

## **Stick to the Facts:**

### **On the Norms of Assertion\***

Daniel Whiting

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The man broke in to say that indeed the tale was a true one. He said that they had no desire to entertain him nor yet even to instruct him. He said that it was their whole bent only to tell what was true and that otherwise they had no purpose at all (Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*).<sup>1</sup>

#### **1 Introduction**

Suppose that there are norms which govern the act of asserting and determine when it is appropriate or otherwise to perform that act. Those norms would surely be of interest to philosophers of language. Assertion seems in some sense to be one of the fundamental speech acts and clarity about the standards to which it is subject ought to shed light on the nature of that act and its relations to others. In turn, reflection on the standards for assertion might inform theories of what determines the contents assertions express or the meanings of the linguistic vehicles used to express them.

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<sup>1</sup> McCarthy 2002: 596.

Since assertion is frequently used to provide testimony, an understanding of its governing norms should contribute to epistemologists' efforts to understand this crucial source of knowledge. Moreover, if the relevant norms concern the epistemic standing of the subject making the assertion, then attention to the respects, if any, in which practical considerations influence the propriety of assertions might provide a clue to the respects, if any, in which such considerations influence a subject's epistemic standing. With epistemologists, philosophers of mind might seek to 'read off' the principles governing belief from those governing assertion, on the assumption that belief is the 'internal' counterpart of assertion. Finally, if the notion of truth figures in some way in the relevant norms, then one might expect that fact to constrain theories of its nature. For these and no doubt other reasons, identifying the general normative principles to which assertions are subject is an important task for philosophers.

What, then, are the candidate norms of assertion? As a start, note that the following appears to be the merest platitude:

(C) One correctly asserts that  $p$  if and only if  $p$

Arguably, this is equivalent to, or at least to implies:<sup>2</sup>

(T) One may assert that  $p$  if and only if it is true that  $p$ <sup>3</sup>

Evidently, (T) breaks down into the following conditionals:

(T-NEC) One may assert that  $p$  only if it is true that  $p$

(T-SUFF) One may assert that  $p$  if it is true that  $p$

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<sup>2</sup> See Whiting 2010 for defence of the claim that statements about what it is (in)correct to do entail statements about what one may (not) do.

If one does not accept this, nothing in what follows hangs on it. The focus is on the considerations for and against (T), whatever its relationship to (C).

<sup>3</sup> Note that 'may' here has narrow scope. So, if it is not true that  $p$ , it follows from (T) that it is not the case that one may assert that  $p$  (and so one should not do so). In contrast, if 'may' has wide scope, then, if it is false that  $p$ , it no longer follows from (T) that it is not the case that one may assert that  $p$ , only that one may either not assert that  $p$  or (somehow!) make it the case that  $p$ .

Call the view that truth provides the standard for assertion, *the truth view*.<sup>4</sup>

One might think that (T) is obviously false. Surely, if an axe-wielding child-killer asks me where my sons are, I should not assert (truly) that my sons are in the bedroom. Cases of this sort remind us that the normative status of an assertion is, like that of any act, determined by a host of considerations relating to the particular circumstances. This does not, however, show that (T) is false but only that it is to be understood in a certain way. (T) tells us what it takes, and all it takes, for an assertion to pass muster *qua* assertion;<sup>5</sup> it concerns the considerations which are relevant to the normative status of one's act only in virtue of its being an asserting. On this view, taking into account just the fact that my children are in the bedroom, asserting that my children are in the bedroom would be okay. This is compatible with the thought that, taking into account all the facts, I should not do so. To put the same point differently, (T) expresses a *prima facie*, not an all-things-considered, normative judgement.

I have formulated (T) using the deontic term 'may'. But, while it is not uncommon for participants in the debates surrounding such principles to talk of what one should, may, must or ought to assert, the focus is sometimes on what it takes for there to be *warrant* for asserting.<sup>6</sup> I take warrants to be analogues of *reasons*, where warrants stand to what one may do as reasons stand to what one ought to do. A reason for  $\phi$ ing is a consideration which speaks in favour of  $\phi$ ing. If a reason to  $\phi$  is conclusive or undefeated, one ought to  $\phi$ ; and, if one ought to  $\phi$ , there is a reason for

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<sup>4</sup> Alston (2000), McDowell (2000) and Wright (1992: ch. 1) endorse (T). Weiner (2005) and Horwich (1998: ch. 8) accept (T-NEC). An important precursor to the truth view can be found in (Dummett 1958-1959).

<sup>5</sup> This is consistent with thinking that *qua* contribution to a conversation an assertion is subject to additional standards (see §3 below).

<sup>6</sup> Weiner (2005: 227) and Williamson (2000: 423-424), for example, both move between talk of when one *should* or *must* assert something and when there is *warrant* for doing so.

Some participants in the debate formulate the relevant norms, not in terms of when one may assert that *p* or when there is warrant for doing so, but in terms of when doing so is proper, permitted, entitled, and so forth. For present purposes, these differences do not make a difference and the remarks that follow should make it clear how such vocabulary maps on to that which is used here.

ϕing. A warrant, in contrast, need not speak in favour of ϕing, though it does not speak *against* it. If a warrant to ϕ is conclusive or undefeated, one may ϕ, though it might not be the case that one ought to ϕ; and, if one may ϕ, there is a warrant for ϕing. So understood, a warrant to ϕ is, as it were, a (prima facie) entitlement, permission or license to ϕ.<sup>7</sup>

Returning to the matter at hand, it is implausible that the mere fact that (it is true that) *p* could be a reason for asserting that *p* and so could make it the case that one ought to do so. For this reason, I have formulated (T) so that, according to it, the fact that *p* is a warrant to assert that *p* and so could only make it the case that one may do so.

I have suggested that (T), insofar as it follows from (C), is platitudinous. This estimation is not widely shared. Below, I shall outline some of the formidable arguments which are thought by many to show (T) to be false. Several of those arguments are also thought to support an account according to which knowledge provides the standard for assertion. Call this, *the knowledge view*. Its proponents endorse one or both of the conditionals that make up the following principle:<sup>8</sup>

(K) One may assert that *p* if and only if one knows that *p*

The knowledge view is without doubt the most prominent in the recent literature.

Arguably its main rival at present is *the justification view*, according to which:

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gert's distinction between 'requiring' and 'justifying' reasons (2004).

<sup>8</sup> For endorsements of (K-NEC) (to use obvious labelling), see Adler 2002; Adler 2009; Engel 2002: §3.5; Fricker 2006; Hawthorne and Stanley 2008; Reynolds 2002; Stanley 2005: 10-11; Turri 2010; and Unger 1975: 252ff. For an endorsement of (K-SUFF), see Fantl and McGrath 2009.

