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Assertion, Belief, and ‘I believe’-Guarded Affirmation¹

Anders Nes

CSMN, University of Oslo

Abstract

According to a widely held view of assertion and belief, they are each governed by a tacitly acknowledged epistemic norm, and the norm on assertion and norm on belief are so related that believing p is epistemically permissible only if asserting it is. I call it the Same Norm View. A very common type of utterance raises a puzzle for this view, viz. utterances in which we say ‘I believe p ’ to convey somehow guarded affirmation of the proposition that p . For example, one might respond to a query for directions to the station by saying ‘I believe it is down the first street on your left.’ Often, when we reply in this way, it would have been pragmatically preferable simply to assert that p , had we been epistemically warranted in doing so. One’s guarded reply thus suggests one is not so warranted. Nevertheless, if one believes what one, at face value, says one believes, one believes p . Contrary to what might seem to be suggested by the Same Norm View, one does not seem to portray oneself as irrational or epistemically beyond the pale in replying in this way. The paper develops this puzzle in detail, and examines a variety of options for a resolving it consistently with the Same Norm view. The most promising of these options, I argue, is to see ‘I believe’ guarded affirmations as a form merely approximately correct speech. They would, though, be a

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form of such speech that interestingly differs from paradigm cases of loose use or conventional hyperbole in that speakers would be comparatively unaware of engaging in approximation.

We often, quite properly, believe things we should not assert, because it would be impolite, imprudent or immoral to assert them. Is it also commonplace, and often all right, to believe what we should not assert, because it would be *epistemically* improper to assert it? An ordinary type of utterance, taken at face value, suggests this is so, viz. utterances in which we say ‘I believe p’ to convey somehow guarded affirmation that p. Thus one might respond to a query for directions to the station by saying ‘I believe it is down the first street on your left.’ Often, when we reply in this way, it would have been pragmatically preferable simply to assert that p, had we been epistemically warranted in doing so. One’s guarded reply thus suggests one is not so warranted. Nevertheless, if one believes what one, at face value, says one believes, one believes p. One does not seem to portray oneself as irrational or epistemically beyond the pale in replying in this way.

Yet a popular view of assertion and belief suggests there should be something rather odd about believing what one would not, for epistemic reasons, assert. The popular view has it that assertion and belief each is governed by a tacitly acknowledged epistemic norm, where the norms are so related that believing p is epistemically permissible only if asserting it is. I will call it the Same Norm View.

The next section characterises the Same Norm View a little more fully. Section 2 introduces the utterances of the form ‘I believe p’ that we shall concentrate on. Sections 3, 4 and 5 explain how they raise a puzzle for the Same Norm View, by (§3) defending a certain pragmatic norm on ‘I believe’-guarded affirmations, drawing on considerations of informativeness, brevity,

etc.; (§4) making a case for a norm for of truthfulness, or sincerity, on such affirmations to the effect that one reply ‘I believe p’ only if one believes p; and (§5) showing how the relevant pragmatic and truth/sincerity norms, in combination with the Same Norm View’s requirement on proper belief, suggest no ‘I believe’-guarded affirmations are admissible.

A quick response to the puzzle, on behalf of a Same Norm theorist, adverts to a putative parallel between ‘I believe’-guarded affirmations and statements of the form ‘I assert p’. This response is criticised in section 6. Section 7 explores a number of responses to the puzzle, within the framework of the Same Norm View. These include appeals to variable standards of epistemic warrant, contextualism about ‘believe’, and the idea that ‘I believe’-guarded affirmations are akin to loose talk. I shall recommend the latter to the Same Norm theorist as the more promising of the bunch. Concerns remain for this response, however, on grounds of how comparatively unaware speakers seem to be about speaking only loosely or approximately when they offer ‘I believe’-guarded affirmations. I also observe that a viable Same Norm View must adopt a rather stringent standard for epistemically proper assertion that p, stronger than its being reasonable to think that p.²

