

## **Workshop “Assertion, Norms and Effects”**

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## ***Abstracts***

### **Assertion and its norm**

Elizabeth Fricker (Magdalen College, Oxford)

Assertion is distinguished as an act-type by its performative force: a speaker who asserts that P thereby assumes responsibility for the truth of P to her audience. So one who asserts P presents herself as assuming responsibility for the truth of P; hence she presents herself as so epistemically placed as to properly do so. Thus an assertion is proper only if the speaker is indeed so placed. So assertion is governed by the norm: Assert P only if one is epistemically so placed as to properly assume responsibility for the truth of P.

An assertion is a telling when its primary conversational aim is to enable the audience to form belief in what is told on the teller’s say-so. In these cases the specific manner of undertaking of responsibility for truth for what is asserted, P, is that the audience may believe P on the speaker’s say-so. The performative force of her utterance is to publicly make available that right. So the speaker presents herself as epistemically so placed as to properly offer that right. She is so, some special cases aside, just if she knows what she states – this role is one fix on our concept of knowledge. So tellings are governed by this specific instantiation of the more general norm for assertion: One must tell that P only if one knows that P.

A question arises about the direction of explanation between the performative force of assertion, and the epistemic norm it is governed by. Sanford Goldberg (*Assertion* 2015 OUP) argues that the explanatorily fundamental feature of assertion is the epistemic norm that governs it, and that other characteristic features can be explained as derived from this, given common knowledge of the norm. I take issue with Goldberg, and argue that the most fundamental feature of assertion is its performative force, the epistemic norm governing it being a consequence of this.

### **Scorekeeping**

Paal Antonsen (Bergen)

An influential suggestion from David Lewis is that we should think of assertions in terms of how they affect the ‘conversational score’ (Lewis, 1979). The focus should not be on the attitudes we express, or the norms for when to do so, but on the changes we bring about. So, what makes a speech act a case of assertion is to be explained in terms of its characteristic effect. This idea has been developed in two different directions: one normative and one informational.

(A) To assert is to undertake commitments.

(B) To assert is to propose to add information to the common ground.

While (A) and (B) are not mutually exclusive, they are often seen as rivals. The most sophisticated versions of the first direction is due to Brandom (1983, 1994, 2008) and MacFarlane (2003, 2005, 2011). For Brandom a conversational score is a collection of normative statuses, encapsulated in their deontic score. When we make assertions we alter the deontic score by adding further commitments. In this way, (A) focuses on the personal aspect of communication. Taking off in the other direction, this account has been pioneered by Stalnaker (1978, 1998, 2002). For him a conversational score is a set of propositions mutually accepted among the speakers, the so-called common ground. The way an assertion affects the common

ground is that, when successful, it adds further information to the shared pool. As such, (B) focuses on the interpersonal aspect of communication.

In this talk, I propose a strategy for bringing the two directions together. (A) and (B) should not be seen as rivals, but as complementary. The motivation is that both accounts can legitimately claim to capture an important aspect of our practices of making assertions. A conversational score is a specification of the state of the conversation at some time. On the dual effect view of assertion that I propose, then, this specification will include both individual deontic scores and a shared common ground.

The main part of the talk is devoted to (A), outlining a formal account of deontic scores and how they are updated. Following Stalnaker's (2002) description of conversations as growing bodies of mutually accepted propositions, I go on to define the common ground as the intersection of individual speakers' deontic scores. Although (A) is given explanatory priority, this results in a way to accommodate (B) as a natural extension of undertaking commitments and proposing that others do the same.

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## Are assertions and implicatures governed by the same norm(s)?

David Austin (York)

Fricker (2012), following Williamson (1996), claims that assertion is governed by a constitutive norm, the condition of which is knowledge: assert that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ . Moreover, she claims that when one asserts that  $p$ , one incurs full responsibility for the truth of  $p$ . Sometimes, though, what is communicated is not asserted. The paradigm case being conversational implicature. According to Fricker, conversational implicature is not accompanied by full responsibility in the way that assertion is, for two reasons: (1) it is not clear exactly what is communicated; (2) the hearer has a choice about what to infer from what the speaker says. She concludes, therefore, that conversational implicature is not governed by assertion's constitutive knowledge norm.

In this paper, I propose the following. Even if we suppose that assertion is governed by a constitutive knowledge norm, neither (1) nor (2) support the conclusion that conversational implicature cannot be governed by it. Furthermore, I propose that what constitutes assertion is best accounted for not in terms of normativity but in terms of communicative intention. On this model, assertion and conversational implicature can be seen to be governed by the same norm(s), those offered by Grice (1989).