With the exception of DeRose (2002), advocates of (K) are more difficult to pin down. Hawthorne (2004: 21-24) explicitly advances (K-NEC), but a cautious footnote (n58) suggests he might also accept (K-SUFF). Williamson (2000) focuses on (K-NEC), but seems to accept (K-SUFF) when he writes, 'the propositions which one is permitted to assert outright are exactly those which' one knows (2000: 11). It is possible to read Brandom (1994: ch. 4) as arguing for (K). Bird's remarks (2007: §5) strongly suggest he would accept (K). Finally, Sutton (2007: 44-48) explicitly endorses (K-NEC) but, given his view that justification is knowledge, a commitment to (K-SUFF) might follow.

(JB) One may assert that  $p$  if and only if one is justified in believing that  $p$ <sup>9</sup>

Further candidates include:

(B) One may assert that  $p$  if and only if one believes that  $p$ <sup>10</sup>

(BK) One may assert that  $p$  if and only if one believes that one knows that  $p$ <sup>11</sup>

(JBK) One may assert that  $p$  if and only if one is justified in believing that one knows that  $p$ <sup>12</sup>

This list is not exhaustive.

Williamson is right, I think, that ‘our attitude to false assertions is misrepresented by any simple account on which what warrants assertion does not entail truth’ (2000: 263). Equally, I would add, any such account misrepresents our attitude to true assertions. However, since the focus of this paper lies elsewhere, I shall not pursue this issue. Accordingly, I shall set (B), (BK) and (JBK) aside, and I shall consider (JB) at various points only as a non-fundamental norm governing assertion, i.e. as derived in some way from (T).<sup>13</sup>

Despite an explosion of interest in assertion and its norms in recent years, philosophers have made almost no effort to resuscitate (T) in the face of the numerous and apparently serious problems facing it. In this paper, I shall defend the truth view

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<sup>9</sup> (JB) is really a schema which can be filled in in various ways depending on how one understands justification. On certain ways of filling it in, (JB) is simply a restatement of (K) (e.g. Sutton 2007). Typically, however, justification for believing that  $p$  is understood as requiring less than knowledge. Defenders of some version of (JB-NEC) include Hill and Schechter (2007), Douven (2006), for whom justification is rational credibility, Kvanvig (2009; 2011), for whom justification must be knowledge-affording, and Lackey (2007), for whom justification is reasonableness.

<sup>10</sup> See Bach 2008.

<sup>11</sup> I do not know of anyone who advances (BK). Should one be tempted, see (Williamson 2000: §11.5).

<sup>12</sup> Koethe (2009) defends something like this principle.

<sup>13</sup> Adler (2009) presents an argument against a version of (JB), according to justification is rational credibility. Very roughly, he considers a case in which A asserts that  $p$  or  $q$ , and B asserts that not- $q$ . B’s assertion, Adler points out, does not constitute a challenge to A’s but is complimentary to it; in light of it, A might proceed to assert that  $p$ . This is not what one would expect if rational credibility were the standard for assertion, since its being rationally credible that not- $p$  weakens the rational credibility of  $p$  or  $q$ . Adler suggests that this supports the knowledge view, though it equally supports the truth view.

and, in doing so, reject the knowledge view. First, I shall consider the data typically cited in support of the knowledge view, data which it appears the truth view cannot accommodate. Second, I shall outline and reject what is—to my knowledge at least—the only attempt to show that the truth view can account for this data, namely, Weiner's (2005). Third, I shall make my case for the truth view and against the knowledge view.

Attempts in the contemporary literature to undermine the knowledge view depend almost exclusively on alleged counterexamples to (K), generating which has become something of a cottage industry.<sup>14</sup> While it no doubt has a role to play, such a strategy relies on intuitions concerning hypothetical cases, intuitions which might not be shared and which might shift depending on how the relevant cases are fleshed out. Rather than appealing to potential counterexamples, I shall reject (K) on principled grounds. To do so, I shall introduce a distinction, which, though not familiar from debates concerning the norms of assertion, is acknowledged in the philosophy of normativity and practical reason, namely, the distinction between there *being* reason or warrant for a subject (not) to  $\phi$ , in a sense to be specified, and a subject's *having* reason or warrant (not) to  $\phi$ , in a sense to be specified. By appealing to that distinction I shall show, first, that the proponent of the truth view is able to accommodate the data that seems otherwise to point toward the knowledge view and, second, that the knowledge view is mistaken. My argument has the added advantage of showing why, although it is false, the knowledge view might appear to be true. Hence, it simultaneously undermines the view while accounting for the attraction it exerts.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Brown 2008; Brown 2010; Hill and Schechter 2007; Lackey 2007; Lackey 2011; Levin 2008; and Weiner 2005.

After addressing some possible responses to my arguments, I shall conclude by offering some (admittedly speculative) remarks on what might explain the fact that there is an act, assertion, governed by (T).

## 2 The data

In this section, I shall outline the considerations which proponents of the knowledge view adduce in its support and in opposition to the truth view. Some have tried to show that some version of (JB) can also accommodate this data.<sup>15</sup> Be that as it may, the important point for present purposes is that, to all appearances, the truth view cannot.<sup>16</sup> Brown (2008; 2010) notes that the data, at best, supports (K-NEC), not (K-SUFF). That might be true, but it offers no comfort to the proponent of the truth view—if knowledge is insufficient for warranted assertion, so is truth.

It is typically legitimate to respond to assertions by saying, ‘How do you know?’ or, ‘Do you know that?’ Moreover, these remarks are not heard merely as requests for information but as *challenges*, challenges which would be met if the asserter could show that or how she knows. If the truth view were correct, such challenges would seem excessive and failure to meet them could hardly be grounds for criticism. In contrast, the knowledge view has an easy explanation for these conversational patterns, namely, (K).<sup>17</sup>

Next, consider Moorean assertions. Suppose that Holly asserts flat-out:

- (1) Dogs bark, but I don’t know that dogs bark.

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<sup>15</sup> See Douven 2006; Hill and Schechter 2008; Lackey 2007; Kvanvig 2009; and Kvanvig 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Several of the attempts to account for the relevant data consistently with the justification view appeal to the (Gricean) pragmatic norms governing conversational exchange. In §3, I argue that this kind of strategy does not look very promising.

<sup>17</sup> For versions of this argument, see Adler 2002: 36; Reynolds 2002: 140; Unger 1975: 263; Sutton 2007: 44; and Williamson 2000: 252-253. Brown (2008: 4; 2010: §3) and Kvanvig (2009) raise doubts about whether the conversational data supports the knowledge view. For a response to those doubts, see Turri 2010.

