

DEFENDING PHILOSOPHY IN THE FACE OF SYSTEMATIC DISAGREEMENT¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

I believe that the sort of disagreements we encounter in philosophy—disagreements that often take the form that I have elsewhere called *systematic peer disagreements*—make it unreasonable to think that there is any knowledge, or even justified belief, when the disagreements themselves are systematic. I readily acknowledge that this skeptical view is quite controversial; I suspect many are unconvinced.² However, I will not be defending it here. Rather, I will be exploring a worry, or set of worries, that arise on the assumption that this view is correct. For if it is unreasonable to think that there is justified belief in contexts of systematic philosophical disagreements, by what right do we continue to advance philosophical claims in such contexts?

¹ I have benefitted in recent years from many profitable discussions of the matters I discuss in this paper; for these I thank Hilary Kornblith, Jennifer Lackey, Nick Leonard, Peter Ludlow, Baron Reed, Tim Sundell, and Sarah Wright. I want to give thanks as well to audiences at Oxford University and the Kentucky Philosophical Association 2011 meeting, where I have presented parts of this paper in talks. Finally, I want to express a very special thanks to Diego Machuca, for his very helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

² As Baron Reed and Nick Leonard have pointed out to me, there appears to be an air of self-defeatingness in this: if the truth of my claim, to the effect that it is unreasonable to think that there is knowledge or justified belief on matters of systematic disagreement, is itself a matter of systematic disagreement, then even if my claim is true it is neither known or justifiably believed. I have come to think that this is grist for the mill of the Pyrrhonian skeptic. Nevertheless, I will not be developing this idea here.

Indeed, by what right do we *believe* the philosophical claims we advance? And if we don't believe them, why do we advance them in the first place? An inability to respond to these worries would leave us with the distinct impression that the practice or activity of philosophy is quite suspect: what sort of practice or activity would have us believe unreasonably, assert unwarrantedly, and perhaps exhibit insincerity to boot?

In this paper I want to address these worries. I want to do so, first, by being clear on precisely what does follow (regarding the doxastic and assertoric elements in philosophical practice) from my skeptical view; and second, by arguing that, far from constituting a *reductio*, the implications of my skeptical view are in fact independently defensible. In particular, these implications can be used to shed light on the doxastic attitudes that are present in the activity of philosophizing, and on the normative dimension of that part of the activity of philosophy wherein we make and respond to claims.

To this end, I will be advancing three hypotheses in conjunction with a picture of philosophical practice. The hypotheses are these. First, while an attitude of *belief* is unreasonable in the face of systematic disagreement, nevertheless there is a doxastic attitude that is reasonable even under such conditions: the attitude of *regarding-as-defensible*. Second, while philosophical assertions under conditions of systematic disagreement fail to conform to a norm of justified belief (let alone knowledge), philosophical assertions need not be unwarranted for all that. Third, and relatedly, it is not the case that a philosopher is insincere whenever she makes a philosophical assertion whose content she does not believe. On the contrary, there is a kind of sincerity that goes along with what I will call the activity of *defending a philosophical view*. When conditions are mutually acknowledged to involve systematic disagreement, one who defends a philosophical view warrants her audience to have certain expectations regarding her attitude towards the view she is defending; as a result, she can misrepresent herself as having that attitude when in fact she

does not. Sincerity in connection with the defense of a philosophical view, then, is simply a matter of having the attitude in question (*regarding-as-defensible*). Insofar as this sort of picture is mutually familiar to those engaged in the practice of philosophy, none of the parties to a philosophical discussion should be misled into regarding each other as believing the views for which they are arguing; as a result, none should be inclined to level a charge of insincerity merely because of a failure by one's interlocutor to believe her own views. Such, anyway, are the views I will be defending here.

2. Systematic peer disagreements and the case for skepticism

The picture I will be developing, and to some extent defending, is a radical one. I endorse it in part because I think there is no choice, once one comes to see the strength of the case for skepticism regarding philosophical knowledge and justified belief. But since the resulting picture is radical, it will be helpful to begin with a quick review of the case for skepticism—if only to suggest why one might think that there is no alternative. Since I have defended this sort of skepticism elsewhere,³ here I will be quick.

My argument for the skeptical conclusion just described employs the notion of a *systematic* peer disagreement. A systematic peer disagreement is a species of peer disagreement, that is, a disagreement between people who regard themselves as roughly equivalent in intellectual competence and in familiarity with the evidence bearing on the question before them. A peer disagreement is systematic when it is non-local, widespread, and entrenched. A peer

³ See Goldberg (2009; 2012). In Goldberg 2009 I resisted the conclusion of the argument I presented; in Goldberg 2012 I drew the conclusion of the argument; but in both cases I presented an argument for a certain kind of skepticism, arising from the facts regarding philosophical disagreement.

disagreement over whether p is *non-local* when the disagreement over whether p is part of a much wider disagreement, with lots of other related matters in dispute. Thus, non-local disagreements contrast with the class of disagreements which Elga (2007) and Kornblith (2010) label “isolated disagreement,” where the disagreement does not “threaten to force [participants] to suspend judgment very widely.” (Kornblith 2010, 33) A peer disagreement is *widespread* when at least two of the positions endorsed by the disagreeing parties have attracted, or are capable of attracting, a substantial and dedicated following. Thus it is not just a disagreement between two people, but between two (or more) *groups* of people, each of which is to some degree committed to its claims in the face of the disagreement. Finally, a peer disagreement is *entrenched* when it has persisted for at least some time, with both sides continuing to defend and advance their side, in the face of persistent challenges from the other side, where the defenses in question remain responsive to the relevant evidence and arguments.