First, developing on Szabó (2016), I suggest that the best way to understand what is communicated via conversational implicature is by using the notion of a *question under discussion*. Diverging from Szabó, I argue that speakers provide straight answers to such questions via conversational implicature, and so it is clear exactly what is communicated. I bolster this with Langton's (pc. 2017) recent observation that Moorean paradoxicality can apply to implicature as well as assertion. Second, conversational implicature raises puzzling questions about who is responsible for the hearer's belief in what is communicated, since the hearer has a choice about what to infer from what the speaker says, as Fricker notes. By using the following trichotomy, what I call the shared *conversational responsibility*, the speaker's *informational responsibility*, and the hearer's *inferential responsibility*, I show that even though the hearer has a choice about what to infer from what the speaker says, the speaker still incurs full responsibility for the truth of what is communicated. Third, it has been said by Williamson (pc. 2017), "Since conversational implicatures are generated by more general social norms, they don't need constitutive norms of their own." Why not respond, 'Assertion doesn't need a constitutive norm of its own, either'? As Keiser (forthcoming) argues, constitutive norm accounts inherit a substantial theoretical burden: providing necessary and sufficient conditions for assertion by specifying the relevant relation which holds between asserters and the proposed norm. An account of

assertion defined in terms of communicative intention is better placed to specify the relevant relation. Moreover, when we understand assertion and conversational implicature in these terms, we can see why both can be governed by the same norm(s): in virtue of sharing the same communicative intention. I end by demonstrating that assertion can be governed by norms with weaker conditions than conversational implicature, and vice versa.

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## Testimony, assertion, and practical risks

Felix Bräuer (Berlin)

Under which conditions are our testimony-based beliefs (TBBs) justified? Traditionally, the answer has either been reductionist<sup>1</sup> or anti-reductionist<sup>2</sup>: either our justification reduces to non-testimonial reasons, or we have a presumptive, though defeasible, right to believe what we are told. However, different cases pull in different directions.<sup>3</sup> Intuitively, someone asking for the time is subject to different epistemic standards than a surgeon consulting a colleague before a dangerous operation. Following this line of thought, this paper provides an account of testimonial justification that captures our reductionist as well as our anti-reductionist intuitions. It is argued that the speaker's commitment to an epistemic norm gives the hearer a presumptive right to believe what she is told. However, this justification doesn't apply to situations with high practical risks. Here, the hearer needs reductive reasons to believe her interlocutor.

It is relatively uncontroversial to assume that testifying is an assertoric speech act<sup>4</sup> and that, in making an assertion, the speaker commits herself to fulfilling a certain epistemic norm.<sup>5</sup> This in turn gives the hearer a presumptive right to believe her interlocutor.<sup>6</sup> More precisely, she is justified to believe that her interlocutor speaks truthfully and with due diligence. This conforms to our attitude towards the aspects of our lives that are norm-governed. We assume the norms to be upheld, provided we don't have concrete reasons for doubt.<sup>7</sup> – This straightforwardly explains our intuitions concerning the *time-case*.

However, this norm-based justification doesn't justify our TBBs in high-risk situations like the *surgeon-case*. In order to show this, I'm going to pick up on motives from Craig's (1990) genealogy of the concept of knowledge. According to Craig, "knowledge" serves to flag good informants in a wide variety of practical situations. In order to do so, the epistemic standards for calling someone a "knower" have to be quite high. Yet, they can't be exceedingly high. If the latter was the case, very few people could be called "knowers" and the concept would lose its utility.<sup>8</sup>

Similar considerations apply to the epistemic norm governing testimony. This norm, I am going to argue, shall make sure that we receive high-quality information in a wide variety of practical situations. In order to do so, the standards connected to testifying have to be quite high. Yet, they can't be exceedingly high. If this was the case, these standards would often prevent us from exchanging information, thus undermining the very function of the norm. This has the following consequence: someone in a high-risk situation can't assume that the epistemic norm governing testimony is tailored to her needs. Therefore, she needs reductive reasons to believe that her interlocutor is especially qualified to give her the desired information. The surgeon, for example, needs to know that her colleague is aware of the dangers and is an expert in the relevant field of medicine.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. Hume (1748/1999), Fricker (1994, 1995), Van Cleve (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. Reid (1785/2002), Coady (1992), Burge (1993), Foley (2001).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. Fricker (1995), Kusch (2002), Greco (2013, 2015), Freedman (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Goldberg (2011, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Some philosophers have argued for knowledge being the norm of assertion – cf. e.g. Williamson (2000), DeRose (2002), Hawthorne (2004), Stanley (2005), Stanley and Hawthorne (2008). Others have argued for an evidence-based norm – cf. e.g. Grice (1989), Pritchard (2005), Lackey (2008), Lawlor (2013). The above formulation is meant to be neutral regarding the question which norm applies.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Nickel (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ross (1986).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Henderson (2011).

## Assertion and presupposition in on-line language processing

Filippo Domaneschi (Genoa)

Presuppositions (PSPs) are the level of background information communicated as taken for granted. For example, the utterance

(1) Diana stopped smoking

introduces the presupposition

(1a) Diana used to smoke

Presuppositions are usually carried by “presupposition triggers” (PSP triggers), namely, lexical items and syntactic constructions that, if used in an utterance, activate a presupposition – e.g. definite descriptions, focus sensitive particles, or, as in (1), change of state verbs like *to stop* (Levinson, 1983).

