

## Norms of Assertion

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A view growing in popularity in the recent philosophical literature is that only knowledge warrants assertion. More precisely, the following is frequently taken to be the central norm of assertion (hereafter, the *Knowledge Norm of Assertion*, or the KNA):

KNA:           One should assert that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ .<sup>1</sup>

So, for instance, Timothy Williamson says that his view can be “...summarized in the slogan ‘Only knowledge warrants assertion.’”<sup>2</sup> Following this view, Keith DeRose claims that “...one is positioned well-enough to assert that  $P$  iff one knows that  $P$ .”<sup>3</sup> And John Hawthorne concurs:<sup>4</sup> “[t]he practice of assertion is constituted by the rule/requirement that one assert something only if one knows it.”<sup>5</sup>

Now, as with many other norms, the KNA can be, and frequently is, violated. I may, for instance, assert that pollution is killing our local wildlife when I only suspect that this is the case. According to proponents of the KNA, in cases such as this—where an assertion is made in the absence of the corresponding knowledge—the asserter in question is properly subject to criticism. Thus, John Hawthorne maintains that “...if someone asserts  $p$ , it is proper to criticize that person if she does not know that  $p$ .”<sup>6</sup> In a similar spirit, Williamson holds that “...asserting that  $P$  without knowing that  $P$  is doing something without having the authority to do it, like giving someone a command without having the authority to do so.”<sup>7</sup>

In what follows, I shall argue that the KNA is false. In particular, I shall show that there are cases in which a speaker asserts that  $p$  in the absence of knowing that  $p$  without being subject to criticism in any relevant sense, thereby showing that knowledge cannot be what is required for proper assertion.<sup>8</sup> I shall then develop and defend an alternative norm of assertion—what I shall call the *Reasonable to Believe Norm of Assertion*, or the RTBNA—that not only avoids the problems

afflicting the KNA, but also more fully and coherently accommodates our general intuitions about both asserters and their assertions.

### 1. Two Initial Objections

Before turning to my own argument against the KNA, let me begin with two initial objections that may be raised to the view that knowledge is the norm of assertion. The first objection involves assertions that are not known by the asserter in question—because they are false, unjustified, or both—but are nevertheless appropriate given the circumstances of the situation. For instance, suppose that I, knowing that it is urgent for you to get to your destination, shout “That is your train” upon seeing a train approach the station. Despite my asserting this, however, I do not know this to be the case: I merely believe that it is very likely that it is your train. According to Williamson:

Such cases do not show that the knowledge rule is not the rule of assertion. They merely show that it can be overridden by other norms not specific to assertion. The other norms do not give me warrant to assert  $p$ , for to have such warrant is to satisfy the rule of assertion.<sup>9</sup>

Presumably, proponents of the KNA would offer similar responses to countless other cases of this sort: I assert to my terminally ill friend, “I know that you will survive this,” even though I am aware that all of the evidence suggests otherwise; I assert to my relative who is riddled with self-doubt, “I know that you will pass this exam,” even though I am aware of her poor performances in the past, and so on.

The second initial objection to the KNA is grounded in cases like the following: “it is winter, and it looks exactly as it would if there were snow outside, but in fact that white stuff is not snow but foam put there by a film crew of whose existence I have no idea.”<sup>10</sup> Given that I have every reason to believe that the white stuff I see is snow, I assert that there is snow outside to my

neighbor. Of course, since there is not in fact snow outside, my assertion is offered in the absence of the corresponding knowledge required by the KNA, thereby violating such a norm. Similarly, suppose that Wendy correctly sees the only real barn that, unbeknownst to her, is completely surrounded by barn facades and asserts to me “There was a barn in the field we just passed” on this basis. In such a Gettier-type situation, the accidental truth of Wendy’s belief prevents her from having the relevant knowledge, despite the fact that she has excellent evidence for holding the belief in question.

Notice that in both types of cases, the speaker in question *reasonably believes that she knows* the relevant proposition in question. Because of this, it may be argued that it is improper to criticize such a speaker for asserting without knowing, thereby showing that the KNA is too strong a requirement for assertion. If this line of reasoning is correct, then the KNA should be replaced with a weaker norm, such as the following (hereafter, the *Reasonable Belief Norm of Assertion* or the RBNA):

RBNA:           One should assert that  $p$  only if one reasonably believes that one knows that  $p$ .

According to the RBNA, then, an asserter is not subject to criticism for asserting that which she reasonably believes she knows, even if infelicitous circumstances lead her to assert a proposition that as a matter of fact falls short of knowledge. Thus, the RBNA, unlike the KNA, is able to accommodate the intuitions above—namely, that I am behaving properly when I assert that there is snow outside and that Wendy is undeserving of criticism when she asserts that there was a barn in the field that was just passed. For in both cases, the speaker in question reasonably believes that she has the relevant knowledge even though she in fact fails to possess it.

Despite these intuitions, however, proponents of the KNA do not regard these sorts of cases as counterexamples to their thesis. For instance, regarding the assertion involving snow above, and the weaker RBNA that it supports, Williamson maintains:

On the [RBNA] account...my assertion ‘There is snow outside’ satisfies the rule of assertion. Yet something is wrong with my assertion; neither [the Belief Norm of Assertion<sup>11</sup>] nor the [RBNA] account implies that it is. They can allow that something is wrong with my belief that I know that there is snow outside, for it is false, but that is another matter. The [BNA] and [RBNA] accounts lack the resources to explain why we regard the false assertion itself, not just the asserter, as faulty.<sup>12</sup>

So the *mere falsity* of the assertion—even if it in no way results from something for which the person in question is responsible—renders both the asserter and the assertion faulty. This faultiness, then, purportedly grounds the sense in which a central norm of assertion has been violated in cases involving highly reasonable but false belief, thereby resulting in the relevant asserter properly deserving criticism. Similar remarks presumably apply to assertions involving Gettierized beliefs: the fact that an assertion involves a belief that is only accidentally true renders both the speaker and her assertion improper relative to the goals of assertion.

But surely, it may be argued, there is a clear sense in which speakers who assert reasonably believed falsehoods and Gettierized beliefs are *not* subject to criticism. For the faultiness of the assertions in such cases results from infelicitous circumstances, not from any sort of blameworthy behavior on the part of the asserters. Here is where Keith DeRose’s distinction between *primary* and *secondary* propriety/impropriety is relevant:

As happens with other rules, a kind of secondary propriety/impropriety will arise with respect to [the KNA]. While those who assert appropriately (with respect to this rule) in a primary sense will be those who actually obey it, a speaker who broke this rule in a blameless fashion (one who asserted something she didn’t know, but reasonably thought she did know) would in some secondary sense be asserting properly....<sup>13</sup>

According to DeRose, then, if an act is governed by a given norm, primary propriety/impropriety is determined by whether the act actually conforms to the norm, and secondary propriety/impropriety is determined by whether the agent in question reasonably believes that the act conforms to the norm. This enables proponents of the KNA to explain how subjects who assert, for instance, reasonably believed falsehoods and Gettierized beliefs are behaving, in one sense, appropriately and, in another sense, inappropriately: such assertions are made in a blameless fashion and are thus proper in a secondary sense, despite the fact that they violate the norm of assertion and are thereby improper in a primary sense.

More could certainly be said both about these two initial objections and the responses offered by proponents of the KNA.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, I bring up these cases only to put them aside for now. The central type of counterexample I raise to the KNA will be unlike any of these cases and, as such, will not be subsumed by any of these responses.

## 2. Selfless Assertion

In this section, I shall present what I take to be the strongest type of counterexample to the KNA. It will involve a phenomenon that I shall call *selfless assertion*.

To begin, consider the following three cases:

**RACIST JUROR:** Martin was raised by racist parents in a very small-minded community and, for most of his life, he shared the majority of beliefs held by his friends and family members. After graduating from high school, he started taking classes at a local community college and soon began recognizing some of the causes of, and consequences of, racism. During this time, Martin was called to serve on the jury of a case involving a black man on trial for raping a white woman. After hearing all of the evidence presented by both the prosecution and the defense, Martin is able

to recognize that the evidence clearly does not support the conclusion that the defendant committed the crime of which he is accused.<sup>15</sup> In spite of this, however, he can't shake the feeling that the man on trial is guilty of raping the woman in question. Upon further reflection, Martin begins to suspect that such a feeling is grounded in the racism that he still harbors, and so he concludes that even if he can't quite come to believe that the defendant is innocent himself, he nonetheless has an obligation to present the case to others this way. Shortly after leaving the courthouse, Martin bumps into a childhood friend who asks him whether the "guy did it." Despite the fact that he does not believe, and hence does not know, that the defendant in question is innocent, Martin asserts, "No, the guy did not rape her."

**DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR:** Sebastian is an extremely well-respected pediatrician and researcher who has done extensive work studying childhood vaccines. He recognizes and appreciates that all of the scientific evidence shows that there is absolutely no connection between vaccines and autism.<sup>16</sup> However, shortly after his apparently normal 18-month-old daughter received one of her vaccines, her behavior became increasingly withdrawn and she was soon diagnosed with autism. While Sebastian is aware that signs of autism typically emerge around this age, regardless of whether a child received any vaccines, the grief and exhaustion brought on by his daughter's recent diagnosis cause him to abandon his previously deeply-held beliefs regarding vaccines. Today, while performing a well-baby checkup on one of his patients, the child's parents ask him about the legitimacy of the rumors surrounding vaccines and autism. Recognizing both that the current doubt he has towards vaccines was probably brought about through the emotional trauma of dealing with

his daughter's condition and that he has an obligation to his patients to present what is most likely to be true, Sebastian asserts, "There is no connection between vaccines and autism." In spite of this, at the time of this assertion, it would not be correct to say that Sebastian himself believes or knows this proposition.

CREATIONIST TEACHER: Stella is a devoutly Christian fourth-grade teacher, and her religious beliefs are grounded in a deep faith that she has had since she was a very young child. Part of this faith includes a belief in the truth of creationism and, accordingly, a belief in the falsity of evolutionary theory. Despite this, Stella fully recognizes that there is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence against both of these beliefs. Indeed, she readily admits that she is not basing her own commitment to creationism on evidence at all but, rather, on the personal faith that she has in an all-powerful Creator. Because of this, Stella does not think that religion is something that she should impose on those around her, and this is especially true with respect to her fourth-grade students. Instead, she regards her duty as a teacher to include presenting material that is best supported by the available evidence, which clearly includes the truth of evolutionary theory. As a result, while presenting her biology lesson today, Stella asserts to her students, "Modern day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*," though she herself neither believes nor knows this proposition.

