Interrogating the Linguistic Argument for KK

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The KK thesis says (roughly) that if *S* knows that *p*, then *S* knows that *S* knows that *p*. Though controversial, KK may be able to neatly explain an otherwise puzzling fact: namely, that assertions of the form "*p*, but I don't know if I know that *p*" are infelicitous. If KK is true, those assertions are unknowable, and hence bound to violate a knowledge norm on assertion. This is commonly taken to be a satisfying explanation of why those assertions are infelicitous. For many, that KK (if true) yields such an intuitive explanation of the data is a strong consideration in its favor.[1]

My goal is to undermine this argument for KK. I will first go on the offensive, and argue that the most plausible version of KK offers the least attractive explanation of the data. I will then propose my own explanation of the data, an explanation which relies on a "believe that you know" norm on assertion rather than on any version of KK. Together, these moves significantly undermine the explanatory power of KK, and so significantly weaken the overall case for KK.

§1. The KK-based explanation

In this section, I will look at how KK (if true) can explain why certain assertions are infelicitous. The assertions relevant for the debate surrounding KK are quite similar to other

[1] Notably Daniel Greco's "Iteration and Fragmentation", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2015, his "Iteration Principles in Epistemology I: Arguments For", Philosophy Compass 2015, Nilanjan Das and Bernhard Salow's "Transparency and the KK Principle", *Noûs* 2018, and Stewart Cohen and Juan Comesaña's "Williamson on Gettier Cases and Epistemic Logic", *Inquiry* 2013. Even critics of KK seem to be somewhat moved by this line of thought (see David Sosa's "Dubious Assertions", *Philosophical Studies* 2009 and Ben Holguín "Indicative Conditionals Without Iterative Epistemology", *Noûs* 2021. In his "Abominable KK Failures", *Mind* 2019, Kevin Dorst argues that there are other linguistic data which KK can explain. I will not be focusing on Dorst's data or argument here.

kinds of assertions which have been studied by philosophers, however, so it will be helpful to begin by disambiguating. Consider the following six types of infelicitous assertions:

[A] $p\ \&\ {\sim}B(p)$ # *It's raining, but I don't believe it's raining*.

[B] $p\ \&\ B({\sim}p)$ # *It's raining, but I believe it's not raining*.

[C] $p\ \&\ \diamond\,({\sim}p)$ # *It's raining, but it might not be raining*.

[D] $p\ \&\ {\sim}K(p)$ # *It's raining, but I don't know if it's raining*.

[E] $p\ \&\ K{\sim}K(p)$ # *It's raining, but I know that I don't know if it's raining*.

[F] $p\ \&\ {\sim}KK(p)$ # *It's raining, but I don't know if I know it's raining*.[2]

The first three kinds of assertion are irrelevant to the KK dialectic. As I will show shortly, the fourth and fifth can be explained without appealing to KK, and so are largely irrelevant as well. Our focus will be exclusively on the sixth type: assertions of the form $p\ \&\ {\sim}KK(p)$. This paper will follow David Sosa in calling them "dubious assertions".[3] These assertions have pride of place in the linguistic argument for KK: it is the infelicity of *these* assertions which proponents of KK claim that KK can (best) explain. Hence, this paper will focus on dubious assertions to the almost total exclusion of [A] through [E].[4]

To begin, it will be helpful to rehearse Timothy Williamson's popular explanation of why epistemic Moorean assertions of the form $p\ \&\ {\sim}Kp$ (type [D], above) are infelicitous: in short, they are bound to violate his "knowledge norm" for assertion, the norm that "one must: assert *p* only if one knows that *p*".[5] Such assertions are bound to violate that norm because, even though

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[2] In each of these examples, the left hand side "form" of the assertion papers over crucial differences. For instance: "but" versus "and"; "…know [if/whether]…" versus "…know that…". These interesting subtleties should not, however, affect the current dialectic, and so I will mostly ignore them. It is worth mentioning, though, that I prefer to use "…know [if/whether]…" rather than "…know that…" since sometimes "*S* does not know that *p*" may distractingly suggest that *p*. This is an interesting phenomenon, but investigating it is beyond the scope of this paper.
[3] See David Sosa's "Dubious Assertions", *Philosophical Studies* 2009.
[4] It seems to me that it is token assertions which are infelicitous, not types, and my language throughout will reflect this. Nothing below hangs on whether this is so.
[5] Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* 2000, p.243.

they may be true, given the plausible assumption that knowledge distributes over a conjunction, they are unknowable by the speaker. For: to know the conjunction, one must know the first conjunct, and also know that one does not know the first conjunct. Since knowledge is factive, this yields a contradiction.[6] This explanation does not rely on KK.

Again, this essay will predominantly focus on dubious assertions, the last of the six surveyed above. Dubious assertions are similar to epistemic Moorean assertions, but are slightly different in that they contain a double iteration of *knows*. They are of the form p & $\sim KKp$:

(1) # It's raining, but I don't know if I know it's raining.

Such assertions sound bad (or sound "infelicitous", or sound "abominable", etc.). Why?

On its own, Williamson's knowledge norm seems unable to explain this. For by that norm, an assertion of p & $\sim KKp$ at most requires Kp & $K\sim KKp$, which is only a contradiction if (something like) KK is true. If KK is true, though, there is a simple explanation available which closely parallels Williamson's explanation of epistemic Moorean assertions. The basic idea is that if KK is true, then dubious assertions of the form p & $\sim KKp$ are unknowable. We can see this by considering the following sequence[7]:

<u>Sequence 1</u>

L1.	$K(p$ & $\sim KKp)$	Suppose for *reductio*
L2.[8]	Kp & $K\sim KKp$	K distributes over conjunctions, L1
L3.	$K\sim KKp$ entails $\sim KKp$	K is factive
L4.	Kp & $\sim KKp$	L2, L3
L5.	Kp entails KKp	KK
L6.	KKp & $\sim KKp$ (contradiction)	L4, L5

[6] Williamson's norm similarly explains why assertions of type [E] (of form p & $K\sim K(p)$) are infelicitous.

[7] This sequence harmlessly compresses a few steps involving conjunction elimination and introduction. It also assumes that K distributes over conjunctions, which I think is plausible. In any case, I am happy to grant it for sake of argument.

[8] The argument could go differently: we could replace L2 (above) with L2*: $KK(p$ & $\sim KKp)$, justified by KK. This is a much less promising strategy for the KK-theorist, however, since it would then require distributing the second-to-outermost K *within* the scope of the outermost K, which would require a controversial closure principle for K.

L7. $\sim K(p \mathbin{\&} \sim KKp)$ L1–L7, *reductio*

What Sequence 1 shows is that if KK is true, dubious assertions are unknowable. Just like epistemic Moorean assertions, then, if KK is true, dubious assertions are bound to violate Williamson's knowledge norm for assertion (and, more generally, any norm on which one may assert *p* only if one knows *p*). So when KK is combined with a knowledge norm like Williamson's, explaining why dubious assertions are infelicitous seems easy: simply notice that dubious assertions are bound to violate that norm!

