Assertion of Knowledge

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1. Introduction

As evidenced by many of the other contributions to this volume, there are a variety of epistemological issues relating to assertion, and many questions about assertion of interest to epistemologists. This chapter addresses epistemological issues arising in connection with assertions *of knowledge* specifically – that is, with assertions that constitute ascriptions of knowledge. The latter have served as a central source of data in the epistemological theorizing. But they also constitute an important target of such theorizing themselves. Below, we consider three issues concerning knowledge ascriptions that have figured prominently in recent epistemological discussion: their *use as evidence* for specific epistemological claims and theories, the *pragmatics and psychology* of knowledge ascriptions, and the *social role(s)* that the relevant assertions might play. As we'll see, there are important interactions among these three issues or subjects: a given stance on one of them is liable to influence how one addresses the others. (Not coincidentally, while the use of knowledge ascriptions in fashioning epistemological theories is introduced in the next section, it's a topic that recurs throughout.) So too, these issues, and particular views concerning them, interact with central questions about both assertion and linguistic communication generally. As we'll also see, however, a central point on which epistemologists divide is how closely tied various features of our knowledge attributing behavior are to semantics, or to (presumed) facts about assertion *per se*.

2. Assertions of knowledge and epistemological theory

Traditionally, a, if not the, primary object of epistemological inquiry has been knowledge. But *assertions* of knowledge are of interest to epistemologists too.[1] This is unsurprising: on the face of it, it would seem that just in virtue of their content such assertions would constitute an important source of evidence for epistemologists. For, just as a competent and sincere assertion, "*x* is *F*," can give you knowledge of that to which the speaker is testifying, it can also serve, indirectly, as a source of information as to the conditions under which '*F*', and/or the corresponding concept, is correctly applied, and perhaps even insight into *F*-ness itself. As a quite general point, then, it's natural to think that we can look to the conditions in which various assertions are made in order to gain insight into the truth conditional contents of the uttered sentences, the contours of the relevant concepts, and/or the nature of relevant worldly phenomena themselves.[2]

So it's not surprising that linguistic phenomena have served as an important source of

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[1] Here, largely because they have received the greatest attention to date, the focus will be on ascriptions of knowledge-*that*; but there are interesting and important questions about ascriptions of knowledge-*how* too, for example. For a sample treatment of the latter, see Glick 2012.

[2] In the epistemological case, theorists sometimes differ in what they take the real or ultimate target of investigation to be – the truth-conditions of various sentence types, the application conditions for concepts, or the nature of knowledge itself. Often, however, they fail to show much concern with distinguishing between the metaphysical and conceptual or linguistic projects, perhaps because the latter are assumed to be closely related.

data for epistemology: considerations of 'what we would say', our ordinary knowledge-attributing (and -denying) habits and inclinations, the circumstances under which we typically attribute knowledge, the oddity of certain utterances containing epistemic terms, and so on, have long helped to shape and constrain theories of knowledge, justification, and other central epistemic notions. Thus, for example, the naturalness of attributing knowledge to children and non-human animals, as well as of figurative attributions of knowledge to non-human devices, has been given as evidence for certain externalist theories of knowledge.[3] Our willingness to attribute knowledge in spite of uneliminated possibilities of error is often taken as evidence for fallibilism -- not to mention, as evidence against scepticism.[4] And the apparent inconsistency of assertions of the form '*S* knows that *p*, but *p* is false', is often cited as reason to think that 'knows' is a factive term, and that truth is a necessary condition for knowing.[5]

Some have raised deep concerns about the status and significance of such data: some (e.g., Kornblith 2002), on the grounds that a reliance on linguistic and otherwise intuitional data is at odds with epistemologists' proper concern with epistemic phenomena themselves; others (e.g., Weinberg *et al.* 2001), because they take there to be evidence of widespread diversity in the intuitions that knowledge ascriptions are thought to express, such that epistemological theories based on such data are fated to be idiosyncratic and lacking in normative significance.[6] But others have responded to such arguments;[7] and the majority view is that knowledge ascriptions constitute a key, even indispensible, source that epistemological theory must draw upon.

Even so, there remain important methodological questions concerning the use of knowledge ascriptions in epistemological theorizing. For, as is generally allowed, the evidence that such ascriptions provide is defeasible; it may be overridden in light of other data – including, in light of other features of our ordinary knowledge-ascribing behavior. Thus, in terms of the examples mentioned just above, while he does not deny that epistemological theory should take heed of how we use epistemic terms, Richard Fumerton (1988) has argued that while the uses on which externalists fix may be perfectly natural, and even well-motivated, they are not "philosophically significant", since they, and the phenomena they pick out, aren't associated with the resolution of philosophical curiosity and doubt (1988: 457). In terms of our apparently natural fallibilism and anti-scepticism, both Peter Unger and David Lewis have raised concerns: Lewis, on the grounds that overt, explicit fallibilism -- as expressed by statements of the form, '*S* knows that p, but *S* cannot eliminate certain not-*p* possibilities' -- "just *sounds*

[3] See, for example, Goldman 1976, particularly the opening and closing remarks.
[4] For example, Leite: "In the end, careful attention to the details of our ordinary practices of knowledge attribution provides the best basis for accepting fallibilism" (2010: 371).
[5] For example, Bonjour: "In general, it seems intuitively wrong to ascribe knowledge where the claim in question is not in fact true. This is why a person who claims to know something will normally withdraw that claim when it is demonstrated in some way that the claim in question is mistaken and concede that he or she did not know after all" (2002: 33).
[6] The latter thesis is characteristic of the 'negative program' in 'experimental philosophy'. Examples of work from within the 'positive' program are mentioned below.
[7] See, for example, Brown 2012 and Nagel 2012a, respectively.

contradictory" (1996: 549); and Unger (1975), because while our ordinary tendency to attribute knowledge may be excusable, and may even serve to pragmatically communicate truths,[8] as that same linguistic behavior shows, knowledge requires an absolute certainty that is hardly ever warranted.[9] Finally, while knowledge is very widely believed to require truth, there *are* non-factive uses of 'know(s)', as when it's said that ancient thinkers "knew" that the earth was flat. Most epistemologists think that such utterances should not be taken literally – more specifically, that they involve 'protagonist projection' (Holton 1997), reflecting the point of view of the subject(s) to whom "knowledge" is being ascribed. According to Allen Hazlett (2010), however, when supplemented by Gricean principles of conversation, an account of the ordinary 'knows' as *non*-factive can explain why someone who attributes knowledge (typically) implies that *p* is true.