With this as the relevant understanding of a systematic peer disagreement, I then went on to offer an argument for skepticism on matters of philosophical controversy. My case begins with the following MASTER ARGUMENT, which has nothing in particular to do with philosophy *per se*:

- I. In cases in which S believes that p in the face of a systematic peer disagreement over whether p , there are (undefeated doxastic or normative) defeaters with respect to S’s belief that p .
- II. If there are (undefeated doxastic or normative) defeaters with respect to S’s belief that p , then S neither knows, nor is doxastically justified in believing, that p .

Therefore,

- III. If p is a proposition regarding which there is systematic peer disagreement, then if S believes that p , S’s belief is neither knowledgeable nor doxastically justified.

I then went on to argue that many cases of philosophical disagreement *are* cases of systematic peer disagreement. The result is that no belief under these conditions is knowledgeable or doxastically justified.

As I have formulated it here, the conclusion of the foregoing argument is a strong skeptical conclusion: no knowledge or doxastically justified belief is available in contexts of systematic peer disagreement. As I will indicate below, however, it is possible to tweak the premises of this argument so that it supports a weaker conclusion: *it is unreasonable to suppose that* knowledge or doxastically justified belief is available in contexts of systematic peer disagreement. In what follows, I will distinguish these conclusions, if only to suggest which conclusion(s) are needed to develop the difficulty introduced at the outset of this paper.

3. Unhappy implications of philosophical skepticism?

Let a ‘contested proposition’ be any proposition p regarding which there is systematic disagreement in philosophy. As just noted, the argument above might be used to establish one or both of two skeptical conclusions. The weaker skeptical conclusion is this:

Weak Philosophical Skepticism (WPS)

It is unreasonable to think that belief in a contested proposition is knowledgeable or even doxastically justified.

The stronger skeptical conclusion that might be supported by the foregoing argument is this:

Strong Philosophical Skepticism (SPS)

There is no knowledge of or justified belief in any contested proposition.

In what follows I want to bring out how these views threaten to undermine the possibility of *reasonable belief* in, and *warranted or sincere claims* advancing, contested propositions.

It is perhaps easiest to appreciate how the weaker conclusion of MASTER ARGUMENT threatens the possibility of reasonable belief in contested propositions. To this end consider the following argument, which I will call ‘NO REASONABLE BELIEF’:

- i. It is not reasonable to believe that p if it is unreasonable to believe that such a belief is justified.
[Plausible thesis about epistemic defeat]
- ii. For any contested proposition p , it unreasonable to believe that the belief that p is justified. [WPS]
Therefore,
- iii. It is not reasonable to believe any contested proposition, that is, any proposition on matters regarding which there is systematic disagreement in philosophy. [From (i) and (ii)]

In this manner the lesson of NO REASONABLE BELIEF is clear: WPS plus a plausible account of epistemic defeat yield the skeptical conclusion that there is no reasonable belief on controversial matters of philosophy.

Next, consider how the stronger conclusion of MASTER ARGUMENT jeopardizes the possibility of warranted claims advancing contested propositions. This objection is based on the following mini-argument, which I will call ‘UNWARRANTED CLAIMS’:

1. To advance a claim is to make an assertion. [Plausible characterization of ‘advancing a claim’]
2. For any speaker S and assertion that p , S ’s assertion is warranted only if: S justifiably believes that p . [Implication of any one in a range of widely-endorsed theses regarding the norm of assertion⁴]

⁴ If knowledge that p entails justifiedly believing that p , as seems imminently plausible, then premise 2 is implied by the knowledge norm of assertion—perhaps the most widely-endorsed account of the norm of

3. There is no justified belief on matters regarding which there is systematic disagreement in philosophy. [SPS]

Therefore,

4. To advance a claim on matters regarding which there is systematic disagreement in philosophy is unwarranted.

The lesson of UNWARRANTED CLAIMS, then, is that when added to plausible claims about the nature of assertion, SPS implies that there is no warranted assertion of a contested proposition.

