

TRUTH AND WARRANTED ASSERTION

A commonly held view is that you have sufficient warrant to assert that p is the case iff you know that p is the case (KA). An obvious consequence of KA is that all false assertions are unwarranted. Critics have complained that this clashes with widely held intuitions. Critics have also claimed that the arguments offered in support of KA support only weaker internalist views on which we have sufficient warrant for asserting any proposition we either reasonably believe or reasonably believe ourselves to know (RA). In this paper, I shall argue it is possible for someone to reasonably believe they know p and fail to have sufficient warrant to assert p because there are some propositions that we cannot have warrant to assert if they are false regardless of whether we are reasonable in believing that they are true.

INTRODUCTION

There is a strange lacuna in the literature on warranted assertion that this paper tries to fill. In spite of the fact that a significant number of contributors to this literature are committed to the view that there can be no false, warranted assertions the literature contains no direct arguments for the truth requirement on warranted assertion.¹ Of course, the literature contains arguments for the knowledge account of assertion, the view that S has sufficient warrant to assert p iff S knows p (KA).² Of course, an obvious consequence of KA is that you cannot have warranted, false assertions. So, it might seem that we do not need any additional arguments for the truth requirement on warranted assertion because once we've established that KN governs assertion we've established that TN governs assertion as well:

KN: S should not assert p unless S knows p .

TN: S should not assert p unless p .

The reason I think we need a direct argument for TN is that the arguments that have been given in support of KA and KN seem to support only the weaker reasonable belief accounts (RA) of warranted assertion on which you have sufficient warrant to assert p iff you reasonably believe that you know that p (RBKA) or iff you are reasonable to believe p (RBA).³ For example, proponents of KA try to explain why we oughtn't assert lottery propositions or Moorean absurdities by citing the fact that these are things we cannot know to be true. Commentators have said that RBA or RBKA can handle these cases since it is clear from the subject's perspective that these are things that cannot be known and so things that are either not reasonably believed to be true or not reasonably believed to be known to be true. Since you can reasonably believe you know p even if p is false, it seems there is little in the literature that motivates the idea that the warrant to

assert p depends upon whether p is true. Since RA accounts do not commit us to the view that there cannot be any false, warranted assertions it seems that the extant arguments do little to show that TN is among the norms that governs assertion. Moreover, it seems there is some reason for preferring RBA and RBKA to KA. KA delivers the wrong verdicts for some Gettier cases. KA classifies a speaker's true and reasonably believed assertion that there is a barn before them as unwarranted if the speaker happens to be in fake barn country.⁴ Intuitively, it doesn't seem that there's any reason for the speaker to refrain from saying that the barn they see is a barn. So why not just say that the warrant we need to properly assert derives from that which makes our beliefs reasonable? Once we acknowledge that there can be warranted assertions without knowledge, why not allow for the possibility of false, warranted assertions?

I shall argue that there is reason to think that truth is sometimes necessary for warranted assertion. The argument is not perfectly general, but it does show that in a wide range of cases RA accounts deliver the wrong verdicts because RA accounts classify false assertions as warranted when they aren't. After some preliminary remarks, in §1 I shall argue that it is possible to reasonably believe p and reasonably believe that p is known while lacking sufficient warrant to assert that p is true. In §2, I shall address what seems to be the important objection to the argument.

TRUTH AND WARRANT

In this section, I shall argue that RA accounts are inadequate. In a wide range of cases, a speaker who asserts a false proposition doesn't have warrant for that assertion even if that speaker reasonably believed that what she said was true. Before doing that, some preliminary remarks about the notion of warrant are in order.

As I understand it, the term 'warrant' is a term of art. You have sufficient warrant to assert p iff you are permitted to assert that p . The permission is an epistemic permission. The warranted assertion either does not contravene any epistemic norms or, if it does, does so only because there is some overriding (epistemic) reason to do so. In what follows, I shall assume that when there is no reason not to Φ , it is permissible to Φ . When there is reason not to Φ , however, it is permissible to Φ only if there is at least equally good reason to Φ . When you oughtn't Φ , there is an undefeated reason not to Φ . When there is an undefeated reason not to Φ , that reason constitutes a conclusive or decisive reason not to Φ . I'll also assume that for any norm governing assertion, N , there is (at least) a *pro tanto* reason to conform to that norm. I'll assume that for any *pro tanto* reason that bears on whether to Φ there is a norm that specifies the condition under which that reason obtains and the response that the reason 'calls for'. For example, if you think that knowledge is the norm of assertion, you should acknowledge that there is at least a *pro tanto* reason to refrain from asserting p if you do not know that p . If you think there is such a reason, you should think that there is a norm that says, in effect, that you should refrain from asserting what you do not know where the 'should' is read in an advisory way as opposed to being read in a mandatory way.⁵ If a norm enjoins you

to refrain from asserting in conditions *C*, there is a *pro tanto* reason not to assert if *C*. If *C* obtains and you assert anyway, you are permitted to do so only if there is some further norm, *N'*, that gives you a reason to assert in *C* and a reason that is sufficient to justify making the assertion in spite of the reason to refrain. Since norms of assertion are typically formulated as prohibitions, I do not think we will have to worry much about cases of conflicting norms and reasons.