According to the traditional Stalnaker-Karttunen-Heim semantic framework (cf. Heim 1990, Stalnaker 1974, Heim & Kratzer 1998), presuppositions constitute a restriction for the context update: a sentence *p* presupposes *q* if the use of *p* would be inappropriate and if *q* did not belong to the background of common presuppositions in a conversation. If the presupposition *q* is entailed by the context, then *q* is said to be *satisfied*. Conversely, if *q* does not belong to the common ground this leads to *presupposition failure*. If failure occurs, then speakers are supposed to repair it to make sense of the presupposing utterance and to allow the update of the context with its assertive content by means of *accommodation*, i.e. the process whereby the presupposition that is not satisfied is introduced in the context set in order to make the context update possible. In this perspective, presuppositions are considered conventional properties of lexical items (i.e., PSP-triggers), which constitute a *precondition for the comprehension of an utterance* and for the update of the context with its assertive component.

Recently, some authors have claimed that the presuppositions of certain triggers have a pragmatic source (Simons 2001, Absuch 2010). Simons (2001), for example, argues that the presuppositions of triggers such as *to stop* possess properties like suspendability and non-detachability that are typical of conversational inferences like conversational implicatures. In this view, the information that the speaker A presupposes (1a) is considered the result of a conversational inference that the addressee derives on the basis of what is said, i.e. *after the whole assertive content is computed*, plus the assumption that the speaker is behaving cooperatively.

In this work I provide experimental evidences against the view that PSPs have a conversational source. Experimental data collected in word-by-word self-paced reading task show that, with different classes of PSP triggers, presupposition accommodation takes place immediately, as just the trigger becomes available during the on-line sentence processing. This result disconfirms the prediction of the pragmatic view that PSPs are processed only after the whole assertive content is computed and provides partial evidence in support of the idea that PSPs are semantic properties encoded in the lexical meaning of the PSP triggers.

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## Normative (alethic) pluralism

Filippo Ferrari (Bonn)

The focus of this paper is an investigation into the alethic norms governing assertion, and more generally, judgement. Many philosophers have argued that truth is a norm of assertion and judgement (e.g. Dummett 1959, Gibbard 2005, Horwich 2013, Wedgwood 2007, Wright 1992). In this talk I will mostly focus on

judgement—understood as the cognitive mental counterpart of assertion, i.e. as the act of putting forward as true a proposition in the mind (Shah & Velleman 2005)—but I will elaborate on what I take to be the main connection between judgement and assertion vis-à-vis epistemic normativity.

The general thesis that truth is the norm of judgement has been given in a variety of formulations—that true judgements are the correct ones; that it is better to judge truly than to judge falsely; and that the truth is what judges ought to pursue in enquiry. I will not defend the general thesis, or any specific formulation of it. I assume that truth is a norm of judgement and that the various formulations that have been given are all partially correct. What I am primarily concerned with here are two core questions concerning the judgement-truth norm—namely, (i) what are the normative relationships between truth and judgement? And (ii) do these relationships vary or are they constant? I will show that there is an interesting kind of variability in the normative significance of disagreement and that such variability requires some flexibility in the normative function that truth exerts in different areas of discourse.

With that on board, I will argue, by means of a normative interpretation of Lynch's scope problem (Lynch 2009), that a monistic view on truth's normative function—what I call *Normative Alethic Monism (NAM)*—forces us to adopt a Procrustean attitude towards the normative significance of disagreement. For this reason, it is inadequate as a general model of the normativity of truth. I will then develop and defend a pluralist picture—what I call *Normative Alethic Pluralism (NAP)*—according to which (i) there is more than one correct judgement-truth norm and (ii) the normative relationships between truth and judgement vary in relation to the subject matter of the judgement. My conclusion will be that NAP promises to score better than normative alethic monism in addressing the interesting variability in the normative significance of disagreement.

For the purpose of this talk, I will leave discussion of both the metaphysical issue of what grounds these normative relationships and the epistemic issue of what justifies them for another occasion. In particular, I take no stand in this talk on the question of whether truth's normative function over judgements reflects a characteristic intrinsic to the nature of truth or whether it is grounded in some features external to truth's nature.

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### **“I promise I did not steal your money”. Interpersonal commitment in assertion**

Margherita Isella (San Raffaele, Milan)

Some assertions seem to produce similar effects as promises. For instance, the assertion ‘(I promise) I did not steal your money’ seems to produce similar effects as the promise ‘(I promise) I will not steal your money’ on the hearer's interpersonal trust in the speaker, as well as interpersonal blame towards the speaker in case the speech act is not fulfilled. I argue that the interpersonal weight of a speech act depends on how much (according to the common ground between speaker and hearer) the hearer might potentially rely on that speech act. Promises always involve relatively high reliance because they are by definition directed at the hearer's interests (see preparatory condition for promising; Searle, 1969). However, assertions can also involve high reliance and therefore carry high interpersonal weight. I discuss the theoretical implications of this parallel for traditional taxonomies of illocutionary acts (Searle, 1969; Searle & Vandervaken, 1985), focusing on the notion of commitment. I then turn to the empirical literature to assess whether it supports the intuition that the effects of assertions and promises depend on the hearer's potential reliance, and outline a proposal for a study to directly test that intuition.