This seems absurd, though what is asserted is consistent and might be true. The knowledge view's advocate can account for this as follows.<sup>18</sup> Speakers who make such assertions are performing acts subject to a certain norm, namely, (K), but, given what they assert, they cannot satisfy that norm. Returning to (1), if there is warrant to assert the first conjunct, Holly knows that dogs bark, in which case the second conjunct is false and so there is no warrant to assert it. Conversely, if there is warrant to assert the second conjunct, then Holly knows that she doesn't know that dogs bark, which entails that she doesn't know that dogs bark, in which case there is no warrant to assert the first conjunct. It is hard to see how the proponent of the truth view could account for the absurdity of knowledge-versions of Moorean assertions.

Third, consider lottery cases. Suppose that the tickets of a lottery have been drawn but the results have not been made available yet. The chances of winning, as Elliot and Stanley are aware, are 1/1,000,000. Elliot asserts flat-out:

(2) Your ticket didn't win.

Intuitively, Elliot's assertion is unwarranted, even though it is highly probable that he is right. Assuming that Elliot cannot know that Stanley's ticket lost on probabilistic grounds alone, the knowledge view has a good explanation of why the lottery assertion is unwarranted: it violates (K). Suppose further that, unbeknownst to Elliot or Stanley, Stanley's ticket in fact lost—it still seems inappropriate to have asserted this, contra (T).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Adler 2002: 36; Sutton 2007: 44; Unger 1975: 256; and Williamson 2000: 253-254.

<sup>19</sup> For appeals to lottery cases in support of the knowledge view, see Hawthorne 2004: 21-24; Sutton 2007: 44; Unger 1975: 261; and Williamson 2000: 244-249. Dudman (1992) uses lottery cases to argue against the view that high (subjective) probability is sufficient for warranted assertion.

Lackey (2007: 618) and Hill and Schechter (2007) claim that assertions of lottery propositions can be warranted, pointing to cases like the following. Having bought a lottery ticket and convinced it won, despite not having seen the result, I express my intention to quit my job. It appears it would be appropriate for you to say, 'Don't be crazy: your ticket didn't win'.

Such examples are not decisive. First, it seems legitimate to respond to the assertion by saying, 'You don't know that!' Second, if the assertion is appropriate, this might be due to the high practical stakes overriding (K).



Williamson (2000: 244-247) bolsters the case against the truth view as follows. If truth is the norm for assertion, one might expect it to generate a subsidiary evidential norm, according to which ‘one should not make an assertion for which one lacks evidence’ (2000: 244). (In effect, this is to suggest that one can derive (JB) from (T).) One might view this in instrumental terms: the evidential norm holds since conforming to it is the means to conforming to the truth norm. Williamson appeals instead to a general principle, not specific to assertion, concerning responsibility: if one should  $\phi$  only if some condition obtains, then one should  $\phi$  only if one has evidence for thinking that that condition obtains. To illustrate with his memorable example, if one should not bury the living, one should bury someone only if one has evidence that she is dead—to do otherwise is irresponsible. Returning to the lottery case, since it is extremely probable on Elliot’s evidence that Stanley’s ticket lost, asserting (2) would seem to satisfy any evidential norm derivable from (T). According to Williamson, the truth view cannot explain why strong probabilistic support is insufficient for warranted assertion.

Finally, (T-SUFF) seems too weak (Lackey 2007: 607).<sup>20</sup> It surely does not follow from the fact that one’s assertion expresses a truth that one’s assertion is warranted, since one’s assertion might be based on flimsy evidence, wishful thinking or irrational conviction. It speaks in favour of (K) that it delivers what appears to be the right verdict about such cases. An assertion which is true but based on, say,

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<sup>20</sup> Douven (2006: 480), Hill and Schechter (2007: 109), Lackey (2007: 596, 607) and Levin (2008: 367-380) complain that (T-NEC) is too strong on the grounds that there can be warrant to assert falsehoods, for example, when one has misleading evidence that suggests that the assertion is true. Other than to note that the suggestion that one might derive (JB) from (T) goes some way to meeting this concern, I shall not address it. My principal focus is the dispute between the proponents of the truth view and of the knowledge view; both agree that, according to whatever norm fundamentally governs assertion, one may assert that  $p$  only if it is true that  $p$ .

irrational conviction is unwarranted, since the subject does not know what she asserts.<sup>21</sup>

### 3 Going Gricean

Having summarised the considerations which seem to support the knowledge view and to cast doubt on the truth view, I shall critically examine Weiner's recent attempt to show that the proponent of (T-NEC) can account for the relevant data. Though sympathetic to (T-NEC), I shall argue that Weiner's defence of it is unsuccessful, the details of which, to my knowledge, have yet to receive critical attention.<sup>22</sup>

Consider again Elliot's (true) assertion of:

(2) Your ticket didn't win.

Weiner argues that the truth view can account for its inappropriateness by appeal to the idea that, in addition to the norms specific to assertion, there are general norms governing conversation. Although Elliot's assertion does not violate the truth norm, Weiner claims, it violates the norms that determine conversational propriety (2005: 232ff); specifically, it violates the maxim of Quantity (Grice 1989: 26), according to which one's contribution to a conversation must be no more informative than necessary. Presumably, Weiner suggests, Stanley is already aware of the overwhelming likelihood that his ticket didn't win and does not need reminding of this. In that case, asserting (2) would have a point only if Elliot were party to 'inside information' which would give Stanley additional reason to believe that his ticket

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<sup>21</sup> Williamson also complains that being subject to (T) does not distinguish assertion from other speech acts, such as conjecture (2000: 244). I shall set this aside, since the present focus is not whether one can distinguish assertion from all other speech acts by appeal only to the norms governing it.

<sup>22</sup> Lackey (2007) objects to the primary/secondary propriety distinction, which part of Weiner's defence of the truth view depends upon. It seems to me that drawing some such distinction is unavoidable, though I shall not pursue the issue here. For a response to Lackey, see (Weiner 2007: §4).

didn't win. So, Elliot's assertion conversationally implicates that he has such information and, since this implicature is false, the assertion is inappropriate.<sup>23</sup>

Weiner's attempt to explain the impropriety of Elliot's assertion consistently with the truth view is problematic. First, grant that, for the reasons Weiner gives, Elliot's assertion conversationally implicates that he has "inside information". It is possible that Elliot has such information, only not of the sort that would put him in a position to know that the ticket didn't win. Suppose that Elliot knows that the balls are weighted in a way which is unfavourable to Stanley's ticket, so the odds of its having won are much lower than Stanley realises. In such a situation, what Elliot implicates in asserting (2), namely, that he has inside information which gives Stanley additional reason to believe his ticket lost, is *true*. Hence, Elliot's assertion is not conversationally inappropriate; nonetheless, it still seems as though Elliot should not flat-out assert that the ticket lost. The truth view seems unable to account for this, since Elliot's assertion is true and supported by strong probabilistic grounds, indeed, stronger than previously realised.