Some have suggested that when someone asserts without warrant or violates the norm(s) of assertion, the speaker is thereby subject to criticism. This encourages us to think that if it is improper to criticize a subject for asserting *p*, it follows that the subject's assertion was warranted or permissible. Since we can make non-culpable mistakes and non-culpably assert that our mistaken beliefs are true, it would seem to follow that TN is not among the norms that governs assertion. Lackey recently offered these remarks:

[T]here is an intimate connection between our assessment of asserters and our assessment of their assertions. In particular, *asserters* are in violation of a norm of assertion and thereby *subject to criticism* when their *assertions* are *improper*. An analogy with competitive basketball may make this point clear: suppose a player steps over the free throw line when making his foul shot. In such a case, there would be an intimate connection between our assessment of the player and our assessment of the free throw—we would, for instance, say that the player is subject to criticism for making an improper shot.⁶

It may be that any unwarranted assertion is an assertion the speaker can be criticized for making, but we shouldn't assume from the outset that this is right. Sometimes when someone violates a norm of assertion they are thereby subject to criticism. Sometimes when someone commits a foul or breaks a rule they are thereby subject to criticism. This is not always the case. The case above is atypical, in part, because it is hard to imagine what excuse someone could have for not knowing where the foul line is when taking a foul shot. Typically referees apply a strict liability standard in assessing plays. In soccer, if a defending player's hand comes in contact with the ball, that is a foul and it is a foul even if the player exercised due care in trying to avoid making contact with the ball. In basketball, if a defender hits the arm of an offensive player taking a shot, this is a foul even if the defensive player has exercised due care in trying to touch only the ball. I don't think we can properly criticize those who exercise due care. So, if the sports analogy is at all apt, we shouldn't be surprised to discover that there are faultless failures to conform to the norms of assertion just as we aren't surprised that there are fouls without fault in sports. A case where we can directly say that a player can be criticized because of what the player did is the exceptional case, not the typical one. We don't criticize those who we are certain exercised due care and, perhaps, showed great skill in the failed attempt to play within the rules of the game.

If the distinction between warranted and unwarranted assertion is really just the distinction between the assertions for which an agent cannot be criticized and the assertions for which the agent can be criticized, then some version of RA must be correct. It isn't reasonable to criticize someone for having Φ 'd if you believe that they were nothing less than fully reasonable for believing that they were within their rights to Φ . However, I think it's fair to ask proponents of the RA accounts to offer some reason to think that an agent cannot fail to live up to her obligations without thereby being properly criticized or at fault. If they were to concede that they could do no such thing but insisted that warranted Φ -ing amounted to nothing more than the Φ -ing for which you cannot be criticized, they could be accused of changing the topic since 'warrant' is a term of art that is understood in terms of permissibility. If they acknowledge this point and agree that all warranted assertions are permissible assertions but insist that 'S cannot be criticized for Φ -ing' entails 'S's Φ -ing was warranted', they have just denied that it's possible for a subject to be excused for wrongfully asserting something she shouldn't have. That view seems to me to be *prima facie* implausible. Arguments might be given that establish that there is this link between blamelessness, warrant, and permissibility but we should ask for arguments.

Before offering my own argument for TN, I want to consider what seems to be an initially promising argument for TN. It might seem obvious that TN governs assertion because, as Oppy notes, we often criticize assertions simply on the grounds that they are mistaken. He asks, "How could one always be *pro tanto* justified in pointing out that one who has made a false assertion has made a mistake unless it is a norm of assertion that one ought not assert that which is not true?"⁷ He suggests that we might not need TN to explain why this is:

Certainly, it should not be denied that someone who makes a false assertion is subject to a certain kind of liability; but it does not follow from this fact that they violated one of the norms of *assertion*. Suppose that we agree that it is one of the norms of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one believes to be false. Suppose further that we are dealing with a case in which a speaker is conforming to this norm, so when she makes the false assertion that *p*, she is nonetheless mistaken in believing that *p*. Then it plainly remains open to say that, while this person violated no norm of *assertion* in expressing her false belief that *p*, she is nonetheless mistaken in believing *p* ... Perhaps we might go on to allow that there is a kind of secondary or derivative "norm" of assertion to the effect that one not to assert the false *because* one ought not to believe the false; but this allowance is perfectly consistent with the

proposal that the central norm of assertion is that one ought to assert only that which one believes.⁸

For the purposes of this paper, I'm not concerned with identifying the central or fundamental norm of assertion. I want to know whether TN is among the norms governing assertion, and if it is successfully derived from some other norm such as KN or a norm that connects warranted assertion to the beliefs the assertion expresses, then I will have settled the question that this paper addresses. I'm skeptical, however, of the suggestion that it would follow from the fact that you should not believe what is false that you should not assert what is false. Suppose there is a norm that enjoined us to assert only that which we can sincerely assert (i.e., a norm that enjoins us to assert only what we believe). Can we derive an adequate account of the norms of assertion from the sincerity norm and the norms governing belief? If we tried, it would probably be done along these lines:

Belief is the fundamental norm of assertion, and that among the norms for belief are the other things that lead one to think that the sincerity requirement alone is too weak. So, for example, if one thinks that good reasons are required for assertion, that would be because it is a norm of belief that you shouldn't believe things without good reasons. Assertion thereby inherits this derivative norm because of the sincerity requirement.⁹

I don't think this will work. Compare:

Belief is the fundamental norm of second-order belief, and that among the norms for belief are the things that lead one to think that the sincerity requirement alone is too weak as an account of assertion. So, for example, if you think that good reasons are required for assertion, that would be because it is a norm of belief that you shouldn't believe things without good reasons. Like assertion, second-order belief thereby inherits this derivative norm because of the accuracy requirement on second-order belief.