1. The Same Norm View

Many philosophers hold assertion to be subject to an epistemic norm, to the effect that one should not assert that p unless one meets a certain epistemic condition with respect to p. Different

² Two prior articles where ‘I believe’-guarded affirmations are noticed to raise questions about the alignment of the respective epistemic requirements on assertion and belief are Slote 1979 and Sutton 2005. Slote rejects what is in effect a Same Norm View partly by appeal to such affirmations. Sutton recognises them as a challenge to his version of the Same Norm View, offering a response we discuss in §7.4 below. Neither Slote nor Sutton however articulates in detail how ‘I believe’-guarded affirmations raise a general puzzle for the Same Norm View (not just for some particular version of it), or critically examines alternative responses to this puzzle beyond those they respectively suggest.

identifications of the requisite epistemic condition have been offered. Some hold it to be knowledge that p, e.g. Unger (1975), Slote (1979), Williamson (2000), Adler (2002), and Sutton (2005); others that it is some form of justification for believing that p, e.g. its being ‘rationally credible’ for one that p (Douven 2006) or ‘reasonable to believe’ that p (Lackey 2007). Let’s adopt ‘warrant’ as a technical term for the epistemic standing to a proposition, p, that is necessary and minimally sufficient for epistemically appropriate assertion that p. Many writers agree, then, that assertion is bound by an:

Assertion Norm Assert that p only if you have warrant that p.

Similarly, many philosophers hold belief to be subject to an epistemic norm, to the effect that one should not believe p unless one meets a certain epistemic condition with respect to p. Again, there is disagreement over what that condition is. Some say the norm is knowledge, e.g. Williamson (2000) and Sutton (2005); others that it is some variety of justification, e.g. Douven (2006) and Kvanvig (2009). Among those who hold both assertion and belief to be subject to an epistemic norm, many are committed to a further claim about the relationship between these norms, viz: that the requirement for epistemically proper belief is no weaker or less stringent than that for epistemically proper assertion. If you have what it takes, epistemically, to believe that p, you have what it takes, epistemically, to assert it. Although this view logically allows for the possibility that the epistemic requirement for proper belief is stronger than that for proper assertion, those committed to it tend to take the position that these requirements are the same; hence I call it the Same Norm View. On the technical notion of ‘warrant’ introduced in the last paragraph, proponents of the Same Norm View are, then, committed the following

Belief^{SNV} Norm: Believe that p only if you have warrant that p.³

Recent writers committed to the Same Norm View include Adler (2002), Bach (2010), Douven (2006), Kvanvig (2009), Sutton (2005) and Williamson (2000).

In what ways are assertion and belief supposed to be subject to these epistemic norms? For our purposes here, I will briefly mention two relevant features. First, the norms are not to be understood as articulating features that are nice to have in assertions or beliefs but strictly optional. The norms are supposed to have the force of requirements and not of mere desiderata. This is not to deny that they can be overridden by other, non-epistemic requirements in some situations (cf. Williamson 2000: 256). Second, speakers are supposed more or less tacitly to acknowledge these norms. They have some capacity to recognise particular violations of the norms and acknowledge these instances as off.

Two main lines of argument have been advanced in favour of the Same Norm View. One line of thought springs from the idea that belief can be elucidated in terms of the model of being a mental counterpart of assertion (cf. Adler 2002: 159-161, Williamson: 255-6). Williamson puts it this way:

It is plausible ... that occurrently believing p stands to asserting p as the inner stands to the outer. If so, the knowledge rule for assertion corresponds to the norm that one should believe p only if one knows p. (2000: 255-6)

Another line of argument for the view rests on the thought that epistemic impropriety in an assertion that p must somehow reflect an epistemic impropriety in the beliefs that p that would be expressed by, or based on, the assertion in question. If such beliefs that p would be okay from the epistemic point of view, why should the assertion that p not be? It might seem unreasonable, or

³ The superscript marks that this is the form the belief norm takes on the Same Norm View.

