Epistemically Responsible Action

by

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Abstract

We are often, as agents, responsible for the things we do and say. This responsibility can come in a number of different forms: here I propose and defend a view of how we are epistemically responsible for our actions and assertions. First, I establish a general claim about the ways that we make epistemic evaluations in relation to the norms that govern assertion and practical reasoning. Many endorse what I call epistemic monism, the view that all epistemic evaluations of actions or assertions must be explained solely in terms of whether one has adhered to the respective norm. I argue that epistemic monism is false. Instead, I defend epistemic separability, the view that we make two different kinds of epistemic evaluations when it comes to assertions and actions: one that pertains to whether one has adhered to the relevant epistemic norm, and one that pertains to the way in which one has adhered to that norm. I argue that whether one’s action is epistemically responsible depends on whether one is able to fulfil the epistemic commitments one makes in performing that action. These commitments consist in being able to provide reasons to believe that one has adhered to the norm governing the action one performs, according to a standard imposed by the situation in which one acts. Finally, I consider how accepting a notion of epistemic responsibility affects the ways in which epistemologists interpret judgments of the propriety of actions and assertions. I argue that epistemologists might be mistakenly interpreting judgments of epistemic propriety as being indicative of something important about knowledge, when they should actually be interpreted as something about our ability to employ our knowledge responsibly in our actions.
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Introduction

Here’s a common kind of criticism of one’s action: “you don’t know what you’re doing.” This is an *epistemic* criticism, because it is made in response to a distinctively epistemic kind of failure: perhaps you have failed to take into account some bit of evidence that is pertinent to your situation, or you are acting on the basis of beliefs held for bad reasons, or you are acting on the basis of something that is just plain false, etc. Recently, epistemologists have appealed to criticisms of this kind to indicate that one has failed to meet the epistemic standards that govern the proper treatment of a proposition as a reason for acting. Determining what these standards are falls under the project of determining the *epistemic norm of practical reasoning*. Consider, for example, the following pair of cases of practical reasoning:

*Hannah’s Hunch*: Hannah and Sarah are trying to find a restaurant, at which they have time-limited reservations. Instead of asking someone for directions, Hannah goes on her hunch that the restaurant is down a street on the left. After walking for some amount of time, it becomes quite clear that they went down the wrong street. A natural way for Sarah to point out that Hannah made the wrong decision is to say, “You shouldn’t have gone down this street, since you did not know that the restaurant was here.” (Stanley and Hawthorne, 2008: 571).

*Knowledgeable Karen*: Karen is going to meet Hannah and Sarah at the aforementioned restaurant. Before leaving her house, Karen looks up the directions on Google Maps, and calls the restaurant in order to confirm. She follows her directions and arrives at the restaurant on time.
It’s clear that there’s something wrong with Hannah’s action. A natural explanation of this impropriety locates the problem in Hannah’s epistemic relationship with the proposition she was acting on the basis of: she merely has a hunch that the restaurant is on the left, and we typically think that hunches are not good enough bases for action. As Stanley and Hawthorne (2008) note, that there is something insufficient about Hannah’s epistemic relationship is echoed in Sarah’s criticism: Sarah criticizes Hannah for acting on the basis of something that she does not know. Cases like Hannah’s in conjunction with judgments like Sarah’s support the view that, first, appropriately acting on the basis of a proposition requires that we meet some epistemic standard, and second, that this standard is knowledge, specifically. Thus we get the following potential norm of practical reasoning:

*Knowledge Norm of Practical Reasoning:* it is appropriate to treat $p$ as a reason for acting only if one knows that $p$.¹

The knowledge norm gives us the intuitively correct judgment in Hannah’s case: since Hannah does not know that “the restaurant is on the left”, it is not appropriate for her to act on the basis of that proposition. The knowledge norm also gives us the expected answer in the case of Knowledgeable Karen. Our intuitive judgment in Karen’s case is that her actions are appropriate, and the knowledge norm permits this answer: since Karen knows that “the restaurant is on the right” she can appropriately act on that proposition.

In addition to instances in which one treats a proposition as a reason for acting, we also often criticize the *assertions* that people make. We might, then, criticize someone in the

¹ Stanley and Hawthorne defend a biconditional version of this principle, calling it the “Reason-Knowledge” principle (2008: 578). Several other versions of the principle appear in many different places in the literature, some of which we will see below.
following way: “you don’t know what you’re talking about.” This is again an epistemic
criticism; and again, as in the case of practical reasoning, epistemologists have recently appealed
to these kinds of criticisms of assertions to indicate that one is failing to meet some epistemic
standard that governs proper assertion. Determining what these standards are falls under the
project of determining the *epistemic norm of assertion*. Consider cases parallel to those above:
while Hannah and Karen’s cases are one in which they treat a proposition as a reason for acting,
we can consider cases in which Hannah and Karen *assert* their respective propositions, instead,
namely ones in which Hannah asserts to Georgie that “the restaurant is on the left”, and Karen
asserts (perhaps on the phone to Georgie) that “the restaurant is on the right.” These parallel
cases lead to parallel conclusions: we are likely to judge that there is something inappropriate
about Hannah’s assertion, and nothing inappropriate about Karen’s. Again, the most natural
place to locate the source of the (im)propriety in the two assertions is in the asserter’s respective
epistemic relationship: Hannah only has a hunch that the proposition she is asserting is true, and
that is simply not good enough to guarantee appropriate assertion. Karen, on the other hand, is in
a much stronger epistemic position: she knows the proposition she is asserting, and this is
sufficient for appropriate assertion. As in the case of practical reasoning, cases like the modified
Hannah and Karen cases and the respective intuitive judgments of each support the following
norm of assertion:

*Knowledge Norm of Assertion*: it is appropriate to assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*.\(^2\)

\(^2\) Again, several versions of this norm appear in the literature. Williamson (2000) presents a norm similar in form to
the above, while Jessica Brown (2008) calls this form of the principle “NEC”, as it states the necessary (but not
sufficient) conditions for appropriate action. We will see several different expressions of the relationship between
knowledge and assertion in what follows.
Now, if a proposed norm deems a lot of intuitively appropriate action or assertion inappropriate, or intuitively inappropriate action or assertion appropriate, then this gives us reason to think that the proposed norm is not the right one. In other words, it is necessary that a norm capture a wide range of our intuitive judgments in order for it to be plausible. The problem for the knowledge norms, then, is that there are classes of cases that seem to deliver exactly these counterintuitive consequences. We can illustrate such cases through what I will call the “general challenges” for the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning:

**General challenge for knowledge norm of assertion:** I assert that \( p \). I do not know that \( p \) (for whatever reason), although I have good reason to think that I do. Intuitively, in such an instance I appropriately assert a proposition I don’t know.

**General challenge for knowledge norm of practical reasoning:** I treat that \( p \) as a reason for acting. I do not know that \( p \) (for whatever reason), although I have good reason to think that I do. Intuitively, in such an instance I appropriately treat a proposition as a reason for acting that I don’t know.

In the above general challenges, the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning will deliver the intuitively incorrect result, namely that one’s assertion or action is inappropriate.

Many have argued that these kinds of cases give us reason to reject the knowledge norms. Those who argue in this way are committed to the idea that our epistemic evaluations of actions and assertions necessarily reflect whether we take them to be permissible or impermissible, i.e. whether they have adhered to or violated the respective epistemic norm. Call this view *epistemic monism*:
Epistemic Monism (EM): The only properly epistemic evaluations of assertions or actions are in terms of whether the epistemic norms of assertion or action has been adhered to or violated, respectively.

If we accept EM and the intuitive judgments from the general problem cases, then we are forced to reject the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning.

However, this is not the only way we can interpret the relationship between an act and its norm. Those who defend the knowledge norms deny EM. Instead, they appeal to what I will call epistemic separability:

Epistemic Separability (ES): Instances of assertion and practical reasoning can be evaluated epistemically either in terms of their adherence to the epistemic norms of assertion and practical reasoning, respectively, or in terms of the way that one has adhered to or violated those norms.

According to ES, there are two ways treating something as a reason for acting and asserting can be evaluated epistemically: in terms of whether one has adhered to or violated the respective epistemic norm, and in terms of the way in which one has gone about adhering to or violating that norm. Keith DeRose (2002) coins the terms “primary epistemic propriety” for the former and “secondary epistemic propriety” for the latter. The major problems facing epistemic separability are, first, whether such a normative structure for epistemic evaluations makes conceptual sense, and second, what a notion of secondary epistemic propriety consists in.

This project is concerned with addressing both of these problems. In roughly the first half I argue for not only the plausibility but the necessity of epistemic separability, and in the second half I posit a view of and consider the ramifications of a notion of secondary epistemic propriety.
In arguing for epistemic separability I appeal to work both in epistemology and psychology that claims that we only have fallible access to how epistemically well-positioned we are towards a given proposition in a given circumstance, and that this failure to recognize how epistemically well-positioned we are can have normative consequences. Specifically, ones which are reflected in the fact that we are not liable to criticize one for acting on the basis of something one did not know but was not able to recognize when acting.

In my proposal for a concept of epistemically responsible action I argue that the ways in which people accept information suggest that we distinguish epistemic evaluations of actions that pertain to whether one has a given epistemic relationship from evaluations of how those epistemic relationships are employed in one’s actions. We are *epistemically vigilant* – we actively track the veracity of information we are presented with – and as a result we have certain expectations for the provision of reasons to believe the information we are presented with. By asserting or acting, then, we *commit* ourselves to providing such reasons. Such commitments provide the criteria of the epistemic responsibility of our actions. These commitments might change depending on the nature of the act of φ-ing, the proposition p, or the circumstances S finds herself in. More epistemically demanding situations require us to undertake more significant commitments, and thereby make the requirements for epistemically responsible action more demanding.

Accepting epistemic separability and a notion of epistemically responsible action has consequences for a number of current debates in epistemology. One that I will consider here is *interest-relative invariantism* (IRI). According to IRI whether one has knowledge that p is at least partially a function of the consequences of being wrong about p. The interest-relative invariantist appeals to intuitive cases in which we ascribe or are reluctant to ascribe knowledge
in order to support their view. For example, the interest-relative invariantist appeals to our tendency to withhold attributions of knowledge when there is a lot at stake as reason to believe that whether we do, in fact, have knowledge of a proposition is partially dependent on how much there is at stake given the truth or falsity of that proposition. However, I argue that interest-relative invariantists generally fail to distinguish the conditions for the possession of knowledge and the conditions for the responsible use of that knowledge in one’s reasoning. As a result, intuitive attributions or denials of knowledge might be better interpreted not as being indicative of the interest-relativity of knowledge, but instead of whether one is acting in an epistemically responsible way. While one could still adhere to IRI while also adhering to epistemic separability, I argue that the judgments that are appealed to most frequently in support of these views are better accommodated by a notion of epistemic responsibility.

Here are some brief chapter summaries:

In chapter 1 (“Assertion, Practical Reasoning and Epistemic Separability”) I introduce the notion of epistemic separability in terms of the role it plays in the debates concerning the epistemic norms of assertion and practical reasoning. I argue that while the knowledge norm proponents are going to have to appeal to a notion of secondary epistemic propriety in order to explain intuitive judgments of the propriety of cases in which one asserts a proposition or treats a proposition as a reason for acting when that proposition is not known, so, too, will popular alternative norms that have been proposed in the knowledge norm’s stead. In chapter 2 (“Three Arguments Against Epistemic Monism”) I consider three arguments in support of the view that we can be mistaken about what epistemic relationship we are in with a proposition, and thus have good reason to believe that we are in an epistemic relationship with a proposition other than the one we are actually in. This kind of fallibility has the consequence that we can always be
mistaken about whether we are adhering to or violating an epistemic norm, and thus necessitates a conception of secondary epistemic propriety.

In chapter 3 (“Norms of Illocutionary Acts and Commonality”) I consider in detail what, exactly, it means for a norm to be “constitutive,” and argue that different acts can have the same epistemic requirements for their appropriate performance, and are differentiated not by their epistemic requirements but rather by what I call their propositional components. As a result, I argue we should accept commonality: that every action, illocutionary or otherwise, has the same epistemic conditions for proper performance. Accepting commonality allows us to talk of the norms of assertion (as well as other illocutionary acts) and action as a unified debate.

In chapter 4 (“The Structure of Epistemic Separability”), epistemic separability is compared to other kinds of normative separability, namely moral, practical, and legal separability. I argue that epistemic separability is disanalogous in important ways with other kinds of normative separability, and thus involves a different kind of evaluative structure.

In chapter 5 (“Reasonableness and Responsibility”) I argue that evaluations of “reasonableness” fail to account for factors that pertain to information that one should have acquired, given the situation that one is in. An evaluative notion that takes into account not only what one does know but what one should know I call epistemic responsibility. In chapter 6 (“Commitments, Vigilance, and Responsibility”) I outline a view of epistemically responsible action. In doing so, I reconcile two ways of approaching the problem of determining the conditions under which we should make assertions, specifically: the constitutive approach, which conceives of assertions as actions that are defined by the epistemic conditions for their appropriate performance, and the commitment approach, which conceives of assertions as actions that are defined by the consequences of making them. I argue that the commitments we make by
asserting are not themselves definitional of the act of assertion, but instead of whether we evaluate an assertion as a responsible one.

Finally, in chapter 7 (“Interest-Relative Invariantism and Responsibility”) I consider the ramifications of accepting epistemic separability and epistemic responsibility in terms of the plausibility of interest-relative invariantism about knowledge. I argue that many of the cases that have been appealed to as support for these views are better interpreted as evaluations of epistemic responsibility. In the conclusion I consider what I take to be the most prominent questions that have been created by the project I present here, as well as what I take to be fruitful further areas of research.
Chapter 1: Assertion, Practical Reasoning, and Epistemic Separability

Chapter Summary

I argue here for a view I call *epistemic separability (ES)*, which states that there are two different ways we can be evaluated epistemically when we assert a proposition or treat it as a reason for acting: one in terms of whether we have adhered to or violated the relevant epistemically constituted norm, and another in terms of how epistemically well-positioned we are towards the fact that we have either adhered to or violated said norm. ES has been appealed to most prominently in order to explain why those epistemic evaluations that conflict with the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning nevertheless seem correct. Opponents of such a view are committed to what I call *epistemic monism (EM)*, which states that there is only one way we can be properly evaluated as epistemically appropriate asserters and actors, namely in terms of whether we have adhered to or violated the relevant epistemic norm. Accepting ES over EM has two significant consequences: first, the “metaepistemological” consequence that the structure of normative epistemic evaluations parallels that found in other normative areas (namely, moral evaluations), and second, that the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning are no worse off than any alternatives in terms of explanatory power and simplicity.

1.1 Norms of Assertion and Practical Reasoning

Proponents of a knowledge norm of assertion (like Peter Unger (1975), Timothy Williamson (2000), Keith DeRose (2002), and others) argue that it is appropriate to assert
proposition \( p \) only if one knows that \( p \). Assertions of propositions that are not known are thus in some ways improper, and, in turn, are subject to criticism. Specifically, epistemic criticism: we are deemed insufficiently well-positioned epistemically towards \( p \) to assert that \( p \). Almost immediately one can come up with plenty of cases in which the knowledge norm of assertion seems too strict. The most common cases typically take one of the following forms:

**Justified False Belief (JFB):** \( S \) asserts that \( p \). \( S \) is justified in believing that \( p \), but \( p \) happens to be false (perhaps for reasons that \( S \) would not typically be expected to take into account).

**Gettiered:** \( S \) asserts that \( p \). \( S \) is justified in believing that \( p \), and \( p \) is true, but \( S \) does not know that \( p \) (perhaps for reasons that \( S \) would not typically be expected to take into account).

Consider, as an example of the former, the following example:

**Justified Julian:** Julian has been told by his friend Juan that his party starts at 9 p.m. Juan is reliable, and Julian has no reason to think that he’s being misled in any way. Julian then tells his friend Jacob, “The party tonight starts at 9.” Unbeknownst to Julian, in between being told that the party starts at 9 and his assertion to Jacob, the party has been rescheduled to start at 10.

An intuitive judgment of Julian’s assertion is that he is not deserving of criticism for it, despite his violation of the knowledge norm of assertion. When \( S \) has a justified but false belief that \( p \) or

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3 I take Gettiered to encompass traditional Gettier cases as well as other kinds of justified true beliefs that fall short of knowledge, such as barn facade cases and their kin. Gettiered is named after Edmund Gettier’s famous (1963).
has a justified true belief that $p$ that $S$ does not know, it seems that we are often not inclined to criticize $S$ for asserting that $p$, despite $S$’s lack of knowledge in both cases. Now, one test for the plausibility of a norm is that it generally coheres with our intuitive judgments: we expect that if one asserts appropriately, it is *because* one has adhered to the norm of assertion, and, similarly, if one asserts inappropriately it is *because* one has violated the norm of assertion. Thus if our judgments about the JFB and Gettiered cases are intuitive, and if intuitive criticisability is taken to be a mark of norm violation, then these cases seem to be counterexamples to the knowledge norm of assertion.

Other norms face the same problem. Proponents of a knowledge norm of practical reasoning (like Stanley and Hawthorne (2008), Fantl and McGrath (2002, 2009), and others) argue that it is appropriate to treat $p$ as a reason for acting only if one knows $p$. And again, the knowledge norm of practical reasoning seems too strict: it often seems that someone who treats a proposition as a reason for acting when one justifiably believes that $p$ when $p$ is false, or when one has a justified true belief that $p$ that one does not know, is not liable to be criticized. Once again, if these judgments are intuitive, and if a norm of practical reasoning needs to be able to accommodate a wide range of intuitive judgments of propriety, the above cases seem to be counterexamples to the knowledge norm of practical reasoning.

We might, then, choose to reject the knowledge norms in favor of some other norms that are better able to accommodate a wider range of our intuitive judgments; indeed, much of the debate concerning the norms of assertion and practical reasoning is guided by finding a replacement for the knowledge norm that does not admit of what seem to be such ready counterexamples. Defenders of the knowledge norms, however, deny that there is such a strict connection between criticisability and norm violation. Instead, they have argued that one can be
epistemically criticisable for one’s instances of practical reasoning and assertion in two different ways: according to a *primary* level of propriety, which concerns whether one has adhered to the relevant norm, and according to a *secondary* level of propriety, which concerns whether one is criticisable for one’s primary level improprieties. The idea, then, is that what appear to be problematic judgments about the JFB and Gettiered cases are not indicative of the primary propriety of one’s assertion or practical reasoning, but rather about its secondary propriety.

Call a kind of view wherein intuitive propriety judgments can be indicative of either one’s adherence to or violation of a norm, or whether one should be, in some way, criticisable for said adherences or violations, *evaluative separability*. Evaluative separability is common in other normative areas. For example, it is widely accepted that we make two different kinds of *moral* evaluations (at least when it comes to consequentialist theories of morally right action): one that pertains to whether our actions are morally *permissible*, and another that pertains to whether we are *blameworthy* for them. For example, my action might be morally impermissible because, say, it causes a significant amount of avoidable pain, but I might not be blameworthy for it, since I had good reason to think that my action was going to have different results. We thus accept a kind of moral separability when it comes to consequentialist views. I’ll call the epistemic analogue *epistemic separability* (*ES*): there are two different ways that we can be evaluated epistemically in relation to epistemic norms, namely by either adhering to or violating those norms, or in terms of whether we are criticisable for those adherences or violations. Accepting *ES* is what allows the proponent of the knowledge norm to accept what appear to be intuitive judgments of the propriety of our assertions and actions in the JFB and Gettiered cases, not as judgments not about the permissibility of the act, but rather whether we are criticisable for violating the relevant norm.
The strategy of defending the knowledge norms by appeal to epistemic separability is employed by a number of authors, but in different ways. For example, Keith DeRose (2002), who coins the term “secondary propriety,” defends the knowledge norm of assertion against judgments about cases like JFB and Gettiered in the following way:

As happens with other rules, a kind of secondary propriety/impropriety will arise with respect to [the knowledge norm of assertion]. While those who assert appropriately (with respect to this rule) in a primary sense will be those who actually obey it, a speaker who broke this rule in a blameless fashion (one who asserted something she didn’t know, but reasonably thought she did know) would in some secondary sense be asserting properly. (180)

Stanley and Hawthorne (2008) take a similar tack, although they refer to a notion of one being “excused” for violating the norm of practical reasoning:

If someone asserts that p without knowing it and knowing that they don’t know that p, they will have no excuse for their failure to act on the norm that one should assert only if one knows. If on the other hand, they assert that p, do not know that p, but cannot be expected to know that they don’t know that p, we may be willing to deem their failure to comply with the norm excusable. The conceptual structure, one familiar from the normative realm, explains suitable appraisal in terms of a combination of norms and excuses for failure to comply with them. (286)

Timothy Williamson (2000) employs the same strategy in defense of the knowledge norm of assertion, but appeals instead to a notion of “reasonableness”:
The [knowledge norm of assertion] makes knowledge the condition for permissible assertion, not reasonable assertion. One may reasonably do something impermissible because one reasonably but falsely believes it to be permissible. In particular, one may reasonably assert p, even though one does not know that p, because it is very probable on one’s evidence that one knows that p. (256)

All of the proposals from DeRose, Stanley and Hawthorne, and Williamson attempt to account for the judgments that we are liable to have in response to the JFB and Gettiered cases in terms of some other epistemic evaluative notion, and thus adhere to ES.

Epistemic separability has received considerable backlash. We can divide its main criticisms into three general themes: first, that ES is implausible because there is no “conceptual room” for a notion of secondary epistemic propriety; second, that ES prevents us from being able to give straightforward advice about what to do; and third, that ES results in unparsimonious norms of assertion and practical reasoning. Those who deny the plausibility of epistemic separability are committed to what I will call *epistemic monism (EM)* for assertion and practical reasoning: the only proper judgments of epistemically appropriate or inappropriate assertions and actions are those that reflect our adherence to or violation of the relevant norm. We cannot consistently adhere to the knowledge norms and the intuition that our judgments in the JFB and Gettiered cases are intuitive if we also accept EM. Thus those who do accept EM give up the knowledge norms in lieu of norms which are governed by some other condition(s). We will see below that this has occurred in abundance.

Here I will defend epistemic separability against these criticisms. The consequences are twofold: first, there is the “metaepistemological” consequence that epistemic evaluations do indeed parallel evaluations in other normative areas (such as moral evaluations), and second, that
the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning are capable of accommodating apt judgments of the JFB and Gettiered cases.

1.2 The Conceptual Plausibility of Epistemic Separability

The first kind of criticism I will consider pertains to whether there is enough “conceptual space” for epistemic monism. Pascal Engel (2008), for example, argues that the distinction between primary and secondary propriety is “spurious,”

because there is only one way of violating a norm: simply by not doing or believing what it prescribes. The fact that I am unaware that I crossed the yellow line does not make me less liable to receive the fine from the policeman who notices my bad driving behaviour. That may excuse me, but that does not change the fact that I have violated the rule. The fact that one is unaware of violating the norm does not change one’s status with respect to the norm (56).

Jennifer Lackey (2007) is in agreement with Engel. She argues that,

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

In other words, according to Lackey one violates a norm of assertion if and only if one is subject to criticism qua asserter. The “qua asserter” qualification is crucial. There are, after all, plenty of instances in which one might be subject to criticism for making an assertion in ways that do not pertain to one’s having violated the norm of assertion: perhaps the content of the assertion was insensitive, off-color, otherwise socially unacceptable, etc. But while an asserter is certainly
subject to criticism in these instances, criticism is directed at the asserter qua moral agent, qua joke-teller, qua dinner guest, etc., and not qua asserter. Thus we should not confuse a claim of separability with a different claim about evaluation of adherences to or violations of norms, namely \textit{defeasibility}. Norms of assertion and action are defeasible insofar as the best action overall given one’s circumstances might not be the one that the norm dictates is permissible. For example, while an assertion of a known falsehood is most likely going to be epistemically impermissible, it might still be the best action to perform overall, say, because it is the morally best thing to do (perhaps because it spares someone’s feelings).

Although Lackey does not conceive of her argument in the terms I have presented here, her claim that “there is simply no room for acts being secondarily proper or improper” is a clear indication of support for epistemic monism. Lackey illustrates the connection between criticisability and norm violation via discussion of Toby, the hapless (American) football quarterback who loses a contact lens before unwittingly stepping over the line of scrimmage prior to attempting a forward pass. We stipulate that his blurred vision in this instance gives Toby a justified but false belief that he has not crossed the line of scrimmage prematurely. Regardless, Toby is clearly in violation of the rules of football. And while he may not be subject to criticism qua fallible human being, he is certainly still subject to criticism qua football player. Indeed, criticism is quickly and justifiably doled out in the form of a penalty.

As in our JFB case above, Toby has a justified but false belief that his action is permissible. However, Lackey argues there simply does not seem to be any way in which Toby, \textit{qua football player}, does anything appropriate, in any sense, when stepping over the line of scrimmage; there is, after all, nothing in the rulebook that forgives understandable mistakes. Evaluations that pertain to football propriety, then, seem to be \textit{monistic}: we can only be properly
evaluated *qua* football player in terms of whether we have adhered to or violated the rules of football.

Similarly, Toby might again lose his contact lens but, as a matter of luck, just-so-happen to keep his feet on the correct side of the line of scrimmage, all while completing a forward pass. In this instance, we stipulate that Toby’s blurred vision gives him no specific reason to think that he has not crossed the line of scrimmage prematurely. However, no flags are thrown and no yards are deducted. Toby might be a lucky son-of-a-gun for completing a legal pass given his circumstances, but again there does not seem to be any sense in which Toby is doing something inappropriate *qua* football player by getting lucky and completing the pass: nothing in the rules of football penalizes a player for dumb luck. Thus, just as getting lucky with regards to remaining onside in football is not something that we should be criticized for, getting lucky with regard to the truth of a proposition is also not something that we should be criticized for, either. Assertion, then, is supposed to be an activity that is analogous to football, with rules that govern each in the same way. Lackey concludes that the primary/secondary propriety distinction in epistemic norms of assertion cannot, as in the football case, correctly track propriety and impropriety *qua* asserter.

While some have argued that there is a principled difference between the way we evaluate inappropriate assertions and the way that we evaluate infractions in sports (see Maitra, 2011), I think the problem is not with the strength of the analogy, but with a failure to recognize that even in the realm of sports, monism is implausible. Consider, to stretch the analogy further, basketball player Bobby. Bobby’s team, the Canines, is down by two points with 20 seconds left in the game, and his opponent’s team, the Arachnids, has possession of the ball. A rule of (professional) basketball states that teams can possess the ball for 24 seconds before taking a
shot that touches the rim, otherwise possession changes to the opposing team. All the Arachnids have to do to win the game, then, is to run out the clock by refraining from shooting for 20 seconds. Another rule of basketball states that certain forms of intentional physical contact constitute a foul, and as a result, free throws are often given to the player on the receiving end of the offense. Committing a foul, however, also stops the clock and can result in a favorable circumstance for the fouling team if the fouled team misses their free throws. Knowing all of these rules and the consequences for breaking them, Bobby intentionally commits a foul on the Arachnid’s player holding the ball.

In basketball, this situation is common. The purpose of the example is the following: Bobby is clearly in violation of a rule of basketball by committing a foul. But fouling the player on the other team is clearly also an appropriate thing to do; indeed, if Bobby did not foul the Arachnid’s player, he would be heaped with criticism for failing to do so. If Bobby commits the foul he is still in some sense deserving of criticism (this is indicated by the fact that he is penalized by the referee), and if Bobby does not commit the foul he is in some sense not criticisable, since he receives no penalty. But in the former case Bobby is in another sense clearly not criticisable (since he exhibits excellent strategy), and the latter he is in another sense clearly criticisable (since he exhibits poor strategy). Importantly, Bobby is, in all the above cases, criticisable or not qua basketball player: failing to stop the clock by not taking the opportunity to commit a foul makes Bobby a criticisable basketball player, specifically. Lackey’s case, then,

4 Other similar strategies are ubiquitous in sports: a soccer player might illegally stop an otherwise sure goal with his hands in order to risk a penalty shot; better a slim chance at preventing a goal than a guaranteed goal against (such a manoeuvre was attempted – successfully – in the 2010 World Cup, for example). Similar situations occur in hockey and, I am sure, in many other sports that I am less familiar with.
does not adequately support evaluative monism in sports and, by analogy, does not support epistemic monism for norms of assertion and practical reasoning.

Furthermore, Lackey suggests that we can determine whether an act “is in accordance with the norms governing proper φ’ing” (where we can think of “φ-ing” either as asserting or treating something as a reason for acting) if we answer the following question in the affirmative: “relative to the goal of proper φ’ing, should the agent have performed φ or not?” (605) Applied to Bobby’s case, we thus ask the following question: relative to the goal of proper basketball playing, should Bobby have committed a foul or not? The answer is, I think, ambiguous: on the one hand, avoiding committing a foul is surely a mark of proper basketball playing. On the other hand, it is clearly poor strategy for Bobby to not commit a foul, given the circumstances. The ambiguity is explained by evaluative separability in basketball.

One might think that the answer to Lackey’s question when directed at Bobby is, in fact, not actually ambiguous: it is clear that Bobby should commit a foul, and thus there is no need to appeal to any other sense of propriety since there is no ambiguous answer to explain. But answering Lackey’s question in this way gives us the strange result that a norm governing proper basketball playing should include committing intentional fouls; after all, if we accept that the only way in which one can be appropriately evaluated as a basketball player is in terms of adhering to or violating the rules of basketball, then if Bobby’s act is appropriate, it must be because he has adhered to a rule of basketball. If this were the case, in what sense should Bobby’s action be considered a foul? Indeed, if Bobby’s, say, hitting the hands of the Arachnid’s player were unambiguously acceptable, the referee’s penalization of the Canines’ player would be out of line. But no such thing is the case.
One might have the following objection to my interpretation of Bobby’s case: I might be mixing up two different kinds of evaluations of “proper basketball playing,” namely one that pertains to following the rules that govern the act, and another that pertains to what is presumably a goal of Bobby’s, namely to win the game of basketball. However, the objector continues, it’s not clear whether the way that we evaluate Bobby as someone who is pursuing his interests should affect the way that we evaluate his standing with regards to the rules of basketball. Are we, then, just talking about two completely different ways that one could evaluate Bobby, i.e. one as a basketball player, and another as someone who is doing what he needs to do in order to achieve his goals? If this is the case, then the apparent separability of evaluations of Bobby is not at all surprising. We can, after all, evaluate people in all sorts of different ways: Bobby might be a great basketball player but a compulsive liar, or a bad basketball player but a snappy dresser, etc. But our evaluations of Bobby as morally reprehensible or aesthetically astute do not say anything about how we should evaluate Bobby’s relationship with the rules that govern basketball. So why should it matter if Bobby is good at winning basketball, if what we are interested in is his relation to the rules that govern playing basketball?

In order to address this concern we need to be careful to distinguish between evaluations of a subject made across evaluative domains (i.e. evaluating someone as bad at sports but good at picking out clothes) and those made within evaluative domains. Lackey’s argument was that there was insufficient conceptual space to allow us to make different evaluations of the same subject within the same evaluative domain when it came to playing sports; hence the crucial qualification that we evaluate a φ’er qua φ’er. However, if separating evaluations of an agent qua φ’er (that is, within the same evaluative domain) is not ruled out when it comes to sports, then,
by analogy, neither is it ruled out when it comes to evaluations of other ruled-governed activities like assertion and treating something as a reason for acting. If there are two different ways that we can evaluate someone as an epistemic subject when asserting or treating a proposition as a reason for acting, then this kind of evaluative separabilism does say something about the epistemic conditions that warrant assertion and practical reasoning; namely, it supports the ES thesis. The point of the extended sports analogy is to show that just as there is conceptual room for two different kinds of evaluation when it comes to rule-governed activities like sports, so, then, can there be room for different kinds of evaluation when it comes to other rule-governed activities, like assertion and practical reasoning.

Igor Douven (2006) presents a different kind of argument concerned with the existence of conceptual space for epistemic separability. He argues that:

if one can consistently violate a given norm without being blameworthy, provided one obeys a less stringent norm, then the former is not really a norm at all. Suppose, for instance, it is claimed that the following is a (or the) norm for serving alcoholic beverages:

One ought to serve alcoholic beverages only to persons of age 18 or older. (+)

At the same time it is declared that anyone who serves alcoholic beverages to persons of age 16 or older is blameless. It would then appear that the practice of serving alcoholic beverages is really governed by the norm that one ought to serve such beverages only to persons of age 16 or older rather than by (+). (Douven, 2006: 480)

Since we think that, typically, instances of assertions of JFB and Gettiered propositions are going to be ones that we judge to be epistemically appropriate, instead of claiming that these assertions
are epistemically appropriate in some sense that does not pertain to whether we have adhered to the norm of assertion, the correct norm of assertion should instead incorporate the conditions that make these assertions appropriate. Douven is again arguing from a position of epistemic monism: instead of separating different kinds of epistemic evaluations, we should instead combine these kinds of evaluations into the permissibility conditions of the relevant norm.

A problem with Douven’s objection is that there are many cases in which one can consistently be blameless in violating a norm, yet the conditions under which one is blameless should clearly not be made part of the permissibility conditions of the norm. Now, surely it would not be the case that we would declare as blameless anyone who served a drink to a 16-year-old. But now consider a specific class of 16-year-olds that one would always be blameless in serving: one that consists of those 16-year-olds that are extremely cunning, who make use of convincing fake IDs, facial prosthetics, and casual references to the 1980s. If anyone were to serve a member of this group of people alcohol, they would doubtless be blameless in doing so. Yet it is equally clear that no one would recommend amending the minimum drinking age laws to include just the extremely cunning 16-year-olds.

There are clearly cases, then, in which judgments that a given act of φ’ing is appropriate despite violating the relevant norm should not be accommodated by the conditions of the norm itself. How, then, can we determine whether a case in which one does not seem criticisable for violating a norm is one that should accommodated by the norm itself, as opposed to some additional evaluative notion? In other words, how can we tell when a case is a legitimate counterexample to the plausibility of norm, and when it is just indicative of a different normative relationship? I don’t have a definitive answer to this question. It seems, however, that the frequency in which the potential counterexample occurs cannot be the deciding factor (consider:
there are a plethora of instances in which we are morally blameless, but this fact in itself should not lead us to reconsider the norms that we are blameless for violating. Rather, the case should say something significant about the nature or purpose of the rule itself. Consider again Douven’s (+) rule: the purpose of such a rule is (in theory) to try and make it such that alcohol is only sold to those who are mature enough to make responsible decisions. The rule that says that one ought to only sell alcohol to those of 18 years of age or more has nothing to do with whether we can identify one’s age in any given situation. If we were to follow Douven’s advice and incorporate the conditions under which one would always be blameless for violating the rule into the condition of the rule itself, then we would be adding unwelcome conditions to our rule: it would be antithetical to the purpose of the rule. Now, if it turned out that we would always be blameless for serving a 16-year-old alcohol because, as it turns out, there is no significant difference in maturity between 16-year-olds and 18-year-olds, then it seems that we should, in fact, amend the (+) rule. Similarly, unless one can show that intuitively appropriate assertions in the JFB and Gettiered cases say something significant about the act of assertion itself, then just because we might typically be considered undeserving of criticism for asserting or treating as a reason for action a proposition that we are justified in believing but happens to be false does not mean that we should amend a norm of assertion or practical reasoning to make these cases permissible in terms of the relevant norm.

The fact, then, that separability can admit of cases in which one is always or nearly always blameless for violating a norm does not mean that we should change or amend the norm such that these cases are no longer instances of being blameless, but rather instances in which one has, in fact, adhered to the norm. We could, of course, still propose a different norm that could accommodate these cases in this way; indeed, as we will see below, this is Douven’s
strategy, as it is the strategy of many others. I will argue there that this strategy fails. Before getting there, I will consider one more metatheoretical complaint aimed at the plausibility of epistemic separability.

1.3 The Problem of Normative Guidance

Jonathan Kvanvig (2011) argues that if one conceives of norms that admit of a secondary dimension of epistemic propriety then we cannot answer a crucial question in a helpful way: what is it that we should do? Here’s his complaint in full:

What we do not want and cannot tolerate is multiple answers to the questions of what to do and what to think. If a theorist says, “well, if you do A you will be justified in so doing, and if you refrain, it will be excusable,” the appropriate reply is simply to repeat the request: tell me what to do. The conjunctive reply, distinguishing primary and secondary notions, is simply non-responsive. (243)

By distinguishing between primary and secondary propriety, Kvanvig claims, we can at best offer a “conjunctive reply” if we are asked what to do. This is, of course, not the kind of guidance we want: we want to know what to do, full stop, not what to do in some sense, and what to do in some other sense.

To see the problem in full, we need to see how epistemic separability differs from separability in other normative areas. We are concerned here with giving advice from an epistemic standpoint: what should we do, given that we are subject to evaluation as an epistemic subject. Consider, in contrast, an analogous problem for giving moral advice. I have noted that it is much more widely accepted in evaluations of consequentialist moral propriety that there is a distinction to be made between doing something morally impermissible and being blameworthy
for it. When one asks for advice about what one should do from a moral standpoint, we are advising them as someone who is subject to moral evaluation. In the case of moral advice, however, evaluative separability is seemingly not a problem: if we are, for instance, aware that someone is about to do something morally impermissible, but that, were they to perform the act, they would be blameless in doing so, it would be preposterous to give the conjunctive reply that they should, in some sense, perform the act, but that in another sense they shouldn’t. This is because when we are asked for moral advice we are not being asked what we should do if we are interested in being blameworthy for our actions, but rather what the morally permissible thing to do is. Simply differentiating between moral impermissibility and blamelessness thus does not in any way obligate us to give conjunctive advice. We might conclude, then, that simply differentiating primary and secondary epistemic propriety similarly simply does not obligate us to give conjunctive advice.

We might think, however, that the analogy between moral and epistemic separability breaks down. It is typically argued that to be blameless in regards to a moral transgression is, at least in part, a function of one’s epistemic relationship with the relevant moral facts. The epistemic case is perhaps more complicated. Primary epistemic propriety is an evaluation of whether we are epistemically well-positioned enough to make an assertion or to treat something as a reason for acting. But if secondary epistemic propriety is akin to a kind of blameworthiness, then the conditions that determine whether our assertion or action would be secondarily epistemically appropriate is itself a function of how epistemically well-positioned we are. We have seen hints in the above proposals that this is the case: DeRose claims that one’s assertion is

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5 For an extensive treatise on the epistemic conditions that determine moral culpability, see Sher (2009). The other component of moral culpability is often taken to be that the act was performed “freely”, or as a function of the agent’s “agency”. See, however, Arpaly (2003) for a dissenting view.
secondarily appropriate when one “reasonably thought” that she knew it; Stanley and Hawthorne claimed that one’s assertion is excusable when one had “every good reason” to think they knew it, etc. Thus it seems that when we are being asked what we should do as epistemic agents, in those cases in which a potential action would be primarily inappropriate but secondarily appropriate, we would be epistemically well-positioned in one way, but not another. Since when we ask what we should do as epistemic subjects we are asking what we are most epistemically well-positioned to do, we would thus seem committed to giving conjunctive advice.

However, even though there seems to be a difference between the way that moral blameworthiness relates to norms of right action and epistemic blameworthiness relates to norms of proper ϕ’ing, we are still not committed to giving conjunctive advice in the epistemic case. This is because when we are asked about what we should do when it comes to assertions and instances of practical reasoning, we are being asked not about our overall epistemic standing, but our standing towards a particular proposition – namely, that proposition that we are asserting or treating as a reason for acting. Consider an epistemic analogue for the moral advice case above, a case in which we know that someone has a justified but false belief that \( p \), and in which they do not realize that their belief is false. When they ask what they should assert, we will certainly not give the advice that Kvanvig thinks we are forced to, namely that one should, in one sense, not assert that \( p \), but that in another sense they should (rather, we will no doubt say that the subject should not assert the proposition). We may find it understandable why they do not realize that this is the case, but this is no reason to change the advice that we give. But we can accept all of this and still accept ES. This is because when someone asks for advice about what to assert, they are asking whether they are epistemically well-positioned enough towards the proposition that they are asserting, not whether they are epistemically well-positioned towards the fact of their
adherence to or violation of the norm of assertion. To give advice concerning the latter, or to
give advice concerning both the former and the latter is to misunderstand how to properly give
advice in that situation. Thus one’s epistemic position towards \( p \) can be insufficient for proper
assertion, whereas one’s epistemic position towards “I know that \( p \)” can be sufficient for non-
criticisability. We can, and do, give advice that pertains to the former and not the latter. ES thus
does not require us to give conjunctive advice.

1.4 The Necessity of Epistemic Separability

In the previous two sections I argued that there is conceptual room for epistemic
separability, and it does not face any specific problem when it comes to giving advice about what
to do. The last criticism that I will consider is one of parsimony: it certainly seems that epistemic
separability is more complicated than epistemic monism as a way of evaluating instances of
improper assertion and practical reasoning. Christopher Hill and Joshua Schechter (2007), for
example, argue that simplicity should be a component in determining whether we should admit
of a kind of secondary epistemic propriety:

A practice that involves a rule linking assertion to knowledge but allows minor violations
of the rule is more complex than a practice that is based on a less demanding rule…In a
practice of the former sort there will have to be a convention allowing excuses together
with one or more rules specifying the gravity of various forms of infraction. Moreover,
each participant in such a practice will have to keep track of the various psychological
and epistemic factors that determine whether particular infractions should be excused.

(110)

Douven (2006) argues in the same vein:
A first remark is that it seems simpler, and thus methodologically preferable, to explain our intuitions about false but reasonable assertions without having to appeal to an extra story about how one can breach rules blamelessly, or about there being two senses of proper assertability. (478)

Simplicity is in general something that we want. And it does seem that accepting epistemic monism results in simpler evaluations of appropriate assertions and actions. As we saw earlier, accepting epistemic monism requires us to come up with new norms of assertion and practical reasoning to replace the knowledge norms. Unfortunately, once we actually undertake this project, we see that epistemic separability is unavoidable. This is because, for any epistemic condition that one posits as constitutive of the norm of assertion or practical reasoning, we will be able to construct counterexamples analogous to those presented for the knowledge norms, namely situations in which one has good reason to think that one is in a given epistemic position when one fails to be. The purpose of this last section is to argue that since any other epistemically constituted norm of assertion or practical reasoning will require us to accept epistemic separability, considerations of parsimony become irrelevant: there is no plausible epistemically monistic norm of assertion or practical reasoning that can entirely account for intuitive judgments of epistemic propriety.

As we saw above, one of the ways that we can accommodate the intuitive judgments that someone who asserts justified but false beliefs or Gettiered beliefs does so in an epistemically appropriate way is to replace the knowledge norm with some other norm of assertion. One such proposal has been a truth norm, which states that it is appropriate to assert that \( p \) just in case \( p \) is true (see, for example, Weiner (2005)). Proponents of a truth norm, however, are going to need to appeal to epistemic separability, as well, to explain judgments that assertions of justified but
false beliefs that are nevertheless appropriate (consider, for example, our case of Justified Julian). So this kind of norm is not an epistemically monistic norm. Other proposals take the form of a *justification* norm, i.e. that it is appropriate for one to assert a proposition only if one is justified in believing it. Impetus for proposing a justification norm is often as a response to the knowledge norm’s perceived inability to accommodate the JFB and Gettiered cases without needing to appeal to any notion of secondary epistemic propriety. After all, if justification is the necessary epistemic condition for appropriate assertion or action, then since the subjects in both the JFB and Gettiered cases are justified in believing the propositions they assert or treat as a reason for acting, we are able to account for the intuitive judgments that their assertions or actions are epistemically appropriate without appeal to ES. Since the justification norm does not need to appeal to any other dimension of propriety in order to explain the judgments of the above cases, some version of it has become the go-to replacement for the knowledge norm for those who argue against it (I will outline several such proposed replacements below).

I will argue that the apparent success of the justification norm is short-lived once we look at an even wider range of cases. Of course, “justification” is a nebulous concept, so we would need to look at many different possible interpretations of what it means to be justified in believing a proposition in order to rule them all out as capable of serving as a replacement for the knowledge norm that does not need to appeal to ES. Such a task would be tedious; instead, for the remainder of the chapter here I will look at a representative sample of such theories, and argue that none of them are capable of serving the aforementioned role required of them. The argument goes as follows: just as the JFB and Gettiered cases required us to either abandon the knowledge norms or accept ES, we can generate analogous problem cases for many other popular alternative norms that have been proposed in its stead, and thus will similarly be faced
with the option of abandoning it or appealing to ES. No matter what, then, if we are interested in our norms being coherent with intuitive judgments of propriety, then we are forced to accept ES.

I’ll consider a couple of toy examples first, before looking at some of the more popular proposals that have recently been put forth as variations on a justification norm. Consider, first, a norm that states that one’s assertion that \( p \) is appropriate just in case one is justified in believing that \( p \), where one is justified in believing \( p \) just in case one’s belief was formed via a *reliable process* (call this a “basic reliabilist” view of justification). According to such a conception of justification, I might be justified in believing a proposition while also having a lot of misleading evidence that \( p \) is false, or at least no particular evidence that \( p \) is true (consider something like Keith Lehrer’s “Truetemp” case (see Lehrer, 1990)). In this case, although I have a justified belief that \( p \), it still seems that there is something inappropriate about either asserting that \( p \) or incorporating \( p \) into my practical reasoning. Reliabilist justification cannot accommodate a wide range of intuitively apt judgments of inappropriate asserting or practical reasoning.

We have two options before us: reject the reliabilist justification norm in lieu of some other justification norm, or attempt to explain the impropriety of our action by appeal to some other dimension of epistemic evaluation. We might say, for example, that the impropriety of my action comes from the fact that I am ignoring evidence that I am mistaken (even if it turns out to be misleading), or that I have no particular reason to believe my belief is true, etc. Just as in the above defense of the knowledge norm, if we want to maintain the reliabilist justification norm in the face of intuitive judgments we need to adhere to an evaluative structure in which propriety is not determined solely by violating or adhering to a first-order norm. Thus this form of a norm of assertion or practical reasoning requires accepting ES.
Since we are currently in the business of finding an iteration of the justification norm that does not require acceptance of epistemic separability, I will reject the reliabilist conception for a different one. Consider instead a notion of justification wherein being justified requires that one have a degree of belief that is above a certain threshold, e.g. one is justified in believing that $p$ iff one has credence $\alpha$ in $p$, where $\alpha$ is greater than some specified value – call this the “Lockean threshold view” of justification. The problem with this notion of justification is no doubt familiar. Consider a so-called “lottery case” in which one believes that one will lose the lottery, and in which the odds are tremendously in favor of this belief being true. For any reasonably chosen value of $\alpha$ one will be able to generate a lottery case where one has a credence above level $\alpha$ in $p$ but nevertheless can neither appropriately assert that $p$ nor incorporate $p$ into one’s practical reasoning: one is never in a strong enough epistemic position to appropriately assert “I will lose the lottery,” no matter the odds (see Williamson (2000: 251) for an appeal to this data in support of the knowledge norm of assertion). What’s important to take away from the lottery example is that on the Lockean threshold view of justification, there will be instances where one will have a justified belief that $p$ but one will not be intuitively appropriate in asserting or acting upon it. As in the basic reliabilist case, we can accommodate this judgment in one of two ways: reject a Lockean threshold conception of justification as the constitutive epistemic component in norms of assertion and practical reasoning, or explain these conflicting judgments by appealing to an additional sense of epistemic propriety. Once again, since we are in the market for a norm that does not require such an appeal, for the reasons that we rejected the reliabilist justification norm we need to also reject the Lockean threshold justification norm.