Clearly, that's not right. Just because you oughtn't believe p without good reasons and oughtn't believe that you believe p unless you have the first-order belief that p is the case, it doesn't follow that you oughtn't form the second-order belief unless there are good reasons for believing p . The fact that the first-order belief is groundless is no reason to question the epistemic merits of the second-order belief. Similarly, if someone were to say that you oughtn't assert p unless you believed p and oughtn't believe p without good reasons for doing so, I don't see why it follows from this alone that you oughtn't assert without good reason. It's often thought that you cannot justifiably believe p unless your belief is based upon good reasons and that you

shouldn't believe p unless your belief is justified. If someone's belief isn't based on good reasons or their reasons for asserting don't have to do with the good reasons for believing, it isn't obvious that the subject's assertion is unwarranted. Isn't it enough that they are aware of the good reasons to believe? I don't see any obvious ways of resuscitating this sort of inheritance argument. It doesn't seem to follow from the facts that (i) you oughtn't Φ unless you believe p and (ii) you oughtn't believe p unless C obtains that (iii) you oughtn't Φ unless C obtains.¹⁰

While this sort of inheritance argument might not work, I think a variant on this argument should. Instead of trying to derive the norms governing assertion from the norms that govern the speaker's beliefs, we try to uncover the norms of assertion by thinking about the 'downstream' effects of assertion on the hearer.¹¹ If certain sorts of downstream effects are best avoided, given the social nature of assertion, it wouldn't be surprising if there were norms that enjoined speakers to avoid asserting propositions that brought about these unfortunate downstream effects. Whereas the subject's reasonable beliefs might give us good reason to excuse the speaker for her failures, it might nevertheless be the case that there's a decisive case to be made against the assertion in virtue of the effects of the assertion. This is all very abstract, but an example should make it clearer what I have in mind.

Consider an example:

Cook. Peacock just moved into the apartment next to Plum's. To welcome her to the building, Plum cooked her dinner. She did not realize that the mushrooms she used in making her dinner were poisonous. (So far as this is possible, imagine that she is not culpable or blameworthy for her ignorance. She used a field guide for distinguishing safe from unsafe mushrooms, but it contained a few errors.) Plum has on hand the stuff to give people who eat poisoned mushrooms, but only enough for one person. It just so happens that her other neighbor, Mustard, is suffering from food poisoning because he ate a can of bad peaches. (So far as this is possible, imagine that he is non-culpably ignorant). Plum's stuff could help Mustard just as well as it could help Peacock. It's good stuff. Now, Mustard and Peacock are equally sick and Plum can help only one.

It seems intuitively clear that Plum has a more stringent duty to assist Peacock than to assist Mustard. She did poison Peacock, after all. The intuition elicited by this example seems to disconfirm the internalist idea that the conditions or properties that determine whether one has acted permissibly or with justification are limited to those properties that are internal to the subject or the subject's perspective. In some nearby possible world where Plum's mental duplicate gives her neighbor a dish with mushrooms that were not

poisonous, I think we can easily imagine that the Plum's mental duplicate does nothing wrong. Plum's counterpart is no more negligent than Plum is and her dish is not harmful. So, it seems we accommodate folk intuition only if we reject the following supervenience thesis, deontological practical internalism:

(DPI) Necessarily, if S and S' are mental duplicates from the cradle to the grave, S is permitted to Φ iff S' is permitted to Φ .

If Plum's duty to Peacock was just some *prima facie* duty of beneficence, it would be difficult to see how the duty to Peacock could be more stringent since Mustard's needs are just as great as hers. Thus, it's tempting to think that Plum's duty is no mere duty of beneficence. My hypothesis is this. The reason that Plum's duty to Peacock is more stringent is that Plum is righting some past wrong of hers by assisting Peacock. Whereas reasons having to do with beneficence count in favor of helping both Mustard and Peacock, the reparative duty gives a reason that breaks the tie. We cannot make sense of how there could be this wrong on any internalist view for the simple reason that it seems there is no ground for wrongdoing that is constituted by or strongly supervenes upon the internal conditions that determine how things seem to Plum and Plum's counterpart. The reason she ought to assist Peacock first is that she poisoned Peacock by serving her poisonous mushrooms, and this fact is something that is not accessible to Plum.

In response, someone might just dismiss the claim that Plum has a more stringent duty to assist Peacock. This intuition I've reported above is the intuition of a philosopher with an axe to grind. To keep myself (and my opponents) honest, I did a survey of undergraduate students. Approximately 75% of the respondents said that there was a more stringent duty for Plum to assist Peacock.¹² So, if our concern is with folk concepts, it seems that the folk concept of permissible action is an externalist one that allows for the possibility of faultless or blameless wrongdoing. It allows for the possibility of cases where there are not only reasons against Φ -ing that do not supervene on the subject's non-factive mental states but reasons that bear on the deontic status of the subject's Φ -ing even when the subject is non-culpably ignorant in believing that there is no such decisive case against Φ -ing.