Second, if an assertion of (2) is conversationally inappropriate for the reasons Weiner gives, it ought to be possible for Elliot to assert (2) with propriety by cancelling the implicature. However, as Williamson points out (2000: 248) in anticipation of an account of this sort, it seems inappropriate for Elliot to assert, 'Your ticket didn't win, but I don't have inside information that suggests that your ticket didn't win'. Indeed, one might add, this attempt to cancel the implicature sounds perilously close to an assertion of, 'Your ticket didn't win, but I don't know that your ticket didn't win', which is a Moorean absurdity. (I shall discuss Weiner's account of Moorean assertions below.)

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<sup>23</sup> Williamson (2000: 247-248) anticipates this kind of Gricean story. He objects that such an account wrongly implies that asserting (1) is inappropriate in the same way as asserting that Stanley's ticket almost certainly did not win. For a response, see Weiner 2005: 233-234.

In response to the second point, Weiner (2005: 234) tries to explain why asserting (2) remains inappropriate despite the cancelled false implicature by suggesting that cancelling the implicature leaves Elliot with an overly informative assertion. He violates the maxim of Quantity, since Stanley is already aware of the probability that his ticket lost.

This points to a further problem with Weiner's account, which Williamson also anticipates (2000: 247), namely, that it does not cover cases in which the audience, in this case Stanley, appears not to be aware of the likelihood of the ticket's having lost.

To deal with such cases, Weiner supplements his explanation by appealing to DeRose's (2002: 180) distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' propriety (a version of the idea that one might derive (JB) from (T)). According to the truth view, an assertion is warranted in the primary sense only if it expresses a truth. This generates a secondary propriety, according to which an assertion is warranted only if there is evidence that the assertion is true. In turn, Weiner continues (2005: 235), this suggests that when an assertion is made there is a legitimate expectation that the speaker has secondary warrant for what she asserts. In the case that concerns us, the 'most likely' warrant—namely, inside information—is the kind that would put the speaker in a position to know what she asserts. Hence, Elliot's assertion of (2) is, though true and so warranted in the primary sense, unwarranted in the secondary sense, since the secondary warrant which Stanley legitimately expects to be present is lacking.

One might wonder why Stanley has reason to expect the secondary warrant for the assertion to be knowledge-affording rather than, say, merely probabilistic. Anticipating this, Weiner appeals to another conversational norm, the maxim of

Manner (Grice 1989: 27), which requires, among other things, participants in a conversation to avoid ambiguity. According to Weiner (2005: 236), (2) is ‘ambiguous between two kinds of warrant’. In asserting (2), Elliot conversationally implicates that he has non-probabilistic warrant, since, if the warrant were merely probabilistic, he should have asserted:

(3) Your ticket almost certainly didn’t win.

Since, Weiner concludes, in asserting (2), Elliot falsely implicates that there is secondary non-probabilistic warrant for doing so, his assertion is improper.

This story faces two difficulties. First, Elliot need not violate the maxim of Manner in asserting (2) in the absence of warrant sufficient for knowledge. Granting that (2) is ambiguous in the way Weiner suggests, suppose Elliot asserts (2) in a context in which it is apparent that whatever warrant there is for doing so is probabilistic. In this context, Elliot’s assertion would not be ambiguous in the relevant sense (any more than it would be ambiguous to assert that the bank is busy when stood beside a river). Since here Stanley could not reasonably take Elliot to have knowledge-affording grounds for his assertion, that assertion would not generate the implicature that he does. In which case, so long as there is some probabilistic warrant for asserting (2), and assuming Stanley appears unaware of the odds that his ticket lost, Elliot’s assertion violates neither the maxim of Manner nor the secondary propriety. Nonetheless, it still seems unwarranted to assert (flat-out) that Stanley’s ticket didn’t win. Weiner fails to account for this.

Second, supposing that Elliot’s assertion of (2) does conversationally implicate that he has knowledge-affording secondary warrant for doing so. In that case, to return to an issue raised earlier, it should be possible for Elliot to cancel the implicature by adding, ‘but I don’t know that the ticket didn’t win’. Not only does this

seem not to remove the conversational impropriety, it seems to result in a Moorean absurdity!

This is an appropriate point to examine Weiner's attempt to account for Moorean assertions consistently with the truth view. Consider again:

(1) Dogs bark, but I don't know that dogs bark.

Weiner's explanation of its absurdity exploits now-familiar ideas (2005: 237-238).

When asserting the first conjunct, he suggests, one's audience reasonably expects there to be (secondary) warrant for doing so. Since the "most likely" warrant would be knowledge-affording, one conversationally implicates that one knows that dogs bark. However, in asserting the second conjunct, one denies that there is such warrant. Hence, Weiner concludes, asserting (1) is conversationally inappropriate, even if it accords with (T-NEC).

On Weiner's view, assertions of (1) and the like are absurd and improper because to assert the right-hand side is to deny what is implicated by one's assertion of the left-hand side. But cancelling an implicature is not usually absurd and typically removes rather than results in impropriety. It would not be absurd, to use a well-worn example, to assert, when writing a reference, that Jones has nice hand-writing but I don't mean to imply that he is a poor philosopher. Indeed, if Jones is not a poor philosopher, then cancelling the false implicature by asserting the second conjunct serves to prevent any impropriety that the assertion of the first conjunct would otherwise involve. By the same token, rather than explain why asserting (1) seems improper, Weiner's account would seem to suggest that it is not. So, Weiner simply fails to explain what is problematic about Moorean assertions.

The prospects for defending the truth view by appeal to the general principles governing conversational exchange look dim. In what follows, I shall provide a very different defence of the truth view but first I shall take what might seem like a detour.

#### 4 Being and having

It is important to distinguish the fact that there *is* a reason for S to  $\phi$  from the fact that S *has* a reason to  $\phi$ . At the superficial level, ordinary language cuts across this distinction. One might equally say that there is a reason for Hayley to go to the cinema, namely, that the new Herzog film is showing, and that Hayley has a reason to go to the cinema, namely, that the new Herzog film is showing.

To say that there *is* a reason for S to  $\phi$  *in the relevant sense* is to say only that there exists some reason for S to  $\phi$ ; it is to say nothing about S's awareness of that reason or her epistemic relation to it. So, it is consistent with there being a reason for S to  $\phi$  that S is ignorant of it.

To say that S *has* a reason to  $\phi$  *in the relevant sense* is not merely to say that there exists some reason for S to  $\phi$ , but that in some way this reason is in S's possession, that she is aware of or recognises it, that she stands in a suitable epistemic relation to it. Specifically, to say that S *has* a reason to  $\phi$  *in the relevant sense* is to say that she is able to act in light of or for that reason, that she is in a position to  $\phi$  because of it.