Neither a bare-bones reliabilist nor a Lockean threshold view of justification is, I think, popular choices for a norm of assertion or practical reasoning. So let’s consider some other
views. Mikkel Gerken (2011) defends the following variation of a justification norm of practical reasoning:

*Warranted Action (WA):* In the deliberative context DC, S meets the epistemic conditions on rational use of her belief that p as a premise in practical reasoning or of her belief that p as a reason for acting (if and) only if S is warranted in believing that p to a degree that is adequate relative to DC. (530)

According to WA, whether S is warranted in her belief that p is partially dependent upon the nature of S’s deliberative context. (WA differs from a Lockean threshold view in that there will not be cases in which one can meet a justification threshold but not be justified enough to act in that context.)

Like the other justification accounts, however, there will be cases in which one fails to meet the requirements of WA but nevertheless seem to appropriately act on a given proposition. Such cases trade on the fact that one might not necessarily be aware of what one’s deliberative context consists in, and thus one might have good reason to believe that one is adhering to WA when one is, in fact, violating it. For example, Gerken lists the following (non-exhaustive) criteria that determine a deliberative context: available alternative courses of action, availability of further evidence, considerations of urgency, and the practical stakes associated with available actions. It seems that none of these factors are necessarily ones which one will be aware of in one’s practical reasoning (although one certainly could be aware of them in different situations). Furthermore, it seems that there will be instances in which one would not be expected to know what one’s deliberative context is: perhaps there is a lot of available evidence that is outside of one’s ability to acquire, or perhaps it is unclear just how much is at stake in acting in such-and-such a way, etc.
There will therefore be situations in which one has good reason to believe that one has met the criteria for being warranted in believing that \( p \), but in which one is not, in fact, warranted in believing that \( p \). Such situations form the basis of a counterexample for the WA norm, analogous to that which was posed for the knowledge norms:

JFB-WA: I treat \( p \) as a reason for action. I fail to meet the conditions of WA (for whatever reason), although I have good reason to think that I adhere to them. One is likely to judge that in such an instance there my practical reasoning is appropriate.

We can generate specific examples based on the above general problem case. For example, let us say that I take myself to have available to me two possible courses of action, and I have good reason to think that following one of them will help me achieve my goals. My deliberative context, however, is such that there is a third course of action of which I am unaware. Furthermore, my unawareness is not due to my consciously ignoring evidence or by exercising a bad method of reasoning, but rather because I simply have no reason to think that I have not exhausted the potential courses of action before me. In such a case, WA dictates that I fail to meet the epistemic requirement as spelled out by WA, and thus that my action is inappropriate. I thus have a justified but false belief that I have adhered to the norm governing my treating something as a reason for acting. Since cases of justified false beliefs were ones for which we thought that one could nevertheless act appropriately when evaluating the plausibility of the knowledge norm, we should have the same judgments in the JFB-WA case. We again need to appeal to epistemic separability in order to accommodate the full range of intuitive judgments that we have of actions that violate the WA norm.
Consider a different candidate norm, this time for assertion, which attempts to accommodate the JFB and Gettiered cases without appeal to epistemic monism: Jennifer Lackey’s “Reasonable To Believe Norm of Assertion”:

(RTBNA) One should assert p only if (i) it is reasonable for one to believe that p, and (ii) if one asserted that p, one would assert that p at least in part because it is reasonable for one to believe that p (608).

What does it mean for it to be reasonable for one to believe that p? Here is what Lackey takes to be a “plausible answer”: “it is reasonable for S to believe that p only if S has epistemic support that is adequate for S’s justifiably believing that p were S to believe that p on that basis” (611)

Thus while S might not actually be justified in believing that p, S can properly assert p if S has the same strength of epistemic position towards p required for justified belief. The RTBNA, however, faces the same problems that the above views faced: I might not necessarily be aware that I am failing to meet the conditions of the RTBNA, and my lack of awareness may be due to factors that I would not normally be expected to take into consideration. In other words, I might have a justified but false belief that I am adhering to the RTBNA, and, in such instances, it seems that I am not liable to be criticized for making an assertion under the circumstances. Thus we can generate a general problem case for the RTBNA:

JFB-RTBNA: I assert that p. I do not meet the conditions of the RTBNA (for whatever reason), although I have good reason to think that I do meet those conditions. One is likely to judge that in such an instance there is something appropriate about my assertion.
Again, I might have good reason to suspect that my epistemic support for $p$ is stronger than it actually is. In such cases, the RTBNA alone is unable to explain what is intuitively appropriate about my assertion that $p$.

Ram Neta (2009) proposed the following norm of practical reasoning:

JBK-Reasons: Where S's choice is $p$-dependent, it is rationally permissible for S to treat the proposition that $p$ as a reason for acting if and only if S justifiably believes that she knows that $p$. (686)

Neta claims that JBK-Reasons is superior to a knowledge account of action because it can account for our judgments of the JFB and Gettiered cases. The motivation for JBK-Reasons is again to explain a wide range of intuitive judgments of instances of practical reasoning without needing to appeal to epistemic separability.

Neta does not specify exactly what it means for one to justifiably believe that one knows a proposition. If Neta is requiring that one forms a belief that one knows a proposition in order to appropriately act on it, then this seems too demanding; indeed, it seems that we rarely form such beliefs when acting or asserting. If, on the other hand, Neta is requiring that one merely be propositionally justified in believing that “I know that $p$” (i.e. one is propositionally justified in believing that $p$ just in case one is in a position such that were one to form the belief that $p$ then it would be a justified belief), then we face the same problem as the norms above, namely that we can have good reason to think that we are meeting the requirements of JBK-Reasons while

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6 A choice situation is “$p$-dependent” just in case one’s preferred choice given $p$ differs from one’s preferred choice given $\neg p$. The $p$-dependency condition is included to make sure that only the propriety of acting on propositions that are relevant given one’s situation are under the jurisdiction of the JBK-Reasons norm (see also Fantl and McGrath, 2002; Stanley and Hawthorne, 2008).
actually failing to do so. Once again, JBK-Reasons faces a JFB case of its own: one might have good reason to think that one is adhering to JBK-Reasons while violating it, and such cases require that we explain judgments of propriety that cannot be accounted for by JBK-Reasons alone.

The final proposal I will consider comes from Douven (2006), who proposes what he calls the “rational credibility account” of assertion: “One should assert only what is rationally credible to one” (449). Douven is explicit that he is not in the business of providing a comprehensive theory of rational credibility. Instead, for his purposes a general sketch of rational credibility needs only to fulfil the following conditions: that a theory of rational credibility coheres with our pretheoretic intuitions about what we are rationally credible in believing (457), that what is rationally credible to us is “closed under logical consequence” (458), and that beliefs in lottery propositions such as “this ticket will lose” are not rationally credible (459). Douven takes his rational credibility account to be simpler than the knowledge norm of assertion because it does not need to appeal to any notion of “excuses” for norm violation, nor any conception of secondary propriety in order to explain judgments of appropriate and inappropriate assertions. Douven, then, is in the business of finding a norm of assertion that does not need to appeal to epistemic separability.

Douven, like many of the other authors we have considered so far, is concerned primarily with accounting for the data that is problematic for the knowledge accounts: the JFB and Gettiered cases. And, like many of the other proposals we have seen so far, it does seem that the rational credibility account delivers the correct judgments in these cases. However, the problem with the rational credibility account follows the same pattern as the problems for the previous accounts: there are plausibly instances in which one could have good reason to believe that one
has adhered to the conditions of the rational credibility account while failing to, since one might have good reason to believe that something is rationally credible to one when, in fact, it fails to be. Why, though, should we think that we can be mistaken about what is rationally credible for us? First, note that nothing in Douven’s restrictions on rational credibility entails that we cannot be mistaken about what is rationally credible for us: the factors that make something rationally credible might be ones that we can be mistaken about having. Second, we might think that a plausible notion of rational credibility is, in fact, one that entails that I can have mistaken beliefs about what is rationally credible to me. For example, Douven places the restriction on rational credibility that lottery beliefs are not rationally credible. However, it would certainly not be odd for someone to think that the proposition “my lottery ticket will lose” is, in fact, rationally credible. Once again, by accepting Douven’s proposal we cannot fully accommodate judgments of intuitive judgments of epistemic propriety while adhering to epistemic monism.

Again, the proposals of Gerken, Lackey, Neta, and Douven comprise only a few of the many conceptions of a norm of action or assertion out there. However, each of them suffers from the same general problem, namely that we can be justified in believing that we have adhered to the norms when we actually have not. In such cases, we are faced with the intuitive judgment that assertions we make or actions we perform on the basis of our epistemic relationship with the relevant propositions are epistemically appropriate. In such instances, then, the defender of the relevant norm should appeal to a different kind of epistemic evaluation, one that pertains not to whether one has adhered to or violated the given norm, but to a notion that pertains to the way in which one has done so. This is just the epistemic separability view.
1.5 The Epistemological and the Metaepistemological

Epistemic separability is what I have called a metaepistemological thesis: it is a claim about the way that we are evaluated when our actions are under the jurisdiction of epistemic norms. Accepting the metaepistemological thesis, however, has epistemological consequences. When applied to the debate surrounding the norms of assertion and practical reasoning, the most salient consequence is that judgments of propriety or impropriety are not necessarily indicative of adherences to or violations of the norm (and thereby an indication that one is not sufficiently epistemically well-positioned towards the relevant proposition), but are potentially indicative of how epistemically well-positioned we are towards the conditions of the norm themselves. As I have argued above, accepting epistemic separability does not crowd the conceptual space, does not require us to give bad advice, and cannot be avoided by positing epistemically constituted norms that, on first glance, appear to accommodate cases that are problematic for the knowledge norms.

I have argued that prominent norms for assertion and practical reasoning do not avoid the need to appeal to some notion of secondary epistemic propriety. I have not, however, surveyed every possible epistemic condition that could warrant these acts. In the next chapter I will argue that any such condition will either result in norms that will need to appeal to secondary epistemic propriety, or else are unable to warrant proper assertion or practical reasoning.
Chapter 2: Three Arguments Against Epistemic Monism

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I argue that recent work from philosophy and psychology gives us reason to think that the kind of access that we have to the contents of our own mind is fallible. As a result, for any epistemic condition that is posited as constitutive for a norm of assertion and practical reasoning, we can be mistaken about whether we meet it. Furthermore, situations in which we have good reason to think that we meet a norm’s epistemic condition when we fail to are those in which we will need to appeal to a notion of secondary propriety to fully explain our judgments.

2.1 Conceptions of Secondary Epistemic Propriety

Proponents of epistemic separability argue that when we perform an act that is governed by a norm that makes epistemic demands of us, we can be evaluated in two ways: one in terms of whether we have met the epistemic requirements of said norm (the dimension of “primary epistemic propriety”, or “permissibility”), and one in terms of the way that we have gone about meeting or failing to meet those requirements (the dimension of “secondary epistemic propriety”). While there has been extensive debate concerning the conditions for permissible action and assertion, very little has been done to try to spell out, exactly, what it means for an action or assertion to be secondarily epistemically appropriate. I will first look at two proposals: one that states that one’s φ-ing p is secondarily epistemically appropriate if one reasonably believes that one has met the epistemic requirements of the norm of φ-ing, and one that states that one’s φ-ing p is secondarily appropriate if it is reasonable for one to believe that one has met
the epistemic requirements of the norm of φ-ing. Some have argued that this conception of epistemic propriety does not make sense when we conceive of assertion or action as being warranted by epistemic conditions that we cannot be mistaken about being in. However, I argue here that there are plausibly no such conditions that we cannot be mistaken about meeting, and that even if there were any condition that does fulfil this requirement it will be too weak to warrant action or assertion. I start by looking at our two proposals for secondary epistemic propriety:

*Reasonably Believes*

Recall how Keith DeRose spells out secondary propriety:

The knowledge account of assertion would lead us to expect that though [speakers that assert propositions that they are justified in believing but are nevertheless false] are breaking the rule for assertion, their assertions are warranted in a secondary way, since they reasonably take themselves to know what they assert. (2002: 199)

Based on this very short passage, we might take DeRose to be adverting to the following view:

**Secondary Propriety as Reasonably Believing (RB):** S is secondarily appropriate in φ-ing p just in case S reasonably believes that S knows that p.

(RB) faces some immediate problems. First, it is not clear whether DeRose intends the phrase “reasonably take themselves to know” to mean that the φ-ing subject *occurently* believes that they know what they are asserting, or that they merely possess the belief that they know what they are asserting, perhaps non-occurently. (RB) is, however, implausible on both readings. When I assert a proposition, for example, it is unlikely that I have gone through the process of
forming a belief that I know what it is that I’m asserting. Everyday experience tells me that I
certainly do not occurently form such beliefs – I do not, before I assert, think “this is something
that I know.” It is also implausible to think that I form these beliefs non-occurently whenever I
make any assertion – after all, I make a lot of assertions, and this would require the possession of
a lot of non-occurent beliefs. (RB) also does not capture our judgments about our intuitively
secondarily-appropriate subjects: it simply does not seem necessary to ascribe to a subject any
particular beliefs about whether they believe that they know the proposition they are asserting in
order to find them secondarily appropriate in doing so. Let’s look at an alternative:

**Being Reasonable**

Consider instead Timothy Williamson’s view of second-order propriety:

The [knowledge] rule makes knowledge the condition for permissible assertion, not for
reasonable assertion. One may reasonably do something impermissible because one
reasonably but falsely believes it to be permissible. In particular, one may reasonably
assert $p$, even though one does not know $p$, because it is very probable on one’s evidence
that one knows that $p$. (Williamson, 2000: 256)

Williamson does not speak in terms of primary and secondary propriety, but rather in terms of
permissible and reasonable assertion. Is there an important difference between speaking in terms
of “primary and secondary propriety” instead of “permissibility and reasonableness”? I don’t
think so. Both DeRose and Williamson are looking for the conditions that allow us to evaluate
violations of the knowledge norms as still, in some sense, epistemically appropriate. We can see
Williamson as endorsing the following view:
Secondary Propriety as Being Reasonable (BR): S is secondarily appropriate in φ-ing p just in case it is reasonable for S to believe that S knows that p (where it is reasonable for S to believe that S knows that p just in case it is highly probable on S’s evidence that S knows that p).

(BR) differs from (RB) in that the former does not require that one actually hold the belief – occurrently or non-occurrently – that one knows the proposition one is asserting. (BR) also seems to capture our judgments about those cases in which one asserts a justified false belief or is Gettiered (in these cases it seems that it will be highly probable on one’s evidence that one knows the relevant proposition, despite failing to know it).

Williamson’s position has, however, received criticism. Here I will consider two such objections. The first challenges the project of separating the conditions of reasonableness from permissibility, and the second challenges Williamson’s view specifically concerning a notion of secondary propriety. I’ll address these concerns in turn.

2.2 First Objection: “If I am φ-ing reasonably, in what sense do I need to be excused?”

Igor Douven (2006) conceives of the project of determining secondary epistemic propriety as those conditions that can “excuse” us from violating the relevant norm. His complaint against Williamson’s conception of reasonableness, however, is that if I do enough epistemic work to be considered to be φ-ing reasonably, in what sense do I need to be found to be excused from anything at all? The notion of an “excuse” seems to imply that there was something that I should have done that I did not, but in many of the problem cases for the knowledge norm (cases of justified false beliefs when one has very strong justification, and some
kinds of Gettier cases, for example) it does not seem that I require an “excuse” for anything.

Here’s his objection in full:

On Williamson’s explanation, a person who asserts $\phi$ without knowing $\phi$ may have a very good epistemic excuse for doing so; if she has, that makes her assertion a reasonable one. However, someone who has meticulously investigated an issue and who subsequently, on the basis of what seems to be excellent evidence, reports about the issue what, to the best of her knowledge, are nothing but truths appears not to have done anything for which she would need an excuse—even if what, to the best of her knowledge, is true is in fact false. That is to say, intuitively her assertion is reasonable not because she has a good excuse for making it; it is reasonable because she has done nothing for which she needs to be excused. (480)

We don’t have this problem when it comes to, for example, moral excuses. I might perform a morally impermissible act, but the conditions under which I do so might be such that I had excellent reason to think that what I was doing wasn’t morally impermissible at all. My strong epistemic position is capable of exonerating me from my moral transgression (all else being equal). But when we try to make the analogy to cases of epistemic impropriety, it appears to break down: if I have done everything that is expected of me epistemically, then why do I need an epistemic excuse?

Consider, for instance, a situation in which you are investigating the truth of a proposition in a fake-barn scenario. In this situation you have inadvertently entered barn façade country, which boasts the largest number of convincing barn facsimiles in the world. You happen to be looking at the one real barn in barn façade country when you form the belief that “there is a barn.” You have done everything you would normally be expected to do in regards to
investigating the truth of “there is a barn,” and you assert the proposition. However, due to the preponderance of fake barns in the immediate vicinity, you do not know that “there is a barn.”\textsuperscript{7}

You have violated the knowledge norm of assertion, but it is reasonable for you to believe that you know the proposition you are asserting. But you have put all your epistemic efforts into investigating whether $p$ is true, and it seems that you did the best that you, or anyone else in your position, could have done. So what do you need to be excused from?

Simply doing the best one can, however, does not automatically preclude the need for an excuse. Consider again the moral case: I might do everything I was expected to do epistemically in regards to figuring out whether it was morally permissible to perform some action, and yet here I am, doing something morally impermissible regardless. Just because I did everything that was expected of me does not preclude the need for \textit{moral} excuses. Similarly, the simple fact that I did everything that might be reasonably expected of me when it comes to figuring out whether $p$ does not necessarily preclude the need for an epistemic excuse.

While it does not seem strange that one’s epistemic position is capable of excusing one’s moral transgression, it might sound strange to say that one’s epistemic position can excuse one of one’s epistemic transgressions. I think we can make better sense of this idea by noting the difference between what I will call \textit{proposition-based} and \textit{access-based} excuses:

\textbf{Proposition-Based Excuses:} I can have good reason to think that I know that $p$, despite failing to know that $p$, because I have good reason to think that $p$.

\textsuperscript{7} It might not be the simple fact that there are fake barns in the vicinity that prevents you from knowing; perhaps your belief is not \textit{safe} in the right kind of way. Whatever it is that prevents one from having knowledge in a fake barn scenario, let us assume that it applies here.
Access-Based Excuses: I can have good reason to think that I know that $p$, despite failing to know that $p$, because I do not have the right kind of access to my reasons for believing that $p$.

Proposition-based excuses are, I think the most commonly discussed in the literature surrounding secondary propriety: one is deemed secondarily appropriate because it was reasonable for one to believe that one knew that $p$, and it is reasonable for one to believe that one knew that $p$ just because of one’s epistemic relationship towards $p$. Proposition-based excuses are also the most common target of those who argue against a conception of secondary epistemic propriety. Douven’s criticism is of this kind: it is difficult to see why I would need a proposition-based excuse for failing to know that $p$, Douven argues, if I did everything I could when it came to figuring out whether $p$.

However, as I show below, recent work in philosophy and psychology suggests that we can be mistaken about the nature of our epistemic relationship not just because we are somehow mistaken about $p$, but because the kind of access we have to our beliefs and our reasons for believing is fallible. As a result, we might have good reason to think that we are meeting the epistemic conditions of a certain norm while failing to, not because of our relationship towards the proposition we are employing in action, but rather because of our relationship towards our belief in or reasons to believe in that proposition. For example, I might not believe that $p$. However, because of the circumstances, I might have good reason to think that I do, in fact, believe that $p$, and act accordingly. This failure of access to my doxastic states might then excuse me of my transgression. On the other hand, failure of access to my epistemic states or my reasons can also make a permissible act a secondarily inappropriate one. An act might be secondarily inappropriate when, despite meeting the conditions of the relevant norm, we
nevertheless fail to have good reason to think that we have met these conditions. This again might be due to a failure to recognize our epistemic states or the reasons we have for believing that proposition. For example, if I know that $p$, but because of whatever circumstances I happen to be in, I believe that I do not know that $p$, then when I am doing my epistemic work in formulating an assertion or treating something as a reason for acting I don’t have complete access to my epistemic status that would allow me to assert or act appropriately. I have not failed to recognize something about $p$ itself — I know that $p$, after all — but I have failed to recognize something about my own epistemic status — that I know that $p$. A failure of this kind is an epistemic failure that can influence our judgments of the propriety of actions.

Distinguishing proposition-based from access-based excuses addresses Douven’s criticism in the following way: despite being somehow reasonable in $\phi$-ing $p$, we might still need to be “excused” because that which makes us reasonable or unreasonable in believing that we know that $p$ is potentially independent of that which makes us reasonable or unreasonable in believing that $p$. Distinguishing these kinds of excuses also resolves some of the confusion surrounding the debate as to whether epistemic excuses even make sense. When Douven argues that the idea that needing an excuse for asserting a justified but false belief does not make sense, he is arguing that in this case the idea of a proposition-based excuse does not make sense. Proposition-based excuses are plausible when it comes to knowledge norms. This is because the following is a plausible scenario:

**Proposition-Based Knowledge Failure (PKF):** I think that I know that $p$, but am mistaken: I fail to know that $p$ because while I have good reason to think that $p$, $p$ is, in fact, false.
I might have good reason to think that I know that $p$ because of my strong epistemic relationship with $p$, yet ultimately be mistaken because $p$ happens to be false. In these kinds of cases, argues the knowledge-norm proponent, one’s $\phi$-ing $p$ is impermissible but secondarily appropriate. However, the same kind of situation does not seem to make sense when we consider certain epistemic components for norms of assertion and practical reasoning other than knowledge. Consider, for example:

**Proposition-Based Justification Failure (PJF)**: I think that I am justified in believing that $p$, but am mistaken: I fail to be justified in believing that $p$ because while I have good reason to think that $p$, $p$ is, in fact, false.

PJF is arguably *implausible*: if it is reasonable for me to believe that I am justified in believing that $p$ because of my good reasons for believing that $p$, then it seems that I am also justified in believing that $p$. A justification norm, then, does not require any appeal to proposition-based excuses: if epistemic justification warrants assertion and action, then I cannot have good reason to think that I am adhering to the relevant norm while failing to because of my relationship with the relevant proposition. Hence the impetus for epistemic monism: replace the epistemic condition in the norm of action or assertion with one that does not admit of proposition-based excuses, and you do away with the need for a notion of secondary propriety.

However, the following sorts of situations *are* possible for both the knowledge and justification norms:

**Access-Based Knowledge Failure (AKF)**: I think that I know that $p$, but am mistaken: I am mistaken because while I have good reason to think that my epistemic relationship towards $p$ is one of knowledge, I am, in fact, not in this relationship.
Access-Based Justification Failure (AJF): I think that I am justified in believing that \( p \), but am mistaken: I am mistaken because while I have good reason to think that my epistemic relationship towards \( p \) is one of justification, I am, in fact, not in this relationship.

If we can have good reason to think that our epistemic status is different than it actually is, then this, I argue, can exonerate us of our epistemic transgressions. Before I argue for the plausibility of AKF and AJF I want to show how distinguishing between proposition-based and access-based excuses allows us to defuse another objection.

2.3 Second Objection: “(BR) spells out being reasonable as having ‘excellent evidence’. But having excellent evidence for a proposition does not always mean that you’re reasonable in believing it.”

Williamson wants to spell out being reasonable in terms of having excellent evidence that a given proposition is true. But, Douven argues, there are cases in which I might have excellent evidence for a proposition, evidence which makes it reasonable to assert a proposition, but does not make it very probable that one knows that proposition. His example is one in which, despite having good evidence for \( p \), one decides to “play it safe” and not believe that \( p \). Since one has good evidence for \( p \) but it would not be reasonable for one to believe that one knows that \( p \), we can’t spell out reasonableness solely in terms of the high probability that one has knowledge.

I think that Douven is generally correct that just because one has good evidence for a proposition does not mean that one can necessarily assert that proposition reasonably. For instance, one we might have excellent evidence for a proposition and yet not believe it on the basis of that evidence. One would then assert that \( p \), not because of one’s excellent evidence that \( p \), but because of something else. These kinds of cases can arise if one consciously makes the
decision to believe something on the basis of poor evidence (say, one has excellent evidence that
$p$ is true, but one decides to believe that $p$ because of what one’s psychic said), or when one has
good evidence but doesn’t realize that one has such evidence.

Let’s look Douven’s case in more detail. His example revolves around Henry, who is
looking at a very convincing fake barn. Henry also happens to be an epistemologist, who
considers the possibility that he is in fake barn country. Henry realizes that he has excellent
evidence for the proposition “there is a barn”, but also realizes that he might not know the
proposition. So he chooses to remain agnostic about it. As Douven puts it,

Henry decides, reasonably it seems, to remain agnostic about whether he is in [a fake
barn scenario], and accordingly, and also reasonably (at least from his perspective), he
wants to remain agnostic about whether he knows he is facing a barn. (Douven, 2006:
479)

Douven claims that, nevertheless, an assertion by Henry of “there is a barn” is a reasonable one
(479). On his Rational Credibility account, we can explain the reasonableness of this assertion by
appeal to the rational credibility rule (i.e. that one should assert only what is rationally credible to
one). According to the knowledge norm, Douven claims, things get more complicated:

Since Henry does not know he is seeing a barn, the assertion in any case is not warranted.
And on what grounds could an advocate of the [(BR)] account claim the assertion to be
reasonable nonetheless, as it is not very probable to Henry, nor does he reasonably
believe, that he knows he is seeing a barn? (Douven, 2006: 479-80)

Douven’s claim is that Henry’s evidence makes it reasonable for him to assert “there is a barn”,
but not reasonable for him to believe that he knows it. Williamson’s idea that reasonableness
consists in having good evidence that one knows a proposition cannot capture our intuitions about Henry: after all, it is not probable for Henry, Douven thinks, that he knows that “there is a barn”, since he recognizes that he might be Gettiered and decides to remain agnostic about whether he knows the proposition.

It’s not obvious that we would find Henry’s assertion of “there is a barn” in this case to be appropriate. If we do think that there is something appropriate about said assertion, however, the knowledge-norm proponent seemingly cannot account for that propriety with the tools we have given her so far: Henry does not know that “there is a barn”, and it is not reasonable for Henry to believe that he knows that “there is a barn,” on any construal of “reasonableness.” So where should we locate the propriety? Douven wants to locate it at the first-order: since Henry is warranted in believing that “there is a barn” his assertion is therefore appropriate. We might reply on behalf of Williamson in the following way: Henry is simply mistaken about what his evidence warrants him to believe, and that, regardless of his agnosticism, it would still be reasonable (although not permissible) for Henry to assert that “there is a barn” because his evidence makes it probable that he knows that “there is a barn.” There is perhaps a confusion here between what one’s evidence makes probable, and what one takes one’s evidence to make probable. This is exemplified in the way that Douven portrays the problem for Williamson, namely when he says that “it is not very probable to Henry.” It may not be very probable to Henry that he knows that he is looking at a barn, since he has consciously decided to remain agnostic about whether he is, in fact, looking at a barn. But Williamson can accept this, since it might still be the case that Henry’s evidence makes it probable that he knows that he is looking at a barn, even though he might not recognize what his evidence entails: Williamson’s formulation of reasonableness is in terms of what evidence on has, not what one takes one’s
evidence to be. If we want to say that Henry’s assertion is in some ways epistemically appropriate, then, Williamson’s account has the resources to do so.

However, Henry’s case does not seem to me to be so cut-and-dry; indeed, Douven’s interpretation of Henry might cause problems for the rational credibility view itself. After all, even if we agree with Douven that there is something appropriate about Henry’s assertion, there certainly seems to be something inappropriate about it, as well. Henry has consciously decided to remain agnostic about whether he knows that “there is a barn”, yet he asserts that “there is a barn” regardless. Something seems wrong with that assertion: it is odd that one would actively consider the possibility that one is in a fake barn scenario and yet assert that “there is a barn” regardless, presumably since the consideration that one is in a fake barn scenario means that one has not ruled out that one is actually looking at a fake barn instead of a real one. Of course, if Henry had confirmed that he is, in fact, looking at a real barn, then the mere existence of fake barns in the vicinity will not prevent him from knowing, in which case he does not violate the knowledge norm of assertion at all. We might be able to explain what’s gone wrong in Douven’s initial case by saying that while Henry is, in fact, justified in believing that “there is a barn”, he does not have good reason to think that he is so justified (because he has decided to remain agnostic about the nature of his epistemic status). This would require appealing to the notion secondary propriety for his rational credibility rule, however, a move that he wants to avoid.

I’ve argued that proposition-based secondary propriety does not seem like it is possible when it comes to the justification norms, nor, perhaps, Douven’s rational credibility norm. In order to be excused from a justification norm, then, we need to argue that one can have good reason to think that one’s justificatory status towards a proposition is different than it actually is. One might argue that this is implausible: on certain kinds of internalist understandings of
justification in particular we might think that it is not conceptually possible that one could have a
good epistemic relationship towards “I am justified in believing that p” without thereby having a
good epistemic relationship towards p, or vice versa. There would never be a situation, then, in
which one could have good reason to think that one is justified when one fails to be, or in which
one is justified but fails to have good reason to think that one is, in fact, justified. In the
remainder of the chapter I will argue that this situation is indeed possible: since we can fail to
have access to our own internal mental states, we can fail to recognize that we are justified in
even an internalist sense. As a result, for any condition that we choose to posit as warranting
appropriate assertion or practical reasoning, we can be mistaken about whether we are in it.

I will appeal to three different arguments in support of this view: the first comes from
Timothy Williamson, who argues that we can have knowledge or a justified belief in a
proposition and yet it still be highly probable on our evidence that we do not have that
knowledge or are not justified in believing that proposition; the second is an empirical argument
from Peter Carruthers, who argues that experimental results from confabulation and dissonance
experiments suggest that we can sincerely express that we have beliefs that we do not, in fact,
have; and the third concerns arguments from the rationality of acting on the basis of reasons that
we do not consciously recognize that we have. I will look at each of these arguments in turn.

2.4 Williamson’s Argument

In the following I offer an argument from Williamson (2010) that it can be highly
probable on one’s evidence that one knows or justifiably believes that something is the case
while one does not, in fact, have that knowledge or justification, or that it can be very improbable
on one’s evidence that one knows or justifiably believe that something is the case when one
does, in fact, have that knowledge or justification. If we accept Williamson’s argument, then the
proponent of a justification norm of assertion or practical reasoning will have trouble explaining those instances in which one asserts on the basis of something one is not justified in believing, but is very probable that one is justified in believing. As we will see below, however, Williamson’s argument is not fatal to every possible interpretation of a justification norm; we will have to look to other arguments to handle those additional cases.

In *Very Improbable Knowing* Williamson argues that we can have knowledge that *p* and it be very improbable on our evidence that we know that *p*, or have justification that *p* but it be very improbable on our evidence that we are justified in believing that *p*. He asks us to imagine an “irritatingly austere clock” which consists solely in a blank face and an hour hand. We are looking at the clock from across a reasonably sized room with reasonable lighting conditions using reasonably good eyesight, and are trying to determine what time it is. We now consider a model <*W*, *R*>, consisting of a set of possible worlds *W*, the members of which correspond to a possible position on the clock face, and some epistemic relation *R*. While we are reasonably good at telling the difference between one position on the clock and another, our powers of discrimination are only reasonably good, not perfect. Therefore there is a margin of error, call it *h*, which corresponds to the distance between two points on the clock face that we can discriminate (22). We say that a world *y* (i.e. a possible position on the clock face) is *accessible* from another world *x* just in case that when we are in *x* for all we know we could be in *y* (17). The set of all worlds that are accessible from any given world are thus those that fall on either side of the given world up to *h* steps away. The set *R(w)* is the set of all possible worlds accessible from *w*.

Williamson notes a few more things about the model. The constant *h* is plausibly not 0, otherwise our powers of discrimination would be perfect: we would always be able to tell that
we’re in one world as opposed to a very close-by different world (in other words, we’d have to be infallible austere-clock readers). Also, $h$ is plausibly not so large that every possible world is accessible from every other one, otherwise our powers of discrimination would be so bad that we wouldn’t be able to tell any position of the hand from any other (and thus would not be able to learn anything from reading the clock). Thus $R(w)$ is a set that has $2h + 1$ members, i.e. all of the members that are up to and including $h$ units away from $w$ on both sides, including $w$ itself (since $R$ is plausibly reflexive: when we are in $w$, for all we know we are in $w$), where $|W|$ is considerably larger than $|R(w)|$, and $|R(w)|>1$ (16).

Because of the austerity of the clock, there are a lot of possible positions that the hour hand can be in, which correspond to a lot of possible worlds in $W$. Say now we divide the clock face into sixty units, each corresponding to a minute, and stipulate that our power of discrimination, $h$, is 5 units. So $R(w)$ corresponds to the set of positions on the clock face that are within 5 minutes on either side of $w$. The proposition $R(w)$ might then be something like “The time is between 3:55 and 4:05” (16). Let’s say that I know $R(w)$. Now, it’s only possible that I know $R(w)$ at $w$. This is because at some world $x$ that is not $w$ (say, one of the members of $R(w)$) $R(x)$ corresponds to a set of worlds that has as members $x$ and all the worlds that corresponds to all of the positions on the clock face that are $h$ units away from $x$. For example, let’s continue assuming that our $h$ is 5 minutes. Thus I can only know that “the time is between 3:55 and 4:05” at 4:00; if it were 4:02, say, I could only know that “the time is between 3:57 and 4:07.”

The catch is that because our set $R(w)$ consists of worlds that are, for all we know, the same as $w$, when we are in $w$ the evidential probability that we’re in $w$ is $1/(2h+1)$. As Williamson notes, this number can be as low as we like, depending on how high we take our $h$ to be. We can make $h$ high in two ways: one, by positing worse and worse powers of discrimination
on our part (thus increasing the number of worlds that are, for all we know, indistinguishable from the one we are in), or by increasing the amount of possible positions there are on the clock face (i.e. we could conceive of the “units” of the clock face to be seconds rather than minutes, and thus our $h$ value would be 300 units instead of 5; because our clock is irritatingly austere, this latter value can be as high as we like). The upshot is that while we might know $R(w)$, if we set our $h$ such that the evidential probability of $KR(w)$ is low, we certainly cannot know $KR(w)$.

This result formalizes one of the problems for the knowledge norm: Williamson’s model shows that we can adhere to the knowledge norms without knowing that we’ve adhered to the knowledge norms because we can know without knowing that we know. Furthermore, since we can set the parameters of our model such that the value of $Pr(KR(w))$ is very low, it can be highly probable that we don’t know that $KR(w)$. In chapter 4 I will argue that in cases in which one fulfils the epistemic requirements of a norm of assertion or practical reasoning but nevertheless has good reason to think that one has not fulfilled it are cases in which one is intuitively doing something inappropriate if one acts on the relevant proposition, despite adhering to the relevant norm. What Williamson has shown is that these situations are possible for the proponent of a knowledge norm, since it will be possible that one knows $R(w)$, while $Pr(KR(w))$ is very low. I also argued that cases in which one fails to meet the epistemic requirements of a norm of assertion or practical reasoning but nevertheless has good reason to think that one has fulfilled it are cases in which one is intuitively doing something appropriate if one acts on the relevant proposition. Again, since according to Williamson’s model it can both be the case that one knows $R(w)$ while the evidential probability that one knows $R(w)$ is very low, $1-Pr(KR(w))$ will thus be high, and thus so will $Pr(\neg KR(w))$. In this case, if one acts on $\neg KR(w)$, then one is acting on something that one has good reason to think is true, despite it’s being false (since $KR(w)$ is
still true). Thus explaining the intuitive judgment that acting on ~KR(w) is appropriate requires an appeal to a notion of secondary epistemic propriety.

Williamson’s model formalizes the necessity of appealing to secondary epistemic propriety to explain intuitively appropriate violations of a knowledge norm and intuitive inappropriate adheres to a knowledge norm. Of course, one of the main motivations for abandoning a knowledge norm was not having to deal with secondary epistemic propriety in the first place. So much the worse, we might think, for the knowledge norm. As we also saw, the most commonly proposed replacement for a knowledge norm was a justification norm, which attempts to account for our intuitive judgments of propriety without appeal to any other dimension of propriety. However, Williamson argues that we get the same results as above for justification as we do with knowledge, namely that we can be justified in believing that a proposition is true, despite having any possible epistemic probability between 0 and 1 that we are so justified. The argument is almost identical: we again specify a constant that corresponds to our discriminatory capacity and note that while we can be justified in believing the proposition that, say, the time is between a certain range, the probability that we are actually justified in believing that proposition can be made as low as we like. Thus again our situation can be such that we are justified in believing a proposition, but because the probability that we are justified in believing that proposition is very low, we have good reason to believe that we are not actually justified in believing that proposition. Again we require a notion of secondary epistemic propriety to supplement the justification norm to account for intuitive judgments of impropriety despite adherence to it. Parallel to the conclusions drawn in regards to the knowledge norm, we are also required to supplement the justification norm with an excuse manoeuvre in order to explain intuitive judgments of propriety despite violation of it.
The justification norm, then, isn’t going to work as a way of getting around the need for secondary epistemic propriety. But could there be some other condition that does? Note that a need for an appeal to secondary epistemic propriety occurs when it is highly probable that one is in a different state than the one actually is in. To get around the need for an appeal to secondary propriety, then, a new epistemic condition for a norm of assertion or practical reasoning needs to be such that one cannot have high evidential probability that one is in a different state than they are actually in. So there needs to be something about our new condition, call it E, such that ER(w) \rightarrow Pr(ER(w)) > \alpha, for some sufficiently high \alpha. Of course, if this is the case then it is consistent that both \neg ER(w) and Pr(ER(w)) > \alpha, a situation that requires an excuse manoeuvre. Thus the relationship needs to be a biconditional: ER(w) \leftrightarrow Pr(ER(w)) > \alpha.

How might this be possible? There are a number of ways: first, I have perfect discriminatory capacity in regards to E. In this case, I can never be mistaken about whether I ER(w), in which case the evidential probability that I ER(w) will be 1 (and thus higher than any choice of \alpha). We might think that there is a conception of justification that fits this bill, namely a kind of accessibilist justification. According to an accessibilist view of justification what we are justified in believing is a function of internal states that we have access to. On this view, then, it does not seem that we can ever be mistaken about whether we are justified in an accessibilist way.

The plausibility of this kind of justification depends on the possibility that there are internal states that we have perfect access to. Recent work in empirical psychology, however, has suggested that the kind of access that we have to our own mental states is not so straightforward. I will review some of these arguments next.
2.5 The Empirical Argument

In *Opacity of Mind*, Peter Carruthers surveys a number of empirical studies to defend his view that the kind of access we have to our own propositional attitudes is always interpretative (what he calls the “Interpretative Sensory Account” or ISA). I will not defend the details of Carruthers’ theory here; however, the studies he cites gives us good reason to think that the kind of access we have to our own propositional attitudes is at least of a fallible kind. The first phenomenon I will look at is one of confabulation. Confabulation, according to Carruthers, occurs when one attributes to oneself an attitude that one does not actually possess. For example, one experiment by Albarracin and Wyer (2000) found that they could manipulate the expressed attitudes of students concerning the possible implementation of comprehensive exams at their university. Participants took part in what they were told was a measure of their subliminal responses to various issues pertaining to university affairs. Messages were flashed on a computer screen, after which they were asked simply to respond with a “yes” or “no”. Participants were then lead to believe that the computer calculated their attitudes towards a certain issue. Half were then told that the computer had calculated that they were in support of comprehensive exams, and the other half was told that they were opposed to comprehensive exams. When told of the (fabricated) computerized result, subjects were much more likely to report being in agreement with the results of the computer program, regardless of what their initial self-reported views on the issue were before the experiment began. Albarracin and Wyer note that it is a well-received datum that people are much more likely to express attitudes that are consistent with their past beliefs. What their experiment shows, however, is that people are much more likely to express

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8 Carruthers leaves open the possibility that other states we can be in – say, the state of being cold, or the state of being in pain – are ones that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the ISA. For my purposes, this is no concern: since we are looking for the correct epistemic requirements for appropriate action and assertion, these conditions are accounted for by the ISA and the empirical data that Carruthers appeals to in support of it.
attitudes that are consistent with what they are told their beliefs are, even if they never actually held those beliefs.

What should we make of these results? We might think that by the end of the experiment the subject expresses an attitude that they don’t actually have, but are merely led to believe that they have. Thus the subject actually believes, say, that instituting comprehensive exams is a bad idea, despite asserting a proposition that expresses the opposite attitude (this is Carruthers’ preferred interpretation). The candidate norms that we have considered thus far are going to tell us that this assertion is inappropriate: by stipulation, the proposition asserted is false, and the subject does not believe it. Is the subject’s post-experiment assertion appropriate? I don’t have strong intuitions about the case. If we think that there is something appropriate about the subject’s assertion, however, then we need to appeal to an excuse manoeuvre. Indeed, one presents itself naturally in this case: by being told that the subject has a particular opinion on an issue, and because they have no reason to distrust what appears to be a sophisticated program, one has good reason to think that one actually holds that belief. This would be an access-based excuse: one has good reason to believe something about one’s own beliefs that happens to be false.

However, we might now be tempted to make the following move: since the subject has good reason to think that they believe that \( p \), they therefore have good reason to believe that \( p \) itself. Under the current interpretation of the results of the experiment, though, this explanation is not possible: after all, we have stipulated that the subject believes that \( p \) but asserts a proposition that expresses a negative attitude towards \( p \). Thus although we might think that the subject has good reason to think that they believe that \( \neg p \), this second-order attitude does not affect whether it is reasonable for her to hold her first-order attitude.
Why not think, though, that instead of the above results showing that the subject is expressing an attitude that she does not actually have, that by the end of the experiment she actually holds the attitude that is contrary to the one she initially expressed? Perhaps, due to hearing about their computer processed results, the subjects are lead to change their minds, and are therefore expressing an attitude they really do possess (albeit one that has only recently been formed). Interpreting the results of the experiment this way would allow us to make the move that we cannot make under the above interpretation, namely that one’s having good reason to think that one holds an attitude towards a proposition is due to one actually holding that attitude.

This interpretation, however, runs into some serious difficulties, which Carruthers illustrates in another set of experiments. In one such experiment, participants were asked to write an essay supporting a position that they had expressed opposition to during a survey (in one set of experiments subjects were asked to write essays expressing approval for increasing tuition costs, a position which the vast majority of participants disagreed with). There were three conditions under which participants were asked to write the essays. For one set of participants, it was emphasized to them that they had to write the essay as an agreed-upon condition of their participation in the study. In the second set, participants were offered a monetary incentive to write the essays. For the third set of participants, it was emphasized that the participants were writing the essay out of their own free choice (and without compensation). The results were that after writing the essay, participants often expressed much stronger positive attitudes towards the position they were arguing for (and initially disagreed with), but only if it was emphasized to them that they were writing the essay out of their own free choice. Subjects who were in the third group experienced dissonance, an uneasiness about expressing an attitude (via writing essays that expressed contrary opinions) which they didn’t actually hold. To ease this tension, then,
subjects expressed attitudes when questioned afterwards that were more in line with what they wrote about then what they expressed they believed beforehand.

How should we explain these results? There is clearly a metarepresentational difference between the three conditions. In the first two conditions the subjects are made aware that they are writing the essays with a distinct goal in mind, namely to do as one’s told and to receive a monetary reward, respectively. In the last condition, however, there is no such metarepresented goal. As a result, subjects are much more likely to feel tension by freely expressing an attitude with which they disagree, and thus are more likely to act with the goal of reducing this tension. Carruthers expresses the phenomenon as follows: one feels bad for acting in a way that expresses an attitude that they disagree with. To ease these feelings, then, one acts “in such a way as to present the action to oneself as being less bad; so guilt should be attenuated” (360). We can ease our guilty consciences in more than one way. The most oft-tested way shows that people will indicate less disagreement or even agreement with the position they initially disagreed strongly with. Another experiment, however, showed that guilt reduction could be achieved through rating the issue subjects were being questioned about as less important than would be expected given their initial attitudes (see Simon et. al. (1995)). Carruthers concludes that our actions that express an attitude are thus not necessarily indicative of the attitude we actually possess: we are merely acting in a way to reduce guilt, not to express our beliefs. As a result, we judge ourselves to have a belief that we do not actually have.

But why should we think that this is the correct way to interpret these results? Why not think, as was suggested above, that after writing their essays participants express an attitude contrary to the one they started with precisely because they have changed their minds? This kind of explanation would cohere with the fact that only participants in the “free choice” condition
expressed different attitudes: after all, we are not likely to be convinced by arguments that have been formed because their authors were forced to write them, or because they were done solely for the money (even if those authors happen to be ourselves). Thus one might think that there is something of genuine merit to opinions that were expressed under the auspices of being without external influence or motive.

As Carruthers notes, however, it is unclear why an attitude change would occur in this way after writing the essays. Most problematic for a view that posits actual attitude change as a result of dissonance is, I think, another result from Simon et. al. (1995) which shows that when participants were presented with an opportunity to reduce dissonance either by expressing their attitude or by rating the importance of an issue, subjects will take one option but not both. If actual (as opposed to expressed) attitude had changed then it is unclear why a subject would not express a changed attitude after trivializing the importance of the issue. While Simon et. al. focus on trivialization as a method of dissonance reduction, an earlier study by Gotz-Marchand et. al. (1974) shows the same kind of effect by presenting another route to dissonance reduction, namely denigrating the test. Again, the experiment showed that when presented first with the option of denigrating the test and then expressing their attitude, once the test was denigrated subjects no longer expressed a change in attitude. A view that claimed that one’s actual attitude changed as a result of writing counter-attitudinal essays would then have to make the further claim that attitudes were only changed once asked what their opinion on the subject was. But it is implausible to think that there is some mechanism in merely being asked to express one’s opinion that leads to a change in one’s actual beliefs. These results support Carruthers’ explanation that expressed attitude change is indicative of a desire to ameliorate “guilty” feelings for acting in a way that is contrary to one’s actual beliefs, and not as an indication of an actual
change in beliefs. Thus the expressed attitude is confabulatory: we come to have a second-order belief that our first-order beliefs are different than they actually are.

The confabulation results imply that we can have good reason to think that we possess an attitude that we do not have. The consequence is that to explain the propriety of an assertion of a proposition that expresses an attitude that we do not have but have good reason to think we have requires an appeal to a notion of secondary epistemic propriety. In order to circumvent this problem we considered the possibility of confabulation resulting in an actual change to our attitudes, as opposed to just an expressed change. This result was found to be implausible, however, because of the above results from dissonance experiments. What we are left with is the real possibility that we can express an attitude that we have good reason to think that we have, while not actually having it.

2.6 Rationally Acting on Reasons We Don’t Know We Have

Williamson’s improbable knowledge argument and Carruthers’ empirical arguments give us reason to think that the kind of access we have to our own propositional attitudes is not of an infallible variety. Even on an internalist conception of justification, then, there will be instances in which our internal states determines our justificatory status, but since we do not have access to those states, we can be mistaken about what that status is. Would the accessibilist conception of justification not still circumvent this problem? We might think that it does because in those cases in which one does not have access to some of one’s internal states, those states will not contribute to one’s being justified. There will never be a case, then, in which one has good reason to think that one’s justificatory status is different than it actually is.

However, just because a norm that is constituted by a condition that we cannot be mistaken about being in avoids the need for an appeal to secondary propriety, that does not mean
that such a norm is a plausible one. As I argue below, there are intuitively many cases in which one can act at least in some way appropriately on the basis of factors that one does not have access to. I will look at three kinds of cases:

I) One knows that (or has some other epistemic relationship towards) \( p \), but has good evidence that one doesn’t know that (or have some other epistemic relationship towards) \( p \) (and fail to recognize their reasons for \( p \)).

II) One knows that (or has some other epistemic relationship towards) \( p \), recognizes one’s reasons for knowing that (or having some other epistemic relationship towards) \( p \), but second-guesses themselves about \( p \).

III) One knows that (or has some other epistemic relationship towards) \( p \), but simply doesn’t recognize that one knows that (or have some other epistemic relationship towards) \( p \).

There will be cases, I will argue, in which one is in one of the conditions (I)-(III) and in which one should be evaluated as secondarily appropriate despite acting in an impermissible way, or in which one should be evaluated as secondarily inappropriate despite acting in a permissible way. I will look at each kind of case in turn.