As even this quick review suggests, while knowledge ascriptions may well be a crucial source of data for epistemological theory, their proper interpretation, and so their use in supporting this or that epistemological theory, is the target of much lively debate. It would be a mistake, however, to regard this as merely an illustration of the perfectly general -- and perhaps not very interesting -- point that all data stand in need of interpretation if they're to be put to theoretical use. *That* is true of the flashing of the green and red lights on a CO_2 monitor, for example. Whereas, the deeper point suggested by the above examples, and a point of special relevance in the present context, is that the correct understanding of knowledge ascriptions is as contentious as it is because assertions of knowledge *are assertions*[10] – because, that is, they are intentional acts undertaken for specific practical and communicative purposes, against the background of certain shared assumptions and mutual expectations, by language users and thinkers with finite cognitive, informational, and other resources, and so on. It's because of this that, for a given piece of knowledge-attributing behavior, it's an open question what's responsible for its production, and for our assessment of it as true or false, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on. And it's for this reason too that we should expect a full and proper theoretical handling of assertions of knowledge to engage not just with the semantics of the relevant sentences, but also with the psychological, communicative, and social factors and issues that assertions of knowledge both reflect and raise. These points, and some of the main views and approaches concerning knowledge ascriptions that have emerged in recent epistemology, are perhaps best illustrated by considering the important recent debate concerning the semantics of knowledge ascriptions – and, in particular, the controversy over whether their truth conditional contents and/or truth values might be importantly context-sensitive.

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[8] Bach (2005: 73) doubts that Unger himself meant to be offering a pragmatic account. But more some recent defenders of sceptic-friendly, Unger-style views – e.g., Blaauw 2003 and Schaffer 2004a -- avowedly are.

[9] Here too, the relevant claim is supported by appeal to the alleged unhappiness of certain 'knowledge'-involving utterances. For example, the fact that knowing entails that it's *all right* to be (absolutely) certain is, Unger says, made clear by the fact that, in asking someone, "How can you be *certain* of that?," "we manage to imply that it might not be all right for him to be certain and imply, further, that this is because he might not really *know* the thing" (1975: 98).

[10] I'm indebted here to discussion with Cindy Holder.

3. Assertions of knowledge: semantics, pragmatics, psychology

Obviously, whether you know depends on many features of you and your situation. Epistemologists disagree over which such features are important -- whether and wherein knowing depends on what else you believe, on objective features of your situation over and above whether *p* is true, on certain counterfactuals holding of you, on your evidence for/against *p*, on the etiology of your belief, and so on. The natural thought, however, is that once such factors are fixed, what it means to say that one "know(s)," and whether what is thus said is true, is fixed as well -- changes in such things as what the speaker has in mind in attributing knowledge, the importance to the subject of getting things right, and so on, don't directly alter the truth-conditional content of the relevant tokened sentence or otherwise affect whether he speaks truly in saying what he does.

Various recent theorists, however, have challenged this traditional view. According to *contextualists*, for example, an utterance of '*S* knows that *p*' expresses a proposition of the form,

> *S* has a true belief and is in a strong$_C$ epistemic position with respect to *p*,

where strength of epistemic position is a function of the standards operative in the context, *C*, as determined by features of the knowledge attributor's psychology and/or conversational-practical situation. In effect, then, a knowledge ascription or denial expresses the proposition that it is or isn't the case that,

> *S* has a true belief that belief satisfies the contextually operative epistemic standards. (DeRose 2009: 34)

While *contrastivists* (e.g., Schaffer 2004b, Karjalainen and Morton 2003) agree that the relevant sentences' contents are shifty, they hold that this is because 'knows' denotes a *three*-place relation that includes a contrast variable. The latter can shift when not explicitly provided. When that happens, what a given knowledge ascription expresses shifts too; as a result, and as on contextualist accounts generally, an ascription ('Jane knows that that's a hand') can go from true (*Jane knows that that's a hand rather than a post-amputation stump*) to false (*Jane knows that that's a hand rather than a figment of the Matrix*). Meanwhile, according to *subject sensitive invariantists* (e.g., Fantl and McGrath 2002, 2009, Hawthorne 2004, Stanley 2005), *whether a subject knows* -- though not what's expressed by the relevant knowledge sentences themselves – depends on facts about his/her practical interests (and/or his/her beliefs about such), and especially the degree of practical importance to the subject of getting things right. As a general rule, on this view, the more that's at stake, the harder it is to know. Finally, according to *relativists* (MacFarlane 2005, 2014), the truth values (though not the contents) of knowledge sentences depend on the standards in play in the contexts *in which they are assessed*, as opposed to the standards operative in either the context in which they are uttered or the context of the subject.

The debate among the parties just mentioned has been at center stage in recent discussions of knowledge ascriptions, and a large literature has quickly grown up around it. One feature of that literature that's of particular relevance here is the fact that proponents of one or another non-traditional view often link their position to specific claims about assertion *per se*. Conspicuous among the latter has been the idea that assertion is individuated and governed by a constitutive norm (or rule), and specifically that its constitutive rule is the knowledge norm:

> One must: assert that *p* only if one knows that *p* (Williamson 1996, 2000).

According to Keith DeRose, it's just obvious that what may be warrantedly asserted depends on context and that, when coupled with the knowledge norm, this yields a novel argument for contextualism:

> The knowledge account of assertion provides a powerful argument for contextualism: If the standards for when one is in a position to warrantedly assert 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 assertability yields contextualism about knowledge. (2002: 171)

In this way, "the knowledge account of assertion demands a contextualist account of knowledge and is simply incredible without it" (*ibid.*: 182).