Someone might say that while Plum has a more stringent duty to assist Peacock, it doesn't follow that this is a duty to address some prior wrong she's committed. Perhaps it is no mere duty of beneficence, but it is not a reparative duty if such duties are understood as responses to past wrongs that the agent has committed. To give this kind of duty a name, we can speak of reparative* duties. A reparative* duty is similar to a reparative duty insofar as they are duties one can be under only if the agent brought about some bad state of affairs, but they are like the duty of beneficence insofar as they can arise without any prior wrongdoing on the agent's part. Why can't we say that the difference in stringency is due to the fact that there is a *prima facie* duty to assist both Peacock and Mustard, but a stronger duty to Peacock because there is the additional reparative* duty that gives her a *pro tanto* reason to assist Peacock? That way, we can accommodate intuition without giving up internalism about the justification of action.

The problem with this response is with this idea of reparative* duties. If this is *merely* a reparative* duty, then we would have to say that this is a case in which Plum did not act against any *pro tanto* reason to refrain from giving Peacock the poisoned dish. (Otherwise, we would have to say that this was a reparative duty.) But, then it seems quite odd to think that Plum could have such a duty because it would have to combine two features. First, it would have to give Plum a reason to act that a similarly situated but causally idle agent would not have. (Otherwise, we would say that the reparative* duty was really a mere duty of beneficence. It would be the very duty that, say, Green would have if he had just the same amount of stuff to give to someone who has been poisoned as Plum has.) Second, it would have to be a reason for Plum to act over and above a reason associated with a mere duty of beneficence to address some bad state of affairs when she could know full well that she never had any reason not to bring that bad state of affairs about in the first place. On this account, there would be a resultant moral difference between Plum and Green's duties (i.e., both would have reasons of beneficence to assist either subject but Plum would have the additional reason to discharge a reparative* duty) that alters the range of permissible options available to them that arose in virtue of a causal difference that was not coupled with any normative difference. That sounds quite odd. Better, I think, to say that the reason that this causal difference between Plum and Green makes a normative difference because it was in virtue of a causal relation between Plum and the bad state of affairs that she acted against a *pro tanto* reason unknowingly and now has the knowledge necessary to see that her actions were wrongful and there is a wrong that needs to be addressed. This is why Peacock has a stronger claim on Plum's assistance than Mustard does. But, this is why there is a reparative duty that Plum ought to discharge, not a reparative* duty.

So, suppose DPI is false. Let's add a further detail to the story. Suppose Plum didn't know what to make Peacock to welcome her to the building. She asked White. White said that she should use the mushrooms in the garden to make her dish and Plum followed his advice. Should White have said this? Here's a principle that seems pretty plausible: if an advisee oughtn't Φ and there is no reason to give insincere advice, the advisor oughtn't assert that the advisee ought to Φ . Why? If it is false, the reasons that speak against Φ -ing do not constitute reasons to refrain from encouraging someone to act against those reasons by advising them to do so. That seems to go against everything we know about giving sincere advice. If the argument above is correct, a kind of non-culpable ignorance works as an excusing condition. When such excusing conditions obtain, the agent can only act rightly if there is some justifying reason for giving the neighbor the poisoned dish. There is none in the story I've just told.

Now we have our case against RA:

- (1) Circumstances can arise in which a decisive case can be made against Φ -ing where the reasons not to Φ are grounded in considerations the agent is non-culpably ignorant of (e.g., Cook).

- (2) In such cases, an advisor might also be reasonably ignorant of the reasons that constitute a decisive case against Φ -ing.
- (3) In such cases, there is nevertheless a decisive case to be made against the advisor's asserting that the advisee ought to Φ .
- (C) Circumstances can arise in which a decisive case can be made against the advisor's assertion that the advisee ought to Φ where the considerations that constitute this case are considerations the advisor is non-culpably ignorant of.

Since you cannot have warrant to assert that p is the case when there is a decisive case to refrain from asserting that p is the case, Cook is a counterexample to RA.¹³

Here are some recipes for constructing counterexamples to RA. Suppose S is trying to decide whether to Φ . Suppose also S oughtn't Φ . If S oughtn't Φ , S' oughtn't assert that S should Φ or say that S should feel free to Φ . It does not matter whether S' has reasonable beliefs about the deontic status of Φ -ing. If S' is reasonable in believing that S would be permitted to Φ , the facts in light of which S' has that reasonable belief are facts that excuse S' for asserting that S ought to Φ just as they would excuse S for Φ -ing. Suppose S is trying to decide whether to Φ and Φ -ing would be, as S knows, a p -determined choice.¹⁴ If S oughtn't Φ unless p and it's not the case that p , S' oughtn't assert p . It does not matter whether S' reasonably believes that p . If that is not something S' reasonably believes, S' cannot be excused for asserting that p is the case. If it is something that S' is reasonable to believe, S' should be excused just as S should be excused for Φ -ing on the mistaken belief that p .¹⁵ RA accounts cannot explain why we should refrain from asserting falsehoods in such cases. Excuses do not provide permission and the reasonable mistaken belief excuses the speaker for speaking.