even mysterious, as Sutton suggests in the quote below, to apply such higher epistemic demands to assertion than to these beliefs to which assertion characteristically gives expression or rise:

One of the main goals of making assertions, if not *the* main goal, is to transmit beliefs from one thinker to another. If the beliefs so transmitted meet the primary standards governing good belief for both speaker and hearer – that is, they are justified in an evaluative sense – and meet standards of permissible belief (as noted previously, it is hard to imagine the former standards being met without the latter), it would be mysterious if the assertions transmitting the beliefs failed to meet the standards governing good assertion. (Sutton 2005: 375-6)

We may also observe a third source of motivation the Same Norm View, applying to a theorist who takes the epistemic requirement for proper assertion that p to be no more demanding than its being rationally credible for one that p (Douven 2006), or reasonable for one to think that p (Lackey 2007). If it is not rationally credible for one, or not reasonable for one to think, that p, it would seem one ipso facto would be subject to epistemic criticism for believing p. Accordingly, there is pressure on such a theorist to think failure to have what it takes, epistemically, to assert p implies failure to have what it takes, epistemically, to believe it, thereby accepting the Same Norm View.

2. ‘I believe’-guarded affirmation (IBGA)

Consider the following conversation:

- (1) A: Why won’t the car start?
 B: I believe the batteries are flat.

By way of contrast, consider:

- (2) A: What do you believe about God’s will in this tsunami visited upon us?
 B: I believe all will be set right in the hereafter.

Although B's reply has the form 'I believe p' in each conversation, there is intuitively a difference between the character of B's reply in (1) as compared with (2). Simons (2007) has put it in terms of the notion of the 'main point' of an utterance, U, which she characterizes as 'the proposition *p*, communicated by U, which renders U relevant.' (2007: 1035) Intuitively, the main point of B's utterance in (1) is expressed by the complement clause. It is the complement, not the main clause, which expresses the proposition that is somehow proffered as an answer to the question. In (2), by contrast, the main point is carried by the main clause. The contrast here may manifest itself prosodically. It would not be untypical for the intonation of 'believe' in (1) to exemplify a hesitant, implicational fall-rise, where the implication in question typically would be that the speaker is not quite sure of the truth of the complement. In (2), in contrast, 'believe' may well have a more definitive flat or falling intonation, and there may be no implication of uncertainty.⁴ Our interest here is in replies of the form 'I believe p', of the sort exemplified in (1), that are offered in reply to straight questions about mundane verifiable matters of fact, as contrasted with the use in (2). I will refer to such replies as 'I believe'-guarded affirmations, or IBGAs, for short.

Many complement-taking mental predicates (CTMPs) can be used, in the first person, for purposes analogous to that of 'I believe' in (1). Examples include (cf. Simons 2007, Brinton 2008, Wesson & Pulford 2009, van Bogaert 2011):

- (3) A: When did Mary return last night?
- B: a. I hear/gather/understand/infer she came back just after midnight.
- b. I guess/suspect/suppose/think/believe/know/am certain she came back just after midnight.

⁴ See, e.g., Wells 2006: 25-30. Whilst not uncommon, the noted prosodic contrast is not obligatory. There need be no fall-rise on 'believe' in 'I believe p' replies akin to that in (1).

c. I discovered/could hear/remember she came back just after midnight.

d. I would say she came back just after midnight.

In (3)a-d, as in (1), the main point of B's utterance is expressed by the complement. The CTMP functions to convey information about the source of the claim there expressed (e.g., whether it is perception, inference, hearsay), about its reliability, or on the nature of someone's commitment to it. The CTMPs functions pragmatically, then, as an evidential, in a broad sense of the term (for an overview, see Ifantidou 2001: 1-17). The CTMPs in (3) also have in common that they can occur in the first person, with at least roughly the same function, in a syntactically parenthetical position, either medially or finally, as in:

(4) a. She came back, I gather, just after midnight

c. She came back just after midnight, I remember.