If KK is true, this explanation seems perfectly satisfactory. There are, of course, variations on this basic explanation, but I will not consider them here.[9] The important point (commonly granted by both sides of the debate) that if KK is true, it can explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous.[10]

§2. Classic problems and Weak KK

There are a number of (infamous) cases in which KK (as formulated above) seems to fail, however. The simplest kinds are cases where subjects seem to know that *p* without believing that they know that *p*. Assuming that knowledge requires belief, if these cases are coherent, then they are counterexamples to KK. The first case I have in mind is something like this:

[9] One alternative explanation worth briefly mentioning is Daniel Greco's in his "Iteration and Fragmentation", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2015. There, Greco argues that if KK is true, then—given that one is entitled to assert that *p* iff one knows that *p*—in asserting the second conjunct of a dubious assertion, one is "unnecessarily reticent" to assert that one knows that *p*. Greco's basic thought seems to be that since one is entitled to assert the first conjunct, if KK holds, one must be entitled to assert "…and I know that *p*"—but then, there is something strange about refusing to assert that, and instead asserting "…but I don't know if I know that *p*". I find this explanation somewhat opaque, however. I may be entitled to do all sorts of things which it is nevertheless perfectly fine to refrain from doing. Why should knowledge entitle assertion in such a way that it would be strange to refrain from asserting what one is entitled to? Are there not plenty of cases where I am reticent to assert some *p* which I know, and hence am entitled to assert, and yet my reticence is entirely appropriate?

[10] See, for instance, Cohen and Comesaña's op. cit. pp.24-25, Greco's op. cit. a and op. cit. b, Das and Salow's op. cit., and Holguín's op. cit. p.13. Though Sosa rejects both KNA and KK, seems open to the possibility that KK could at least *help* explain why dubious assertions sound infelicitous (see Sosa op. cit.).

> *The Salesman*. George is busy selling vacuums door-to-door. As such a salesman, he knows a great deal about the vacuums: how many colors they come in, for example. While he often wonders whether he will sell enough vacuums to meet his quota, he never wonders if he *knows* how many colors the vacuums come in. He is simply too busy selling vacuums to reflect on what he knows.

George knows how many colors the vacuums come in. But he has never reflected on whether he knows how many colors the vacuums come in, and so it is possible that he simply has no beliefs about whether he knows how many colors the vacuums come in, and hence (assuming that knowledge requires belief) doesn't know whether he knows. Note: this is not to say that failing to reflect on *p* entails that one has no belief as to *p*; it is only to say that failing to reflect on *p* suggests that it *possible* that one lacks beliefs as to *p*. If (as many think) belief is necessary for knowledge, then George may not know that he knows how many colors the vacuums come in. George's case may thus exemplify a KK failure.

The obvious way to resist this case would be to claim that George does, in fact, have the required belief (perhaps implicitly). But it is not obvious that he *must* have such a belief. Moreover, if KK is true, George must not only believe that he knows, he must believe that he knows that he knows, believe that he knows that he knows that he knows, and so on (for every finite number of iterations). Again, this might well be possible, but claiming that it is necessarily the case whenever one knows that *p* is a non-trivial explanatory burden for advocates of KK.

Another set of difficult cases for KK are Colin Radford's "unconfident examinee" cases.[11] For instance:

> *Unconfident Examinee*: Mary, a high schooler, has spent months studying for the AP US history exam. She has memorized countless facts, and has written practice essays making use of those facts. Unfortunately, Mary has severe testing anxiety. When Mary comes to the multiple-choice section on the exam, she starts to doubt her memory. Nevertheless, she puts her best guess down for each question. As it turns out, she gets every question correct.

[11] See Colin Radford's "Knowledge—by examples", *Analysis* 1966.

A commonly-drawn moral is that for some historical propositions *p*, Mary knows that *p*, but she does not believe that she knows it, and hence does not know that she knows it.

Of course, one might argue either that Mary's doubts defeat her first-order justification for believing that *p* and thus destroy her first-order knowledge that *p*, or that Mary does not, in fact, believe that *p* (or both). On either approach—assuming, contra Radford, that knowledge requires belief—Mary loses her first-order knowledge that *p*, and so would not be a counterexample to KK. On the other hand, for some (especially those with reliabilist sympathies), it is still quite intuitive that Mary nevertheless knows that *p*.[12] Cases like *Unconfident Examinee* are controversial, and I do not mean to rest my case on them. My point is just that cases like *The Salesman* and (perhaps) *Unconfident Examinee* put significant pressure on KK. I do not mean to claim that they decisively refute it—just that they make it a potentially costly position to maintain.

Now, even if one agrees that these are counterexamples to KK, one might not think they are very interesting counterexamples. For one might take it that the real point of KK is that if one knows something then one has, in some sense, already done everything that one needs to do (short of belief) in order to know *that* one knows it. In line with this thought, many advocates of KK hold a weaker version of KK.[13] According to this weaker version, if you know that *p*, then you are automatically *in a position to know* that you know that *p*. Thus, there are at least two versions of the KK thesis: the version we have been working with so far (call it "Strong KK"), and a version couched in terms of being in a *position to know*:

[12] Presumably there are also cases where subjects do not have the concept *knowledge* and so cannot believe that they know anything at all. Discussing these would take us too far afield, however, so I will set them aside going forward.

[13] See, for instance, Conor McHugh's "Self-Knowledge and the KK Principle", *Synthese* 2010, Das and Salow's op. cit., and Dorst's op. cit.. Dorst works with a slightly different principle: if one is in a position to know that *p*, then one is in a position to know that one is in a position to know that *p*. Still, Dorst's version of KK is "weak" in the sense that simply failing to have the relevant higher-order belief is no counterexample.

> Strong KK: Necessarily, for all *S* and *p*, if *S* knows that *p*, then *S* knows that *S* knows that *p*.

> Weak KK: Necessarily, for all *S* and *p*, if *S* knows that *p*, then *S* is in a position to know that *S* knows that *p*.

The notion of being in a position to know threatens to be somewhat obscure, but the gist is that if one is in a position to know that *p* then one has done everything one needs to do, epistemically if not psychologically, in order to know that *p*; for instance, one might not have formed the belief that *p*, but one has good evidence for *p*, one is not in a Gettier case, etc..[14] Those who find KK plausible but are worried by the (purported) counterexamples outlined above often retreat to Weak KK, for cases like *The Salesman* are almost certainly not counterexamples to Weak KK. And while cases like *The Unconfident Examinee* are certainly contentious, Weak KK offers a plausible diagnosis of them: if Mary really does preserve her first-order knowledge, then while she does not know that she knows, she may be in a position to know that she knows.[15] Hence, moving to Weak KK manages to avoid the most troubling cases for Strong KK without surrendering what its proponents take to be its basic insight. There is thus much to be gained by moving from Strong KK to Weak KK.