I take this distinction to be relatively uncontroversial. But what does it take to *have* a reason (so understood)? An influential answer to this is as follows:

(POSSESSION) The fact that  $p$  can be one's reason for  $\phi$ ing if and only if one knows that  $p$

According to this principle, to be in a position to act in light of or for the fact which provides a reason, one must know it.<sup>24</sup> Returning to the above example, if (POSSESSION) is true, the fact that the new Herzog film is showing can be Hayley's reason for going to the cinema only if she knows that the new Herzog film is showing, say, as a result of having read the film-listings.

Note that (POSSESSION) concerns the reasons which are facts. Perhaps there is a sense in which one's reason for  $\phi$ ing can be that  $p$ , although it is false that  $p$  and so one does not know that  $p$ , so long as one believes that  $p$  and that  $p$  would have been a reason for  $\phi$ ing had it been the case (cf. Hornsby 2008). Be that as it may, (POSSESSION), restricted to the reasons there actually are, suffices for present purposes.

Proponents of some version of (POSSESSION) include several of the foremost advocates of the knowledge view of assertion—for example, Unger (1975: 206ff), Williamson<sup>25</sup> and Stanley and Hawthorne (2008: §2)—as well as prominent philosophers of action and practical reason not participating in the debate over assertion—for example, Hornsby (2008) and Hyman (1999; 2006; 2010).

My aim in this paper is not to argue for (POSSESSION) but to take it for granted and consider its implications for the debate concerning norms of assertion. Evidently, there is not space here to provide a conclusive case for, or comprehensive defence of, the thesis. However, some attempt to motivate it is called for.

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<sup>24</sup> The notion of having a reason this principle concerns should not be confused with that which Skorupski introduces (2009: §5). For Skorupski, that  $p$  might be a reason one 'has' to  $\phi$ , what he calls a 'warranted reason', though it is false that  $p$  or one does not believe that  $p$  (when, relative to what Skorupski calls one's 'epistemic state', there is sufficient reason for one to believe that there is reason for one to  $\phi$ , whether or not there is or one so believes). Whatever the significance of Skorupski's notion of having a reason, it does not correspond to that which I employ here and in what follows.

<sup>25</sup> Williamson claims that that  $p$  can be one's evidence if and only if one knows that  $p$  (2000: ch. 9). So, he would certainly endorse (POSSESSION) in the case of theoretical reasons. Moreover, Williamson says that it is 'plausible' to think that 'One knows that A if and only if one's reason for doing something can be A' (2000: 64n1; cf. 200n10).



Part of (POSSESSION)'s appeal stems from our intuitions concerning scenarios like the following.<sup>26</sup> Pip opens the cupboard. It is evident that his reason for doing so cannot be that it contains chocolate, if he does not believe this. Moreover, his reason for opening the cupboard, the reason in light of which he does so, cannot be the fact that it contains chocolate, if the cupboard does not contain chocolate. Alternatively, if the cupboard does not contain chocolate, Pip cannot be said to have opened the cupboard because it contains chocolate.

Suppose now that Pip earlier saw what looked like chocolate in the cupboard, and so, with justification, believes that there is chocolate in the cupboard. Unbeknownst to Pip, what he saw was play-food. Nonetheless, his belief is true—there is chocolate in the cupboard (hidden at the back). It seems wrong to say that the reason in light of which Pip opens the cupboard is the fact that it contains chocolate, or that he opened the cupboard because, i.e. for the reason that, it contains chocolate. In contrast, if Pip knows that the cupboard contains chocolate, it seems unproblematic to suppose that he opens the cupboard for that reason, that he does so in light of the fact that it contains chocolate.

While there is no doubt more to say about such cases, they provide prima facie support for (POSSESSION). As Unger says, it appears that 'any necessary condition for knowing must be satisfied for something to be someone's reason and, on the other hand, no matter how many conditions are satisfied the thing will not be the person's reason unless the person knows' (1975: 210).

A less direct route to (POSSESSION) is via the idea that knowledge is the norm for practical reasoning. This idea is spelled out in various ways, but the following suffices for present purposes:

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<sup>26</sup> See Hyman 1999: 443-448; Hyman 2006: §9; Hornsby 2008: §1.3; and Unger 1975: 209-210.

(KPR) One may treat that  $p$  as a premise in one's practical reasoning if and only if one knows that  $p$

This principle or some version of it is endorsed by many of the foremost proponents of the knowledge view,<sup>27</sup> as well as philosophers not participating in the debate over assertion.<sup>28</sup>

Various arguments have been advanced in support of (KPR) and this is not the place to survey or assess them all. For present purposes, consider the following chain of practical reasoning concerning what to do with a lottery ticket:<sup>29</sup>

This ticket will lose.

So, if I keep the ticket I will gain nothing.

But if I sell the ticket I will get a penny.

So, I shall sell the ticket.

Assuming that the subject has no inside information, something is wrong with this reasoning. A plausible diagnosis is that, though one can have strong grounds for accepting the first premise, one cannot know it and so, given (KPR), one should not treat the lottery proposition as a premise in one's practical reasoning. Note that, if the subject knows the first premise, the reasoning would seem acceptable, as (KPR) predicts.

If a similar thesis holds for theoretical reasoning, then one arrives at the generalised:

(KR) One may treat that  $p$  as a premise in one's reasoning if and only if one knows that  $p$

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<sup>27</sup> See Hawthorne 2004: 29-31; Hawthorne and Stanley 2008; Stanley 2005: 9; and Williamson 2005: 227. Fantl and McGrath (2009: 69) accept (KPR-SUFF). For criticisms, see Neta 2009, though Neta is 'inclined to endorse' (POSSESSION).

<sup>28</sup> Greco (2010), for example, accepts (KPR-NEC).

<sup>29</sup> For the point to follow, and the example, see Hawthorne 2004: 30; Hawthorne and Stanley 2008: §1.

From (KR), it is a short step to (POSSESSION), as the latter seems to explain the former.<sup>30</sup> If that  $p$  can be one's reason for  $\phi$ ing just in case one knows that  $p$ , then it straightforwardly follows that it is a mistake to treat that  $p$  as one's reason for  $\phi$ ing just in case one does not know that  $p$ .

Finally, Williamson argues for the claim that that  $p$  can be one's evidence only if one knows that  $p$  by appeal to the 'function' of evidence. He writes:

When we prefer an hypothesis  $h$  to an hypothesis  $h^*$  because  $h$  explains our evidence  $e$  better than  $h^*$  does, we are standardly assuming  $e$  to be known; if we do not know  $e$ , why should  $h$ 's capacity to explain  $e$  confirm  $h$  for us? It is likewise hard to see why the probability of  $h$  on  $e$  should regulate our degree of belief in  $h$  unless we know  $e$ . Again, an incompatibility between  $h$  and  $e$  does not rule out  $h$  unless  $e$  is known (2000: 200).

He adds that, if one's evidence is one's knowledge, then 'adjusting our beliefs to the evidence has an obvious point. It is a way of adjusting them to the facts' (2000: 202).