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## Beyond assertion: How vocatives illuminate slurs

Robin Beth Jeshion (Southern California)

Most contemporary work on the semantics and pragmatics of slurring terms takes as paramount linguistic data of slur-containing asserted declaratives. Theorists have primarily focused on accounting for intuitions about truth of asserted content as well as the projective behavior of slurs. In this vein, philosophers have examined slurs as they occur under negation, in conditionals, and in modals; they have explored how slurs embed in attitude attributions; and have investigated the variable offense profile of slurs when used, mentioned, explicitly quoted, and employed in free indirect discourse. Some have reached somewhat beyond assertions of declaratives to investigate speech acts involving slurs in imperative and interrogative constructions.

Theorists have advanced different analyses of how slurs differ from their neutral counterparts. Among the reigning views are Semantic Descriptivism (Hom, Hom & May, Bach); Semantic Expressivism (Jeshion, Saka, Kaplan); Semantic Perspectivalism (Camp); Pure Pragmatic Affiliationism (Nunberg, Bollinger); Prohibitionism (Anderson & Lepore). The plethora of theories has borne fruit. Nevertheless, because of the near exclusive focus of slurs in asserted content, theorists have been incorrectly presuming that slurs and their neutral counterparts are syntactically equivalent, differing only in their semantics, pragmatics, or sociolinguistic properties. All contemporary theorizing (including my own previous work) has neglected a host of important syntactic data differentiating slurs from neutral counterparts. This data resides in vocatives. I have two goals in this paper. One is to discern the syntactic data distinguishing slurs from neutral counterparts within vocatives. The other is to argue that an expressivist semantics can most naturally account for many of these special syntactic properties, and, indeed, that the syntactic properties may well underwrite that semantics. In this abstract, I can give only a small taste of that syntactic data, but enough of it to demonstrate the central ideas to back the second goal.

On the expressivist semantics of slurs I favor, a slur like “Wop” is treated as essentially semantically equivalent to “fucking Italian” because fronting the neutral counterpart with the bare expressive keeps the referential content constant while separately contributing an expression of speaker-contempt toward Italians qua Italians. Vocatives are ‘noun phrases that refer to the addressee but are not syntactically or semantically incorporated as the arguments of a predicate’ (Levinson 1983, 71). They are standardly distinguished in terms of their function as either *calls* or *addresses*. Calls, as in (1a,b), function to secure the addressee’s attention. Addresses, as in (2a,b), function to maintain or spotlight that attention.

- (1a) *Hey mister*, you’re stepping on my foot.
- (1b) *Grandma*, give me a kiss.
- (2a) The fact is, *doctor*, things just aren’t improving.
- (2b) Frankly, *Scarlett*, I don’t give a damn.

My argument depends upon syntactic data point #1, part of which is discussed in (Zwicky, 1974): Most slurs naturally occur as vocative calls and addresses, as in (3)/(4), but most neutral counterpart do not, as shown in (3’)/(4’). The corresponding referential, *non-vocative*, constructions exhibit parallelism between slurs and neutral counterparts, as in (3’)/(4’).

- (3) Hey *Nigger/Wop*, get your ass off that bench! (from Zwicky, 1974, 792)
- (3’) Hey *African American\*/Italian\**, get your ass off that bench!
- (3’’) *Niggers/African Americans/Wops/Italians* should get their asses off that bench!
- (4) Wherever you go, *faggot/dyke*, I’ll be taunting you.
- (4’) Wherever you go, *homosexual\*/lesbian\**, I’ll be taunting you.
- (4’’) Wherever the *faggots/homosexuals/dykes/lesbians* go, I’ll be taunting them.

The argument also depends upon syntactic data point #2: Coupling ‘you’ together with a neutral counterpart, and especially fronting it with a bare pejorative like ‘goddamn’, ‘fucking’, systematically generates acceptable vocative uses as calls and addresses.

- (3’’) Hey *you fucking African American\*/Italian\**, get your ass off that bench!
- (4’’) Wherever you go, *you goddamn homosexual/lesbian*, I’ll be taunting you.

The argument I offer is simple. We can retain syntactic parallelism of neutral counterparts and slurs within vocatives by supplementing them with negative contemptuous affect. Although I do not deny that alternative accounts of slurs can explain these striking syntactic facts, I believe this argument from vocatives may actually offer some syntactic support for an expressivist semantics.

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## Norms of assertion: Empirical data

Markus Kneer (Zurich)

### 1. Introduction

Are assertions governed by *norms*? Differently put, are there rules of linguistic communication that determine whether or not an assertion should be made? Inquiries of this sort presuppose that (i) assertions of different sorts form a unified type of linguistic move or speech act, and (ii) that ‘the speech act [of assertion], like a game and unlike the act of jumping, is constituted by rules.’ (Williamson, 1996, 489). If we accept these premises, we can ask ourselves what requirements a speaker must fulfill in order to satisfy the norm of assertion. Four proposals dominate the literature (for recent reviews, cf. e.g. Weiner 2007; Pagin 2015; Goldberg 2015):

*Belief*: Assert that  $p$  only if you believe that  $p$ . (Bach 2008; Bach and Harnish 1979)

*Justified belief*: Assert that  $p$  only if you justifiedly believe that  $p$ . (Douven 2006; Lackey 2007)

*Truth*: Assert that  $p$  only if  $p$  is true. (Weiner 2005)

*Knowledge*: Assert that  $p$  only if you know that  $p$ . (Williamson 2000; DeRose 2002; Adler 2002; Hawthorne 2003; Turri 2011; Benton 2011; for early accounts, cf. Black 1952; Unger 1975).