Though there are some obvious differences among these cases, they are united in all being instances of what I earlier called selfless assertion. There are three central components to this phenomenon: first, a subject, for purely non-epistemic reasons, does not believe (and hence does not know) that  $p$ ;<sup>17</sup> second, despite this lack of belief, the subject is aware that  $p$  is very well supported by all of the

available evidence; and, third, because of this, the subject asserts that  $p$  without believing and, hence, without knowing that  $p$ .

The combination of these three features has the following result: a subject offers an assertion in the absence of knowledge and is not properly subject to criticism in any relevant sense. Indeed, in all of the above cases, the subject in question, *qua* asserter, is *properly subject to praise*: a racist juror, whose verdict can determine the future of an innocent defendant, is able to transcend his own racism and thereby offers an assertion that is both true and epistemically flawless; a well-respected pediatrician, whose patients depend on him for their health, is able to recognize his own emotional distress and thereby offers an assertion that is both true and clearly supported by all of the available evidence; and a fourth-grade teacher, whose students depend on her for their education, is able to put aside her own purely faith-based religious beliefs and thereby offers an assertion that is both true and evidentially impeccable. Moreover, in all of these cases, the subject offers the assertion in question precisely *because* he/she recognizes that it is supported by an overwhelming amount of excellent evidence, evidence that the subject either cannot or will not allow to govern his/her own doxastic states.<sup>18</sup>

The upshot of these considerations, then, is that *it is a mistake to require proper assertion to pass through the doxastic states of the asserter*.<sup>19</sup> For in cases of selfless assertion, even though the person in question may be subject to criticism *qua* believer, she is nonetheless subject to praise *qua* asserter.<sup>20</sup> For instance, while Martin is unable to prevent his residual racism from determining his *doxastic states* regarding the defendant's guilt, he does not allow it to govern his relevant *assertions*. Similarly, although Sebastian's grief and exhaustion directly affect his *states of believing* about the connection between vaccines and autism, he is able to overcome these impediments with respect to his *assertions*. Hence, one can properly assert that  $p$  in the absence of knowing that  $p$  without being subject to

criticism as an asserter in any sense, thereby showing that a norm of assertion has not been violated.<sup>21</sup> The KNA is, therefore, false.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Objections and Replies

In this section, I shall consider the most compelling objections to my arguments against the KNA, and show each to be unsuccessful in achieving its desired end.

First, it may be argued that the statements in question in the three cases *do not qualify as genuine assertions*. In particular, one may claim that an assertion requires that the asserter in question “speak for herself” and therefore regard the proffered statement as somehow being truly her own rather than, for instance, the general medical profession’s or the scientific community’s. Since the speakers in instances of selfless assertion do not personally identify with their proffered statements, it may be concluded that they are not therefore offering genuine assertions. Hence, the above cases would not be counterexamples to the KNA.<sup>23</sup>

By way of response to this objection, notice that the only element that distinguishes the statements in cases of selfless assertion from those that would satisfy the KNA is the lack of belief on the part of the speaker. For in all three cases, the statement in question is an ordinary declarative sentence that is not only non-accidentally true, it is also so well supported epistemically that it would be known if only it were believed. Because of this, the objection that the statements in the above cases are not instances of genuine assertion boils down to the thesis that S must believe that *p* in order to genuinely assert that *p*. But then it follows that it wouldn’t be possible to assert a lie, which is clearly the wrong result. For telling a lie is a paradigmatic instance of an assertion that, though genuine, is in violation of the norms governing assertion. Thus, while a person who asserts that *p* with the intention to deceive is undoubtedly subject to criticism, that she didn’t really offer an assertion doesn’t seem to be among her problems.

A second and related objection that may be raised against cases of selfless assertion is this: in all of the above examples, the speakers in question occupy various positions—e.g., being a juror, a doctor, or a teacher—that carry with them specific responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities are relevant to the assertions that such speakers offer in professional contexts. For instance, jurors have the duty to consider only evidence that is presented at trial and to offer verdicts based on whether that evidence supports guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and doctors and teachers arguably have the duty to at times rely on the scientific consensus when providing medical advice or teaching biology to students. Given this, it may be argued that the “role responsibilities” specific to the professional assertions in the above cases render such selfless assertions problematic as *general* counterexamples to the KNA.<sup>24</sup>

Notice, however, that even if this response were persuasive, it would not apply to all of the cases of selfless assertion above. For in RACIST JUROR, Martin’s assertion about the innocence of the defendant in question is offered to a childhood friend after he has left the courthouse, not to the members of a courtroom or to a judge. Because of this, Martin’s assertion is not made in a professional setting, nor is he bound in this context by the responsibilities specific to being a juror. Indeed, we can even ensure that this is the case by modifying RACIST JUROR so that the relevant assertion is offered while Martin and his friend are chatting over lunch, well after the trial has concluded. At best, then, this objection to the above cases applies only to DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR and CREATIONIST TEACHER, leaving RACIST JUROR to function as a counterexample to the KNA.

However, there are independent reasons to reject the general move employed by this response to cases of selfless assertion. For such a response is tantamount to saying that knowledge is the norm of assertion, except when one is a juror, doctor, or teacher. But what if one is a reporter, politician, or scientist? Aren’t there specific responsibilities relevant to the professional

assertions offered by these speakers? Are these speakers, then, also not bound by the KNA when they make assertions in contexts unique to their occupations? Similar considerations apply to lawyers, priests, law enforcement officers, biographers, social workers, and countless other professions. All of these roles bring with them various responsibilities that are relevant to the assertions deemed professionally appropriate, but surely they are not all exempt from the KNA because of this. That this consequence is unacceptable is made clear by the fact that the KNA is presented as a general, constitutive norm of assertion, not as one that applies only when one is not speaking as a juror, doctor, teacher, reporter, and so on.

A third objection that one may raise to cases of selfless assertion is that, because the relevant asserter in such cases is asserting what he or she does not truly believe, there is a clear sense in which he or she is *lying*. Accordingly, such an asserter is manipulating, cheating, or otherwise deceiving the hearer in question and is thereby subject to criticism *qua asserter*. For instance, in asserting that the defendant did not commit the rape in question, Martin is presenting this to his childhood friend as indeed representing his own view on the issue. Likewise, in asserting that there is no connection between vaccines and autism, Sebastian is presenting this to the parents of his patient as truly being his own considered view of the matter. Because such assertions do not in fact correctly represent the beliefs of the asserters, they are instances of lying and, as such, constitute clear violations of a norm of assertion.

To see that this objection is unpersuasive, notice first that in cases of selfless assertion, there is absolutely no intention on the part of the asserter to deceive or otherwise mislead. Indeed, quite the contrary is true—the asserter in question *positively intends to not deceive or mislead her hearer* and, as a result, asserts what she herself does not believe. This is relevant to whether it is appropriate to characterize instances of selfless assertion as genuine lies. For instance, according to Augustine's well-known account of lying in *De mendacio*, a lie requires both (a) S asserting that *p*, where S does

not herself believe that  $p$ , and (b) S asserting that  $p$  with the deliberate intention to deceive.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Augustine claims that, “[t]he objectionable feature of lying is the desire to deliberately mislead in what one says,” not the fact that one asserts what one does not truly believe.<sup>26</sup> If Augustine is correct, then, the asserters in all three cases would not be lying since they would fail to satisfy condition (b). Indeed, in cases of selfless assertion, the asserter in question recognizes that she is not a reliable believer relative to the topic at hand and, because of this, deliberately satisfies (a) in order to fail (b), that is, she asserts what she herself does not believe in order to avoid deceiving her hearers.<sup>27</sup> But even if one does not wish to embrace Augustine’s general conception of lying, it should surely be granted that, at the very least, there are two radically different kinds of lying: those involving the satisfaction of both (a) and (b) and those involving the satisfaction of only (a). It should be further granted that only asserters who lie in the first sense are necessarily subject to criticism and thus in violation of a norm of assertion. For there is simply no reasonable sense in which a subject who recognizes that she is an unreliable believer relative to a given proposition and, so as to make it more likely that her hearer will form a belief that is best supported by the available evidence, asserts what she fails to believe herself, is subject to criticism *qua* asserter.

A fourth and related objection that may be raised to the arguments from the previous section is this: suppose that the hearer in each of the cases above were to ask the asserter in question whether he or she believes or knows the proposition asserted. Wouldn’t the hearer *feel* cheated or deceived upon learning that the answer to these questions is no? For instance, wouldn’t the parents of Sebastian’s patient feel misled or otherwise manipulated when their pediatrician admits that he does not himself believe or know that that there is no connection between vaccines and autism? Similarly, wouldn’t the students in Stella’s class feel cheated upon learning that their teacher does not herself believe in the truth of evolutionary theory? These plausible reactions to the asserters in

question, one may argue, strongly suggest that a norm of assertion has indeed been violated in cases of selfless assertion.<sup>28</sup>

Even if these *would be* the reactions had by the hearers in the above cases, what I would say is that such reactions are not the ones that rationally *should be* had. For instance, surely the childhood friend of Martin should not rationally prefer that he assert what he truly believes about the defendant's guilt, for this would result in Martin *offering an assertion based purely on racism*. Similarly, the parents of Sebastian's patient should not rationally desire that he assert what he truly believes about vaccines and autism, since this would amount to Sebastian *offering an assertion caused by the emotional grief, distress, and exhaustion of his daughter's newly diagnosed autism*. And the students in Stella's class should not rationally want her to assert what she truly believes about evolutionary theory, as this would lead to Stella *offering an assertion grounded in her own purely faith-based personal relationship with God*. Rather, in each of these cases, the hearers in question should rationally prefer that the speakers offer assertions that are best supported by the evidence, which is precisely what they do. Indeed, if the hearers learned the reasons why the asserters do not have the beliefs in question, they would clearly not feel cheated but grateful that the asserters have fit their assertions to the evidence rather than to their confused doxastic states.