This argument has been criticized on several grounds. For example, even if the knowledge norm (together with the general variability of warranted assertion) supports *some* kind of non-traditional view, it's not clear which. Thus, Thomas Blackson (2004) argues that the knowledge norm (plus the context-variability of warranted assertion) might just as naturally be taken to favor subject sensitive invariantism, as John Hawthorne (2004) for instance has suggested. Jonathan Schaffer (2008), on the other hand, argues that assertion is best thought of as being governed by a *question-relative* knowledge norm, since what may be properly asserted depends on what contrast propositions are at issue; and this in turn, he suggests, calls for a contrastivist understanding of the knowledge relation itself.

DeRose's argument has also been criticized on the grounds that it involves an equivocation on the notion of 'warranted assertability'. According to Adam Leite (2007), for example, the type of "warrantedness" of assertability that's obviously context-variable – roughly, whether an assertion is (epistemically) appropriate in a particular conversational context -- needn't and, Leite argues, cannot be the sort of warrantedness to which the knowledge norm speaks (see too Bach 2005: 73-74). More generally, Leite and others (e.g., Turri 2010, McHugh 2012) have argued that the knowledge norm is perfectly compatible with our natural (moderate) 'insensitive invariantism' about knowledge itself

and/or the semantics of knowledge ascriptions.[11,12]

Finally, while it has many defenders, the knowledge norm itself is quite contentious. Some deny that assertions are best thought of as being governed by any constitutive norm(s) at all. Others deny that knowledge -- rather than belief, truth, or reasonable belief, say – is what the relevant rule requires. Among the latter theorists, some (e.g., Levin 2008, Maitra and Weatherson 2010, Brown 2010, McKinnon 2013, 2015, Gerken 2012a, 2015, Goldberg 2013, 2015a) take the norm governing assertion to be context-sensitive; others (e.g., Weiner 2005, Douven 2006, Lackey 2007, Bach 2008, Kvanvig 2009) do not.[13] Either way, such theorists typically argue that the data commonly cited on behalf of the knowledge rule[14] can be explained by their preferred alternative norm together with other facts, such as our interlocutors' presumed adherence to certain conversational norms, their tending to be reasonable and reliable in their beliefs, and so on. On this view, there may well be a close, even very close, relation between knowledge and what is properly asserted; but this is not a brute fact owing to any constitutive relation between the two. (This is an idea to which we'll briefly return below.)

For all of the above reasons, DeRose's knowledge-norm argument for contextualism is unlikely to persuade anyone not already sympathetic to the conclusion. More generally, arguments in the knowledge ascriptions literature that rely on some specific claim about assertion's constitutive norm, for example, are bound for that very reason to have limited dialectical effectiveness. Hence a relative advantage of a different, and more prominent, type of argument that contextualists (and others) have employed. Here, we're told, no controversial theoretical claims are required. We need only observe our actual knowledge-attributing practices and, in particular, the manifest variability in our willingness to assert *that someone knows*. Here again is DeRose:

> The best grounds for accepting contextualism concerning knowledge attributions come from how knowledge-attributing (and knowledge-denying) sentences are used in ordinary, non-philosophical talk: What ordinary speakers will count as 'knowledge' in some non-philosophical contexts they will deny is such in others (2009: 47).

Familiar illustrations of such flexibility in our willingness to ascribe (/deny) knowledge include DeRose's Bank (1992) and Cohen's Airport (1999) Cases. In such examples, a

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[11] Timothy Williamson too, to whom much of the recent attention given the knowledge rule is due, is no friend to the non-traditional views described above. Where he breaks with many current epistemologists is in his advocacy of 'knowledge-first' epistemology.

[12] DeRose's argument has also been criticized for applying, at best, only to first-person cases – that is, to self-ascriptions of knowledge (Bach 2005: 74).

[13] Overviews of the relevant issues and positions are provided by Benton n.d., Weiner 2007, and Goldberg 2015b; see too Simion and Kelp, this volume.

[14] These are, following Williamson (2000: Chapter 11): the apparent unhappiness of assertions of the form '*p*, but I don't know that *p*'; the fact that "How do you know?" can be used as a challenge to an assertion; and the fact that, though the odds of its winning might be ever so small, one cannot properly assert that a given ticket will not win.

scenario ('Low') in which a positive knowledge attribution seems correct is paired with one ('High') in which *denying* knowledge of the same subject seems right, even though none of what would normally be regarded as the epistemically relevant factors have changed. The only clear difference between the cases is an increase in the practical importance of the subject's getting it right. While a standard (insensitive invariantist) semantics seems ill-suited to the task, one or another non-standard account is said to provide an attractive way of explaining what's going on. According to contextualists, for example, who were first to press the significance of such cases, the apparent tension between the relevant (Low) attribution and (High) denial is merely apparent, since what the relevant, surface-contradictory sentence tokens actually express are,

(Low) *S* has a true belief and is in a *moderately* strong epistemic position with respect to *p*, and

(High) It's not the case that (*S* has a true belief and is in a *very* strong epistemic position with respect to *p*).

And these, of course, are perfectly compatible.

Again, this pro-contextualist argument doesn't rely on anything like the knowledge norm. But that's not to say that it's theoretically innocent. In particular, the argument assumes that what's primarily responsible for both the relevant linguistic behavior and our intuitive response thereto is the perceived truth of the relevant sentences: both the (Low) attribution and (High) denial seem right, and since an insensitive invariantist semantics can't account for that, the only question is which *non*-standard account of the sentences' truth conditional contents provides the best explanation of this and other data. But is that right?