The epistemic requirements of the four accounts differ considerably. Whereas on the last two views, the norm of assertion is factive, it is acceptable on the first two accounts to make an assertion that  $p$  even if  $p$  is false. Which of the above rules, if any, constitutively defines the speech act of assertion is principally a matter of empirical inquiry – an inquiry that ‘must face the linguistic data’ (Douven, 2006, p. 450, cf. also Turri 2013, Pagin 2015).

Turri (2013) has presented evidence according to which the norm of assertion is factive; in further works (Turri 2015, 2016) he reports findings in favour of the knowledge account. In my talk, I will demonstrate that most of these experiments are misconceived, and that Gettier cases can play a helpful role in empirically exploring the norm of assertion. I will report a series of studies with a total of about 1500 participants, which suggest that the norm of assertion is neither truth nor knowledge, but justified belief. The following section briefly summarizes one experiment.

### 2. An Experiment

#### 2.1 Participants, materials and procedure

In an online experiment with 379 participants (164 female, age  $M=36$  years,  $SD=12$  years), participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions of the well-worn AMERICAN CAR vignette (Nichols et al. 2003): Bob’s friend Jill has driven a Buick (an American car) for years. In the knowledge condition K, Jill still drives a Buick. In the Gettier condition TJB, Jill has replaced it with a Pontiac (also an American car), of which Bob is unaware. In the false belief condition FB, Jill now drives – unbeknownst to Bob – a Mercedes. Bob’s wife wants to know what car Jill drives.

Participants were asked forced-choice questions whether Bob should say  $p$ , whether Bob really knows that  $p$ , whether  $p$  is true and whether Bob is justified in believing that  $p$  (in that order), where  $p$  stands for ‘Jill drives an American car’.

#### 2.2 Results and Discussion

A logistic regression was run to explore the effects of knowledge, truth, and justification on assertability. The logistic regression model was significant,  $\chi^2(3)=33.08$ ,  $p<.001$ , explained 21% (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) of the

variance in assertability and correctly classified 93.9% of cases. Knowledge proved insignificant (Wald  $\chi^2(1)=.006$ ,  $p=.940$ ). Justification had a significant impact on assertability (Wald  $\chi^2(1)=9.58$ ,  $p=.002$ ), and so did truth Wald  $\chi^2(1)=13.77$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

While advocates of a factive account of assertion might consider this a welcome result, a closer look at the FB condition frustrates further expectations. Though only 4% of participants deem  $p$  true, 84% consider it nonetheless assertable. A second logistic regression explored the effects of knowledge, truth, and justification on assertability in the FB condition. The model was significant,  $\chi^2(3)=11.46$ ,  $p=.009$ , explained 14% (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) of the variance in assertability and correctly classified 86.2% of cases. The impact of truth on assertability proved insignificant (Wald  $\chi^2(1)=.146$ ,  $p=.702$ ), and so did the impact of knowledge (Wald  $\chi^2(1)=.545$ ,  $p=.460$ ). The impact of justification on assertability was significant (Wald  $\chi^2(1)=.8.38$ ,  $p=.004$ ).

The experiment suggests that knowledge is not the norm of assertion, and that it isn't factive either. Justification, by contrast, seems to be a strong predictor of assertability. I will present three more experiments using different scenarios, experimental designs and analyses to demonstrate that these findings are robust.

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## A defense of the common ground view about assertion

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Abbott (2008) claims that Stalnaker's widely influential views about both presupposition and assertion are wrong. She calls Stalnaker's view on assertion the *common ground view of assertion*. According to this view (e.g. Stalnaker (1978, 2002)) conversation takes place on the basis of a set of assumptions about the beliefs that all the participants in the conversation share (or are disposed to behave, for the purposes of the conversation, as if they share). Abbot claims that according to the common ground view about assertion:

- (a) Speakers "intend their utterances to reduce the set of possible worlds consistent with these beliefs" (Abbott 2008, p. 531), and that
- (b) "To make an assertion is to reduce the context set (i.e. the common ground) in a particular way" (p. 532).

Abbott points out that there are a number of clear counterexamples to the *common ground* view of assertion. For instance, when uttering (1) in an university elevator

- (1) The term will soon be over

the speaker will typically have no intention of being informative, but just to avoid an uncomfortable silence in the elevator; (1) is not providing any new information and so neither (a) nor (b) will hold in this case.

Examples (2)-(7) could be used to make similar points: (2-6 are taken or adapted from Abbott (2008))

(2) Our speaker tonight is Noam Chomsky [when uttered by the person who introduces the speaker] (Everyone attending the talk does of course already know who the speaker is; (2) does not provide any new information that can be added to the common ground; still, though, this utterance of (2) is completely adequate and felicitous, contrary to what the common ground view would seem to predict).

(3) [Head of the department at the departmental meeting]: The next item in the agenda is our annual picnic

(4) (Reminder) You have a dentist appointment next Tuesday, but we've just agreed that we'll pick Sue up [in a case where it is common knowledge that the addressee already knows that she has a dentist appointment].