For those who sympathize with the KK thesis's fundamental idea, giving up Strong KK and retreating to Weak KK is a tidy way to avoid having to deal with the most troubling (alleged) counterexamples countenanced above. It is far less clear, however, that Weak KK (if true) could explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous.

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[14] This is how Declan Smithies's "The Normative Role of Knowledge" 2012, p. 268 describes being in a position to know. See Williamson op. cit. p.95 for a related explication.

[15] Of course, this is contestable. Alex Worsnip's "The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2018, for instance, argues that Mary is not even in a position to know that she knows that *p*.

Recall how Strong KK (if true) can explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous: it entails they are unknowable, and so violate a knowledge norm on assertion. It is not clear that this argument can be neatly modified so that it shows that dubious assertions are unknowable while relying *only* on Weak KK, however. The most promising modification is as follows, where $\overline{K}p$ means one is in a position to know that p[16]:

<u>Sequence 2</u>

L1.	$K(p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$	Suppose for *reductio*
L2.	$\overline{K}K(p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$	Weak KK, L1
L3.	$K(p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$ entails $Kp \,\&\, K{\sim}KKp$	Distribution of K
L4.	$K{\sim}KKp$ entails ${\sim}KKp$	Factivity of K
L5.	$Kp \,\&\, K{\sim}KKp$ entails $Kp \,\&\, {\sim}KKp$	Substitution of second conjunct, L4
L6.	$K(p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$ entails $Kp \,\&\, {\sim}KKp$	L3–L5
L7.	$\overline{K}(Kp \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$ (absurd!)	L2, $\overline{K}$ closed under L6's entailment
L8.	${\sim}K(p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$	L1 through L7 (*reductio*)

The argument is supposed to work just like the first (though it is slightly different from the first, which shows that if Strong KK is true, the supposition that a dubious assertion is known yields a contradiction). The point is supposed to be that if Weak KK is true, the supposition that a dubious assertion is known yields an absurd consequence. Here, the absurd consequence is

[16] There are also unpromising ways to proceed. We could, for instance, proceed by first distributing the K and *then* appealing to Weak KK:

L1.	$K(p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$	suppose for *reductio*
L2*.	$Kp \,\&\, K{\sim}KKp$	K distributes over conjunctions, L1
L3*.	$K{\sim}KKp$ entails ${\sim}KKp$	K is factive
L4*.	$Kp \,\&\, {\sim}KKp$	L2 entails L4 by L3
L5*.	Kp entails $\overline{K}Kp$	Weak KK
L6*.	$\overline{K}Kp \,\&\, {\sim}KKp$	L4 entails L6 by L5

But this is a failed *reductio*, because the conclusion L6* is hardly absurd! L6* merely claims that one is in a position to know *Kp*, and yet does not in fact know it. If this were absurd, then being in a position to know *p* would entail knowing *p*, and Weak KK would be no different from Strong KK (moreover, the utility of the concept *position to know* would be entirely obscure).

supposed to be that one is in a position to know Kp & $\sim KKp$. Presumably, it is supposed to be absurd that one is in a position to know Kp & $\sim KKp$ because it is metaphysically impossible that one knows Kp & $\sim KKp$. Hence, the thought goes, Weak KK (if true) can explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous: it explains why they are unknowable, and so they are bound to violate a knowledge norm on assertion.

I have two worries about this line of thought. First, is not obvious that the consequence in L7 is really absurd—that is, it is not obvious that one can be in a position to know that *p* only if it is metaphysically possible for one to know that *p*. For instance: suppose Anita has excellent evidence for *q,* and yet she does not believe q. It seems plausible that Anita could still be in a position to know q & $\sim Kq$. What better epistemic position could Anita be in with respect to it? She has overwhelming evidence for the first conjunct; moreover, she need merely reflect on whether she *in fact* believes q, and it will become obvious to her (at least in some cases) that she does not.[17] That Anita could not possibly know q & $\sim Kq$ seems beside the point: it seems that Anita is in excellent epistemic standing with respect to q & $\sim Kq$, and this may be all that "being in a position to know" is supposed to capture.

Or at least, this much seems plausible to me. My opponent will likely object that Anita is merely in a position to know each of the conjuncts, though not the conjunction. What do I have to say for myself? Two things. First, this could just be a clash of intuitions—intuitions about how exactly we should extend the concept *position to know* from clear to borderline cases. After all, "position to know" is a relatively young term of art.

Second, my opponent might think that Anita is merely in a position to know each of the conjuncts (rather than the conjunction) because they are committed (or at least sympathetic) to

[17] This is not to say that belief is "luminous".

thinking that S is in a position to know that p only if the following counterfactual obtains: were S to come to believe p, S would know that p. But we should resist the counterfactual, for it seems open to counterexamples. For instance: Alice has excellent evidence for p but, unfortunately, were Alice to come to believe p, she would misconstrue the evidence's relationship to p so that her resulting belief would be improperly based on that evidence. So were Alice to come to believe that p, she would not come to know that p. Intuitively, this is compatible with Alice's being in a position to know that p in the first place. Intuitively, then, 'S is in a position to know that p' does not entail 'were S to believe that p, S would come to know that p'.

There is, moreover, a second and much more serious difficulty with trying to use Weak KK to show that dubious assertions are unknowable. Notice that at L7 (building on L2–L6), this sequence relies on a significant closure principle: the principle that if one is in a position to know $K(p \;\&\; {\sim}KKp)$, then one is in a position to know its entailment $Kp \;\&\; {\sim}KKp$. As we saw (L3–L5), this is a non-trivial entailment. It is unlikely that *position to know* is closed under it—but if *position to know* is not closed under this entailment, then the argument from L2 to L7 is invalid.

Why should we doubt that *position to know* is closed under this entailment? Notice first that the proponent of Sequence 2 is not allowed to assume that the subject knows that the entailment from $K(p \;\&\; {\sim}KKp)$ to $Kp \;\&\; {\sim}KKp$ obtains. Just because someone has made a dubious assertion hardly means they know that $K(p \;\&\; {\sim}KKp)$ entails $Kp \;\&\; {\sim}KKp$! Moreover, the subject may not even be in a position to know this entailment obtains: perhaps, for instance, they have (misleading) evidence that K does not distribute over conjunctions. So even if *position to know* were closed under known entailment (or entailments which a subject is in a position to know), the proponent of Sequence 2 cannot appeal to that fact to ensure that moving from L2 to L7 is valid.