I. \( S \) knows that \( p \), doesn’t realize it, and has evidence that she doesn’t know that \( p \)

The first kind of situation that I will examine comes from Timothy Williamson (forthcoming), who presents a case in which Hamlet knows a proposition, but has excellent evidence that he does not know it. When considering what Hamlet should do in such a situation, Williamson analyzes the case as follows:
The flatfooted solution is clear from the conditions of the example: it is rational for Hamlet to do A if and only if he knows p, and he does know p, so it is rational for him to do A. The trouble is that he has strongly misleading evidence about those facts. But that does not mean that they are not facts after all; it just means that he has a good excuse – not justification – for not having done A. Hamlet is in a bad predicament, but why should we expect an epistemological theory to tell us that rational agents cannot get into bad predicaments, or trust it if it does so? (Williamson, forthcoming: 35)

In Williamson’s scenario, Hamlet does not do A, even though it would be rational for him to do so. Williamson claims that Hamlet has an excuse for not performing A because he has excellent (although misleading) evidence that he doesn’t know that p. Hamlet, I claim, has an access-based excuse: he has misleading evidence about whether he has knowledge, and thus has an excuse for failing to reason properly in figuring out what it is rational for him to do.

Williamson claims that because Hamlet knows that p, and because this knowledge entails that he is rational in doing A, then if Hamlet were to have done A, he would have been rational to do so, regardless of the misleading evidence. That might sound strange, as though the rationality of performing A is just a brute consequence of the theory (hence Williamson’s characterization of the consequence as “flat-footed”). However, I think that such situations are not so strange, and not so uncommon, and so shouldn’t be considered troubling. Consider the following cases from Nomy Arpaly (2003), who argues that there are situations in which it is rational to act against one’s “best judgment.” She considers two cases involving two different students: in the first, Sam reasons that in order to best accomplish his goals of being an excellent student, he should become a social hermit. In fact, Sam does not become a social hermit:
In failing to become a hermit, Sam might, unbeknownst to him, be acting for the same reasons he overlooked in his deliberation. His visceral reluctance to abide by his decision, which he perceives as weakness or laziness, was (let us imagine) in fact the result or the embodiment of an awareness, inaccessible at the moment of his deliberation, of all the things that are, given his beliefs and desires, overwhelmingly wrong with becoming a hermit. Far from being the result of fatigue, major depression, or some general lack of self-control—conditions equally likely to prevent him from following through with a good decision as with a bad one—Sam's lack of motivation was a response to the badness of his decision, or rather to the same factors that make his decision bad. (Arpaly, 2003: 48-9)

In Arpaly’s second case, Emily is a PhD student in chemistry, and has convinced herself that she wants to stay in her program, despite really believing that she is not a good fit for it. One day Emily decides to leave the program, doing so on the basis of her belief that she did not recognize that she possessed. Arpaly summarizes the cases of Sam and Emily as follows:

My accounts of Sam and Emily as rational in taking their courses of action assume that one can act for good reasons (where good reasons are thought of in terms of desire satisfaction given one’s beliefs) without knowing that one is acting for good reasons: Sam thinks that he is acting out of sheer laziness, Emily thinks her behavior makes no sense, and still I maintain that they act for good reasons. This assumption is not any more
bizarre than the common view in epistemology that one can know that \( P \) without knowing \( that \ one \ knows \) that \( P \).” (Arpaly, 2003: 50)

It would not be a stretch to say that Sam \( knows \) that being a social hermit would actually be more detrimental than helpful to his becoming a good student, and that Emily \( knows \) that she is not a good fit for her program. According to Arpaly, as long as Sam and Emily act on those propositions that they know, their actions can be rational ones. This is because, although they have not consciously deliberated on the basis of those reasons they didn’t realize they had, Sam and Emily are nevertheless acting on the basis of good reasons that they possess: conscious deliberation, argues Arpaly, is not the only way that one can be rational when acting on the basis of reasons one possesses. We’ve seen a similar point in a different form already: those theories of either primary or secondary epistemic propriety that require that one actually have formed a belief about whether one knows a proposition in order to be considered appropriate in asserting or acting on it are too demanding, since we simply do not seem to form these kinds of beliefs very often in everyday kind of situations. Arpaly’s cases show in more detail how such rationality is possible, and how such rationality might not simply be a “flatfooted” consequence of the knowledge norm of action.

When Sam or Emily act on the basis of what they know, they are adhering to the knowledge norm of action. But neither Sam nor Emily have access to the knowledge they have. Thus while they both adhere to the norm of action, it still seems that they are making a kind of epistemic mistake, not one they have made concerning facts about the propositions they act on,

\[ \text{Arpaly is, in fact, making a much stronger claim than the relatively uncontroversial one that one can know that } p \text{ without knowing that one knows: instead, it must be possible for one to know that } p \text{ while at the same time having excellent reason to think otherwise.} \]
but rather about their own respective epistemic statuses: both Sam and Emily convince themselves that they know something that they don’t. So what should we want to say about Sam and Emily? Perhaps this: that while their actions are epistemically permissible, they are not secondarily epistemically appropriate. This is because while they adhere to the letter of the norm, they do not have good reason to think that they are, in fact, adhering to it. That we should consider them acting in a secondarily inappropriate way is exemplified by the fact that if Sam or Emily had acted in accordance to what they mistakenly took themselves to know – if Sam acted in a way as to become a hermit, or Emily continued in the PhD program – the impermissibility of their actions would not be excused by their failure to recognize their own epistemic status, since they did not have good reason to think that their epistemic status was one of knowledge.

Note how an accessibilist internalist would have to interpret these cases: since neither Emily nor Sam have access to their reasons, neither of them will be justified in believing the proposition they act upon, and thus their actions will be impermissible. This simply does not capture the whole normative story: as Arpaly argues there certainly does seem to be something appropriate about Emily and Sam’s actions, even though we might also argue that they are making some other kind of epistemic mistake, as well.

I have argued that while Hamlet’s failure to recognize his own epistemic status makes his action impermissible but second-order appropriate, Sam and Emily’s cases are ones in which their ignorance of their respective epistemic states make their actions permissible but second-order inappropriate. These kinds of access-based excuses are not idiosyncratic: it seems that situations like Sam’s and Emily’s are commonplace. That they are commonplace is exemplified by the following kind of situation:
II. S knows that p, but second-guesses themselves.

Consider the following form Neta (2009), which illustrates a case in which a test-taker who second-guesses himself:

History Test: Harold is taking an oral history exam, and comes across the question “in what year was Abraham Lincoln assassinated?” He knows that the answer is 1865. But he is momentarily struck by a neurotic diffidence about your memory of this historical fact. After Harold hears the question, the first thought that goes through his mind is: I believe that the answer is 1865, but of course I don’t know that it is! Although the latter conjunct is false – he does know that the answer is 1865 – it’s also true that he believes that he doesn’t know that the answer is 1865, and it’s furthermore true that he doesn’t believe that he knows that the answer is 1865…A fortiori, Harold does not justifiably believe that he knows that the answer is 1865. (Neta, 2009: 688)

History Test is meant to show that even though the knowledge norm would imply that it would be permissible for Harold to assert “1865” as the correct answer, this is something of a counterintuitive result, given his belief that he does not, in fact, know the right answer. Since Harold is not justified in believing that he knows the right answer, then according to Neta’s JBK-Reasons principle his assertion of “1865” as the correct answer is thereby impermissible.

How should we interpret this case? Harold knows that the answer is “1865”, but he is second-guessing himself. If Harold ends up answering “1865” on his test, because he knows the answer, then the flat-footed consequence of the knowledge norm of action is in effect, and Harold’s action is deemed permissible. Of course, we can also say that Harold’s assertion would not be secondarily appropriate, perhaps because he does not have good reason to think that he
knows the correct answer. What if Harold does not end up answering 1865, because he has convinced himself that he does not know the answer?\textsuperscript{10} Again, because Harold’s second-guessing is the result of a “neurotic diffidence,” it does not seem that Harold has a good reason for thinking that he does not know the relevant proposition. If Harold were to answer incorrectly, then, it does not seem like he should be excused for his failing to answer in the way he knows is correct.

Second-guessing does not always have to be due to neurotic diffidence. Perhaps there are good reasons for one to second-guess oneself: perhaps the consequences of being wrong are significant\textsuperscript{11}, or perhaps one has had experience where second-guessing oneself turned out to be prudent (one’s diffidence is not neurotic, but well-founded). In these kinds of cases, it might be reasonable for one to think that one did not know a proposition that one did, in fact, know.

Consider, for example, the following kind of case:

\textit{Novice:} Learning a new language generally involves a pretty steep learning curve: in addition to memorizing a great deal of vocabulary, one must also become familiar with the many exceptions that come along with many rules. Audrey has begun learning French, and has had good reason to second-guess herself when it comes to the proper conjugation of verbs, as she has been wrong many times during the learning process. Without her realizing it, though, Audrey has studied enough that she now has knowledge

\textsuperscript{10} Neta’s example is a little awkward because it’s not clear what Harold would do otherwise: after all, he’s writing a test, and it’s not like he has any other ideas about how he should answer. We could add some more detail to the example, perhaps: say Harold is taking one of those tests where one is rewarded for correct answers, penalized for incorrect ones, and neither rewarded nor penalized for leaving an answer blank. Thus Harold might think that, because he is unsure of his knowledge, that he should leave the answer blank.

\textsuperscript{11} The interest-relative invariant would no doubt interpret such a case as one in which one does not actually have knowledge, if the stakes are high enough. I’ll return to this issue in chapter 7.
of a good deal of French. Audrey is asked to conjugate the verb “être” in the first-person future tense. Although she knows the correct answer is “serai,” she second-guesses herself, thinking that she does not know the correct answer.

In *Novice*, Audrey second-guesses herself: if asked on a test what the relevant tense of the verb is, she might choose to refrain from answering, or answer differently, even though she possesses the relevant knowledge. But it seems that she has good reason to second-guess herself, since she has legitimate reason to think that she is mistaken, as she knows she is a novice and has been mistaken so many times in the past. One could concoct a situation like *Novice* for any sort of skill that involves a learning curve: there will be a point at which one stops making mistakes, but nevertheless has good reason to think that one will still be making mistakes. These kinds of cases are again ones in which one’s failure to act in a permissible way is due to a failure to recognize one’s epistemic states. There may be even more mundane cases of this kind of situation, as well:

**III. S knows that p, and simply doesn’t recognize it**

The following case from Angela Smith (2005) concerns a morally impermissible act, although we could generate a similar example involving epistemically impermissible acts, as well:

*Forgotten Birthday*: I forgot a close friend’s birthday last year. A few days after the fact, I realized that this important date had come and gone without my so much as sending a card or giving her a call. I was mortified. What kind of a friend could forget such a thing? Within minutes I was on the phone to her, acknowledging my fault and offering my apologies. But what, exactly, was the nature of my fault in this case? After all, I did not consciously choose to forget this special day or deliberately decide to ignore it. I did not
intend to hurt my friend’s feelings or even foresee that my conduct would have this
effect. I just forgot. It didn’t occur to me. I failed to notice. And yet, despite the apparent
involuntariness of this failure, there was no doubt in either of our minds that I was,
indeed, responsible for it. Although my friend was quick to pardon my thoughtlessness
and to dismiss it as trivial and unimportant, the act of pardoning itself is simply a way of
renouncing certain critical responses which it is acknowledged would, in principle, be
justified. (Smith, 2005: 236)

Smith has forgotten her friend’s birthday. On the day of her friend’s birthday she still knows that
“my friend’s birthday is on such-and-such date,” this is just not something that comes to mind.
This is, I claim, an access-based failing: Smith’s failure is a failure of knowledge that she had to
become occurrent when it should have.

Is the failure of Smith’s knowledge that it is her friend’s birthday to become occurrent
enough to exonerate her of responsibility for her morally impermissible act? Smith argues that it
is not: she finds herself responsible for forgetting her friend’s birthday, and thus morally
responsible for failing to acknowledge it in some way. Levy (2005), however, disagrees:

Which kind of apology was called for when Smith forgot her friend’s birthday? That
depends upon whether she was responsible for the lapse. If there was something that
Smith might reasonably have been expected to do, the omission of which caused or
contributed to causing her forgetfulness, then an apology of the first kind is appropriate.
She should acknowledge her responsibility for her lapse. But if there was nothing that
she might reasonably have been expected to do, which would have made her recalling her
friend’s birthday more probable, then an apology of the second kind is the only one called
for. Rather than acknowledging her responsibility – for she has none – Smith should
reassure her friend. In these circumstances, an apology has two functions...Because we were so busy, under such pressure, so anxious or so ill, our omission was not reflective of our deep commitments. As Smith says, we apologize “to reassure the other person(s) that we do still care about these things and judge them to be important” (Levy, 2005: 248)

Levy adds more details to Smith’s original argument: if the lapse in memory was not due to any extenuating circumstances, then Smith has no excuse for failing to remember her friend’s birthday. But if something else got in the way – Smith was very busy, or there were other practical matters that demanded attention – then Smith owes no apology to her friend, and is not responsible for her moral transgression. In these cases, then, an access-based epistemic failing might exonerate of one of one’s moral responsibility.

The language in Levy’s analysis is telling: Levy only finds Smith responsible for her lapse in memory if there was something “that Smith might reasonably have been expected to do” to ensure that she had not forgotten her friend’s birthday. There are certainly cases in which my failure to recognize my own mental states are not excusable. However, while Levy exonerates Smith of her responsibility to remember her friend’s birthday when other practical matters get in the way, this is only an exoneration of a certain sort. We are no doubt understanding and forgiving when someone has a lot on their plate, but such cases are simply exemplifications of the fact that a norm can be overridden by other considerations. Smith would no doubt be all-things-considered more prudent to attend to some pressing practical matter than to call her friend on her birthday, but that does not mean that forgetting to call her friend is not still a moral transgression, and not still one that she is, in some sense, responsible for. Indeed, it would be
natural to expect Smith to apologize regardless, even if it is just to say “I’m sorry I forgot to call you on your birthday, I had to get my appendix removed.”

That we rationally act on the basis of reasons we don’t recognize we have, that we act on propositions that we second-guess, and that we can have good reason for failing to bring relevant knowledge to mind shows that the full epistemic normative story in these cases is unable to be captured solely by one’s epistemic relationship towards a relevant proposition. That we can fail to recognize our doxastic and epistemic relationships, and that we make epistemic evaluations of acts performed under such circumstances gives us reason to think that epistemic monism is implausible.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter started with distinguishing a notion of a proposition-based excuse from an access-based excuse. I argued that while epistemic monists can avoid the need for proposition-based excuses, the same is arguably not the case when it comes to access-based excuses. Arguments for a fallible kind of access to the contents of our own minds suggests that even for an epistemic condition that is internalist, we will still be able to have good reason to think that we are in that condition when we fail to be. I argued finally that even if there were an epistemic condition that we do not have fallible access to, then because it seems that we are often able to act rationally on the basis of reasons we do not consciously recognize we have, then such a condition will not be able to fully capture judgments concerning appropriate and inappropriate action. From the first two chapters, then, I conclude that a notion of secondary epistemic

12 Needing to apologize for forgetting a friend’s birthday after having an appendectomy is perhaps a particularly Canadian intuition. Further research is required.
propriety must accompany the norms that determine permissible and impermissible assertion and action.

So far I have been discussing the norms of assertion and action together, as it seems that they face the same requirements for a notion of secondary propriety. In the next chapter I argue that this is not a coincidence: there is a principled connection between a norm of assertion and a norm of action.
Chapter 3: Norms of Illocutionary Acts and Commonality

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I argue that whatever the correct norms of action and assertion are, they are the same, a view that Jessica Brown calls *Commonality*. While Brown argues that there is no good argument for *Commonality*, I argue that there is, but that in order to generate such an argument we need to rethink the way that we conceive of the structure of norms of illocutionary acts and practical reasoning.

3.1 Norms and Speech Acts

In the previous two chapters I argued for epistemic separability for norms of both assertion and practical reasoning. The debates surrounding these norms have a lot in common: in debates about both the norm of assertion and the norm of practical reasoning the knowledge norm is a popular option (and some form of a justification norm is a popular alternative), and both the knowledge norm of assertion and the knowledge norm of action seem to face the same explanatory burdens when it came to explaining the intuitive propriety of certain cases of one’s assertions and actions when one did not have knowledge. Here I want to look more closely at the structure of these norms, and how they are related to one another. I argue that there is good reason to think that whatever the epistemic requirements for proper assertion and action are, they are the same. Furthermore, we need not restrict our discussion to just assertion and practical reasoning: the epistemic requirements for the proper performance of *any* illocutionary act will also be the same. By establishing this result, what has been called *Commonality*, we can streamline our discussion
of the nature of epistemic separability to talk simply about the epistemic requirements of properly doing things with propositions.

In addition to asserting, we can do a lot of things with words. We can conjecture, hypothesize, swear (that something is the case), ask, deny, etc. Call these doings with words *illocutionary acts* (Austin, 1962). The performance of an illocutionary act can go wrong in a lot of different ways. An assertion, for example, can be insensitive because it is off-color; a denial can be morally wrong because it is a lie; a conjecture can be harebrained because it is wildly implausible; etc. One particular way the performance of an illocutionary act can go wrong is if the person performing that act does so from a weak epistemic position. One shouldn’t, for example, swear that something is the case if one is not absolutely certain; one shouldn’t assert something one only has a hunch is true; one shouldn’t conjecture something one has no reason to think is even possible; etc. The thought, then, is that the proper performance of an illocutionary act requires that one be well-positioned epistemically, to some extent. Figuring out the epistemic requirements for the proper performance of an illocutionary act is the project of figuring out the correct *norms* of these acts. As we have seen, there has been a lot said in recent years about what, exactly, the epistemic requirements of these norms are – especially when it comes to assertion, with popular options being that proper assertion requires knowledge, or justified belief, or true belief. I am not here interested in defending one particular norm of assertion over any other. Rather, I am interested in a more general question, namely: what is the relationship between the things we do with words and the epistemic requirements for their proper performance?

There are two possible answers. The first is that different illocutionary acts have different epistemic requirements for their proper performance. On this view, performing one type of illocutionary act will require that one be better-positioned epistemically than if one were to
perform a different kind of illocutionary act. For example, the epistemic requirements for assertion are probably going to be more demanding than those for conjecturing (perhaps one has to have knowledge when asserting, but only has to have some evidence when conjecturing), whereas the epistemic requirements for swearing that something is the case are probably going to be more demanding than both asserting and conjecturing that something is the case (perhaps one has to have not only knowledge, but exceptionally good evidence when swearing, whereas this is not required for asserting or conjecturing). I’ll call this way of thinking about illocutionary acts and the epistemic demands they make of us the *epistemically variable* view, since on this view the norms of different illocutionary acts differ from one another on the basis of how well-positioned epistemically one needs to be to perform them properly.

The second answer is that different illocutionary acts do *not* have different epistemic requirements for their proper performance\(^\text{13}\). Instead, *all* illocutionary acts have the *same* epistemic requirement, this requirement just happens to be for different things for different acts. For example, on this view proper asserting and conjecturing might both require that I know something (say), but they will require that I know different things: perhaps when asserting that \(p\) I need to know that \(p\), but when conjecturing that \(p\) I need to know something else, perhaps that “\(p\) is possible”. I’ll call this way of thinking about illocutionary acts and the epistemic demands they make of us the *propositionally variable* view, since on this view the norms of different illocutionary acts differ from one another on the basis of the proposition that one needs to have an epistemic relationship with, *not* on the basis of the epistemic relationship itself.

\(^{13}\) This view is also compatible with the view that *no* illocutionary act makes *any* epistemic demands of us, whatsoever (perhaps because the correct norm of illocutionary acts does not involve any epistemic condition, but rather an alethic condition (see Weiner (2005)), or because the whole project is fundamentally misguided (see Cappelen (2010)). I won’t have anything more to say about this view in what follows.
In recent discussion concerning the norms of illocutionary acts, the epistemically variable view is the preferred view. However, I’ll argue here that a better way to think of the relationship between illocutionary acts and their epistemic requirements is in terms of the propositionally variable view. This is because only the propositionally variable view can allow for the derivation of what Jessica Brown (2012) calls *Commonality*, the view that all of the norms of illocutionary acts have the same epistemic requirements in virtue of their all being kinds of acts. *Commonality*, I’ll argue, is not only intuitively plausible, but can explain why assertion and other illocutionary acts have the epistemic requirements that they do. Here’s the plan: in section 2 I’ll argue that the epistemically variable view is popular because it seems to be a consequence of a similarly popular way of thinking about the norms of illocutionary acts, namely Timothy Williamson’s (2000) “C Rule.” In section 3 I’ll argue that a propositionally variable view suggests that we should think of the norms of illocutionary acts as having a different structure, what I will call the “Cf Rule”. With the two possible views laid out, in section 4 I show how the Cf Rule can allow for a positive argument for the propositionally variable view, what Brown calls the “instance argument” for *Commonality*: the view that all illocutionary acts make the same epistemic demands in virtue of their all being instances of actions. Finally, I consider the benefits of accepting the Cf Rule and the propositionally variable view in terms of its effects on the literature concerning the norms of assertion and other illocutionary acts.

### 3.2 The C Rule and the Epistemically Variable View

The epistemically variable view is popular in large part due to Williamson’s (2000) influential discussion concerning the structure of the norm of assertion, namely that by looking for the epistemic requirements for proper assertion we are looking for a *constitutive* norm. A constitutive norm of an act is one that both specifies the conditions under which one should
perform that act and makes that act the kind of act that it is. Compare the relationship between a
game and its rules: a game such as chess is defined by a set of rules, and whether one does
something impermissible when playing chess is determined by whether one has adhered to or
violated those rules. Assertion is supposed to be governed by a norm in the same way: there is a
norm of assertion that both makes assertion the act that it is, and determines what kinds of
assertions are permissible and impermissible. The thought, then, is that a norm with a specific
epistemic requirement can be constitutive in this way; we just have to figure out what this norm is.

Williamson proposes that in our search for such norms we accept that they have a very
general structure, what he calls the “C Rule”:

\[(C \text{ Rule}) \text{ One must: } \phi p \text{ only if } p \text{ has } C.\]

Where \(\phi\) is an act (for our purposes, an illocutionary act), \(p\) is the propositional content of that
act (i.e. if one asserts that \(p\), \(p\) is the propositional content of that act of assertion), and \(C\) is the
constitutive condition of the norm. The constitutive condition is what does the heavy lifting:
meeting or failing to meet the C condition is what determines whether one’s act of \(\phi\)-ing is
permissible. Williamson’s version of the C Rule for assertion is the knowledge norm:

\[(KNA) \text{ One must: } \text{assert } p \text{ only if one knows that } p.\]

KNA has the structure of the C Rule, where the constitutive condition is that of “being known”.
There are, of course, more possible constitutive conditions than just “being known.” Indeed, the
extensive debate concerning the correct norm of assertion comes down to specifying exactly
what this C condition is. As we saw in the previous chapter, for example, Jonathan Kvanvig
(2009) argues that assertion is governed by a justification norm (where one is justified to a
degree sufficient for knowledge). So we can propose an alternative to KNA with something like the following:

(JNA) One must: assert \( p \) only if one is justified in believing that \( p \).

JNA will look different depending on how one wants to conceive of the conditions for being justified. Hill and Schecter (2007) argue that there is reason to think that the KNA should be replaced (at least in part) by the JNA, but don’t specify any particular conditions for having a justified belief. Similarly, we saw that Jennifer Lackey (2007) posits a variant of JNA, such that it must be *reasonable* for one to believe the proposition one is asserting, and that Igor Douven (2006) proposes a similar norm:

*Rational Credibility Rule*: One should assert only what is rationally credible to one (449)

All of these norms conceive of assertion in different ways, but they share an overall structure: a norm of assertion tells us how well-positioned epistemically we should be towards the propositional content of that assertion. This is what’s captured in the most general way by the C Rule.

Now, just as there are more “C’s” than “being known”, there are more \( \phi \)’s than assertion. Two other kinds of illocutionary acts that I will focus on here are *conjecturing* and *swearing* (although, as we will see below, there are many more). Illocutionary acts other than assertion will be governed by different constitutive norms, just as different games have different rules. We can then argue in the same way about the correct norms of these other illocutionary acts as we do about the correct norm of assertion, by trying to figure out what the correct C condition is for the respective norms. The C Rule, then, provides a structure that can guide the debates concerning the norms of not only assertion, but of other illocutionary acts, as well.
If we accept that the C Rule is the correct structure of the norms of illocutionary acts, then it seems that the difference between the norms of these acts is going to come down to their respective C conditions. For example, consider the difference between the norms of conjecturing a proposition and asserting a proposition:

(Assertion) One must: assert that \( p \) only if \( p \) has C.

(Conjecture) One must: conjecture that \( p \) only if \( p \) has C’.

C and C’ must be different conditions: if C and C’ were the same condition, then there would be no difference between the act of assertion and the act of conjecturing. This is a consequence of adopting the C Rule, and is Williamson’s endorsed view. For example, Williamson argues that while the knowledge norm is the correct norm of assertion, other illocutionary acts have less-demanding conditions for their proper performance. Specifically, in terms of conjecturing: “[a]lthough it is somehow good to conjecture the true and bad to conjecture the false, it is quite acceptable to conjecture \( p \), but not to assert \( p \), when \( p \) is merely more probable than not on one’s evidence” (2000: 244). Spelling out the C Rule for conjecturing, then, would result in something like the following:

(Conjecture) One must: conjecture that \( p \) only if \( p \) is more probable than not on one’s evidence.

On the other hand, other illocutionary acts will have more demanding epistemic requirements for their proper performance than assertion. Consider the act of swearing. Again, if the illocutionary acts of asserting and swearing are governed by norms that have the structure of the C Rule, then the norms for assertion and swearing will look like the following:
(Assertion) One must: assert that $p$ only if $p$ has C.

(Swearing) One must: swear that $p$ only if $p$ has C’’.

Where, again, C and C’’ will be distinct epistemic conditions. And again, this is the view that Williamson endorses: he says that “[n]ot only is it somehow good to swear to the true and bad to swear to the false, it is acceptable to swear to $p$ only if one has grounds for unusual certainty about $p$, more than is required to assert $p$” (244). Cashing out the C Rule for swearing, then, would result in the something like the following:

(Swearing) One must: swear that $p$ only if one has unusual grounds for certainty that $p$.

While all of the acts of asserting, conjecturing, and swearing are governed by constitutive norms, then, the epistemic requirements for their proper performance are different because they are different kinds of acts. This is just the epistemically variable view, one that seems to be a consequence of adopting the C Rule.

3.3 The Propositionally Variable View and the Cf Rule

But this is not the only way we can think about the norms of illocutionary acts. Before Williamson’s influential discussion of the norm of assertion, Peter Unger (1975) also argued that proper assertion requires that one knows what one is asserting. However, Unger does not limit his discussion to just assertion. Instead, he considers as fair game the following extensive list of illocutionary acts:

Of course, it might not be the case that all of illocutionary acts that Unger lists are constituted by a unique epistemic norm. Indeed, I have argued here that one way to distinguish illocutionary acts that are governed by epistemically constituted norms is in terms of the conditions of the norms themselves. But it seems clear that some illocutionary acts are going to differ from one another not on the basis of their epistemic requirements, but rather on the basis of factors that pertain to the intentions or feelings of the speaker, or the contexts in which the acts are typically performed, or some other factor. For example, it might not be the case that one needs to have a different strength of epistemic position towards a proposition to “object” that something is the case than to “deny” that something is the case, or that the epistemic requirements of the proper performance of these actions requires that one has epistemic relationships with distinct propositions. Although we might think that there are epistemic requirements for the proper performance of both of those acts, these requirements might be the same. We would instead locate the difference between the acts in some other way.

We should then focus on what I will call members of families of illocutionary acts. According to the proponent of the epistemically variable view, there will be different epistemic families of illocutionary acts: sets of acts that are governed by norms that have the same epistemic requirements towards the same proposition. For instance, we could consider an epistemic family of illocutionary acts consisting of illocutionary acts such that each act in the family requires that one know that $p$ in order to perform any of the acts with the propositional content that $p$ – e.g. {assertion, affirmation, reporting, etc.}. We might then also consider an epistemic family of illocutionary acts that requires that we merely have reason to believe the proposition that is the content of those acts – {hypothesizing, suggesting, conjecturing, etc.} –
and a family that requires that we have especially good reason to believe the propositional
content of those acts – {swearing, guaranteeing, etc.}.

According to the proponent of the propositionally variable view, these families are
different not because they make different epistemic requirements of us, but rather because their epistemic requirements are directed towards different propositions. Thus when we perform an act that is a member of the family \{assertion, affirmation, reporting, etc.\} with propositional content \(p\), the epistemic requirement will be one that is directed towards \(p\); when we perform an act that is a member of the family \{hypothesizing, conjecturing, suggesting, etc.\} with propositional content \(p\) the epistemic requirement will be one that is directed towards “\(p\) is likely”; when we perform an act that is a member of the family \{swearing, guaranteeing, etc.\} with propositional content \(p\) the epistemic requirement will be one that is directed towards “\(p\) has unusually strong grounds”; etc.

How do we know which family a given illocutionary act is a member of? One could tell potentially many different stories here. For instance, we could appeal to the way in which we evaluate performances of the different illocutionary acts to see what kind of epistemic relationship we ought to have when performing them, or what kind of proposition we are evaluated in terms of. Other views of illocutionary acts might differentiate families in different ways. Robert Stalnaker (1999), for example, argues that by making an assertion one reduces the set of knowledge that is presupposed by the speaker (the “context set”) and listener by eliminating any possibilities that are incompatible with the proposition asserted (86). One might then argue that a family of illocutionary acts is that consisting of members which reduce context sets in the same way. Or, as we will see next, we might think of these families as being
distinguished by the kinds of *commitments* we make in performing various acts. This is closer to Unger’s view.

In determining the conditions for the proper performances of illocutionary acts, Unger at first seems to be in agreement with Williamson when he says that although one should know that *p* when asserting that *p*, this is not necessarily the case for the other items on his list: for example, Unger states that “[i]n suggesting that [there is no danger]…S need not represent himself as knowing that there is no danger.” (267) However, he does not think that just because one does not need to know the proposition one suggests that the norm for proper suggesting is thereby epistemically less demanding than that for proper assertion. Rather, he states that:

[In suggesting that there is no danger, S] must represent himself as knowing some other thing, or things. Hazarding to be more specific, I think that one thing he must represent himself to know is that it is at least possible that there is no danger. (267-8, emphasis mine)

Unger argues, then, that even though by suggesting that *p* one does not represent oneself as knowing that *p*, by performing the illocutionary act of suggesting one nevertheless represents oneself as knowing *something*; in this case, knowing that “*p* is at least possible.” Unger does not explicitly state a norm of suggesting, nor does he conceive of illocutionary acts as “constituted” in the way that Williamson does. However, we could implement Unger’s idea to generate the following norm of suggesting:

(Suggesting) One must: suggest that *p* only if one knows that “*p* is at least possible.”

Similarly, by performing other illocutionary acts, one represents oneself as knowing something different still. Unger’s view is thus a propositionally individuating view: the *difference* between
the norms of different illocutionary acts is the proposition that one represents oneself as knowing, not the fact that one needs to have knowledge when performing that act. Unger’s norm of suggesting does not have the form of the C Rule: proper suggesting is not determined by how well-positioned epistemically one is towards the propositional content of the act (i.e. the proposition \( p \)), but rather towards “some other thing,” namely the proposition “\( p \) is at least possible.” The propositions that one needs to know when performing some illocutionary act – the respective “other things” – are determined by a proposition that one “represents oneself” as having a particular epistemic relationship with. We could argue about what epistemic relationship this happens to be – Unger argues that it’s knowledge – but whatever it is, on Unger’s view it is the same for any illocutionary act.

To accommodate Unger’s view we need to propose a different structure for the norms of illocutionary acts:

\[
\text{(Cf Rule) One must: } \phi \text{ that } p \text{ only if } f_\phi(p) \text{ has } C. 
\]

As in the C Rule, \( \phi \) is again an act, \( p \) is again the propositional content of that act, and \( C \) is again some open condition or set of conditions; in the discussion here I take it to capture some epistemic relationship. The difference between the C Rule and the Cf Rule is the inclusion of \( f_\phi(p) \): \( f_\phi(p) \) is a proposition, what I will call the \textit{individuating proposition}. This proposition is determined by the propositional content of the act (the proposition \( p \)) and the \textit{characteristic function} of the act, \( f_\phi \), which will be different for each illocutionary act. On Unger’s view, the characteristic function of the norm of an illocutionary act with the structure of the Cf Rule pertains to what we represent ourselves as having an epistemic relationship with by performing a
particular kind of act. According to some different theory the characteristic function could be determined in another way; I won’t adjudicate between different possible options here.\textsuperscript{14}

While Williamson and Unger are often mentioned in the same breath when providing examples of proponents of a knowledge norm of assertion, they reach their conclusions from very different starting points. The Cf Rule can, of course, equally well accommodate the view that knowledge is the norm of assertion. This is because we can specify that the individuating proposition of asserting – call it \( f_{\text{A}}(p) \) – happens to be \( p \) itself. This seems to be Unger’s view: assertion is the act by which one represents oneself as knowing the propositional content of one’s assertion. Part of the reason why, I think, that Williamson and others have taken the C Rule to be the correct form of illocutionary acts in general is that assertion \textit{seems} to be governed by a norm of this form, and since assertion is typically given privileged status amongst the rest of the illocutionary acts, the norms of other illocutionary acts are modeled on the norm of assertion. However, on the propositionally variable view there is nothing special about assertion, beyond the fact that it happens to be the act that is governed by a norm whose individuating proposition is the same as the propositional content of the act. If we accept that the Cf Rule is the correct structure of the norms of illocutionary acts, however, we should then think of assertion as being a special case of illocutionary acts in general, not as other illocutionary acts being more or less demanding in relation to assertion.

We saw above that the C Rule seems to lead us towards the epistemically variable view: the difference between the norms of different illocutionary acts that have the structure of the C

\textsuperscript{14} Here’s another example: C.S. Peirce argued that by asserting a proposition one “takes responsibility” for the truth of the proposition asserted (CP 5.543). We might then conceive of a characteristic function of illocutionary acts for Peirce as involving what one takes responsibility for in performing that kind of act.
Rule will come down to the C condition itself, and since the conditions of the C Rule are typically taken to be an epistemic relationship, the difference between the norms of different illocutionary acts will come down to the kind of epistemic relationship we need to have in performing that act. The Cf Rule, however, does not lead us to this view: the norms of different illocutionary acts can differ on the basis of those norms’ individuating propositions, rather than the epistemic relationship one needs to have towards those proposition. Consider again how we can differentiate illocutionary acts on the basis of their norms when we conceive of these norms as having the structure of the Cf Rule. Let’s look at the act of conjecturing again: according to the Cf Rule conjecturing a proposition requires that one have a certain strength of epistemic relationship with its individuating proposition, one that is determined by the characteristic function of conjecturing. Call this function \( f_{\text{Conj}} \), and the individuating proposition \( f_{\text{Conj}}(p) \). What \( f_{\text{Conj}}(p) \) is, then, will depend on the proposition one is conjecturing (\( p \)) and the characteristic function of conjecturing. The norms of assertion and conjecturing will then look like this (where, again, \( f_{\text{As}} \) is the characteristic function of asserting):

\[
\text{(Assertion-f) One must: assert that } p \text{ only if } f_{\text{As}}(p) \text{ has C.}
\]

\[
\text{(Conjecture-f) One must: conjecture that } p \text{ only if } f_{\text{Conj}}(p) \text{ has C’}.
\]

As we’ve seen, if (Assertion-f) and (Conjecture-f) are members of different families of illocutionary acts, then they will differ on the basis of the norms that govern them. But (Assertion-f) and (Conjecture-f) can differ in two respects: either in terms of their constitutive conditions (C and C’, respectively) or their individuating propositions (\( f_{\text{As}}(p) \) and \( f_{\text{Conj}}(p) \),
respectively)\textsuperscript{15}. In other words, the strength of epistemic relationship one needs to have towards $f_{\text{conj}}(p)$ when conjecturing need not be any stronger or weaker than the strength of epistemic relationship one needs to have towards $f_{\text{as}}(p)$ when asserting.

Consider again the difference between the norm of assertion and the norm of swearing when conceived of in terms of the Cf Rule instead of the C Rule:

- (Assertion-f) One must: assert that $p$ only if $f_{\text{as}}(p)$ has C.

- (Swearing-f) One must: swear that $p$ only if $f_{\text{sw}}(p)$ has C’’.

Here, $f_{\text{sw}}$ is the characteristic function of swearing, and $f_{\text{sw}}(p)$ is the norm’s individuating proposition. As in the case of the comparison between assertion and conjecturing, the difference between assertion and swearing need not lie in any difference between C and C’’. Instead, whereas $f_{\text{as}}(p)$ is going to just be $p$, $f_{\text{sw}}(p)$ is going to be some different proposition, perhaps something like “there is no chance that $\neg p$.” If we accept this proposition as the individuating proposition of (Swearing-f) (and, for argument’s sake, also accept that the C’’ condition is knowledge), the norm then looks like the following:

- (Swearing-f) One must: swear that $p$ only if one knows that there is no chance than $\neg p$.

Again, the difference between a norm of swearing that is governed by the C Rule and one that is governed by the Cf Rule is that in the former instances of swearing that $p$ are evaluated in terms of one’s epistemic relationship with $p$, whereas in the latter instances are swearing that $p$ are evaluated in terms of one’s epistemic relationship with “there is no chance that $\neg p$.”

\textsuperscript{15} The “either” here is inclusive: there could be both a difference in the individuating proposition and constitutive condition of the norms of different illocutionary acts.
Note now that if we think of illocutionary acts as governed by a norm that has the structure of the Cf Rule that we also have a way of determining which families different illocutionary acts are member of, namely that illocutionary acts that have the same characteristic function will be members of the same family. If we think, for example, that \( f_{\phi}(p) \) is the same proposition when \( \phi \) is the act of assertion as when \( \phi \) is the act of affirming, then assertion and affirming will be members of the same family. How we determine the characteristic function of a given act can vary depending on what one thinks the purpose of performing an illocutionary act is. If one thinks that illocutionary acts are the kinds of things that require that we make certain commitments, then the characteristic function of an illocutionary act will be a function of those commitments we make, and families will be determined by the set of illocutionary acts that require us to make the same commitments; if one thinks that illocutionary acts are the kinds of things that can add or subtract possibilities from a context set, then the families of illocutionary acts will be determined by those acts that add or subtract the same possibilities; etc.

While the C Rule and the Cf Rule conceive of the structure of the norms of illocutionary acts in different ways, they do not necessarily make different claims about the degree of epistemic demand for the proper performance of illocutionary acts. For instance, consider again the difference between the norm of swearing according to the C Rule and the Cf Rule: what is the difference between needing to be certain that \( p \) – the requirement that the C Rule makes – and needing to know that there is no chance that \( p \) is false – the requirement that the Cf Rule makes? Is it not plausible that, in order to be certain that \( p \), for example, one needs to know that there is no chance that \( \neg p \), and that knowing that there is no chance that \( \neg p \) is sufficient for being certain that \( p \)? Probably (see: Moss (2013)). But this is what we should expect: the C Rule and the Cf Rule are simply two different ways about thinking how the norms of illocutionary acts are
structured, they make no claims about what the epistemic requirements of these acts happen to be. So why should we prefer the Cf Rule to the C Rule? The reason is again a structural one: it is by assuming the truth of the C Rule that an intuitively plausible argument for *Commonality* results in implausible consequences.

### 3.4 The C Rule and Commonality

I noted above that by accepting the Cf Rule instead of the C Rule the propositionally variable view becomes a viable option, but not one that we are forced to accept. Here I will argue that there is good reason to accept the propositionally variable view, by arguing that the epistemic relationships that govern the proper performance of various illocutionary acts are the same, a view that has been called *Commonality*. I will consider here what looks like a straightforward argument for commonality that goes awry, what Jessica Brown (2012) calls the *instance argument*. I’ll argue that the problem with the instance argument is that it is typically made under the assumption that the C Rule is the correct structure of the norms of illocutionary acts. Once we reject this assumption and embrace the Cf Rule in its place, the instance argument becomes a good one.

Again, the norm of action debate asks how epistemically well-positioned one needs to be towards a proposition in order to appropriately treat that proposition as a reason for acting. The norm of action has a similar form as the norms of assertion we have looked at earlier:

\[
\text{(Action) One must: treat } p \text{ as a reason for acting only if } p \text{ has } E.
\]

Where E is some epistemic relationship that one needs to have towards p. Again, what E happens to be is up for debate: we have seen that knowledge (viz. Hawthorne (2004), Stanley and Hawthorne (2008), Fantl and McGrath (2010)) and justification or warrant of some kind (viz.
Neta (2009), Gerken (2011)) are popular options, although there are others. If we assume for the time being that the C Rule represents the correct structure of the norms of both action and illocutionary acts – again, that one must: $\phi p$ only if $p$ has C – then Commonality can be stated succinctly as follows\(^1\)

\[ \text{Commonality: } E = C. \]

For any C condition in the norm of any illocutionary act. In other words, the epistemic requirements for treating a proposition as a reason for acting are the same as those for performing an illocutionary act with the same propositional content.

Why might we think that Commonality is true? One reason pertains to the ways that the debates concerning the correct norms of action and assertion are conducted: we often appeal to intuitions concerning cases in which one asserts or treats as a reason for action a proposition under various degrees of ignorance. These intuitions seem to run in parallel: just as it seems inappropriate, say, to assert that $p$ when one has no good reason to think that $p$ is the case, it seems similarly inappropriate to treat that $p$ as a reason for acting while under the same epistemic conditions. Similarly, just as knowing that $p$ seems good enough to assert that $p$, so, too, when treating that $p$ as a reason for acting. Parallel intuitions lead to parallel norms (again, the knowledge norms of both action and assertion are popular choices), which suggests that there is some principled connection between the norms of action and assertion that can explain why they are often seen as making the same epistemic demands.

\[^{16}\] Brown (2012: 126) formulates Commonality in essentially this way, using slightly different variables. I have formulated Commonality in the way I have here in order to emphasize its reliance on the assumption that the C Rule is the correct structure of the norms of illocutionary acts.
Of course, just because intuitive judgments of impropriety for asserting and reasoning on the basis of a proposition are the same in some cases does not mean that our judgments for all cases will necessarily follow suit. Indeed, Brown argues that there are plausibly cases in which one is in an epistemic position towards \( p \) that warrants permissible assertion that \( p \), but does not warrant permissibly treating that \( p \) as a reason for acting. She considers hypothetical subject Luke, who lives in a universe that is influenced by a “whimsical god” who will punish anyone severely for incorporating a proposition into their practical reasoning if they do not know it, but will not punish anyone for asserting that same proposition. We then stipulate that Luke has an epistemic relationship with \( p \), but does not know that \( p \). In such a setup, Brown argues, it can be appropriate for Luke to assert that \( p \), but inappropriate for him to act on \( p \). This is because the practical stakes that are associated with asserting and acting in this instance are different, and thus propriety in assertion can come apart from propriety in acting: Luke would presumably need a stronger epistemic position towards \( p \) in order to appropriately act on it than to assert it (141).

The problem with this line of thought, however, is that we can employ the same kind of argument to reach clearly false conclusions about propriety of assertions or actions. Consider the following kind of case:

*Never on a Sunday*: Jake lives in a world governed by a whimsical god who abides by the following principle: one is not subject to punishment for asserting a false proposition, unless one does so on a Sunday, in which case one is punished severely.

In *Never on a Sunday* there are different practical consequences for asserting the same proposition on different days of the week. In Jake’s world, we might argue that the norms of asserting propositions from Monday to Saturday differ from those norms of asserting propositions on Sundays, and thus that there is no unified epistemic norm that governs assertions
in general in that world. But that’s no reason to think that there is no common norm for all assertions in a world that is not governed by whimsical gods (namely, the actual world). Similarly, simply because we can conceive of a world in which there are systematic differences between in the consequences of asserting something and treating something as a reason for acting does not mean that there are similar consequences for this world. Brown’s example fails to give us a case in which it can be appropriate to assert a proposition but not incorporate it into ones practical reasoning.

There is, then, sufficient reason to pursue what looks like a straightforward relationship between the norm of action and the norm of assertion, namely that, since asserting is a kind of action, the norm that governs proper assertion should have the same epistemic requirements as the norm that governs proper assertion. Brown formulates the following argument for establishing this relationship:\(^{17}\):

**Instance Argument**

1. One is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on p in deciding what to do iff one knows that p.
2. Assertion is a kind of action.
3. So, one is in a good enough position to rely on p in deciding what to assert iff one knows that p. (130-1)

If the Instance Argument holds up, not only would it provide a principled reason to accept a particular norm of action (in Brown’s formulation we would derive the knowledge norm of

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\(^{17}\) Brown presents the norms of action and other illocutionary acts as a biconditional between the propositional content of the act and the epistemic relationship one has with that proposition, whereas throughout here I have presented it as a conditional. For the issues I’m concerned with here, the difference is unimportant.
assertion from the knowledge norm of action, but we could just as easily derive the justified-belief norm of assertion from the justified-belief norm of action, etc.), but it would also explain why intuitions concerning the epistemic demands for properly treating something as a reason for acting run in such a close parallel to those concerning the epistemic demands for properly asserting a proposition.

Brown argues there are two major problems with the Instance Argument. The first is that it’s not clear how we are supposed to derive the knowledge norm of assertion from the conclusion of the Instance Argument. The knowledge norm of assertion “one must: assert p only if one knows that p” certainly does not look anything like (3) in the Instance Argument: (3) tells us how well-positioned epistemically we need to be when relying on a proposition in deciding what to assert, whereas the norm of assertion is supposed to tell us how well-positioned epistemically we need to be when asserting a proposition. As Brown argues, that (3) is not equivalent to the knowledge norm of assertion is revealed by the fact that I can rely on a proposition when I am deciding to assert a completely different proposition. For example, I might assert to you “no one has planned anything special for your birthday.” In deciding to assert this proposition I might rely on the proposition “there is a surprise party planned for your birthday”, along with my desire not to ruin the surprise. Now, it may very well be the case that when relying on “there is a surprise party planned for your birthday” in deciding what to assert, I should know that proposition. But if we’re in the business of figuring out the norm of assertion, this is relatively uninteresting: the whole point of figuring out the correct norm of assertion is to figure out how well-positioned epistemically one needs to be towards p in order to assert that p, and (3) doesn’t tell us anything about this epistemic requirement.
In order to fix the problem that the conclusion of the Instance Argument does not actually allow us to derive the norm of assertion we need to find some way of translating (3) into something that looks like a norm of assertion. It’s not clear how this should be done. However, Brown’s second major problem with the Instance Argument is that even if there were a straightforward way of translating (3) into something that did, in fact, look like the norm of assertion, then since we should be willing to replace the act of assertion in the Instance Argument with any other kind of speech act (since they are, after all, also actions), we should therefore reach the same conclusions about the epistemic requirements for those actions as for assertion. The norms of other speech acts, however, do not seem to be governed by the same epistemic requirements as the norm of treating something as a reason for acting. Again, let’s assume for the time being that the knowledge norm of action is true. Consider, then, what happens if in the Instance Argument we replace the act of assertion with a different speech act, the act of asking:

**Instance Argument – Asking**

1A. One is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on p in deciding what to do only if one knows that p.

2A. Asking is a kind of action.

3A. So, one is in a good enough position to rely on p in deciding what to ask only if one knows that p.

Just as we can ask how well-positioned epistemically one needs to be when asserting, we can similarly ask how well-positioned epistemically one needs to be when asking. Again, assuming we can translate (3A) to something that looks like a norm of asking, we are going to get the
result that knowledge governs proper asking. But this doesn’t seem right: one need not know that
\( p \) in order to ask whether \( p \). The trouble doesn’t stop here: by replacing the act of assertion in the
Instance Argument with any number of other speech acts we will get similarly counterintuitive
results. Consider the act of *denying*:

**Instance Argument - Denying**

1D. One is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on \( p \) in deciding what to do only if
one knows that \( p \).