One might provide parallel arguments in support of the more general (POSSESSION). Consider a case in which a subject has to choose between two incompatible courses of action. I need butter. Do I go to shop A or shop B (I can't go to both)? It is hard to see how the thought that A has butter and B does not could rule out going to shop B if, for all I know, B has butter and A does not. Likewise, to echo Williamson, if the reasons one has are the facts one knows, then being guided by one's reasons in deciding what to do has a point—it is a way of being guided by the facts. So, thinking about the function of reasons seems to support (POSSESSION).

(POSSESSION) refers to *reasons* for  $\phi$ ing. But, as discussed above, the candidate norms for assertion concern, not when there is reason for asserting something, but when there is warrant for doing so. Whatever is to be said in favour of

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<sup>30</sup> Hawthorne and Stanley make a similar point in passing (2008: §2).

(POSSESSION) restricted to reasons would speak in favour of a version of that thesis extended to warrants:

(POSSESSION) The fact that  $p$  can be one's reason *or warrant* for  $\phi$ ing if and only if one knows that  $p$

For the remainder, I shall treat (POSSESSION) as generalised in this way.<sup>31</sup> According to it, one is in a position to  $\phi$  in light of the fact which warrants doing so just in case one knows that fact.

To illustrate, suppose that the fact that it is snowing is a warrant for Harry to stay indoors (given that it is snowing, Harry may go to the shops later when the weather improves). Suppose also that Harry stays indoors. It does not follow that Harry stays indoors in light of the warrant for doing so; he might be unaware that it is snowing. While such ignorance does not change the fact that there is or exists warrant for Harry to stay indoors, it does mean that the fact that it is snowing cannot be a warrant Harry possesses (in the relevant sense) for staying indoors, that he is not in position to stay indoors in light of the fact that it is snowing, that is, with the warrant which exists for doing so.

Suppose now that Harry believes that it is snowing, having seen a weather report according to which it is snowing. Unbeknownst to Harry, the report was an elaborate hoax. Since he does not know that it is snowing, the fact that it is snowing is not a warrant which Harry possesses for staying indoors, and so he is not in a position to stay indoors in light of the fact that it is snowing, that is, with the warrant which exists for doing so.

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<sup>31</sup> To echo a point made earlier, one might allow that there is a sense in which a person can  $\phi$  with a certain warrant, namely, that  $p$ , although it is false that  $p$  and so she does not know that  $p$ , so long as she believes that  $p$  and that  $p$  would have been a warrant for  $\phi$ ing had it been the case. Be that as it may, (POSSESSION), restricted to the warrants which there actually are, suffices for present purposes.

In contrast, if Harry were to know that it is snowing, then it would be unproblematic to suppose that he is in a position to stay indoors in light of the fact that it is snowing, that is, with the warrant which exists for doing so.

## 5 Nothing but the truth

(POSSESSION) shows the knowledge view to be false while explaining why it might appear to be true. Hence, it serves both a critical and a diagnostic role. In addition, (POSSESSION) provides a defence of the truth view.<sup>32</sup>

No doubt the case sketched above in support of (POSSESSION) is not decisive but for the remainder I shall take it for granted. In defence, note, first, that (POSSESSION) is motivated independently of the issues at stake in the debate over the norms of assertion. Hence, it is a neutral datum available to any participant in that debate and there is nothing ad hoc about appealing to it in order to defend (T) or criticise (K). Second, recall that many of the principal advocates of the knowledge view endorse (POSSESSION). At the very least, then, the argument that follows shows that they need to choose between the knowledge view and (POSSESSION). Needless to say, I recommend the latter.

It is important to keep in view that (T) states what it takes for there to *be* warrant to assert that *p*. According to (T), there *is* warrant to assert that *p*, and so one may do so, if and only if it is true that *p*. So understood, (T) says nothing about what it is for one to *have* warrant to assert that *p*, or for a subject to be in a position to assert that *p* in the light of this warrant. This is precisely what one should expect from a

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<sup>32</sup> The arguments to follow might also provide a defence of the view that a norm of truth fundamentally governs *belief* and a challenge to the view that a norm of knowledge fundamentally governs belief, insofar as the arguments against the former and for the latter mirror those philosophers advance in the debate concerning assertion. For an overview of the debate concerning belief, and a rather different defence of the truth view with respect to belief, see (Whiting Forthcoming).

norm; a norm states the standards  $\phi$ ing has to meet, not what it takes for a subject to be aware that  $\phi$ ing meets those standards.

In light of this, I shall argue that, if a proponent of the truth view accepts (POSSESSION), she can easily account for the data which seems otherwise to speak in favour of the knowledge view. Consider challenges. I assert that the car is unsafe to drive. According to (T), there is warrant to assert this if and only if the car is unsafe to drive. Ever watchful, you respond, ‘How do you know that?’ Given (POSSESSION), this is entirely appropriate—perhaps there *is* warrant for the assertion, but you are asking if *I have* that warrant. Recall that typically what matters to our evaluation of a person and her actions is not simply that there *is* reason or warrant for what she does, but that she does what she does for that reason or in light of that warrant. This point is a general one, not restricted to acts of asserting.

Consider again Moorean assertions, such as:

(1) Dogs bark, but I don’t know that dogs bark.

According to the truth view, it is possible for there to *be* warrant to assert this (i.e. for (1) to be true). However, given (POSSESSION), it is not warrant one can *have* or act in the light of. If Holly has warrant to assert the first conjunct, she knows that dogs bark. But, if she knows that dogs bark, the second conjunct is false; in which case, Holly cannot have warrant to assert it, since there is no such warrant. Conversely, if there is warrant to assert the right-hand side, then Holly doesn’t know that dogs bark; in which case, Holly cannot have warrant to assert the left. So, Moorean assertions involving the notion of knowledge are absurd because in making such an assertion

one represents oneself as not having the warrant to do so. Alternatively, given (T) and (POSSESSION), one cannot possibly have warrant to assert (1) and its kin.<sup>33</sup>

Consider again Elliot's assertion of:

(2) Your ticket didn't win.

If (2) is true, (T) implies that there *is* warrant to assert this. However, the proponent of the truth view can point out that, given (POSSESSION) and the fact that Elliot cannot know that Stanley's ticket didn't win, Elliot cannot *have* warrant for asserting this. This seems adequate to account for our intuitions regarding lottery cases.

Finally, consider the charge that (T-SUFF) is too weak, since it implies that there is warrant to make true assertions on the basis of, say, irrational conviction. Given (POSSESSION), the proponent of the truth view can argue that these are cases in which there exists warrant for the assertion, but in which the subject lacks that warrant. To be in a position to assert that *p* in light of the warrant for doing so requires that one know that *p*, and one does not know that *p* if one has an irrational conviction that *p*.