One reason for thinking that the semantics of knowledge sentences might not be the engine driving the relevant linguistic behavior, at least in the case of first-person attributions (such as are featured in the Bank Case), is in fact suggested by an idea that forms part of DeRose's argument from the knowledge rule that we considered earlier – viz., the idea that in asserting that *p* one represents oneself as knowing that *p*.[15] According to DeRose, this idea, and the knowledge norm, are "just two sides of the same coin" (2002: 180).[16] However, while the knowledge norm might provide a natural *explanation* of why asserters represent themselves as knowing (Hawthorne 2004: 23; Goldberg 2015a: 155-157), it's not clearly necessary for explaining the latter – not, at least, if the epistemic self-representation claim (as Goldberg 2015a calls it) isn't taken to be, or to directly reflect, a constitutive fact about assertion. To briefly illustrate (Rysiew 2007a: 630-633; 2016: Section 5.2): if our talk is governed by Grice's 'Cooperative Principle' (CP), then 'saying' itself presumes one's striving to fulfill certain credal-

[15] The idea is closely associated with Unger 1975, but many have endorsed it in various forms. For citations, see DeRose 2002: 199, n. 20 and Rysiew 2007a: 657, n. 7.

[16] Similarly, Leite refers to these two ideas as "two forms" of "the knowledge account of assertion" (2007: 111).

epistemic conditions. For, chief among the Gricean maxims is that of Quality, 'Try to make your contribution one that is true,' along with its two more specific sub-maxims:

(i) 'Do not say what you believe to be false;' and

(ii) 'Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.' (Grice 1989: 27)

Notice that the properties addressed by Quality and its sub-maxims approximate what are generally taken to be the central conditions on knowing.[17] Granted, (i) doesn't explicitly require a *positive* belief as to what one asserts; but even if the latter is plausibly implied, there is the question of what *degree* of belief is required, and whether it constitutes the type of confident belief that knowledge is often taken to involve. So too, it's an open question whether or how often the 'adequate evidence' to which (ii) refers will constitute knowledge-level justification, as opposed to something less, or more. Plausibly, however, in those cases where one's degree of confidence or the quality of one's evidence (justification, grounds, etc.) falls clearly short of the sort of belief or justification commonly thought to be necessary for knowledge, it's also natural and common to qualify one's assertion ("I think that…;" "…, though I don't know for sure;" etc.), rather than to assert outright. If that's right, then – typically, anyway -- the sort of belief and justification one represents oneself as having when one asserts are not obviously weaker than what knowledge requires.

With this line of thinking in mind, two points bear stressing. First, while the discussion of the previous paragraph provides at least a partial vindication of the thought that in asserting one represents oneself as knowing, no mention has been made of the knowledge norm. (The vindication is partial, in that it doesn't establish such an association as an exceptionless or constitutive fact about assertion.) And in fact, while none endorses the knowledge norm, each of Weiner (2005), Douven (2006), Goldberg (2015a), and Gerken (2015), for example, suggest that there may be a normal, even default, association between a speaker's conforming to their favored (non-knowledge) norm of assertion and his/her having knowledge.[18,19]

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[17] So long, at least, as we are open-minded as to how to read (ii) -- such that, e.g., 'justification', 'reliable grounds', or what have you, could be substituted for 'evidence'.

[18] Benton (2016) has argued that, far from furnishing an alternative to the knowledge rule, Grice's maxim of Quality, at least as understood by Grice himself, in fact points to the knowledge rule as constitutive of assertion. Benton grants, however (2016: 700, n. 13), that his discussion does not rule out the possibility that (for example) the norm is context-sensitive but often – even normally, or by default – requires knowledge.

[19] In response to the idea that one's representing oneself as knowing is merely typically inferable from one's asserting, Brown objects that if asserting merely conveys that one has knowledge, "one should be able to cancel the implication. But, it seems that one cannot -- statements of the form 'p but I don't know that p' always seem problematic" (2008a: 92). The latter claim is controversial, however: Weiner 2005, Levin 2008, Maitra and Weatherson 2010, and Goldberg 2015a, for example, argue that in certain (perhaps-exceptional) cases, such assertions would be warranted and make good sense. (Benton 2012 responds to Weiner; Goldberg 2015a: 252-253, 288 responds to Benton.)

Second, and returning to the main thread of our discussion, insofar as a commitment to knowing *is* (at least typically) already carried by an assertion that *p*, this gives us reason to think that self-ascriptions of knowledge may (often) *not* be intended to communicate what the knowledge sentence itself means. For if they were, adding 'I know…' would be needlessly making explicit what would (typically) already be mutually obvious (Rysiew 2001: 492; 2007a: 635-636).

Of course, none of this would cast doubt on the advisability of taking third-person knowledge ascriptions at face value.[20] And, in any case, to have some reason to think that a given utterance may be non-literal – here, that a self-ascription of knowledge may not be merely, or primarily, an attempt to describe one's own (supposed) possessing of knowledge *per se* – is one thing. It's quite another to have some principled and plausible account of what such utterances *are* plausibly intended to communicate. In response to anti-traditionalist arguments from High-Low paired cases, however, such an account has been offered. Briefly sketched, it runs as follows.[21]

According to the traditional theorist knowing requires, minimally, (unGettiered) true belief plus the subject's being in a good epistemic position *vis-à-vis* the proposition in question. What else it might require, and how goodness of epistemic position should be cashed-out, is a matter of dispute. As with assertions generally, however, an assertion of knowledge – *one's saying* that someone knows – is a source of information over and above that encoded in the tokened words themselves. And our willingness to ascribe knowledge, and our intuitive responses to such assertions, is arguably as much a function of information that's merely pragmatically generated as it is of the literal content of what is said. Thus, on the presumption that one is striving to make one's conversational contributions maximally relevantly informative, in attributing knowledge to a subject, *S* (whether him/herself or another), the speaker takes on commitments as to *S*'s epistemic position *vis-à-vis* the proposition in question that plausibly go beyond what knowledge *per se* requires. For, in naturally-occurring situations, and given the maxim of Relevance in particular, it would be misleading to assert that *S* knows -- something that entails *S*'s being in a good epistemic position with respect to *p* -- unless one thought that certain *other* things were true, including:

- that among the various not-*p* possibilities being considered, either *S* can rule them out (his/her evidence eliminates them), or they aren't worth taking seriously;
- that *S* is in a good epistemic position with respect to *p* given the contextually operative standards, insofar as they are appropriately in play; and
- that it is permissible for *S* not to doubt that *p* -- for *S* to be certain (i.e., especially confident) that *p*.