For this reason, Urmson famously referred to the verbs following 'I' in (4) as 'parenthetical', holding them to have a 'purely parenthetical use' whenever it would be 'virtually indifferent, on all but stylistic grounds' (1952: 481) whether or not they occur in a syntactically parenthetical position. Corpus studies suggest, though, that clause initial position is by far most common for 'I believe' and indeed for most other evidentially functioning, first-person CTMPs (van Bogaert 2011). I shall here limit attention to clause initial examples.

English is not idiosyncratic in having a verb, viz. 'believe', that (i) can be used for belief attributions, in the third person or first person past tense, notably in the context of psychological explanation, and so can translate 'believe' in such sentences as

(5) He was late, for he believed the meeting started at 1pm.

but that also (ii) can be used in the first person present tense to convey somehow guarded affirmation of the complement, as in (1). According to informants, or the cited works, other

languages with such a verb include Chiapas Zoque ('kyomoyu' (3rdp)/'nkomoyut' (1stp) (Chiapas Zoque lacks infinitive)), Dutch ('geloven', cf. Vanderbergen 1998), Finnish ('uskoa'), French ('croire', cf. Mullan 2010), German ('glauben'), and Mainland Scandinavian ('tro'). Thus, if, as I shall suggest, IBGAs raise a puzzle for the Same Norm view, it is unlikely to be a puzzle trading on idiosyncratic or merely idiomatic features of English.

It should be stressed, though, that it is not required for our purposes here that what we say about IBGAs holds for all broadly parenthetical uses of the cited verbs in the respective languages or even for all such uses of 'I believe' in English. To give but one example, the parenthetical use of 'I believe' for purposes of conversational mitigation is at best of secondary relevance to our concerns. For there to be a puzzle, of the sort we will be articulating, for the Same Norm View here, it is enough that there is an established use of 'I believe' (or of the translating verbs in the other languages, although we shall focus on English) such that what we say about IBGAs holds for this use.

3. The Pragmatic Norm

Suppose you are in speaker B's shoes in a conversation akin to (1), where your options for answering a question include (a) and (b) below:

(6) A: Why can't I turn this thing on?

B: a. The batteries are flat.

b. I believe the batteries are flat.

Other things equal, option (a) is pragmatically preferable to (b) in so far as it is more informative, briefer, and less demanding to process. Does (a) have any drawbacks compared with (b), outweighing these benefits? Taking option (a) would constitute, we assume, asserting that the batteries are flat. In view of the Assertion Norm, which the Same Norm View endorses, this means

one should not take option (a) unless one has warrant that the batteries are flat. However, let us suppose you have warrant. Are there still any overriding benefits that (b) might enjoy over (a)? Certainly, there are contexts in which an ‘I believe’-qualified reply may come across as more polite or less confrontational, as when one’s audience has a cherished conviction that not-p or has asserted that not-p. In other words, ‘I believe’ can function as a device of conversational mitigation. But such considerations do not apply in a wide range of common, everyday situations where an ‘I believe p’ reply is a natural option. Rather, one is simply faced with a straight request for mundane, factual information, such as the whereabouts of the train station. The issue in question is not fraught, controversial, or a likely topic for intellectual debate. Thus, since we are here limiting ourselves to such fairly standard, everyday circumstances, it is permissible to abstract away from these considerations. The considerations of informativeness, brevity and simplicity of processing in favour of (a), and apparent absence of any overriding considerations in favour of (b) as long as one has warrant that the batteries are flat, thus support the verdict that if you have such warrant, you shouldn’t take option (b). Generalising this line of thought, we obtain the following:

Pragmatic Norm If you have warrant that p, do not IBGA that p.