Could *position to know* be closed under entailments which the subject does not know, or is not even in a position to know? Perhaps. But notice that for Sequence 2 to be valid, *position to know* must be closed under an entailment from (for instance) $K(p \;\&\; q)$ to $Kp \;\&\; Kq$ (see L3). But this is not a formal entailment (the kind of entailment relation which holds between $p \;\&\; q$ and p). Hence, for Sequence 2 to be valid, *position to know* must be closed under a stronger kind of entailment, such as metaphysical entailment. But of course, it cannot be closed under metaphysical entailment: one is not automatically in a position to know that water is H_2O even though this is metaphysically entailed by any truth whatsoever.

Could *position to know* be closed under those patterns of metaphysical entailment which may be known *a priori*? This is not likely either. For instance: while Kurt Gödel was once in a position to know that arithmetic is incomplete, plausibly, he was not in a position to know this at age twelve—even though by that age, he was in a position to know many things which *a priori* metaphysically entail that arithmetic is incomplete. There are, therefore, significant difficulties with claiming that *being in a position to know* is closed under the kind of entailment which it needs to be in order for Sequence 2 to be valid.[18]

One might wonder whether there is some other way for Weak KK to explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous. Perhaps, for instance, it is necessarily the case that whenever one is in a position to know that p, if one considers whether p, then one knows that p. That is:

[18] Moreover, as Juhani Yli-Vakkuri and John Hawthorne show in their "Being in a Position to Know" *Philosophical Studies* 2022, from (i) one is automatically in a position to know every logical truth, (ii) the K-axiom holds for being in a position to know, and (iii) if one is in a position to know that *p*, then it is metaphysically possible that one knows that *p*, it follows that if one is in a position to know that *p*, then for some *q*, one actually knows *p* & *q*. This is a rather unpalatable consequence for being in a position to know. The most natural way to accept a closure principle for *position to know* and validate Sequence 2, however, may be to accept all three of these theses! Of course, there may be a way to argue that Sequence 2 is valid while avoiding these three theses. A careful examination of whether this is so is beyond the scope of this paper.

perhaps the following is a necessary truth (where $C(p)$ means that one considers whether p, and like before, $\overline{K}(p)$ means that one is in a position to know that p):

$$\overline{K}(p) \mathbin{\&} C(p) \supset K(p)$$

This might be a good way to capture the thought that when one is in a position to know, the path to knowledge lies open.

One might also think that a speaker felicitously asserts “I don’t know whether *p*” only if they have considered whether *p*. For instance: if one has not considered whether one will be busy tomorrow afternoon, plausibly, it would be infelicitous to assert “I don’t know whether I’ll be busy tomorrow afternoon”. In particular, it seems plausible that one could felicitously make a dubious assertion only if one has considered whether one knows that *p*.

Once we put these two thoughts together, though, it starts looking like Weak KK can explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous after all. For if both of these thoughts are correct, if Weak KK is true, it will be impossible for one to felicitously make a dubious assertion while conforming to a knowledge norm on assertion. We can see this by supposing for *reductio* that one both felicitously makes a dubious assertion, and that one knows what one asserts. The following sequence plays this out:

Sequence 3

L1.	$K(p \mathbin{\&} {\sim}KKp)$	for *reductio*, suppose that one knows what one asserts
L2.	$Kp \mathbin{\&} K{\sim}KKp$	L1 (distribute K)
L3.	$Kp \mathbin{\&} {\sim}KKp$	L2 (factivity of K)
L4.	$\overline{K}Kp \mathbin{\&} {\sim}KKp$	L3 (Weak KK applied to left conjunct)
L5.	$KKp \mathbin{\&} {\sim}KKp$ (contradiction)	L4 (see below)

It is in virtue of the two thoughts we just encountered that L5 is supposed to follow from L4: since we are supposing (for *reductio*) that the dubious assertion is felicitous, and since its second conjunct is "…I don't know whether I know that p", by our second thought, it must be that the speaker considered whether they know that p (that is: $C(Kp)$). And since the left conjunct of L4—which follows from L3 by Weak KK—is that the speaker is in a position to know whether they know that p (that is: $\overline{K}(Kp)$), by our starting thought (that $\forall p, \overline{K}(p)$ & $C(p) \supset K(p)$), it follows that the speaker must know that they know that p—that is, that $K(Kp)$.

But of course, L5 is a contradiction. Given the two thoughts we started with, then, it looks like Weak KK can straightforwardly combine with a knowledge norm on assertion to explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous: either the speaker infelicitously asserted it in virtue of failing to consider whether they knew that p, or they failed to know the conjunction, violating a knowledge norm on assertion.[19]

This is a natural way to use Weak KK to explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous. Indeed, on the face of it, it seems just as successful as the Strong KK-based explanation we considered above. Unfortunately, however, it is not obvious that this strategy can succeed. The problem is with its starting thought: that one knows that p whenever one is in a position to know that p and considers whether p.

To bring out the difficulty, recall: Weak KK's central advantage over Strong KK is that it does not claim that whenever subjects know that p, they *actually* believe that they know that p. Whatever it means to be in a position to know something, then, being in that position must not include actually believing it—or else Weak KK will be no better off than Strong KK.

But now, two points are worth noting. First: no matter how excellent one's starting epistemic position with respect to some proposition p, it's not obvious that if one considers whether p, one will come to believe that p (even setting aside time-lag considerations). There

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[19] Thanks to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this strategy.

might be psychological barriers to believing that p—or one may simply fail to put q and $q \supset p$ together, even though one knows each. This means that, in general, when one is in a position to know p, one may consider whether p without coming to believe it, and so one may not know that p.

Even if one does come to believe that p, though, a second point is worth noting: no matter how excellent one's starting epistemic position with respect to some proposition p, in general, it is not guaranteed that beliefs one forms about p will amount to knowledge. For when one forms the belief that p, the resulting belief will only be doxastically justified—and hence, will only amount to knowledge—as long as one (a) bases one's belief on the right sorts of reasons (for instance: one's evidential reasons), and (b) performs the act of basing in the right sort of way. But a subject could fail to satisfy either of these conditions.

She might fail the first, for instance, in the following way: though she is in an excellent epistemic position with respect to p, she believes it on the basis of a bizarre, evidentially irrelevant fact (for example: that her friend's tea leaves were arranged in a particular pattern). She may, for instance, be disposed to cite the arrangement of the tea leaves (rather than her excellent evidence for p) when defending her belief to others. Such a belief fails the first condition: it is not based on the right sorts of reasons. Despite starting out in as good an epistemic position anyone could be in with respect to p (without believing it), then, this subject's belief that p will not amount to knowledge.

Moreover, as John Turri nicely argues, even if p is based on the right sorts of reasons, something could still go wrong.[20] Turri gives the example of Mr. F. A. Lacy, who knows (i) that if the Spurs play the Pistons, they'll win, and that (ii) the Spurs will play the Pistons. From these

[20] See his "On the Relationship between Propositional and Doxastic Justification", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2010.

facts, Lacy infers that the Spurs will win; he therefore bases his belief that the Spurs will win on the right sorts of reasons.[21] Unfortunately, however, in forming his belief, Lacy applies a bad inference rule: "from any *p* and *q*, conclude any *r* whatsoever". Intuitively, the resulting belief does not amount to knowledge—even though it has the right sort of basis, and even though Lacy started out in as good an epistemic position as one could be in (without believing) with respect to its content.