A final point worth emphasizing about the central argument above is that it relies on only three claims regarding knowledge and assertion: first, that knowledge requires belief, second, that one can offer an assertion in the absence of the corresponding belief, and, third, that some assertions offered in the absence of the corresponding belief are proper. The first two claims are accepted by nearly every available theory of knowledge and assertion and thus do not depend on any particular view in epistemology or the philosophy of language. And the third claim, grounded in the above three cases, is intuitively compelling. Hence, it should be widely accepted that such cases of selfless assertion provide convincing counterexamples to the KNA.

#### 4. The Spuriousness of Secondary Propriety/Impropriety

If the KNA fails, then what is the central norm of assertion? By way of answering this question, I shall begin by taking seriously the widely accepted thesis that there is a very intimate connection between violating norms and deserving criticism. In particular, when a person is subject to criticism *qua* asserter, I shall regard this as being very good evidence for concluding that a norm of assertion has been violated.

But, one might immediately ask, doesn't DeRose's distinction between primary and secondary propriety/impropriety provide us with a way to reject this thesis? For recall that if an act is governed by a given norm, primary propriety/impropriety is determined by whether the act actually conforms to the norm, while secondary propriety/impropriety is determined by whether the agent in question reasonably believes that the act conforms to the norm. Given this, an asserter may be deserving of (secondary) criticism even if her act conforms to the norm in question, and may be behaving properly (in a secondary sense) even if her act violates such a norm.

Indeed, this is precisely how Matthew Weiner recently argues on behalf of the following competitor to the KNA (hereafter, the *Truth Norm of Assertion*, or the TNA):

TNA:            One should assert that  $p$  only if it is true that  $p$ .

Now, it may be argued that the TNA is obviously far too weak to be the central norm of assertion. For what if one truly asserts that  $p$  on the basis of extremely poor evidence, e.g., one asserts a lucky guess or a correctly believed product of wishful thinking? Surely, one may claim, the asserter in these instances would be properly subject to criticism despite satisfying the TNA. Given the TNA's inability to account for the impropriety of these kinds of correct assertions, it may be concluded that more than mere truth is needed for the central norm of assertion.

Not so fast, says the proponent of secondary propriety and impropriety. Even if, according to the TNA, an asserted lucky guess turns out to be primarily proper, it can nonetheless be secondarily improper and thereby subject to criticism. As Weiner writes, "...if assertion is governed by the truth norm, an assertion is secondarily improper if the speaker does not have reason to believe that it is true."<sup>29</sup> Hence, because you do not have reason to believe that your lucky guess is true, it is improper in a secondary sense to offer the corresponding assertion. Similarly, if you have reason to believe that which is in fact false, your assertion of this falsehood is secondarily proper despite being primarily improper.

In what follows, however, I shall argue that the notions of secondary propriety and impropriety are spurious: either a speaker is behaving properly and is not subject to criticism *qua* asserter, in which case she has not violated a norm of assertion, or she is behaving improperly and is subject to criticism *qua* asserter, in which case she has violated a norm of assertion. There is simply no room for acts being secondarily proper or improper.

Let us begin with the notion of secondary propriety. Notice, first, that norms of assertion are the rules that need to be followed in order to offer a proper assertion, much like we have rules that need to be followed in order to properly perform in certain competitive sports. So, for instance, if Toby crosses over the line of scrimmage when making a forward pass, he may rightly be criticized for failing to play professional football by the rules. In other words, this particular pass is improperly made because it does not follow the rules governing professional football. Suppose further, however, that Toby's contact lens had earlier fallen out during the game, and so his impaired vision causes him to reasonably believe that his forward pass was made without crossing over the line of scrimmage. Would we then say that Toby's pass is secondarily proper, despite the fact that it is primarily improper? No. Given the rules of professional football, there is no sense in which Toby's pass is *proper*. Rather, the impaired vision brought on by the loss of his contact lens provides

Toby with an excellent *excuse* for making an *improper* pass. Otherwise put, while his particular circumstances render his violation of the rules of the game *blameless*, Toby's pass is nonetheless one that *shouldn't have been made* in order to successfully play professional football. This is evidenced by the fact that no referee, upon hearing the story about his contact lens, would allow Toby another chance at his pass.

Secondary impropriety is similarly misguided when applied to the rules for performing in competitive sports. Suppose, for instance, that because of Toby's impaired sight, he cannot see precisely where the line of scrimmage is. Despite this, he makes a lucky guess as to its exact whereabouts and, on this basis, successfully makes his forward pass without crossing over the line. Would we regard his pass as secondarily improper because, even though Toby did not in fact cross over the line of scrimmage, he did not have reason to believe this? Once again, the answer is clearly no. Toby, *qua* professional football player, neither behaved in ways that he shouldn't have nor did he violate any of the rules of the game. Moreover, there is no reasonable sense in which he is subject to criticism. For even if the players on the opposing team later found out that Toby did not know whether he crossed over the line when making his pass, none of them would rightly regard him as somehow cheating. They may, to be sure, regard him as failing to be fully praiseworthy for making the pass in question, but this is a different matter. Again, this is borne out by the fact that his team's field position would still include the relevant yards, even if the referee learned about the circumstances involving Toby's contact lens.

Approaching this issue from a slightly different angle, notice that with respect to a given act,  $\alpha$ , the question may be asked: relative to the goal of proper  $\varphi$ 'ing, should the agent have performed  $\alpha$  or not? If the answer here is affirmative, then there is good reason to conclude that  $\alpha$  is in accordance with the norms governing proper  $\varphi$ 'ing. But then what room is there for  $\alpha$  being improper in some secondary sense? Perhaps the act fails to be particularly *praiseworthy* or *deserving of*

*full credit*—as when Toby luckily makes his forward pass without crossing over the line of scrimmage—but this does not render it *improper* in any reasonable sense. If, however, the answer to the above question is negative, i.e., the agent should not have performed  $\alpha$ , then there is good reason to conclude that  $\alpha$  violates the norms for proper  $\varphi$ 'ing. But then, again, what room is there for the act being proper in some secondary sense? The agent may be *blameless* or have an excellent *excuse* for performing such an improper act—as when Toby crosses over the line of scrimmage because of his missing contact lens—but this does not render the act *proper* in any reasonable sense.

Notice that similar considerations apply in many other domains. For instance, suppose that a moral theorist provides the following account of moral rightness:

MR: Action A is morally right only if A possesses feature  $x$ .

Suppose further that cases are presented in which an action fails to possess feature  $x$ , but the agent in question reasonably believes that the action possesses this feature. The familiar response in moral theory is not to argue that there are two kinds of moral rightness—primary and secondary—but, rather, to distinguish moral rightness from a different property, such as excusability or blamelessness. Thus, the standard move for a consequentialist is not to classify actions that an agent reasonably believes will bring about the best consequences but actually fail to do so as secondarily right; instead, such actions are regarded as wrong, but excusable or blameless. Similarly, suppose that an epistemologist provides the following account of knowledge:

EJ: Belief B is an instance of knowledge only if B possesses feature  $x$ .

Again, the familiar response to cases in which a belief fails to possess feature  $x$  but the subject in question reasonably believes that the belief possesses this feature is not to argue that there are two kinds of knowledge—primary and secondary—but to distinguish knowledge from excusable or blameless belief. Thus, true beliefs that are believed to be reliably formed but are in fact unreliably formed are not taken by reliabilists as instances of secondary knowledge, but as obvious cases of

beliefs that are blamelessly held but unknown. To invoke a primary/secondary distinction in these sorts of cases when familiar concepts, like excusability or blamelessness, suffice is to obscure the relevant issues rather than to resolve the disagreements that motivated such a move in the first place.

Applying these considerations to the practice of assertion, it should be clear that the notions of secondary propriety and impropriety are spurious. For if S asserts that  $p$  in violation of a norm of assertion, then, relative to being a proper asserter, *S should not have made the assertion in question*. If S asserts that  $p$  because S reasonably believes that asserting that  $p$  satisfies the norm of assertion even though it in fact does not, then S may be blameless or have a good excuse for offering an improper assertion. But this does not make either the assertion or the asserter proper in any reasonable (or secondary) sense. Accordingly, if S asserts that  $p$  in accordance with a norm of assertion, then, relative to being a proper asserter, *S should have made, or was permitted to make, such an assertion*. If S does not have reason to believe that her assertion satisfies the norm of assertion, then S may not deserve full praise or credit for offering a proper assertion. But this does not render either the assertion or the asserter improper in any clear (or secondary) sense.

The above considerations show, therefore, that Weiner cannot invoke the notions of secondary propriety and impropriety in an effort to make the TNA more plausible. Given that the TNA requires only truth for assertion, its proponents must accordingly live with the counterintuitive consequences that follow from such a norm. There are two dimensions to such consequences that I take to be the most debilitating. On the one hand, truth is not sufficient for proper assertion, and thus the TNA is far too weak a norm to govern assertion. For, on such a view, lucky guesses and correctly believed products of wishful thinking turn out to be proper. If I, for instance, correctly assert that the President is currently in Paris merely because I make a lucky guess, then, according to the TNA, this turns out to be a legitimate assertion that is not subject to criticism. Or if I truly assert that I got the job for which I applied merely because I convinced myself of this through

wishful thinking, then such a norm regards my proffered assertion as proper. But surely both kinds of assertions are clearly improper; indeed, it is precisely because of the obvious illegitimacy of such assertions that Weiner invoked the notion of secondary impropriety in the first place.