Finally, consider the case for thinking that the weaker conclusion of MASTER ARGUMENT jeopardizes the possibility of (reasonable people making) sincere claims advancing contested propositions. Consider the following argument which I will call ‘INSINCERE CLAIMS’:

- a. It is not reasonable to believe contested propositions. [Conclusion of NO REASONABLE BELIEF]
- b. Assume that S’s beliefs are reasonable. [Assumption]
- c. Then S does not believe contested propositions. [Trivial implication from (a) and (b)]
- d. Assume S makes a claim advancing a contested proposition. [Assumption]
- e. Then S does not believe the proposition advanced in the claim. [Trivial implication from (c) and (d)]
- f. If S makes a claim but does not believe the proposition advanced in the claim, then S is insincere. [Plausible characterization of ‘insincerity’]

assertion. (The knowledge norm is defended in Unger (1975), DeRose (1996), Williamson (1996), Hawthorne (2005), and Stanley (2005), among others.) But premise 2 is also implied by “rational credibility” norms of the sort endorsed by Douven (2006), Lackey (2007), and Kvanvig (2009).

Therefore

- g. If S's beliefs are reasonable yet S makes a claim advancing a contested proposition, then S is insincere. [From (e) and (f)]

Since (g) itself is implicitly general, it holds of any subject S, and hence we have the lesson of INSINCERE CLAIMS: no reasonable person—no person whose beliefs are reasonable—sincerely makes a claim advancing a contested proposition. By implication, if S is a reasonable person who makes a claim advancing a contested proposition, S is being insincere.

In this way we see that the combination of Weak Philosophical Skepticism (WPS) and Strong Philosophical Skepticism (SPS) appear to undermine the possibility of reasonable belief in, and warranted and sincere assertion of, contested propositions. If such a result is left to stand, it would arguably make a mockery of philosophical practice. (“Arguably,” since it is arguable that philosophical practice depends on the possibility of warranted and sincere claims advancing contested propositions.) Those who do not doubt the viability of philosophical practice will take our result as a reason to reject both WPS and SPS. Since I am assuming the cogency of MASTER ARGUMENT, and so am assuming that the case for both WPS and SPS is solid, I am assuming that such a reaction is wrongheaded. However, in what follows I want to argue that the move to preserve philosophical practice by rejecting WPS and SPS is (not merely wrongheaded but) unnecessary. Granted that the combination of WPS and SPS does undermine the possibility of reasonable belief in contested propositions, I will argue that, even so, this combination is compatible with cases of warranted and sincere assertion of such propositions. To show this, I will begin by considering what sort of attitude *other than* belief might be reasonably instantiated by those with controversial philosophical ‘views’. I will then go on to use this proposal to characterize conditions on warranted and sincere assertion of contested propositions.

4. Defending a philosophical position

Let us accept (if only for the sake of argument) the following conclusion of NO REASONABLE BELIEF: it is not reasonable to believe propositions on matters regarding which there is systematic disagreement in philosophy. If this is correct, then any belief in a contested proposition is unreasonable. Unless we want to condemn philosophers to widespread unreasonableness (!), we must allow that their doxastic attitude towards contested propositions is, or at any rate can be, something other than that of belief. But once we have agreed that belief in contested propositions is unreasonable, we immediately face the question whether *there is* a doxastic attitude which it would be reasonable to have towards such propositions. I want to answer this question in the affirmative; the attitude in question is that of *regarding-as-defensible*. In this section I develop this idea.

It will help to begin with a few uncontroversial comments about the nature of belief.⁵ It is normatively inappropriate for a subject S to take an attitude of belief towards the proposition that *p* if S believes that the balance of evidence favors the hypothesis that not-*p*. Stronger still: taking an attitude of belief towards [*p*] is normatively inappropriate if S believes that the balance of evidence does not strongly support *either* that *p*, *or* that not-*p*. And even more strongly still: taking an attitude of belief towards [*p*] is normatively inappropriate if, given the state of the evidence, S *should* believe that the balance of evidence does not strongly support *either* that *p*, *or* that not-*p*. I take all of this as obvious.

⁵ Since I will be using “belief” in these comments, they are not intended as analyses of “belief,” but rather as truisms to help us fix the attitude in question.

Next, consider what is involved in holding a philosophical view under conditions of (acknowledged) systematic disagreement—something familiar to all of us. Let Jones be such a philosopher. If she is reasonable, Jones will recognize that the arguments on her side are not decisive; she will recognize that there are arguments on the other side that she is not in a position to refute. To be sure, she will regard the weight of the considerations supporting the opposition to be less than the weight of the considerations supporting her own view: if not, she is unreasonable in holding on to her view. But at the same time, she will acknowledge that her opponents do not agree with her on her weighting of the evidence. So even as Jones continues to hold on to and argue for her views in the face of this disagreement, she will acknowledge—or at any rate, she ought to acknowledge—that there are others who are equally smart, equally knowledgeable of the arguments and evidence, equally attentive and motivated to get things right, and who would be highly motivated to discern their errors if they could, who nevertheless failed to do so, even having given the matter a good deal of their time and effort. But more than this: Jones will acknowledge—or at any rate she ought to acknowledge—that it is not only in the present case, but *in the entire history of the dispute*, that those who are in the wrong have not been brought to see the error(s) of their ways, despite the best efforts of those on the side of truth (as she sees it). And this conclusion, in turn, should tell Jones something about the discernibility of the sort(s) of truth and falsity that are at issue here. Even as she continues to endorse and defend her views, and so even as she continues to think that she has the truth on her side, still, given the persisting systematic disagreement, she must acknowledge that truth and falsity here are *not easily discernible by very many people as smart as she is, as knowledgeable of the relevant arguments and evidence, who have had a good deal of time thinking about the relevant issues, who work in a manner that is at least somewhat independent of others, who are as highly motivated to endorse*

what is true as she is, etc. In these circumstances, I submit, she should not be particularly confident that she does have the truth on her side.