The Pragmatic Norm fits in with the observation that IBGAs conversationally implicate that the speaker is not in an epistemic position to make the outright assertion that p, i.e., in our terms, that she lacks warrant that p.⁵ A straightforward explanation of this implicature is that speakers expect

⁵ See Levison 1983: 136 and Lyons 1977: 594-5. The general claim that IBGAs implicate that one lacks warrant that p is doubtful if warrant is understood in a highly permissive way, e.g. as consisting just in having some reason to believe. For it is doubtful that IBGAs that p conversationally implicate that one lacks any reason to believe that p. However, as I return to below, such permissive understandings of warrant are independently problematic, especially for a defender of the Same Norm View. We are thus not uncharitable to the Same Norm View in tacitly presuming, at this point, that warrant is not of this highly permissive kind.

each other to follow conversational maxims that has the Pragmatic Norm as a corollary.⁶

When one puts the Pragmatic and Belief^{SNV} Norms together, one can already get a sense that there should, given this package, be something puzzling about IBGAs. When someone IBGAs, there is presumably a defeasible presumption that they abide by the Pragmatic Norm, and so lack warrant. Speaker and hearer can readily infer, then, that the speaker violates the Belief^{SNV} Norm if she believes p. They can indeed quite readily infer that, if she believes p, she either (i) is not self-conscious about her believing that p, or (ii) self-consciously violates what she what she acknowledges to be an epistemic requirement, and no mere optional desideratum, on belief. Option (i) would be rather odd, not least in light of the fact that what she believes in regard of p is in some sense currently in question for her. Option (ii) would be a form of epistemic akrasia, a flagrant form of irrationality – so blatant, in fact, that it has seriously been questioned to what extent it is a psychological possibility.⁷ So it seems speaker and hearer quite readily can infer that, on pain of violating the Pragmatic Norm or of being in some pretty remarkable epistemic mess, someone who IBGAs does not believe that p.

The situation we are in vis-à-vis IBGAs thus does not seem to be entirely unlike the situation we are in as regards a reply of the following sort:

- (7) Journalist: How is the minister faring?
- Source: The minister will resign next week, but I am not informing about this.

⁶ Perhaps it will be objected to the Pragmatic Norm that it can be appropriate to IBGA that p even though one has warrant that p if one is unsure whether one has warrant, or no position to tell that one has. For this reason (the objection continues), the operative norm in this neighbourhood should rather be something like: ‘If you *clearly* have warrant that p, do not IBGA that p’. However, this move leads down a vicious regress. Just as one may be unsure or in no position to tell that one has warrant that p, one may be unsure or be in no position to tell that one clearly has warrant that p, and so on. For a general argument to this effect, see Williamson 2000: ch. 4.

⁷ On epistemic akrasia, see e.g. Owens 2002.

Here, it can be inferred that, unless the source is violating pragmatic maxims of informativeness, she is informing the hearer that the minister will resign next week, and so the last conjunct would have to be taken as one where the speaker is speaking untruly or insincerely. Some simple reasoning along these lines is so readily available and understood to be available among conversants that it ordinarily is clear that the speaker does not intend her overall utterance to be taken as true and sincere. This indicates why (7) ordinarily is transparently ironic. In light of this, it might be wondered why not some similar effect arises for IBGAs, when, in that case too, it can readily be inferred that someone who IBGAs does not believe *p*, unless she is violating pragmatic norms.

4. The Truth/Sincerity Norm

The foretaste of a puzzle here brings in considerations of truth or sincerity. I shall now make a *prima facie* case for a certain norm of truth or sincerity on IBGAs, viz:

Truth/Sincerity Norm: IBGA that *p* only if you believe that *p*.

I make no claim that the considerations to be offered here clinch the case for the Truth/Sincerity Norm, only that they are sufficiently evocative thereof to suggest that there really is something of a puzzle to be addressed. Also, I shall remain neutral on whether the norm is ultimately best seen to rest on a norm of truthfulness or on one of sincerity.

Perhaps the easiest way to bring out the attractions of the Truth/Sincerity Norm is through scenarios such as the following. Charlie is eavesdropping on a conversation where Ann asks Ben about when Mary returned last night. Charlie is aware Ben does not believe Mary came back just after midnight.