(5) We all know that Bill will never come clean of this

(If it is true that we all know it, then, it seems that (a) and (b) cannot hold, and the utterance should be predicted to be infelicitous)

(6) (Tautology) Cats are cats

(7) (Repetition) We will fight for our rights. We will fight for our rights.

I will argue that we can account for each of (1)-(7) on the basis of the common ground view of assertion and several additional (and uncontroversial) facts and mechanisms. I believe that the significant challenge that Abbott (2008) poses for the common ground view of assertion can be answered in a satisfactory way.

Four of the points that I will use in my argument are:

(i) Abbott partially misdescribes the Stalnakerian view of assertion. The defining feature of assertion is not that it reduces the common ground, but rather that (c) it prescribes that its content be added to the common ground in a certain way.

(ii) The fact that conversations are subject to Grice's Cooperative Principle (*make your contribution as it is required by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange*) when combined with (c) allows us to explain why usually (but, crucially, not always) assertions do reduce the common ground and are inappropriate if they do not.

(iii) Beliefs can be activated or just implicit (1 minute ago the reader already believed that there are no flying elephants; now this belief is activated, 1 minute ago, most likely, it was not).

(iv) As already pointed out by Stalnaker and others, making an assertion will change the common ground not just by prescribing to the audience that they add its content to the common ground but, also, because it will cause that some new fact becomes part of the common ground: that the speaker uttered a certain sentence with certain content.

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## ***Implicating, asserting and presupposing: The cost of commitment violation***

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It is widely assumed in the philosophical and linguistic literature that *implicating enables* a message to be conveyed while being deniable, disavowable, by its sender (Fricker 2012; Pinker 2007). For this reason, *implicating* is said to be less committal than *asserting*.

This paper empirically investigates how commitment attribution varies as a function of the pragmatic layering of information in discourse (Moeschler 2013). Specifically, it addresses the question of whether

distinct layers of information (asserted content, implicated content and presupposed content) are taken to correspond to different degrees of speaker's commitment.

Following Vulliouid et al. (2017), we take commitment to represent a measure of the cost (direct or reputational) that the sender is willing to incur if the message is found unreliable. A reputational cost typically concerns the perceived trustworthiness of the speaker as a source of information. By representing a reason for the addressee to accept the communicated message, this cost plays a crucial role in the stabilization of communication.

In a series of experimental studies, we show that after the message  $p$  is falsified ('commitment violation'), participants are significantly more likely to selectively trust a speaker who implicated  $p$  than a speaker who asserted or presupposed  $p$ . This demonstrates that implicit communication allows the transmission of relevant information without the risk of reputational damage.

Our result shed new light on the strategic advantages of implicit communication, whose investigation is crucial to solve its *prima facie* puzzle: that is, why implicit communication is pervasive despite being costly and open to misunderstandings (Reboul 2017).

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## On assertoric authority to blame

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It is commonly accepted in the literature that, unless the speaker can satisfactorily reply to a conversational challenge — e.g., “You can't say  $p$ , you don't know  $p$ ” — her authority in asserting  $p$  would be thereby hampered. A similar challenge is sometimes issued to assertions used in placing a blame: if the speaker who asserts *that  $x$  is immoral* has herself performed  $x$ , she could be retorted with “You can't say that, you did  $x$  yourself”. Can we, then, analogously insist that unless the latter challenge can be replied satisfactorily, the speaker's assertoric authority would be denied, too?

One may resist such a conclusion by claiming that the “You *can't say* that” part from the latter challenge, unlike the former, picks out a merely regulative norm, such as that of politeness. That won't do, however: whereas it makes perfect sense to assert  $p$  by insisting “I don't care if it's impolite to say  $p$ ,  $p$  is still true” the analogous “I don't care if I did the same thing, it's still immoral” has a rather odd ring to it, suggesting that the norm is not merely regulative. In fact, my contention precisely is that in the absence of a satisfactory reply, the speaker can't go on *uttering* “ $x$  is immoral”. The real worry I wish to discuss is whether this result implies that not having a clear moral record would turn such assertions into normatively incorrect ones, despite their being *true*, *justified* or *known*. The worry is relevant insofar as no normative account of assertion on the table has proposed any similar, extra-linguistic condition as being constitutive of assertion. Thus, we either need to revise all the normative accounts of the speech act adding this further norm for a specified class of blaming assertions or else to explain how come our speaker can't go on uttering “ $x$  is immoral” if she is indeed authorized to assert *that  $x$  is immoral*.

In the talk, I go to expand on the second horn of the dilemma. On my proposal, when we publicly say that  $x$  is immoral we are both (i) asserting that  $x$  is immoral and implicitly (ii) inviting others to share our attitude towards  $x$ . After offering data in support of this reading, I will argue that it is possible that while (i) is performed correctly, (ii) can be performed incorrectly. Namely, if by asserting that  $x$  is immoral I implicitly invite people to accept a judgmental attitude towards the act and the agent, I ought not to have done  $x$  myself as I should be judged, too. Indeed, the challenge “You can't say  $p$ , you did the same thing” is precisely aiming at (ii). That said, the challenge still leaves (i) intact: borrowing Owens' (2006) case of writing a secret diary which I don't intend anyone to read, I could easily perform (i) without thereby performing (ii). For, “ $x$  is immoral” can follow as a well-argued point that makes it a correct assertion. Yet, if I don't intend

anyone to read my diary, the directive (ii) doesn't take place. Of course, one can argue that it might still be *odd* for me to be judging the act I have myself performed, but the assertion itself would be equally grounded if written by a person who performed *x* and by a person who did not.