2D. Denying is a kind of action.

3D. So, one is in a good enough position to rely on \( p \) in deciding what to deny only if one
knows that \( p \).

Since denying is an action, according to the instance argument (plus a translation from (3D) to a
norm of denying) one is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on \( p \) in deciding what to
deny if one knows that \( p \). On the contrary, one’s denial that \( p \) is completely inappropriate if one
knows that \( p \). Since the Instance Argument does not generalize to acts other than assertion,
Brown argues, it is not a good one. We could, of course, argue that assertion is *the only act* that
works in the Instance Argument, which would then at least save the Instance Argument for our
most special of illocutionary acts. The problem with this line of thought is that there is, as far as I
can tell, no good reason to single out assertion in this regard. Certainly singling it out in this way
is against the spirit of the Instance Argument: assertion is no “more of an act” than any other
speech act.
I agree with Brown that the Instance Argument, as she presents it, gives us intolerable results. But we can fix it. The first step is to tweak the instance argument itself, so that we can easily translate its conclusion to the norms of the actions we are trying to derive. Once we do this, however, we still face Brown’s second problem, which is that we seem to get the results that all illocutionary acts have to be governed by the same epistemic relationships with the same propositions. This is where an implicit acceptance of the C Rule creates problems: I will argue that if we accept the Cf Rule as the correct structure of the norms of illocutionary acts then we can also accept that the norms of illocutionary acts inherit the epistemic relationship from the norm of action, but not the proposition with which need to be in that relationship.

First, the tweak. The problem with the conclusion of the instance argument as it stands now is that while it states that we need to know something in order to rely on it when deciding what to assert, it doesn’t specify what, exactly, we are asserting. But of course we never just assert; rather, we always assert something. The Instance Argument should account for this; specifically, we need to specify in (2) the act not just of asserting, but of asserting something. Similarly, the first premise of the instance argument presents a norm of treating something as a reason for acting. But, of course, we never just act; rather, we do something. (1) in the Instance Argument should account for this fact, as well. If we make these small adjustments to the instance argument, we can then work in some propositional content into its conclusion:

**Instance Argument 2**

I. One is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on $p$ in deciding to $\psi$ only if one knows that $p$.

II. Asserting that $q$ is a kind of action.
III. So, one is in a good enough position to rely on $p$ in deciding to assert that $q$ only if one knows that $p$.

Here $\psi$ is some action (the thing we do) and $q$ is some proposition (the thing we assert). There is not much difference in the conclusion: (III) still does not look like the norm of assertion, in that it does not tell us how well-positioned epistemically we need to be towards a proposition when we are asserting that proposition. This is Brown’s first problem with the Instance Argument again: saying that one should know (say) that $p$ when relying on $p$ in deciding what to assert is relatively uninteresting, since that’s not what the norm of assertion is trying to get at. However, we now have a readily available translation between (III) and a norm of assertion: we simply consider those instances in which we rely on $p$ in deciding to assert that $p$. In this case, the conclusion of the above becomes the following:

III’. So, one is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on $p$ in deciding to assert that $p$ only if one knows that $p$.

(III’) still doesn’t *look* exactly like the knowledge norm of assertion, but it is equivalent to it. To see why, consider what it means to “rely on” a proposition. To a first approximation, any proposition I rely on when doing something is one that I would cite as a reason for doing that thing. For example, if I treat “the restaurant is on the left” as a reason to do something – namely turn left – then I would cite as a reason for turning left that “the restaurant is on the left.” Similarly, I might treat “the restaurant is on the left” as a reason to turn *right*, when combined with my desire to avoid going to the restaurant. The same is the case when performing a speech act: in relying on a proposition when asserting I would cite that proposition as a reason for why I asserted what I did. So if I assert to you: “merge into the left lane”, I am relying on the proposition “the restaurant is on the left,” which is also what I would cite as a reason for why I
asserted what I did\textsuperscript{18}. The conclusion of Brown’s Instance Argument states that by relying on a proposition in deciding what to assert, we need to know that proposition. The problem was not that this conclusion was \textit{false}, but that we could not derive the norm of assertion from it. However, we \textit{can} derive the norm of assertion when we consider those cases in which I rely on \(p\) in performing a particular kind of assertion, namely when I assert \(p\) itself. When I rely on \(p\) in deciding to assert that \(p\), I would cite \(p\) as a reason for my assertion, and thus the propriety of my assertion is evaluated on the basis of my epistemic relationship with \(p\). But this is just what a norm of assertion is trying to capture: how well-positioned epistemically one needs to be towards \(p\) when asserting that \(p\). So (III’) is equivalent to a norm of assertion.

A problem with the Instance Argument as Brown presents it that it does not adequately account for the fact that when we decide to assert, we necessarily decide to assert \textit{something}, namely some proposition. When this proposition is just the proposition we are relying on when deciding what to assert we are evaluating the propriety of an assertion that \(p\) in terms of our epistemic relationship with \(p\) itself, which is just what a norm of assertion is trying to capture.

The way we can derive the norm of assertion from the conclusion of the Instance Argument 2, then, is just to consider the specific case in which what we are deciding to do is to assert that \(p\).

We have, then, answered Brown’s first criticism against the instance argument. What about Brown’s second criticism, that by substituting some other speech act in the place of assertion in the second step of the Instance Argument we get the unpalatable result that, assuming we can

\textsuperscript{18} A caveat: when I say that what we rely on is what we would cite as a reason for doing what we do I am idealizing a bit, i.e. I’m assuming that we always have access to the propositions we rely on when doing things. In the real world, I think it’s plausible to think that there are lots of propositions we “rely on” that we would not be able to bring to consciousness in every situation in which we act. So we should not take our actual ability to cite reasons as the only indicator that we are relying on a proposition when acting. But, if we did have such infallible access to our reasons, then we would cite as a reason for doing what we are doing the propositions that we rely on.
find a way to translate the conclusion of the Instance Argument to a norm of that act, in order to perform *any* illocutionary act we need to know the propositional content of that act? It seems like Instance Argument 2 is indeed going to run headlong into this problem. Consider another instantiation of the argument that involves a speech act other than assertion, namely conjecturing:

**Instance Argument 2 - Conjecturing**

IC. One is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on *p* in deciding to ψ only if one knows that *p*.

IIC. Conjecturing that *q* is a kind of action.

IIIC. So, one is in a good enough position to rely on *p* in deciding to conjecture that *q* only if one knows that *p*.

Again, (IIIC) may very well be true: it might be the case that when I conjecture something I need to know the propositions I am relying on when I decide to perform that act of conjecturing. But (IIIC) does not look like a norm of conjecturing: it does not tell us how well-positioned epistemically we need to be towards a proposition in order to properly conjecture that proposition. Furthermore, the strategy we used to derive the norm of assertion from the conclusion of its Instance Argument – namely, the case in which we consider just that instance in which the propositional content of the act we perform is the proposition we are relying on – is not going to work here. Consider that case in which the proposition I decide to conjecture is just *p* itself. The new conclusion of the above argument then becomes:
IIIC’. So, one is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on \( p \) in deciding to conjecture that \( p \) only if one knows that \( p \).

(IIIC’) presents a norm that evaluates one’s conjecturing a proposition in terms of one’s epistemic relationship with that very proposition. But (IIIC’) is not a plausible norm of conjecturing: it does not seem like one needs to know that \( p \) in order to conjecture that \( p \). Again, we can run the Instance Argument 2 with any number of other illocutionary acts and get the same results (consider again: denying, asking, hypothesizing, etc.). Our tweak, then does not address Brown’s second concern.

However, Brown’s second criticism is only a concern if we assume that the right way to think about norms of illocutionary acts other than assertion is in terms of how well-positioned epistemically we are towards the propositional content of that act – in other words, that the correct structure of the norms of illocutionary act is the C Rule. Indeed, Brown explicitly argues that,

[S]ome linguistic actions appear to have weaker epistemic requirements than does assertion. For instance, it may be fully appropriate to ask whether \( p \), or surmise that \( p \) even if one does not know that \( p \). On the other hand, some linguistic actions appear to have stronger epistemic requirements than does assertion. For instance, it may seem that swearing that \( p \) requires a stronger epistemic position than merely asserting that \( p \). If the epistemic norms governing linguistic actions vary in the suggested way, then the epistemic norms governing them cannot derive merely from the practical reasoning norm together with the fact that they are actions, otherwise the very same norm would apply to all linguistic actions. (131)
Brown clearly accepts the C Rule and the epistemically variable view of illocutionary acts. By accepting the C Rule, when we apply the Instance Argument to an illocutionary act it is assumed that the norm of this act, by virtue of being an act, inherits both the constitutive condition *and* the proposition that one stands in an epistemic relationship with. In other words, since we evaluate whether treating that \( p \) as a reason for acting is appropriate based on how epistemically well-positioned we are towards \( p \), it must also be the case that we evaluate whether \( \phi \)-ing that \( p \) is appropriate based on how epistemically well-positioned we are towards \( p \), for some illocutionary act of \( \phi \)-ing. But we need not think that this is the case. Instead, we can say that while the norm of a particular illocutionary act inherits the epistemic component of a norm of action, it does not inherit its propositional component. After all, what distinguishes an illocutionary act is, on the view I have argued for her, is its individuating proposition.

We only get the undesirable result of Brown’s instance argument, then, when we assume that we need to evaluate the propriety of our performance of some illocutionary act in terms of our epistemic relationship with the propositional content of that act. This assumption is a natural consequence of the C Rule. However, if we accept the Cf Rule instead, then our performances of illocutionary acts should be evaluated in terms of how well-positioned epistemically we are not towards the propositional content of that act, but instead towards that act’s individuating proposition.

The idea is the following: by replacing the act of assertion with the act of conjecturing in Instance Argument 2, and then applying the same translation on its conclusion that we did with the norm of assertion (i.e. considered the case in which \( q = p \)), we are left with what appears to be an intolerable norm of conjecturing, namely that when conjecturing that \( p \) one should know that \( p \). However, we are only left with this conclusion if we assume the C Rule and the
epistemically variable view, that is, if we accept that an instance of conjecturing that \( p \) is properly evaluated in terms of one’s epistemic relationship with \( p \) itself. According to the propositionally variable view, however, this is not the case: an instance of conjecturing that \( p \) is properly evaluated in terms of one’s epistemic relationship with some proposition other than \( p \) – as I have suggested here, “\( p \) is possible.” The problem, then, is that we have been assuming that the translation scheme that we applied to the Instance Argument for the norm of assertion is the same as that for the norm of every other speech act. But this need not be the case. Consider running the Instance Argument 2 again when applied to conjecturing, but instead of considering the instance in which we rely on \( p \) in conjecturing that \( p \), we consider the instance in which one relies on “\( p \) is likely” when deciding to conjecture that \( p \) (i.e. we consider that instance in which \( q = \text{“} p \text{ is likely} \text{”} \)):

a. One is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on “\( p \) is likely” in deciding to do \( \psi \) only if one knows that “\( p \) is likely”.

b. Conjecturing that \( q \) is a kind of action.

c. So, one is in a good enough position to rely on “\( p \) is likely” in deciding to conjecture that \( q \) only if one knows that “\( p \) is likely”.

Then, when we consider just those cases in which we conjecture \( p \) itself, we get the following:

C1. So, one is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on “\( p \) is likely” in deciding to conjecture that \( p \) only if one knows that “\( p \) is likely”.

Which, in turn, has the following form:

C2. So, one is in a good enough epistemic position to rely on \( f_{\text{Con}}(p) \) in deciding to conjecture that \( p \) only if one knows that \( f_{\text{Con}}(p) \).
C2 evaluates one’s conjecturing that \( p \) in terms of one’s epistemic relationship with \( f_\psi(p) \), which is what the norm of conjecturing should look like, according to the Cf Rule. The idea, then, is that if this argument is successful with assertion, conjecturing, and swearing, that we can then run this argument with any other kind of illocutionary act: we will get the correct norm of that act when we consider just those cases in which we rely on that act’s individuating proposition in the performance of that act. Again, the arguments are going to look the same for each member of a family of illocutionary acts, since these families are determined by their characteristic function.

Don’t we still get the result in IIIC, though, that when one relies on \( p \) in conjecturing that \( p \) that one should know that \( p \)? Yes; however, I’ve argued that we should not think of this result as telling us what the norm of conjecturing is, since a norm of conjecturing should be conceived of in terms of how well-positioned epistemically we are with \( f_{\text{Con}}(p) \) when we conjecture \( p \), not \( p \) itself. Thus IIIC again tells us something merely incidental about conjecturing, namely that in those cases in which we rely on \( p \) in conjecturing that \( p \), we should know that \( p \). It is unlikely that these kinds of cases are going to arise very often: when I conjecture that \( p \), I’m not going to cite \( p \) itself as a reason for why I made my conjecture. What, after all, would be the point in conjecturing \( p \) if I’m going to be relying on \( p \) when deciding what to conjecture?

The Instance Argument, then, only fails if we assume the epistemically variable view. I have suggested that this is not the only way to think about these norms: instead, we can think of the difference between them consisting in the proposition we need to have an epistemic relationship with, not which epistemic relationship we need to have. Why, however, should we accept the propositionally variable view instead of the epistemically variable view? One reason is perhaps the success of the Instance Argument itself: the Instance Argument is able to both explain why the debates about the norms of action and assertion (as well as the other
ilocutionary acts) run in the kind of parallels that they do, as well as why assertion is governed by a particular epistemic relationship rather than some other one. Regardless, I have shown that the Instance Argument gives untenable results only on the assumption of the epistemically variable view, a view that Brown has not defended.

3.5 Consequences and Conclusion

I’ve argued here that the propositionally variable view requires that we think of the structure of the norms of illocutionary acts as being governed by the Cf Rule as opposed to the C Rule, and that by accepting the Cf Rule the Instance Argument no longer gives untenable results in terms of the epistemic requirements of illocutionary acts other than assertion. With Commonality comes an explanation as to why the debates concerning the norm of action and the norm of assertion have run in such a close parallel, as well as principled reason as to why proper assertion has the epistemic requirements that it does. A consequence of accepting Commonality along with the Cf Rule, then, is that the debates concerning the correct norm of action and those concerning the correct norms of illocutionary acts should not be conducted in isolation from one another: if norms of illocutionary acts have the epistemic requirements that they do because they are instances of actions, then our main concern should be with finding out the correct norm of action. The work for determining the correct norms of different illocutionary acts will then come down to figuring out what the individuating propositions for these norms are, i.e. what proposition we need to have an epistemic relationship with when performing a particular illocutionary act.
Chapter 4: The Structure of Epistemic Separability

Chapter Summary

In order to accommodate what seem like counterintuitive consequences of accepting a particular norm of assertion or action, epistemologists have appealed to a notion of “secondary propriety.” By doing so they can explain why it is that violations of norms can seem intuitively appropriate: in these cases, one’s action is permissible, but not secondarily appropriate. A similar normative structure can be found in the literature concerning moral responsibility: while one’s actions can be morally impermissible, one can still be evaluated as doing something appropriate in some other way, namely if one is deemed blameless for one’s action. What is the nature of the relationship between first-order permissibility and secondary propriety when it comes to epistemic evaluations? In this chapter I argue that the relationship between secondary epistemic propriety and epistemic permissibility is fundamentally different than that between first- and second-order propriety in other normative areas. The difference is that while there is no sense of negative responsibility in other normative areas, there is plausibly such a notion when it comes to epistemic evaluations.

4.1 The Relationship Between Primary and Secondary Epistemic Propriety

If knowledge warrants action and/or assertion, we are required to explain why there are cases in which it is intuitively plausible that one does something that is permissible according to the relevant norm, but nevertheless fails to have knowledge. We have seen that defenders of the
knowledge norms appeal to what’s been called a notion of “secondary propriety”: whereas primary propriety concerns whether one has adhered to or violated the conditions of relevant norm, secondary propriety is an evaluation pertaining to the conditions under which one adhered to or violated that norm. We have seen some sketches of theories of secondary propriety: two such sketches are that one’s assertion is secondarily appropriate if one has “good reason” to think that one is adhering to the conditions of a norm when one actually fails to, or if one has a sufficient “excuse” for one’s first-order transgression. In the next few chapters I will survey in greater detail some of these specific views of secondary propriety. Here, however, I want to look at a more general question: what is the nature of the relationship between primary and secondary epistemic propriety?

I will address this question by surveying different options for a general framework of secondary propriety. While we don’t yet know what, exactly, the conditions for secondary propriety are, we do know what we want such a concept to capture. In broad strokes, we want our conception of secondary propriety to:

1) Explain judgments of intuitively appropriate violations of norms;
2) Have conditions that are related to the conditions that govern primary propriety; and
3) Evaluate the φ-ing subject as an appropriate or inappropriate φ’er in the right kind of way.

Condition (1) is really the impetus behind proposing a notion of secondary propriety in the first place. Condition (2) guarantees that our conception of secondary propriety really is secondary: we want our conception of secondary propriety to capture the ways in which we either adhere to or violate first-order norms, so the conditions of secondary propriety should not be wholly divorced from said norms. We need condition (3) to make sure that the normative dimension by which we are evaluating our subject as secondarily appropriate is the same as that by which we
are evaluating our subject as primarily appropriate. For example, when someone fails to meet the epistemic criteria of the norm of assertion we evaluate her as a poor epistemic subject, and thus our evaluations of secondary epistemic propriety should also evaluate her along the same normative dimension. We do not want a conception of secondary propriety that would evaluate our subject as a having done something morally permissible or impermissible when they are being evaluated as an epistemic subject, for example (we saw in chapter 1, for example, Lackey’s complaint that secondary propriety fails to capture appropriate judgments of a φ’er qua φ’er). We will see below that meeting this third condition is more elusive than it might seem, and several proposed counterexamples to conceptions of secondary propriety fail because they do not fully take into account this condition.

With these requirements in mind, there are, I think, three general ways in which we could conceive of secondary propriety: as a set of conditions that determine exceptions from the requirements of the relevant norms; as a kind of blameworthiness, analogous to that found in the realm of consequentialist moral evaluations; and as a different kind of epistemic evaluation, usually (but not necessarily) taken to be a kind of reasonableness. As I’ll show below, all of these conceptions of secondary propriety face significant problems.

(a) Secondary propriety as an exception

Recall the problem we’re facing. Let’s say we have some norm of φ-ing which has an epistemic component E, and is structured according to the Cf Rule: φ p only if you are in epistemic relationship E with f_φ(p). Cases in which I φ p while not having epistemic relationship E with f_φ(p) will be cases in which I violate the relevant norm. Violations of norms deserve criticism, in some way or another. But as we’ve seen there are going to be cases in which I have good reason to think that I am adhering to the relevant norm, despite actually violating it. Often
our intuitions in these cases are that I do not deserve criticism, despite violating the norm. Epistemic monists take an intuitive lack of desert of criticism to be an indication that no norm has been violated, whereas epistemic separabilists claim that intuitive lack of desert of criticism can be indicative of secondary propriety, instead.

We might explain our intuitive judgments of these kinds of cases as follows: in the cases in which I have good reason to believe that I am adhering to the relevant norm despite failing to, I shouldn’t count as being in violation of any norm at all. Our norms of assertion and action, then, will have exceptions. We can thus think of secondary propriety as determining the criteria by which an exception should be made to the relevant rule. In order to judge the plausibility of this notion of secondary propriety we can look to the way that exceptions to rules are dealt with in different areas of normative discourse. I will focus on two here: the first looks at the way in which legal norms admit of exceptions, while the second looks at a way in which moral norms might admit of exceptions.

*Legal Exceptions*

The question of culpability for legal transgressions is a matter of considerable debate. It is well accepted, for instance, that “ignorance of the law is no excuse” is an inaccurate and tired cliché. We can think of two types of ignorance that are relevant to determining one’s legal culpability: ignorance of fact (one is ignorant of some relevant fact of one’s situation) and ignorance of valence (one is ignorant of the relevant act’s being legal or illegal). There are cases where either kind of ignorance exculpates us of our legal responsibility. Doug Husak (2010) provides the following examples: a little-known New Jersey state law prohibits affixing any unofficial decals to the windshield of a car. If I apply a small decal of my alma mater to my windshield, and am unaware that the law prohibits such an act, it is unlikely that I will be found
culpable for my act: I am ignorant of the legal valence of the act of attaching a decal to my windshield. On the other hand, if am aware of the word of the law (i.e. I know that “It is illegal to affix an unofficial decal to my windshield”) but I am unaware of the extension of the concept “decal” – perhaps I think that certain stickers are prohibited because they qualify as decals, but that others are not, but I am mistaken about what the law classifies as a “decal” – then I am ignorant of a relevant fact. Depending on the nature of the offense and the wording of the law, there will be cases in which I should intuitively be exculpated of legal responsibility.

Part of the project of determining legal culpability is determining the necessary epistemic conditions for exculpation. Gideon Yaffe (2009) describes the problem of finding the necessary conditions for legal exculpation as figuring out how to fill in the blank in the following formula: “If defendant D has a false belief that \( p \) and ____, then D is excused” (1-2). Yaffe’s own solution that he defends is the following:

**Uncorrupted Deliberation Principle**: If \( D \) falsely believes that \( p \) and such a false belief indicates that in his deliberations pertaining to \( A \)-ing \( D \) was committed to accurate principles for extracting reasons from facts and accurate principles for weighting reasons, then \( D \) is excused for \( A \)-ing. (12)

I won’t evaluate Yaffe’s proposal here; we will see later that it captures a lot of the same themes as a general theory of excuses in the realm of both moral responsibility and secondary epistemic propriety. Instead, what I’m interested in here is how the idea of legal exculpation relates to violations of the law, and if we could apply this kind of model to a notion of exceptions from epistemically impermissible actions.
The relationship between exculpation and culpability in legal norms is seemingly different from that in, say, moral norms. If one violates a moral norm then regardless of whether we find them culpable or excused, some moral transgression has still occurred. In the legal case, however, when someone’s epistemic state excuses them from what would otherwise be a legal transgression, it can be the case that no transgression is committed at all. In other words, there will be circumstances in which, despite my action being in violation of the letter of the law, I have committed no crime: I cannot be innocent and deserving of legal punishment, or guilty and not deserving of legal punishment.

Perhaps, then, we can think of secondary epistemic propriety in a way that is similar to legal exceptions: perhaps in those instances in which I have good reason to think that I am adhering to a norm but failing to, I should not be considered to have done anything epistemically inappropriate at all. An exception view of secondary epistemic propriety fulfils our three requirements for a notion of secondary epistemic propriety. Consider applying the exception framework to Justified Julian’s case: Julian’s assertion of a justified but false belief can be deemed appropriate because there are facts about his assertion – either the way he formed his belief, or the epistemic relationship he has with the proposition he asserts, etc. – that exempt his assertion from being evaluated by the first-order norm. Julian’s assertion is thus not improper in any sense because he has been exempted from the rule. Secondary propriety as an exception can also explain said intuitions in a way that is directly related to the conditions for first-order propriety (since Julian is being excused from the requirements of the first-order norm), and evaluates Julian in the right sort of way (that is to say, we are evaluating him as an asserter and an epistemic subject, and not as anything else).
Although this conception of secondary propriety can explain our intuitions of cases like Julian’s, I think it does so in a dialectically suspect way. Consider how we would have to evaluate Justified Julian according to the knowledge norm: because of the way in which Julian formed his belief, he is exempt from having to meet the knowledge condition for appropriate assertion, and thus his assertion should itself be considered appropriate. Why, though, should we think that the conditions that exonerate Julian from what would have been a violation of a first-order norm are not simply themselves the conditions that determine first-order propriety? In other words, if there are going to be exceptions to the rule, why not say that whatever conditions determine when the exceptions are applicable should instead be incorporated into the conditions of the first-order norm? We have seen this kind of reasoning already, when looking at criticisms against a notion of secondary propriety in general: instead of saying that a justified but false belief can, say, exonerate one of a first-order norm violation (in whatever way), why not instead posit that justification is what actually determines first-order propriety?

The other problem with positing secondary propriety as a kind of exemption from the norm is that, at least under the conception we have been working with here, the norm of assertion is constitutive of that act. What does it mean, then, to be exempt from a norm that is constitutive of the act one is performing? If my assertion is not being evaluated according to the norm of assertion, then in what sense is it an assertion at all anymore? There seems, then, to be a fundamental tension between being exempt from a norm that is constitutive of the act that one is performing.

There is another way that we might conceive of epistemic norms as admitting of exceptions. Some ethical theories – *moral particularism* and *moral contextualism* specifically –
claim that moral principles have exceptions. Below I’ll briefly review how moral exceptions are
supposed to work, and see if there’s a plausible analogue in the epistemic case.

*Moral Exceptions*

Here is a somewhat different way of thinking about how we can be excused from the
requirements of the norms of action/assertion: *ceteris paribus* assert/treat as a reason for acting
that \( p \) only if you E that \( f_\phi(p) \). For the most part, then, one should only \( \phi p \) if one has epistemic
relationship E with \( f_\phi(p) \), but there will be certain exceptions. Again, if we are considering the
knowledge norm, we might think that when one has good reason to think that one knows that \( p \)
but fails to, the conditions of the norm do not hold *ceteris paribus*.

This kind of evaluative structure can be found in so-called “hedged” moral principles.
Proponents of such principles claim that moral principles typically have *ceteris paribus* clauses
built in. This kind of view has the appeal of allowing us to hold intuitive moral principles while
admitting that they are not universally applicable. Consider the following: we might think that it
is always wrong to tell a lie. There are many mundane cases, however, in which it seems that
lying does not seem wrong at all (when I lie to you while playing poker, for example), or when it
is the best available action (telling a little white lie to save someone’s feelings, for example, or
perhaps telling a bigger lie in order to avoid potential disaster). We can explain these kinds of
judgments in two ways: first, we might maintain that lying is always wrong, but in certain
situations the benefits of lying swamp the costs, so in those cases lying is the overall best thing to
do. The lie, then, still counts as a small moral demerit, even if the overall moral value of the
action is high. Second, we might think that in these cases lying is actually not morally
impermissible at all. When telling little white lies, for example, there is actually no moral
demerit to speak of; indeed, the act of lying itself might be taken to be a good action. On this
interpretation, then, the maxim “it’s always wrong to lie” contains an unspoken “ceteris paribus” clause. Appeals to hedged moral principles have been used to support both moral particularism – the view that there are no substantial moral principles at all (see Dancy (2004)) – and moral contextualism – the view that the truth value of sentences that express moral propositions can vary depending on their context of utterance (see Lance and Little (2008)).

We could apply this structure to our epistemic principles. Call epistemic norms that admit of exceptions in the sense that the norms only apply ceteris paribus “hedged epistemic norms.” How would these work? Take the knowledge norm of assertion. We might explain our intuitions in the general problem cases by claiming that the true form of the norm of assertion is not “assert that $p$ only if you know that $p$”, but rather “ceteris paribus, assert that $p$ only if you know that $p$.”

Consider some possible cases that could be accounted for by appeal to a hedged epistemic principle: a friend is running to catch a train, but he doesn’t know if the one that’s about to pull out of the station is his or not. You have a pretty good idea that that is indeed his train, although you don’t know it. It might seem that in this case that it would be permissible to assert “run man, that’s your train about to leave!” despite not knowing the content of your assertion. Thus we might think that you should assert that $p$ only if you know that $p$, except if there are extenuating practical circumstances.

Of course, we can always explain these kinds of cases by saying that in the train case, we did something epistemically inappropriate by asserting something that we didn’t know, but that the practical (and, perhaps, moral) benefits outweigh the epistemic impropriety, so overall we did what we should have done. Our ledger might contain a small negative in the “epistemic” column, but the sum total is still overall positive. Of course, these kinds of cases again appeal perhaps simply to the fact that certain norms can be overridden by certain others: it might not say
anything in particular about the plausibility of our epistemic norms that sometimes the best course of action is to violate them. What we need is a case in which a small epistemic demerit is overridden by a greater epistemic gain. Here is perhaps such a case: a high school physics teacher knows that Newtonian mechanics is not the correct way to calculate, say, the velocity of a ball dropped from a tower. She knows that equations from more advanced theories like general relativity and quantum mechanics will give the real results, but also knows that her class needs to learn the basics before they can move on to more complicated material. Nevertheless, she asserts “the correct way to calculate the velocity of a ball dropped from a tower is by using such-and-such equation.” The teacher is asserting something she doesn’t know (since it is false), and thus her transgression of the norm of assertion might again count as a small epistemic demerit. However, the foundation she has laid for future learning in her students might qualify as a large overall epistemic merit. Our other option, as in the moral case, to say that in this case there was actually no epistemic transgression at all: because this is one of the situations that the ceteris paribus clause applies, our epistemic norm does not apply. On this view, in the physics teacher case we should not say that she has done anything epistemically wrong at all.

Hedged epistemic norms have not, to my knowledge, been championed by anyone in the norms of assertion or action literature. Hedged epistemic norms might lead us to adopt a kind of epistemic particularism – a view where there are no substantial epistemic principles – or a kind of epistemic normative contextualism – a view where the meanings of sentences like “only assert propositions you know” has different truth values depending on the context of utterance. This second view should not be confused with standard epistemic contextualism, in which the truth value of sentences of the form “x knows that p” is dependent upon the context of utterance. Indeed, we could have a (admittedly confusing) combination of epistemic contextualism about
“knows” and normative contextualism about the norms of assertion and action. The above train case is a good example: an epistemic contextualist evaluation of the case would entail that it is false that “I know that that is your train”, yet it might be acceptable to assert that proposition because in the same context the value of “assert only what you know” is false.

In general, I think there are three significant problems with positing hedged epistemic principles in a manner akin to hedged moral principles. The first has to do with the general plausibility of explanation; the second, with the capacity of hedged principles to explain the wide variety of potential counterexamples that proponents of different epistemic norms have to face; and the third, to do with the role that the epistemic component serves in norms of assertion and practical reasoning, and how that differs from moral evaluations of various actions. I’ll address these three concerns in turn.

The first concern is that it’s very difficult in general to separate the epistemic evaluation from evaluation pertaining to other dimensions of value when considering candidate cases to which hedged epistemic principles might apply. Again, in the train case above, because it is clearly practically appropriate to tell someone that that is their train lest they miss it, and because this practical value swamps the potential epistemic demerit so significantly, it is hard to separate the epistemic value from the practical value. But, of course, we already accepted the defeasibility of our norms: there will be cases in which, overall, one ought to do something that will involve a violation of an epistemic norm. So we can accept defeasibility without accepting hedged epistemic principles.

The second problem is that the range of potential counterexamples for potential epistemic norms do not seem to be able to be captured by hedging. For example, if we take Justified Julian to be asserting or acting appropriately, what can we appeal to in order to explain why his case is
one that falls under the ceteris paribus clause? That there are many instances of justified but false beliefs in general that are deemed intuitively appropriate would require an inordinately strong ceteris paribus clause if we are proponents of a knowledge norm, for example. Indeed, a principle like “assert that \( p \) only if you know that \( p \) – except if you are justified in believing without knowing that \( p \)” sounds implausible; why not say that justification warrants assertion instead?

The third problem is that the norms of assertion and practical reasoning that we have been considering thus far have epistemic components that are constitutive of the relevant subject matter. As I’ve argued in chapter 3, different illocutionary acts are differentiated according to the individuating proposition that one has an epistemic relationship with. The illocutionary act of suggesting that \( p \), for example, is deemed appropriate or inappropriate according to one’s epistemic relationship towards “\( p \) is plausible”. Thus one of the possible explanations for a judgment of propriety of an action despite a norm dictating that the action is inappropriate is that we are not actually performing that action. For example, we might evaluate the train example as follows: if it is appropriate for me to say “that’s your train!” despite not knowing it, we might think that the best explanation is that my act does not qualify as an act of asserting, but rather something else, say “warning” or “advising.” The norms of warning or advising might not require that we know the content of what we are warning or advising against (rather, we might think that we just need to know that the content is likely).

This kind of explanation in the epistemic case is not available to us in the moral case. Consider again the case of lying: it is implausible to suggest that in cases of apparently morally acceptable lying that we are not actually lying at all. Moral valence is not constitutive of acts: even if we think that lying is always wrong, it’s not constitutive of lying that it be something
morally wrong. None of this constitutes definitive reason to give up on conceiving of norms of assertions and practical reasoning as admitting of exceptions. We might simply deny that there are constitutive epistemic norms at all and be epistemic particularists or epistemic normative contextualists. But as I’ve attempted to show here, taking such a stance is an uphill battle: reasons that one might hold for moral particularism or moral contextualism do not readily admit of epistemic analogues.

Furthermore, conceiving of secondary propriety as creating exceptions for norms seems to collapse into positing different conditions for those norms. As we saw in the first two chapters, however, regardless of the epistemic component that we propose for norms of assertion or action we are going to need a conception of secondary propriety to explain our judgments of at least some class of cases. Thus even if we choose to refine our norms by amending exceptions, we are going to need to tack on even further exception conditions to account for the new general problem cases that will arise. For now, the main problem facing a conception of secondary propriety as a set of conditions that create exceptions to a norm is that it is dialectically simpler to think of these conditions as refining the norm. I don’t think it should be surprising, then, that secondary propriety proponents have not explicitly adhered to a conception as an exception from a rule. So let’s consider some other, more popular options.

(b) Secondary propriety as blameworthiness

When we evaluate people for their moral transgressions, talk of blameworthiness is commonplace. It is recognized (especially in moral theories that determine moral propriety by appealing to factors that are not (solely) reliant upon the mental state of the agent, e.g. various forms of consequentialism) that one can violate a moral norm and yet be blameless for doing so. The conditions that determine blameworthiness are far from universally agreed upon. In general,
however, it seems that the conditions for being blameworthy for committing a morally
impermissible act are at least partially epistemic in nature\textsuperscript{19}: there will often be cases in which
we find someone undeserving of moral criticism because they didn’t know either some relevant
fact of the matter, or they didn’t know that what they were doing was morally impermissible
(and they couldn’t have been expected to have known any better). We might then think of
secondary propriety in regards to norms of assertion and practical reason as a kind of
blamelessness: one is secondarily appropriate just in case one is not blameworthy for one’s
epistemic transgression.

Stanley and Hawthorne (2008) seem to conceive of secondary propriety as akin to a
notion of blameworthiness. Recall their claim that in cases of assertion a proposition that one
does not know, but would not be expected to know, that,

we may be willing to deem their failure to comply with the norm excusable. The
conceptual structure, one familiar from the normative realm, explains suitable appraisal
in terms of a combination of norms and excuses for failure to comply with them. (573)

The “normative realm” that Stanley and Hawthorne are appealing to is no doubt the realm of
moral evaluation. When we appeal to epistemic “excuses”, then, we are spelling out the
conditions under which one is blameless.

Secondary epistemic propriety as blameworthiness also fulfils all of our above conditions
for secondary propriety. Consider how a knowledge-norm proponent would explain a case like

\textsuperscript{19} It is generally agreed that the other major factor that determines moral blameworthiness is whether the agent who
committed the act was \textit{free} to do so, in some relevant sense of “free.” I will not focus on the freedom condition
here.
Justified Julian’s using this conception of secondary propriety: Julian violates a first-order norm, but because of some fact about his epistemic state – because he is justified in believing that he has adhered to the norm, perhaps – he is not to blame for his transgression. This is not to say that Julian is exempt from the rule. After all, if one is blameless for committing a morally impermissible act, the act remains morally impermissible; similarly in the epistemic case, Julian has still committed an epistemic transgression, he just should not be blamed for it. We can see that blamelessness fulfils the second and third criteria for a conception of secondary propriety, as well: Julian is blameless precisely because of his relationship with the first-order norm, and he is being evaluated as a blameless asserter and epistemic subject, as opposed to anything else.

Conceiving of secondary propriety as blameworthiness has one major advantage, namely that we can look to the literature on other kinds of blameworthiness to figure out the conditions for being blameworthy for violations of norms of assertion and practical reasoning. Thus we can pass off the work of trying to answer the second question of secondary propriety (which would here be equivalent to the question: what are the conditions under which one is determined to be blameworthy) to those who are trying to answer the question of the conditions of moral blameworthiness.

However, conceiving of a notion of secondary epistemic propriety as akin to a notion of blameworthiness faces a fundamental problem. While we can be blameworthy or blameless for our moral transgressions, we can also be praiseworthy or fail to be praiseworthy for our morally permissible actions. A morally permissible action is praiseworthy, perhaps, because it was performed out a desire to bring out a certain good outcome, whereas a morally permissible action is not praiseworthy, perhaps, because it was not performed voluntarily, or perhaps one did not intend the outcome that came about, etc. As a notion of blameworthiness can explain why we
shouldn’t be credited with the badness of our morally impermissible actions, a notion of praiseworthiness can explain why we should be credited the goodness of our morally permissible actions. There does not, however, seem to be a way in which we can be evaluated in a morally negative way when we perform a morally permissible action. Just as it does not make sense to say that we can be praiseworthy for doing something morally wrong – “praise” does not make sense in this context, only an absence of blame – it does not make sense to say that we can be blameworthy for doing something morally right – “blame” does not make sense in this context, only, perhaps, an absence of being praiseworthy. However, I will argue below that it does seem that there is a relevant sense when it comes to epistemic normativity that pertains to a way in which we make a negative evaluation of epistemically permissible actions.

4.2 The Counterpart Problem

The knowledge norm of action and assertion seem plausible in part because there are many cases in which one is acting in an intuitively appropriate way when one acts on the basis of knowledge. As we have seen, though, many other norms have been proposed in the knowledge norm’s stead, ones that claim to be able to accommodate the relevant data. After all, one who acts on the basis of knowledge does not just act on the basis of something that one knows, but something that is true, as well as something that one is justified in believing. We then need a way to decide amongst the following choices of norms:

*Truth Norm:* It is appropriate for S to $\phi p$ only if $p$ is true.

*Belief Norm:* It is appropriate for S to $\phi p$ only if S believes that $p$. 
Justification Norm: It is appropriate for S to \( \phi p \) only if S is justified in believing that \( p \).  

It seems that additional data may be appealed to in order to rule out some of these norms. For instance, there seems to be plentiful data ruling out the truth norm, as there will be many cases in which a subject has acted/asserted inappropriately, despite the relevant proposition being acted upon or asserted being true. Consider, for example:

Georgie’s Guess:  Hannah and Georgie are travelling to another restaurant on another occasion. Coming to a fork in the road, Georgie needs to decide which way to turn. She could easily turn on her GPS, which would guide her directly to the restaurant. Instead, Georgie ignores the GPS and guesses that she should turn right. Sure enough, the restaurant happens to be on the right. Hannah asks Georgie, “Why did you turn right?” Georgie responds, “I just guessed.”

Hannah is right to criticize Georgie for guessing, but the truth norm cannot explain why: Georgie acted on a true proposition, which is all that is required of her. In addition to this counterintuitive result, the truth norm will also often tell us that a subject is inappropriately \( \phi \)-ing \( p \) when they’re intuitively appropriately \( \phi \)-ing \( p \). Consider again our case of Justified Julian: he is asserting a false proposition, but he seems appropriate in doing so, contra the truth norm.

The judgments of propriety in the cases of Georgie and Julian only count against the truth norm, however, if we have already assumed epistemic monism. According to this view, if it is improper for one to \( \phi p \), then \( p \) is false. Since this is not the case in the above examples, one might argue that the truth norm must therefore be incorrect. But the truth norm proponent has

\[20\] Again, for some broad construal of “justification.”
another way out: if we accept epistemic separability, then the truth norm can be employed to
capture the propriety of Julian’s assertion by proposing a truth norm with an excuse manoeuvre.
(After all, if an excuse manoeuvre can be appealed to in order to defend the knowledge norm,
why not the truth norm?) According to this strategy, while Julian violates the norm “assert only
what is true”, he is excusable in doing so (for whatever reason), thus making his assertion, at
least in some ways, appropriate.

The truth norm proponent thus at least has the necessary tools for explaining the intuitive
propriety of Julian’s action. She cannot, however, appeal to an excuse manoeuvre to explain the
intuitive impropropriety of Georgie’s assertion. In Georgie’s case, she is not excused from violating
the truth norm; rather, she adheres to it, but nevertheless seems inappropriate in doing so.
However, once we have demarcated senses of epistemic propriety into one that tracks adherence
to a norm and another that tracks excusability, the proponent of the truth norm now has a way to
explain the intuitive judgment in Georgie’s Guess, as well: we might say that despite adhering to
the truth norm, there is something about the way in which she does so that nevertheless makes
her assertion, at least in some way, inappropriate. Say that in cases like Georgie’s the subject is
culpable, and call such an explanation a “culpability manoeuvre.” As excuse manoeuvres can
explain intuitive judgments of propriety despite norm violation, culpability manoeuvres can
explain intuitive judgments of impropropriety despite norm adherence.

What might a culpability manoeuvre look like? We might spell out the conditions under
which one comes to adhere to the $\phi$-norm, and claim that because these conditions obtained,
one’s $\phi$-ing $p$ is still nevertheless in some sense epistemically inappropriate. Or we might say
that because of some other characteristic of the subject’s epistemic state (say, despite knowing
that $p$ one has good reason think that $p$ is false) one’s $\phi$-ing $p$ is again in some way epistemically
inappropriate. A worry in appealing to this structure of explanation, however, is that it seems that any norm could account for any data, given a strong enough theory of excuse and culpability manoeuvres. For instance, consider the following norm that (hopefully) no one takes seriously:

**Norman Norm**: It is appropriate for S to $\phi p$ only if S believes that S is named “Norman.”

Counterintuitive consequences of the Norman norm are readily available. But with gratuitous appeal to excuse and culpability manoeuvres we can explain any of the above data with the Norman Norm. Indeed, for any norm of assertion or practical reasoning of the form “it is appropriate for S to $\phi p$ only if C” for some condition or set of conditions C, one can provide excuse and/or culpability manoeuvres in order to explain any conflicting data whatsoever. Based on the sheer ability to explain data, then, by accepting epistemic separability we cannot privilege any norm of practical reasoning above any other.

Perhaps this conclusion is too hasty. After all, one might think that we *can* privilege some norms over others, since some norms require appeal to excuse and culpability manoeuvres more often than others; the Norman Norm is inferior to, say, the truth norm, since the former needs to appeal to a secondary level of propriety more often than the latter (and the latter might be seen to be inferior to the justification norm, which in turn requires less appeal to a secondary level of propriety, etc.). That certain norms need to appeal to excuse and culpability manoeuvres less often is not, however, a strategy that can be employed by a proponent of epistemic separability to privilege any one norm over any other. There is nothing, after all, that says that having to appeal to a secondary level of propriety to explain judgments somehow makes one norm inferior to the other; secondary propriety is not (at least not as we have been talking about it thus far) a second-class normative citizen.
We can address this problem in a number of ways. First, we can give up the concept of a culpability manoeuvre. We would not be giving it up without cause: if we take the blameworthiness structure of evaluation of norm adherence as paradigmatic, then since it does not admit of the possibility of culpability manoeuvres we should therefore abandon them. Abandoning culpability manoeuvres means abandoning a lot of possible candidates for the norms of assertion and practical reasoning. For instance, the truth norm proponent relies heavily on culpability manoeuvres to explain the intuitive impropriety of assertions of propositions that just-so-happen to be true. Without culpability manoeuvres the truth norm proponent will face serious gaps in its explanatory power. This would give us good reason to prefer some other candidate norm.

Instead of giving up on culpability manoeuvres, we could try to find some principled reason why the structure of evaluation in the moral case is not analogous to that in the epistemic case. In other words, if blameworthiness is the standard second-order way of evaluating the conditions of norm violations, we would have to provide reasons as to why epistemic blameworthiness has a different structure than moral blameworthiness. I think there is such an explanation.

When we violate moral norms, the conditions that make us blameless for our transgressions are those conditions that get us “off the hook”. But secondary moral impropriety cannot get us “on the hook”, so to speak: if we have done something morally permissible according to the relevant moral norms, how could we have done something morally inappropriate in any other way? There is no hook to be hanged upon! Gary Watson (1996) notices a similar point about the asymmetry between positive and negative evaluations pertaining to judgments of moral responsibility: “‘holding responsible’ has, strictly speaking, no positive
counterpart…To be held liable is to be on the hook, and we lack a ready phrase for the positive
counterpart to the “hook” (236). Call the lack of evaluative concept that allows us to assign
negative judgment that pertains to the performance of morally permissible actions the
counterpart problem. The way we have been talking about secondary epistemic propriety,
however, does not seem to admit of a counterpart problem: actions that are first-order
epistemically permissible can be second-order epistemically inappropriate according to a notion
of secondary propriety. We might, then, think that since a notion of secondary epistemic
propriety does not face the counterpart problem that it is thereby not a legitimate kind of
normative judgment. On the other hand, we might think that there is a significant difference
between the way that second-order judgments that pertain to epistemic permissibility differ from
those that pertain to moral permissibility. But why would there be such a difference?

Here’s why. When we violate moral norms, our primary transgressions are moral ones,
and whether we are blameworthy for those transgressions depends, at least in part, on our
epistemic status, viz. whether we should have known better, or are otherwise responsible for
being in a state of ignorance. When we violate norms that have epistemic components (i.e. our
norms of assertion and practical reasoning) our primary transgressions are epistemic ones. Since
part of what determines whether we are responsible for our morally impermissible actions is
whether we are epistemically situated in the right ways with the relevant moral facts or valences,
it stands to reason that we can also be let off the hook for our epistemic transgressions if we are
epistemically situated in the right ways with the relevant epistemic facts or valences – if we
didn’t know any better, if we really believed that what we were doing was permissible, etc.

Now, the counterpart problem was that there is no relevant sense in which one’s
epistemic status can result in a negative moral evaluation when one’s act is first-order morally
permissible. Where one’s epistemic status was incapable of creating any additional sense of moral impropriety, however, it does seem to be capable of creating an additional sense of epistemic impropriety. This is because if I am being evaluated as an epistemic subject, then I can commit an epistemic transgression in two ways: one, by violating a first-order norm, and another, by adhering to a first-order norm in some epistemically bad way. It is the fact that evaluations of blameworthiness depend on one’s epistemic status and that norms of assertion and practical reasoning have epistemic components that results in a counterpart problem in the moral case, but not in the epistemic case.

There is, then, no counterpart problem when it comes to epistemic evaluations: the proper kind of epistemic status can get us off the hook for failing to adhere to norms that are epistemically constituted, but we can also be put back on the hook, so to speak, by adhering to those norms in epistemically suspect ways - by doing so we essentially create the hook and hang ourselves on it all at once. The fact that there is no counterpart problem in epistemic evaluations means that we should expect there to be a difference in the way that we make secondary ethical and epistemic evaluations. We should then move at least somewhat away from the familiar normative territory of blame and praise.

(c) Secondary propriety as some different kind of evaluation

Both a conception of secondary propriety that determines conditions for exceptions and as a kind of blameworthiness face dialectical and explanatory difficulties. There are alternatives. One such alternative conception of secondary propriety that we have seen briefly is that of reasonableness. Williamson (2000), for example, argues that in cases of justified false belief, for example, despite having violated the knowledge norm of assertion, one’s assertion can nevertheless still be evaluated as reasonable. Thus we can explain our intuitive judgment that
despite violating a first-order norm one has done something appropriate because we are evaluating them as reasonable. This conception of secondary propriety differs from an exemption view of secondary propriety since no exceptions are being made to the first-order norm; it is also distinct from a blame view of secondary propriety, as it permits an evaluation of secondary impropriety despite norm adherence: as we could presumably be *reasonable* in violating a norm, we could also be *unreasonable* in adhering to a norm. Williamson at least entertains this possibility when he says that “[o]ne may have the authority to do something even when it is unreasonable for one to believe that one has that authority” (264-5). Williamson might then endorse a conception of secondary propriety with the following conditions: one is secondarily appropriate in asserting a proposition just in case it is reasonable for one to believe that one knows that proposition.