On the other hand, truth is not necessary for proper assertion, and thus the TNA is far too strong a norm to govern assertion. For, on such a view, assertions offered by our twins in evil demon worlds<sup>30</sup> and imprecise assertions turn out to be improper. For instance, if my twin, who is the unfortunate inhabitant of an evil demon world, acquires on the basis of experiences indistinguishable from my own the same sorts of beliefs as me, then her beliefs should be regarded as reasonable.<sup>31</sup> Given this, my twin also should not be subject to criticism for offering the same assertions as me, even if the truth value of our respective assertions varies significantly. According to the TNA, however, while I may be acting in perfect accordance with the norm of assertion, my twin is consistently violating such a norm and is therefore open to constant criticism. This seems like the wrong result.<sup>32</sup> Similar considerations apply with respect to imprecise assertions. For instance, suppose that you ask me how tall I am and I assert that I am 5 feet, 4 inches. Strictly speaking, however, suppose that I am 5 feet,  $3\frac{7}{8}$  inches. My assertion about my height, then, violates the TNA since it is false that I am 5 feet, 4 inches tall. Similar cases abound: the weatherman asserts that there is a 40% chance of rain tomorrow, when in fact there is only a 39.96% chance; a friend asserts that she is 28, when in fact she is 27 years, 364 days old; a contractor asserts that the room is 10X11 feet, when in fact it is 9 feet, 11 inches by 10 feet, 11 inches; a scientist asserts that the temperature of the water is 33.65 degrees Celsius when in fact it is 33.65432 degrees Celsius; a friend asserts that it is 6:00 PM, when in fact it is 6:01 PM, and so on. In all of these cases, the assertions in question are false because they are not absolutely precise, but they nonetheless seem perfectly proper.<sup>33</sup>

Now, the proponent of the TNA may respond here that imprecise assertions *are* improper, but the norm governing assertion is overridden by other norms in such cases. This would make imprecise assertions similar to Williamson's case of asserting, "That is your train," when I merely believe that it is very likely that it is your train. But notice: in Williamson's case, urgent practical circumstances explain why one might offer the stronger assertion, rather than the weaker "That might be your train." In the circumstances involving imprecise assertions, however, there need not be other relevant factors that explain why more precise assertions are not offered. When a friend tells me the time while we are taking a stroll, for instance, there need not be any practical circumstances that prevent her from saying 6:01 PM or 6:00:30 PM, rather than 6:00 PM. Moreover, even if imprecise assertions could be treated as similar to Williamson's train example, it is extremely counterintuitive for a norm of assertion to regard such a vast number of ordinary assertions—ones that cut across many different topics, contexts, and asserters—as improper. Yet this is precisely what the proponent of the TNA is forced to do.

The upshot of these considerations, then, is that those who appeal to the secondary propriety and impropriety distinction cannot have it both ways. If proponents of the KNA and the TNA wish to divorce satisfaction of a given norm from what the subject reasonably believes to be the case about satisfaction of the norm, then they cannot sneak the intuitive mileage of substantively different norms—ones that do not embrace such a divorce—through the back door of secondary propriety and impropriety. According to their views, even if one reasonably believes one's assertion is true or known, the fact that it is not true or known renders one in violation of the norm of assertion and, thereby, leaves one properly subject to criticism. If proponents of the KNA and TNA find this consequence so counterintuitive that invoking secondary propriety and impropriety seems necessary, this is probably good reason to conclude that the norms themselves are false.

## 5. The RTBNA

We have now seen, first, that cases of selfless assertion show that the KNA is false and, second, that the notions of secondary propriety and impropriety cannot be invoked to vindicate this norm—or the TNA—from the problems facing it. What, then, is the proper norm of assertion?

In response to this question, I propose the following *Reasonable to Believe Norm of Assertion* (hereafter, the RTBNA):

RTBNA:                    One should assert that  $p$  only if (i) it is reasonable for one to believe that  $p$ , and (ii) if one asserted that  $p$ , one would assert that  $p$  at least in part because it is reasonable for one to believe that  $p$ .<sup>34</sup>

There are several points to notice about the RTBNA. First, the RTBNA does *not* include for proper assertion the condition that one *reasonably believe* that  $p$ , but only the importantly weaker requirement that it is *reasonable for one to believe* that  $p$ . This is crucial to the RTBNA's ability to countenance cases of selfless assertion as instances of proper assertion. For in such cases, the asserter in question not only fails to know that  $p$  when it is being asserted, she also fails to believe—reasonably or otherwise—that  $p$ ; nevertheless, she has substantial evidence indicating that such a proposition should be believed, thereby rendering it reasonable for her to believe that  $p$ . Hence, cases of selfless assertion clearly satisfy the RTBNA.<sup>35</sup>

The second point to notice about the RTBNA is that, though it does not require that the subject reasonably believe that  $p$  when it is being asserted, it subsumes cases in which the subject does reasonably believe that  $p$ . For instance, my twin in an evil demon world who falsely but reasonably asserts everything that I do in the actual world satisfies the RTBNA because her reasonably believing that  $p$  entails that it is reasonable for her to believe that  $p$ . So, whereas stronger norms that require belief on the part of the asserter incorrectly exclude some cases of proper

assertion that the weaker RTBNA captures—such as those involving selfless assertion—the RTBNA is able to include all of the cases that stronger norms requiring reasonable belief subsume.

The third feature of the RTBNA to notice is the inclusion of (ii), i.e., the requirement that, if one asserted that  $p$ , one would assert that  $p$  at least in part because it is reasonable for one to believe that  $p$ . This is included to prevent cases from qualifying as proper assertions where, though it is reasonable to believe that  $p$ , a speaker's asserting that  $p$  is, or would be were she to assert that  $p$ , entirely disconnected from this reasonableness. For instance, consider the following:

ALARMIST: Gertrude has an overwhelming amount of excellent evidence available to her for believing that Oliver is the person who forgot to turn the alarm on before leaving the bank that employs both of them. She doesn't believe that this is the case, however, because she has romantic feelings for Oliver that cloud her rational judgment about his behavior. Nonetheless, when Gertrude is questioned by her supervisor about the alarm, she asserts "Oliver forgot to turn it on" merely to avoid any suspicion that she was involved in this oversight.

Now, while Gertrude has substantial evidence for believing that Oliver forgot to turn the alarm on before leaving their place of employment, she asserts that this is the case merely to avoid suspicion that she was involved in such an error. The RTBNA provides the correct result here: even though it is reasonable for Gertrude to believe the proposition she asserts, she does not assert it even in part because of this reasonableness and, hence, her assertion is improper.<sup>36</sup>

It is worth noting that competing norms, such as the TNA and the KNA, face similar problems. In particular, though it may be true that  $p$  or  $S$  might know that  $p$ ,  $S$ 's assertion that  $p$  may be entirely disconnected from this truth or knowledge. For instance, Hilda may have good reason to truly believe that her brother recently traveled to San Francisco—he told her about his vacation there a few weeks ago—but her daughter's recent trip to the emergency room may have caused her

to temporarily forget this fact. Thus, when she asserts to a nurse in the hospital that she knows someone who just came back from California, merely to make small talk and to get her mind off of her daughter's illness, her assertion both satisfies the TNA and is secondarily proper in Weiner's sense, i.e., it is true and she has reason to believe that it is true. But, given that the crisis in Hilda's life caused her to forget this reason, the proffering of such an assertion is entirely disconnected from its truth, thereby rendering it no different than a lucky guess. Similar considerations can be adduced regarding cases where a speaker knows a given proposition and has reason to believe that she knows it, but is temporarily distraught and forgetful and asserts this proposition for reasons that are entirely disconnected from this knowledge. Since the obvious illegitimacy of asserting lucky guesses is what motivated the introduction of secondary impropriety in the first place, proponents of the TNA and the KNA should include a clause requiring that, if one asserted that  $p$ , one would assert that  $p$  at least in part because it is true/known that  $p$ .

Fourth, the RTBNA derives support from the way in which criticisms of assertions are commonly offered. For instance, we frequently say, "Why would you believe that?" or "You don't have reason to think that." Of course, a proponent of the KNA may respond that we also criticize assertions by accusing speakers of lacking knowledge. We may say "How do you know that?" or "You couldn't know that" when a speaker offers an assertion that is deemed improper. But implicit in these challenges is the expectation that the asserter will respond with some *reason for believing* that the proposition asserted is true. A natural response to "How do you know that North Korea tested a nuclear bomb?" is "I read it in the *New York Times*." Here, I am offering my reason for believing that such a nuclear bomb was tested in response to a question challenging my knowledge. Thus, the central way in which assertions are criticized—where the speaker is accused of lacking reasons for believing the proposition in question—is exactly what the RTBNA predicts.

Fifth, the notion of “reasonableness” operative in the RTBNA should not be understood in a purely subjective manner. That is to say, the mere fact that a subject regards it as reasonable to believe that  $p$  does not make it reasonable to believe that  $p$ . In order for it to be reasonable for a subject to believe that  $p$  in the sense required by the RTBNA, there needs to be epistemic support available to the subject that makes it in the actual world, as a matter of objective fact, likely that it is true that  $p$ . The clause “in the actual world” not only enables the RTBNA to countenance the assertions of our twins in evil demon worlds as proper, it also captures the intuition that what is of import is the connection between epistemic support and likely truth when things are working as they should. How much support is required here?

One way of understanding the RTBNA is as follows: it is reasonable for S to believe that  $p$  only if S has epistemic support that is adequate for S’s knowing that  $p$  were S to truly believe that  $p$ . Otherwise put, minus belief and truth, the RTBNA would require everything epistemic that the KNA does.<sup>37</sup> While this strategy avoids the counterexamples involving selfless assertion in a way that would probably be most amenable to proponents of the KNA, it is not the one that I favor. For such a view has the consequence that all assertions involving Gettierized beliefs are improper and, accordingly, that such asserters are thereby subject to criticism. So, for example, if I assert “There is a barn” on the basis of my visual experience of seeing a barn, then the fact that unbeknownst to me it is surrounded by barn façades renders my assertion improper on this reading of the RTBNA. If one finds this consequence unattractive—as I do—then the threshold of epistemic support needed for reasonableness operative in the RTBNA should be at least slightly lower than what is required for knowledge.<sup>38</sup> How much lower? Though I shall not here attempt a decisive answer to this question, a plausible answer is that the notion of reasonableness in the RTBNA requires as much epistemic support as is needed for *justified belief*. More precisely: it is

reasonable for S to believe that  $p$  only if S has epistemic support that is adequate for S's justifiedly believing that  $p$  were S to believe that  $p$  on that basis.<sup>39</sup>

But regardless of the exact details of the RTBNA, it is clear that such a norm of assertion not only countenances cases of selfless assertion as proper, it also includes both assertions of Gettierized beliefs and those made by our twins in evil demon worlds. Since such asserters do not seem subject to criticism in any reasonable sense, these are clear and compelling advantages that the RTBNA has over rival norms of assertions. The case for replacing the KNA with this norm of assertion is not yet complete, however, since there are two central and formidable objections to the RTBNA that still need to be discussed.