- (8) Ann: When did Mary return last night?
 Ben: I believe she came back just after midnight.

Charlie: Ben is not speaking truly/Ben is not speaking sincerely. Ben does not believe Mary came back just after midnight.

Charlie's comment here does not seem out of place. (The reader is free to choose between the 'truly' or 'sincerely' option; she should choose whatever option makes our claims most plausible.) The perceived problem or problems with Ben's reply, further, seem to include that Ben fails to believe that Mary came back just after midnight.

Perhaps it will be objected, at this point, that what Charlie perceives to be a problem about Ben's reply may not be so much that Ben *fails to* believe that Mary came back just after midnight as that he believes that she *did not* come back then. After all, negation in front of 'believe' is commonly construed as raised from the complement. However, an otherwise similar case where Charlie is aware that Ben has no belief one way or another on the matter, or that Ben neither believes or disbelieves that Mary came back just after midnight, suggests that a problem still remains. In this alternative scenario, Charlie could still object:

(9) Charlie: Ben is not speaking truly/He is not speaking sincerely. Ben neither believes nor disbelieves that she came back just then/Ben has no belief one way or another on just when she came back.

If Charlie is right to perceive a problem here, as he might seem to be, the perceived problem cannot be that Ben has a contrary belief; it must be that Ben fails to believe that Mary came back just after midnight.

Instead of relying on an eavesdropping scenario, we might reflect on a case where speech acts are reported. Suppose Ann inquires and Ben replies as in (8) above, with no eavesdropping. Later, Ann reports Ben's reply:

(10) Ann: Ben said/told me he believes Mary came back just after midnight.

Charlie: Did he? I happen to know Ben does not believe Mary came back just after midnight. (/I happen to know Ben neither believes nor disbelieves that she came back then, having no belief one way or another as to just when she came back.) Ben, then, did not speak truthfully/did not speak sincerely.

Ann's report of Ben's reply here seems quite accurate. In so far as she accurately reports what Ben told her, Charlie seems justified in concluding that Ben, in telling her that, did not speak truthfully or did not speak sincerely.

Another consideration in favour of the Truth/Sincerity Norm emerges in the following conversation. We are here supposing that Charlie is party to the conversation, that he lacks prior knowledge of Ben's attitudes, but takes himself to be in possession of some considerations evidentially relevant to Ann's query:

(11) Ann: When did Mary return last night?

Ben: I believe Mary was out all night.

Charlie: Why do you believe she was out all night? We all heard someone, with a voice that certainly sounded like Mary's, return just after midnight, and Mary, as we know, is not the type who stays out into the small hours.

Charlie's question here seems felicitous. His question presupposes, moreover, that Ben believes Mary was out all night. If we did not ordinarily expect someone who IBGAs to believe that p, it would be unusual or surprising that it should be okay to be making this presupposition here. Yet, as far as I can see, there is nothing extraordinary about making this presupposition. If the Truth/Sincerity Norm is acknowledged, it explains why the presupposition should seem

unexceptional.

At this point, some issues of prosody should be addressed.⁸ Suppose the intonation of Ben's utterance of 'I believe ...' in each example is characterized by a hesitant fall-rise on 'believe', as would not be untypical. Yet, if this is so, and if Ann's report in (10) and Charlie's question in (11) deployed a more definitive flat or falling intonation on 'believe', there might be a worry that Ann's report would be inaccurate or at least misleading, and Charlie's question infelicitous. Now, a quick response, to this concern, would be to build it in, as a stipulation about our cases, that Ann's report in (10) and Charlie's question in (11) also makes use of a hesitant fall-rise on 'believe'. However, this stipulation would really just shift around the locus of concerns on the score of prosody. With regard to example (10), involving Ann's report, as well as with regard to examples (8) and (9), involving eavesdropping, there is the following concern. Charlie's statements, in these cases, that 'Ben does not believe...', or that 'Ben neither believes nor disbelieves...', might be thought not naturally to have a hesitant fall-rise on 'believe' but to be said with a more definite intonation. In so far as these statements are offered in this different tone, do they really constitute good grounds for the objection of untruthfulness or insincerity that Charlie is pressing against Ben's hesitant statement? With regard to example (11), involving Charlie's question 'Why do you believe...', there is the following concern. If Charlie's question involves a hesitant fall-rise on 'believe', as we are now supposing it does, might not this affect the presupposition involved? If it does, then in so far as the final 'believe' in the Truth/Sincerity Norm either lacks relevant prosody or, at least, is not relevantly affected by any such fall-rise, to what extent is this norm suitable to account for the presupposition in question?