Suppose that this is so: when Jones holds views under conditions in which she acknowledges that there is systematic (peer) disagreement, Jones ought not to be particularly confident of the truth of her views. Then it seems to me that to precisely this degree her situation is like that of someone who regards the evidence bearing on whether p to be such as not to decisively tell in favor of either $[p]$ or its negation. This is not to say that she regards it as an open question which side is better supported; to repeat, if that were her attitude, she shouldn't have views on the matter at all.⁶ Rather, my claim is that her views on the second-order question—which side is better supported by the total evidence?—do not have the sort of confidence that goes along with the attitude of *belief*. And if this is so, then Jones ought not to believe that p : such an attitude would be normatively inappropriate given the evidence.

Perhaps it will be wondered how it can be *reasonable* for one to continue to “have a view” on a matter regarding which one acknowledges that the total evidence does not warrant

⁶ I am not sure this is correct. Mightn't I defend a view which I regard as a “long shot,” even as I acknowledge that it is less well-supported by current evidence than is one of its competitors? Would this alone convict me of unreasonableness or irrationality? I don't think so. It seems to me that the decision to defend a view on a controversial matter in philosophy is as much a normative status—I thereby inherit the burden of defending it, that is, of providing positive reasons on its behalf, and fending off objections from other parties—as it is a judgment made on the basis of evidence. To be sure, if I don't think that it will turn out that the view I favor will ultimately be better-supported by the evidence—perhaps by evidence to which no one currently has access, or by reasons which no one has thought of to date—then there seems something slightly perverse about my defending that view. In any case I leave these details for future work.

belief in either the hypothesis that p or its negation. But it is easy to see that these worries are misguided. Consider the attitude of *speculation*. (Or, if one thinks that speculation is a speech act, not an attitude, consider the attitude-type that constitutes the sincerity condition for this speech act. Call this “attitudinal speculation.”) It is consistent with one’s (attitudinally) speculating that p that one acknowledges that the total set of reasons and evidence bearing on whether p fail to warrant belief either way. To be sure, one who speculates that p will regard the balance of reasons as tipping in favor of the truth of $[p]$, as against its negation.⁷ Still, such a person might happily concede that this balance in favor of $[p]$ is not sufficiently strong as to warrant outright belief in $[p]$. Hence the attitude of speculation that p : one who attitudinally speculates that p regards $[p]$ as more likely than $[\text{not-}p]$, though also regards the total evidence as stopping short of warranting belief in $[p]$. It should be obvious that one’s attitude on this score can be more or less reasonable: it is more reasonable to the degree that the evidential situation is as one takes it to be, namely, such as to make it more likely that $[p]$, even as the evidence stops short of being supportive enough to warrant outright belief in $[p]$. What this shows is that there is a truth-directed attitude which can be reasonable even in the face of evidence which one acknowledges to fall short of warranting outright belief. The objection that there can be no such attitude, then, is met.

Still, it might be wondered whether the sort of attitude I am describing—an attitude in the family of *attitudinal speculation*—is anything like the attitude of those who have views on contested matters in philosophy. Many will object straight-away that they believe their theories,

⁷ We might then construe attitudinal speculation as a matter of having a degree of belief that is above .5 but which is below the threshold for outright belief. I am sympathetic to this construal, but do not have the space to argue for it here.

period; to such folks, any attempt to characterize their attitude as other than belief is to be false to the facts.⁸ However, my claims here are that they *shouldn't* believe, and that in any case there is an attitudinal cousin of belief which is reasonable to have even under conditions of systematic disagreement and which captures much, if perhaps not all, of the things that are involved in “having a view” in philosophy.

To make good on this claim, I need to revisit what is involved in “having a view” in philosophy. Typically, the attitude present when one “has a view” in philosophy involves endorsing the view, and also being committed to defending it (as the occasion arises). This, I want to suggest, is the core of the attitude associated with having a view in philosophy: it is *to regard the view as defensible*. The attitude of regarding a view as defensible stretches a long way across a confidence interval. At one extreme, S regards a view as defensible when S regards it as true (perhaps because she has what she regards as decisive evidence in favor of the view). At the other extreme, S regards a view as defensible when, although S acknowledges that the reasons and evidence bearing on the question do not settle matters, and so do not warrant outright belief, still, the balance of reasons supports [*p*] over [*not-p*].⁹ (There are cases between these extremes as well, of course.) One might take the latter sort of attitude in the face of acknowledged systematic disagreement. It is when one does so, I submit, that one’s doxastic attitude should be seen as a species of (attitudinal) speculation—at least with respect to one’s assessment of the evidential situation.