## Future contingents, indeterminism and assertion

Alessio Santelli (Ca' Foscari, Venice)

This paper focuses on the assertability conditions of future contingents. Suppose that it is now *open* whether tomorrow there will be a sea battle. That is, it is objectively (as opposed to epistemically) possible that tomorrow a sea battle will occur and it is objectively possible that it won't. Suppose also that today I assert "there will be a sea battle tomorrow". How should we evaluate my assertion if, as the branching picture has it, in some possible histories it will be true that tomorrow there is a sea battle, whereas in some others it will be false—and none of them can be singled out as *the* history that is going to happen?

This is what Belnap and Green (1994) have termed the *Assertion Problem*. Very roughly, the assertion problem may be seen as the result of two main assumptions taken together. The first—which goes back at least to Aristotle—is that the openness of the future entails a failure of bivalence for future contingents. The second is that, given their truth-valueless, future contingents cannot be correctly assertable—at least if we assume, as many do, that the correct norm for assertion is the truth norm (T). However, since we assert future contingents all the time (even when we take the future to be open), we are left with the problem of how to account for this apparent contradiction.

Several attempts have been made to solve this puzzle, either by arguing that, albeit truth-valueless, future contingents can be correctly assertable, or by rejecting the Aristotelian intuition altogether. The paper examines the three most representative accounts of the first kind—namely, R. H. Thomason's *Supervaluationism*, N. Belnap's *Double-time reference semantics* and J. MacFarlane's *relativist semantics*—and concludes that none of these theories, usually dubbed Branching-time theories (BT-theories), is able to provide a persuasive answer as to why we comfortably assert future contingents.

The paper is structured as follows. §1 introduces the problem of future contingents and shows how each of the aforementioned accounts formalizes Aristotle's solution. §2 outlines an argument to the effect that no future contingent is correctly assertable and then illustrates some difficulties of Thomason's proposal concerning, in particular, its incapacity to generate a compelling account of assertion in line with (T). §3 focuses on Belnap's account and provides some reasons to be unsatisfied with his general response to the argument. §4 explores MacFarlane's account of assertion and shows how both of his alternative approaches suffer from different but very serious problems.

It will be argued that the reason of their failure lies in the very assumption that makes the branching picture so attractive, namely that, in the absence of an actual history, future contingents cannot be true (false) as of the time of their utterance. Adapting a well-known objection raised by Gareth Evans (1985) against Prior's view on tensed propositions, it will be suggested that this assumption is less solid than expected since it leads to consequences that are far less plausible than those that BT-theorists are keen to avoid.

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## Certainty as the epistemic norm of assertion

Jacques-Henri Vollet (Geneva)

It is widely held that assertions are governed by an epistemic norm. But what is this epistemic norm? Is it knowledge, truth, belief, or something else? In this paper, I defend an unpopular account, first articulated by Stanley (2008). According to this account, the epistemic norm of assertion is epistemic certainty.

First, I introduce this account and I respond to the pervasive objection that it is plainly implausible because too strong. I emphasize that, on this account, certainty can often be reached, for the epistemic standards of “certain” are context-sensitive.

I provide some reasons to think that “certain” is context-sensitive: “certain” is a gradable adjective and many gradable adjectives are context-sensitive; further it turns out that we are not blind to the context-sensitivity of “certain”. If “certain” is context-sensitive, there is no reason to think that ‘It is certain that p’ is not true in many ordinary contexts.

Second, I show that the main linguistic and conversational data advanced in the more recent literature (e.g., Sosa 2009; Turri 2010; Benton 2011, 2013, 2014; Blaauw 2012) are best explained on the assumption that the certainty account is correct.

In particular, I provide criticisms of the main way in which an advocate of the knowledge account might want to deal with these data, namely, by appealing to the distinction between warrant and knowledge of warrant (see Turri 2010; Benton 2013). In brief, this approach also relies on the claim that it is somewhat bad to do something which is warranted when one does not know that it is warranted (see, e.g., Williamson 2005 for this claim). But I show that this claim is false.

Third, I offer two principled arguments in favour of the certainty account of assertion. First, I show that this account is the only one which is compatible with these three independently plausible claims:

- A. The warrant necessary and sufficient for asserting p shifts with the context.
- B. The linguistic and conversational data (e.g., the infelicity of asserting Moorean sentences, appropriate challenges and prompts to assert, etc.) about “certain”, “know” and “believe” are invariant across contexts.
- C. The meaning of ‘know’, or ‘belief’, is not context-sensitive.

Second, I emphasize that if we want to distinguish knowledge and certainty, it is natural to take certainty, rather than knowledge, as the epistemic norm of assertion. As Stanley (2008) notes, we can thus explain why we may (incorrectly) think that knowledge entails certainty. Further, if knowledge does not always satisfy the highest epistemic standards (of the context of assertion), it is unclear why knowledge would have to be always sufficient for assertion.