The lesson is that, in general, no matter how excellent one's epistemic setup is with respect to some proposition, if one does not believe it, something can always go wrong. In a slogan: no matter how open the path to knowledge, there is always the possibility of a misstep.[22] We should be wary, then, of this proposed explanation's starting thought that if one is in a position to know that *p* and one considers whether *p*, one knows that *p*. Since being in a position to know that *p* must not involve believing that *p*, coming to know that *p* must involve a transition from considering whether *p* to believing it. This transition might not take place at all—and even if it does, it might be executed poorly, regardless of how excellent one's antecedent epistemic position was with respect to *p*.

It is thus far from clear that Weak KK can, on its own, explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous. Successfully modifying the Strong KK-based explanation we saw earlier involves undertaking rather unattractive commitments about *position to know*. In moving from Strong KK to Weak KK, one seriously risks losing the ability to offer a satisfying explanation of

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[21] Indeed, it is natural to describe Lacy as being in a position to know that the Spurs will win. But the point here is not just about the concept *position to know*: the point is that no matter what epistemic position one is in, if one does not believe that *p*, something could always go wrong when one forms the belief that *p*.

[22] Indeed, these are not just possibilities for the theoretician: they might be possibilities that the speaker herself believes to obtain. She might, for instance, know that *p*, be in a position to know that she knows it, believe she knows it, but—perhaps (truly) thinking that her belief *that* she knows that *p* is merely the result of wishful thinking—assert "*p*, but I don't know that I know that *p*".

why dubious assertions are infelicitous. Since that explanatory power is often taken to be a strong consideration in favor of KK's basic idea, the move to Weak KK may prove quite costly.

Those whose sympathy for KK is based on its ability to explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous are thus caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, while Strong KK (if true) offers a powerful explanation of why dubious assertions are infelicitous, it faces a broad range of plausible counterexamples. On the other hand, though Weak KK arguably avoids those counterexamples, it can explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous only by taking on some dubious commitments concerning *position to know*. On either version of KK, then, the effort to explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous will involve some implausible commitments.

§3. Alternative explanations which do not rely on any version of KK

This paper's constructive ambition is to explain why dubious assertions sound infelicitous without appealing to (any version of) KK. In doing so, it means to further undermine the explanatory power of KK: by showing that alternative (and less contentious) explanations are available, it only becomes more difficult for the proponent of KK to insist that their explanation is the best.

I am hardly the first to attempt this, however: Simon Goldstein, Timothy Williamson, and Matthew Benton have each proposed explanations of the relevant data which do not appeal to (any version of) KK. In this section I will review these proposals, indicate various points at which they may seem unsatisfying, and draw attention to the insights which should be preserved.

Simon Goldstein has recently argued that dubious assertions are unknowable because knowledge is "fragile", and hence dubious assertions are bound to violate a knowledge norm on assertion:

> FRAGILITY If one knows that one does not know that one knows that p, then one does not know that p (formally: $K{\sim}KKp \supset {\sim}Kp$)[23]

It straightforwardly follows that if knowledge is fragile, then dubious assertions are unknowable.[24] Dubious assertions would thus be bound to violate a knowledge norm on assertion.

My basic concern with Goldstein's account is with his motivation for FRAGILITY. His central motivation in favor of FRAGILITY is that failing to know that one knows that *p* exhibits a kind of "epistemic defect" with respect to *p*, and that learning that one has such a defect defeats one's knowledge.[25] But if one knows that *p*, why is failing to know that one knows that *p* epistemically defective? Failing to know other true propositions (such as the circumference of Jupiter's smallest moon) need not be epistemically defective. Suppose I know that *p*, but have simply failed to form a belief about *whether* I know that *p*. It is not clear that in this situation, I need be epistemically defective. Moreover, there does not seem to be anything epistemically defective in failing to know that one knows … that one knows that *p* (for some number of iterations).

Might Goldstein still be correct to claim that: knowing *that* one does not know that one knows that *p* automatically defeats one's first-order knowledge that *p*? Perhaps, but this is far from obvious. Consider the following case: I know where my house is, but I believe that I do not know where my house is (and correspondingly, I *fail* to believe that I know where my house is). My second-order belief is completely unjustified, though: it was formed as a result of wishful thinking, since I wish to make a name for myself as someone who professes not to know anything. Suppose further that I find ultimate personal fulfillment in being famous for professing

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[23] See his "Fragile Knowledge", *Mind* 2022.
[24] Op. cit. p.8.
[25] Op. cit. pp.4-5.

not to know anything, and so it becomes psychologically impossible for me to believe I know anything. In this situation, it would be rather controversial to claim that this belief automatically defeats my first-order knowledge of where my house is. So, taking stock: I know where my house is, but I do not believe I know where my house is.

It also seems plausible, though, that I could realize this about myself. More specifically: it seems plausible that I could come to know that I do not believe I know where my house is, all while maintaining my first-order knowledge. Moreover, if I know that belief is a necessary component for knowledge, then it even seems plausible that I could come to know the proposition *I do not know that I know where my house is*—and all this while maintaining my first order knowledge about the location of my house (for instance: I would continue filling out forms correctly, have no trouble reporting my address to others, etc.).

If such cases are possible, then knowledge is not fragile after all. Of course, such cases may be psychologically and phenomenologically unfamiliar—but that is hardly reason to think them metaphysically impossible. There is thus reason to doubt FRAGILITY, and so we should be wary of committing to it unless we must. If there is a less tendentious explanation of why dubious assertions are infelicitous on offer, the fact that Goldstein's explanation takes on these contentious commitments is a mark against it.

Nevertheless, Goldstein's explanation follows the KK-based explanations above in an important respect: it argues that dubious assertions are infelicitous in virtue of violating some norm or other. This is a commitment I think we should preserve.[26]

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[26] I agree that there is something strange about Kp & $K{\sim}KKp$, though I hesitate to say that it is metaphysically impossible. Rather (as we will see), I would prefer to say that one should not believe *that* one is in such a case: regardless of whether it is possible for such a state of affairs to obtain, the belief that it presently obtains in one's own case is irrational (or, perhaps, epistemically defective in some other sense).

Timothy Williamson proposes a different explanation.[27] He points out that "performing a speech act *A* and then adding 'and I do not believe that I am entitled to perform *A*' […] will sound bad, even if the speaker is in fact entitled to perform *A*".[28] Dubious assertions fit this pattern: one asserts that *p*, and so (by Williamson's knowledge norm) ought to know that *p*. The effect of saying (in the second conjunct) "I don't know if I know that *p*" is similar to the effect of saying that one does not believe that one is entitled to perform the speech act of asserting the first conjunct.