Still, there are some important differences between attitudinal speculation (*simpliciter*, as it were) and the attitude that corresponds to the endorsement and defense of a philosophical view

⁸ I thank Diego Machuca for this point.

⁹ But see n. 5 for a potentially very important qualification.

(when this is done under conditions of systematic disagreement). One who endorses and defends a philosophical view is typically more motivated to persist in defense of the view when challenged, than is one who merely speculates that *p*. (We are more committed, and perhaps more emotionally attached, to our philosophical views, than we are to our speculations.) I grant this, but deny that it establishes anything very substantial. For even granting the point, it might only suggest that endorsing and defending a view under conditions of systematic disagreement is a *special case* of attitudinal speculation—one whose specialness consists (in part) of characteristic emotional overtones and the associated practical commitments. What is more, it is not hard to see how a species of attitudinal speculation with this sort of emotional-and-practical-commitment profile might emerge. If one takes oneself to have a deep appreciation of the total evidence bearing on the question on which one is speculating, one might well feel motivated to defend one's speculation against those who would speculate that the contrary is true. What is more, there is also a sociological dimension to philosophical practice in this regard: since it is common knowledge that those who defend their views well do better in the profession, generally speaking, one will have a clear motive (and emotional investment) in defending one's views in philosophy. Finally, there is also a psychological dimension to philosophical practice in this regard: since many of the views we defend are views about such things as the nature of the good life, or justice, or beauty, or what is of ultimate value, etc., and since such matters are the sort of things around which one can orient one's life, one will be animated to defend these views when they are put under pressure. In short, we have many motives for being emotionally involved in, and motivated to defend, our philosophical views; and we can make sense of these motives even on the assumption that having a philosophical view on a contested issue is a species of attitudinal speculation.

There is one other aspect of philosophical practice that becomes intelligible on the hypothesis that having a philosophical view on a controversial topic is a matter of attitudinal speculation: we can make sense of the possibility of (cases of) “reasonable disagreement in philosophy.” If having a view is a matter of attitudinal speculation, and if attitudinal speculation is a matter of having a degree of confidence above .5 but below the threshold warranting outright belief, then disagreements over the truth-value of a given proposition can be formulated as disagreements over the point *within the confidence interval between disbelief and belief* which the total evidence warrants. But as the disagreeing sides get closer and closer to one another—one side a bit above .5, the other side a bit below .5—it becomes harder and harder to discern from the total evidence which side is correct. In this way we might be able to make sense of reasonable disagreement regarding contested propositions, even if we assume that for any body of evidence and any proposition there is a unique degree of confidence one ought to have in that proposition given that evidence.¹⁰ In the same way that it can be very hard for anyone to discern whether the total evidence warrants a degree of confidence in $[p]$ which is .9, as opposed to .89 or .88 or ..., so too it can be very hard to discern whether the total evidence warrants a .55 degree of confidence in $[p]$, as opposed to .45 (or some other close value less than .5). Even if the uniqueness thesis is true, we can in this way still make sense of the reasonableness of (some) philosophical disagreements. Note though that if the uniqueness thesis is true, and if having a view in philosophy involves having an outright belief in the truth of the view, reasonable disagreement in philosophy is a non-starter. In that case the disagreement is one in which the confidence levels of the disputing parties are at a great distance from one another, and so the

¹⁰ This is of course one version of the uniqueness thesis, familiar in debates in the epistemology of disagreement.

disagreement over whether p cannot be rationalized as a matter of the difficulty of discerning where *within some small interval* the evidence warrants.

In sum: I tentatively endorse the hypothesis that, when one defends a view in the face of acknowledged systematic disagreement, one's attitude is—or should be!—a species of *attitudinal speculation* as to the truth of the view. The advantage of such a proposal is that it enables us to see how one's attitude can continue to be reasonable, even when one acknowledges (as one should) that the state of evidence fails to warrant outright belief on either side.¹¹ Of course, no sooner is this hypothesis formulated than we face the other set of worries noted at the outset of this paper, namely: if one doesn't flat-out believe one's views, by what right does one assert them (in conversation with other philosophers)? And can one's doing so ever be anything other than a case of insincerity?

5. Reconceiving philosophical practice: a Grice-inspired account

In what follows, I want to try to address both of these problems—unwarrantedness and insincerity in philosophical assertions—at once. I do so by way of an account of assertion that can make sense of warranted, sincere assertions of contested propositions in philosophy. That it can do so is a selling point of the account; but I will begin by motivating the account using considerations having nothing specifically to do with these problems—if only to make clear that the appeal to such an account need not be *ad hoc*. (Alas, considerations of space prevent a full development of these ideas here.¹²)

¹¹ It also promises to enable us to see how certain cases of reasonable disagreement in philosophy are possible.

