position to assert that *p*. By contrast, Kvanvig questions necessity: the claim that one is in a good enough epistemic position to assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*. Instead, he suggests a weaker necessary condition for appropriate assertion, a certain justification condition. Goldberg argues that, if there is a necessary epistemic condition on appropriate assertion, then this can explain certain prominent features of testimony. Greenough considers how a relativist should best specify the epistemic norms for assertion. Maitra questions Williamson's suggestion that the intimate connection between the notion of assertion and the epistemic norms governing it can be understood on analogy with the rules of a game.

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Brown, “Fallibilism and the Knowledge Norm for Assertion and Practical Reasoning” Brown is interested in what might motivate two different ideas: (1) sufficiency, the claim that knowledge that *p* is sufficient to place one in a good enough epistemic position to assert that *p*; and, (2), commonality, the idea that knowledge is the common epistemic standard for assertion and practical reasoning. Although both claims are appealed to in the debate between contextualists and invariantists about *know*, she argues that the existing defense of these claims is inadequate. She considers infallibilism about knowledge as a potential motivation for both claims. This motivation is suggested by the fact that many recent proponents of the knowledge norm are, in one sense or other, infallibilists about knowledge (e.g., Hawthorne, Stanley, and Williamson), and that some opponents of the knowledge norm deny sufficiency by appeal to fallibilism (e.g., Hill and Schechter 2007; Brown 2008; Reed forthcoming). However, despite its initial promise, she concludes that infallibilism fails to motivate either claim.

Goldberg, “Putting the Norm of Assertion to Work: The Case of Testimony” Goldberg uses the idea that there is an epistemic condition necessary for appropriate assertion to explain certain features of testimony, in particular what he calls “buck-passing” and “blame.” His account assumes that a speaker’s assertion of *p* is appropriate only if the speaker stands in a certain epistemic relation to *p*, where he is neutral about what the required epistemic relation is, and, in particular, whether it is justification or knowledge (for Goldberg, neither belief nor truth is an epistemic condition in the relevant sense). He claims that his account has the benefits of explaining the relevant features of testimony by appeal to materials needed anyway in the proper account of assertion while remaining neutral on controversial issues in the epistemology of testimony, such as the debate between reductionism and non-reductionism, and the debate about the conditions for the transmission of knowledge by testimony.

Greenough, “Truth-Relativism, Norm-Relativism, and Assertion” Greenough’s contribution asks what is the best account of assertion for a relativist about truth? Greenough isolates two main challenges for a relativistic account of assertion: accommodating the variability data and the “Evans challenge” (if assertion aims at truth or knowledge that are relative, what constitutes success in the goal of assertion?). Greenough argues against two accounts of assertion put forward by prominent relativists—namely, Kölbel and MacFarlane. He argues that a relativist about truth should instead endorse a relativistic version of the knowledge norm for assertion according to which an assertion of a sentence *S* by subject *s* in context of use *c* is correct, relative to the context of assessment *a*, if and only if “*s* knows that *p*” is true at the circumstances of evaluation determined by both *c* and *a*. However, he argues that, for Truth-Relativism to be at all plausible, an alternative view of assertion needs to be ruled out. According to this alternative view, which he labels “Norm-Relativism,” what norm of assertion is in play in some context of use is itself relative to a perspective. The basic idea, he explains, is

that the standards for assertability are more demanding in some contexts (for example, legal contexts) than others (for example, casual conversation in a pub). Greenough argues that Norm-Relativism is preferable to Truth-Relativism.

Kvanvig, "Norms of Assertion" Kvanvig argues against the necessity direction of the knowledge norm for assertion. Instead, he defends a justification norm for assertion. On his view, assertion is governed by the rule: assert that *p* only if you have justification to believe that *p*. The relevant notion of justification, "epistemic justification," is knowledge-strength justification. He appeals to the strength of the relevant kind of justification in arguing that his justification norm can explain the data that Williamson took to support the knowledge norm, in particular the impropriety of asserting lottery propositions and the impropriety of Moorean assertions. Further, he argues that his justification account has an advantage over the knowledge account in that it provides a unified answer to the fundamental questions of the egocentric predicament of what to do and what to say. Kvanvig believes that the knowledge norm cannot provide a unified answer to these fundamental questions, since, in dealing with a number of counter-examples, it introduces a distinction between the primary and secondary propriety of assertion.

Lackey, "Assertion and Isolated Second-Hand Knowledge" Lackey's contribution concerns the sufficiency direction of the knowledge norm for assertion: if one knows that *p*, then one is in a good enough epistemic position to assert that *p*. Lackey puts forward several cases in which, she alleges, the speaker knows a certain proposition, *p*, but is not in a good enough epistemic position to assert it. The cases all involve what she describes as isolated second-hand knowledge. In these examples, the speaker gains knowledge of *p* via testimony and it is in this sense second hand. However, her knowledge is also isolated in the sense that the subject knows nothing or very little relevant about the matter other than *p*. For instance, in one case, an oncologist, Matilda, knows that one of her patients, Derek, has pancreatic cancer via the testimony of one of her medical students. However, having been out of the office, she has no specific knowledge about the case, such as the test results that arrive during her day off. In this case, Lackey argues that, even though Matilda knows that Derek has pancreatic cancer, it would be improper for her to assert this diagnosis flat out to Derek in a consultation.

Maitra, "Assertion, Norms, and Games" Maitra examines one component of Williamson's classic account of the knowledge norm for assertion, the analogy between assertion and games. According to Williamson, the knowledge norm of assertion is more intimately connected to assertion than other norms governing assertion, such as norms of politeness, relevance, sincerity, and so on. Maitra argues that the notion of an intimate connection between the knowledge norm for assertion and the speech act of assertion is not illuminated by appeal to the notion of a game. She extends this conclusion to the broader idea that assertion is governed by either an alethic or an

epistemic norm. She is careful to point out that her arguments show only that we need a better understanding of the relevant notion of intimate connection. They do not cast doubt either on the idea that there is an epistemic or alethic norm for assertion or that the relevant norm is intimately connected to the nature of assertion. Rather, she argues that the analogy with the notion of a game does not help explain the notion of an intimate connection, and that we need to turn elsewhere to explain this notion.

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