## 6. Counterexamples to the RTBNA

Support for preferring the KNA to rival views that require anything less than knowledge for assertion—such as the RTBNA—comes from considering two central phenomena: Moorean paradoxes and lottery propositions.<sup>40</sup> Let us begin with the former.

Consider the following two assertions:

- (1) Albatrosses are birds, but I don't believe that they are.
- (2) Albatrosses are birds, but I don't know that they are.

Moore famously noted that assertions of these general forms—that is, of either the form “ $p$ , but I don't believe that  $p$ ” or of the form “ $p$ , but I don't know that  $p$ ”—seem quite paradoxical.<sup>41</sup> For instance, upon hearing you offer (1) and (2), one may rightly ask, “Well, if you take yourself to neither know nor believe that albatrosses are birds, then why are you asserting that they are?” At least *prima facie*, one may think it is unclear what you could reasonably offer by way of response to such a question.

Advocates of the KNA are in an excellent position to account for the paradoxical nature of asserting Moorean sentences: if only knowledge warrants assertion, then in order to properly assert the conjunctions found in (1) and (2), both conjuncts of each sentence must be known by the asserter. Thus, regarding (1), in order to properly assert that albatrosses are birds, you need to know that they are. Given that knowledge entails belief, this conjunct is true only if you believe that albatrosses are indeed birds. Hence, you know the first conjunct of (1) only if the second conjunct is false, i.e., you know that albatrosses are birds only if it is false that you don't believe that they are. Similar considerations apply to (2): in order to properly assert that albatrosses are birds, the KNA requires that you know that they are. But then it turns out, again, that you know the first conjunct of (2) only if the second conjunct is false, i.e., you know that albatrosses are birds only if it is false that you don't know that they are.

Let us now turn to lottery propositions. Suppose that Sabrina bought a ticket in a very large lottery. While the drawing has already taken place and only one ticket has won, the result has not yet been made public. As a matter of fact, Sabrina's ticket has not won. Nevertheless, her friend, Mervin, who has no inside information regarding the outcome of the lottery, flat-out asserts to Sabrina merely on the basis of the relevant probabilities:

(3) Your ticket did not win.

Given that Mervin's grounds for asserting (3) are merely probabilistic, they seem intuitively inadequate for making such an unqualified assertion. Because of this, Williamson maintains that Sabrina will be "entitled to feel some resentment" when she later discovers the nature of these grounds.<sup>42</sup> For Mervin was representing himself to Sabrina as having a kind of authority to make the outright assertion which he in fact lacked. Hence there is a clear sense in which he "was cheating."<sup>43</sup>

Again, proponents of the KNA have the resources to explain the data involving (3) with ease: intuitively, such lottery propositions, even when believed on very good probabilistic grounds, do not qualify as instances of knowledge. In offering (3), therefore, Mervin is asserting that which he does not know. If the KNA is correct, then, Sabrina's resentment is perfectly justified: Mervin, in offering an assertion that fails to be known, is violating a central norm of assertion. Substituting the KNA with a norm that requires anything less than knowledge, however, will leave us hard-pressed to explain what is wrong with these sorts of assertions. For even if (3) is true, believed, and based on excellent probabilistic grounds, it is still improper for Mervin to flat-out assert, in the absence of inside information, that Sabrina did not win the lottery in question.

We have seen, then, that proponents of the KNA have the resources to clearly explain the impermissibility of flat-out asserting both Moorean paradoxes and lottery propositions. The RTBNA, however, is taken to be at a clear disadvantage here. For since such a norm requires reasonableness rather than knowledge, it is said that assertions involving both of these kinds of propositions will at times satisfy the RTBNA. Regarding Moorean paradoxes, instances of selfless assertion, among possible others, provide clear examples in which the RTBNA countenances such assertions as permissible. For example, it is reasonable for Sebastian in *DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR* to believe both *that there is no connection between vaccines and autism* and *that he neither believes nor knows that this is the case*. Accordingly, his asserting "There is no connection between vaccines and autism, but I don't believe that this is the case" and "There is no connection between vaccines and autism, but I don't know that this is the case" both satisfy the RTBNA and are thus permissible assertions according to this norm. Similarly, the very good probabilistic grounds for lottery propositions presumably render it reasonable to believe in their truth. Hence, so long as a speaker asserts a lottery proposition, such as that found in (3) above, *because* of this reasonableness, these assertions are taken to satisfy the RTBNA.

Let me begin my response to these two central problems for the RTBNA by focusing on assertions involving Moorean paradoxes. The first point to notice here is that there are very few sentences of the form found in either (1) or (2) that will actually satisfy the RTBNA. For in order to conform to such a norm, it needs to be reasonable for S to believe that *p* and it needs to be reasonable for S to believe that she either fails to believe or know that *p*. Certainly, both of these conjuncts will be true of very few—if any—of our ordinary beliefs. For instance, consider the sentences found in (1) and (2). If it is reasonable for me to believe that albatrosses are birds—which I assume it is—then it is unclear what circumstances could make it such that it is also reasonable for me to believe that I either fail to believe or know that albatrosses are birds, especially when reasonableness is understood in terms of the amount of epistemic support needed for justified belief. This is not to say that there aren't such circumstances—perhaps it is possible for an ornithologist to have very good evidence for believing that albatrosses are birds, but also be aware of enough conflicting evidence that makes it reasonable for her to doubt whether she in fact *knows* that albatrosses are birds. But regardless of whether such conjunctions are possible, the point that is of import here is that it will be quite rare for Moorean paradoxes to satisfy the RTBNA.

Of course, even if it is rare, there are some Moorean paradoxes that clearly *do* satisfy the RTBNA on my view: namely, cases involving selfless assertion. In order to account for such assertions, let us begin by considering the following two cases:

LOSING DRINKER: Nadia and Hank know both that their friend Nina tends to go to the bar only when she loses a tennis match and that this is a fact that is generally known by all of her friends. However, Nadia knows further that Nina went to the bar today to have a drink with her opponent despite having won her tennis match. Nevertheless, while discussing Nina's recent tennis matches, Nadia asserts to Hank, "Nina went to the bar earlier today after her tennis match."

CHURCH THIEF: Quinn, Manfred, Rosalind, and Dolores are all currently at Starbucks drinking coffee and Quinn knows both that Dolores stole the money that was discovered to be missing earlier today from a local church's collection basket and that Manfred strongly suspects that Rosalind is the one who committed this crime. Nevertheless, Quinn asserts to Manfred, "Someone in this coffee shop stole the money from the church's collection basket earlier today."

Both the assertion made by Nadia in LOSING DRINKER and that made by Quinn in CHURCH THIEF satisfy all of the norms of assertion that have been thus far considered: the propositions in question are reasonable, true, and known by their respective asserters, and hence the corresponding assertions satisfy the RTBNA, the TNA, and the KNA. Yet, despite this, the assertions being offered are obviously problematic and the asserters in question are clearly subject to criticism.

What is the precise problem with the asserters and their assertions in LOSING DRINKER and CHURCH THIEF? In both cases, the speaker is offering an assertion that she or he knows will be *misleading* in the context at hand. For instance, even though Nadia's assertion that "Nina went to the bar earlier today after her tennis match" is reasonable, true, and known, she knows that Hank will form the further *false* belief that Nina lost her tennis match. By omitting the information that this is one of the rare times that Nina went to the bar after winning her tennis match, then, Nadia is offering an assertion that she knows will be misleading to Hank. Similarly, despite the fact that Quinn's assertion that "Someone in this coffee shop stole the money from the church's collection basket earlier today" is reasonable, true, and known, he knows that Manfred will form the additional *false* belief that Rosalind is the thief in question. His failing to add that Dolores stole the money is, then, tantamount to indirectly lying to Manfred.

Moreover, it is not only asserters who *know* that their assertions will be misleading that are subject to criticism or otherwise problematic. For instance, suppose that because of laziness, carelessness, or some other epistemic vice, both Nadia and Quinn in the above cases fail to realize that their assertions will be misleading to their respective interlocutors. Despite this, the circumstances are such that it is *reasonable for them to believe that their assertions will be misleading*. Such asserters are also clearly subject to criticism for asserting what they *should* believe is misleading, in much the same way that one who fails to know that she is speeding, but should know it, is nonetheless deserving of a speeding ticket. Yet, none of the three norms thus far considered—the RTBNA, TNA, or the KNA—have the resources to regard any of these assertions as improper or impermissible.

What LOSING DRINKER and CHURCH THIEF, combined with their slightly modified versions, show is that there is an additional norm governing assertion, one that rules out as permissible or proper assertions that it is reasonable to believe are misleading in the contexts in which they are offered. More precisely, proponents of the RTBNA, TNA, and the KNA should all embrace something like the following *Not Misleading Norm of Assertion* (hereafter, the NMNA):

NMNA:        S should assert that  $p$  in context C only if it is not reasonable for S to believe that the assertion that  $p$  will be misleading in C.

According to the NMNA, then, the assertions made by Nadia and Quinn both turn out to be impermissible because the asserters in question know that their assertions will be misleading (*a fortiori*, it is also reasonable for them to believe this). Moreover, notice that the NMNA is different from the following stronger norm:

NMNA\*:      S should assert that  $p$  in context C only if it is reasonable for S to believe that the assertion that  $p$  will not be misleading in C.

While the stronger NMNA\* requires that S have positive epistemic support for believing that her assertion will not be misleading in C, the weaker NMNA requires only that S not have reason for believing that her assertion will be misleading in C. Unlike the NMNA\*, then, the weaker NMNA allows assertions to be permissible when asserters do not have any relevant information about whether they will be misleading or not.