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[20] One who asserts that another knows that *p* might (at least typically) represent him/herself as knowing it as well (Rysiew 2007a: 637-638). However, unlike the first-person case, the use of '*S* knows' in a third-person knowledge attribution does not make explicit something that would already be obviously inferable.

[21] For details, and applications to specific cases, see Rysiew 2001, 2007a, and Brown 2006.

And so on. Putting it another way, given the assumption that one is striving to conform to the CP, and especially to Relevance, these further things are commitments one takes on in asserting that *S* knows that *p*; or -- in still other terms -- they are things one represents as being the case in virtue of uttering a sentence with just that force and content. And when it's mutually obvious that what's at issue in a given conversational setting is precisely whether *S* can eliminate certain salient not-*p* possibilities, how *S* fares with respect to contextually operative epistemic standards, whether it's all right for him, or us, to take *p* as settled, and so on, an assertion of knowledge, or its denial, can serve to communicate just such information as that. The latter information can fail to coincide with the truth conditional contents of the relevant sentences. But if, as often happens, we read the relevant commitments or communicated messages back on to the sentences themselves, these can strike us intuitively true (/false) even if, according to the correct epistemological theory, they're false (/true) – as is, according to a moderate traditional view, the knowledge denial in High.

Insofar as it gives us a way of understanding the context- (/interest-, and contrast-) sensitivity of the information communicated by assertions of knowledge without supposing that this is directly reflected in the semantics of the uttered sentences, the account just sketched undercuts certain anti-traditionalist arguments. The same general approach has also been used to address some of the apparently troubling data mentioned in Section 2 above – namely, the apparent inconsistency of explicit statements of the fallibilist idea (to which Lewis draws our attention), and the fact (to which Unger appeals) that by challenging someone's 'right to be sure', we can manage to imply that s/he doesn't know.[22] The approach is hardly uncontroversial.[23] It bears stressing, however, that all parties to the debate over the correct handling of knowledge ascriptions need an account of their pragmatics – of the generation and recovery of information arising from the relevant utterances. For even when a speaker means just what she says, that itself is something that needs to be inferred.[24] So even if knowledge sentences do encode the sort of contextually-geared information that's said above to be merely pragmatically generated, *that* doesn't suffice to explain its successful communication. The real question is whether, with a plausible account of the pragmatics of knowledge ascriptions in place, positing in addition a non-traditional account of their semantics is theoretically necessary or simply gratuitous.

Clearly, any attempt to understand utterance production and interpretation will engage with psychological matters. Thus, in terms of the above pragmatic account, corresponding to various contents that might arise from someone's ascribing knowledge are psychological requirements on the making of such an ascription. For instance, just as

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[22] On the former, see Rysiew 2001: Section 6, Dougherty and Rysiew 2009, 2011; on the latter, see Rysiew 2007a: 641-645.

[23] Rysiew 2017 includes discussion of central criticisms and responses thereto. Different views on concessive knowledge attributions -- sentences of the form, '*S* knows that *p*, but it's possible that *q*' (where *q* entails not-*p*) -- are discussed, and recent contributions noted, in Rysiew 2016: Section 5.1.

[24] This and related points about the pervasiveness of our reliance on pragmatics are discussed, in connection with the epistemology of testimony, in Rysiew 2007b.

attributing knowledge that *p* to another involves an implied commitment to oneself believing (perhaps even knowing; see n. 20) that *p*, one normally wouldn't attribute knowledge to another unless one had that belief. Kent Bach has suggested that the latter fact can itself be used to explain the knowledge denial in High: since the speaker isn't herself sure that *p*, and since she thinks that the evidence available to herself and the subject doesn't settle the matter, she can't coherently attribute knowledge that *p* to him (Bach 2005: 76-77).

Jennifer Nagel offers a different though related account. According to Nagel, when a person has much riding on some matter, we normally expect them to engage in more, and more diligent, evidence-seeking behavior before arriving at confident belief. For this reason, we naturally attribute to the subject in High either less confident belief or confident belief along with a state of evidence assessment that precedes fixed belief (2008: 289). Further, even in cases where the subject does not share the evaluator's concerns about certain possibilities of error, epistemic egocentrism -- our natural tendency to overestimate the extent to which others share our beliefs, attitudes, and interests -- can lead the evaluator to project those concerns onto the subject. If the subject is not then engaging in the expected extra evidence-seeking behavior, she will once again be judged hasty, and as not knowing (2010a, 2010b).

Other accounts of the psychology of the relevant knowledge-attributing behavior see it as stemming from more general factors -- for example, the fact that focusing on a possibility tends to make one overestimate the likelihood of its actually occurring. If the speaker in High is, as seems plausible, focusing on ways in which the belief in question might be mistaken – or if we're doing do as we assess the scenario -- this might lead her (and us) to falsely deny that the subject knows.[25] Others (e.g., Nagel 2010a) have raised doubts about whether the knowledge attributing behavior in question is plausibly explained by 'the availability heuristic', for example. As part of his 'epistemic focal bias' account, Mikkel Gerken (2013) presents a "principle of contextual salience" which differs from the availability heuristic and, he argues, explains why we might naturally though mistakenly deny knowledge of someone in High.

Like the pragmatic account sketched earlier, each of the psychological views just described was initially introduced in the attempt to explain, in non-semantic terms, what's going on in the paired High-Low cases. But -- again, like the pragmatic account – each might extend beyond that, and so contribute to our understanding of the psychology of knowledge ascriptions generally. Also relevant to the latter are results from 'experimental philosophy'. Here too, many of the relevant studies are intended to shed light on just which features of High-Low paired cases – heightened practical stakes, salient possibilities of error, relevant contrast propositions, and so on -- our intuitive knowledge ascribing judgments do and don't track, thereby supporting/discrediting specific theories within the knowledge ascriptions literature.[26] Once again, however,

[25] See, e.g., Williamson 2005a: 112, 2005b: 226, Hawthorne 2004: 164-165, and Rysiew 2001: 503-505.