¹² I do so in Goldberg (n.d.).

An account of assertion is an account of a type of speech act, and as such it should be presented against the background of our best understanding of speech acts. Paul Grice (1968/89) has provided an important grounding principle for such an understanding. Regarding speech as a rational, cooperative activity, Grice formulated the familiar Cooperative Principle as capturing a core part of the rationality of particular acts of this sort:

Cooperative Principle (CP)

Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice 1968/89, 26)

Now most people who have employed Grice's CP (and the account he developed on this basis) have done so out of an interest in offering an account of how speakers manage to communicate more than they (strictly and literally) say, and of how hearers manage to recover what is communicated when this goes beyond what is (strictly and literally) said. That is to say, most people using CP do so with an eye on characterizing the *content* dimension of communication. But I see no reason why we can't use Grice's insight to shed light on the dimension of (illocutionary) *force*.

In this light, it is worth underscoring that Grice went on to present various submaxims that he regarded as falling out of CP. Of these I highlight one (which he called Quality):

Quality (Q)

Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

(Grice 1968/89, 27)

While Grice's submaxims are aimed at characterizing the notion of "saying" something, I think it is not a far stretch to regard Q itself as contributing to our understanding of the speech act of

assertion as well. On this picture, the speech act of assertion is governed by two rules: you shouldn't assert what you believe to be false, and you shouldn't assert that for which you lack adequate evidence. But precisely what counts as "adequate" evidence?

I think we should answer this question by appeal to the CP itself: the standards for adequacy of evidence are determined, at least in part, by "the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." What is more, I submit that we can spell this out in terms of Bach and Harnisch's useful (1979) notion of *mutual belief*. The following is their gloss on the role that mutual belief plays in the sort of inferences that are made in the course of the production and comprehension of speech:

Mutual Belief

If p is mutually believed between S and H, then (1) not only do S and H believe p , but (2) each believes that the other takes it into account in his thinking, and (3) each, supposing the other to take p into account, supposes the other to take him to take it into account. (Bach & Harnisch 1979, 6)

If there is mutual belief that the hearer faces a practical task in which she is in need of information, and that she is relying on the speaker to provide this information, then adequate evidence would be the sort of evidence for a proposition which would render it reasonable for the hearer to act on the assumption that the proposition is true. If there is mutual belief to the effect that the hearer needs information of which she can be certain, then adequate evidence would be the sort of evidence that would support certainty. Or—to take the case before us—if there is mutual belief to the effect that the purpose or direction of the talk exchange is philosophical, then *evidence is adequate when it satisfies the sorts of standards that people expect of one another in the context of doing this sort of philosophy.*

What sort of evidence do we expect of one another when engaging in philosophy? It is not clear that there is one set standard for all of philosophy. On the contrary, it seems plausible to suppose that the expected standard can vary according to subject-matter: what we expect from a speaker who is advancing what she presents to be a theorem in logic is one thing, what we expect from a speaker who is advancing a claim in ethics (for example) is another still. I submit that this is because of what it is reasonable to assume is mutually believed in philosophy. It is reasonable to assume mutual belief among philosophers to the effect that propositions in logic can be established or refuted by proof. This is why we will expect one advancing such a claim by way of a straight assertion to have evidence that approximates a proof. It is also reasonable to assume mutual belief among philosophers to the effect that propositions in ethics cannot (typically) be established in this way. This is why we will not expect anything approximating a proof of someone advancing a claim in ethics. Rather, what we will expect in the way of evidence in ethics turns on what is mutually believed, or perhaps what it is reasonable to assume is mutually believed, regarding the nature of the subject-matter in ethics: the sorts of considerations that can support such claims, the difficulty of synthesizing all of the considerations bearing on a given ethical question, the nature of the sorts of methods we use in doing so, and so forth. If it is mutually believed that a certain claim in ethics is part of a systematic disagreement, participants to the speech exchange will—or at any rate, should—adjust their evidence-related expectations accordingly. And what goes for contested ethical propositions, goes more generally for contested philosophical propositions—at least insofar as the participants to an exchange in which such propositions are being asserted and denied have the sort of mutual belief I have described.

The model I am offering here is a special case of a more general picture of speech having nothing in particular to do with philosophy (or with disagreement, for that matter). On this picture, speech is a cooperative activity, and assertion is to be understood in these terms, as

governed by rules of the sort Grice articulated in his principle of Quality. Insofar as these rules are themselves an object of (perhaps merely implicit) mutual belief, they determine a set of mutual expectations of speaker and hearer. That these expectations are (in part) epistemic, demanding adequacy of evidence, is precisely what makes assertion apt for playing the very important role it does: that of serving as the vehicle for the transmission of information. For consider that a hearer who observes an assertion, and for whom the governing rules are objects of mutual belief, will expect that the speaker acknowledges these rules, and so will expect the speaker to acknowledge the responsibility for having had adequate evidence.¹³ Insofar as the hearer regards the speaker as having succeeded at following the rules, then, the hearer regards the speaker as having adequate evidence; and when the hearer's so regarding the speaker is rational, it is this that rationalizes the hearer's move to accept the information presented in the assertion, on the basis of the fact that it has been so asserted.¹⁴ In sum, it is because of the rules governing assertion that this speech act is apt for rationalizing hearers beliefs in what is asserted—and precisely this renders assertion apt for the transmission of information.