In summary, by appealing to (POSSESSION), which is independently motivated and accepted by the knowledge view's advocates, one can show that the truth view is able to account for the data which would otherwise seem to undermine it.<sup>34</sup> As far as

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<sup>33</sup> One might wonder how there can *be* warrant which no subject could *have*. If one finds this idea problematic, one could suggest that it is a constraint on a fact's being a reason or warrant that it could be a person's reason or warrant. I have no quarrel with this.

<sup>34</sup> One might doubt that the considerations in light of or on the basis of which a person asserts typically concern whatever warrants doing so. What warrants or entitles a person to make an assertion is a quite different matter, one might think, from what moves her to do so or what she takes into account when doing so. When I assert that the train arrives at 8pm, for example, I might do so on the grounds that so-and-so needs to catch the train and does not have a timetable to hand—I do not usually give a thought to whether the warrant for performing this speech act is present. This might suggest that one should not typically expect a subject asserting something to be doing so in light of whatever warrants doing so, which might in turn cause problems for my defence of the truth view.

If my account were to assume that one should expect a subject to make an assertion simply on the grounds that the warrant for doing so obtains, it might be in trouble. But it need only assume that one should expect that whether or not there is warrant for doing so is something a subject takes into account when asserting something, that the fact that the warrant for doing so exists is among the considerations in light of which she makes an assertion, and that whether or not the subject satisfies

the data goes, then, the knowledge view and the truth view are on all fours. Since the latter, unlike the former, accords with the platitudinous (C), it is tempting to conclude that the balance tips in favour of the truth view. However, since being a platitude does not preclude being contentious, I shall not rely on this point; instead, I shall argue that (POSSESSION) casts doubt on the knowledge view.

(K), like (T), is a thesis about when there *is* warrant to assert that *p*, namely, when one knows that *p*.<sup>35</sup> This, together with (POSSESSION), implies that to *have* warrant to assert that *p*, one must know *that one knows that p*, i.e. one must possess second-order knowledge. Alternatively, on this view, asserting in the light of the warrant to do so requires self-knowledge. This seems wrong. When a speaker asserts that *p* without knowing that she knows that *p*, it does not appear that she is asserting that *p* without having the warrant to do so. Surely, to *have* warrant to assert that *p*, the speaker does not need to find out about herself, specifically, about her epistemic relation to the fact that *p*; it seems enough for her to find out whether or not *p*.

Perhaps these are not arguments but appeals to intuition. To bolster them, recall the general point, not specific to assertion, that in cases where there *is* warrant to  $\phi$  it often matters to us and our evaluation of a person whether or not she *has* warrant for  $\phi$ ing. As a result, when a person  $\phi$ s, one can challenge her by querying whether there exists warrant for  $\phi$ ing, or by querying whether she possesses the warrant for  $\phi$ ing. Given this, and given (K) and (POSSESSION), we should expect challenges to assertions to come in at least two forms. If David asserts that the bank is

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this expectation makes a difference to how one evaluates her performance. This assumption seems unproblematic.

Furthermore, note that the assumption seems especially unproblematic on the truth view. According to (TRUTH), what warrants asserting that the train leaves at 8pm is simply the fact that the train leaves at 8pm. It is surely plausible to think that, when a subject asserts that the train leaves at 8pm, she typically takes into account whether or not it is 8pm. By the same token, it seems legitimate to expect a subject making this assertion to be doing so in light of such considerations.

<sup>35</sup> I shall defend this claim in the following section (§6).



closed, one might ask, ‘Do you know that the bank is closed?’, which would be to ask if there *is* warrant for David’s assertion. Alternatively, on the view under consideration, one might raise a challenge by asking, ‘Do you know that you know that the bank is closed?’, which would be to ask if David *has* warrant for his assertion, if he made his assertion in light of or with the warrant for doing so. However, challenges of the latter sort are unheard of, except in very unusual contexts, and would ordinarily be excessive. If David were to fail to meet the challenge, it would surely not follow that he has no warrant for asserting that the bank is closed; after all, he might know that it is. This suggests that having warrant for assertion does not require second-order knowledge, which in turn suggests that there being warrant for assertion does not require first-order knowledge.

A proponent of the knowledge view might reply that typically we assume that a subject who knows that  $p$  also knows that she knows that  $p$ . So, returning to the example, one would not typically bother to challenge whether David knows that he knows that the bank is closed, since, if one is assured that David has the relevant first-order knowledge, one is assured that he has the relevant second-order knowledge.

However, this reply could at most account for the fact that querying whether the subject who makes an assertion knows that she knows what she asserts is *uncommon*. It does not seem to explain why, as noted above, such a challenge seems *excessive*.

In light of (POSSESSION), the knowledge view is hard to accept. Of course, there are costs to any theory but, since the truth view is able to account for the data typically offered in support of the knowledge view, there seems no reason to pay the price.

By appeal to (POSSESSION), a proponent of the truth view is in addition able to diagnose the attraction of the knowledge view; it rests on a failure to appreciate the distinction between, and so on the conflation of, what it takes for there to *be* warrant for asserting and what it takes for a subject to *have* that warrant, to be in a position to assert with or in the light of it. Moreover, since our evaluations of assertions sometimes track, not simply the existence of warrant but also its possession, the data concerning those evaluations, which in large part motivates the knowledge view, encourages such a conflation. Given (POSSESSION), it is no surprise that knowledge might appear to be the norm of assertion, that, whenever someone asserts, the question of whether she knows what she asserts is a live one.<sup>36</sup>

## 6 Objections and replies

A possible response is to ask whether there is any real dispute between me and the advocate of the knowledge view. Wasn't it only ever intended as an account of what it is to possess warrant, not of what it is for there to be warrant?

There is no evidence for this. First, proponents of the knowledge view *contrast* (K) with (T) (e.g. Williamson 2000: 242ff), which is hardly what one would expect if (K) were offered as an account of what it is to possess—in the relevant sense—warrant for assertion while (T) is an account of what it is for there to exist such warrant. (T) is not remotely plausible as an account of the former; it says nothing about the relation a subject must stand in to the truth if she is to be in a position to

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<sup>36</sup> One might think that some version of the truth view in conjunction with (POSSESSION) delivers some version of the knowledge view. Suppose that the warrant to assert that  $p$  is the fact that  $p$ . Suppose further that one should not  $\phi$  unless one has (in the relevant sense) the warrant for  $\phi$ ing. It follows, given (POSSESSION), that one should not assert that  $p$  unless one knows that  $p$ .

If this line of thought is correct, then a proponent of the truth view might still claim to have shown, contra the knowledge view as it is usually presented (see Williamson 2000: 11), that truth provides the *fundamental* norm for assertion and so that the knowledge norm is at best derivative. However, I think that the proponent of the truth view should reject the line of thought on the grounds that the principle that one should not  $\phi$  unless one possesses the warrant for  $\phi$ ing is false.

assert with the warrant for doing so, and it hardly follows from the mere fact that  $p$  that a subject is able to assert in light of the warrant for doing so—after all, she might not even believe that  $p$ . Since the truth view can only concern what the warrant for assertion *is*, not what possessing such warrant requires, then one would expect the knowledge view also to concern what the warrant for assertion is, insofar as it is offered as a rival to the truth view.