[26] Recent experimental work on knowledge ascriptions includes May *et al.* 2009, Schaffer and Knobe 2012, Nagel 2012b, Pinillos 2012, Beebe (ed.) 2014, and Rose *et al.* forthcoming,

while their proper interpretation is hardly straightforward,[27] the results thus obtained can yield general insights into the psychological bases of assertions of knowledge. Finally, just as some epistemologists have thought that general-purpose cognitive shortcuts such as the availability heuristic can explain features of our knowledge-attributing behavior, some have made similar suggestions about broad developments in psychology, including the much-discussed two systems (or dual process) approach (e.g., Gerken 2012b, 2013, Nagel 2012a).

4. The social role(s) of assertions of knowledge

Like much of the recent literature concerning knowledge ascriptions, the discussion to this point has largely concerned issues arising in considering *particular* assertions of knowledge, as made in various specific contexts. Of course, *qua* communicative act, any given knowledge ascription is, as such, a social act. Recent epistemologists, however, have turned to a consideration of broader and more explicitly socially-geared questions about assertions of knowledge. Prominent among these is the question of the *general role(s)* such assertions play.[28] This project was anticipated by J. L. Austin, who suggested that, as compared with asserting that *p*, saying "I know…." involves 'taking a new plunge' (1979: 99) – a suggestion which, as we'll see shortly, has recently been developed along deliberately Austinian lines by Krista Lawlor. Recent discussions of the social role(s) played by knowledge ascriptions, however, are most heavily indebted to Edward Craig, who urged that instead of focusing directly on 'know(s)' and its cognates, we should ask, "what knowledge *does* for us, what its role in our life might be, and then ask what a concept having that role would be like" (1990: 2, emphasis added). Because Craig's work here has been so influential, it will be helpful to briefly summarize his view.

According to Craig, "the core of the concept of knowledge is an outcome of certain very general facts about the human situation" (1990: 10). The most conspicuous such general fact is that we must rely on others as sources of information (1990: 11), which in turn gives rise to the need for some way to pick out good informants. Craig asks us to consider this question first "at its most subjective":

> "...I am seeking information as to whether or not p, and hence want an informant who is satisfactory for my purposes, here and now, with my present beliefs and capacities for receiving information. I am concerned, in other words, that as well as [(0)] his having the right answer to my question,
>
> 1. He should be accessible to me here and now.
> 2. He should be recognizable by me as someone likely to be right about *p*.
> 3. He should be as likely to be right about *p* as my concerns require.
> 4. Channels of communication between him and me should be open."
>
> (1990: 84-85)

[27] And while there may be concerns about the design and presentation of some of the relevant cases; see Dinges (2016), e.g.

[28] Another important instance is the ascription of knowledge to groups (Lackey 2012). For some general discussion of the 'social turn' in the study of knowledge ascriptions, see Brown and Gerken 2012: Introduction, Section 1.4; see too Goldberg's complementary discussion of social directions in recent work on assertion generally (2015b: Section 4).

So stated, this is a highly 'subjectivized' notion of the good informant, and there is a consequent mismatch between it and our conception of knowledge. For surely there can be knowers neither accessible to (1) nor recognizable by (2) me, with whom I'm unable to communicate (4), and so on. Importantly, for Craig, the high degree of purpose-relativity of the fledgling concept of knowledge before us makes it ill-suited to play an effective interpersonal role. According to Craig, for there to be useful sharing of information there needs to be some means by which individuals can come to share a common point of view concerning the character and presence of good informants. Hence the pressure to form an 'objectivized' concept, one that retains the 'common core' of the notion without tying it to the needs, abilities, and circumstances of specific individuals, "and so varying with them" (1990: 88). Among other things, this process of objectivization involves pegging the reliability of the good informant (hence, the knower) to the interests and purposes of the most demanding potential consumer of the information in question. Thus, for Craig, our concept of the knower is the highly objectivized notion of a good informant, where the latter is "someone with a very high degree of reliability" (1990: 91).

Some responses to Craig concern the details of his view. For example, several commentators (*i.a.*, Kelp 2011, Rysiew 2012) have pointed out that there is nothing in the notion of objectivization *per se* that requires that the relevant stable standards be very high, as Craig supposes, as opposed to ones that would tend to serve the interests of the majority of potential recipients of the information in question.

Another type of response questions whether Craig is correct that 'knowledge' serves – uniquely, or most especially -- to flag reliable informants. Here, a number of alternative suggestions have been made, often with the accompanying *caveat* that, contrary to what the discussions of Craig and some of his respondents might suggest, knowledge attributions (or, the concept of knowledge) may well serve more than one role.[29] One such alternative is the idea that 'know(s)' plays a special role in signaling an appropriate end to particular lines of inquiry – that knowledge ascriptions are (often) made with a view to conveying that a given matter may, or perhaps should, be taken as settled for purposes of practical and theoretical deliberations.

This 'certification' or 'inquiry stopper' view[30] has been more or less explicitly endorsed by a number of philosophers.[31] Gerken expresses the idea by saying that 'knowledge' has an important 'threshold-marking' function:

> In normal cases of epistemic assessment, the use of 'knowledge' and its cognates frequently fills the communicative function of marking the threshold of warrant that S must possess with regard to p in order to be epistemically rational in acting on (the belief that) p. (2015: 153)

The certification view also has obvious affinities with Krista Lawlor's (Austinian)

[29] Other worries about Craig's account, some more serious than others, are noted in Rysiew 2012.
[30] These are Rysiew's (2012) and Hannon's (2015a) labels, respectively.
[31] Including Kelp 2011, Kappel 2012, Sosa (see Cohen 1999: 60), and Kvanvig 2003: 171.

suggestion that what's distinctive about claiming to *know*, as opposed to merely asserting – the 'new plunge' Austin refers to (see above) -- is that it serves to provide an *assurance*. On Lawlor's assurance view, in claiming (or attributing) knowledge one represents oneself (or another) as having exclusionary reasons -- reasons that all others will find epistemically adequate, insofar as they are reasonable. *Qua* assurance, a knowledge ascription is a prompt to cease deliberation, and "a tool for helping each other get on with our business" (2013: 20).[32]

As Michael Hannon notes, the certification view is not incompatible with Craig's. For example, as Hannon says, "[o]ne common way to reasonably terminate inquiry is by identifying a sufficiently reliable informant who has the information one needs" (2015a: 858). However, whereas Hannon suggests that the two roles might be "just opposite sides of the same coin" (2015a: 858), Rysiew (2012: 277-279) argues that the certification role is the more fundamental (it explains Craig's), that it better captures the social and practical character of situations that have been the focus of attention (such as the High-Low cases discussed above), and that it better explains why *'know(s)'*, in particular, is as widely used as it is.