Weiner (2005) also seems to have a conception of secondary propriety as reasonableness in mind when he claims that “if assertion is governed by the truth norm, an assertion is secondarily improper if the speaker does not have reason to believe that it is true” (236). Again, secondary propriety as blamelessness won’t work here for Weiner, since in order for the truth norm to accommodate a wide range of our intuitive judgments about improper assertions of true propositions he needs to appeal to the possibility of secondary impropriety despite primary propriety.

DeRose (2002) seems to endorse a view similar to Williamson and Weiner’s in which secondary propriety is determined by whether it was reasonable for one to believe that one had adhered to the relevant norm. His formulation of secondary propriety is confusing, however, since he refers to it as a kind of blamelessness. Recall his introduction of the distinction:
While those who assert appropriately [with respect to the knowledge norm of assertion] in a primary sense will be those who actually obey it, a speaker who broke this rule in a blameless fashion (one who asserted something she didn’t know, but reasonably thought she did know) would in some secondary sense be asserting properly, and a speaker who asserted something she thought she did not know, but in fact did know (if this is possible) would be asserting improperly in a secondary sense. (180)

Of course, as we’ve seen DeRose could only appeal to a sense of blamelessness when evaluating norm violations, not adherences. DeRose’s discussion of secondary propriety underscores the burdens that such a concept needs to bear. If we need secondary propriety to allow for the possibility of both excuse and culpability manoeuvres, we’re going to have to either leave behind or amend the “familiar normative structure” that only permits evaluations of blameworthiness and praiseworthiness. But then we need some conception of secondary propriety to replace or amend it with. One major project that we would need to undertake, then, is to find the right conditions for this notion of propriety. This is the task of the next two chapters.
Chapter 5: Reasonableness and Responsibility

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I argue that a prominent account of secondary epistemic propriety – Timothy Williamson’s conception of reasonableness – is both too strong and too weak of a notion to accommodate the full range of our epistemic evaluations of assertions and actions. This is because while reasonableness is defined as a function of what evidence one possesses, I argue that we make epistemic evaluations not solely on the basis of the evidence that one has, but on the basis of the evidence that one should have. I call an evaluative notion that takes into account the evidence one should have responsibility. I then consider another proposal from Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, who argues for a notion of what I label process-reasonableness. I argue that process-reasonableness faces similar problems to the ones I raise for Williamson. Finally, I consider and respond to the objection that in arguing for a notion of responsibility I am introducing positive epistemic obligations, which, it has been argued, are incoherent.

5.1 Permissibility and Reasonableness

In regards to criticism that the knowledge norm of assertion rules out too many intuitively epistemically appropriate assertions as impermissible, Williamson (2000) distinguishes two normative relations that one’s assertion can stand in with respect to the norm of assertion: as permissible and as reasonable. One’s assertion is permissible iff one fulfills the conditions of the norm (and impermissible if one fails to fulfil those conditions) and reasonable if “it is very probable on one’s evidence that one knows that p” (256) (and unreasonable otherwise). Since for
Williamson one’s evidence is just one’s knowledge\(^\text{21}\), an assertion is reasonable iff, given what one knows, it is likely that one knows the asserted proposition. Here I argue that reasonableness as Williamson conceives of it cannot account for the full range of instances in which we are liable to judge that someone’s assertion is epistemically appropriate or inappropriate. I will argue that there are cases in which reasonableness is too weak an evaluative notion – i.e. cases in which an assertion will be epistemically inappropriate despite being either reasonable and permissible, or reasonable and impermissible where the epistemic impropriety of the assertion cannot be captured by its status as impermissible – as well as cases in which reasonableness is too strong an evaluative notion – i.e. cases in which an assertion will be either epistemically appropriate despite being unreasonable and impermissible, or unreasonable and permissible, where the epistemic propriety of the assertion cannot be captured by its status as permissible. The problem, I argue, is that while reasonableness is defined in terms of the evidence that the subject actually possesses, there is a relevant dimension of epistemic evaluation that pertains to the evidence one should have in a situation in which one acts or asserts, as well. I call the normative notion that takes the latter into account responsibility.

The idea behind this chapter, then, is to argue for the view that we should conceive of the ways that one can be evaluated epistemically with regards to the norm of assertion and action in terms of permissibility and responsibility. In sections 2 and 3 I will show how Williamson’s conception of reasonableness entails counterintuitive consequences for a range of cases, and then sketch a view of responsibility. In section 4 I will consider a different conception of reasonableness, one from Maria Lasonen-Aarnio (2010), who cashes out her concept in terms of

\(^{21}\) In his (2000) Williamson argues extensively for this claim, what he calls the “E=K” thesis (185). I will not rehearse his arguments here.
adopting certain belief-forming methods (what I refer to as process-reasonableness), and then raise some objections to it. In section 5 I will respond to the objection that by claiming that we ought to have certain evidence or know certain things in order to be epistemically responsible involves an appeal to a positive epistemic duty, a kind of duty, it has been argued, that is incoherent. Rather, I argue that such a duty is coherent, at least in those cases in which we are asserting or treating a proposition as a reason for acting.

5.2 Reasonableness is too Weak

Consider one of Williamson’s (2000) cases of an assertion that is impermissible yet reasonable:

*Fake Snow*: One notices that it looks like it is snowing outside, and forms the belief that it is, in fact, snowing outside. However, one is really seeing a convincing artificial snow substitute that has been carried by the wind from a nearby movie studio. One has a justified but false belief that it is snowing, and thus by asserting “it is snowing”, one violates the knowledge norm of assertion (i.e. the assertion is impermissible). (modified from 257)

As in many other cases of assertions of justified false beliefs, there seems to be something epistemically appropriate about an assertion that “it is snowing” in the above case. Williamson accounts for this judgment by arguing that the assertion is reasonable. This is because, given what the asserter knows, it is highly probable that she knows that “it is snowing.” (257)

Just given the information in the above case, however, it is not yet clear whether the assertion that “it is snowing” is, in fact, reasonable. To make sure that it is reasonable we would need to assume some extra knowledge on the part of the asserter: that she has a good idea of
what snow looks like, that she is in an area of the world that receives snow, that the assertion is 
made at the time of year in which one would expect to see snow, etc. When we determine what is 
probable given one’s evidence, one’s background knowledge is included in the set of what one 
knows, even if it is not occurrent in the mind of the asserter. For example, if one is living in Los 
Angeles in July, and one knows this, it would not be reasonable for one to assert “it is snowing”, 
since, regardless of how real the fake snow might look, it would no longer be highly probable on 
one’s evidence that one knows that “it is snowing”. Reasonableness thus seems to do a good job 
in capturing the fact that we find there to be something epistemically appropriate about the 
assertion in the case where, for instance, one asserts “it is snowing” when it is January and one is 
in Buffalo, as opposed to July in Los Angeles, despite the asserter’s violation of the knowledge 
norm in both cases.

It’s not clear, however, where we should locate the source of the perceived propriety of 
our subject’s assertion. After all, it is not simply the case that for the subject in Fake Snow it is 
highly probable given her knowledge that she knows the relevant proposition. She is also, despite 
believing something that is false, doing everything epistemically that we would expect someone 
to do in her situation (that is to say, we would not typically expect one to double-check on 
whether what really looks like snow in Buffalo in January is actually snow). In Fake Snow, then, 
it is not only the case that our asserter’s evidence makes it highly probable that she knows the 
content of her assertion, but she also knows everything that she should have known. The 
conditions of it being highly probable on one’s evidence that one knows that \( p \) and having done 
everything epistemically expected of one with regards to \( p \) can come apart. Specifically, we can 
think of cases in which one meets the former but not the latter condition. In these cases it seems
that we are liable to judge instance of reasonable assertions as epistemically inappropriate.

Consider, for example, the following cases:

**Dr. Vigilant:** A doctor asserts to his patient “drug X is the best medicine for your condition.” He has reason to think that he knows what he is saying, since it is part of standard medical training to learn that drug X is the best medicine for this particular condition. As it turns out, drug X is *not* the best medicine for the patient’s condition; rather, drug Y is. Dr. Vigilant does not know this, though, since research concerning the effectiveness of drugs X and Y has not yet been made available to the medical community at large.

**Dr. Lazy:** A doctor asserts to his patient “drug X is the best medicine for your condition.” He has reason to think that he knows what he is saying, since it is part of standard medical training to learn that drug X is the best medicine for this particular condition. As it turns out, drug X is *not* the best medicine for the patient’s condition; rather, drug Y is. Dr. Lazy does not know this. However, he could have easily come to have known this: he has ignored the relevant medical literature on the subject of the patient’s condition, which happens to be widely available and easily accessible. At the time of his assertion, *Non-Specified Medical Condition Quarterly*, which features a special exposé on the ineffectiveness of drug X, is sitting, unread, on Dr. Lazy’s desk.²²

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²² These cases are presented as instances of assertions, but we could change them to be instance of practical reasoning: the doctors, instead of asserting “drug X is the best medicine for your condition” could instead treat the relevant proposition as a reason for acting, namely by handing their patients a bottle of drug X.
According to the adherent of the knowledge norm, both Dr. Vigilant and Dr. Lazy make impermissible assertions (since neither of them know the proposition they are asserting). Furthermore, both doctors have the same evidence that drug X is the best choice of drug to prescribe: they have both received the same medical training, and both base their prescriptions on this training. Both doctors lack the evidence that drug Y is the superior treatment, but they lack it for different reasons: Dr. Vigilant lacks the evidence because it is unavailable to him, whereas Dr. Lazy lacks the evidence because he has ignored it. Since it is highly likely on the evidence that the doctors share that drug X is the best medicine for their respective patients’ conditions, both assertions are reasonable. Thus both the doctor who has a false belief because he has no access to relevant information and the doctor who has a false belief despite the fact that he does have access to relevant information but either chooses to ignore it or simply happens to ignore it out of laziness, assert reasonably. However, it seems that we should want to distinguish these two cases; specifically, it seems that the assertion of Dr. Vigilant is more epistemically appropriate than the assertion of Dr. Lazy. Williamson’s notion of reasonableness is unable to account for this difference.

However, we might think that the difference between our evaluations of the doctors can, in fact, be accommodated by a notion of reasonableness, because there is a relevant difference in the evidence the doctors possess. For instance, Dr. Lazy might know more than Dr. Vigilant, specifically the fact that there is available, relevant information to be had that he is ignoring. If this is the case, then perhaps there is also a difference in reasonableness between the two doctors: the doctors would have different evidence and therefore different propositions would be likely on their respective sets of evidence. However, we need not describe Dr. Lazy in this way: he does not necessarily know that there is specific information that is relevant to his situation that he is
ignoring. He perhaps knows that there is something else he could be doing before making his prescription, but why should we think that simply knowing that there is some kind of extra evidence available makes his assertion any less reasonable? After all, there is always some extra evidence we could come to acquire whenever we assert (or do) anything at all, but we are not always expected to pursue it. Given the evidence Dr. Lazy does possess, then, it is reasonable to conclude that, in fact, drug X is the best drug to prescribe to his patient. But in his case this does not seem good enough: he should have known much more than he actually did.

The difference between our evaluations of the two doctors can, I propose, best be explained by the fact that while Dr. Vigilant knew everything that he would be expected to know given his situation, the same is not true for Dr. Lazy. Specifically, the relevant basis for determining whether it is probable that one knows a given proposition is not the evidence that one does have, but the evidence one should have. I will call a normative notion that pertains to the latter responsibility. As applied to the act of assertion, we get the following notion:

*Epistemically Responsible Assertion:* For an assertion to be epistemically responsible, it must be the case that, given what S should have known regarding p and the situation in which S asserts, it is highly probable that S knows that p.

While I will be discussing assertion specifically here, we can generalize the above to acts other than assertion. Recall the structure of the constitutive norm of an act of ϕ-ing that I defended in chapter 3:

Cf Rule: One must: ϕ p only if one has epistemic relationship E with f_ϕ(p).

We can then generalize a notion of epistemic responsibility to acts that are constituted by any kind of epistemic condition:
Epistemic Responsibility: For an act of φ-ing p to be responsible, it must be the case that, given what S should have known regarding p and the situation in which S φ’s, it is highly probable that S is in epistemic relationship E with f(φ).

According to a notion of responsibility, Dr. Lazy’s assertion that “drug X is the best medicine for your condition” is epistemically irresponsible because on the basis of what the doctor should have known (namely, the relevant, easily accessible information) it is not probable that he knows the relevant proposition. In the variant of Williamson’s Fake Snow case where the asserter is living in Buffalo in January, an assertion that “it is snowing” is impermissible but responsible, since the asserter knew everything that he should have known, given his situation. In the variant in which one is living in Los Angeles in July, however, an assertion of the same proposition is irresponsible (since one should have known that it does not snow in Los Angeles in July).

In Fake Snow and the doctor cases, the respective subjects assert impermissibly but reasonably. I have argued that these cases show us that impermissible and reasonable assertions can nevertheless still be epistemically inappropriately in a way that is not solely attributable to being impermissible. We can also illustrate the shortcomings of the reasonableness account by looking at a case in which one asserts permissibly and reasonably, but nevertheless seems to be doing something epistemically inappropriate. To set the stage for these kinds of cases let us first look at an example that Williamson provides of a permissible but unreasonable assertion:

Now consider putative cases in which one has a proof of a mathematical proposition but lacks warrant to assert the proposition…When I have a genuine proof, expert mathematicians may tell me falsely that it contains a fallacy. They may give me a complicated explanation of the supposed fallacy, blinding me with science. I may recall other occasions on which what I believed for broadly similar reasons to be a proof really
did turn out to be fallacious. In such cases, it would be unreasonable for me to assert $p$, for it is unreasonable for me to believe that I have warrant to assert $p$. It does not immediately follow that I have no warrant to assert $p$. One may have the authority to do something even when it is unreasonable for one to believe that one has that authority.

(264-5)

I'll interpret the above case as one in which one does maintain knowledge of the relevant proposition, despite one’s uncertainty (as does Williamson). Our judgment of this case is probably something like the following: despite adhering to the knowledge norm, there is still something epistemically inappropriate about an assertion made in the presence of so much potentially recalcitrant information. The mathematician – let us call her Prof. Uncertain – asserts permissibly since she knows the proposition she is asserting; nevertheless, her assertion is unreasonable, since it is not highly probable given her evidence that she knows the relevant proposition. This is the result that we want: we can explain our judgment of epistemic impropriety by appealing to its unreasonableness on Williamson’s account. Note that the responsibility view can also accommodate this judgment: given what Prof. Uncertain should know, it is also not the case that it is probable that she knows that $p$.

We can, however, find cases in which one asserts permissibly and reasonably, but in which there nevertheless still seems to be something epistemically inappropriate about the assertion. These cases will again be ones in which there is a difference between what one does know and what one should have known in a given situation. Consider the following:

Prof. Attentive: A zoologist, Prof. Attentive, purports to have discovered a new species of newt, *Notophthalmus attentivus*. One of Prof. Attentive’s colleagues, Prof. Bashful, has what she thinks is a good deal of evidence that Prof. Attentive’s discovery is not novel.
However, Prof. Bashful is far too shy to bring her concerns to the attention of Prof. Attentive. As it turns out, Prof. Bashful’s evidence is misleading: Prof. Attentive really has discovered a new species of newt. At the zoology department colloquium, Prof. Attentive announces her discovery.

Prof. Stubborn: A zoologist, Prof. Stubborn, purports to have discovered a new species of skink, *Trachylepis stubbornis*. Many of her colleagues try to tell Prof. Stubborn that they think that her discovery is not a novel one: they send emails which go unread, and try to talk to her when they see her in the zoology department, but she never gives them the time of day. Prof. Stubborn happens to be right: she has, indeed, discovered a new species of skink, and her colleagues would only have provided her with misleading information had she listened to them. At the zoology department colloquium, Prof. Stubborn announces her discovery.

For now we will assume that in the above cases Prof. Attentive knows that “*Notophthalmus attentivus* is a heretofore undiscovered species of newt” and Prof. Stubborn knows that “*Trachylepis stubbornis* is a heretofore undiscovered species of skink.” According to the knowledge norm both professors make permissible assertions at the department colloquium, because they know their respective propositions. Prof. Attentive’s assertion is also reasonable: it is highly likely, given her evidence, that she knows the proposition she is asserting. The same is also true of Prof. Stubborn: it is highly likely on her evidence that she knows the relevant proposition, as well. This is because, unlike Prof. Uncertain (Williamson’s math professor), Prof. Stubborn’s evidence does not include any of the content of the concerns of her colleagues, since she has refused to listen to them. While on neither evaluative dimension – permissibility or reasonableness – can we find anything epistemically wrong with Prof. Stubborn’s assertion, it
still seems that we should want to find it to be somehow less epistemically appropriate than that of her colleague’s. We can accommodate this judgment by noting that, while reasonable, Prof. Stubborn’s assertion is *irresponsible*, since given not only what she knows but what she should have known (i.e. the content of the objections of her colleagues), it is not highly probable that she knows the relevant proposition. Prof. Stubborn should have listened to her colleagues, even if they would have only provided her with misleading information.

One might respond to the case of Prof. Stubborn in the same way that we attempted to respond to the case of Dr. Lazy, namely by appealing to a difference in evidence possessed by the two zoology professors: we might think that since Prof. Stubborn knows that she is ignoring the concerns of her colleagues that when we factor this knowledge into her total evidence it is no longer the case that it is highly probable given her evidence that she knows the relevant proposition (and thus we can explain what is wrong with her assertion simply by appealing to a notion of reasonableness). We could respond to this problem in the same way that we responded to the parallel problem in the case of the doctors, namely to appeal to the case of Prof. Oblivious, yet another zoologist who does not even realize that her colleagues have the concerns that they do (perhaps her colleagues drop hints that are clearly indications that they have concerns about her discovery of a new species of salamander, *Ambystoma oblivii*, yet the subtlety is entirely lost on her). Prof. Oblivious’s evidence, then, does not even include the facts that her colleagues have concerns, even though it seems that she should know such information.

However, it is not obvious that we need to change the example in this way. The worry outlined above was that since Prof. Stubborn knows that her colleagues have concerns about her work, that it is thereby not highly probable on her evidence that she knows the relevant proposition. But why should it be that simply knowing that someone thinks that you are mistaken
makes it improbable on your knowledge that you know a proposition? I am aware that some of my colleagues think I am mistaken about some things that I think are true (and which, in fact, actually are true). But simply knowing this does not (ceteris paribus) make my assertions of my ideas unreasonable. For example, I might have colleagues that believe that I am mistaken that there is good evidence that global climate change is at least partially the result of factors attributable to industrialization and pollution cause by humans, but the fact that we disagree does not mean that I could not still reasonably assert that there is such good evidence. The zoologists are going to know many different things in addition to that which is relevant to the propositions they are asserting. In order to determine whether their assertions are responsible we need to look at what is relevant in making it probable that they know on their respective evidence. It is not obvious that simply knowing that someone disagrees with you is a fact that affects this probability.

One might have the following concern: if one’s assertion that \( p \) is epistemically irresponsible, then how can one still know that \( p \)? Prof. Stubborn ignores what appears to be relevant information concerning the truth of “\( Trachylepis stubbornis \) is a heretofore undiscovered species of skink”; would we say that she can know this proposition when she is ignoring such information? For instance, we might think that, in general, by ignoring relevant information concerning \( p \) one’s belief that \( p \) would not be safe, i.e. that one would still believe the relevant proposition even if it were false, when having formed the belief in the same way.

\[ \text{23 Indeed, if this were the case then it would be difficult to see how any assertion in, say, philosophy, could ever be reasonable; perhaps worse is that we would not be able to reasonably assert anything that we knew was controversial, since evidence that there is disagreement would undermine reasonableness. Now, one might very well accept this, in which case a great number of assertions will be unreasonable. However, this results seems to go against the spirit of what we wanted a notion of reasonableness to accomplish. One might interpret my remarks here to be taking the steadfast approach to cases of peer disagreement (see, for example, van Inwagen (1996), Kelly (2005), Christensen (2007)). I will not take a stance here on the correct way to settle cases of peer disagreement here.} \]
Safety is popularly taken to be a necessary condition for knowledge\(^24\), so if irresponsibility entails a lack of safety, then it would also entail a lack of knowledge\(^25\). But why think that irresponsible beliefs cannot be safe? After all, Prof. Stubborn’s belief that she has discovered a new species of skink is still true, and if she were to form her belief in the same way, namely by basing it on whatever evidence she used to form it in the first place, while ignoring misleading evidence, then it would still be true\(^26\). Thus it still seems that Prof. Stubborn’s belief, while perhaps not responsible, could still be a safe one\(^27\).

The above cases involving the medical doctors and zoologists illustrate instances both in which someone can assert permissibly and irresponsibly, and impermissibly and irresponsibly. A worry we faced in the previous chapter was whether a judgment of secondary epistemic propriety was a judgment that was relevant to the epistemic propriety of an act, or whether it was simply a judgment of one’s overall epistemic character; people can, after all, be sub-par epistemic agents

\(^{24}\) For recent prominent defenses of the safety condition see, for example, Williamson (2000), Pritchard (2005), and Sosa (2007, 2009).

\(^{25}\) I am, to make things easier, assuming that \(p\) is not a necessary truth.

\(^{26}\) Lackey (2008), for example, argues that beliefs can be safe inasmuch as they are modally robust (i.e. in all nearby possible worlds in which one formed one’s belief in the same way as in the actual world, the belief is true), but still be in some sense epistemically lacking (Lackey’s concern is that such beliefs can still be lucky, and thus would not, intuitively, count as knowledge, contra Duncan Pritchard’s (2005)).

\(^{27}\) One might think that this view could potentially conflict with interest-relative invariantism (IRI) as a theory of knowledge. The guiding thought behind IRI is that practical factors such as the stakes that surround the truth or falsity of a proposition partly determine whether one knows that proposition. Thus in a practically demanding situation, one might not know that \(p\) at least in part because of the practical circumstances. We might then think that the idea that responsibility is at least partially determined by facts that pertain to one’s \(\phi\)-ing situation is inconsistent with IRI: if the situation is such that I am ignoring information that I would reasonably be expected to take into account, then, according to IRI, this prevents me from knowing the proposition at all. Thus we cannot have irresponsible knowledge according to IRI. In this project I have not taken a stance on what I take to be the correct theory of knowledge. However, we need not reach the conclusion that one cannot have irresponsible knowledge and hold IRI simultaneously. For example, it might be the case that the stakes surrounding the truth of \(p\) happen to be low, but that the subject has good reason to think that they are much higher. Thus the actual low stakes will not prevent one from knowing the proposition, whereas the presence of misleading information that suggests that the stakes are higher than they are could prevent one from acting on the proposition responsibly. I will return to the issue of responsibility and IRI in chapter 7.
while still acting perfectly appropriately in specific situations. Consider a parallel situation: someone can have an overall morally vicious character but still do morally permissible things in specific instances. If we are concerned with determining whether someone is deserving of moral blame in a given instance, it is (ceteris paribus) irrelevant whether that person has a generally vicious character. We should not, then, confuse a judgment of someone’s overall moral character with a judgment of moral blameworthiness in a given situation. The possible confusion we run into in the epistemic case is one in which we are judging one’s overall epistemic character, but this judgment is irrelevant to a specific instance of adhering to or violating a norm. Does a judgment of epistemic irresponsibility run into this problem? I don’t think so. When someone irresponsibly asserts that \( p \) we are judging them on the basis of whether they take into account relevant information that pertains to the obtaining of \( p \) and/or one’s epistemic relationship with \( p \). This judgment can be made independently of any judgments concerning the general nature of one’s epistemic character.

So far I have presented cases in which reasonableness is too weak of an evaluative notion to accommodate the full range of situations in which one violates an epistemic norm but nevertheless seems to be doing something epistemically appropriate. In the following section I will look at a case in which reasonableness seems too strong, i.e. in which an evaluation of reasonableness dictates that there is something epistemically appropriate about a given assertion when we judge there to be nothing epistemically appropriate about it. As discussed in chapter 2, both facts about the obtaining of a proposition, as well as facts about one’s own epistemic position towards a proposition are relevant facts that one should take into account when \( \phi \)-ing. It is this latter fact in particular that makes the normative concept of reasonableness too strong.
5.3 Reasonableness is too Strong

To show that reasonableness is too strong, we need to demonstrate a case in which one’s assertion is impermissible and unreasonable despite being intuitively epistemically appropriate, or in which one’s assertion is permissible and unreasonable but intuitively epistemically inappropriate in a way that is not attributable solely to one’s adherence to the $\phi$-norm. Consider the following case:

*Dr. Inaccessible:* A doctor asserts to his patient “drug X is the best medicine for your condition.” He has reason to think that he knows what he is saying since it is part of standard medical training to learn that drug X is the best medicine for this particular condition. As it turns out, drug X is *not* the best medicine for the patient’s condition; rather, drug Y is. Furthermore, Dr. Inaccessible knows this: at one point he read in a reliable source and came to know that “drug Y is superior to drug X.” However, this knowledge is inaccessible to the doctor when he makes his prescription: the patient’s condition was difficult to diagnose, presenting symptoms that would lead a less-experienced doctor to make the wrong diagnosis. Due to all of the confounding factors, it did not occur to Dr. Inaccessible that drug Y would actually be the better treatment. As a result, he ends up prescribing drug X instead of drug Y.

According to Williamson, Dr. Inaccessible’s assertion is unreasonable: since reasonableness is determined on the basis of what one *does* know, and not on the basis of what one takes oneself to know at a given time, it does not matter in determining whether one’s assertion is reasonable that some information that the doctor knows is inaccessible to him. But, as we have seen, there are going to be cases in which a failure of access to what one knows can exonerate one of a negative normative status. For instance, we can say that the information that the doctor knows concerning
drug X’s suitability is not only knowledge that is not occurrent to him, but knowledge that is inaccessible for good reasons (whatever those reasons happen to be; in the above case I posit that the complications surrounding his patient's case makes it understandable why Dr. Inaccessible would not be able to realize that he has the relevant knowledge). Thus while the assertion is still unreasonable, it can nevertheless be responsible. This is because whether an assertion is responsible is determined by what one should have known when asserting, and information that is inaccessible for good reasons is not necessarily something that one should have known. Note that this view entails that it might not be the case that, in a given situation, the set of information that one should have known contains information that one actually does know: for example, just as Dr. Vigilant has good reason for failing to know that there is relevant information pertaining to the effectiveness of drug X, Dr. Inaccessible can have good reason for failing to act on the basis of the knowledge he has. This is a consequence of the previous results that one can have good reason for failing to incorporate what one knows into one’s actions, and that this failure can exonerate one of a normative failing. Reasonableness is unable to account for those cases in which we fail to have some evidence that we should have had, or in which we fail to recognize evidence that we do have for good reason.

The conception of reasonableness I have been addressing thus far has been Williamson’s, but there are other ways we could think a notion of reasonableness. I will look at one of these ways in the following section.

5.4 “Should Have Known” – Good and Bad Methods

Instead of considering what is likely that one knows given one’s evidence, we might instead look to good or bad belief-forming processes to determine whether an assertion or action should be considered reasonable or unreasonable. For example, Maria Lasonen-Aarnio (2010)
argues that we can have unreasonable (in her sense) knowledge when this knowledge has come about as a result of a belief-forming process that we would generally consider not to be a good one. I will call Lasonen-Aarnio’s conception of reasonableness *process-unreasonableness* to distinguish it from Williamson’s. The idea, then, is that we can perhaps accommodate our judgments of intuitively epistemically inappropriate assertions and actions that are permissible by appealing to the belief-forming processes one employed in coming to know the relevant proposition\(^{28}\). According to Lasonen-Aarnio, sometimes bad methods lead to good results, and simply because one would not know in many other cases using the same belief-forming method does not mean that one does not have knowledge in *this* case. Such belief-forming behavior, however, is certainly not enviable, and indeed this is the basis for the criticism that comes along with being labelled as process-unreasonable. According to Lasonen-Aarnio, process-reasonable beliefs “are formed and retained through the manifestation of knowledge conducive dispositions and abilities” (12). Furthermore, process-reasonableness incorporates a rule consequentialist way of thinking…it is at least largely a matter of adopting or being guided by policies, thought of as a set of rules, that have certain consequences for knowledge (13).

Importantly, these methods are not just good in the sense of being the kinds of things that, when followed, tend to result in knowledge; rather, they are the kinds of things that are good *for the subject to adopt* (14). There are, for example, some methods of belief formation that might be good in the sense of being reliably knowledge-producing that we would not be methods that we

\(^{28}\) Interestingly, while Williamson conceives of reasonableness primarily as a way of explaining intuitively appropriate violations of the knowledge norms, Lasonen-Aarnio conceives of reasonableness primarily as a way of explaining intuitively epistemically inappropriate instances in which one possesses knowledge.
would endorse. For instance, it might be the case that stubbornly maintaining belief when one is faced with misleading evidence can result in acquiring a good deal of knowledge. For example, Lasonen-Aarnio provides the following rule: “believe p when you see that p in the presence of evidence for thinking that your senses are not to be trusted” (15). It might turn out that by following such a rule one obtains a lot of knowledge, since it typically is the case that evidence that our senses are not to be trusted turns out to be misleading. So, the rule “ignore recalcitrant evidence” might be a good rule in the sense that adopting it results in one having a lot of knowledge. However, such a rule might not be one that is “good to adopt,” since adopting the rule will lead to the formation of dispositions that will, in general, not result in one acquiring a lot of knowledge. On Lasonen-Aarnio’s view, one’s belief is process-reasonable when it is the product of following a rule that is good to adopt.

Consider again the case of Prof. Stubborn, who actively ignored the concerns of her colleagues: although it is true that in the one instance her colleagues were rightly ignored (at least in the sense that, had Prof. Stubborn listened to them she would have lost knowledge that she managed to maintain by ignoring them), following the rule “ignore your colleagues” on the whole leads to the formation of a belief-forming disposition that is likely to result in the formation of many false beliefs in similar situations (since the scientist’s colleagues would, presumably, not always be a source of misleading information). The “ignore your colleagues” rule might then be a rule that is good in a given circumstance, but not one that is good to adopt29.

29 Or consider the following as another example of a method of belief formation that is “good” inasmuch as it might tend to result in the possession of true beliefs, but which is not one that we would think is “good” in general: the methods of belief formation that C.S. Peirce rejects in the “The Fixation of Belief.” Amongst these methods he rejects what he calls the “method of tenacity”, which involves holding on to your beliefs regardless of any opposition to those ideas that you might face. This method might result in the possession of many true beliefs. But the method itself is clearly not an enviable one. But why not? Peirce’s explanation is that what appears to be a belief that is acquired by this method is really no belief at all: a necessary condition for believing something is that it be
However, it is not clear that we would always be able to get the results that one has done something epistemically appropriate or inappropriate by employing or failing to employ methods that are good to adopt, respectively. This is because it might just so happen to be that one could employ a method that consistently results in true beliefs that we would not take to be a good rule to adopt. Consider instead of Prof. Stubborn, an arrogant but brilliant scientist, who comes to acquire many truths despite following what would, for less brilliant scientists, be bad rules for them to adopt. Our brilliant scientist ignores discussing his results with any of his colleagues: he considers his colleagues to be nowhere near as intelligent as him, that they could not possibly contribute to the quality of his research, etc. But he happens to be right: he acquires many true beliefs, and does so in part because he is not distracted by his intellectually inferior colleagues. Ignoring potentially relevant information is, for the brilliant scientist, a rule that is both good (since it result in him having a lot of knowledge) and good to adopt (since following this method results in belief-forming dispositions that themselves result in the long-term acquisition of a lot of knowledge). On Lasonen-Aarnio’s view, then, the arrogant-but-brilliant scientist has process-reasonable knowledge despite forming his beliefs via what we would typically think are bad methods. Similarly, it does not seem that we should say that the arrogant scientist is being unreasonable in Williamson’s sense, either, since if the scientist were to assert (or otherwise employ in an action) the relevant proposition, it would be highly probable on his evidence that he knows that proposition (seeing as his evidence does not include the concerns of his colleagues).
We might think, however, that by following a method of belief formation that involves the systematic ignoring of the opinions of others that the arrogant scientist would form the bad disposition to apply this method in cases in which it does not apply, and thus would be led to have a lot of false beliefs in the long run. But why think this is the case? Perhaps the arrogant scientist’s arrogance stops at the realm of science: in other areas of life he recognizes the value of input from others. Within the realm of scientific inquiry, though, his arrogance has resulted in him having a lot of knowledge.

It is tempting to explain how the use of the method “ignore the concerns of your colleagues” is bad by appealing to how the method would lead the “average person” to have false beliefs: it seems that if a less-brilliant scientist were to follow this method that they would form dispositions that would result in the acquisition of many more false beliefs than true ones, and it certainly seems that we would not recommend this particular method of belief formation to scientists or other people in general. But we cannot say that a bad rule is a rule that would, when followed by any sort of “typical epistemic subject”, lead to many more false beliefs than true ones, since that would be conflating methods that are good to adopt with those methods that are just good. The upshot is that methods that are good to adopt can still seem to be epistemically suspect regardless of this ability to consistently result in the possession of true beliefs.

Maybe this is not such a problem. After all, if the rule “ignore the concerns of your colleagues” does actually lead to a lot of knowledge for the arrogant scientist, then why should it be somehow epistemically bad for said scientist to follow it? We might find there to be something undesirable about being arrogant in general, but why should this be relevant for determining whether an assertion or an action performed on the basis of knowledge that is acquired by methods that we find arrogant is in some ways epistemically inappropriate?
Perhaps it is the following of the rule itself that is problematic, namely that someone should actively adopt the rule to ignore potential evidence. However, the fact that Lasonen-Aarnio’s view of process-reasonableness requires the adoption of a method of belief formation creates some general problems. First, since methods that are good to adopt are those that produce true beliefs in a “rule consequentialist” fashion, we might not realize when we are or are not employing methods that are good to adopt. We could then conceive of a case in which one just so happens to be adopting a method of belief formation that is good in a given situation without realizing it; in this sort of case it would be difficult to see why we should call such knowledge “reasonable”. For example, instead of the arrogant-but-brilliant scientist who knowingly refuses to acknowledge the concerns of his colleagues because of a sense of superiority, consider the timid-but-brilliant scientist, who, due to fear of being proven wrong, isolates himself from the input of his colleagues. Unbeknownst to the timid scientist, isolating himself has significant epistemic gains: had he exposed himself to his intellectually inferior colleagues, he would have been swayed by their concerns and abandoned his work early on. Thus the method of forming beliefs in isolation from others is a method that is, for the timid scientist, good to adopt, and is one that he is at least acting in accordance with. We would not, however, congratulate the timid scientist on his excellent choice of belief-forming method.

We might think that in the above kinds of cases, neither the arrogant nor the timid scientist is really “following” the “ignore the concerns of your colleagues” method of belief formation. Neither the brilliant-but-arrogant nor the timid-but-brilliant scientist has the relevant method “in mind”; that is to say neither scientist consciously nor unconsciously thinks that “such-and-such a way is the best way to form a belief” (or, at least, they need not). Perhaps it is a consequence of the arrogant scientist’s arrogance or the timid scientist’s timidity that they ignore
the concerns of their colleagues, but they are not guided by the method itself. We might then want to specify that one needs to either have a method in mind when following it to be considered process-reasonable or process-unreasonable, or that one should have to somehow “intentionally follow” the method in question. However, without getting into the thorny issue of the requirements of rule following, it seems that when forming beliefs we rarely have any sort of guiding method “in mind”. Dr. Lazy, for example, does not pay sufficient attention to information that is readily available not because he is trying to be lazy, but just because he is lazy. The best we could expect from a view that dictates that we are in some way reasonable when we follow a rule that is good to adopt is that we act in accordance with the rule, rather than actively having it in mind. However, as we have seen above, merely acting in accordance with a rule does not entail that one is acting like an epistemically decent subject.

Lasonen-Aarnio’s view also runs into problems when it comes to the person who ignores evidence, not intentionally, but simply because they are not being careful. What method is being followed when one does not account for information simply because one is oblivious? One need not even have a generally oblivious or lazy disposition; perhaps this laziness is a one-time-thing, where one is generally attentive to available information. It seems strange to describe the oblivious subject as someone who is in conformity with the rule “ignore available evidence.” They are not ignoring this information because they do not know that it is available; that is precisely the problem! It is similarly unclear which rule the oblivious subject should be following: what rule is a rule that is good to adopt in the case where one is simply oblivious? It is, perhaps, “pay attention to relevant information.” But this rule is uninformative (one should always be paying attention to relevant information, presumably) or, at least, it does not address
the problem at hand, which is to determine what qualifies as relevant information that one should be paying attention to.

While Lasonen-Aarnio’s view of process-reasonableness captures many of the judgments that we have of instances of epistemic impropriety while having knowledge, it suffers from the shortcomings that we saw with Williamson’s account, namely that it does not account for those epistemic improprieties that are caused by a lack of knowing what one really should have known in a given situation. Now, it is easy to talk about what one “should have known,” but when we look at this notion in more detail it becomes difficult to spell out, exactly, what this requirement entails, or if it is even, in some sense, coherent. The task of the next chapter is to spell out in more detail what it means to say that one should have known something in a situation in which one makes as assertion or treats a proposition as a reason for acting. For the remainder of this chapter I will address the conceptual issue, and argue that there is a coherent sense of what one “should have known” when it comes to performing an act that is constituted by an epistemic norm.

5.5 “Should Have Known” – Positive Epistemic Requirements?

Let’s return to our (medical) doctors examples. When it came to Dr. Lazy, I argued that we could locate the source of the perceived epistemic impropriety of his assertion in his failure to know some relevant information concerning the effectiveness of the drug he was prescribing. Why should he have known this information? Here is at least a partial answer: it was readily available to him (the journal was right there on his desk), and relevant to the truth of the proposition he was asserting. This is, of course, a rough-and-ready conception of what one should have known: some information will be more available than other information, and some information will be more relevant than other information, etc. Gray areas abound, but I won’t
attempt to precisify them at this point. However, these cannot be the sole determinants of what
one should have known when $\phi$-ing; after all, there was surely lots of other information that was
readily available, and that was somehow relevant to the truth of the proposition being asserted
that we would not necessarily say that he “should have known”. Rather, it seems that the doctor
should have known about the relevant research because in situations in which one prescribes
medical treatment one should be as up to date as possible on the best possible treatment. The
whole point of the doctor making his assertion was to attempt to convey the best information
available (where what is available is determined by some appropriate standard), and conveying
the best information possible requires that one know information that is relevant to the
proposition being asserted. This I an idea that I will develop in the next chapter.

However, since we are conceiving of responsibility in terms of what one “should have
known”, one might take this view to be one that depends upon the existence of a positive
epistemic duty, namely an obligation to form a particular doxastic relationship with a particular
proposition in a particular situation (contrast this with a negative epistemic duty, i.e. a duty to not
form a particular doxastic relationship with a particular proposition in a particular situation; see
Nelson (2010)): I am saying here that the doctor ought to have acquired certain evidence in his
situation, and that a failure to do so is an epistemic one. But it is not clear that we have any
positive epistemic duties of this sort, or, in the cases in which it does seem that we ought to form
particular doxastic relationships with particular propositions, it is not clear that this duty is an
epistemic duty, and thus not clear that a failure to form these doxastic relationships is really an
epistemic failing. If responsibility is supposed to be an epistemic evaluation, defining it in terms
of what one should have known threatens to confuse epistemic evaluations with non-epistemic
ones. For example, why should we say that Dr. Lazy’s failing is an epistemic failing, and not
simply a failing according to other norms that govern being a good doctor? Perhaps it is a *moral* failing; we would no doubt find a consistently lazy doctor morally reprehensible for failing to attend to his duties as a doctor. But this kind of failing has nothing to do with the epistemic status of his assertion. However, as we have already seen, I think that the criticism that Dr. Lazy is merely violating a norm of being a good doctor glosses over what is really an epistemic evaluation: what it means to be a good doctor is a multifaceted notion that consists in adhering to professional, moral and epistemic norms, and thus one of the ways of being a bad doctor is to violate epistemic norms in the context of doing the things that doctors do. I will illustrate this idea in more detail by considering an argument against the view that we have any positive epistemic duties.

Positive epistemic duties can come in one of two forms: the duty to form a certain doxastic relationship with a proposition given one’s body of evidence, or the duty to form a doxastic relationship with a proposition *regardless* of what one’s body of evidence happens to be (this second kind of duty can be thought of as a general duty to acquire evidence). Mark Nelson (2010) is concerned with the first type of duty: he argues that while we have *negative* epistemic duties, there is no proposition that a body of evidence dictates that we are *positively epistemically obligated* to have a doxastic relationship with. Nelson argues that while it might seem that, say, we ought to believe what is best supported by the evidence we have, there is no one belief that is best supported by a body of evidence, since a body of evidence can equally well support belief in an infinite number of propositions (viz. the disjunctions of evidentially well-supported propositions and any other proposition). A duty to form an infinite number of beliefs, Nelson
argues, is far too demanding to be a genuine duty\textsuperscript{30}. Nelson gives the example of having the following evidence: “the appearance of some distinctive dark, winged shapes, moving across my visual field” (87). He suggests that on the basis of this evidence we might form one or more of the following beliefs:

(1) There are things moving through the air in front of me

(2) There are birds flying in front of me

(3) There are jackdaws flying in front of me

(4) At least three jackdaws exist (87)

Now, it may very well be the case, says Nelson, that given my perceptual abilities, my knowledge of jackdaws and my interests, that I ought to believe one or more of these propositions as opposed to others. But there is no strictly epistemic constraint on which of these beliefs I should form, since each belief would be well supported by my evidence (as would many others). Thus I have no positive, strictly epistemic duty to believe any particular proposition.

Richard Feldman (2000) anticipates a similar argument: he recognizes that what might appear to be the most obvious statement of the evidentialist epistemic ought is that one ought to believe what one’s evidence best supports. But thinking of the epistemic ought in this way runs into the problem above, namely that there are an infinite number of propositions that are equally well supported by one’s evidence, and thus that the evidentialist seems to be prescribing that we

\textsuperscript{30} Scott Stapleford (2012) challenges the validity of this inference: he argues that simply because there is no way one could ever fulfil such a duty does not mean that it is not still a duty (170). I am not sympathetic to the view that we have such “infinite duties”, but I will not argue against it here. Stapleford’s position is, as far as I can tell, compatible with mine, it just might turn out that if we agree with Stapleford that there will be a coherent notion of epistemic responsibility, it will just be one that we can never achieve.
ought to believe an infinite number of things. Feldman avoids this problem by defining the epistemic ought as follows:

O2. For any person S, at time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p at time t and S’s evidence at t supports p, then S epistemically ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S’s evidence at t. (679)

O2 does not oblige us to form an infinite number of beliefs; instead, it states which kind of doxastic attitude we ought to have towards a proposition (viz. disbelieving, believing, or refraining from believing)\textsuperscript{31} when we form a doxastic attitude towards that proposition. O2 is compatible with the view that there are no strictly positive epistemic oughts as Nelson conceives of them: the evidence alone does not obligate us to believe anything in particular, but it does obligate us just in those cases in which we are forming doxastic attitudes.

Even if we do admit that there are no positive epistemic duties, it’s not clear what we should make of the results. Indeed, while we might not have any strictly positive epistemic duty to form any particular beliefs, this constraint is artificial: once we place our belief-forming in a context, it seems that we do have such duties. In Nelson’s example, if we are ornithologists concerned with the dwindling numbers of jackdaws in the area, we ought to believe (4); if we are concerned with trying to launch a model airplane (maybe we have no idea what a jackdaw is), then we ought to believe (1). Similarly, in the cases I have presented here, while there is perhaps nothing in the set of information that is available to Dr. Lazy that epistemically obligates him to

\textsuperscript{31} Feldman couches his argument in the language of a tripartite view of belief, but we could just as easily talk about degrees of belief here, where one ought to have a degree of belief in a proposition that is dictated by one’s evidential support for that proposition. I’ll stick to the tripartite view to make exposition easier.
believe that “drug X is not the optimal drug for the patient’s condition”, when in the practical context of needing to prescribe a treatment, it is the case that he ought to have known this.

I take it as uncontroversial that there are things that one should have known given one’s interests, one’s roles, and one’s context. A pharmacist should know that such-and-such medication cannot be taken on an empty stomach; a pilot should know that this button lowers the landing gear and that this button lowers the oxygen masks; a philosopher should know that Aristotle wrote after Plato; etc. None of these obligations are contingent on what the pharmacist, pilot or philosopher actually do know: it is, rather, contingent on doing the things a good pharmacist, pilot, or philosopher, respectively, does. The question, then, is whether these duties can be properly called epistemic, if they only come into play when we have the interests and play the roles that we do (and thus should be conceived of as practical). Nelson himself seems unwilling to commit to an answer to the question of whether there are positive epistemic duties when such factors are taken into account. He states that while our evidence determines what it is permissible for us to believe,

[O]ther, non-epistemic considerations may include ‘devices and desires of our own hearts’, such as needs, interests, and preferences, but also moral duties. We might even suppose that negative epistemic duties derive solely from epistemic rationality, while positive epistemic ‘duties’ (such as they are) derive from epistemic rationality plus some other source of normativity, such as morality or instrumental rationality. (88)

If we want to say that we ought to believe (4) above when we are ornithologists interested in the population of jackdaws is this because, given our goals and interests, we have an epistemic obligation to form a belief, or does our epistemic position only make it permissible for us to believe (4), and some other obligations – perhaps our professional or some other practical form
of obligation – drive the obligation to form the belief? We could, for example, explain the
impropriety of Dr. Lazy’s assertion by saying that if he is epistemically obligated to believe that
“drug X is not the optimal drug for the patient’s condition”, then it is only in conjunction with
the moral or professional requirement that he prescribe the best treatment available, and it is a
failure to meet these kinds of requirements that is the source of the perceived impropriety. But
should we call this an *epistemic* failure?

If duties to have certain beliefs only come about when conjoined with other duties, then it
is difficult to determine when we would have any strictly positive epistemic obligations at all.
Consider what Dr. Lazy would be morally required to do, at least under some consequentialist
view of moral obligation: Dr. Lazy should do what has the best outcome, namely prescribe drug
Y. Perhaps his epistemic situation can affect whether he should be blamed for failing to prescribe
the right drug\(^\text{32}\), but it’s not obvious that his epistemic status is itself a basis for the impropriety
of his assertion\(^\text{33}\).

However, I think these problems go away once we look at those situations in which we
actually make assertions or treat propositions as reasons for acting. In the moral case there is a
best thing to do, and in the practical case there is a best thing to do, given my interests (the
question of what one practically ought to do does not make sense without being in the context of

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\(^{32}\) George Sher (2009) argues that in a situation like Dr. Lazy’s he is potentially *morally* responsible for his failure
to prescribe the right drug, precisely because there is readily available evidence that he does not possess that he
should have possessed. While I am sympathetic to Sher’s view of moral responsibility, he takes it for granted that
there is a coherent notion of what one “should have believed”, and he does not address the issue of whether it makes
sense to have positive epistemic requirements of the relevant kind.

\(^{33}\) We might think that a different kind of moral theory, one that takes as relevant the doxastic state of the agent as
morally relevant, can generate positive epistemic requirements. But then the obligation to be in a particular
epistemic relationship with a proposition has nothing, necessarily, to do with the amount of evidential support that
one has for this proposition, and thus would not, presumably, be considered “strictly epistemic.”
what one’s goals are); these are the things we ought to do, either morally or practically. There is, however, perhaps no “best thing to assert”, or “best thing to treat as a reason for acting”, at least if we are thinking in purely epistemic terms. After all, one’s epistemic position can only make certain assertions or actions permissible: knowing that \( p \) makes it the case that one is permitted to assert that \( p \) or to treat \( p \) as a reason for acting, but it is not the case that one ought to assert that \( p \) or treat \( p \) as a reason for acting if one knows it (if that were the case then we would be required to speak and act constantly). Now, to appropriately assert that \( p \), it is the case that we ought to know that \( p \) (or fulfil whatever other epistemic condition we think constitutes the norm of assertion, viz. believe that \( p \), be justified in believing that \( p \), etc.). Thus we have, in a way, created an epistemic obligation for ourselves when we are doing something with that which we know: just as in Feldman’s O2 case above includes epistemic obligations that come into play when we are forming a doxastic attitude, so to do these obligations come into play when we are asserting propositions.