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## Addressing other people's informational needs: An assertion-based norm of belief

Marc Andree Weber (Freiburg)

In my presentation, I will establish the following norm of belief:

One must: belief  $p$  only if one is allowed to assert  $p$ .

The normativity of this norm, as it comes out by my argument, is moral; it is neither epistemic, as is common for norms of belief, nor of the constitutive kind that rules of e.g. games usually have. Thus, in effect, what I will defend is a moral norm that connects believability with assertability.

My argument for the norm invokes the idea, drawn from Sanford Goldberg (2015: ch. 7), that we have a moral obligation to address other persons' legitimate informational needs as long as they are not overridden by other considerations. Moreover, I will explain why several seemingly convincing counterexamples to the norm, such as cases of self-deception and retraction, do not in fact speak against it.

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## What is it for an assertion to be normal?

Maciej Witek (Szczecin)

Brian Ball (2014a; 2014b) argues that assertion is both a normative and natural kind; it is normative, because it is individuated and constitutively governed by Williamson's knowledge rule (Williamson 1996; for a critical discussion, see Sbisà forthcoming); at the same time it is a natural kind, because the normative expressions occurring in the knowledge rule can be paraphrased in naturalistic terms. More specifically, Ball argues that the knowledge rule can be derived by arguing, first, that speakers *normally* assert only what they know, and second, that speakers always have reason to do what is *normal*. He declares that he uses 'normal' in Millikan's (1984; 2005) sense and assumes that the knowledge rule prescribes that speakers ought to produce only *normal* or *properly functioning* assertions.

Although I am sympathetic to the project of using Millikan's framework to account for the normative aspect of the practice of making and accepting assertions (see Witek 2015; forthcoming), I would like to take issue with Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule. I start by examining his argument which involves four premises: (P1) normally, speakers assert only if they reflexively intend to induce belief; (P2) normally, speakers intend to induce belief only if hearers come to belief; (P3) normally, hearers come to belief only if thereby come to know; and (P4) normally, hearers come to know only if speakers know. According to Ball, the conclusion 'normally, speakers assert only if they know' follows from the above-mentioned premises by the transitivity of 'only if' and the fact that 'normally' is a "universal quantifier over the same set of normal assertions" (Ball 2014a: 18). In my view, however, the reasoning under consideration equivocates between two senses of 'normal'. More specifically, Ball wrongly identifies 'normal functioning' in Millikan's sense with what she defines as 'proper functioning'; In fact, Millikan argues that a device or mechanism can function properly though not normally. I argue that (P1) and (P4) are supported by considering the normal condition for proper function of the practice of making and accepting assertions, whereas (P2) and (P3) are supported by considering its proper function. Finally, I develop an alternative version of the Millikanian account of norms governing illocutionary acts. I argue that the proper function of assertion, *qua* assertions, is to get hearers to believe what they are told and *thereby* to contribute to what I call *mental coordination*, i.e., keeping the interlocutors' individual representations of common ground aligned; I also claim that the normal condition under which assertions can function properly is their sincerity. In short, sincerity is the norm for assertions.

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## Logical dynamics of Assertions and commitments

Tomoyuki Yamada (Hokkaido)

In the literature on speech acts theory, agents who make assertions are often said to commit themselves to the truth of what they have asserted. As Walton and Krabbe (1995, p.8) point out in the context of the theory of argumentation, the kind of commitments incurred by making assertions constitute a special case of commitment to a course of action. According to them, an agent who asserts a proposition is obliged to defend it if the other party in the dialogue requires her to justify it. In a more general context, MacFarlane (2005, p. 229) writes:

Assertoric Commitment (Dual Contexts): In asserting that  $p$  at a context  $C_U$ , one commits oneself to providing adequate grounds for the truth of  $p$  (relative to  $C_U$  and one's current context of assessment), 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.

This formulation presupposes the distinction between the context of utterance and the context of assessment, on which his theory of assessment sensitivity of knowledge attributions is based, but we can ignore the reference to the context of assessment as far as the present discussion is concerned. What we need to note here is to what course of action the asserter is said to commit oneself. What does “providing adequate grounds for the truth of  $p$ ” amount to?

Inspired by the knowledge account of assertion proposed by Williamson (1996, 2000), Yamada (2016) proposes to interpret “adequate grounds for the truth of  $p$ ” here as “grounds adequate for the challenger to learn that  $p$ ” and gives a characterization of the effects of acts of commanding in the framework of “dynamified” multi-agent epistemic deontic logic. It treats the relevant kind of commitment as something very close to the commitment incurred when a person promises the addressee to give grounds adequate for her (the addressee) to learn what is asserted. This treatment enables us to see how acts of asserting contribute to the sharing of knowledge among agents.

Yamada's analysis, however, does not take the conditional character of the commitments into account. As is stated in the above quote from MacFarlane (2005), the asserter does not unconditionally commit himself to providing grounds adequate for the addressee to learn what is asserted. He only commits himself to providing them if challenged (i.e. “in response to any appropriate challenge”). The purpose of this paper is to give a better characterization of the effects of acts of asserting that accommodates this conditional character of the commitments incurred by acts of asserting.

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