Applying these considerations to Moorean paradoxes, we are now in a position to see that the NMNA rules out the permissibility of asserting such paradoxes, even when they involve selfless assertions. For consider, again, Sebastian in DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR: it is reasonable for him to believe both *that there is no connection between vaccines and autism* and *that he neither believes nor knows that this is the case*. But now imagine that he asserts to the parents of his patients either, “There is no connection between vaccines and autism, but I don’t believe that this is the case” or “There is no connection between vaccines and autism, but I don’t know that this is the case.” Surely, it is extremely unlikely that such an assertion will prompt in his interlocutors the belief that though there is very good evidence for believing that there is no connection between vaccines and autism, Sebastian fails to believe or know this because of the grief and exhaustion brought on by his daughter’s recent diagnosis of autism. Rather, such an assertion is most likely to lead to Sebastian’s hearers either forming *no* relevant beliefs at all, because they are confused by its oddity, or to forming *false* beliefs, because they are trying to plausibly explain its oddity away. It would, for instance, be natural for them to falsely believe that the medical profession requires that Sebastian say that there is not such a connection, despite the fact that he believes that there are *good* reasons to suspect that vaccines do cause autism. Moreover, assuming that his hearers do not have any privileged information about their doctor’s personal life, it is clearly reasonable for Sebastian to believe that such odd assertions—as those found in Moorean paradoxes—will be misleading to his interlocutors. In particular, in the absence of concrete information about his personal life, it is

reasonable for Sebastian to believe that assertions of the kind expressed above will lead to his hearers forming either no relevant beliefs or false beliefs.

Similar considerations apply to other cases of selfless assertion. Suppose, for instance, that Martin in RACIST JUROR asserts to his childhood friend either, “No, the guy didn’t rape her, but I don’t believe that this is the case” or “No, the guy didn’t rape her, but I don’t know that this is the case.” Again, it is highly unlikely that Martin’s friend will come to believe that though there is excellent evidence for believing in the defendant’s innocence, Martin fails to believe this because of his residual racism. Instead, this odd assertion is most likely to lead to his friend forming either *no* relevant beliefs or *false* beliefs, e.g., that though the prosecution didn’t adequately prove that he committed the rape, there are *good* reasons to believe in the defendant’s guilt. Furthermore, if we assume that the hearer in question does not have any privileged information, either about the case or about Martin’s psychology relative to the race of the defendant, then it is reasonable for Martin to believe that assertions of these Moorean paradoxes will lead to the formation of either no relevant beliefs or to such false beliefs on the part of his hearer, thereby making them misleading.

Now, is the NMNA a constitutive norm of assertion, such as the RTBNA, TNA, and KNA purport to be, or is it a pragmatic norm of conversation, on a par with a Gricean maxim? One plausible answer here is that the NMNA either can be subsumed by or is at least akin to Grice’s Maxim of Quantity: “Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.”<sup>44</sup> In all of the above cases, the speakers in question offer assertions that can be seen as failing the NMNA because they offer either *too little* or *too much* information. For instance, both Nadia and Hank omit crucial information that lead to their assertions being misleading: if Nadia had added that Nina won her tennis match today and if Hank had added that the thief in question is not Rosalind, both assertions would have satisfied the NMNA by being as informative as is required for the current purposes of the respective exchanges. Similarly, speakers who assert

Moorean versions of selfless assertions offer either too little or too much information: too little, if they fail to explain away the oddity of their assertions—e.g., Sebastian can satisfy the NMNA by explaining to his hearers the whole story involving his daughter’s recent diagnosis of autism and the grief and exhaustion he has been experiencing; too much, if they add to their assertion that *p* the conjuncts “I do not believe that *p*” or “I do not know that *p*”—e.g., Sebastian can satisfy the NMNA by merely asserting, as he does in *DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR*, “There is no connection between vaccines and autism.”

But, one might ask, if Sebastian asserts only that there is not a connection between vaccines and autism, won’t he be guilty of offering an assertion that it is reasonable to believe will lead to his hearers forming false beliefs? For isn’t it likely that the parents of his patient will form the false beliefs that Sebastian both believes and knows that there is no connection between vaccines and autism? While there may be times when this is true, this is where Grice’s requirement that the contribution be “as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange” is relevant. For when the parents in *DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR* ask Sebastian about the purported connection between vaccines and autism, they are interested in *the fact of the matter* on this issue, not the personal beliefs he has about such a topic in the midst of grief and exhaustion. Given the current purposes of the exchange—namely, to provide the parents of his patient with the best medical advice about vaccines—it would not only be irrelevant for him to express his personal beliefs, it would also be misleading in achieving the desired end. Similar considerations apply in *RACIST JUROR* and *CREATIONIST TEACHER*: the current purposes of these exchanges do not require that Martin offer an assertion grounded in his residual racism or that Stella assert to her students what is the result of her own personal relationship with God. Rather, both contexts require that the speakers in question offer what is best supported by the evidence, which is precisely what they do. This is importantly different both from *LOSING DRINKER* and *CHURCH THIEF* and from Moorean

versions of selfless assertions, all of which are misleading relative to the purposes of the exchanges in question. For instance, in CHURCH THIEF, Quinn's assertion to Manfred is misleading with respect to the question of who stole the money missing from the local church's collection basket, which is precisely the topic at hand. So, in order to make this point explicit, we can modify the NMNA as follows:

NMNA\*\*:  
           S should assert that  $p$  in context C only if it is not reasonable for S to believe that the assertion that  $p$  will be misleading in C relative to the purposes of the exchange in question.

According to the NMNA\*\*, then, assertions of Moorean paradoxes, even those involving selfless assertions, are impermissible.

Let us now turn to assertions involving lottery propositions. The first point to notice is that it is not universally accepted that subjects *do* in fact lack knowledge of lottery propositions.<sup>45</sup> For given a commitment to fallibilism, it is not obvious why excellent probabilistic grounds for believing a true lottery proposition would fail to be adequate for knowledge. Hence, it is at least not clear that proponents of the KNA have the advantage that they are said to have here over advocates of the RTBNA.

Second, even if we suppose that knowledge is *not* had of lottery propositions, assertions of such propositions are surely not always impermissible or improper. For instance, if my friend, Hannah, who is 3 months pregnant and will not receive another paycheck for at least a week, is considering spending her last 4 dollars on lottery tickets rather than on prenatal vitamins, surely it is permissible and indeed proper for me to flat-out assert, "You are *not* going to win the lottery." Similarly, if my cousin, Sean, is considering buying a car that far exceeds his financial capabilities on the grounds that he might have won a lottery in which the drawing has already taken place but the results have not yet been made public, it is clearly both permissible and proper for me to flat-out

assert, “You did *not* win the lottery.” In cases such as this, flat-out assertions involving lottery propositions, even if they are not known, invite neither resentment nor criticism from the relevant hearers, thereby showing that they are not in violation of a norm of assertion.

Third, even if we suppose that knowledge is *not* had of lottery propositions and that there are clear instances in which asserting these propositions is *impermissible*, such assertions, like those involving Moorean paradoxes, will generally fail the NMNA\*\*. In particular, in cases where it is truly improper to assert lottery propositions, such assertions will frequently be impermissible precisely *because they are misleading*, where this misleading nature is both directly relevant to the purposes of the exchange in question and reasonably anticipated by the asserter.<sup>46</sup> For instance, if I flat-out assert to a woman I just met on a train, “You did not win the lottery,” it would be natural for her to form the *false* belief that I have some sort of inside information about the results of the drawing when in fact I do not. Furthermore, such a false belief is both relevant to the purposes of our exchange and one that I could reasonably expect her to form. Similar considerations apply to most other assertions of lottery propositions that are genuinely impermissible. In contexts where it is clear that an asserter is properly subject to criticism—unlike those above involving my assertions to Hannah and Sean—the central problem in offering lottery propositions is that they are apt to mislead hearers into believing that inside information about the lottery is possessed by the speaker.<sup>47</sup> Given this likelihood to mislead, then, though assertions of lottery propositions satisfy the RTBNA, those that are truly impermissible will nonetheless generally fail the NMNA\*\*.<sup>48</sup>

Hence, neither lottery propositions nor Moorean paradoxes—the two central objections to norms requiring anything less than the KNA—pose a problem for the RTBNA.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

We have seen that cases of selfless assertion show that the KNA is false, and that the distinction between primary and secondary propriety cannot be invoked either to defend the KNA or to support replacing this norm with the TNA. We have also seen that the RTBNA provides a plausible middle ground between these two rival views. For, unlike the KNA, the RTBNA rightly recognizes that assertions need not pass through the doxastic states of asserters in order to be proper, particularly when such states are riddled with prejudice or confusion. At the same time, however, the RTBNA, unlike the TNA, appreciates that assertions that float entirely free from adequate epistemic support—such as lucky guesses—are not proper in any significant sense. Finally, we have seen that the RTBNA not only avoids all of the problems facing its rivals, it also accommodates the two central advantages of the KNA—the impermissibility of asserting both lottery propositions and Moorean paradoxes.

A final note, on the consequences of accepting the RTBNA over the KNA: some of the most important epistemological views in recent years—e.g., contextualism and speaker sensitive invariantism—have been grounded in large part in a close consideration of the semantics of knowledge ascriptions.<sup>49</sup> The KNA has been one of the central supports for these linguistically motivated views.<sup>50</sup> If, however, the KNA is false, and ought to be replaced by the RTBNA, the proper focus in epistemology should begin to shift back to traditional considerations involving justification, warrant, evidence, and so on—which is where it should have been all along.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am formulating the KNA as specifying only a necessary condition for proper assertion, though some proponents of this norm, such as DeRose (2002) and perhaps Hawthorne (2004), take knowledge to be both necessary and sufficient for proper assertion.

<sup>2</sup> Williamson (2000, p. 243). See also his (1996).

<sup>3</sup> DeRose (2002, p. 180).

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Hawthorne doesn't explicitly endorse the KNA, but he claims that it is "plausible" and then proceeds to evaluate competing views by the extent to which they are compatible with such a norm.

<sup>5</sup> Hawthorne (2004, p. 23). Other proponents of the KNA include Unger (1975), Brandom (1983 and 1994), Reynolds (2002), Adler (2002), and Fricker (forthcoming). Cohen (2004) says that he is "not unsympathetic" to the view.

<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne (2004, p. 23).

<sup>7</sup> Williamson (2000, p. 257).

<sup>8</sup> In what follows, I shall speak of both asserters being subject to criticism and their assertions being improper or otherwise faulty. The way I am understanding these terms—which is in keeping with standard usage—is that asserters are in violation of a norm of assertion and are thereby subject to criticism when their assertions are faulty. But asserters can be subject to criticism without being blameworthy in the assertions they offer, as happens when, for instance, an asserter unknowingly violates a norm of assertion. For more on these issues, see Section 4.