We create an epistemic obligation for ourselves by asserting \( p \) or treating \( p \) as a reason for acting because these acts are partly constituted by epistemic norms. But we also create additional epistemic obligations for ourselves because of the kinds of things that result from putting our epistemic relationships into action. For example, the purpose of one’s assertion might be to convey the best information possible, and in order to do this one is obligated to know certain things. Crucially, assertions are always made for some purpose. Hence the formulation of the Cf Rule in chapter 3 that conceives of assertions and actions as epistemically constituted, but where the constitutive requirements are directed towards the individuating proposition \( f_\phi(p) \), where \( f_\phi \) was the characteristic function of the act of \( \phi \)-ing.
Again, we can split up the claim that we ought to know certain things when asserting into two categories: an obligation to form a particular belief on the basis of a body of evidence, and an obligation to acquire additional evidence. On the second point, Feldman considers such a requirement, what he calls a requirement to acquire evidence:

Consider a person who is negligent about collecting evidence. Suppose that I have the belief that

G. Taking ginkgo supplements is a safe and effective way to improve my memory.

I have a modest amount of evidence supporting (G). I then see on the cover of a reputable magazine that it contains a major article about the merits of ginkgo. Rather than read the article, I avoid it for fear that it will undermine a belief I prefer to keep. Thus, I am negligent in collecting evidence; there is evidence I don’t have but should have. (687)

Feldman continues to fill out the example: the article contains evidence that (G) is false, and if he had read the article he would have acquired, on the balance, evidence that supported believing that (G) is false. One might conclude that he ought not believe that p, despite it being the proposition that is best supported by his evidence, but Feldman is rightly skeptical whether this case is a counterexample to O2. He considers two possibilities: either I know enough about the article that it will shift the balance of evidence away from believing that p – perhaps I know the title (“Forget About Gingko!”), or that “there is an article with a lot of evidence against believing (G)” – or, if I don’t know any of these things, and this is merely evidence that is available, then I
don’t have any reason to stop believing that (G). Thus it is not the case that I ought to believe something that is not supported by the bulk of my evidence.

Here, I think, we can see the difference between the notions of having a reasonable belief and having a responsible belief. Feldman is right that one ought not to believe that (G) is false simply because there is some evidence out there that, if one were to know it, would make it the case that one ought not to believe that (G). Based on the evidence that one does have, it is not the case that one ought to believe that (G) is false. This is essentially the reasonableness requirement, as conceived by Williamson: based on the evidence you have, it is reasonable to believe (G). We can accept all of this. We are not in the business of saying what one ought to believe \textit{simpliciter}, but what one ought to believe as \( \phi \)-ing agents. Thus if we are going to assert that (G), or treat (G) as a reason for acting, then the conditions under which we make that assertion may require us to know information that we do not currently know.

However, Feldman argues that this obligation is still not an epistemic one:

By seeking out new evidence concerning some important proposition and then believing what that evidence supports, I don’t do a better job of achieving the goal of believing reasonably. I achieve that goal at any moment by believing what is then supported by my evidence. It’s surely true that there are times when one would be best off finding new evidence. But this always turns on what options one has, what one cares about, and other non-epistemic factors. As I see it, these are prudential or moral matters, not strictly epistemic matters…You should gather more evidence concerning a proposition only when having a true belief about the subject matter of the proposition makes a moral or prudential difference and gathering more evidence is likely to improve your chances of getting it right. Of course, whether you ought to gather such evidence also depends upon
what other things you could do with your time. Epistemological considerations simply
don’t resolve such matters. (689-90)

Feldman raises the same problem that we faced above, namely that in situations in which one is
required to gather evidence, one is not epistemically required to do so; rather, it is a requirement
of whatever norms govern whatever activity we happen to be gathering evidence for.

But why should we think that this is the case? Why is the only proper sense of an
epistemic obligation one that has to do with which beliefs one should form on the basis of one’s
evidence, and not on the evidence that one should collect, given one’s goals and interests?
DeRose (2000), for example, argues that Feldman’s conception of the epistemic ought conflates
at least three different ways to think about epistemic obligations:

1. Relative to the evidence that he actually brought to bear on the issue, ought Henry to
   believe that P?

2. Relative to all the evidence that he has, ought Henry to believe that P?

3. Relative to the evidence available to him (the evidence he has plus what evidence he
easily could have, and should have, had), ought Henry to believe that P? (700)

DeRose considers a case much like one of those that we considered above: someone forms a
belief in a proposition that is best supported by their evidence, but not on the basis of that
evidence. Consider a doctor whose evidence supports the proposition that drug X is the best
treatment for his patient’s condition, but who forms his belief in that proposition because a
pharmaceutical company pays him for every prescription of drug X he makes. DeRose analyzes
a similar case in the following way:
To “do it right,” to do a good job of filling the role of a believer, or of a reasonable believer, it seems one should both gather and process evidence well. And if Henry had both gathered and processed evidence reasonably, he would not believe that P. So Henry did not perform well in filling the role of a believer, nor did he end up believing what he would have believe if he had performed well in that role, despite the fact that he satisfies Feldman’s account of believing what he ought…if what we mean by believing what we “epistemically” ought to believe is the specialized notion of believing what we would have believed if we had taken all the evidence we actually have (no matter how unreasonable we were in getting just that evidence) and then processed it well, we seem to be back to just understanding “ought” so as to make O2 come out true, and then it’s no surprise that O2 gets that specialized notion right. (703)

DeRose is drawing attention to what Feldman calls “role oughts”: the obligations that we acquire when we are playing a certain role. One of these roles is as a believer: when I am doing what a belief-former does (namely, forming beliefs), then I am under certain obligations. As DeRose points out, it seems just as natural to say that one of these obligations is to not simply form the belief that is best supported by one’s evidence, but also to seek out the best evidence available. The belief-former does not occupy a static epistemological space in which she is limited by the evidence she has at that moment. Playing the role well involves more active participation.

This is how I think we should think of the obligations of those who assert a proposition or treat it as a reason for acting; indeed, how we should think of the obligations of anyone who is doing anything with propositions they have epistemic relationships with. In the next chapter I will argue that when we perform acts that are governed by epistemically constituted norms we undertake certain commitments, ones that make epistemic demands of us.
Chapter 6: Commitments, Vigilance, and Responsibility

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I argue that in order for our acts of φ-ing to be epistemically responsible, we need to fulfil the epistemic commitments we make by φ-ing. These commitments, I argue, are that we be able to provide reasons for our audience to believe that we are adhering to the relevant φ-norm. In arguing for this view I look first at commitment views of assertion, and argue that while these views define permissible assertion in terms of whether we are able to fulfil the commitments we undertake, we should instead conceive of our ability to fulfil these commitments as being indicative of the status of secondarily epistemically appropriate. In order to defend the view that we do, in fact, make such commitments in asserting or performing any other epistemically constituted act, I look to recent work on epistemic vigilance. The conditions under which we are epistemically vigilant, I argue, determine what our epistemic commitments are when we perform these acts.

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I sketched the following view of epistemic responsibility:

*Epistemic Responsibility:* S’s φ-ing *p* is epistemically responsible if and only if given what S *should have known* regarding *p* and the situation in which S φ’s, it is highly probable that S is in epistemic relationship E with f_p_.
While Epistemic Responsibility is presented here in its most general form, I will, for ease of exposition, usually assume that the relevant condition E is knowledge. Here I want to fill out this proposal by looking in more detail at what one “should have known” regarding a proposition in a given situation. The view I will defend is as follows: what one should know when φ-ing p in a given situation is a function of the reasons one is committed to providing to believe that one has met the conditions of the relevant norm. The fact that one is committed to providing these reasons is, I will argue, a product of the way that we communicate with one another and how epistemic states like knowledge are relied upon in the process of communication. This chapter will proceed as follows: I will first look at how commitment views of assertion conceive of the commitments that one makes when asserting. I then argue that there is reason to think that the commitment and constitutive approaches are not normatively coextensional, i.e. that a commitment view and a constitutive view will not prescribe the same epistemic requirements for the proper performance of an assertion in all cases. I then propose something of an amalgamation of the constitutive and commitment accounts, wherein permissibility is determined by a constitutive norm and secondary propriety is determined by the commitments we make. To defend this view, I look at recent views in psychology that argue that, in employing our knowledge in our communicative acts, we engender expectations that we be able to provide our audience with reason to believe that we are epistemically well-positioned enough such that we adhere to the relevant φ-norm. In the remainder, I argue that the commitments that determine our status as epistemically responsible are specifically those commitments to fulfil the truth-directed expectations of our audience.
6.2 Assertions and Commitments

So far I have been looking primarily at constitutive norms of assertion and practical reasoning, i.e. those norms that state both the permissibility conditions of an action and make the action the kind of thing that it is. There are, however, other ways of thinking about how we should determine the permissibility conditions of assertion, specifically. John MacFarlane (2011), for example, describes commitment views of assertion in opposition to constitutive norms as ones that “describe assertion in essentially normative terms…[in terms of] the normative effects of making assertions” (91). An example of one of the earliest and simplest commitment view of assertion comes from C.S. Peirce, who stated that to assert a proposition is to take responsibility for its truth (CP 5.543). Peirce is never really clear about what taking responsibility for the truth of a proposition entails (the closest he comes to an explanation is that by asserting, a person “subjects themselves to the penalties of the social law” (CP 2.315)); there are, thankfully, other commitment views that are less vague than Peirce’s. For example, in his (2005), MacFarlane provides the following commitment view of assertion:

Assertoric Commitment: In asserting that $p$ at a context $C_U$, one commits oneself to providing adequate grounds for the truth of $p$ (relative to $C_U$), in response to any appropriate challenge, or (when appropriate) to deferring this responsibility to another asserter on whose testimony one is relying. One can be released from this commitment only by withdrawing the assertion. (228)
The commitment that one undertakes as an asserter, says MacFarlane, is to be able to provide grounds for the truth of the proposition one asserts. That asserters undertake a commitment to provide grounds for the truth of the propositions they assert is echoed in many other commitment views. Consider the following from Gary Watson (2004):

To assert that \( p \) is, among other things, to endorse \( p \), to authorize others to assume that \( p \), to commit oneself to defending \( p \), thereby (typically) giving others standing to criticize or challenge what one says. One exercises one’s epistemic authority. (58)

Finally, consider the following view from Robert Brandom (1994):

In asserting a sentence one both commits oneself to it and endorses it. The dimension of endorsement is that which we indicated in a preliminary fashion in terms of the function of an asserting as licensing or authorizing further assertions...In asserting a claim one not only authorizes further assertions, but commits oneself to vindicate the original claim, showing that one is entitled to make it. Failure to defend one’s entitlement to an assertion voids its social significance as inferential warrant for further assertions. (641)

Again, for Brandom, making a commitment to “vindicate the original claim” one asserts is part of what it means to make an assertion.

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34 There are obvious aspects of this view that require elucidation, namely, what counts as “adequate grounds” in a context, and what counts as an “appropriate challenge”. MacFarlane is, however, concerned only with providing a sketch of how assertions and commitments are related to one another, and thus these gaps remain unfilled.

35 Brandom, like Peirce, embeds discussion of assertions in a social context, where inappropriate assertions are those that fail to perform some overall social function of providing warrant for other assertions. The exact type of penalty that one faces in making an inappropriate assertion is not my concern.
Commitment and constitutive views are sometimes viewed as competing ways of thinking about the conditions that determine permissible assertion\(^36\). As MacFarlane notes, however, these approaches do not necessarily need to be at odds, in that it is not necessarily the case that a commitment view and a constitutive view entail different epistemic requirements for proper assertion. A commitment-view proponent could agree with a constitutive norm proponent, for example, that one must know that \(p\) in order to appropriately assert that \(p\), since the commitment-view proponent could argue that by knowing the proposition one asserts one thereby fulfils the commitments one makes by asserting. In other words, if by asserting that \(p\) I am committed to defending the truth of \(p\), then by having knowledge that \(p\) I must be sufficiently well-positioned in order for me to be able to fulfil this commitment\(^37\).

I think there are two problems with the view that the normative requirements of a commitment view are coextensive with those of the constitutive knowledge norm of assertion. First, there seem to be instances in which by knowing that \(p\) one is insufficiently well-positioned epistemically to fully defend one’s assertion that \(p\) – in these cases, it seems that a commitment view would be more epistemically demanding than a constitutive view. Second, there seem to be cases in which we would not expect one to defend one’s assertion at all, even though it can be

\(^{36}\) Commitment views of assertion seem to hold the act of assertion in particularly high regard, at least in comparison to other illocutionary acts. Brandom, for example, claims without argument that “No speech act is as important for philosophers to understand as assertion” (637). As I’ve argued earlier, Commonality for the norms of assertion, practical reasoning, and other illocutionary acts would seem to imply that, at least in epistemic terms, there is really nothing special about assertion. As I will argue below, that we undertake commitments when asserting is a product of the fact that the act of assertion has epistemic requirements for its proper performance. Of course, the commitment view adherent is not alone in holding assertion in undeservedly high regard; as I argued in chapter 2, Williamson’s proposed structure for the norms of illocutionary acts seems to take assertion as paradigmatic. It is this assumption, I argued, that leads Williamson to accept epistemic separability instead of propositional variability.

\(^{37}\) We could, of course, argue that the commitment and constitutive views agree on epistemic requirements other than knowledge. A commitment view proponent might argue that having a justified belief is good enough for fulfilling one’s commitments, which would be in agreement with a proponent of the constitutive approach who argues that justified belief constitutes the act of assertion, etc.
evaluated as epistemically appropriate or inappropriate – in these cases, it seems that a commitment view would be less epistemically demanding than a constitutive view.

As an example of the first problem, consider what Jennifer Lackey (2011) calls cases of “isolated second-hand knowledge.” These cases are ones in which one knows a proposition on the basis of testimony, but does not know any reasons why that proposition is true. One of Lackey’s cases involves Judith, a law professor who asserts to her class: “The Supreme Court is unlikely to hear the upcoming challenge to the recent extension of US copyright pretentions to seventy years after the author’s death” (254). Judith is unfamiliar with this particular recent development in US law: her trustworthy colleague has told her that it is the case, but that is the extent of her knowledge. Lackey interprets the case as follows: Judith knows the relevant proposition on the basis of the testimony of her colleague, but this knowledge is intuitively not enough to warrant appropriate assertion. In another case, Lackey considers Richard, a movie buff with good taste who tells a friend that “The Diving Bell and the Butterfly is extremely moving”. Richard’s friend then comes to know this proposition, which he asserts at a later time to someone who asks him to recommend a particularly moving movie. Again, Lackey claims, Richard’s friend can come to know this proposition on the basis of testimony, but is intuitively not in a good enough epistemic position to assert it. While Lackey is arguing that knowledge is insufficient to warrant permissible assertion, I take her examples to be cases in which knowing a proposition does not guarantee that one is able to defend it: after all, it seems that a natural way to locate the intuitive impropriety of Judith’s assertion is in her inability to provide reasons to believe that she is epistemically well-positioned enough to make her assertion. If knowledge

\[\text{As we saw in chapter 1, Lackey assumes that intuitively correct judgments of the epistemic propriety of an assertion needs to be accommodated by the norm of assertion itself, and thus takes cases of isolated second-hand}\]
does not guarantee that one can appropriately defend one’s assertion, then it seems that the commitment view would require more of us epistemically in cases of isolated second-hand knowledge.

The second problem with the view that commitment and constitutive views of assertion are normatively coextensive comes from Patrick Greenough (2011), who argues that in making assertions we are not always required to be able to provide reasons for the truth of the propositions we assert, because to make such demands is to over-intellectualize the act of assertion. He argues, for example, that,

Small children can make good and bad assertions (and so are subject to the norms of assertion) and yet we do not always require of them that they be able to cite reasons in favor of the contents they assert. (212)

This is not, perhaps, the best example: we no doubt let children “off the hook” for violating rules all the time, precisely because they are children, but this does not mean that a rule has not still been violated. It is far from clear whether our reluctance to challenge children to provide reasons for their assertions is an indication of whether anyone should be expected to provide such reasons, or if it is simply a function of the fact that kids can get away with more than adults.

However, Greenough softens the challenge of over-intellectualization by appealing to a broader notion of what it might mean to be able to provide grounds for the truth of an asserted proposition when challenged. Perhaps providing “adequate grounds” for a proposition one knowledge to be problem cases for the knowledge norm. Again, Lackey is working under the assumption of epistemic monism.
asserts could consist in an appeal to one’s confidence in the truth of a proposition, or confidence in one’s ability to remember things in general (212). While cases in which one asserted some isolated second-hand knowledge seemed to be ones in which one was expected to provide reason to believe the proposition asserted, there might be other cases in which one is not expected to provide reasons to believe the proposition itself. Again, perhaps knowledge of trivia falls into this category: for example, I know that Lincoln was born in 1809, but the reasons I have for believing this fact are long forgotten. When I assert that “Lincoln was born in 1809” do I thereby undertake any commitments to provide reasons that support Lincoln’s having been born in 1809? It might seem overly demanding to require me to provide such information when I have no way of knowing what reason I have for believing the content of my assertion, especially when I am simply stating my knowledge of trivia as a matter of fact, perhaps in a casual conversation with nothing important riding on it. Or consider, for example, an instance of what might be called isolated first-hand knowledge, i.e. an instance in which I know something, but I do not know any of the reasons that make it true. Reports of personal judgments or experiences might fall into this category: I can assert “I am cold,” and it does not seem that I should be committed to providing any additional information beyond the report itself to defend such a claim.

As Greenough suggests, we might be able to defend assertions of trivia by appeal to factors like our confidence in our assertion, or our good memory. However, appeals to confidence or good memory are not appeals to specific reasons for the asserted proposition’s truth. Remember that according to MacFarlane’s commitment view, we either have to be able to provide reasons for the truth of the relevant proposition, or defer those commitments to the source of the relevant information. It’s not clear, however, how we can do this in the case of trivia, especially if I have forgotten what source I should be deferring my commitments to (“I
must have read it somewhere” does not seem adequate here\textsuperscript{39}). Assertions of trivia might then not involve the kind of commitment that MacFarlane or others have in mind; they are, nevertheless, still seemingly able to be evaluated in terms of whether we are epistemically well-positioned enough to assert them. We might then still be subjected to the epistemic requirements of a constitutive norm in order to assert permissibly, but not those of the commitment account. While cases of isolated second-hand knowledge were ones in which it seemed that the commitment view was more epistemically demanding than the constitutive view, cases of isolated first-hand knowledge are ones in which it seems that the constitutive view is more epistemically demanding than the commitment view.

As we will see below, the fact that when defending our assertions that $p$ we often fall back not on reasons for the truth of $p$, but rather as our status as knowers, implies that we are evaluated as epistemic agents not solely with regard to our ability to defend the truth of $p$, but also with regards to our ability to provide reason that we are sufficiently positioned epistemically in order to do what we want to do with $p$. We should not, then, think of the constitutive approach and the commitment approach to determining the conditions for permissible assertion as normatively coextensional. Instead, I think that the two approaches say something different about the epistemic requirements of assertion (along with the epistemic requirements of other acts). The view I have sketched so far looks like this: the difference between primary and secondary epistemic propriety when performing some act $\phi$ is that primary epistemic propriety pertains to whether one has met the requirements of the epistemic norm that constitutes the act of $\phi$-ing, whereas secondary epistemic propriety is a function of what one should have known when $\phi$-ing.

\textsuperscript{39}As a matter of fact, I do remember that the source of my own knowledge of the date of Lincoln’s birth is from examples from other philosophy papers. I don’t remember which ones, though.
To fill out the latter concept, I propose here that what one should have known is a function of what one is committed to in performing that act. In other words, while a constitutive norm determines the conditions for permissible assertion, the commitments we made determine whether our assertions are secondarily epistemically appropriate. Secondary propriety on this view is an epistemic notion because these commitments are epistemic ones: they are commitments to be able to provide evidence that one has adhered to the relevant ϕ-norm. When one ϕ’s, then, one is not only subject to the epistemic demands of the norm that constitutes the act of ϕ-ing, but to the epistemic demands of knowing what one should have known with regards to meeting these demands.

The project at this point is to motivate the view that we are subject to such commitments, to better understand what these commitments consist in, and to determine how being epistemically responsible depends upon the fulfilling of such commitments. Hypothesizing about the nature of the act of assertion is not, I think, going to help us out here. As I argued earlier, conceiving of assertion as “the kind of act that requires that we make certain commitments” is motivated by the unwarranted assumption that assertion occupies a privileged position amongst the illocutionary acts. Instead, I will look to research concerning how we comprehend and process information in general, specifically concerning how we are epistemically vigilant, i.e. how we monitor the content and source of information that we are presented with so that we minimize the chances of accepting what we take to be false information, or of otherwise being the victims of what we take to be deception. Such vigilance creates expectations that an asserter be able to provide reasons in support of the truth of the content of their assertion, or that they can

40 In chapter 3 I argued that Williamson also makes the mistake of focusing predominantly on assertion, and then drawing lessons about other illocutionary acts when using assertion as an exemplar of an illocutionary act.
prove themselves trustworthy (and, in turn, that it is likely that what they are asserting is true).

On this view, the commitments we undertake as asserters are not a product of assertion being the kind of act that involves the undertaking of a commitment, but are rather rooted in the expectations of others that come about as a product of the way that we process information. This view has the benefit of explaining why we have commitments over and above adhering to the relevant constitutive φ-norm, and predicts many of the judgments that are made in the literature concerning the epistemic norms of assertion and action.

What, then, are we committed to when we make an assertion? As we’ve seen in the most prominent commitment views of assertion, these commitments are typically taken to involve the provision of reasons that support the truth of the content of one’s assertion. However, we’ve seen that there are instances of what seem to be appropriate assertion that also do not commit us to defending the truth of the proposition we assert. The view I will defend here looks at our commitments in a different way: when asserting, we are committed to providing reasons to believe that we have adhered to the constitutive norm of assertion, whatever that norm should be. Let’s say that knowledge is the constitutive epistemic condition of assertion. Then, by asserting, the commitment one undertakes is to be able to provide reason to believe that one knows the relevant proposition. Now, one of the ways that we can provide reason to believe that we know that \( p \) is to provide reasons that support the truth of \( p \). But we can also appeal to other facts about ourselves as knowers in general, or as trustworthy sources of information, that can also fulfil these commitments. We can now get a better idea of the requirement that in order to \( φ \) responsibly one should have known certain information: what one should have known consists in those factors that allow the \( φ \)’er to defend one’s adherence to the relevant \( φ \)-norm. Below I will
give examples of how this view explains judgments of propriety that we have been looking at over the past few chapters.

First, an objection: one might wonder why, by asserting, we are committing ourselves to being able to do anything beyond fulfilling its constitutive norm. Most of the commitment-view adherents we’ve looked at answer this question by claiming that that assertion just is the illocutionary act that requires us to provide reasons when challenged. As I’ve argued, assigning assertion such a role makes it unique amongst illocutionary acts (and acts in general) for really no principled reason. I think that to say that assertion is the act, the performance of which subjects us to making certain commitments, gets things the wrong way around. Instead, or so I will attempt to show here, when asserting, one is expected to fulfil certain commitments is a result of the fact that when communicating information one’s audience will have expectations that we be able to provide reasons to believe that we know the relevant information. However, these expectations are not unique to receiving information via the act of assertion: we have similar expectations toward information that we receive via any communicative act.\(^4\)

One final potential concern: why should we think that the commitment view is unable, on its own, to account for our judgments of the propriety or impropriety of assertions? Why do we need to appeal to constitutive norms at all, if we are admitting that commitments are an important part of our epistemic evaluations of assertions and other acts? As I mentioned above, when (for example) asserting, our commitments are best thought of as defending our adherence to the constitutive norm of assertion. When we ask “how do you know?” when someone makes an assertion that we perhaps think is questionable, we are asking that person to fulfil their

\(^4\) Does this mean that we do, in fact, undertake commitments when we assert knowledge of trivia, or of personal experiences? Yes; however, as I will argue below, these commitments need not be epistemically demanding.
commitments to defend their adherence to the norm that governs their action. If there was no constitutive epistemic norm of assertion, then there would be nothing to be committed to defending our adherence to. Consider again the basketball analogy from chapter 1. In playing basketball, one subjects oneself to the requirement to adhere to the rules that constitute the game of basketball. However, one also subjects oneself to potential scrutiny for failing to exercise good strategy when the situation calls for it (our basketball player Bobby was rightly chastised for failing to stop the clock when he could have committed an intentional foul). Of course, good strategy is something that only makes sense in reference to the rules that govern the underlying activity: the game of basketball could not be described solely in terms of “good strategy.”

Something similar, I think, is the case for assertion (and, indeed, any acts that are constituted by epistemic norms): what we are committed to depends on the rules that govern the act we are performing, otherwise there would be nothing to be committed to. Hence the need to refrain from either pitting the constitutive and commitment views against each other or from attempting to reduce one to the other: once we are no longer able to define a particular act as that which we are committed to, commitments only make sense when invoked in reference to underlying rules, and having underlying rules entails that we are subject to certain commitments.

The second half of that sentence – the claim that some act’s being epistemically constituted entails that we are committed to providing reason to believe that we have met those requirements when performing that act – is what requires significant argument. In order to defend this claim, I’ll look at some of the literature in empirical psychology concerning the circumstances in which we are likely to accept or reject information that is presented to us. As we will see, the situations in which the literature concerning epistemic vigilance predicts that we are likely to require additional evidence in order to accept information reflects many cases in the
norm of assertion literature where it seems that we are committed to providing reasons for our assertions.

6.3 Epistemic Vigilance and Commitments

Recent work in psychology on the functions of reasoning and communicating starts with a general observation: we rely on communication, but want to minimize the chances of being misinformed. As a result, we employ cognitive mechanisms that help reduce the risk of being, from our perspective, misled. Employing such mechanisms is, potentially, cognitively costly: we don’t want to have to actively monitor all of the information that we are presented with in detail to determine if it’s trustworthy, so in order to minimize such costs we employ these mechanisms selectively, and more or less stringently, depending on the circumstances. Monitoring of information for trustworthiness has been dubbed *epistemic vigilance* (Sperber and Mercier, 2011; Sperber et. al. 2010). For example, Sperber and Mercier (2011) claim that “the task of epistemic vigilance is to evaluate communicators and the content of their message in order to filter communicated information” (60). Sperber et. al. (2010) argue that epistemic vigilance is furthermore a process that occurs as information is being processed and comprehended, and that

Comprehension involves adopting a tentative and labile stance of trust; this will lead to acceptance only if epistemic vigilance, which is triggered by the same communicative acts that trigger comprehension, does not come up with reasons to doubt (368-9)\(^42\).

\(^{42}\) This is in contrast to earlier views (see Gilbert (1990), Gilbert et. al. (1993)) in which it was argued that by comprehending information we automatically initially accept it, and only afterwards represent it at false (if we so represent it). Richter et. al. (2009) argue against this view by noting how, according to it, it should take us longer to process information that we regard as false than that which we regard as true, but that this consequence is not supported by empirical evidence.
In order to communicate with one another at all, then, requires us to put a certain amount of trust in our fellow communicators. Sperber et. al. claim that reliable informants are taken to be both competent and benevolent, and that

this suggests that trust should be allocated to informants depending on the topic, the audience, and the circumstances. However, such precise calibration of trust is costly in cognitive terms, and, while people are often willing to pay the price, they also commonly rely on less costly general impressions of competence, benevolence and overall trustworthiness. (369)

There are thus two significant issues that deserve attention: the descriptive project that is concerned with determining when we do, in fact, employ these cognitive mechanisms, and the normative project that is concerned with determining when we should. The normative question is really two additional questions: when, as receivers of information, should we trust the source of some information, and what, as providers of information, should we do in order to be considered trustworthy, so that our information is most likely to be accepted? The normative questions are the ones that concern me most here: since communicative acts like assertion are performed in order to get our audiences to believe what we’re saying, determining what we need to do in order to make sure that the information we present via assertion or some other speech act is accepted will also determine what we are committed to when performing such an act.

The literature on epistemic vigilance suggests that we are, in general, much more likely to accept information that coheres with our expectations, our desires, and our beliefs; that comes from what we perceive to be a trustworthy source of information; and that is of little relevance to us. On the other hand, when we are presented with information that is inconsistent with our expectations, our desires, and our beliefs; that comes from what we perceive to be an
untrustworthy source of information; or that has significant relevance to us, we both take longer to process this information, and are more likely to generate reasons for thinking that this information is false. For example, Eagly et. al. (2000) tested how easily one could remember information that was either proattitudinal (cohered with or supported the attitudes of the participants) or counterattitudinal (did not cohere with or challenged the attitudes of the participants). While both kinds of information were as easily recalled, they were recalled for different reasons: proattitudinal information was easily recalled because of its coherence with the attitudes of the subject, whereas counterattitudinal information was easily recalled because the subjects had, essentially, thought about it more, either by trying to find flaws with the information they were presented with, or by generating reasons to disbelieve it. The experimenters concluded that “information inconsistent with preferences produces a greater quantity of processing than does information consistent with preferences” (1393). In another study, Ditto et. al. (2003) presented participants with either favorable or unfavorable medical diagnoses. When diagnoses were favorable, participants were much more likely to simply accept the information that was given to them. When they were unfavorable, participants were much more likely to double-check the results they were given, and took significantly longer to process the information. Ditto et. al. argue that at least two factors contributed to the increase in processing in the unfavorable case: that the results were unfavorable, and that they were unexpected.

In addition to information that conflicts with our attitudes and expectations, Richter et. al. (2009) argue that in cases where information was presented to subjects that conflicted with information that was either “active in working memory or easily accessible in long-term memory”, it took longer for the subjects to process such information as either true or false (541).
Furthermore, Richter et al. argue that in cases where participants are presented with information that conflicts with accessible information, individuals “spontaneously activate knowledge that is incongruent with the content of a message” (540). Similar to instances in which one is distrustful of the content of a message, people will also take longer to process and will automatically bring to mind “alternative meanings” when information is received from what one takes to be an untrustworthy source. Schul et al. (2004), for example, argue that when one trusts the source of some information,

receivers tend to concentrate on message-congruent associations. However if the source is suspected of being untrustworthy, receivers spontaneously activate message-incongruent associations, as they are considering what might happen if the message is invalid (677).

In a different set of studies, Corner and Hahn (2009) present interesting results concerning the role of trust in subjects’ acceptance of scientific information. Subjects were given weak evidence in support of a claim and asked to rate how convincing that claim was. Two kinds of claims were evaluated: one that pertained to a scientific issue (e.g. “The next visible solar flare will be visible during the month of November”), and one that pertained to a non-scientific claim (e.g. “The leader of the Conservative Party and his wife are going to have a baby in the summer”) (211). Despite the fact that each claim was supported with the same quality and quantity of evidence, subjects generally rated the scientific claim as less plausible than the non-scientific one. Corner and Hahn suggest that the difference might be explained by “the perceived position of scientific knowledge in our lives,” namely as “a collection of facts – certainties – that are arrived at by a rigorous and objective process of hypothesis testing” (207). Scientific claims (or perhaps scientists themselves), then, might be held to a higher evidential standard in order to
be found convincing, and thus without the presentation of additional reasons to believe that what is presented to us is true, we are less likely to find it convincing.

Jonathan Haidt (2001) argues that similar effects as those described above are observed when surveying people’s moral judgments, in particular. According to Haidt’s model (what he calls the “social intuitionist” model), moral judgments are made initially as quick, intuitive judgments, which are followed by slow moral reasoning when one is required to defend their judgments to others. We engage in moral reasoning in circumstances similar to those described in the epistemic vigilance literature: Haidt argues that we are more likely to scrutinize evidence that supports a view that conflicts with our moral judgments, that we are more likely to scrutinize moral judgments of those that we do not find trustworthy, and that we are likely to simply accept moral judgments if they are not relevant to us (e.g. we are more likely to accept a judgment that “Robert is evil!” when conveyed to us by a friend if we have no idea who Robert is and have no interest in finding out than if Robert is an acquaintance of ours) or if it is made by someone we trust. Although Haidt’s conclusions are drawn with an eye to supporting his social intuitionist model of moral judgment, we can also see how they are accounted for by the general mechanisms that underlie epistemic vigilance, with one simply exercising one’s vigilance towards moral claims (for similar results concerning “justice inferences,” see Ham and van den Bos (2007)).

So far, then, we have seen a number of cases in which we might expect someone to expect the provider of some information to be able to defend the truth of that information in one way or another, namely those cases in which information one is presented with conflicts with one’s beliefs, comes from a source one finds untrustworthy, or that one finds important. What does the view that we are epistemically vigilant have to do with the kinds of commitments that
we make when asserting (or otherwise conveying information)? Since under certain conditions—namely those in which we distrust the speaker, in which the information we receive conflicts with our beliefs—we automatically look for reasons to support our assessment that the information we are provided with is false, we would, under those conditions, expect the providers of such information to better support their assertions. Effective assertion might then commit us to being able to provide sufficient reasons to believe that we do, in fact, know what we’re talking about, where what counts as a sufficient reason depends on the expectations of our audience. As I have emphasized, the best way to think about the commitments that come along with assertion is not to think that it is a standing feature of assertion that it engenders commitments; rather, it is a function of the way that we employ our epistemic relationships in action that can engender such commitments, and asserting happens to be one way in which we can employ our epistemic relationships. That we should be subject to such commitments when asserting or otherwise communicating information is a claim supported by several views concerning the nature and purpose of reasoning. For instance, Mercier and Sperber’s (2011) so-called “argumentative view” of reasoning claims that,

the very function of reasoning puts it on display in human communication [and] reasoning is best adapted for its role in argumentation, which should therefore be seen as its main function (59).

Mercier and Sperber argue that the main ways in which we exhibit our epistemic vigilance is through “trust calibration” – i.e. by trying to make sure that we trust only those that are trustworthy – and “coherence checking” – i.e. by trying to make sure that the information we accept and the beliefs we hold are coherent (60). When we communicate, then, part of what we want to communicate is that we are trustworthy. In order to do this, Mercier and Sperber suggest
that one might “provide evidence for her reliability in the matter at hand (for instance, if the information is about health issues, she might inform the addressee that she is a doctor)” (60). Instead of trying to communicate that we are trustworthy, we might instead try to convince our audience that the content of our assertions is actually coherent with what they believe: we might instead, then, “try to convince [our] addressee by offering premises the addressee already believes or is willing to accept on trust, and showing that, once these premises are accepted, it would be less coherent to reject the conclusion than to accept it” (60). Mercier and Sperber’s view suggests that the nature of the way that we communicate information requires that we undertake certain kinds of epistemic commitments, namely those to provide sufficient reason for our audience to believe that we, in some way, know what we are talking about.

We do not, I think, need to fully accept Mercier and Sperber’s view that humans developed the capacity to reason as a way to be better arguers in order to support the view that communication engenders epistemic commitments. Indeed, some of the predictions of the argumentative theory, arguably, are not borne out. One prediction of the theory is that “reasoning should produce its best results when used in argumentative contexts, most notably group discussions” (61). Sternberg (2011), however, argues that groups do not in general reach the “best results” when compared with individuals, if by “best results” we mean the veridical ones. Sternberg cites the phenomenon of “groupthink”, where problems that might be noticed by individuals go unnoticed because of a misplaced sense of confidence generated by group consensus. Sternberg argues that it is therefore unlikely that simply being persuasive is evolutionarily advantageous for a society as a whole; rather, “In today’s world, reasoning is being used primarily to convince others rather than to find the best decision, but this reasoning is not evolutionarily adaptive in the long run” (89). While Sternberg cites examples of people using
convincing rhetoric for malicious purposes – viz. “demagogic politicians” who use reasoning not to get to the truth, but as a tool to inspire “chaos”, “unscrupulous clergymen” who are more interested in convincing people to part with their money than they are in getting at the truth, etc. – it’s not clear that citing a few bad apples should spoil a whole bunch of data. Such unscrupulous figures are bound to impede society no matter what our view are concerning the functioning of reasoning. Presumably there are other factors at play that would make having grossly unscrupulous motivations maladaptive. Furthermore, the fact that there exist individuals who manipulate the mechanisms that Mercier and Sperber argue are necessary for effective communication does not mean that different mechanisms, in fact, developed. Rather, demagogic politicians and unscrupulous clergymen are simply an indication of the fact that bad people will use rhetoric for bad purposes.

However, Sternberg’s examples do remind us that simply being convincing is not necessarily something that we should strive for, in and of itself, at least not if we are concerned with being good epistemic agents. Certainly it should not be considered any kind of epistemic requirement on our part that by performing some act of ϕ-ing we are necessarily committed to being able to convince absolutely everyone, by any means necessary. As I argue below, our epistemic commitments should be conceived not in terms of every possible expectation for the provision of reasons to believe something, but rather in terms of a certain subset of factors that would convince a vigilant audience, specifically a vigilant audience that is concerned with getting at the truth of a given matter.

For my purposes, what is important is that the existence of cognitive mechanisms that make us epistemically vigilant when interpreting information would predict that under certain conditions we will require more reasons in order to accept the information with which we are
presented. Furthermore, a failure to be able to provide these reasons is the basis of a judgment that one’s assertion is somehow epistemically inappropriate. Indeed, we can see how these predictions are borne out in some of the cases we have seen so far. For example, we saw earlier that Greenough (2011) charges the commitment theorist with over-intellectualizing assertion by requiring that the asserter be able to provide reasons to accept the content of any and every assertion that one makes. However, he claims that appeals to one’s high confidence or excellent memory can perhaps suffice to fulfil said commitments. That we would find such appeals satisfactory is exactly what is predicted by a theory of epistemic vigilance that says that we are likely to accept information from a source that we find trustworthy. Greenough’s suggestion is that we can fulfil our commitments in certain cases by providing reason to believe that we are trustworthy, and that if the acceptance of the trustworthiness of a source of information can be sufficient for accepting the information given, then we do not need to actually present reasons that support the truth of the proposition itself that is asserted. Hence the charge of over-intellectualization against the commitment view sticks: we do not necessarily require reasons that support the truth of a proposition if we are content that the source of the asserted information is trustworthy. Sometimes, it is enough to show that we are generally trustworthy in order to fulfil our commitments. We should, however, still consider the fulfilment of these commitments to be an inherently epistemic task: the trustworthy asserter is one who tends to assert truly – or, at least, truly from the perspective of the addressee, i.e. one who makes assertions, the content of which tend to be compatible with the addressee’s beliefs. Thus while not supplying reasons that support the truth of the content of one’s assertion itself, one supports one’s trustworthiness as a source of true information.
Indeed, that appeals to trustworthiness can fulfil our commitments explains why cases of assertions of isolated first-hand knowledge often do not seem like they require us to provide any additional reasons to accept their content. We can instead defend our claims to knowledge of trivia by appealing to our being generally knowledgeable (consider: “Lincoln was born in 1809. I am a mainstay at my bar’s trivia night, so you should trust me”), or by not having any motive to mislead (consider: “Lincoln was born in 1809. Why would I lie about something like that?”). Such explanations still provide reasons to believe that we have adhered to the norm of assertion. I can, after all, provide reason to believe that I know that $p$ either by providing reasons that $p$ – say, by providing some historical details about Lincoln – or by providing reasons that “I know that $p$” – say, by providing reason to believe that I am generally knowledgeable in the relevant matters. In addition to cases of isolated first-hand knowledge, we also saw that we are generally unlikely to be expected to provide reasons to believe that we know things about our own experiences, attitudes, etc. In these cases we are, I think, likely to simply accept the asserter as trustworthy, unless we have some specific reason to distrust them (there are perhaps situations in which we would require support for one’s assertion of one’s attitudes, say if we know that the asserter is a pathological liar, or is known to exaggerate the severity of their feelings in order to garner sympathy; in these cases, it again seems that we require additional information because we view the asserter as inherently untrustworthy). This does not mean that we are not subject to any commitments at all when asserting propositions about our personal experiences, but rather

43 Note here the connection between state-based and proposition-based excuses, as discussed in chapter 4: I argued that we can intuitively be exonerated of our epistemic transgressions because of either our epistemic relationship with the relevant proposition, or because of our epistemic relationship with the facts of our adherence to the relevant norm. Here the distinction is again relevant, in that way can defend our adherence to norms in these two different ways.
that these commitments are easily fulfilled by simply being a generally trustworthy conveyor of information.

Our judgments of other examples in the norms of assertion literature are also plausibly predicted by noting how we exercise epistemic vigilance. Consider again Lackey’s case of isolated second-hand knowledge and the assertion that law professor Judith made to her class. I suggested above that we can locate the intuitive impropriety of Judith’s assertion in her inability to provide sufficient reason for her audience to accept the proposition she asserted. We can now fill out this explanation a little more: since accepting the content of the assertion has direct importance for the members of Judith’s class, they are likely to be exercising their epistemic vigilance, and thus will require supporting reasons for the assertion in order to accept it, reasons that the professor is unable to provide. Since Judith has not fulfilled her epistemic commitments, her assertion is an irresponsible one. We can similarly diagnose some of the cases I have presented earlier. For instance, in the last chapter I argued that while Dr. Vigilant’s assertion was impermissible, it nevertheless seemed in some ways epistemically appropriate, whereas Dr. Lazy’s assertion was both impermissible and seemed in no ways epistemically appropriate. We can now get a better understanding as to why: Dr. Vigilant is, despite being mistaken in this particular instance, able to fulfil our expectations for the provision of reason to believe that he knows the proposition he asserts (since he has done all of the research that we could expect him to do). The same cannot be said for Dr. Lazy: since we would expect a doctor to be as up-to-date as possible concerning their medical diagnoses, we would thus expect Dr. Lazy to know about relevant available information. But Dr. Lazy does not know this information, and thus is unable to provide sufficient reason for us to believe that he knows the content of his assertion.
Earlier we also saw cases in which one asserted a proposition one knew, but did not have access to one’s knowledge at the time. The “flat-footed” diagnosis of such cases was that φ-ing on the basis of such knowledge was permissible, but still epistemically inappropriate in some way. Williamson’s argument was that we could locate the perceived epistemic impropriety of φ-ing on the basis of inaccessible knowledge in its unreasonableness, since it was not likely on the basis of what evidence one had that one knew the relevant proposition. We can accommodate the same judgment in a different way: instances in which one does not have access to one’s knowledge are going to be cases in which one will not be able to provide reason to believe that one knows the relevant proposition, and thus will be irresponsible.

Consider, as another example, instances in which we might employ “implicit knowledge” in our assertions or our practical reasoning. According to Dienes and Perner (1999), when we have “explicit knowledge”, we also have an internal state that functions to represent the fact that we do, in fact, possess said knowledge, whereas implicit knowledge lacks such a corresponding internal state (736). Mercier (forthcoming) says of implicit knowledge that it cannot be easily called to consciousness, for example: “Motor learning – from tying one’s shoelaces to being a professional fencer – can be considered part of implicit knowledge; but higher-level inferences can also be purely implicit” (5). As an example of a higher-level inference that might be an instance of implicit knowledge, Mercier cites Malcolm Gladwell’s (2005) anecdote of an art appraiser who knows that a particular sculpture is a forgery but is unable to provide any reasons to support her judgment (5). We might think that while certain “lower-level” implicit knowledge is not likely to be challenged with the requirement for supporting reasons – we do not typically
subject expressions of one’s “motor learning” to scrutiny\textsuperscript{44} – expressions of implicit propositional knowledge, such as that expressed in Gladwell’s example, is something that would more likely create expectations in an audience for the provision of supporting reasons (especially since the truth of the proposition is a matter of some importance)\textsuperscript{45}.

So far, then, we have seen that while commitment views of assertion are traditionally spelled out from the point of view of the asserter and the nature of assertion (assertion is the kind of thing that licenses others to assert on the basis of the information you provide, the kind of thing that requires that you vindicate your claims when challenged, and so on), I have suggested that, instead, we can locate our commitments not in the nature of the illocutionary act of assertion, but instead in the expectations of one’s audience for the asserter to be able to provide reasons to believe that one does, in fact, have a significant epistemic relationship with the proposition one is asserting. As we’ve seen above, these expectations are often going to be ones that are under the guise of the epistemic: one expects an asserter to provide more information, to defend their view against counterexamples and arguments, to prove that they are trustworthy, etc.

\textsuperscript{44} This kind of knowledge seems to correspond with a “knowledge-how” kind of knowledge, rather than a “knowledge-that” kind of knowledge that we have been dealing with almost exclusively throughout. I take no stance on the issue of whether these kinds of knowledge are reducible to one another or distinct. We might think, however, that we do not typically require the provisions of reasons to support one’s knowledge when one expresses knowledge-how because typically the expression of such knowledge itself justifies the claim to possession of that knowledge. Thus an expression of the knowledge of how to tie my shoelaces is both an expression of and reason to believe that I possess knowledge of how to tie my shoelaces. Ordinary propositional knowledge, however, does not typically automatically justify itself in this way, and thus requires the explicit provision of reasons to believe that one possesses the knowledge they are asserting (there are exceptions: asserting “I am speaking” is both an expression of and reason to believe that I possess knowledge of the proposition I am asserting, in a way that an assertion of “Lincoln was born in 1809” is not).

\textsuperscript{45} On my interpretation of Gladwell’s case, the art appraiser’s assertion is permissible, but epistemically irresponsible. That does not mean that it is irresponsible in other ways: it might be the responsibility of the art appraiser to give her honest opinion, and in this sense she might be in some other way doing something responsible. Or, the art appraiser might be epistemically well-positioned enough to perform some act of ϕ-ing other than assertion, and might then be responsible in performing that act (i.e. if she is simply asked to provide her opinion, she might not be asserting that “the statue is a forgery”).
I say “under the guise of the epistemic” since there are going to be plenty of instances in which one is going to be epistemically vigilant as the result of factors that don’t necessarily pertain to the likelihood of how well-supported the proposition one is comprehending actually is (to anticipate later discussion, vigilance can be increased by such truth-irrelevant factors as prejudice). But the expectations of our audience are, if not caused by specifically epistemic concerns, still directed towards the provision of reasons: for instance, I may not trust you for very bad reasons, and as a result not believe what you say, but from my perspective I might still need more reasons that support the truth of the proposition you are asserting. Of course, our expectations can be satiated by distinctly non-epistemic factors. But our epistemic commitments do not pertain to the mere fulfilment of expectations by any means necessary; rather, they pertain to fulfilment of expectations through the presentation of reasons.

Here the normative problem mentioned earlier comes into focus: just because it is the case that our audience is going to have expectations of us as asserters to be able to provide reasons to believe we know what we’re talking about, does not necessarily mean that we are committed to fulfilling all of these expectations. There are, after all, clearly going to be instances in which the demands of our audience are going to be unreasonable: what do we do, for example, with the skeptic who does not trust the veracity of any information, or the paranoid person who does not trust the source of any information? Surely we are not committed to fulfilling the expectations of these people. The problem of exactly what standards of commitment we need to adhere to seems to be a common gap in the commitment-view literature (as we saw before, MacFarlane speaks of commitments to defend one’s assertion against any “appropriate challenge,” although it’s not clear what makes a challenge an appropriate one), and it seems no
less of a gap here in determining which expectations we need to fulfil in order to be epistemically responsible.

So let’s try to fill this gap. The view that I will defend here is that the expectations that we should fulfil are just those that are made by our audience when they are concerned with getting at the truth of the information they receive. Expectations that are directed towards factors that do not pertain to the truth of the relevant proposition are not ones that one is committed to fulfilling, and thus do not play a role in determining whether we are epistemically responsible. I will say what I mean for an expectation to be truth-directed in what follows.