Bringing in the two subjects is helpful for this reason. If S accepts p on the basis of what S' asserts, in the relevant range of cases, S knows that she ought to Φ if p and so she will judge that she ought to Φ when she oughtn't. If her believing p on the basis of the assertion is permissible, then we have a situation where (i) S oughtn't Φ because $\sim p$; (ii) S knows that she ought to Φ if p ; (iii) S believes p and it's not the case that she shouldn't. This sort of situation is problematic because it seems odd to say that someone should have acted differently and refrained from Φ -ing when the subject knows that it follows from what they believe that they ought to Φ and we're convinced that it's not the case that the subject should have believed differently. Suppose someone is conflicted and, 'I don't know what to think, there's a case for Φ -ing and there's a case for Ψ -ing instead' and you respond saying, 'You should appreciate that Φ -ing is a necessary evil' and so the subject decides to Φ . If you later say that they shouldn't have Φ 'd but should have Ψ 'd instead, it seems that you can't reasonably say that your initial advice pertained to what they should believe, accept, or appreciate whereas your criticism pertained to their deeds rather than their attitudes. If

the actions are wrong, the beliefs in the propositions the subject knows would ensure that the actions were right are wrongful as well. The same goes for the assertions that convinced the subject that the relevant beliefs were true in the first place. I can't think of any good reason to think that the buck doesn't pass back from the action, to the attitudes, to the assertion. Whatever justifies the assertion should justify the action and whatever constitutes a decisive case against the action should thereby constitute an equally decisive case against the belief and the speaker's assertion.

As I said before, the argument is not an argument that all false assertions are unwarranted. It does show that a significant number of assertions are such that if they are false you should not assert them regardless of whether you happen to have excellent evidence that the assertion expresses a true proposition. The facts in virtue of which you count as reasonable are excusing conditions because we should classify some cases of ignorance and mistaken belief as involving excusable wrongs rather than justified or right actions with unfortunate consequences that don't give the agent reasons to act differently.

As a last ditch response, the reader might resist this and try to explain away folk intuition. Let me finish this section by noting one final objection to the reasonable belief accounts. Think of cases of (apparently) reasonable moral disagreement. We might imagine that people from different cultures judge that different responses are called for in certain situations and we might think that while these parties cannot both be right they can nevertheless both be reasonable to do what they think is right when faced with the relevant decisions. While both parties are reasonable in what they do and reasonable in thinking that what they do is right, don't we also know that one party is just going to engage in wrongdoing by following her conscience? If so, we have something like a proof that we cannot use our judgments about whether someone is reasonable in having Φ 'd to determine whether they were permitted to Φ . In our cases of disagreement, both parties would be reasonable to respond to the situation in the ways that they do. In our cases, however, only one party acts permissibly in responding to this situation. That one fails to act permissibly entails that there is an undefeated reason for them not to respond to the situation in the way that they do. That there is such a reason entails that they ought not assert that others ought to respond to the relevant situation in the way that they would. Again, we have an argument against RA that ought to be convincing to any defender of RA that does not go in for relativism, provided that they believe that reasonable moral disagreement is possible.

THE OBJECTION

RA is a theory of warranted assertion where the kind of warrant at issue is *epistemic*. I've argued that RA is false on the grounds that some false propositions reasonably believed to be true are propositions the speaker is not warranted in asserting. The problem with this argument is that in Cook, someone could say, there is a decisive *moral* case to be made against asserting that the agent ought to do things that it turns out the agent

ought not do. But, someone might object, that does not show that there is *any* epistemic reason for the speaker to refrain from asserting the relevant false propositions. So, the example is no threat to RA.

I don't think this difference between epistemic and non-epistemic reasons makes a difference. Some say that there is good reason to expect practical reasons demand more than that just that we are reasonable in doing what we do iff theoretical reasons demand more than we are reasonable in believing what we believe.¹⁶ As Gibbons notes, the similarities between reasons for action and belief have a built in explanation that the differences don't because we're talking about reasons on both sides of the divide. Folk intuition suggests that the reasonable person can fail to do what the practical reasons demand from them. So, if the practical and moral 'ought' is not fixed by facts about the subject's non-factive mental states, we should be surprised if the epistemic 'ought' as it applies to assertion is fixed by those facts. Surprises being what they are, they're unexpected. I don't expect that any internalist account of warranted assertion could turn out to be true if DPI is false. Since the objection concedes that DPI is false, I'm confident that the objection can be addressed.

Let ' Φ ' stand for Plum's giving her neighbor the poisoned dish and let ' Ψ ' stand for White's asserting that she should use the mushrooms that neither knew were poisonous. Suppose we grant that we've established this in the section preceding this one:

- (1) Plum oughtn't Φ and if Plum *morally* oughtn't Φ , White *morally* oughtn't Ψ .

The objection to the argument I've sketched above is that (1) doesn't entail (2):

- (2) White *epistemically* oughtn't Ψ .

If the entailment did go through, however, we could argue from the failure of DPI to the denial of RA. If the entailment does not go through, however, that's because it does not follow from the fact that there is a decisive moral case against Φ -ing and Ψ -ing that there is a decisive *epistemic* case against Ψ -ing. Anyone who accepts (1) but denies (2) accepts (3):

- (3) Although Plum *morally* oughtn't Φ and White *morally* oughtn't Ψ ,
White is *epistemically* permitted to Ψ .