With assertion in particular, Williamson thinks it "sounds bad" to have a second conjunct which expresses doubt about one's warrant for asserting the first conjunct because "the second conjunct blatantly undermines the normally intended effect of the first conjunct on the hearer, by giving reason not to rely on it, even if the speaker does in fact know both *p* and that she does not believe that she knows *p*".[29] Consider, for example, an assertion of:

(2) *p* and I do not believe that I know *p*.

Williamson's point seems to be that such assertions are self-defeating: though the speaker intends a certain effect (that the hearer relies on the first conjunct, "*p*"), she undermines her ability to realize her intention by asserting the second conjunct. *Mutatis mutandis*, this line of thought applies to dubious assertions as well. With a dubious assertion, one asserts that *p* with the intention of getting one's audience to rely on *p*, but undermines that intention by also asserting "I don't know if I know that *p*".

The difficulty with Williamson's explanation is that there seem to be situations where the speaker has no such intention, and yet the dubious assertion is still infelicitous. For suppose I

[27] Timothy Williamson, "Response to Cohen, Comesaña, Goodman, Nagel, and Weatherson on Gettier Cases in Epistemic Logic", *Inquiry* 2013.
[28] Op. cit. p.82.
[29] Op. cit. p.82.

realize that you think I am not very intelligent when it comes to *p*-related matters, and so I do not intend for you to rely on *p* as a result of my assertion, since I know you will just ignore whatever I say. I may also happen to believe that I do not know if I know that *p*. Can I not make a dubious assertion with the mere intention of expressing my overall mental state (and undertaking whatever commitments come in the train of making an assertion)? In doing so, the dubious assertion would still be infelicitous—yet asserting the second conjunct would not undermine my intentions. So Williamson's explanation does not seem to generalize to all cases of infelicitous dubious assertions.

Broadly speaking, Williamson's explanation (like Goldstein's) makes central use of the idea that there are norms governing assertion, and that dubious assertions are in some kind of tension with those norms. This is, again, a commitment which I think should be preserved. Moreover, though they do not directly recommend the idea, Williamson's remarks raise to salience the thought that there is something wrong with failing to believe that one knows that *p* while asserting that *p*. I think this is a critical insight: in the next section, I will structure my explanation around just this thought.

Finally, Matthew Benton proposes that—supposing that there is a knowledge norm on assertion—dubious assertions are infelicitous because they manifest a kind of *carelessness* on the part of the speaker.[30] One way he makes that point precise is by distinguishing between primary and secondary propriety: *S*'s assertion that *p* has *primary propriety* iff *S* knows that *p*, whereas *S*'s assertion that *p* has *secondary propriety* iff *S* reasonably believes that she knows that *p*.[31] It will be convenient to read Benton's insistence that assertions be "secondarily proper" as an endorsement of a "reasonably believe that you know" requirement on assertion:

[30] See his "Dubious Objections from Iterated Conjunctions", *Philosophical Studies* 2013.
[31] Inspired by Maria Lasonen-Aarnio's "Unreasonable Knowledge", *Philosophical Perspectives* 2010.

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

Benton's thought is that even if KK is false and dubious assertions can have primary propriety, they violate RBKNA, and so are secondarily improper: "one who asserts [a dubious assertion], perhaps because one has suspended judgment on whether one knows that p [the first conjunct], is secondarily improper in doing so (even if p is known and the assertion is thereby primarily proper)".[32] Dubious assertions are thus "unduly incautious", or "careless".[33]

I think Benton is right to focus on our beliefs about what we know. Indeed, one of the norms I will propose below is quite similar to (though weaker than) his RBKNA. Unfortunately, Benton's explanation is, at best, incomplete. Benton claims that dubious assertions are secondarily improper—that is, that they violate RBKNA. To support his claim, Benton points to one class of cases: those in which the agent asserts p & $\sim KKp$, suspends judgment about whether they know the first conjunct, and where the second conjunct ("…I don't know if I know that p") expresses this state of suspension. Now, any agent from this class of cases will, of course, violate RBKNA (in virtue of suspending on whether they know that p, and so failing to believe they know that p at all). The problem is just that the second conjunct need not express suspension on whether the agent knows that p, and so for all Benton says, it is unclear why dubious assertions necessarily violate RBKNA.[34] Benton leaves us without a fully satisfactory explanation of why dubious assertions are infelicitous across the board.

§4. Three norms

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[32] Op. cit. p.358.

[33] Op. cit. p.357.

[34] The second conjunct would necessarily express suspension on whether one knows that p only if "I don't know if q" necessarily expressed suspension about q, which is surely too quick. Can I not believe that Harrison was the 23rd president of the United States, and yet (in some contexts) sincerely assert "I don't know if Harrison was the 23rd president of the United States"?

Notice: for all of the KK-based explanations surveyed above, the basic explanatory strategy is to show that, if KK is true, then dubious assertions are bound to violate a norm on assertion—in particular, a knowledge norm. In what follows, I will develop an analogous approach.

I will not rely on a knowledge norm on assertion, however. Hence, my first step will be to introduce and motivate a different norm on assertion. I will also introduce two norms on belief. Introducing these norms will occupy the entirety of the present section. In the next section, I will argue that in virtue of making a dubious assertion, one renders oneself unable to jointly satisfy these three norms.

My first norm is a "believe that you know" norm on assertion:

BKNA: One should assert that *p* only if one believes that one knows that *p*.

BKNA is meant to express a "wide scope" conditional obligation: it *merely* forbids asserting that *p* while also failing to believe that one knows that *p*.[35] It is not meant to be a "constitutive norm" for assertion, and since it only forbids certain combinations of assertions and beliefs, it is compatible with plenty of other norms on assertion (including some versions of a knowledge norm).[36] To comply with it, one's belief need not be occurrent. Furthermore, it only applies to "flat out" assertions, rather than hedged assertions (such as "I believe that *p*", "I think that *p*", "It seems like *p*", etc.).[37]

[35] I am not the first to suggest such a norm: see Michael Huemer's "Moore's Paradox and the Norm of Belief", in *Themes from G.E. Moore: New Essays in Epistemology and Ethics*, edited by Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay, *Oxford University Press* 2007, and his "The Puzzle of Metacoherence", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2011, as well as Smithies op. cit..

[36] In particular, BKNA is meant to be compatible with knowledge norms on assertion which forbid both asserting that *p* while failing to know that *p*. It will not be compatible with knowledge norms on assertion according to which knowing that *p* permits one to assert that *p*, for—as *the salesman* from §2 (allegedly) shows—one may know that *p* without believing one knows it.