6.4 Truth-Directed Expectations

Sometimes, one might be overly-demanding when it comes to requiring reasons to believe that you know what you’re talking about. For example, a challenge to provide additional reasons in support of an assertion of “I have a headache” is presumably asking too much if a simple appeal to one’s trustworthiness or a lack of intention to deceive is found to be unsatisfactory. Other times, one might accept information too readily: there might be cases in which one readily accepts information that one either probably shouldn’t, or at least would have a right to challenge if desired. Several of the studies I have cited here suggest that people will accept weakly supported statements that cohere with their attitudes and/or their beliefs, whereas they are much less likely to accept statements that are in conflict with these attitudes and/or beliefs, even though they might be equally well-supported evidentially. Perceived trustworthiness, especially, seems to be affected by many trivial factors. For example, Willis and Todorov (2006) found that a mere 100 millisecond exposure to pictures of faces was sufficient for someone to judge how attractive, likeable, trustworthy, competent and aggressive they were, and that any additional time beyond the initial 100 milliseconds did not significantly affect such
judgments. That we should be so quick to judge whether someone is trustworthy is perhaps a disturbing result; Willis and Todorov mention many more instances in which our quick interpretations of faces affect our judgments, including the tendency to judge those who are “babyfaced” less harshly (both in general and in a court of law) (Zebrowitz et. al., 1991). Furthermore, they were able to predict outcomes of U.S. congressional elections based on inferences about competence that were based solely on facial appearance (Todorov et. al., 2005). Such results might suggest that increased epistemic vigilance that is the result of a low level of trust in an individual is more often than not based on truth-irrelevant factors.

If the expectations that one’s audience has for the provision of reasons can be affected by so many factors that seem irrelevant to the truth of the relevant information, then why should we think that we are committed to fulfilling such expectations? I don’t think, however, that the simple fact that we are swayed by factors that are irrelevant to the truth is so much of a problem when it comes to determining the conditions for epistemic responsibility: participants in the above experiments were merely asked to rate trustworthiness and competence on the basis of appearance alone, and such is not the case when we are interpreting the information delivered by an asserter. We might be generally bad at determining whether one is trustworthy on the basis of very little information, but in these cases we shouldn’t be expected to meet the expectations of those who have judged us on the basis of so little information. We should, then, want to distinguish those cases in which we typically do expect those who provide us with information to also provide us with reasons that support the veracity of that information, from those cases in which we should expect such supporting reasons. That we should want to do this is, I think, obvious: not only to avoid committing a naturalistic fallacy, but to avoid some rather obvious problem cases for a theory of epistemic responsibility (i.e. that any assertion is made
epistemically irresponsible by the presence of the overly skeptical, or stubborn, or, as we will see below, bigoted).

Of course, it certainly seems that we are, as a matter of common experience, unlikely to be overly epistemically demanding when it comes to accepting assertions about headaches or statements of personal experience. That we do not question every possible bit of information we are presented with seems to be necessary for the possibility of communication in the first place. Gloria Origgi (2004) calls epistemic trust the basic assumption of competence when interpreting information presented by someone. Origgi describes epistemic trust as trust, “on the one hand, in the goodwill of others and, on the other hand, in their competence” (64). That we need some basic level of trust in order to communicate is not a new idea. Thomas Reid, for example, claims that:

The wise and beneficent Author of nature, who intended that we should be social creatures, and that we should receive the greatest and most important part of our knowledge by the information of others, hath, for these purposes implanted into our natures two principles that tally with each other. The first of these principles is a propensity to speak truth…[the second] is a disposition to confide in the veracity of others, and to believe what they tell us. (1997: 196)

Reid is not only advocating the view that we do generally trust those communicating with us, but that, in addition, we are justified in doing so, as God’s beneficence makes it such that we are not likely to deceive or take ourselves to be deceived. I won’t take a stance on God’s beneficence here; what’s important is that there seems to be a basement for the degree of vigilance that our addressees are typically going to exercise when communicating. Origgi (2012) calls this a default trust: “the minimal trust we need to allocate to our interlocutors in order for any act of
communication to succeed” (224). She contrasts default trust with what she calls vigilant trust: “a complex of cognitive mechanisms, emotional dispositions, inherited norms, [and] reputational cues we put at work while filtering the information we receive” (224). While default trust is necessary for communication to happen at all, it is this vigilant trust that drives the requirements that underlie a notion of communicating responsibly.

Of course, we don’t always trust conveyors of information, and sometimes for very poor reasons. Miranda Fricker (2007), for example, calls instances of epistemic injustice ones in which we do not trust information provided by others for reasons that do not pertain to the truth of that information. Such injustice comes in two forms: testimonial injustice, in which, as a result of prejudice, one gives less credibility than one should to a source of testimony, and hermeneutical injustice, in which one gives less credibility to a source of testimony not necessarily due to any conscious prejudice, but because of attitudes held as the result of the influence of more widespread societal views. As an instance of the former, Fricker recounts the fictional case of “The Talented Mr. Ripley” who, by manipulating the stereotype that the testimony of a woman is less reliable than that of a man (as women are at the mercy of their “women’s intuition” and are prone to “hysteria”) convinces those around him that he has not committed a murder that he, in fact, has committed. As an instance of the latter, Fricker considers the case of a trial in which the testimony of the defendant is given less credibility than it should be given because of the race of the individual testifying. For Fricker, in order to minimize the degree to which we are epistemically unjust we should strive to be virtuous receptors of testimony. The virtuous addressee “needs to receive the word of his interlocutor in the light of the probability that someone like that would (be able and willing to) tell someone like
him the truth about something like this in circumstances like these” (71). In other words, the virtuous receiver of testimony is one who is well-attuned to the truth.\footnote{In this way Fricker’s view is similar to that defended by John McDowell (1998), who states that an audience member who receives information that $p$ should have a “sensitivity to surrounding reasons for and against taking it that $p$” (67).}

I think that while Fricker is generally right that as receivers of information we should strive to judge the plausibility of the information we receive solely on the basis of factors that pertain to the truth of that information, her use of the language of “virtue” obfuscates the issue. Our judgment that it would not be virtuous to not take seriously the provider of information because of an underlying prejudice against members of a certain race or gender is no doubt influenced by the judgment that having such a prejudice is morally vicious. In cases in which the prejudice is not so morally charged it is less clear where we can locate one’s “epistemically vicious” behavior. For example, as a geologist I might give less credence to the theories of a young-earth Creationist than I would to those of a fellow scientist. It’s not clear, however, whether this constitutes a lack of virtue on my part.

What seems to be right about Fricker’s view is that it seems that we should only be obligated to fulfil the expectations of those addressees that are legitimately concerned with getting at the truth of the matter when they are presented with information. Those who are epistemically unjust, in Fricker’s sense, are not, presumably, interested in getting at the truth of the matter when they discount information provided to them on the basis of, say, the race or sex of the individual, as these factors have nothing to do with the likelihood that the proposition being asserted is true. But we can be epistemically unjust in more ways than being prejudiced, either overtly, as a product of our upbringing or as a member of a particular society. If
information is discounted simply because the addressee does not like the speaker, for example, then these are expectations we also are not required to fulfil, since they are similarly not truth-directed ones. If someone is simply a skeptic, and rejects all information out-of-hand, then these are, presumably, not expectations that are really concerned with getting at the truth of the matter, either.

We should be careful here: the source of one’s concerns about the truth of a proposition might not itself be the result of explicitly epistemic factors. As we saw above, when the stakes surrounding the truth of a proposition are high, we are likely to be more epistemically vigilant, and thus more demanding for the provision of reasons that show that one does, in fact, know the proposition one is asserting. But while increased stakes increase our vigilance, the stakes themselves have nothing to do with how likely it is that a proposition is true or false. It does seem, however, that we should meet the epistemic obligations of those who have a lot at stake in the truth of the proposition we assert to them\textsuperscript{47}. It might then seem that our commitments are not necessarily driven by any set of concerns for the truth, and thus should not be conceived of as “epistemic” commitments in any relevant way. We can get around this problem, however, by again noting that when one is in a high-stakes setting one is still looking for reasons for what one takes to be necessary to accept the information one is presented with. Thus while in a low-stakes situation one might not have needed as many reasons to support one’s belief in a proposition, in a high-stakes situation one will take the information presented to be less well-supported on the basis of the same amount of evidence. The underlying cause of one’s increased epistemic vigilance, then, does not need to be an explicitly epistemic concern in order for our commitments

\textsuperscript{47} I will argue in the next chapter that by conceiving of stakes as affecting conditions of responsibility instead of permissibility we might undermine the motivation for interest-relative invariantism.
to be epistemic in nature. What’s important is that as a result those concerns that do trigger our epistemic vigilance be directed towards actually getting at the truth of the matter.

Call such concerns truth-directed expectations. Epistemic responsibility, then, requires us to fulfil the truth-directed expectations of our audience. That we should be epistemically obligated only to fulfil the truth-directed expectations of our audience means that expectations based solely on factors like prejudice are not going to be ones that we need to be concerned about as epistemologists. Responsibility is also on this view something that comes in degrees: one can be more or less responsible, depending upon one’s ability to fulfil the expectations of one’s audience’s truth-directed expectations. That such a notion can come in degrees is a characteristic that, I think, is shared by many of the conceptions of secondary epistemic propriety, but rarely mentioned by them explicitly. Williamson’s conception of reasonableness, for instance, seems to be one that comes in degrees (as the extent to which our evidence makes likely our knowing a proposition can come in degrees).

Of course, there are still going to be tricky cases: one’s truth-directed concerns could still be based on factors that we might not think are ones that we should take seriously. Consider an instance in which a racist makes an assertion to a room full of racists. The racist speaker asserts some predictable vitriol, that “members of racial group X are inherently inferior to our own.” Due to mutual prejudice, the audience accepts this information as true, and the asserter thinks nothing of the plausibility of such an assertion. No mechanisms of epistemic vigilance are triggered because, from the audience’s point of view, nothing controversial has been said. We thus might be forced to say that such an assertion is a responsible one in such a context. However, we might think that such an audience really has no interest in getting at the truth at all, at least not when it comes to matters concerning statements about individuals of certain races. So
perhaps we should say that if the audience were, in fact, interested in getting at the truth, then they would rightfully demand additional reasons to accept the asserted proposition. Their mechanisms for epistemic vigilance are simply poorly calibrated.

But perhaps the way in which one takes something to be directed towards the truth is different for some audiences than others. Let’s say that the racist asserter and his audience have been raised in such an environment where all of the information that they have received about racial group X has been that members of group X are inherently inferior. The entirety of their shared set of information about racial group X is misguided, and thus when they direct their inquiry towards what they take to be the truth, they might direct it towards a set of information that supports belief in something that is false. It seems, however, that on the view that I am putting forth here, assertions made in such a situation would count as responsible ones.

Cases in which individuals are informationally isolated in the above way are notoriously difficult. We can again see a parallel between those cases of culpable moral ignorance in which one is ignorant of the moral valence of the action one is performing because one is informationally isolated, and cases in which one is ignorant of one’s epistemic status towards a proposition. Consider, for instance, Gideon Rosen’s (2003) case of the “ancient slave holder” who is ignorant of the moral valence of owning slaves as a result of being part of a culture that does not find the practice morally reprehensible (65). It’s unclear whether we should take the slaveholder’s ignorance to be sufficient to exonerate him of his moral transgressions; similarly, it’s unclear whether it is reasonable to expect someone who is informationally isolated to seek out information that is difficult for them to acquire. Thus perhaps it’s not so bad to say that in informationally isolated cases one is able to assert responsibly even if the content of that assertion is reprehensible. The responsibility account I am putting forth here is also no worse off
than other theories of secondary propriety and reasonableness: these theories would again most likely evaluate assertions of the kind described above in a positive way, as, for example, given the evidence that the informationally isolated racist has, it would be likely that he knows the relevant proposition. And it’s not as though we can’t find anything wrong with the assertion of the racist: his assertion is still primarily epistemically inappropiate because the content of the assertion is not known. Intuitions here are no doubt damaged by what seems to be a morally reprehensible character as the mouthpiece of the assertion. I’ve chosen the case of the racist asserter as a particularly tough pill to swallow, but when it comes to it, epistemically speaking he is simply asserting something that is false and poorly supported by the evidence at large.

The above cases show a key difference between the responsibility account and Williamson’s reasonableness account: whether one’s act of φ-ing is epistemically responsible will be, in part, a product of the context in which one φ’s. On the reasonableness account, the reasonableness of one’s assertion depends solely on the asserter’s evidence. The focus on the asserter, however, generates some of the counterexamples that we saw in the previous chapter. Although others, like Stanley and Hawthorne – who speak in terms of “excuses” – or DeRose – who speaks in terms of it being reasonable that we would think that one has knowledge – do not mention whether their respective conceptions of secondary epistemic propriety are sensitive to the context in which one acts or asserts, it seems that their views are compatible with such context-dependence. For example, what qualifies as a sufficient excuse for one’s violation of the norm of practical reasoning might vary depending on the situation in which one reasons; similarly, what counts as it being reasonable for one to think that one knew a proposition might again depend on the situation in which one asserts. We will see in the next chapter what the consequences of this view are for other views in the theory of knowledge.
Remember what is being claimed here: not that the expectations of others affects whether one has knowledge or fails to, but whether one can exercise this knowledge responsibly. If one finds oneself in a situation in which the expectation for the provision of reasons to believe something are high, then it will take more epistemic work on the part of the ϕ-er to ϕ responsibly. The two major ways in which one can exercise one’s knowledge that we have looked at thus far are by treating it as a reason for action and by asserting it. A consequence of the view that the demands for responsibility increase when we are presented with an epistemically vigilant audience is that we are liable to retract the content of our assertions when explicitly faced with challenges to provide reasons that indicate that we know the relevant proposition when those reasons don’t readily come to mind. That we might issue a retraction in these cases does not mean, however, that we failed to have knowledge. Again, the guiding notion behind epistemic separability is that judgments of epistemic propriety are not necessarily indicative of one’s fulfilment of the norm governing that act, and thus not necessarily indicative of whether one is, in fact, in a given epistemic relationship. The conditions for epistemic responsibility are dependent on the nature of the expectations that we are expected to fulfil (as long as they are truth-directed); since, as noted above, these expectations might be caused by non-epistemic factors, whether one is epistemically responsible is at least partially a function of the context in which one puts their epistemic relationships to work.

Another consequence of the view I am putting forth here is that since whether we are responsible depends on the expectations of our audience, we will not always be in a position to know when we are employing our epistemic relationships responsibly, nor will we always know what the full conditions for responsibility are in a given situation. I think, however, that these kinds of consequences are par for the course when it comes to theories of epistemic propriety. As
I argued in chapter 1, any epistemically constituted norm is going to be one in which we will not always know when we are adhering to it, nor will we always be able to know how to fulfil the relevant epistemic demands in a given situation. The conditions for being *morally* responsible might similarly not be ones that we are always in a position to know: I might not know when my morally impermissible action is blameless, but that doesn’t mean that I should not be blamed for it.

However, it’s not as though we are completely in the dark when it comes to figuring out whether we are asserting in an epistemically responsible way. We can, after all, reason as to what kinds of expectations our audience might have when we assert information. Lackey’s substitute law professor, for example, could have realized that her isolated second-hand knowledge would not stand up to scrutiny in her law classroom, and Dr. Lazy could have realized that his lack of attention to readily available information would have made his assertion an irresponsible one. Sperber et. al (2010), for example, compares the kind of trust that asserters and audiences have in each other to the kind of trust that we have in each other as both navigators and members of a large crowd: although we can’t entirely predict what everyone will do, we can reason well enough to keep moving (364). That we are largely able to anticipate what the demands of our audience are going to be means that the conditions for responsible assertion are not going to be completely opaque to us.

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48 Amia Srinivasan (ms.) argues that admitting of a notion of the hypological (i.e. a notion of responsibility as distinct from a notion of permissibility) when it comes to epistemic evaluations is inherently worrying, since, inevitably, there will be a kind of “luck” that accompanies our epistemic status as deserving blame, or, in my terms, in being responsible. General existential concerns aside, I don’t find these results worrying. Rather, (or so I will state here without argument) it seems to simply say something about the structure of the hypological in general that we are not always able to know our full normative status. It would certainly be nice if we could have such knowledge, but it’s not obvious that we should expect to be able to have it.
One might have the following question: what, exactly, determines one’s audience? I will not attempt to give necessary and sufficient conditions for being an audience member here; I will say only a few things in general. We should not think that one’s audience is anyone who hears anything that someone has said. If you and I are having a private conversation then I am subject to the epistemic standards that are determined by the communicative act occurring between us, and not to the standards of the eavesdropper standing outside the door. One’s audience, then, must be at least partially a function of those to which I intend to communicate information. However, it is perhaps not enough to say that the audience that determines one’s status as epistemically responsible is just one’s intended audience. I might intend, for instance, that my audience consist solely in the reporter interviewing me, but it would be naïve of me to think that the information I am conveying would not be made available to a much larger group of people. In general, then, what determines one’s audience, then, is a function both of the intentions of the communicator and the circumstances in which the communicative act is performed. Although this is somewhat rough-and-ready, it is sufficient, I think, to illustrate a notion of epistemic responsibility.

There is one more significant thing to say about the responsibility view. So far in this chapter I have been focused on outlining a view of responsible assertion, but what happened to practical reasoning? What are the conditions for responsibly treating something as a reason for acting? One might think that we need to tell a different story here, as the way that I have defined responsibility as applied to assertion has been in terms of its role in communication, and the expectations one has of the information being communicated as being trustworthy, and that practical reasoning is not necessarily about communicating anything. But while the primary function of practical reasoning in general might not be the communication of information, we
still criticize instances of practical reasoning in the same way that we do assertions, and for the same reasons. When performing an action that has consequences for those around us, the truth-directed expectations of those who are affected by our actions affect the conditions for responsible practical reasoning. Remember from back in chapter 1, one of the first cases that was used to motivate a knowledge norm of practical reasoning was one in which Georgie took a wrong turn on the way to the restaurant, garnering Hannah’s ire. Georgie’s reasoning was deemed inappropriate because of her lack of knowledge. But now consider an instance in which, say, Georgie acts on the basis of some isolated second-hand knowledge, when there is a lot at stake for Hannah: Georgie was told via testimony that the dialysis clinic can be reached by taking a left at the fork in the road, a place that Hannah needs to get to. Since there is so much at stake for Hannah it seems that Georgie should really verify her information, something that wouldn’t be required if Georgie were just going on a casual drive. This is because Hannah is being particularly epistemically vigilant: she wants to make sure that Georgie is using only information that she knows in her practical reasoning.

We’ve also seen earlier that Jessica Brown (2008b) poses a similar case as a potential counterexample to the knowledge norm of practical reasoning. The case went roughly as follows: a surgeon is going to remove a patient’s kidney, and knows that the kidney to remove is the left one. An observing intern is surprised when the surgeon double-checks the chart before making her first incision, just to make sure that the left kidney is, in fact, the one that needs to be removed, since the surgeon already knows which one to remove (176). Brown’s interpretation of the case is that just knowing that “the left kidney’s the one that’s got to go” is insufficient for permissible action in the surgery scenario (177). I have interpreted this case as involving not an impermissible action, but as an irresponsible one. However, it’s not as though there are
particularly high epistemic standards being exercised by the surgeon’s audience: the intern would not be perturbed if the surgeon just went ahead with the operation, and the patient is presumably unconscious and thus incapable of exercising any increased epistemic vigilance. So whose epistemic vigilance is driving up the standards for responsible action?

Perhaps it’s the vigilance of the surgeon herself. After all, she is the one who decides to double-check the chart, despite knowing which kidney to remove (and perhaps even knowing that she knows), so she seems to have pretty high epistemic standards, given the situation; and, it seems, rightfully so. Sperber and Wilson (2011) provide evidence in support of this kind of claim, arguing that our reasoning is “proactive”, in which a person “anticipates situations in which they might have to argue to convince others that their claims are true or that their actions are justified” (66). This kind of “proactive reasoning” involves cases in which people will look for more reasons to support beliefs that they have in anticipation of having to defend those beliefs to others, especially when these beliefs are not terribly well supported by one’s evidence (see, for an overview of this kind of research, Molden and Higgins, (2005)). If Sperber and Wilson are right and proactive reasoning is indicative of an anticipation to defend one’s views, then by treating a proposition as a reason for acting we might also do so with the thought in mind that we will have to defend our reasoning to others. Responsibly treating that \( p \) as a reason for acting would then again be cashed out in terms of whether we are well-positioned epistemically enough such that we could defend our reliance on \( p \) in our reasoning.

The other option for locating increased epistemic vigilance is in \( us \) – by which I mean those of us who are interpreting the examples. Since we know that there is a lot at stake given the removal of the correct kidney, were we to read that another surgeon (perhaps Dr. Lazy moonlights as a discount surgeon) did not double-check the chart before operating, we would no
doubt be subjecting such an action to higher epistemic standard than if there was very little or nothing at stake. Because the high stakes of the situation increases our epistemic vigilance as judges of the situation, we are likely to find that the surgeon’s action was irresponsible if he failed to double-check the chart. However we can accept this judgment, along with the knowledge norm of practical reasoning and the fact that the surgeon did know which kidney was the right one to remove, since we can locate the epistemic impropriety of the action as a failure to employ one’s knowledge responsibly in one’s practical reasoning as opposed to a failure of having knowledge\textsuperscript{49}.

That such facts are compatible under the view I have been proposing here is potentially at odds with a number of views in contemporary epistemology, namely contextualism and, especially, interest-relative invariantism. In the next chapter I will consider how accepting a normative structure of epistemic norms that includes a dimension of responsibility challenges these views.

\textsuperscript{49} Again, we can see that Brown is arguing from a stance of epistemic monism, in which the judgment that the surgeon is doing something epistemically inappropriately by failing to double-check the chart must be explained either by denying the surgeon knowledge, or by accepting a norm other than the knowledge norm of practical reasoning.
Chapter 7: Interest-Relative Invariantism and Responsibility

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I consider and respond to an argument that if we accept a knowledge norm of practical reasoning and/or assertion, we should thereby also accept interest-relative invariantism (IRI) as a theory of knowledge. I argue that for a knowledge norm of $\phi$-ing to support IRI one needs to accept a kind of epistemic monism when appealing to intuitive judgments of whether one possesses knowledge in certain situations, e.g. that intuitions that one does not have knowledge in a high-stakes situation must be accommodated solely by a theory of knowledge itself. I argue that by accepting epistemic separability we can better explain these judgments as being indicative of whether one has employed one’s knowledge in action in an epistemically responsible way, instead of whether one has knowledge. I argue furthermore that judgments of cases that have been considered problematic for IRI can be explained by appeal to judgments of epistemic responsibility. Ultimately, I argue that while IRI and a notion of epistemic responsibility are not inconsistent, accepting the latter undermines much of the motivation for accepting the former.

7.1 Introduction

In recent years, proponents of interest-relative invariantism (IRI) have argued that whether one knows a proposition is dependent, at least in part, on the practical consequences surrounding the truth or falsity of that proposition. In support of this view, IRI proponents have
appealed to the knowledge norm of practical reasoning, arguing that if there is a connection between what we know and what we can appropriately treat as a reason for acting, and if our evaluations of the latter are dependent upon practical circumstances like the stakes of being wrong, then whether we have knowledge must also be dependent upon those circumstances. By accepting a knowledge norm of practical reasoning and/or assertion, are we committed to the interest-relativity of knowledge? Furthermore, if knowledge is interest-relative, then perhaps we can explain evaluations of cases that I have been explaining in terms of responsibility in terms of whether one possesses knowledge, instead. Can an interest-relative conception of knowledge allow us to have a plausible epistemically monistic knowledge norm?

The answer to both these questions, I will argue, is “no”. This chapter will proceed as follows: first, I will sketch an overview of IRI. Second, I will show why one might think that a knowledge norm of practical reasoning and/or assertion supports IRI. I will argue, however, that knowledge norms only give us reason to accept IRI if we accept another kind of evaluative monism, one that pertains to judgments about whether one possesses knowledge. Third, I will argue that the intuitions appealed to in support of IRI can be explained in terms of a notion of epistemic responsibility, and that while we can accept IRI as well as a notion of epistemic responsibility, accepting the latter undermines much of the motivation for accepting the former.

7.2 Interest-Relative Invariantism

Interest-relative invariantism\textsuperscript{50} is the view that whether one knows a proposition is at least partially determined by the practical consequences surrounding the truth or falsity of that

\textsuperscript{50}IRI goes by several different names in the literature, most notably “subject-sensitive invariantism.” It is also referred to as a general type of “pragmatic encroachment” view of knowledge.
proposition. According to interest-relative views, these practical consequences affect whether one has knowledge because, it is argued, the concept of knowledge itself is sensitive to practical stakes (see Stanley, 2004; Hawthorne, 2005; Fantl and McGrath, 2009; Weatherson, 2012).

One’s practical interests can affect whether one has knowledge in a number of different ways. Weatherson (2012), for example, distinguishes two kinds of IRI, what he calls “Doxastic IRI” and “Non-Doxastic IRI.” According to the former, “knowledge-ascriptions are interest-relative, but their interest-relativity traces solely to the interest-relativity of the corresponding belief ascriptions”; according to the latter, “knowledge ascriptions are interest-relative, and their interest-relativity goes beyond the interest-relativity of the corresponding belief ascriptions” (76). Proponents of non-doxastic IRI are those listed above; proponents of doxastic IRI include Weatherson (2005), Ganson (2008) and Ross and Schroeder (2014). For my purposes, when I discuss IRI, I will have non-doxastic IRI in mind.

IRI has been proposed as an explanation for why our judgments concerning one’s possession of knowledge seems to be affected by practical factors like stakes and interests. Consider, for example, the following pair of “bank cases”:

**Low Stakes:** Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. It is not important that they do so, as they have no impending bills. But as they drive past the bank, they notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Realizing that is isn’t very important that their paychecks are deposited right away, Hannah says, ‘I know the bank will be open tomorrow, since I was there just two weeks ago on Saturday morning. So we can deposit our paychecks tomorrow morning.’
*High Stakes*: Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. Since they have an impending bill coming due, and very little in their account, it is very important that they deposit their paychecks by Saturday. Hannah notes that she was at the bank two weeks before on a Saturday morning, and it was open. But, as Sarah points out, banks do change their hours. Hannah says, ‘I guess you’re right. I don’t know that the bank will be open tomorrow.’ (Stanley, 2005: 3-4).

Intuitively, Hannah’s assertions that she does know in *Low Stakes* and does not know in *High Stakes* that “the bank will be open tomorrow” are both true. In both cases, however, Hannah has the same amount of evidence in support of her belief about whether the bank is open. The traditional invariantist – i.e. one who thinks that whether one has knowledge is not directly a function of the practical consequences of being wrong – is, at first glance, seemingly unable to accommodate both of these intuitions. The interest-relative invariantist explains our judgments in the bank cases in the following way: the practical consequences surrounding the truth of the relevant proposition makes it such that one can know it in *Low Stakes*, but not in *High Stakes*.

For another example, consider the following classic case that has also been presented as a problem for the traditional invariantist, one that the interest-relative invariantist is able to accommodate:

*The Airport Case*: Mary and John are at the L.A. airport contemplating taking a certain flight to New York. They want to know whether the flight has a layover in Chicago. They

\[51\] We will see below a few ways in which the traditional invariantist might try to account for these judgments without having to appeal to IRI.
overheard someone ask a passenger Smith if he knows whether the flight stops in Chicago. Smith looks at the flight itinerary he got from the travel agent and responds, ‘Yes I know – it does stop in Chicago.’ It turns out that Mary and John have a very important business contact they have to make at the Chicago airport. Mary says, ‘How reliable is that itinerary? It could contain a misprint. They could have changed the schedule at the last minute.’ Mary and John agree that Smith doesn’t really know that the plane will stop in Chicago. They decide to heck with the airline agent. (Cohen 1999: 58).

Again, the traditional invariantist seems forced to say that since the non-practical factors are the same for both Mary and John and Smith, then they should all be equally well-positioned epistemically towards the relevant proposition. Intuitively, however, we more easily judge that Smith knows this proposition, but that Mary and John do not. The proponent of IRI can explain why: since the stakes for Mary and John are different than those for Smith, there is a corresponding difference in their respective epistemic positions. In other words, Smith does, in fact, know that “the plane stops in Chicago,” whereas Mary and John do not.

The ability to explain these kinds of judgments has been a mainstay in arguments for IRI. While much has been said on behalf of the traditional invariantist in response to these cases, I am not concerned with adjudicating between the interest-relative invariantist and the traditional invariantist; as I will note later, my primary concern in this project – namely, the establishment of a notion of epistemic responsibility – is compatible with either view of knowledge. I do, however, want to address what has been taken to be a connection between the knowledge norms and IRI, namely that by accepting the knowledge norms we should thereby accept IRI, and that

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52 This is what we should expect, given that epistemic responsibility is a theory about the ways we employ knowledge in action, and not a theory of knowledge itself.
by accepting IRI we would potentially be able to accept an epistemically monistic knowledge norm of practical reasoning. It is to these arguments I turn next.

7.3 IRI and the Knowledge Norms

Interest-relative invariantists often appeal to the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning to support their view. The argument goes as follows: if we accept the view that one appropriately asserts or treats that \( p \) as a reason for acting only if one knows that \( p \), and since some propriety judgments of assertions and actions are seemingly stakes-sensitive (i.e. the higher the stakes the more likely we are to judge that one is acting/asserting inappropriately), then whether one has knowledge is also stakes-sensitive (since, by modus tollens, an action being epistemically inappropriate entails that one does not know the relevant proposition). For example, Hawthorne (2004) considers an instance of practical reasoning in which one relies on the proposition “I will lose the lottery” in coming to reason that one ought to sell ones lottery ticket for any price. The most natural place to locate the impropriety of this kind of reasoning is in denying that one knows that one will lose the lottery, but this strategy risks skepticism (175). Hawthorne argues:

How can we respect this intuition without embracing skepticism? Only by allowing what we might call ‘practical environment’ to make a different to what one knows…The basic idea is clear enough. Insofar as it is unacceptable – and not merely because the content of the belief is irrelevant to the issues at hand – to use a belief that \( p \) as a premise in practical reasoning on a certain occasion, the belief is not a piece of knowledge at that time. (176)

According to Hawthorne, the fact that our evaluations of the propriety of relying on “I will lose the lottery” is subject to the practical environment in which we make those evaluations, then, is
best explained by knowledge itself being sensitive to those practical factors. Stanley (2004) argues in a similar way:

A standard use of knowledge is to justify action. When I am asked why I went to the store on the left, rather than the store on the right, I will respond by saying that I knew that the store on the left had the newspaper I wanted, but I did not know whether the store on the right did…The intuitions that we have in the [bank] cases are best explained by appeal to our commitment to the principle that one should act only upon what one knows…The intuitions therefore provide powerful intuitive evidence for an antecedently plausible principle concerning the relation between knowledge and action. (10-11)

If we accept, then, that knowledge warrants action, and our intuition in a given case is that some action is unwarranted, we then have reason to think that the agent does not have knowledge in that case. However, as the bank cases seem to show, our intuition that an action is unwarranted is affected by practical factors. So, then, we should think of knowledge as being affected by the same kinds of factors.

In general, proponents of IRI appeal to the following kind of argument:

*The Knowledge-Norm/IRI Argument*

1) An act of φ-ing $p$ is epistemically appropriate only if one knows that $p$.

2) Judgements of the epistemic propriety of φ-ing $p$ are affected by the practical stakes surrounding the truth of $p$.

3) Judgements in (2) are, in fact, indicative of one’s epistemic relationship with $p$.

C) Therefore, whether one has knowledge that $p$ in the relevant circumstances is affected by the practical stakes surrounding the truth of $p$. 
The premise that I take issue with here is (3). (3), I argue, does not adequately support the argument’s conclusion because judgments of propriety might not actually be indicative of an insufficient strength of epistemic relationship towards a proposition. Rather, they might be indicative of the irresponsible employment of that epistemic relationship in one’s actions\textsuperscript{53}. In order for the knowledge norms to support IRI, the interest-relative invariantist has to assume (like those who denied the existence of a notion of secondary epistemic propriety in the debate surrounding the correct conditions for the norms of assertion and action) that there is only one factor that our judgments of epistemic propriety pertain to, which is being in a certain epistemic relationship with a proposition. But if these epistemic relationships themselves are ones that can be employed either responsibly or irresponsibly in action, then our judgments do not need to be taken to be indicative of one’s epistemic relationship; rather, they can be indicative of how one is employing those relationships in one’s actions.

So why think that a difference in our judgments concerning knowledge ascriptions in cases like the bank and airport cases should be taken to be indicative of whether one has responsibly employed one’s knowledge in one’s action, instead of whether one actually knows? First, I argue that we can accommodate and predict both those judgments that the IRI proponent appeals to, as well as judgments of cases that have been proposed to be problematic for IRI, in terms of evaluations of epistemic responsibility. Second, I argue that there are cases such that we judge that one is not able to act on a proposition in an epistemically appropriate way because of

\textsuperscript{53} We could also run this argument with an epistemic relationship other than knowledge, thereby reaching the conclusion that this other epistemic relationship is sensitive to practical factors. This is, I think, what’s going on in Fantl and McGrath’s (2009) “subtraction argument.” According to this argument, if we conceive of knowledge as having a JTB+ structure (where the “+” is some suitable de-Gettierizing condition), and then we “subtract” the +, T(ruth), and B(elief) conditions, it seems that justification can warrant action just as well as knowledge can (assuming that the justification is “knowledge level”, that is, that the only thing preventing it from being knowledge are at least one of the T, + or B conditions being met). Fantl and McGrath conclude that justified belief is likely interest-relative, too, on the basis of an analogous argument to the \textit{Knowledge-Norm/IRI Argument} (2009: 96-100).
the practical consequences, but we nevertheless still judge that one knows that proposition. These cases, I argue, provide reason to think that our judgments might not just be tracking one’s possession of an epistemic relationship, but are also tracking one’s employment of one’s epistemic relationship in action. Once we have accepted a notion of epistemic responsibility, our judgments in cases with significant practical consequences given the truth or falsity of a proposition are, I think, much less clearly about knowledge than the interest-relative invariantist makes them out to be.

7.4 How Epistemic Responsibility Accommodates and Predicts IRI Judgments

By appealing to an evaluation of epistemic responsibility we can explain many of the cases that the interest-relative invariantist takes herself to be in the best position to accommodate. Here I will consider a number of cases that have been taken to support IRI, as well as cases that have been presented as potential counterexamples to it. I will consider the following here: (1) bank and airport cases, (2) arguments from personal concern for stakes, (3) “State and Main” cases, (4) extreme bets, and (5) knowledge laundering. While those cases in (1) have been appealed to in support of IRI, (2)-(5) are cases that have been proposed by various authors in objection to it. I argue that in all of these cases we can explain the relevant judgments by appealing to a notion of epistemic responsibility.

7.4.1 Bank and Airport Cases

Above I presented two of Stanley’s (2004) bank cases – *Low Stakes* and *High Stakes*. However, it is a recognized shortcoming of IRI that it cannot accommodate the intuition in what Stanley calls a *High Attributor-Low Subject Stakes* case. In such a case, a person for whom there is a lot at stake given the truth or falsity of \( p \) asserts that someone in a low-stakes situation with
regards to \( p \) does not know that \( p \). In such cases, Stanley claims, our intuition is that the attributor’s assertion is true, despite the fact that the low stakes of the subject should not prevent the subject from having knowledge\(^{54}\).

We can, I think, accommodate all of Stanley’s bank cases by appealing to facts about epistemic responsibility, without ascribing interest-relativity to a concept of knowledge. Let us assume for the time being that knowledge is traditionally invariant. Let us also assume that the subjects in Stanley’s cases are equally well-positioned epistemically, such that if we think that the low-stakes subject has knowledge then we should also think that the high-stakes subject has knowledge. We can then explain the difference in judgments between the two cases by appealing to a difference in how the respective subjects are able to employ their knowledge in a responsible way. On this interpretation, the low-stakes subject is able to employ his knowledge responsibly, while the high-stakes subject is not. This is because when the stakes are low one is not subject to any particularly demanding expectations for the provision of reasons to believe that one is acting in an epistemically permissible way. When the stakes are high, however, the situation is different: as we saw in the previous chapter, when the truth of a proposition is important, one will exercise one’s epistemic vigilance in regards to that proposition, and thus require more reasons to believe that one’s action or assertion is epistemically permissible. Thus in a high-stakes situation, it will be more difficult to employ one’s knowledge responsibly. That it is more difficult to \( \phi \) responsibly when the stakes are high is a consequence that is both predicted and explained by the view of epistemic responsibility that I have been defending here.

\(^{54}\) Stanley fully recognizes that IRI cannot accommodate this intuition. He thinks, however, that this intuition is not as robust as the others he relies on and that, regardless, no theory of knowledge can be expected to accommodate every single intuition all at once.
What about the *High Attributor-Low Subject* case? In this case we are supposed to have the intuition that the high-stakes attributor is asserting something true by saying that the low-stakes subject does not know the relevant proposition. The interest-relative invariantist needs to provide an error theory to explain why it is that our judgment is mistaken in this case. Can we account for this judgment by an appeal to a notion of epistemic responsibility? I think so. Since the low-stakes subject is treating a proposition as a reason for acting in a situation in which there is nothing at stake, we would expect that she would be able to act on that proposition in an epistemically responsible way. However, when evaluated from the perspective of the high-stakes attributor, the low-stakes subject is unable to provide sufficient reason to believe that she knows the proposition she is treating as a reason for acting. Again, we can appeal to the fact that if \( p \) is of significant importance to the attributor, then she is likely to be epistemically vigilant when it comes to accepting information concerning \( p \), and would thus expect the additional provision of reasons to believe that one knows that \( p \) when treating \( p \) as a reason for acting. Since we are considering whether the low-stakes subject has knowledge from the standpoint of the high-stakes attributor, we are, I think, more likely to judge that the low-stakes subject is not acting in an epistemically responsible way.

There are a couple of additional concerns to address here: first, am I not just proposing an error theory of my own? Second, *is* the high-attributor’s assessment of the low-subject accurate (in other words, should we think that the low-stakes subject *is*, in fact, acting in an epistemically responsible way)? In response to the first question, one might think that, since I am explaining a judgment that appears to be about knowledge as one that is motivated by an evaluation of responsibility, that I am committed to providing an error theory of sorts, namely one that explains why it seems that we make judgments about knowledge in situations in which we
should be making judgments about responsibility. However, I think that it is just as natural to explain our judgments in the bank cases as ones in which one is not employing one’s knowledge in the right way, as opposed to ones in which one actually does or does not have knowledge. The fact that the original examples are presented in such a way that they appeal to knowledge attributions is, I think, a feature of a view of epistemic evaluations as only being properly made in terms of one’s epistemic relationships.

We are, I think, generally inclined to attribute epistemic mistakes to failures of knowledge. That we are naturally inclined to make our evaluations in this way is a significant point of contention amongst those who argue against the knowledge norms of assertion and action. For example, we have seen that proponents of the knowledge norms appeal to judgments that one should not have acted on a proposition if one did not know it, or that one should not have asserted a proposition if one did not know it, to support the view that our actions and assertions are warranted by knowledge. However, others argue that in such cases we can accommodate the relevant data by appealing to different kinds of failures, viz. failures of belief, or of justification, or of truth, etc. Neta (2009), for instance, considers a number of cases in which a parent chastises their son, David, for what they think is his having spilled milk on the floor, but where intuitively the parent does not have significant enough of an epistemic relationship with the proposition “David spilled milk on the floor” to appropriately chastise him. A natural way to chastise David’s parent is to challenge their knowledge, perhaps by saying “How can you chastise David if you didn’t know he was the one who spilled the milk?” While this is a natural way of making a criticism of one’s epistemic position in general, it might not accurately reflect what we actually find wrong with David’s parent’s epistemic position. Neta argues, for instance, that we might not chastise the parent in a way that seems to indicated their
possession of the relevant knowledge, but perhaps in a manner such as “what makes you think David spilled his milk on the floor?!” or “what right do you have to accuse David of spilling milk on the floor?!" (695) These kinds of evaluations, Neta argues, are perhaps better reflective not of a challenge towards whether one has knowledge, but towards whether one has a justified belief. Although it might perhaps be more natural to present out criticisms as ones concerning one’s knowledge, Neta notes that other kinds of criticisms might be just as appropriate, and thus indicative of some other epistemic failing (and, in turn, evidence that a different epistemic condition warrants assertion and/or practical reasoning).

The question is, then, whether evaluations that we are likely to make in cases that differ with regards to the stakes involved are ones that can be naturally explained by evaluations other than knowledge. I think they can. Consider again Lackey’s law professor, who has isolated second-hand knowledge. The interest-relative invariantist might say that in a situation in which she is making an assertion to a class who have vested interest in what she has to say, the stakes are high enough such that she no longer qualifies as knowing. If there seems something epistemically wrong with her asserting the relevant proposition in her classroom, then we might evaluate her as failing to have knowledge. We might instead, though, make the more general evaluation that “she shouldn’t have said that.” Now, according to the Knowledge-Norm/IRI Argument, this kind of evaluation should be reflective of the law professor lacking knowledge (since knowledge is the norm of assertion, then the fact that the law professor shouldn’t have made her assertion is explained by her lack of knowledge). But this does not seem to be the case: it does not seem that we are inclined to deny the law professor knowledge, just that she should not have employed her knowledge in that setting in that way (below I will consider another instance of this kind of evaluation, namely when we are presented with “extreme bets”). It
seems, then, that we can separate evaluations of one’s epistemic position from one’s status as epistemically responsible.

The point is, then, that the fact that I have to explain why our intuitive knowledge attributions in certain variants of the bank cases are sometimes mistaken (since what is lacking is not knowledge on my account, but the responsible employment of that knowledge) is not a significant burden, since judgments concerning knowledge are perhaps not a completely accurate indication of whether one actually does think that someone has knowledge. Consider, for instance, one who does act on the proposition “the bank will be open on Saturday” in a high stakes situation, namely by avoiding the long lines on Friday night. After a successful return from the bank on Saturday afternoon, we might chastise our high-stakes subject after we learn about what could have been lost had he been wrong. He might then reply “I knew the bank was open today, because I was there two weeks ago on a Saturday.” We might still protest: “You still shouldn’t have taken that chance!” These kinds of exchanges are, I think, perfectly natural, but do not involve denying knowledge: we might not think that the person in the high stakes subject did not have knowledge, but rather that they should have acted differently. Furthermore, as I have been arguing, we can hold both of these judgments without denying the knowledge norm of practical reasoning.

There is, perhaps, empirical work to be done concerning whether, given the opportunity, people are more likely to make responsibility judgments rather than knowledge judgments in cases like those above. That one can confuse different types of normative judgments is not, I think, controversial. Consider for example another set of normative judgments that can get confused for one another, namely judgments of moral permissibility and blameworthiness. Eugene Bales (1971) argues that while we might judge as impermissible an action that a
utilitarian theory would dictate was permissible, such evaluations often conflate the roles of a utilitarian theory as both something that determines right action and something that can be used as a decision-making procedure. The impetus for our judgments that such-and-such an act is morally impermissible, then, might actually be indicative of our judgment that such-and-such an action would not be the best decision, given the circumstances. It is perhaps most natural to ascribe wrongness to an act that we find suspect, but this does not mean that we should take all such ascriptions to be best interpreted as judgments that an act is, actually, morally wrong.

To address the second concern mentioned above, I think that in the high-attributor/low-subject variant of the bank case the high-stakes attributor is, in fact, most likely mistaken about whether the low-stakes subject is acting in an epistemically responsible way; however, the view of epistemic responsibility I am defending here has a straightforward explanation of why the high-stakes attributor might make this mistake. This is because when the high-stakes attributor evaluates the epistemic propriety of the low-stakes subject’s action, the former naturally conceives of herself as a member of the audience of the latter, and thus expects that the low-stakes subject be able to provide reasons to believe that he knows the relevant proposition to satiate the high-stakes attributor’s increased epistemic vigilance. However, if the high-stakes attributor is not, in fact, a member of the low-stakes subject’s audience, then this evaluation is mistaken.

If there is something that seems correct about the high-stakes attributor’s assertion that the low-stakes subject does not have knowledge, then we do not have to explain this judgment in terms of the subject’s epistemic relationship towards \( p \). However, I think that Stanley is correct that instances of high-attributor/low-subject epistemic evaluations do not elicit very robust judgments. For instance, consider another case in which it might seem that a high-stakes
attributor would deny knowledge to a low-stakes subject, but in which it does not seem that we would necessarily think that this kind of judgment is indicative of the low-stakes subject’s epistemic status:

*Hi:* I’m really worried about the prospects of my application. I’m not sure I’m going to get the job, and I really need it.

*Lo:* Don’t worry, you’ll get the job. You’re clearly the most qualified, and you did exceptionally well at the interview.

*Hi:* Well, that’s nice of you to say, but you don’t really understand. I mean, this is the opportunity of a lifetime!

*Lo:* Look, you’ll get it. I know you will.

I have attempted to make the above scenario as natural as possible, but I should specify a couple of additional features: let’s assume that Lo is not simply trying to satiate the worries of Hi, but that Lo does, in fact, have good evidence that Hi will get the job. Also, let us assume that Hi is not being overly neurotic in her concerns about her job prospects. In the above situation, there is a lot at stake surrounding the truth of “my application will be successful” for Hi, and, let’s say, nothing in particular for Lo. Now, Lo may very well be correct that Hi’s application will be successful: perhaps she has very good reason to believe that her application is head-and-shoulders above her competition. It might still seem, however, that from the perspective of Hi that Lo does not have the relevant knowledge. We can explain why we might find Hi’s judgment that there is something epistemically inappropriate about Lo’s assertion, despite Lo’s having the relevant knowledge, in terms of a judgment of responsibility: since Lo is not able to fulfil the truth-directed expectations for the provision of reasons to believe that she does, in fact, know the
proposition she asserts according to Hi’s standards, Lo is unable to assert responsibly in this situation. But, given the extra specifications of the example, this is not a situation, I think, in which one is tempted to deny knowledge to Lo. Again, here is a case in which one might be tempted to say that a denial of knowledge by Hi towards Lo is true, but where this evaluation is not best interpreted as one that is reflective of Lo’s actually failing to have knowledge.

7.4.2 “The less you care, the more you know”

The second problem case I will look at is the following: the interest-relative invariantist apparently faces the problem that since what one knows is dependent on the relevant stakes, then the less one is interested in the practical outcomes, the lower the stakes will be, and the more one will be able to know. Russell and Doris (2008), for example, present the following case:

*Deadbeat*: Ded, a notorious slacker, is wondering whether to brave the Friday afternoon lines, or return to the bank (late) Saturday morning, and deposit a cheque he has just received from selling his (broken) Harley. His roommate Alfie, lounging in the passenger seat of Ded’s pickup, points out that banks sometimes do change their hours, and given that their rent is due, failure to make a deposit will likely result in yet another bounced cheque to their landlord, whose patience has already been strained to breaking point. Ded responds, ‘Chill, dude, I know the bank will be open tomorrow, I was there on Saturday two weeks ago, and even if I bounce another cheque to the landlord, we can just skip town—I’m sick of this Podunk anyway’. Inhaling deeply, Alfie nods his agreement. (431)

It seems that because Ded does not care about the consequences of his (in)action, he is able to put himself in a low-stakes situation (and thus is not prevented from knowing that the bank is open on Saturday) simply by having misplaced priorities. This seems like a bad consequence for
IRI, namely that one can remove the barriers between oneself and one’s knowledge simply by not caring about the consequences surrounding the truth of the relevant proposition.

Would it not, however, also be the case that the less one cares, or the less people care in general, the easier it would be to employ one’s knowledge responsibly in a situation? It is true that while a consequence of the notion of epistemic responsibility that I have been defending is that, typically, the less there is at stake the more epistemically responsible one is able to be, this is not, I think, a surprising result. Indeed, this just seems to really be how responsibility works: it is a burden of someone who faces significant consequences if they turn out to be wrong that they face more stringent requirements for responsible action than if their actions did not have significant consequences. This does not, however, seem to be how knowledge works: it does not seem, for example, that the overall amount of knowledge in the world would increase if everyone were just more laidback.