It would be open to respond here that IBGAs do not require, as a class, a fall-rise or, more

⁸ I am grateful to two anonymous referees for encouraging me to address these issues of prosody.

generally a nuclear tone, on ‘believe’, and so that we could choose our examples so as to evade the issues just raised. However, as the noted prosody would not be untypical, it would be good to address what role it might be playing. Now, on one, comparatively deflationary view, the role of fall-rising intonation on ‘believe’ in these IBGAs, as far as it is relevant to current concerns anyway, is limited to increasing the salience of the implicature that the speaker is not entirely certain of the truth of the complement, or that she does not know it to be true, i.e. to making this implicature more salient than it otherwise would be. The role of intonation here, on this view, is not relevantly different from how, say, a hesitant fall-rise on ‘try’, in the following case:

(12) Customer: Can you please fix this by tomorrow morning?

Contractor: I will try.

serves to increase the salience of the implicature that the speaker may well not succeed (cf. Wells 2006: 25-30). In this latter case, a contrary statement, lacking comparable hesitant tone, is nevertheless a good objection to the truth or sincerity of what is said the hesitant statement. For example, an eavesdropper could aptly remark as follows (with a fall on ‘try’):

Eavesdropper: He is not speaking truthfully/he is not speaking sincerely. He will not try to fix it. He’ll go surfing instead.

Note that what is, apparently properly, targeted by this objection is not, or at least not merely, the truth of the implicature that the contractor might well not succeed in (intentionally) fixing the relevant task, but (also), roughly, the literal content or what is said in the utterance. On this comparatively deflationary view, there is, by analogy with this example of ‘try’, no good reason to think that an absence of hesitant tone in Charlie’s statements that ‘Ben does not believe...’ etc. prevent them from being good grounds for an objection to the truth or sincerity of the IBGAs, even given that the latter have a hesitant fall-rise on ‘believe’.

A less deflationary view of prosody here is the following. It has been suggested, e.g. by DeRose (1998: 70-1), that prosodic features of token expression can impact on the contextually operative standards that need to be met to satisfy a verb phrase or operator of which that token is a part. To slightly modify one of DeRose's examples, (13)a below may seem acceptable in a way in which (13)b is not, where this arguably is due, at least in part, to a difference in emphasis on 'possible'.

- (13) a: It's *possible* that Russell's 5-minute-old Earth hypothesis is true, but I know that it isn't.
- b: It is possible that my car is no longer parked on the Main Street Lot, but I know it is still parked there.

Might prosodic differences in utterances of 'believe' have a similar effect? In particular, might the hesitant intonation typically exemplified by 'believe' in IBGAs lower the contextual standards for qualifying as believing *p*, whilst a more definitive intonation of 'believe', as in Charlie's statements that Ben 'does not believe...' in (8) and (10), raises them? If so, Charlie's objections of untruthfulness/insincerity would be misguided, failing to acknowledge context shift wherein standards are upped.

The view just floated assumes a contextualist conception of 'believe'. I shall return to it in section 7.3 below, where I shall argue the view is not a good fit for the Same Norm theorist. Until then, I shall set it aside. The alternative, comparatively deflationary view, does not make prosody an obstacle to our case for the Truth/Sincerity Norm. As I don't see any other way here in which prosody could be such an obstacle, I shall not pursue these concerns any further for now.