[37] Following John Hawthorne, Daniel Rothschild, and Levi Spectre's "Belief is Weak", *Philosophical Studies* 2016, some philosophers hold that belief is "weak": that is, that one may have sufficient evidence to justifiably believe that *p* without having sufficient evidence to assert that *p*, and that belief that *p* may even be compatible with credence

There are principled reasons to think that BKNA governs our practice of assertion. For one, we seem to hold each other to BKNA in practice: we tend to be upset with an asserter if we suspect they do not believe they know what they have asserted; moreover, such responses seem warranted. This is good evidence that such a norm governs our practice of assertion.[38]

Another point in its favor is that BKNA can coopt much of the linguistic evidence Williamson marshals in favor of his knowledge norm.[39] Let's look at two kinds of linguistic data that Williamson considers.[40] The first is that, when one asserts that *p*, it is often appropriate for one's interlocutors to respond with "How do you know that?". As Williamson notes, "how is it that *p*?" presupposes that *p*, and so the felicity of this response suggests that we expect speakers to know what they assert. But this question can also be seen as presupposing that someone who asserts that *p* takes themselves to know that *p*, so at the very least, this linguistic pattern is consistent with BKNA.

The other datum is the fact that epistemic Moorean sentences like "it's raining, but I don't know if it's raining" are infelicitous. This is also consonant with BKNA—for we expect someone who asserts that it's raining to believe that they know that it's raining, and yet in the epistemic Moorean case, they seem *not* to believe that they know it. BKNA, that is, promises a satisfying explanation of why epistemic Moorean assertions are infelicitous.[41]

The upshot is that insofar as one doubts Williamson's norm but still wants to explain his data, then, these data provide excellent evidence for BKNA.[42] On the other hand, even if a norm

less than .5 in *p*. I am not inclined to think that the state Hawthorne, Rothschild, and Spectre are identifying is really belief. Even if Hawthorne, Rothschild, and Spectre are right, though, there is surely a stronger propositional attitude available—"full belief", perhaps. It is in *that* attitude that I am here interested.

[38] As Jennifer Lackey notes in her "Norms of Assertion", *Noûs* 2007.

[39] Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, chapter 11.

[40] There are some other data, but the point can be made with just these.

[41] This line of thought is developed more carefully at the end of §5, below.

[42] Williamson explicitly considers something like BKNA and acknowledges that it can explain much of the linguistic data as well. He worries, though, that it would make a poor constitutive norm for assertion (op. cit. p.260).

like Williamson's holds, the fact that BKNA coheres well with these data is still a mark in its favor.

Furthermore, to the extent that a knowledge norm (like Williamson's) merely forbids asserting *p* while failing to know that *p*, such a norm is compatible with BKNA.[43] Indeed, such a norm could even help furnish a principled basis for BKNA, perhaps because genuine norms give rise to genuine secondary norms: that one should assert *p* only if one believes that one knows it, may be partly explained by the fact that one should assert *p* only if one knows it. Thus, those who favor such a knowledge norm on assertion have a straightforward reason to accept BKNA.

Finally and most fundamentally, as many have noticed, when one asserts that *p* (or that *p* & *q*, etc.), one represents oneself as knowing that *p* (or that *p* & *q*, etc.).[44] Intuitively, though, one should represent something as being the case to one's audience only if one believes it to be the case oneself! To do otherwise would be dishonest. So since one represents oneself as knowing that *p* whenever one asserts that *p*, one should assert that *p* only if one believes that one knows it.[45]

But this is no problem for my account, since I am not claiming that BKNA is a constitutive norm on assertion, nor am I claiming that it is the only normative constraint pertaining to assertion.

[43] This is unlikely to be an accurate interpretation of Williamson's norm, since Williamson seems to take it that knowledge makes assertion "correct" (op. cit. p.241) and thus "warranted" (op. cit. p.243). Still, it is an open question how Williamson's sense of "correct" relates to the kind of *permission* which is the dual of the "should" employed in BKNA. In any case, this is why the main text says "a norm *like* Williamson's".

[44] For instance: G.E. Moore's *Commonplace Book*, Routledge 1962, p.277, Peter Unger's *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism*, Oxford University Press, 1975, pp.252-265, and Keith DeRose's "Epistemic Possibilities", *The Philosophical Review* 1991, pp.597-598.

[45] One might worry that Lackey's cases of "selfless assertion" pose a problem for BKNA (see her op. cit.). According to Lackey, these are assertions which are permissible (*qua* the distinctive norms governing assertion) even though the speakers do not believe their contents. If something like this is the right diagnosis of Lackey's cases, then BKNA is likely in trouble. It is not clear to me, though, that Lackey's cases really *do* involve proper assertions *qua* assertion: perhaps they are merely cases where the norm(s) distinctive to assertion are (temporarily) overridden by more urgent moral requirements to, for instance, assert what one does not believe. Adequately motivating that diagnosis of her cases is beyond the scope of this paper. Regardless of whether it is correct, though, it is worth pointing out that the Strong and Weak KK-based explanations considered above (as well as those offered by Goldstein, Williamson, and Benton) rely on a knowledge norm on assertion, which Lackey's cases challenge just as much as they challenge BKNA. So if Lackey is correct, both versions of KK lose their explanatory power anyways.

My second norm is a norm on beliefs:

NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS: do not hold beliefs of the form p & $K{\sim}Kp$.

Such beliefs are similar to more familiar Moorean beliefs like p & ${\sim}Kp$ (hence the label).[46] Though I mean to claim that it is a genuine norm, I leave it open whether this is a norm of rationality; perhaps beliefs of the form p & $K{\sim}Kp$ are defective for some other reason (say, because they manifest a failure to properly value truth).[47]

Why should we accept NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS? Fully explaining the defect in such beliefs is beyond the scope of this paper, but even without getting into the details, it should be plausible that the norm governs belief. Here is one reason to think so: first, notice that the assertoric expression of such beliefs is infelicitous. For instance: an assertion of "it's raining, but I know I don't know it's raining" is infelicitous. Crucially, though, the asserter is not criticizable *merely* in virtue of asserting it—intuitively, they are criticizable in virtue of believing it as well. One cannot avoid being criticizable simply by keeping one's mouth shut, as is the case with other infelicitous assertions (for instance: "I am not now speaking").

Another reason to think that NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS is a genuine norm for belief is that beliefs which violate it are straightforwardly *a priori* unknowable. For: given that that K distributes and is factive, assuming $K(p$ & $K{\sim}Kp)$ leads to contradiction: $K(p$ & $K{\sim}Kp)$ entails Kp & $KK{\sim}Kp$, which entails Kp & ${\sim}Kp$.

I am not committing myself to a knowledge norm for belief—only to NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS. It is natural to think that there is some sense in which belief aspires to knowledge. If this is so, then there will also be some sense in which we ought not hold beliefs

[46] In terms of our original taxonomy, this norm prohibits beliefs with the contents of [E], rather than those of [D].
[47] See, for instance, Kurt Sylvan's "An Epistemic Non-Consequentialism", *The Philosophical Review* 2020.

which one can easily realize *a priori* could never amount to knowledge. NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS follows.