How, then, should we interpret Deadbeat? It seems that we are liable to judge that there is something epistemically inappropriate about Ded’s assertion that he knows that the bank will be open on Sunday, but it doesn’t seem that IRI has the resources to accommodate this judgment. What is tricky about Ded’s case is that although neither him nor his friend Alfie care about whether the bank is open on Saturday, it seems that they really should care, seeing as there are, in fact, significant practical consequences for Ded should he turn out to be wrong. But notice that the dialogue between Ded and Alfie progresses in a way that we would expect, given what I have

55 One might think that, in fact, the amount of knowledge would increase if everyone were just more laidback, because factors that might stand in the way of knowledge – say, our inhibitions, trepidations, or general lack of confidence – might themselves be reduced. If this is the case, then it at best supports the view that caring about consequences can affect the possession of knowledge in an indirect way, namely by preventing one from forming a belief in the first place. But if there is such an influence on knowledge, it is not because of the nature of knowledge itself.
said about the conditions that determine epistemic responsibility: after Ded’s initial wondering whether the bank is open on Saturday, Alfie challenges Ded’s decision to wait until Saturday by providing reason to think that Ded might not be reasoning on the basis of good information. Ded then attempts to satiate Alfie’s concerns by both providing reason to believe that Ded does, in fact, know that the bank is open on Saturday (i.e. he was there last week) and to make the truth of the relevant proposition less relevant to Alfie (i.e. by pointing out how, even if he’s wrong, nothing bad is going to happen to Alfie). We might find Ded’s assertion to be epistemically irresponsible, then, because he has not sufficiently addressed Alfie’s epistemic concerns: Ded has, instead, coerced Alfie into believing that he knows what he is saying by inviting him to “chill”, and by disparaging Alfie’s concerns that they might have to leave town by referring to it as a “Podunk.” As we saw in the previous chapter, these kinds of strategies can make us less epistemically vigilant, and thereby less requiring of reasons to believe that the provider of the relevant information knows what he is talking about. But although Ded has convinced Alfie, he has not fulfilled the truth-directed expectations of his friend. Thus Russell and Doris’ case is one in which either, in fact, no one actually does care about the truth or falsity of the proposition that Ded asserts – in which case I see nothing wrong with saying that Ded is able to assert responsibly – or in which Ded’s assertion actually is epistemically irresponsible, since he is not addressing the right kinds of epistemic concerns in the right way. Either way, I think, the responsibility account does a better job of giving an intuitive answer in *Deadbeat* than does IRI.

7.4.3 State and Main

Another kind of case that IRI has troubling handing comes from Ram Neta (2007), what has been called the “State and Main” problem. The problem is as follows: our subject is standing at the corner of State Street and Main Street, and while there is a tremendous amount at stake
depending on whether she is standing on Main Street, there is nothing at stake for whether she is standing on State Street. Our subject then looks up at a street sign that indicates the intersection of State and Main streets. The interest-relative invariantist seems forced to say that, given significant enough stakes, the subject can know that she is on State Street (since there are no practical factors standing in the way of her coming to know this on the basis of looking at the street sign), but not that she is on Main Street (since the practical consequences of the street sign being mislabeled, say, are significant enough to prevent her from knowing), even though the evidence that she has for both of these propositions seem as strong and of the same general “type” (evidence for “I am on State Street” and “I am on Main Street” are both visual data of the same quality, the individual exercises the same capacities in coming to acquire this evidence, etc.). This result, claims Neta, is counterintuitive: it seems that by looking at the street sign knowledge of being on State and Main either stands or falls together (182).

What seems most troubling about the State and Main case is that the interest-relative invariantist seems committed to saying that one can have knowledge of one of these propositions, but not the other. However, the traditional invariantist who might claim that knowledge of being on State Street and Main Street comes as a package is unable to explain why we might be more inclined to say that a subject is epistemically well-positioned enough to act on the proposition that they are on State Street (the low-stakes proposition) than on the proposition that they are on Main Street. We might be able to explain this judgment without an appeal to one’s possession of knowledge by appealing to responsibility conditions, namely that while Neta’s subject may know both that she is on State Street and Main Street, she can only responsibly employ her knowledge that she is on State Street in her reasoning. This is because the subject would be exercising her epistemic vigilance when it came to the proposition that she is on Main Street, and thus would
not be able to provide sufficient reason to believe that she would be able to act on that proposition in a permissible way. She does not exercise her epistemic vigilance when it comes to accepting the proposition that she is on State Street, and thus is able to act on it in an epistemically responsible way.

We could, then, accept that the high-stakes subject in Neta’s case does, in fact, know that she is on Main Street, and that what’s epistemically suspect about her relationship with this proposition is not that she fails to know it, but that she cannot exercise this knowledge responsibly in her reasoning given her circumstances. That there is potentially a difference in the way that Neta’s subject can responsibly employ the proposition that she is on State Street as opposed to Main Street is not, I think, surprising: our epistemic vigilance will be increased when a matter is of importance to us, and might not be increased when it comes to a different proposition even though it might be equally well-supported epistemically as the important proposition.

The interest-relative invariantist is not without recourse when it comes to the State and Main case; however, the available responses seem equally problematic. For instance, Fantl and McGrath (2009) consider drawing a distinction between the kind of evidence that supports one being on State Street from that which supports one being on Main Street, but it is not clear how we could draw such a distinction in a principled way (202). The other possible way an interest-relative invariantist could respond is to bite the bullet and accept that since Neta’s subject does not know that “I am on Main Street” that she similarly does not know that “I am on State Street,”
because the stakes surrounding one of the propositions somehow “infect” the other. But this kind of response has implausible consequences: after all, in such a situation one might form any number of different kinds of beliefs in similar kinds of ways – perhaps one believes that the street signs are mounted on a signpost, that there is a mailbox next to it, that there is a pigeon perched on the Main Street sign but not the State Street sign, etc. If we are going to deny Neta’s subject knowledge of the low-stakes proposition because it is being formed in the same way as the high-stakes proposition, then it seems that we should also deny her knowledge of all of these other propositions, as well. But that is a lot of knowledge to deny.

Similarly, Weatherson (2011) argues that the subject in Neta’s case cannot know that she is on State Street because in her situation the stakes prevent her from trusting the information provided to her by street signs. Street signs thus get eliminated as a possible source of knowledge. However, I do not see why it is relevant that the information that one is on State Street is conveyed by street sign. We might think of a case instead in which there is a street sign that indicates that one is on Main Street, and that the address listed on the side of a house indicates that one is on State Street. Should one then distrust not only street signs, but also addresses on houses? The fundamental issue raised by the State and Main case was that when ones stakes are so high, it’s hard to see a way of preventing those stakes from affecting ones knowledge of many different things, if one forms one’s other beliefs in a similar way or on a similar subject matter. By appealing to considerations of epistemic responsibility, then, we can

56 Fantl and McGrath consider the following principle in support of this kind of explanation: “(The Global Warrant Principle) If you epistemic position with respect to \( p \) is not stronger than your epistemic position with respect to \( q \), then, for all \( \phi \), if \( q \) isn’t warranted enough to justify you in \( \phi \)-ing, \( p \) isn’t warranted enough to justify you in \( \phi \)-ing” (203).
provide better explanations for our judgments of the epistemic propriety of the actions in the State and Main case that the IRI theorist.

7.4.4 Extreme Bets

Next, consider the following problem case for IRI, one of “extreme bets”: take a proposition that it seems that I am able to know with near certainty – my place of birth, say, or my last name. Now, let’s say that someone comes along and presents me with the opportunity to take a bet on the truth of this proposition, with the following payoffs: if the proposition is true, then I win a dollar; if the proposition is false, I lose ten thousand dollars (we can make the bet as extreme as we like: Weatherson (2012) considers an extreme bet where the payoffs are a penny if I win versus a thousand years of torture if I lose; you get the idea). I am not being coerced into taking the bet, and there is no penalty if I refuse. It seems that I should walk away from such an “opportunity” and refuse to take such a bet: intuitively, it would not be appropriate for me to bet on anything I think I know when the odds are so extreme. But this intuition is in conflict with the knowledge norm of action: if I cannot act in an epistemically appropriate way on the basis of my knowledge in this situation, then either knowledge fails to be the norm of action, or I fail to have knowledge.

The interest-relative invariantist will most likely claim that the practical consequences of being wrong about the proposition being bet upon prevents one from having knowledge. It might seem odd, however, that one can lose one’s knowledge so easily, simply by being offered a bet with outrageous payoffs (especially given that the proposition that is being bet upon could be any proposition whatsoever). As we saw above in Deadbeat, failing to care about the

57 This is, in fact, the interpretation favored by Hawthorne (2004) and Weatherson (2012), amongst others.
consequences of an action seems like it will remove any practical obstacles in the way of one having knowledge according to IRI, but in a way that does not seem like it should affect our knowledge. Similarly, in an extreme bet case, we can “artificially inflate” the practical circumstances to prevent one from having knowledge according to IRI; but again, this kind of inflation of stakes does not seem that it should affect our knowledge, either.

We can, I think, better explain the relevant intuitions in the extreme bet case by appealing to judgments about whether we can employ our knowledge in action in an epistemically responsible way. Again, we can interpret the judgment that it would not be appropriate to accept an extreme bet as being indicative not that one lacks the relevant knowledge, but that one would not be able to employ that knowledge responsibly in one’s practical reasoning (since the high stakes of the situation make it such that one would not be able to provide adequate reasons to believe that one knows the relevant proposition). On this view, one can retain knowledge of the relevant proposition being bet upon, since we do not need to accept that the high stakes prevent one from having knowledge.

However, if one does not lose one’s knowledge in an extreme bet case, then it seems that it can still be epistemically permissible for one to accept an extreme bet. Is this not itself an odd consequence? I don’t think it’s so bad: we can still accept that an act would be epistemically permissible without thinking that one should necessarily perform such an act. Consider, for example, an analogous case that pertains to morally permissible actions: one might perform an act that is morally permissible, but that is not praiseworthy, perhaps because one had no idea that such an act was morally permissible. Acting in this way is not necessarily something that we would encourage others to emulate, but that does not mean that the act is not still a morally
permissible one. Similarly, we might think that there are better things one could do than accept an extreme bet, but that is not to say that it is not an epistemically permissible action.

### 7.4.5 Knowledge Laundering

MacFarlane (2005b) raises the following problem for interest-relative invariantism, what he calls the problem of “knowledge laundering”: one who is in a high-stakes situation can “cycle” one’s evidence via a chain of testimony so that one can come to have knowledge, despite the lack of any change in the stakes or in the quality of one’s evidence. MacFarlane’s example goes as follows: Beth is in a high-stakes situation regarding the truth of the proposition “the car is in the driveway”. She seems to remember parking it in the driveway earlier that morning, but since she is away from home she cannot confirm that it is still there. Furthermore, it is very important for Beth that the car actually is in her driveway. Due to the high stakes surrounding this proposition, according to IRI, Beth is unable to know it on the basis of her evidence. When her husband Arnold calls and asks if the car is in the driveway, Beth asserts that she seems to remember having parked it there in the morning, and on the basis of this evidence, Arnold comes to believe that the car is in the driveway. Since there is nothing at stake for Arnold, Beth’s testimony is sufficient to allow him to know that the car is in the driveway. Later, Beth (assuming that Arnold would be home) calls and asks Arnold if the car is in the driveway. However, while Arnold has not yet been home to confirm the presence of the car himself, he nevertheless asserts that it is, since this is something that he knows, and thus should be able to convey via testimony. On the basis of Arnold’s testimony, Beth is able to come to know that “the car is in the driveway.” That Beth has been able to gain knowledge by passing her evidence, which is initially insufficient for knowledge according to the interest-relative invariantist, through a low-stakes partner in order to acquire knowledge, is clearly a strange result. It would
furthermore give us an easy way to come to know many things in high-stakes situations: we simply give the evidence that we have to a person in a low-stakes situation, and they can then come to know that information, and convey their knowledge back to us, which might be enough to allow us to come to know the same proposition (134-5).

The problem of knowledge laundering requires accepting what MacFarlane takes to be a plausible principle concerning testimony:

Transmission Principle: If B knows that \( p \), then if B asserts that \( p \) and A accepts B’s testimony without doxastic irresponsibility, A also comes to know that \( p \). (133)

Since Arnold knows that “the car is in the driveway” on the basis of Beth’s testimony, and since Beth accepts Arnold’s testimony without “doxastic irresponsibility,” she too can come to know the relevant proposition. By “doxastic responsibility” MacFarlane means “to exclude cases in which A disregards evidence for the falsity of the speaker’s claim or the untrustworthiness of the speaker” (133). This account of responsibility is different from my own, as MacFarlane is concerned with responsibility on the side of the addressee - one that is required of her to come to know information that she has received through testimony - whereas my concern is with the responsibilities that we have as providers of information, the kinds of factors that we need to take into account to be responsible asserters.

How, then, should we interpret this case? Intuitively, we probably want to say that Beth is unable to come to know that the car is in the driveway just by laundering her knowledge through Arnold. The most natural place to break the cycle is between Arnold’s assertion that the car is in the driveway and Beth’s acceptance of it: it seems that we should want to say that Beth is unable to come to have knowledge on the basis of Arnold’s assertion. What has perhaps gone wrong,
then, is that Arnold is unable to assert responsibly to his audience – namely, Beth – since the reasons he has to believe the relevant proposition are just those reasons that Beth herself found insufficient to think that she knows the proposition in the first place. Does that mean that Beth is unable to come to have knowledge on the basis of Arnold’s epistemically irresponsible assertion? In order to establish this, we would have to adhere to something like the following variant of the transmission principle:

*Reception Principle*: If B knows that \( p \), then in order for A to be able to come to know that \( p \) on the basis of B’s assertion that \( p \), then B must assert that \( p \) in an epistemically responsible way.

The *Reception Principle* strikes me as plausible, but I will not here consider in detail arguments for it. However, as the *Transmission Principle* shows, it seems that there is reason to think that what’s doing the work in our judgments of Arnold and Beth in McFarlane’s example is not the practical circumstances surrounding the truth or falsity of \( p \), but the way in which the information that \( p \) is being conveyed.

7.4.6 “You’re ruining it for everyone, Timmy”

The final objection to IRI I will consider comes from MacFarlane (2005b). MacFarlane’s example involves a schoolteacher who asserts to her class the time when their bus will arrive: for the vast majority of students, this information is relatively insignificant, but it is crucial to one student that the bus will arrive precisely when the teacher says it will. According to the interest-relative invariantist, then, every member of the class except the one (call him “Timmy”) can come to know the relevant proposition, even though Timmy and his classmates receive the information about the bus’ arrival time in the exact same way. The question, then, is whether the fact that the stakes are high for only one individual out of arbitrarily many makes it such that the
teacher also experiences the epistemic consequences of increased stakes, and thus cannot know
the proposition she is asserting, and whether the other students who have very little or nothing at
stake can come to know what the teacher asserts through her testimony. According to the
interest-relative invariantist, we might think that the teacher is thereby subject to the high
standards that her one student is, and thus would be unable to transmit information to the rest of
the class. MacFarlane notes, however, that “it would be bizarre that the practical situation of one
student could affect all the others in this way” (136).

MacFarlane’s case is structurally similar to Neta’s State and Main case: in both cases, IRI
has the counterintuitive consequence that one can know a low-stakes proposition but not a high-
stakes one, even though these propositions are considered in the same situation, at the same time,
and in the same way. Can we explain our intuitions in MacFarlane’s case any better by appealing
to considerations of epistemic responsibility? Perhaps there is an analogous problem: since there
is so much at stake for little Timmy, he is going to be particularly epistemically vigilant when he
receives information about the departure time of his bus, and, as a result, he is going to require
more reasons than usual to believe that his teacher knows when the bus is leaving. But now if the
teacher is unable to assert responsibly to Timmy, how can she assert responsibly to the rest of the
class? We might join MacFarlane in finding it “bizarre” that whether one is responsible in
asserting can be affected in this way.

Let’s assume for the sake of argument that being in this situation it would be
irresponsible for the teacher to assert to her class that “the bus will come at such-and-such a
time” because of the high stakes that surround that proposition for Timmy. There are a couple of
things to be said about this. First, it’s not clear to me that this is such a bad result. Consider how
one might react if one were in the schoolteacher’s shoes: after your assertion to the class, little
Timmy puts up his hand and asks if you’re sure, seeing as he has a dialysis appointment he really needs to get to. It seems natural that one would retract one’s assertion, saying that one would have to double-check. So it’s not obvious that the high stakes of one person out of many could not potentially “infect” the epistemic standards of the rest of one’s audience in a way that seems intuitive.

Second, it’s not clear that we could not accommodate the relevant intuitions by appealing to a notion of epistemic responsibility. Again, we could say that while the schoolteacher is able to retain her knowledge, she is not able to employ it responsibly as the content of an assertion, at least not to little Timmy. But since she still knows the proposition, something like MacFarlane’s *Transmission Principle* is upheld for the rest of the class: students who have nothing (or very little) at stake concerning the arrival time of the bus, and are thus not being particularly epistemically vigilant, are able to accept the knowledge that the schoolteacher conveys via testimony without doxastic irresponsibility, and thus are able to come to know that the school bus will arrive at the time the teacher says it does. Of course, Timmy’s mention of his need for additional evidence may very well make the rest of his classmates vigilant, as well, so perhaps they would also require additional evidence that the teacher knows the proposition she asserts. In absence of such epistemic empathy, though, low-stakes students are still able to know via testimony without Timmy ruining it for everyone. This is, I think, the result that we want.

### 7.5 Functionalism and Other Invariantist Interpretations

In this last section, I will consider a number of additional interpretations of the IRI cases that might seem to accommodate the judgments I am claiming are best accommodated by a notion of epistemic responsibility, as well as some general potential objections against the epistemic responsibility interpretations of the cases we have looked at above.
7.5.1 Functionalist Accounts of Belief, and Knowledge

Stanley (2005) and Hawthorne (2004) have interpreted an unwillingness to ascribe knowledge in high-stakes situations as indications that in such situations one is not in a strong enough relationship with a proposition to qualify as knowing it, because knowledge itself is affected by practical factors. Others have interpreted the data differently: if one lacks knowledge in a high-stakes situation it is only indirectly, namely because one does not believe the relevant proposition. Such views often rely on a conception of belief that is defined in terms of its function, namely as something that we are willing to act upon. As we saw above, Brian Weatherson (2005) argues for this kind of view, what he calls “doxastic IRI”: he claims that his view “start[s] with the functionalist idea that to believe that p is to treat p as true for the purposes of practical reasoning” (421). According to Weatherson (2005), interest-relative invariantism is thus primarily a thesis about the mind (i.e. a view about what kinds of factors affect whether we do or not possess certain beliefs), and only indirectly one about epistemology (assuming, that is, that we can only know what we believe).

A functionalist view of belief implies that knowledge is interest-relative (in the doxastic sense) when combined with Weatherson’s version of the knowledge-action principle:

(KP) If S knows that p, then S is justified in using p as a premise in practical reasoning.

(419)

Support for the doxastic interest-relative invariantist view comes from a modus-tollens-ing of (KP) when we judge that its consequent is false. On the functionalist definition of belief, the fact that S is not justified in using p as a premise in her practical reasoning is taken to be an indication that S does not believe that p, and thus S does not know that p (since believing that p is assumed to be necessary for knowing that p). The reason S does not believe that p is because S
is not treating $p$ as true in her practical reasoning. Employing functionalist views of belief as a motivation for doxastic IRI is an argument employed by other adherents of IRI, as well. Fantl and McGrath (2009), for example, argue that if you believe that $p$, “then you are prepared to put $p$ to work as a basis for what you do, believe, etc.” (143), while Dorit Ganson (2008) relies on the claim that “one believes $p$ outright when one is prepared to use $p$ as a premise in practical reasoning” (451)\textsuperscript{58}.

If we accept a functionalist account of belief then perhaps the judgments that we have in cases that we have looked at so far can be explained by a subject’s lacking the relevant belief (as opposed to the interpretation I have put forth, that in these cases subjects are unable to $\phi$ in an epistemically responsible way). Such an interpretation might proceed as follows: if belief in a proposition is defined in terms of a willingness to act on that proposition, then cases in which one is unwilling to act on a proposition are cases in which one lacks belief. There would thus not be any need to explain those instances in which one is unwilling to act on a proposition in terms of a notion of epistemic responsibility, because those cases would be ones in which one does, in fact, lack knowledge.

There are two ways to respond to the challenge from the functionalist view of belief: deny it, or attempt to accommodate it. I am sympathetic to the functionalist view of belief, but I won’t take a definitive stand on it here. We can, I think, accommodate it. Again, such accommodation turns on the different ways that we can employ something in our reasoning: I may very well be willing to put a proposition into action, or to treat it as true when acting, or

\textsuperscript{58} I also mentioned earlier Peirce, who had a similar functionalist account of belief combined with a responsibility account of assertion. According to Peirce, a proposition that one would not be disposed to act upon is not a proposition that one believes.
what have you, as a fulfilment of the norms that govern my actions, but this does not mean that I will be able to do so in a responsible way. Consider again the case of being offered an extreme bet: in this case, I am unwilling to treat the proposition being bet upon as true in my reasoning, even though I still believe it. My unwillingness to employ my beliefs in my reasoning in an extreme bets case, then, is not an indication that I do not believe the proposition, because I would still be willing to employ the proposition if it were not irresponsible to do so: I may very well say to the extreme bettor that “I know where I was born, I’m just not willing to accept your bet” without any inconsistency or tension. An unwillingness to employ a proposition in my reasoning, then, is not necessarily an indication that I do not believe that proposition, because my failure to employ said proposition might be out of concern for doing so responsibly. A plausible functionalist account of belief, after all, cannot take any unwillingness to employ a proposition in action as an indication that one does not believe that proposition; I might, for instance, be unwilling to assert or act on a proposition because of the negative moral or practical ramifications that would result from my action, but this does not mean that I do not have the relevant belief. Instead, a relevant unwillingness must be an epistemic unwillingness, one, perhaps that is caused by doubts that one has in the relevant proposition’s truth. What I am arguing for here, however, is that not every instance of an epistemic unwillingness should be taken to be reflective of one’s doxastic state: we might be unwilling to employ a proposition in action not because of concerns for acting in an epistemically responsible way. Consider again, for example, the law professor whose knowledge is isolated and second-hand. She might not be willing to employ the relevant proposition in her actions because she recognizes that, despite knowing the proposition, she would be unable to provide sufficient reason to her class to believe that she knows that proposition. This kind of unwillingness, however, is not one that should be taken to be indicative of whether the professor has the relevant belief (or, in turn, knowledge).
Ross and Schroeder (2014) also argue for a kind of doxastic IRI way of a functionalist account of belief. They argue that “at least part of the functional role of belief is that believing that \( p \) defeasibly disposes the believer to treat \( p \) as true in her reasoning” (10) and further claim that “it is very plausible that if an agent knows that \( p \), then she can rationally act as if \( p \)”, where someone “acts as if \( p \)” for Ross and Schroeder, if “she evaluates her alternatives by the same procedure by which she would evaluate them conditional on \( p \)” (10)\(^{59}\). Again, we might then argue that since one is not liable to treat that \( p \) as true in one’s practical reasoning when the stakes given \( p \) are high, that in those situations one does not believe that \( p \) and thus does not know that \( p \). However, we can again accept Ross and Schroeder’s functionalist account without committing ourselves to doxastic IRI, since, as I argue above, one might not act on \( p \) not because of a change in one’s doxastic relationship towards \( p \), but because employing \( p \) in one’s practical reasoning might be epistemically irresponsible. Again, in an extreme bet situation it might not be irrational, necessarily, to accept the bet when one is knows that the proposition being bet upon is true, but it may very well be irresponsible.

Ganson (2008), I think, makes a similar equivocation. She argues that the following condition is necessary for belief “we count as believing those propositions which we would not hesitate to act on under all or most circumstances where our evidence for \( p \) remains unchanged” (452). Again, we can accept this functional definition of belief, but note that at least some of those circumstances in which we hesitate to act on the basis of a proposition are ones that aren’t reflective of lacking possession of a belief, but rather one’s unwillingness to employ that proposition in one’s reasoning. And again, Ganson is taking a functionalist definition of belief to

\(^{59}\) Or consider Peirce’s pragmatic definition of belief, where an essential part of what it means to have a belief is that one’s habits are thereby changed because of that belief; if one does not act as if the proposition is true, then they do not believe it. It seems that Peirce would most likely be a member of Ross and Schroeder’s functionalist camp.
provide support for the doxastic IRI: since one’s possession of a belief depends on one’s willingness to act on it, and since beliefs are necessary for knowledge, knowledge of a proposition is indirectly partially a function of one’s willingness to act on it. But this doesn’t follow: one might be unwilling to act on a proposition out of concern for matters of responsibility.

Weatherson (2005) is in the same boat. He argues for an indirect version of interest-relative invariantism in the same way that Ganson does, although his functionalist definition of belief is somewhat different: “If you prefer A to B given q, and you believe that p, then you prefer A to B given p \land q” (5). Weatherson thus defines belief in terms its influence on one’s preferences: if one believes that p, then by simply taking p into consideration one’s preferred action is not going to change. But my preference to perform one act rather than another conditional on considering p in addition to q might change not because of anything that has to do with whether I believe that p, but instead what my preferences are depending on what it would be responsible for me to do. Again, we can accept a functional definition of belief without thereby accepting doxastic IRI, since not all evaluations of an unwillingness to act on a proposition should be taken to be indicative of one’s doxastic state.

7.5.2 Other Invariantist Responses to Interest-Relative Invariantist Challenges

As we saw earlier, the interest-relative invariantist might take herself to be in a better position to explain why it is that we are liable to judge that someone in a high-stakes situation does not have knowledge, even though they might have the same evidence as, and be, in all relevant ways, psychologically identical to someone in a low-stakes situation (someone we are liable to judge as being in possession of knowledge). The evidentialist view of invariantism – i.e.
the view that whether one knows a proposition is solely a function of the evidence one has for that proposition – is typically the one most directly targeted; for example, Ganson states that the evidentialist is committed to accepting that “if two subjects S and S’ have the same evidence for or against p, then S and S’ cannot differ with respect to whether they are epistemically justified in believing p.” (443) The invariantist, then, apparently needs to either grant knowledge (and/or justification) to both high- and low-stakes subjects, or deny it to both, since both subjects have the same evidence. The best that the classic invariantist can do, supposedly, is to provide some sort of error theory, or to bite the bullet. I have suggested that the invariantist should thus be friendly to the responsibility view I am defending, as judgments of a lack of knowledge in high-stakes cases can be interpreted as a failure to employ that knowledge responsibly in one’s reasoning, rather than a failure to have knowledge.

However, it is not clear that the invariantist does need to admit that any two individuals with the same evidence for a proposition are necessarily in the same strength of epistemic position towards that proposition. Here I will look at two views – one from Kent Bach and one from Jennifer Nagel – that have been put forth in defense of the invariantist against this kind of claim. The essence of their arguments are that practical factors surrounding the truth of a proposition can create psychological differences in subjects, and these differences can influence one’s doxastic relationship towards that proposition. If there can be, then, relevant psychological differences between two subjects that are in situations with different stakes but have the same evidence, then we can explain the difference in our judgments between these cases by appealing to those underlying psychological differences. Recall earlier the Knowledge-Norm/IRI argument: there, I took issue with the premise that judgments of the epistemic propriety of φ-ing p in high-stakes situations are, in fact, indicative of one’s epistemic relationship with p. The invariantist,
then, can similarly deny this premise: our propriety judgments can be explained either by appealing to some psychological factors, or by appealing to one’s epistemic relationship with \( p \), but as one that is affected by those factors. One might think, then, that we can accommodate the relevant judgments appeal to in the Knowledge-Norm/IRI argument solely by appealing to psychological factors, and without needing to appeal to a notion of epistemic responsibility at all.

I’ll consider both views briefly, and then compare and contrast them with my own. In general, I agree with Bach and Nagel that there may very well be psychological differences to be found in subjects when the stakes change. But it’s neither clear that these views can accommodate all the instances in which we are liable to deny knowledge in high-stakes situations (especially when one is ignorant of the stakes of a situation), nor that the psychological differences that Bach and Nagel respectively discuss are always going to vary depending on the context or stakes of a subject’s situation.

The first invariantist response I’ll consider comes from Kent Bach (2005), who defends a form of invariantism – “moderate invariantism” – as a way to accommodate cases that have usually been used to motivate contextualism. Bach cites DeRose’s (1999) definition of the moderate invariantist position as follows: “invariantism that keeps the standards governing the truth-conditions of knowledge attributions constant, but meetably low” (in DeRose 1999: 192). Bach again appeals to Cohen’s Airport case: according to the contextualist, the proposition Mary expresses when she says that Smith does not know whether the plane stops in Chicago is true because Mary’s assertion is being made in a high-standards context. As we have seen, the interest-relative invariantist has some trouble accommodating this judgment, since, according to IRI, the proposition Mary expresses in her assertion is false (as Smith is in a low-stakes situation, and there is nothing standing in the way of his knowing that \( p \): “the plane will stop in Chicago”).
Bach’s take on the situation is different. His interpretation of the case is that since there is a lot at stake for Mary, that she is not confident enough in her belief that $p$ to ascribe knowledge that $p$ to Smith. As a result of this lack of confidence, she is unable to “coherently assert that [Smith] knows” because, in general, “if you are not confident that $p$ and think that it still needs to be verified” you are unlikely to ascribe knowledge (and, in Mary’s case, be likely to deny knowledge). (2008: 84)

Importantly, Bach does not need to rely on a functionalist account of belief to support his moderate invariantism, since he argues that what changes given the stakes is not whether one actually believes the relevant proposition, but the confidence one has in that proposition. So while Mary may very well still believe that “the plane will stop in Chicago”, she is not confident enough in her belief to make an attribution of knowledge of that proposition to someone else. In Bach’s words, “the explanation for her denial is not that she doesn’t believe it herself but, rather, that her threshold of confidence has gone up” (77) and thus that “willingness to attribute knowledge does not track the standards of the truth of a [knowledge] attribution; rather, it tracks one’s threshold of doxastic confidence” (78). Bach is thus able to maintain an invariantist view, while accommodating the airport case intuitions that have motivated contextualism.

Bach is, by his own admittance, defending a kind of error theory. He, too, needs to explain why intuitive knowledge ascriptions are strictly speaking false, and that what we are really sensitive to when making these ascriptions is a lack of confidence in one’s belief. I do not have any direct point of contention with Bach’s view; it seems eminently plausible that in certain situations, especially those in which the stakes are high, one can lose confidence in one’s belief, to the point where one would be unwilling to ascribe knowledge to someone else. But this is not to say that we can accommodate all of the relevant judgments in terms of thresholds of
confidence of belief instead of judgments of epistemic responsibility. Indeed, I think that we can explain why our degrees of confidence in our beliefs might change by appealing to the mechanisms that underlie epistemic responsibility. Consider, for example, how Bach summarizes the way that our thresholds of confidence in our beliefs change:

What varies [in different contexts in which we make knowledge ascriptions], rather, is the attributor’s threshold of confidence. In the problem cases, either a practical consideration or an overly demanding epistemic reason raises that threshold and leads the attributor to demand more evidence than knowledge requires. (85-6)

Bach and I agree, then, that in practical situations there is an increased demand for evidence. I take this increased demand to set a standard for epistemic responsibility, and this is a standard against which we can make an epistemic evaluation, regardless of one’s doxastic state. If one’s doxastic state is affected by these factors, then one’s confidence in one’s belief might decrease to the point that one is no longer willing to make a knowledge ascription, as Bach describes. But it need not: as we have seen, we can make epistemic evaluations of a subject regardless of their doxastic state, for example when one does not realize what one’s practical situation fully consists in, or when one should have acquired information that one fails to acquire. According to this view, an increase in a threshold of confidence in certain practical situations, then, may very well occur, and there may very well be instances in which an intuitive knowledge attribution should actually have been an attribution of confidence. But changes in confidence thresholds is just one way that one can react to a change in the demands for epistemically responsible action, and one can be evaluated according to those demands even if one’s doxastic states are unaffected as a result.
While Bach is concerned with arguing against contextualism, Nagel (2008) responds on behalf of the traditional invariantist against charges from the interest-relative invariantist. Nagel’s claim, contra the interest-relative invariantist, is that when two subjects with the same evidence for a proposition are in situations in which there are different stakes surrounding the truth of that proposition, there can be corresponding differences in the relevant psychological status of those subjects. Nagel refers to recent empirical work on “need-for-closure”, the need one feels to end one’s deliberation and come to a conclusion about the truth of some matter. Subjects in high-stakes cases can differ psychologically from those in low-stakes cases since, in the former, one generally experiences a low need-for-closure (since there is more at stake one feels more pressure to get it right than to simply reach a conclusion), whereas in the latter one generally experiences a neutral need-for-closure. Since there is a psychological difference between subjects in high- and low-stakes cases, Nagel argues, the classic invariantist is thereby able to account for the difference in our willingness to ascribe knowledge to subjects in situations where there are different stakes: because of the psychological differences between subjects in high- and low-stakes cases, there may be a difference in the whether these subjects will form the relevant beliefs. Only as a consequence of a difference in the possession of the relevant belief between the subjects, then, might there be a corresponding difference in knowledge. As Nagel notes, this kind of explanation is perfectly consistent with an intellectualist invariantism, since on this account whether one has knowledge is solely a function of traditional intellectual factors.

I don’t take Nagel’s view to be attempting to accommodate every possible intuition that we might have regarding the relationship between stakes and knowledge ascriptions; for instance, it seems that in cases in which the stakes are high but one is ignorant of them, one
would not experience a low need-for-closure; someone in an ignorant high-stakes situation
would, then, be relevantly psychologically identical to another person who had the same
evidence for the same proposition, but for which there was nothing at stake. Nagel is skeptical,
however, about our intuitions in these cases: the intuition that one does not have knowledge in an
ignorant high-stakes situation are, she claims, generally weaker than those in many of the other
cases we have seen so far. Furthermore, Nagel argues that when our intuitions that one does not,
in fact, have knowledge in the ignorant high stakes cases are strongest are those instances in
which we are interpreting those cases as if the subject were aware of them: it is easy, for
instance, to read such a case and think that the subject really should have known what the
relevant stakes were, a phenomenon that Nagel attributes to the “hindsight bias.” (292)

Again, I can readily admit that psychological factors such as a need-for-closure (or, as
Nagel discusses in her 2010, a notion of “epistemic anxiety”) can affect whether one has a belief
and, in turn, whether one has knowledge. This is one way that high stakes can affect our
epistemic appraisals. I have argued, however, that it is not the only way. As I have argued,
increased stakes affect our epistemic vigilance, and, as a result, our need for the provision of
reasons to accept information. While I agree with Nagel, then, that it is not the case in that in all
instances where the subject of epistemic appraisal is ignorant of the high-stakes involved that
subject’s beliefs or knowledge are necessarily affected, it seems to be that in those cases in
which ones audience is highly epistemically vigilant as a result of the importance of the relevant
information and the subject is unaware of them, that we still make a negative epistemic
evaluation of the subject’s employment of that information in their action. An account of
epistemic responsibility, then, has the advantage of being able to accommodate instances of
epistemic appraisal that do not depend on the psychological status of the relevant subject.
7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that a knowledge norm of φ-ing only supports IRI if we accept a kind of evaluative monism when it comes to judgments about knowledge. I have also argue that cases that interest-relative invariantists appeal to in order to support IRI are just as easily explained by a theory of epistemic responsibility; also, many of the problem cases that have been presented for IRI are similarly able to be accommodated by judgments of epistemic responsibility instead of judgments of knowledge. Furthermore, arguments for doxastic IRI via appeal to functionalist accounts of belief are similarly reliant upon an assumption that our evaluations of one’s willingness to employ a proposition in one’s action is necessarily reflective of factors that are relevant to one’s possession of a belief. Ultimately, then, I have attempted to show that we cannot avoid the need for an appeal to a notion of epistemic responsibility by adhering to an interest-relative conception of knowledge. As IRI is a theory about knowledge and epistemic responsibility is an evaluative notion that pertains to the way we employ our epistemic relationships in action, we could very well accept the two together. However, we have also seen that a notion of epistemic responsibility can predict and account for the intuitions that are often appealed to by proponents of IRI, and thus calls into question the motivation for accepting IRI as a theory of knowledge.
Conclusion and Further Areas of Research

8.1 Project Summary

This project has been concerned with establishing two things: first, the epistemic separability thesis – that instances of assertion and practical reasoning can be evaluated epistemically either in terms of their adherence to the epistemic norms of assertion and practical reasoning, respectively, or in terms of the way that one has adhered to or violated those norms – and second, that the best way to think about secondary epistemic propriety is in terms of epistemic responsibility. The argument for epistemic separability came in three forms: one from luminosity failure for mental and epistemic states; one from empirical arguments concerning the way we can access and put into action information with which we have epistemic relationships; and one concerning the ways of making epistemic judgments of actions that were performed when one’s relevant relationship with a relevant proposition was not accessible under rational reflection. On the basis of these arguments it was concluded that for any plausible norm of assertion or action one can have good reason to think that one is adhering to that norm while one actually violates it (or good reason to think that one is violating that norm while one actually adheres to it). As a result, there will be cases in which our evaluations of the epistemic propriety of our actions cannot be accounted for by permissibility evaluations alone.

Having argued for the epistemic separability thesis, the second half of the project focused on determining the conditions for secondary epistemic propriety. While popular conceptions of secondary epistemic propriety are concerned with evaluations that are made on the basis of the epistemic relationships one actually has at the time of acting (i.e. what one has good reason to believe, what is reasonable for one to believe, etc.), it was argued that our judgments are also
significantly influenced by what epistemic relationships one *should have had*. A notion of what one should have known figured prominently into the discussion concerning epistemic responsibility. It was furthermore argued that what one should have known when acting is a function of the expectations of one’s audience for the provision of reasons to believe that one was, in fact, adhering to the relevant norm that governed one’s action.

Finally, it was argued that a notion of epistemic responsibility has potentially important consequences for current debates in philosophy. One such consequence is that proponents of interest-relative invariantism do not distinguish between those epistemic evaluations that pertain to whether one is in a certain epistemic relationship with a proposition, and those evaluations that pertain to whether one is employing those epistemic relationships responsibly in one’s actions. As a result, we may then be able to better explain the relevant intuitions that interest-relative invariantists take to support IRI in terms of evaluations of epistemic responsibility, and thereby lose the underlying motivation for the interest-relative invariantist view.

While this project has been concerned with establishing a view about the way in which we make epistemic evaluations of actions and the structure of those evaluations, we might wonder what conclusions we should draw with regards to the debates that spurred the discussion in the first place, namely those debates concerning the epistemic relationships that warrant permissible action and/or assertion. I noted that these debates often revolved around the ability for a proposed norm to accommodate intuitive judgments concerning the epistemic propriety of certain actions, and that the reason why such judgments are appealed to so frequently is due to the view that norms, if they should be plausible, should not be in conflict with our judgments (or, at least, not significantly so). We can still accept that norms should not be in significant conflict with our intuitive judgments in order to be plausible, but we need to determine which of these
judgments are best explained in terms of permissibility conditions or in terms of some other
evaluative conditions. I have not here put forth an explicit view concerning how we can
definitively categorize such judgments; I am thereby unable to fully adjudicate amongst the
possible epistemic conditions that warrant assertion and action. However, I have hoped to show
that in these debates epistemologists cannot simply take any epistemic evaluation to either be
indicative of one’s possession of a particular epistemic relationship (and thereby to reflect
whether one’s action is permissible or impermissible), or else to be in need of some explanation
via an error theory. I have argued that we can and do make epistemic evaluations that pertain to
the ways in which one employs one’s epistemic relationships in action, and whether one can
employ one’s epistemic relationships in one’s actions in an epistemically responsible way
constitutes a legitimate basis for epistemic evaluation.

There are, I think, additional consequences that accepting epistemic separability and
evaluations of epistemic responsibility have both in epistemology and elsewhere in debates in
philosophy, as well as a number of open questions that I have not been able to address either in
part or in their entirety here, but would make for interesting areas of further research. I will
discuss a number of these consequences below. The first three pertain to discussions that were, at
some point, included in this project, but have been left out of the final version because they were
either too tangential or deserved more discussion than I was able to give them; the last two are
much more speculative extensions of the work I have presented here.

8.2 Moral Evaluations, Epistemic Evaluations, and Counterexamples

I have argued that epistemic monists typically take intuitive epistemic evaluations of
actions and assertions to be indicative of one’s epistemic relationships. As a result, if these
evaluations conflict with a proposed norm, then they will qualify as potential counterexamples. A proponent of epistemic separability, however, might instead interpret these cases not as counterexamples, but as being indicative of another kind of epistemic evaluation. Proponents of epistemic separability, then, will conceive of many fewer intuitive judgments as being a basis for a counterexample. We might think, then, that where evaluative separability is more commonly accepted our intuitive judgments will occupy a different role in the respective dialectic. This is perhaps the case when it comes to consequentialist moral evaluations. On a consequentialist view, whether an action is right or wrong is a function of the consequences of that action. Since we are, in general, unable to know the full extent of the consequences of our actions, there will be many cases in which our judgment of the wrongness of an act will conflict with the dictates of the consequentialist view; for example, there will be cases in which we judge an action to be morally permissible, where the unforeseen consequences of an action make it impermissible. The consequentialist can, however, maintain that such an action is impermissible while explaining what might seem right about it in terms of whether we are blameworthy for it. As a result, many judgments that seem to conflict with the dictates of the consequentialist theory should not be taken to be counterexamples that either need to be accommodated by the theory or accounted for by an error theory, but are rather accommodated by an additional evaluative notion, that of moral blameworthiness.

If epistemologists have, in fact, typically been evaluative monists, and certain ethicists have, in fact, generally adhered to evaluative separability, then we would expect epistemologists and ethicists to treat our intuitive judgments differently. And, at first glance at least, it seems that this is the case: while the history of epistemology is littered with appeals to intuitive judgments that are treated as reasons to reject this-or-that theory of knowledge (no better example being the
fall of the JTB model of knowledge due to Gettier (1963)), consequentialist moral theories continue to survive despite their counterintuitive consequences. There are, then, two related questions worth pursuing: first, is it the fact that epistemologists and ethicists treat intuitive judgments differently in their respective dialectics, and second, if there is such a difference, should they treat these judgments in the same way? My initial thought is that if there is such a difference in the way that epistemologists and ethicists deal with intuitive judgments, then by being evaluative monists, epistemologists should rethink the extent to which intuitive judgments should be treated as counterexamples in various debates. What, exactly, this entails is up for debate.

8.3 Contextualism and Responsibility

In chapter 7 I argued that we can explain epistemic judgments that seem to be sensitive to the stakes involved not in terms of whether one does, in fact, have knowledge, but rather in terms of whether one can employ one’s knowledge responsibly in one’s action. Furthermore, I argued that if we are able to interpret the relevant judgments according to a framework of epistemic responsibility, then we lose much of the motivation for proposing IRI in the first place. Interest-relative invariantists are not the only ones who appeal to intuitions that vary according to stakes to support their view: contextualists – those who hold the view that the semantic value of a sentence expressing a knowledge attribution is dependent upon the context of the ascriber – similarly appeal to cases of stakes and shifting-standards in support of the contextualist thesis. However, if we can, in fact, explain the relevant judgments by appealing to a notion of epistemic responsibility, we might thereby lose the motivation for positing contextualism, as well.

Now, just as we can accept both a notion of epistemic responsibility and IRI (since epistemic responsibility is not a theory of knowledge) we can similarly accept both
contextualism and a notion of epistemic responsibility (since epistemic responsibility is not a theory about the semantic value of knowledge-ascription sentences). In order to show that accepting epistemic responsibility undermines the motivation for accepting contextualism, then, we would need to argue that we can better explain judgments of the relevant cases by appealing to a notion of responsibility than we can by appealing to a shift in semantic values of knowledge-ascription sentences. Perhaps the most important kind of case for the contextualist is one that involves classical skeptical arguments, as explaining the relevant judgments in such arguments is often taken as motivation for accepting contextualism in the first place. For example, DeRose (1995) considers the following set of what appear to be inconsistent statements:

1. I don’t know that I’m not a brain in a vat.
2. If I don’t know that I’m not a brain in a vat, then I don’t know that I have hands.

But,

Not-C. I know that I have hands. (modified from DeRose (1995: 39))

The above is puzzling, since it seems both that if we accept (1) and (2) we should also want to accept (C): I don’t know that I have hands, but that all of (1), (2) and (Not-C) are nevertheless true. A contextualist solution to the problem is to argue that all of (1), (2) and (Not-C) are true, they are just true when evaluated according to different standards. DeRose (1995), for example, argues that while (2) is true at every standard of evaluation, (1) is true at high standards of evaluation whereas (Not-C) is true at low standards of evaluation (40). The above becomes less puzzling once we recognize, says the contextualist, that there is an implicit change in the standards of evaluation when we move from (1) to (Not-C).
There are, of course, invariantist responses that attempt to explain all of our relevant judgments in these cases. Could a notion of epistemic responsibility help us here? Perhaps: as I have been suggesting, what might change in a given context of evaluation is the standard to which one is evaluated as epistemically responsible or not, and thus our evaluations of (1), (2) and (Not-C) might be affected by whether we can assert the respective statement in an epistemically responsible way in a given context (not whether these statements are true in a given context). This is, of course, a sketch of an answer. It would be interesting, however, to investigate the extent to which we could apply a notion of epistemic responsibility to skeptical problems.

8.4 Culpable Ignorance of Epistemic Relationships

One final topic that did not find its way into the final project is one concerning the arguments I presented against epistemic monism and their potential impact on arguments concerning moral responsibility – specifically those concerning one’s status as morally culpable for actions that are performed out of a state of ignorance. Ethicists generally acknowledge that there are two main types of ignorance than can affect one’s status as morally culpable for an action: an ignorance of relevant fact, or (more controversially) an ignorance of moral valence. As an example of the first, it might be the case that I am unaware of some relevant fact, one that factors into determining the wrongness of my act. Whether I am exonerated of culpability for my act performed out of ignorance of relevant fact depends on whether I have good reason for being ignorant. According to the second kind of ignorance, it might be the case that I am unaware that the action that I am performing is wrong. Again, whether I am exonerated of culpability for

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60 This is clearly a gloss, but I won’t here consider any detailed views.
my act performed out of ignorance of moral valence depends on whether I have good reason for being ignorant (and again, it is much more widely accepted that ignorance of fact can exonerate than ignorance of moral valence).

The kind of ignorance that I have been looking at predominantly in the project here – ignorance of one’s epistemic relationships – does not seem to fall neatly into either of these categories. For instance, it might be the case that I know the valence and all of the relevant moral facts surrounding an action, but, for whatever reason, I might not think that I do have such knowledge (furthermore, I might have good reason to think that I do not have such knowledge). Might this kind of ignorance affect our evaluations of moral culpability? Perhaps: we might find it easier to exonerate one of moral culpability if one did not have access to one’s knowledge of the relevant facts or relevant moral valence. The extent to which a failure to recognize one’s own mental and epistemic states effects evaluations of moral culpability is, I think, a topic that deserves attention.

8.5 Further Questions

Finally, a few more possible ways to extend the current project. In the last chapter I touched briefly on the possibility that a notion of epistemic responsibility might affect the ways in which can convey information through testimony. If we do, in fact, make evaluations of epistemically responsible actions and assertions, it might be worthwhile to investigate how we can learn from information that is conveyed via testimony in epistemically responsible and irresponsible ways. We might also consider what a notion of epistemically responsible assertion means for debates concerning disagreement, namely whether peer disagreement should affect whether we can responsibly employ a proposition in action (as opposed to whether peer disagreement should affect our credence in a proposition). Since the view of epistemic
separability I am proposing is concerns a broad normative structure of epistemic relationships, it is applicable, in theory, to all the areas of epistemology that involve epistemic judgments.
Works Cited


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