If we can show that (3) is false, we can show that there's an entailment from (1) to (2), which means that we've established that RA is false once we've established that DPI is false. Here's the argument against (3). Suppose White considers the matter and judges that he should Ψ . White is thereby motivated to Ψ and Ψ 's accordingly. We call White on it. We might say to White that if he wasn't epistemically permitted to judge that he should Ψ that he could not defend his Ψ -ing as being epistemically permissible. This means that this would not be a situation in which Ψ -ing would be epistemically permissible, so (3) would be false because its second conjunct would be false. White agrees but asserts that his judgment that he should Ψ *was* epistemically permissible. He then points out that if the judgment that he should Ψ is

epistemically permissible then her Ψ -ing would be epistemically permissible. This follows from two further assumptions:

- (A1) If S intends to Ψ and it's not the case that S should not so intend, it's not the case that S oughtn't Ψ .¹⁷
- (IB) If S believes that she should Ψ and it's not the case that she should not so believe, it's not the case that S oughtn't intend to Ψ in accordance with that belief.¹⁸

If White judged that she should Ψ and was permitted to Ψ in only some non-moral sense, then he would not be defending his Ψ -ing at all. White could offer a defense if he insisted that in light of his epistemic permission to judge that he should Ψ there was an additional moral permission to Ψ because the moral reasons that determined the permissibility of his Ψ -ing just were (or coincided with) the relevant epistemic reasons that determined whether he was epistemically permitted to Ψ , that would be a defense. However, this defense would contradict (3) since the truth of (3) requires that the reasons in light of which someone morally oughtn't Ψ do not make it the case that the agent epistemically oughtn't Ψ .

Perhaps the problem with (3) can be brought out as follows. Reasons are supposed to satisfy a deliberative constraint. They are supposed to be the sorts of thing that we can reason from and that can move us:

- (DC) R is a reason for which S Ψ 's only if R is capable of disposing S towards Ψ -ing through R's role in S's deliberation whether to Ψ .¹⁹

Could White's reasons for Ψ -ing or intending to Ψ be epistemic without also being moral reasons? If White's deliberations concerned only epistemic matters, perhaps. But, presumably, if White is morally conscientious he is not concerned only with matters epistemic. He is concerned with the considerations that bear on whether Plum ought to Φ given her predicament. He cannot, if he's conscientious, intend to Ψ while remaining neutral on these matters. So, if we described the reasons she took to be the good reasons that settled the matter as epistemic, non-moral reasons, we would describe his reasons in terms that he would reject. These kinds of reasons could not be the ones that dispose White to Ψ through her deliberations. Since what it takes for (1) to be true when (2) is false is for there to be epistemic reasons that bear on whether to Ψ that are not also moral reasons, (2) won't be false if (1) is true. There are no such reasons. Perhaps (DC) is more controversial than I think it is, but I doubt that those who deny it insist that whenever an agent fails to do what she ought she is thereby properly faulted or criticized. This view, which I take it is the view of those who defend RA, seems to assert that there cannot be undefeated reasons to refrain from Φ -ing that the agent cannot be faulted for failing to take account of and it seems on its face that if reasons have to be like this, such reasons would satisfy the deliberative constraint.

We can state what I think is essentially the same point in a different way. Suppose White didn't

suffer from any sort of ignorance and didn't harbor any mistaken beliefs. White isn't just in the good case, White is in the best case possible. It seems natural for someone in White's position to think that the same reasons in light of which the advisee oughtn't Φ are the reasons in light of which he oughtn't *epistemically* and *morally* assert that the advisee ought to Φ or ought to feel free to Φ . In other words, it seems to the subject in the good case that the epistemic and non-epistemic reasons demand the same thing from him. Now, consider a second subject in the bad case, a case where the subject is mistaken about the external surroundings. This second speaker's mistaken beliefs are all about non-normative matters and all her beliefs about non-normative matters are mistaken. It might be that owing to such factual ignorance the subject doesn't know what reasons bear on whether her advisee ought to Φ , but it doesn't seem to follow from the fact that the subject suffers from this factual ignorance that there is a change in the relations between the reasons that bear on whether the agent ought to Φ and whether she should advise the agent to Φ because she happens to be in the bad case. If these relations varied between the good case and bad, the subject's knowledge of the relations between the reasons would not be *apriori* knowledge because it would be knowledge that depended, *inter alia*, upon knowledge of those contingent matters of fact that bear on whether the advisee ought to Φ and these are facts that differ in the good and bad cases. I take it, however, that the subject's knowledge of the relations between the reasons that bear on whether the advisee ought to Φ and whether she ought to advise the advisee to Φ is *apriori* knowledge and so independent from the empirical knowledge that subjects have in the good case but lack in the bad. If these points are correct, then it seems whether the subject is in the good or bad case the subject knows that the reasons that bear on whether the advisee ought to Φ and whether she ought to advise Φ -ing don't differ. To deny that (2) follows from (1), it seems you'd either have to (i) deny that in the case of full information the subject doesn't know that the reasons that bear on action and her assertions about the agent's action are the same or (ii) say that an agent's ignorance changes that relations between the reasons that bear on whether to act or believe. As (i) seems to be something we observe to be correct and the denial of (ii) seems rather implausible given that our knowledge of the relations between the reasons that bear on the speaker's advisory assertion and the agent's advised course of action, it seems we should accept that (2) follows from (1).