In addition to disputes concerning the (central) role(s) of 'know(s)', just as in discussions of the variability in our willingness to ascribe knowledge (Section 3), there is disagreement here as to what underwrites the relevant phenomenon – the fact (suppose) that knowledge ascriptions serve to flag reliable informants or appropriate ends of inquiry – and, relatedly, of what (if anything) this reveals about the semantics of the relevant sentences and/or about knowledge itself. For example, a number of writers have suggested that broadly Craigian reflections on the social role of attributions of knowledge provide a novel line of support for one or another non-standard account of the semantics thereof. Thus, David Henderson (2009, 2011) has argued that by reflecting on "the point or purpose of the concept of knowledge" – which, like Craig, Henderson takes to be the identification of agents as good sources of information -- contextualism "gets a kind of principled motivation" (2009: 125). Similarly, while Craig's own process of objectivization was intended to minimize the context-relativity and -variability of judgments as to a potential informant's reliability, John Greco (2008: 432-435) thinks that we should acknowledge and embrace the latter and allow, as a result, that the question of whether someone 'knows' "be tied to the interests and purposes that are relevant to the practical reasoner at issue" (2008, 433). (Similar views are presented and defended by Hannon 2013 and McKenna 2013, 2014.)[33]

While Greco and Henderson, for example, are arguing from a Craigian view of the role of

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[32] As Lawlor notes (2013, 9, n. 1; 11, n. 4), her view is distinct from 'the assurance view' in the epistemology of testimony. According to the latter, what converts a 'mere assertion' into a telling -- a piece of testimony that can ground a hearer's entitlement to believe -- is the speaker's giving her assurance, deliberately taking responsibility for the truth of what she says. (For discussion and references, see Adler 2017; Section 7.3.)

[33] Taking her cue from Austin, Lawlor (2013) endorses contextualism about 'knowledge' sentences. But while she thinks such a semantics fits well with the assurance view described above, she doesn't argue from the latter to the former.

assertions of knowledge, a non-standard view of knowledge ascriptions, and even of knowledge itself, might seem to be encouraged by the certification view as well. Thus: if a knowledge ascription serves to certify some information, signaling that it may be taken as settled and relied upon in one's theoretical and practical reasoning, given the obvious context- and interest-dependence of whether something is appropriately so taken, it might seem equally obvious that the relevant sentences' truth values are best seen as so varying as well. In the literature, one can find arguments very much like this, proceeding not from the certification view *per se*, but rather from one or another version of the idea that knowledge is the norm of action – the idea, that is, that it's appropriate for *S* to rely upon *p* in her practical reasoning if (or only if, or iff) *S* knows that *p* (e.g., Hawthorne 2004, Stanley 2005, Fantl and McGrath 2002).[34] Given that whether it *is* appropriate for *S* to rely upon *p* depends on the practical stakes, we're invited to infer that whether *S* knows depends on the stakes too – just as subject sensitive invariantism says.

Such arguments assume that a non-traditional semantics comfortably accommodates the relevant data, but that's not clearly true. For example, building on worries about whether contextualism in particular allows for the transfer and storage of information in testimony and memory (Hawthorne 2004: 109-110; Williamson 2005a: 100-101), questions have been raised about whether non-traditional semantics generally are well-suited for explaining how ascriptions of knowledge serve this or that (presumed) central social role (Rysiew 2012: 286-290). Being geared towards – indeed, often designed specifically to handle -- variable contexts, shifting standards, idiosyncratic interests, and so on, such theories must explain how a knowledge report can serve as a piece of common coin, useful to and fit for consumption by people or groups not part of the immediate situation from which it emerges. To render them such was, as we saw, the whole point of Craig's objectivization process. So, while the traditional theorist needs to explain the variability and context-dependence of our willingness to attribute knowledge (Section 3), the non-traditional theorist must find some way of responding to the pressure to objectivize.[35]

Meanwhile, both directions of the knowledge norm for action have been challenged: there appear to be clear cases in which acting on *p* requires less than knowledge, and others in which it requires more (e.g., Brown 2008b, Reed 2010, Gerken 2011). In just the same way, Rysiew (2012) argues, while in many cases what's known is appropriately certified, and *vice versa*, there are situations in which the two can come apart.[36] On this

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[34] Evidence offered on behalf of such norms includes analogues of that cited on behalf of the knowledge norm for assertion – that we can challenge the appropriateness of an action by pointing out that *S* didn't know, that it seems wrong to act on the proposition that one's lottery ticket won't be selected, and so on. For general discussion of knowledge norms on action, see Brown 2008b and Benton n.d.: Section 2.

[35] Henderson distinguishes between *applied practical* and *general-purpose source* communities: a consideration of the former motivates contextualism; a consideration of the latter yields "something like" invariantism (2009: 127). (As Henderson notes (2009: 130-131), the envisaged combination of contextualist and invariantist elements might prove unstable.) More recent responses on behalf of the non-traditional theorist to the above worry include Hannon 2015b and Moeller 2015.

[36] Compare Gerken's 'normal coincidence' thesis: "In normal cases of epistemic assessment, the degree of warrant necessary for S's knowing that p is frequently necessary and very frequently

account, while knowledge and appropriately certified information are non-accidentally related, there is no necessary or constitutive connection between the two. How, then, does an assertion of knowledge serve to convey that a proposition *is* appropriately taken as settled? And how is the apparent variability of the latter captured, absent the adoption of some non-traditional semantics? An answer is suggested by the pragmatic account sketched earlier: communicating the things that are said there to be merely pragmatically conveyed – that *S* satisfies the contextually operative standards, that it's permissible for *S* not to doubt that *p*, to be certain (especially confident) that *p*, and so on – looks to be just what's involved in signaling an appropriate end to inquiry, and signaled via the tokening of a sentence with an insensitive, invariant content. On this view, then, the communicating of situation-sensitive information such as the certification view involves doesn't require a non-traditional semantics, and explaining the close connection between what is known and what's appropriately relied upon doesn't require a knowledge norm for action.