¹³ We can break this down further. The hearer will regard the speaker as recognizing that she (the speaker) has done something impermissible unless she has adequate evidence. Since the hearer regards the speaker as recognizing this, and recognizing that the he (the hearer) recognizes it as well, the hearer will regard the speaker as having done something which (she acknowledges) *all parties* will regard as impermissible unless she has adequate evidence. On this basis, the hearer will regard the speaker as acknowledging responsibility for having had adequate evidence.

¹⁴ Of course, if the hearer was irrational in regarding the speaker as having conformed to the rules—the speaker asserted something regarding which it is common knowledge that no one has any evidence, or she had obvious vested interests in getting the hearer to believe what she said, etc.—then the hearer's acceptance is itself rationally flawed.

Philosophical claims can be seen as a special case of this general picture. The specialness of the case of philosophy can be understood in terms of the distinctive contents regarding which (it is reasonable to assume that) there is mutual belief among philosophers. This mass of mutual belief serves to adjust the mutual (speech-act-related) expectations we have of one another. In this respect, though, philosophers are no different from any other group whose information-sharing practices are mutually familiar to the members of the group. To repeat, what is distinctive of philosophy is the content of our mutual expectations. In particular, I submit that when it is mutually believed that we continue to (want to) philosophize in an area despite the persisting systematic disagreement in that area, this mutual belief will inform what we expect of those who advance claims in the area. Thus, whereas I expect you to know whereof you speak when, recognizing that I need directions, you assert that the Empire State Building is at the corner of 34th St. and 5th Ave., I do not hold you to knowledge when you advance a claim as part of an argument on a controversial matter in philosophy. It is not that I let you get away with anything; it is rather that what I expect of you differs. I expect that you will have some sort of support on behalf of your claim, which support makes a case for the truth of the proposition in question; and I expect that you can defend your claim against the various objections that are leveled against it, or alternatively that you can give reasons for thinking that the objections in question should not lead us to abandon your view. In short, I expect that you can *defend* the proposition to acceptable philosophical standards. Or rather: I will regard your assertion as unwarranted if you cannot so defend your claim.

We have now come full circle: we can now address the worries regarding the warrantedness and sincerity of philosophical claims when they are made under conditions of systematic disagreement. My reply will now be apparent. When the speaker S and hearer H recognize that they are competent philosophers, there is a mass of mutual belief between them

regarding the subject-matter of philosophy, the activity of philosophizing, the difficulty of reaching epistemically high-grade belief on the matter, and so forth. This mass of mutual belief will help to determine what S and H expect of one another in their philosophical exchanges. In particular, H's expectations will be informed by his (mutual-belief-informed) sense of what it is reasonable to expect of someone participating in a systematic philosophical disagreement. And so while H will not expect outright belief (let alone knowledge) on S's part, H will expect that S regards her view as defensible, and is committed to defending it. What is more, H's expectations will reflect what he takes to be mutual belief regarding the sort of thing that can reasonably be expected of those who endorse and defend a view in philosophy.

The foregoing picture can now be used to offer an account of the warrant and sincerity of assertions advancing contested propositions.

Consider first the matter of warrant. This is determined here, as elsewhere, by the adequacy of the evidence. The adequacy of the evidence is determined, in accord with CP, by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange. My proposal is that it is determined by what (it would be reasonable to suppose) is mutually believed. Further, when the participants are philosophers who are philosophizing in a domain of systematic disagreement, (what it would be reasonable to suppose is) mutual belief will include information regarding the sorts of consideration on which these matters turn, the tools available for addressing them, and the difficulties in arriving at knowledge and justified belief on the matter. With this as part of what is mutually believed, when participants nevertheless continue to want to debate the matter—when they do not conclude that further talk exchange would be pointless—they will then adjust their (speech-act-related) expectations accordingly. And these adjusted expectations then set the standard for warranted philosophical assertion; the demand is for meeting a standard of philosophical defensibility (rather than justification or knowledge).

If this is so, then we can diagnose the error of UNWARRANTED CLAIMS. In particular, premise (2), to the effect that

- (2) For any speaker *S* and assertion that *p*, *S*'s assertion is warranted only if: *S* justifiably believes that *p*.

should be rejected. Below I will suggest that the model of assertion on offer can reject (2) while at the same time accommodating the case to be made for the various candidate norms of assertion which have (2) as an implication. (The result is that the proposed model does not suffer from untoward liberality in the verdicts it sanctions.)