If the epistemic reasons that bear on whether to Ψ are constituted by the same considerations that constitute the moral reasons that bear on whether to Ψ , the only way that Ψ -ing could be *epistemically* permissible while being *morally* impermissible is if one of these three theses is rejected:

- (PRO) The reasons that count *in favor* of beliefs or intentions count in favor of the intentions and actions these beliefs and intentions rationalize.
- (CON) The reasons that count *against* actions or intentions count against the intentions and beliefs that purport to rationalize them.

(DEON) If something is permitted, there is no unmatched or undefeated reason
not to do it or believe it.

Since these all seem quite plausible, it seems that we have some reason to think that (AI) and (IB) are true, in which case we have to reject (3). Cook is a counterexample to RA if it's a counterexample to DPI.

CONCLUSION

A speaker cannot have sufficient warrant to assert p if there is a reason to refrain from asserting that p is the case and no overriding reason to make that assertion. Among the reasons that bear on whether to assert that p is the case is a reason that does not supervene on the facts that determine whether the speaker reasonably believes p or reasonably believes she knows p . There's reason for a speaker to refrain from asserting that p is the case when the hearer is faced with a p -determined choice and it's not the case that p . I believe that I've refuted the RA accounts and shown that there is some reason to think that truth is sometimes needed for warranted assertion.

This does not show that assertion is governed by this truth norm:

TN: S should not assert p unless p .

Someone could try to generalize from these examples. It's often assumed that the epistemic norms that apply to the actions and beliefs apply regardless of whether the propositions asserted or believed have practical significance or not, so the epistemic purists among us might be tempted to say that examples like Cook give us good reason to think that TN governs all assertions and not just a special class of assertions.

The argument I've offered in this paper is superficially similar to those arguments that try to derive an account of the norms of assertion from assumptions about practical reasoning. The basic idea behind these arguments is that we try to derive an account of the norms that determine whether we're permitted to assert by focusing on the downstream effects of the assertion.²⁰ If someone adopts a view that combines the idea that it is permissible to assert p when the speaker stands in some sort of epistemic relation to the proposition that p (e.g., the speaker justifiably believes it, knows it, has good enough evidence to believe it, etc...) and that it is permissible to assert p only if the assertion has some effect on the audience (e.g., it entitles the audience to reason from p), it seems the argument might not work. It seems that the right to assert depends upon the *speaker's* epistemic position but the view implies that the speaker's epistemic position depends upon the audience's epistemic position after receiving the assertion. What if the speaker is an expert and the audience is badly deluded so that the speaker's assertion, although true and epistemically impeccable, is the sort of thing that the audience cannot rationally accept or reasonably argue from given how horribly misled they were prior to the assertion? It seems implausible to suggest that the speaker did not have the right to assert what the speaker asserted just because there's no helping the deluded audience.²¹

The arguments in this paper don't assume that the speaker has the right to assert p only if the hearer thereby has the right to reason from p . It may be that given the hearer's other attitudes, it would be irrational for her to add p to her belief set and so irrational to reason from the premise that p for some p -determined choice. It seems that if someone puts another in a position to reason from a premise that they were not in a position to reason from otherwise by asserting that p is the case, the speaker is conferring a benefit upon the hearer and if, owing to hearer's mistaken or incomplete grasp of the situation, the hearer cannot receive that benefit it hardly seems wrongful for the speaker to have said what the speaker did. If, however, the speaker asserts p when p is false, the speaker has not failed to confer a benefit; rather, the speaker has caused the hearer a kind of harm or loss. By convincing the hearer to accept a false proposition, the speaker has put the hearer in the position of someone who is disposed to treat non-reasons as if they were reasons for action and disposed her to reject real reasons as spurious when she rejects claims on the basis of her mistaken beliefs. If you oughtn't cause your audience a harm or loss by convincing them that p is true via your assertion when p is false and convincing them that a non-reason is a reason, you oughtn't assert false propositions.

REFERENCES

- Adler, J. 2002. *Belief's Own Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.
- Brandt, R. 1993. Asserting. *Nous* 17: 637-50.
- Broome, J. 2001. Normative Practical Reasoning. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 75: 175-93.
- Brown, J. MS. Assertion and Practical Reasoning: Common or Divergent Epistemic Standards?
- DeRose, K. 1996. Knowledge, Assertion, and Lotteries. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74: 568-80.
- _____. 2002. Assertion, Knowledge, and Context. *Philosophical Review* 111: 167-203.
- Douven, I. 2006. Assertion, Knowledge, and Rational Credibility. *Philosophical Review* 115: 449-85.
- Gardner, J. 2007. *Offences and Defences*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gibbons, J. forthcoming. Things that Make Things Reasonable. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Hawthorne, J. 2004. *Knowledge and Lotteries*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hieronimi, P. 2005. The Wrong Kind of Reason. *Journal of Philosophy* 102: 437-57.
- Huemer, M. 2006. Phenomenal Conservatism and the Internalist Intuition. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43: 147-58.
- Kavka, G. 1983. The Toxin Puzzle. *Analysis* 43: 33-6.
- Kvanvig, J. Forthcoming. Assertion, Knowledge, and Lotteries.
- Lackey, J. 2007. The Norms of Assertion. *Nous* 41: 594-626.
- MacFarlane, J. Forthcoming. What is Assertion?