<sup>9</sup> Williamson (2000, p. 256).

<sup>10</sup> Williamson (2000, p. 257).

<sup>11</sup> This is:

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(BNA) One must assert that  $p$  only if one believes that one knows that  $p$ .

<sup>12</sup> Williamson (2000, p. 262). Notice that this passage is not at odds with note 8 since Williamson is here talking about the faultiness of the asserter *qua* believer rather than *qua* asserter. Hence, there is no reason to doubt that faultiness *qua* asserter can be understood in terms of offering improper or faulty assertions.

<sup>13</sup> DeRose (2002, p. 180).

<sup>14</sup> In fact, I will say much more about these objections and responses in Section 4, when I argue not only that the distinction between primary and secondary propriety/impropriety is spurious, but also that it is counterintuitive to regard assertions of reasonably believed falsehoods (particularly in evil demon worlds) and Gettierized beliefs as improper. But my main argument against the KNA shall not depend on cases involving these sorts of assertions, especially since it is clear that at least some proponents of this norm, such as Williamson, do not find either kind of assertion problematic for the KNA. (Whether such proponents are correct in finding such assertions unproblematic for their norm is, of course, another matter.)

<sup>15</sup> I am assuming that the defendant in question did not in fact commit the rape of which he is accused.

<sup>16</sup> Again, I am assuming that this is true, i.e., that there is no connection between vaccines and autism.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that the attribution of no belief that  $p$  in the above cases should not be understood as being inferred from the attribution of the belief that not- $p$ . Indeed, in this respect, there seems to be an important difference between RACIST JUROR and DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR, on the one hand, and CREATIONIST TEACHER, on the other hand. For in the first two cases, it would not be accurate to describe the subjects in question as believing that not- $p$ ; rather, it would be most accurate to describe them as believing neither that  $p$  nor that not- $p$  at the time of the assertion in question. For instance, where  $p$  in DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR is the proposition *that there is no connection between vaccines and autism*, it is not clear that Sebastian believes that not- $p$  at the time of the relevant assertion, i.e., that Sebastian believes that there *is* a connection between vaccines and autism when he asserts that there is not such a connection. Indeed, the most plausible way to understand this case is that his daughter's recent diagnosis of autism leaves him feeling utterly confused, believing neither that  $p$  nor that not- $p$  but withholding belief whether  $p$ . Given this, Sebastian's lack of belief that  $p$  cannot be inferred from the attribution of the belief that not- $p$  since Sebastian

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does not necessarily believe that not- $p$ . Thus, while it *is* accurate to describe Stella in CREATIONIST TEACHER as believing that not- $p$ —i.e., she believes that Modern day *Homo sapiens* did not evolve from *Homo erectus* when she asserts that they have—this cannot be a *general* explanation of the attribution of no belief that  $p$  in the three cases of selfless assertion. (I am grateful to an anonymous referee for a question that led to the inclusion of this note.)

<sup>18</sup> XXXX and XXXX both suggested to me that the subjects in cases of selfless assertion may be read as actually weakly believing the propositions that they are asserting. While I agree that there may be cases of this sort—where a subject believes that she doesn’t believe that  $p$  but in fact weakly believes that  $p$ —it is also surely possible that there are subjects like those found in cases of selfless assertion. And this possibility suffices for my counterexamples to the KNA.

<sup>19</sup> Of course, this is not to say that proper assertion need not pass through *any* doxastic states of the asserter. For instance, in cases of selfless assertion, the asserter in question has beliefs about the evidence supporting the proposition being asserted. The point is, rather, that proper assertion need not pass through doxastic states sharing the same content as the assertion being offered.

<sup>20</sup> It is of interest to note that cases of selfless assertion undermine even substantially weaker conceptions of assertion, such as the belief view endorsed by Kent Bach and Robert Harnish (1979)—one must assert that  $p$  only if one believes that  $p$ —and the justification view defended by Jonathan Kvanvig (forthcoming)—one must assert that  $p$  only if one justifiedly believes that  $p$ . Such cases may also pose a problem for both Robert Stalnaker’s (1978) model in which, generally, what is asserted will be what the asserter in question believes, and will result in the transferring of the speaker’s belief to the relevant hearer(s), and for Bernard Williams’s conception of insincere assertion, which can be found in the following passage:

...sincere assertions do not necessarily have the aim of informing the hearer; but insincere assertions do have the aim of misinforming the hearer. In the primary case, they aim to misinform the hearer about the state of things, the truth of what the speaker asserts. Derivatively, they may aim to misinform the hearer merely about the speaker’s beliefs; the speaker may know that the hearer will

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not believe what he falsely asserts but he wants her to believe that he himself believes it. (Williams 2002: 73-4)

Now, while the speakers in cases of selfless assertion assert what they themselves do not believe—and thus qualify as offering insincere assertions on Williams’s view—they do not *aim to misinform* their hearers in either the primary or the derivative senses discussed above. For instance, Stella clearly does not aim to misinform her students about the evolution of *Homo sapiens* from *Homo erectus*, nor is it plausible that she aims for her students to believe that she herself believes this. In fact, she may positively aim for her students to believe merely that the evidence overwhelmingly supports the truth of evolutionary theory, regardless of what she herself believes. Thus, Stella may aim for them to form no relevant beliefs about what she herself believes. In such a case, contrary to Williams’s view, Stella insincerely asserts that *p* to her students with no relevant aim to misinform her hearers regarding *p*.

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that Timothy Williamson distinguishes between *reasonable assertion*, in which an asserter is blameless in asserting that *p*, and *warranted assertion*, in which an asserter has the epistemic authority to assert that *p*. Given this distinction, could Williamson argue that asserters in cases of selfless assertion offer reasonable and therefore blameless assertions that are nonetheless unwarranted? (I am grateful to XXXX for raising this point.) By way of response to this objection, notice that the asserters in all three cases have enough epistemic support for the propositions in question such that they would know them were they to believe them. Indeed, asserters in cases of selfless assertion can even be experts in their fields and so they are often in a better epistemic position relative to the propositions in question than non-experts are who in fact know such propositions. For instance, Sebastian in DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR is an extremely well-respected pediatrician and researcher who has done extensive work studying childhood vaccines, and so he is clearly in a better epistemic position with respect to the evidence supporting the lack of connection between vaccines and autism than a non-expert is. Because of this, it is not at all plausible to claim that a non-expert on vaccines *would have the epistemic authority* to assert that there is not a connection between vaccines and autism *but Sebastian would not*; accordingly, there is no room for plausibly arguing that Sebastian’s assertion is

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reasonable or blameless but unwarranted. Hence, Williamson's distinction between reasonable and warranted assertion cannot be invoked to save the KNA from cases of selfless assertion.

<sup>22</sup> It was suggested to me by an anonymous referee that cases of selfless assertion may instead show that belief is not a necessary condition of knowledge. While it obviously lies outside the scope of this paper to defend the thesis that belief is a necessary condition for knowledge, let me say that such a claim is nearly universally accepted in the epistemological literature. Indeed, even Williamson (2000, p. 3), who argues that knowledge cannot be analyzed in terms of belief—i.e., belief cannot be a conjunct of a non-circular necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge—nevertheless seems to hold that belief is an insufficient but necessary condition for knowledge. He says that, “If believing  $p$  is conceptualized as being in a state sufficiently like knowing  $p$  ‘from the inside’ in the relevant respects, then belief is necessary for knowledge, since knowing  $p$  is sufficiently like itself in every respect, even though knowledge is conceptually prior to belief” (2000, p. 3). The account of belief Williamson goes on to develop, according to which “believing  $p$  is, roughly, treating  $p$  as if one knew  $p$ ” (2000, p. 47), is precisely of this sort.

In any case, my thesis here can simply be read in the following conditional form: *if* belief is a necessary condition for knowledge, then the KNA is false (as well as the BNA and the RBNA). This conditional form of the argument, however, doesn't weaken my conclusion since all of the proponents of the KNA discussed in this paper accept the antecedent.

Moreover, if belief is not a necessary condition for knowledge, then something belief-like surely is. Otherwise, there would be instances of knowledge—namely those lacking any belief-like component—that could play no role whatsoever in the rationalization of actions. Given the obvious problems with this conclusion, there is good reason to think that at least something like belief is a necessary condition of knowledge. Thus, my arguments involving selfless assertion can simply be appropriately modified such that the speakers in question lack even this belief-like state.

<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to XXXX for raising this objection.

<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

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<sup>25</sup> In a similar spirit, James Van Cleve says, “You are not a liar just because you say something false. Lying is saying what you *believe* false in an effort to deceive another....” (2006, p. 51, original emphasis).

<sup>26</sup> *De mendacio* 3.3.

<sup>27</sup> It may be objected that if a speaker is aware both (A) that all of the available evidence supports that  $p$  and (B) that she nonetheless fails to believe that  $p$ , then such a speaker must accept that her attitude of disbelief toward  $p$  is arational—a conclusion that a subject may not be able to coherently or rationally accept about herself.

By way of response to this objection, notice that it is not necessarily true that a speaker must accept that her attitude of disbelief toward  $p$  is arational in light of her awareness of (A) and (B). Consider, for instance, Stella’s situation in CREATIONIST TEACHER. Stella’s belief in evolutionary theory is entirely grounded in her own personal faith-based religious beliefs, which she may regard as being disconnected from evidential constraints. But Stella may nonetheless hold the further belief that it is *sometimes rational to believe propositions for non-evidential reasons*, particularly those that concern religion. Thus, Stella may be aware that (A) and (B) are true and may regard her disbelief toward  $p$  as *non-evidential*, but it does not follow from this that she regards such a belief as *arational*. For Stella may reject the presumed connection between evidence and rationality, believing instead that rationality requires that we sometimes hold beliefs for non-evidential reasons (e.g., for reasons grounded in faith or spirituality). Thus, Stella may regard her disbelief toward  $p$  as *non-evidential but nonetheless rational*.

Alternatively, Stella may not reject the presumed connection between evidence and rationality and may therefore regard her disbelief toward  $p$  as both non-evidential and arational, but may nonetheless believe that there are grounds for beliefs deeper than—or at least comparable to—those provided by evidence or reason. In particular, she may regard beliefs grounded in faith or spirituality as arational but not thereby deficient or defective. Either way, then, an awareness that (A) and (B) are true of one’s current state does not necessarily lead to a conclusion about oneself that one cannot coherently or rationally accept.