Note that if the foregoing account of the conditions on warranted assertion of contested propositions is correct, we have an account of sincerity in philosophical assertion as well. In particular, sincerity is a matter of having the attitude corresponding to what is expected of one who is participating in this sort of activity. That is, a sincere assertion of a contested philosophical proposition is a matter of regarding the proposition as defensible (and being committed to defending it). Since mutual belief among philosophers includes beliefs regarding how difficult it is in this domain to arrive at a belief that is doxastically justified, let alone knowledgeable, hearers will not in general expect that speakers believe what they say—with the further result that mere lack of belief does not constitute insincerity. Insincerity is a matter of advancing a claim under conditions in which one does not regard it as defensible (or where one is not committed to defending it).

If this is correct, then we have a diagnosis of where INSINCERE CLAIMS goes wrong. In particular, premise (f), to the effect that

- (f) If S makes a claim but does not believe the proposition advanced in the claim, then S is insincere.

is false. In general, sincerity in a speech act is a matter of having the attitude which one's speech act warrants the hearer in regarding one as having. But I have argued that when philosophers make claims in contexts of systematic disagreement, a hearer is warranted in regarding the speaker only as taking the content to be defensible, and as being committed to defending it. Indeed, below I will suggest that the foregoing model can explain why one might think (f) is true.

It is perhaps worth concluding this section by highlighting one further virtue of the general account I am offering. There has been widespread debate on the so-called "norm of assertion." Those who participate in this debate typically regard assertion as a speech act which is uniquely governed by a particular rule, where an act's susceptibility to being assessed by reference to that rule is what makes the act one of assertion. The leading candidate for the rule (or "norm") of assertion is knowledge. On this view, one should not assert that p unless one knows that p ; to assert that p when one does not know that p is to assert unwarrantedly. Now I will not rehearse the sorts of argument made on behalf of this candidate norm of assertion, other than to say I find many of those arguments compelling. What I do want to say is that the general account I am offering, while it is indeed inconsistent with the knowledge rule, nevertheless preserves a good deal of what makes the knowledge account so attractive—and in so doing it can explain why we might be tempted to endorse claims like (2) and (f) above.

We can bring this out as follows. Having endorsed the Gricean claim that one should not assert that for which one lacks adequate evidence, I have suggested that adequacy of evidence ought to be determined in conjunction with the "purpose of the talk exchange" itself. One way to understand this is that speakers ought to make their contributions ones that are helpful to their

audience. Insofar as the audience's needs and assumptions are matters of mutual belief between speaker and hearer, these needs and assumptions help to determine both what information would be helpful to the hearer, and what sort of evidence would be needed to warrant an assertion of the relevant content. But insofar as mutual belief is minimal, the speaker will not be in a position to tell either what information would be useful to the hearer, nor what the hearer wants to do with it. In such circumstances (of minimal mutual belief), there is upward pressure on the norm of assertion. This is for the simple reason that, in these circumstances, the speaker will have to make assertions which are such that, *no matter the hearer's informational needs*, the contribution is helpful to her. But this means that the speech contribution will have to be helpful even if the hearer's needs require a high epistemic standard to be met. Under these conditions, knowledge would appear to be required. In this way we can see that the general account I am offering has the resources to accept that (and to explain why) knowledge is the norm's "default setting"—its setting when what is mutually believed is not robust enough to adjust the standard in any particular way. The account thus can claim to capture much of what motivates the knowledge norm, and can indeed accept knowledge as the relevant standard in many, perhaps even most, contexts. But the account can also explain why one might find (f) attractive: assuming knowledge implies belief, the result is that, given that knowledge is the default norm of assertion (and holds in the absence of mutual belief that would adjust the norm), an assertion made under conditions of minimal mutual belief—that is, made in ordinary circumstances—is unwarranted if the subject does not believe what she asserts. But this scenario, though ordinary enough, should not be taken to be the model for all assertion. Philosophical assertion of contested propositions is a case in point.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have responded to a worry, or bundle of worries, that appear to threaten the sort of philosophical skepticism I (and others)¹⁵ have defended elsewhere. The worry was that, if doxastically justified belief and knowledge are not, in general, available on matters of philosophical controversy, then it seems that none of us should believe our own views in philosophy (when these are matters of systematic disagreement). Further, it seems then that neither warranted nor sincere assertion of the content of one's views is possible. In reaction to this, I have allowed that flat-out belief *is* inappropriate when it comes to contested philosophical propositions. But I have argued, first, that there is an attitude towards such propositions that can be more or less reasonable in the face of systematic disagreement; second, that such an attitude does appear to be the sort of attitude it is rational to have towards one's own view when one recognizes the systematic disagreement; and third, that it is in terms of this attitude that we can capture the assertoric practices that make up the activity of philosophizing. What is more, doing so is not *ad hoc*, but instead appears to be motivated by taking a thoroughgoingly Gricean attitude towards assertoric force. Far from being objectionable, then, the implications of the sort of philosophical skepticism I have defended elsewhere go some distance towards illuminating the practice of philosophy.

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¹⁵ See Goldberg (2009; 2012) as well as Kornblith (2010; 2012).

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