- Oppy, G. 2007. Norms of Assertion. In D. Greimann and G. Siegart (eds.), *Truth and Speech Acts: Studies in the Philosophy of Language*. New York: Routledge.
- Robinson, P. 1996. Competing Theories of Justification: Deeds v. Reasons. In A. Simester and A. Smith (eds.), *Harm and Culpability*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shah, N. 2006. A New Argument for Evidentialism. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56: 481-98.
- _____. 2008. How Action Governs Intention. *Philosopher's Imprint* 8: 1-19.
- Slote, M. 1979. Assertion and Belief. In J. Dancy (ed.), *Papers on Language and Logic*. Keele: Keele University Library.
- Stanley, J. 2005. *Knowledge and Practical Interests*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sutton, J. 2007. *Without Justification*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.
- Unger, P. 1975. *Ignorance*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weiner, M. 2005. Must We Know What We Say? *Philosophical Review* 114: 227-51.
- Williams, B. 1981. *Moral Luck*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Williamson, T. 2000. *Knowledge and its Limits*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹ One of the standard objections to the truth account of warranted assertion is that such an account cannot explain why we should not assert lottery propositions or why we should refrain from asserting Moorean absurdities. Weiner (2005) explains how to handle lottery cases using TN and without KN. De Almeida (2001) maintains that you cannot have undefeated evidence or justification for believing Moorean absurd thoughts, and so if it follows from the fact that you should not assert what is false that you should not assert without sufficient evidence of truth as Williamson (2000: 245) suggests, someone could explain why you should not assert Moorean absurd thoughts given just the resources of the truth account. Since our focus is on just the claim that there is a truth norm that governs assertion, these are issues that should be explored elsewhere.

² Williamson (2000) defends the necessity claim, but I do not believe he has come out in defense of the claim that knowledge is sufficient for warranted assertion. Adler (2002), DeRose (1996), Hawthorne (2004), Slote (1979), Stanley (2005), Sutton (2007), and Unger (1975) defend versions of KA.

³ See Douven (2006) and Lackey (2007) for defenses of different versions of reasonable belief accounts of warranted assertion. Kvanvig (forthcoming) defends a justified belief account of warranted assertion that faces the same sort of difficulties that RA accounts face generally. Sutton (2007) agrees with Kvanvig you have sufficient warrant to assert whatever you justifiably believe, but he also thinks that you cannot have a justified belief unless that belief counts as knowledge so he defends both a justification account of warranted assertion and the knowledge account.

⁴ The intuitions of some suggest that assertions not known to be true in fake barn country are nevertheless perfectly warranted. Versions of this objection are found in Lackey (2007) and [omit].

⁵ We sometimes say things like this, 'You should visit your uncle in the hospital and you should visit your aunt in the asylum, but since you have only enough time to see one of them, you should see your aunt'. I take it that the first two uses of 'should' are used in the advisory sense and indicate that there's something that counts in favor of the courses of action described whereas the third use of 'should' is where 'should' is being used in its mandatory sense to express a verdict.

⁶ Lackey (2007: 595).

⁷ Oppy (2007: 235).

⁸ Oppy (2007: 236).

⁹ Kvanvig (forthcoming: 8) considers this strategy for deriving evidential norms from a sincerity norm, but does not endorse the strategy.

¹⁰ Lackey (2007) has also produced a series of examples that suggest that it is permissible to assert what you do not believe, and some of those examples suggest that there is a sense in which it might be permissible to assert p even under circumstances where you might not be perfectly rational to believe p . It might be that the speaker possesses some evidence such that they ought to refrain from believing p outright but might nevertheless be warranted in asserting that p is the case. If these examples do suggest this, they present a more direct challenge to those who would try to derive the norms of assertion from the norms of belief.

¹¹ This phrase is taken from MacFarlane (forthcoming).

¹² Students were asked to read *Cook* and circle whichever answer they thought was best: (a) Plum has a stronger duty to help Peacock; (b) Plum has a stronger duty to help Mustard first; (c) Plum should help but it should not matter to her whom she helps first. 101 students of the 134 students surveyed chose (a) and the remaining students chose (c).

¹³ In saying that there is a decisive case against asserting, I'm saying that *epistemically* the subject oughtn't assert. That's consistent with saying that there is a decisive *moral* case against asserting, but the reasonable belief accounts of assertion only say that it is *epistemically* permissible to assert p when the speaker reasonably believes p or that p is known. Read on if you think that the argument hasn't established that there's a decisive epistemic case against the relevant assertions.

¹⁴ Let's say that the choice to Φ is a p -determined choice iff Φ -ing is permissible iff p .

¹⁵ If they did not have reasonable beliefs, it is hard to see how an excuse could be appropriate unless we were to show that neither S nor S' could exercise the kind of rational control that enable us to hold them responsible. For an excellent discussion of the distinction between justification and excuse, see Gardner (2007).

¹⁶ See Gibbons (forthcoming) and Huemer (2006).

¹⁷ A principle along these lines is useful for understanding the toxin puzzle introduced by Kavka (1983). See Shah (2008).

¹⁸ Broome (2001) argues that there is a normative requirement along these lines.

¹⁹ Shah (2006: 485) attributes this constraint to Williams (1981).

²⁰ See MacFarlane (forthcoming) for a version of this strategy.

²¹ Brown (ms.) suggests that there's a similar problem that arises when the speaker is in a low stakes context but the audience is in a high stakes context. It seems whether the hearer should reason from a proposition depends upon the hearer's context whereas whether the speaker is in a position to speak depends upon the speaker's context.