<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to XXXX for pressing this objection.

<sup>29</sup> Weiner (2005, p. 236).

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the original new evil demon problem, see Cohen and Lehrer (1983).

<sup>31</sup> This assumes, of course, that the way that I form beliefs in the actual world results in them being reasonable.

<sup>32</sup> As mentioned earlier, the KNA has the very same problem with assertions involving reasonably believed falsehoods (and Gettierized beliefs as well). Indeed, DeRose introduces the distinction between primary and secondary propriety/impropriety as a way of accommodating the intuition that there is clearly something proper about assertions of this sort. But given that this distinction is spurious, the intuitive correctness of these assertions cannot be accommodated within the framework of the KNA. Hence, they pose further problems for the KNA, in addition to those deriving from cases of selfless assertion.

<sup>33</sup> For these reasons, then, I disagree with Williamson's suggestion in the following passage that the mere falsity of an assertion renders it improper: "[some rival accounts] lack the resources to explain why we regard the false assertion itself, not just the asserter, as faulty" (2000, p. 262).

<sup>34</sup> Though clause (ii) of the RTBNA subsumes clause (i), I leave them expressed separately so as to make it clear that there are two necessary conditions for proper assertion, one requiring reasonableness and another requiring that the assertion in question be at least partly grounded in this reasonableness.

<sup>35</sup> It is of interest to note that cases of selfless assertion do not satisfy the RBNA (one should assert that  $p$  only if one reasonably believes that one knows that  $p$ ) discussed in Section 1 of this paper.

<sup>36</sup> It is worth making explicit that cases of selfless assertion will clearly satisfy both clauses of the RTBNA since a central component of such a phenomenon is that the speaker asserts that  $p$  *because* it is very well supported by all of the available evidence.

<sup>37</sup> Indeed, if the proponent of the KNA wishes to avoid only my counterexamples involving selfless assertion, the RTBNA could include truth as well. But, of course, our twins deceived by evil demons would then be subject to criticism for offering the same assertions as we do in the actual world, which seems to be the wrong result.

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<sup>38</sup> If a proponent of the KNA does not find such a consequence counterintuitive—as Williamson’s position seems to be (in conversation)—then the threshold of epistemic support needed for reasonableness operative in the RTBNA can be read as being as high as what is needed for knowledge.

<sup>39</sup> In his (2005), Matthew Weiner proposes counterexamples to the KNA that, if successful, would pose a similar problem for the RTBNA. He writes:

Take the following case of prediction: Captain Jack Aubrey has had long experience of naval combat against the French Navy. He and young Lieutenant Pullings have been watching French ships maneuver off Mauritius all day. At two p.m., Aubrey says to Pullings,

(3) The French will wait until nightfall to attack.

Consider also the following case of retrodiction: Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson are brought to a crime scene. Holmes scans the scene and says (truthfully, as it turns out),

(4) This is the work of Professor Moriarty! It has the mark of his fiendish genius.

Holmes, at this point, has not found any evidence (in the criminal rather than epistemological sense) incriminating Professor Moriarty, but he is sticking his neck out based on his sense of what Moriarty’s crimes are like....These cases pose a problem for the knowledge account. They seem to be proper assertions in the absence of knowledge; the speakers’ grounds for belief fall short of those necessary for knowledge, yet the assertions do not seem wrong or odd. (2005, pp. 230-1)

Fortunately, neither case provides a compelling counterexample to the KNA or the RTBNA. On the one hand, if the prediction or retrodiction in question is genuinely based merely on a “hunch” (2005, p. 231)—or otherwise fails to have epistemic support adequate for reasonable belief—then the relevant asserter should offer a *qualified* rather than a *flat-out* assertion. For instance, rather than (3), Aubrey should instead offer a suitably qualified assertion, such as:

(3\*) I suspect that the French will wait until nightfall to attack.

Unlike (3), (3\*) does not have the potential to mislead Pullings into believing that Aubrey is privy to additional information regarding the French attacking. For notice: if Aubrey is truly working *merely on the basis of a hunch*,

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then it is unclear what would justify offering the flat-out assertion found in (3) rather than the qualified version in (3\*).

What is often the case with both predictions and retrodictions, however, is that one does in fact possess epistemic support sufficient for reasonably believing a proposition, but one is unable to fully conceptualize or articulate one's support, perhaps because of cognitive or pragmatic limitations. Thus, on the other hand, Aubrey might in fact be working with more than a hunch—in particular, he may have epistemic grounds adequate for reasonably believing (3)—but not be in a position to articulate his support. In such a case, Aubrey would be entitled to flat-out assert (3), but then such an assertion would also be reasonable to believe, thereby satisfying the RTBNA. (Indeed, I suspect that the fact that Aubrey and Holmes are known as experts in their respective fields might be the source of whatever intuitive pull Weiner attempts to generate from these cases.) Either way, then, Weiner's cases fail to provide compelling counterexamples to the RTBNA.

<sup>40</sup> My presentation of these issues relies heavily on Williamson's discussion in his (2000).

<sup>41</sup> See Moore (1962).

<sup>42</sup> Williamson (2000, p. 246).

<sup>43</sup> Williamson (2000, p. 246).

<sup>44</sup> Grice (1989, pp. 30-1).

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Reed (unpublished).

<sup>46</sup> It is of interest to note that this way of explaining the impermissibility of some assertions involving lottery propositions is importantly different than the Gricean strategy considered by Williamson (2000) and defended by Weiner (2005). For instance, regarding Sarah's asserting to Alice, "Your ticket didn't win," Weiner responds:

Briefly, the idea is that there is a norm, akin to Grice's Cooperative Principle (1989, 26), that one's utterances have some point. It would be pointless for Sarah to tell Alice that her ticket hadn't won unless Sarah had some inside information not obviously available to Alice. Accordingly, when Sarah asserts that Alice's ticket did not win, she implicates that she has inside information. Because she

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lacks inside information, Alice has the right to feel resentful. This resentment is grounded in the falsehood of Sarah's implicature rather than in the mere fact of Sarah's having asserted what she does not know. (2005, p. 232)

There are three points I should like to make about this response. First, there are some assertions of lottery propositions that *clearly do have a point*. For instance, in the example in the text, the point of the assertion I offer to my friend Hannah is that she should spend her remaining money on prenatal vitamins rather than on lottery tickets with wildly improbable odds. So, if Weiner regards all assertions of lottery propositions as impermissible, his Gricean explanation is, at best, only partial. Second, even with respect to assertions of lottery propositions that fail to have as obvious a point as the one I offer to Hannah, it is *highly doubtful that such assertions are even frequently pointless*. For instance, I may assert that you are going to lose the lottery to prevent you from having unrealistic expectations about your odds, or to remind you of your present modest financial situation, or to encourage you to begin looking for reliable employment, and so on, all of which clearly give a point to my assertions. Indeed, it is only in the most unusual and unlikely cases that assertions of lottery propositions would accurately be regarded as pointless. Third, given that Weiner regards assertions involving predictions and retrodictions that are based purely on hunches as proper, *it is not at all clear why he regards lottery propositions as problematic in the first place*. For instance, consider my assertion to Hannah, "You are not going to win the lottery." Such an assertion is rightly regarded as a prediction. But surely my basis for believing this proposition is significantly better than the hunches grounding the predictions that Weiner considers proper. Given this, it is curious that Weiner regards assertions of lottery propositions as being importantly different from predictions and retrodictions, so much so that he goes to great lengths to rule out the permissibility of asserting the former yet relies on the latter as his sole counterexamples to the KNA.

<sup>47</sup> There is an alternate way for proponents of the RTBNA to handle lottery propositions, one that would be most attractive to those who are inclined to accept the KNA but nonetheless find cases of selfless assertion compelling counterexamples. First, one could characterize the notion of reasonableness operative in the RTBNA in terms of *justified belief, where justification is taken to be necessary and, when combined with truth, belief, and a Gettier-condition, sufficient for knowledge*. Otherwise put, one could argue that minus belief, truth, and a Gettier-

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condition, the RTBNA requires everything epistemic that the KNA does. Second, one could argue along the following lines: if lottery propositions are indeed not known, what prevents them from being known? The answer here has to be something involving the *level of epistemic support* possessed for believing such propositions. As the proponent of this strategy is using the term, then, the answer involves the *justification* condition for knowledge. For standard lottery propositions are believed to be true, often are true, and are typically not believed in Gettier-type situations. This leaves only the distinctively epistemic condition of justification as the culprit purportedly preventing knowledge of lottery propositions. But if there is not enough epistemic support for knowledge of lottery propositions, then there is not enough epistemic support for satisfying the RTBNA understood in this way. In particular, where  $p$  is a lottery proposition, S's epistemic support will be inadequate for S's justifiably believing that  $p$ , whether or not S as a matter of fact believes that  $p$ . According to this reading of the RTBNA, then, it may not be reasonable for subjects to believe lottery propositions, thereby rendering it impermissible for such propositions to be asserted. Hence, lottery propositions would not pose a problem for this reading of the RTBNA.

<sup>48</sup> I say “generally” because there may be some assertions involving lottery propositions that are impermissible yet not misleading. For instance, I may say to my friend, “You did not win the lottery,” and we may both know that I am not privy to any inside information regarding the results. Here, Weiner may be correct that the problem with my assertion in such a case is that it is *pointless*, and hence that a conversational norm akin to Grice's Cooperative Principle renders it impermissible. The mistake Weiner makes, however, is to suppose that all—or even most—lottery propositions are impermissible because they are pointless.

<sup>49</sup> The KNA has also been used to defend certain views in the epistemology of testimony, particularly the thesis that in order for H to come to know that  $p$  on the basis of S's testimony that  $p$ , S must know that  $p$ . See, for instance, Reynolds (2002), Adler (2002), and Fricker (forthcoming). (For a dissenting view, see my (XXXX) and (XXXX).) Obviously, if the KNA is false, then the support for this thesis purportedly derived from the KNA is undermined as well.

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, DeRose (2002) and Hawthorne (2004).

<sup>51</sup> Acknowledgements.