Neither does it require a knowledge norm for assertion. In this, the current view contrasts with another recent proposal with clear affinities to the certification view: John Turri's 'KK account' of guaranteeing, where a guarantee is being thought of as "an especially emphatic assertion, by which you undertake heightened responsibility for the truth of the proposition guaranteed" (2015: 602). As on the certification view (and Lawlor's), a central function of guaranteeing "is to provide others with enough assurance that they're willing to proceed with a course of action, in contexts where they aren't satisfied with a mere assertion" (2015: 603). Briefly sketched, Turri's view is that "I know" can play the guaranteeing role thanks to the knowledge norm on assertion. In general, in performing a speech act one represents oneself as satisfying the norm(s) governing such an act (2015: 607). And the reason guaranteeing "feels more demanding than asserting" (2015: 609) is because, given the knowledge norm, a self-ascription of knowledge involves representing oneself as satisfying the heightened requirement of *knowing* that one knows.

As we've seen, however, an appeal to the knowledge norm is just one way of accounting for the fact that guaranteeing demands more of the speaker than merely asserting. For, as we saw (Section 3), the knowledge norm is just one way of explaining why an asserter might (typically, anyway) represent him/herself as a knower – hence, why a self-ascription of knowledge might (typically) involve representing oneself as knowing that one knows. Further, whatever one's preferred account of why the latter holds, it's not clear why such a representation would constitute or yield a guarantee. For, while knowing that one knows of course demands *more* than merely knowing, it does not itself require superior confidence or better evidence as to *p* – it requires only that one satisfy the same requirements on knowing with regard to one's first order credal-epistemic state as one does with respect to *p*. But then it's not apparent that representing oneself as satisfying the KK norm itself explains the *emphatic* character of a guarantee, or its involving "heightened responsibility *for the truth of the proposition guaranteed*" (2015: 602; emphasis added).

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sufficient for the epistemic permissibility of S's acting on (the belief that) p" (2015: 146).

This might seem too quick.[37] After all, to know that one knows, one must warrantedly believe that one's confidence is warranted; and this requires being able to rule out alternatives beyond those needing to be eliminated[38] for knowledge that *p*. So, when I claim knowledge, I represent myself as warrantedly confident as to the warrantedness of my first-order belief, and as able to rule out not only all relevant not-*p* worlds, but also all relevant worlds in which I don't know that *p*. And perhaps this further-represented information does lend extra epistemic-credal 'oomph!' to what's expressed. Again, though, it doesn't obviously translate into the speaker's taking greater responsibility for the truth of *p*; and while more confidence (confidence about more things) is being expressed, it's not clear that greater confidence as to *p* is. What's more, it's arguable that these further commitments about one's epistemic standing -- over and above, that is, one's knowing that *p* -- would already be implicit in one's asserting, simply, '*p*'. For just as one wouldn't (typically) assert that *p* if one thought there were relevant not-*p* worlds one couldn't eliminate, one presumably wouldn't do so if one thought that there were ineliminable relevant worlds in which one didn't know that *p*, or if one thought that one's representation of oneself as knowing was (otherwise) unwarranted. So, while it would be generated by one's presumed conformity to general principles of rational communication rather than by one's presumed satisfaction of the knowledge norm in particular, that these further conditions do hold is, plausibly, a commitment already taken on in asserting that *p*.[39] If so, we're left with the question of what's served by making explicit something that would already be inferable,[40] and how one's doing so yields the special emphatic element and heightened responsibility that guaranteeing is said to involve.

A natural and plausible answer to the latter question is available: namely, that *just because* one's having a certain credal-epistemic standing *vis-à-vis* the proposition in question would already be inferable from one's asserting that *p*, the addition of 'I know' itself serves as a vehicle for expressing *superior confidence* as to *p* and, relatedly, for effecting a representation of oneself as being able to counter any salient not-*p* possibilities worth taking seriously, as having especially good evidence that *p*, as having 'the right to be sure', and so on (Rysiew 2001: 492; 2007a: 636-637), as the pragmatic account sketched above suggests. It's left to the reader to decide whether such a suggestion is best seen as a necessary addendum to the idea that (typical) self-ascriptions of knowledge involve representing oneself as knowing that one knows, or – if one is unmoved by the considerations of the last paragraph and a half – as merely a different proposal as to how guarantees are effected. Either way, as noted above, an appeal to a knowledge norm for assertion isn't required.

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[37] Thanks to Sandy Goldberg for pushing me to say more here.

[38] Or eliminable, and perhaps by one's evidence rather than by oneself -- such details don't affect the discussion here.

[39] As we saw above (Section 3), when one asserts, that one satisfies the central conditions on knowing is a commitment that's (typically) generated by one's presumed conformity to the CP. However, as the CP governs rational communicative behaviour in general, there's no reason to suppose that it applies, and so generates such commitments, only with regard to what one says but not with regard to what one merely represents as being the case (Rysiew 2007a: 636).

[40] This issue, recall, was broached back in Section 3.

5. Conclusion

Assertions that constitute ascriptions of knowledge are a central source of data in epistemological theorizing. But they also constitute an important target of such theorizing themselves. While knowledge, and the truth conditional content of statements of the form '*S* knows that *p*', have been the primary objects of traditional epistemological interest, how far our knowledge ascribing behavior – as a whole, or in specific cases -- is directly attributable to the semantics of the relevant sentences, and to what degree it reveals facts about knowing itself, is the focus of much current epistemological debate. Whatever one's view on the latter issue, it should be uncontroversial that a full and proper understanding of knowledge ascriptions will involve a consideration not just of competing semantics theories, but also of the pragmatic, psychological, and social factors and issues that assertions of knowledge both raise and reflect.[41]

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