Note also that *opponents* of the knowledge view typically present their alternatives as concerning what the warrant for assertion *is*, not what it is for subjects to be in a position to assert in the light of that warrant. For example, Weiner’s discussion of the relative merits of the truth and knowledge views presents both as competing accounts of what constitutes ‘the warrant’ for assertion (2005: esp. §3), as opposed to accounts of what it takes for subjects to possess such warrant. Thus, the tendency in the literature is not to view (K) and its competitors in the way the objection suggests.

Second, while Williamson, for example, sometimes says that to *have* warrant to assert is to know what one asserts (2000: 258), this hardly shows that he is not offering an account of what it is for there to *be* warrant to assert, since, as discussed above, one might have warrant to  $\phi$  in one sense without having warrant to  $\phi$  in the relevant sense (i.e. that of being able to  $\phi$  in light of or with that warrant). Moreover, Williamson as often talks of there *being* warrant to assert when there is knowledge or of knowledge being what warrants assertion. There can certainly be warrant without a subject possessing it. Indeed, Williamson goes so far as to say that his ‘account can be summarized in the slogan “Only knowledge warrants assertion”’ (2000: 243; cf. 250,

253).<sup>37</sup> Here Williamson explicitly presents the knowledge view as concerning *what it is* that warrants assertion, not what it is for a subject to *possess* that warrant in the sense of being in a position to assert with or in light of it.<sup>38</sup>

Third, if the knowledge view is intended as a thesis only about the requirements on possessing warrant to assert, it is not a distinctive thesis specifically about assertion. If (POSSESSION) is correct, then having warrant or reason to do *anything* requires knowledge of the fact that constitutes that warrant or reason.<sup>39</sup>

So, I conclude, there is a genuine dispute here. Of course, once (POSSESSION) is in clear view and its bearing on the debate at hand is made apparent, the proponent of the knowledge view might reject (K) in favour of (T) and claim only that knowledge is required for acting in the light of the fact which, according to (T), warrants assertion. That is precisely what I recommend.

A different concern with my argument against the knowledge view and in defence of the truth view might be expressed as follows: isn't the distinction between there being warrant and a subject's having warrant just the distinction between primary and secondary propriety—or some version of it—in disguise? If so, my arguments do not contribute anything new to the debate.

The answer to this question is: no. First, to distinguish primary and secondary propriety is to distinguish between the warrants that *exist*. If one holds that there is (primary) warrant to assert that *p* only if *p*, one might hold that there is (secondary) warrant to assert that *p* only if there is evidence that *p*. Moreover, for both primary

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<sup>37</sup> Again, Williamson states that 'knowledge is what justifies belief [and assertion]' (2000: 10). Here knowledge *is* the justification (or warrant), not what enables one to possess the justification or warrant.

<sup>38</sup> Recall also that proponents of the knowledge view do *not* say of a lottery case in which one (truly) asserts that one's ticket lost that, though there *is* warrant for the assertion, it is not warrant one asserts in light of—the position I defend in §5—but that in such cases warrant is simply lacking.

<sup>39</sup> To make a related point in a somewhat tendentious way, the objection at hand seems to turn the knowledge view from a thesis concerning the *normative* reasons for and against asserting that *p* into a thesis concerning what can be a subject's *motivating* reasons for asserting that *p*, when the debate at hand was supposed to be precisely over the *norms* of assertion.

and secondary warrant, one can ask what it takes to *have* it. According to (POSSESSION), and following the previous proposal, to have primary warrant to assert that  $p$  one must know that  $p$ , while to have secondary warrant to assert that  $p$  one must know the facts that provide evidence that  $p$ .

Note also that the primary/secondary distinction is motivated by very different considerations than those which motivate the being/having warrant distinction. The former is encouraged in large part by reflection on what calls for praise and blame, or by thinking about the predicament of a subject who needs to act without access to all the facts, reflection and thinking which seems to call for the introduction of (secondary) norm to which the subject's assertions might answer which is less demanding than the supposedly fundamental (primary) norm. This is simply *not* the way in which the being/having distinction is motivated (see §4 above) and, moreover, having warrant for one's assertion—in the sense spelled out by (POSSESSION)—is a *more*, not less, demanding business than there being warrant for that assertion.

So, whether there is a distinction between primary and secondary propriety and how to understand it is simply a separate issue from that of whether there is a distinction between there being and a subject's having warrant and how to understand it.

## **7 Concluding remarks**

Knowledge is not the norm for assertion—truth is. But it is no surprise to find that in evaluating a subject making an assertion our focus is often on whether or not she knows what she asserts. There *is* warrant to assert that spring has sprung just in case it is true that spring has sprung but one *has* this warrant and is in a position to act in light of it just in case one knows that spring has sprung.

One might think that it is a strike against the truth view that, in order to defend it, one has to appeal to a potentially controversial thesis, namely (POSSESSION), and in doing so draw on resources from other areas of philosophy or ideas which do not form part of the common ground on which the debate concerning the norms of assertion proceeds. However, surely it is entirely proper to think that to resolve a dispute about the *normative* considerations pertaining to the *act* of assertion one needs to turn to the philosophy of *normativity* and the philosophy of *action* and, in doing so, to situate a local debate in a larger theoretical context. Moreover, though I have not shown that (POSSESSION) is true—which is clearly beyond the scope of this paper—it is a principle many proponents of the knowledge view already accept and the arguments in its favour do not concern the norms of assertion.

In closing, it is worth asking what would explain the fact that there exists a speech act, namely assertion, governed by (T)? It does not seem difficult to answer this, so long as one keeps in view that the norm claims only that one *may* assert truths, not that one *ought* to, and that one *may not* assert falsehoods. Falsehoods are liable to mislead and those who hear false assertions are receiving misinformation. Arguably, it is finally bad to believe falsely; in any event, to do so is instrumentally bad (other things being equal), since false beliefs thwart one's ability to satisfy one's desires and plans. In contrast, it is less easy to see why the knowledge view should be correct. According to (K), one *may not* assert propositions one does not know. But why, since those propositions might be true (and, indeed, justified)? One might appeal to the thought that knowledge is better than anything which falls short of it. Even if that is true, and it is notoriously difficult to show that it is, it does not follow that true belief is bad, only that it is not as good as knowledge. It remains unclear, then, why it would be the case that one may not assert truths which are not known.

These (tentative) remarks, like the preceding discussion, support the truth view. So, there seems good reason to think that truth, and nothing but the truth, is the norm of assertion.

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