I take my third norm to be a plausible norm of rationality, but thoroughly arguing for it would take us beyond the scope of this paper:

> DISTRIBUTION: *S* ought to be such that: *S* believes they know p & q only if they believe they know p and they know q. Schematically:
>
> $$O\big(BK(p \,\&\, q) \ \supset\ B(Kp \,\&\, Kq)\big)$$

To put it very roughly: if you think you know two things, you should think you know each of them. Just like BKNA, DISTRIBUTION is wide scope: it merely prohibits a certain combination of states, namely: believing one knows p & q while failing to believe both that one knows p and that one knows q. I find this principle extremely intuitive; plausibly, an ideally rational agent would satisfy it. I will not argue for it here, though.

Though I will not argue for DISTRIBUTION I will, however, defuse one objection to it. You might think that this norm asks too much of us (for reasons of "clutter avoidance", perhaps). Fair enough. What I show below, though, is that if one makes a dubious assertion, one is thereby *unable* to satisfy all three of the norms just introduced. So I am happy to admit that one may simply fail to form a certain belief and hence violate DISTRIBUTION, yet without being genuinely criticizable—as long as one *could* form that belief without running into any *other* trouble. Where DISTRIBUTION has genuine bite, I think, is when the *only* way to satisfy it would be by violating BKNA or NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS. In that case, violating DISTRIBUTION would be a genuine source of criticizability. It is the latter, criticizable situation which (as we will see) is bound to meet anyone who makes a dubious assertion.

In this section, I introduced three norms: BKNA, NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS, and DISTRIBUTION. I argued for the first two and assumed the last without argument. In the next section, I will show how in virtue of making a dubious assertion, one is bound to violate one of them.

§5. Explaining why dubious assertions are infelicitous

In this section, I will argue that the collection of norms advanced in the previous section can explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous without appealing to any version of KK. My procedure will be to start by assuming someone has made a dubious assertion and then, through a sequence of three stages, see what must have been the case for them to have satisfied BKNA and DISTRIBUTION. It will turn out that the speaker will be able to comply with these norms only if they violate NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS. Thus, making a dubious assertion guarantees that one will violate one of the norms from the previous section.

The stages are as follows:

Stage 1. Suppose a subject *S* makes a dubious assertion. The form of what is asserted is:

$$p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp$$

Stage 2. *S*'s assertion will satisfy BKNA only if *S* believes they know what they have asserted. Schematically:

$$BK(p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$$

Stage 3. Now, *S* can satisfy DISTRIBUTION in one of two ways. The first is to lack the belief from step 2, that is, to be such that ${\sim}BK(p \,\&\, {\sim}KKp)$. In this case, their assertion would violate BKNA. The other way is to believe they know each conjunct, that is:

$$B(Kp \,\&\, K{\sim}KKp)$$

But this violates NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS!

Thus, the only way for someone who makes a dubious assertion to satisfy BKNA and DISTRIBUTION is to have an epistemic Moorean belief of the form q & $K{\sim}Kq$.[48]

It is worth reiterating the motivations behind NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS. First, consider the assertoric expression of this belief: "I know p, but I know that I don't know if I know p". This assertion is clearly infelicitous. Again, plausibly, the problem is not merely with asserting it—rather, the problem is with believing it. Simply holding one's tongue would not be enough to avoid the relevant kind of criticizability. And again, furthermore, regardless of whether any version of KK is true, as with any belief of the form q & $K{\sim}Kq$, one can know *a priori* and without too much difficulty that one's belief cannot amount to knowledge.

In virtue of making a dubious assertion, then, a speaker can satisfy both BKNA and DISTRIBUTION *only if* they violate NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS. This is why dubious assertions are infelicitous.

This explanation appeals only to BKNA, DISTRIBUTION, and NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS. It does not appeal to a knowledge norm on assertion (such as Williamson's), and it does not appeal to any version of KK. Each of these norms is independently plausible. This explanation is at least as satisfying as its KK-based rivals (especially if we keep in mind the plausible counterexamples to Strong KK, as well as the implausible principles to which an explanation in terms of Weak KK would be committed). Like those explanations, it claims that dubious assertions are infelicitous because they are bound to violate a norm. Since this

[48] Of course, they could violate DISTRIBUTION, and not all violations of DISTRIBUTION may be criticizable. But even if it is not criticizable to violate DISTRIBUTION through the simple (and easily rectifiable) failure to form certain beliefs, it is surely criticizable to be such that one complies with DISTRIBUTION only at the cost of violating BKNA or NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS.

explanation relies on less contentious principles, it undercuts the explanatory power of (Strong *and* Weak) KK.[49,50]

§6. Conclusion

In this paper, I examine how different versions of KK could be used to explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous. We saw that anyone trying to explain the data in terms of (some version of) KK would have a difficult choice to make: while Strong KK offers an initially more satisfying explanation of the data, it is seriously challenged by the apparent possibility of subjects who know that *p*, but simply do not believe that they know that *p*. These cases have moved many to adopt a weaker version of the KK thesis which claims that one knows that *p* only if one is also in a position to know that one knows that *p*. The problem with this weaker thesis, I argued, is that it seems able to explain why dubious assertions are infelicitous only by taking on some rather implausible commitments concerning *position to know*.

I then presented my own explanation of the data. My explanation centered around three norms: BKNA, DISTRIBUTION, and NO EPISTEMIC MOOREAN BELIEFS. I argued that in virtue of making a dubious assertion, one is bound to violate at least one of these norms. A satisfying explanation of why dubious assertions are infelicitous is thus available which does not rely on any version of KK.

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[49] A small upshot: since my explanation relies on BKNA rather than a knowledge norm on assertion, it allows those skeptical of knowledge norms on assertion to explain why dubious assertions (as well as epistemic Moorean assertions) are infelicitous. None of the other potential explanations considered in this paper (KK-based or otherwise) do this.

[50] A natural question at this point is whether BKNA can explain why epistemic Moorean assertions of the form $p \,\&\, {\sim}Kp$ are infelicitous. It seems like it can, and in much the same way as it explains why dubious assertions are infelicitous: if one asserts $p \,\&\, {\sim}Kp$, then one either violates BKNA, or one is such that $BK(p \,\&\, {\sim}Kp)$. If one is to be able to satisfy DISTRIBUTION, then no norms must forbid one from being such that $B(Kp \,\&\, K{\sim}Kp)$. But this is hardly plausible, since that belief is of the form $B(q \,\&\, K{\sim}q)$. Whatever the epistemic norms are, such a belief surely violates them. The same goes for assertions of type [E], $p \,\&\, K{\sim}Kp$. By parallel reasoning one would need to be able to believe something of the form $q \,\&\, KK{\sim}q$, which is hardly better than believing $q \,\&\, K{\sim}q$.

Our verdict? KK does not have the explanatory power it is often taken to have.[51]

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