In leaving open that the Truth/Sincerity Norm might be a norm of truthfulness, I am in effect leaving it open that it might be part of the truth-conditions of an IBGA that the speaker

believes p. I am nevertheless free to endorse the common remark, tracing back to Urmson, that IBGAs are not descriptions of psychological occurrences or processes. If IBGAs attribute psychological phenomena, they clearly attribute states, not events and processes, since ‘believe’ is a state verb. Moreover, if IBGAs have as part of their truth-conditions that the speaker believes that p, this is compatible with conceding another point tracing back to Urmson, viz. that a salient role of ‘I believe’ in IBGAs is to qualify the sort of commitment to p involved in the speech act of IBGAing.⁹ The idea that ‘I believe’ in IBGAs contribute to truth-conditions might be combined with a ‘double speech act’ view, say along the lines defended in Infantidou (2001:132-8), on which an IBGA both affirms that the speaker believes p and performs some other speech act, say ‘proffering’, with the content that p.¹⁰

Although I seek to be neutral on whether it is part of the truth-conditions of an IBGA that the speaker believes p, it might be objected that I cannot really afford the luxury of such neutrality. For suppose it is not part of the truth-conditions. Then the Truth/Sincerity Norm could only rest on requirements of sincerity. But, since IBGAs are not assertions that p nor (we are granting) assertions that the speaker believes that p, they must be assertions that q, for some distinct proposition q. But then the most we can hope to get from considerations of sincerity is that the IBGAer is expected to believe that q.¹¹

⁹ Beside the positive claim that ‘I believe’ and kindred parenthetical phrases serve to indicate what type of speech that is being performed, Urmson is often credited with the negative claim that ‘I believe’ etc. do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterance (see e.g. Infantidou 2001: 120). However, Urmson seems to commit himself to ‘I believe’ etc. having a truth-conditional role, writing: ‘[W]hen a speaker uses a parenthetical verb of himself with an indicative sentence (p), there is not merely an implied claim that *the whole statement is true* but also that p is true.’ (1952: 483, my emphasis) Clearly, ‘the whole statement’ here must be, in the case of an IBGA, ‘I believe p’ as opposed to merely ‘p’.

¹⁰ I borrow the phrase ‘proffer’ from Simons 2007. My use, though related with hers, should not be equated with hers.

¹¹ An anonymous referee encouraged me to consider this objection.

However, if we suppose the role of ‘I believe’ is not truth-conditional but serves rather to modify or mark the type of speech act performed in IBGAing, there are grounds for doubting that the speech act type saliently exemplified by IBGAs is assertion at all. Let’s say, borrowing Simons’s suitably generic verb ‘proffering’, that the speech act type characteristically and saliently exemplified in IBGAing is proffering. What the speaker proffers to be so, plausibly, in replying ‘I believe p’, is just that p. To uphold the Truth/Sincerity Norm, then, we need to uphold that sincerely proffering that p requires believing p. Now, it is at least up for grabs that this is so, for assertion is not the only speech act with belief-involving sincerity questions. For one thing, sincerely asking ‘Why did you quit the force?’ requires believing that the addressee was once in the force and then quit it. For another thing, if one adopts a speech-act modifying view of ‘I believe’, one should allow that there are other broadly affirmative speech act types, beside proffering and straight assertion, at least some of which require (at least) belief for sincerity. Consider for example:

- (14) Dave: I hear such conflicting rumours on just when Mary came back last night...
Ellie: I guarantee/am certain/am positive she came back just after midnight.

On the speech-act modifying view, Ellie’s speech act type here should be distinguished from the proffering characteristic of IBGAs. At the same time, given the evident structural parallels between Ellie's utterance and IBGAs, it ought, on such a view, not simply be assimilated to straight assertion. Let’s put the label ‘guaranteeing’ on this further speech act type saliently exemplified by Ellie. It seems highly plausible that to sincerely guarantee that p one needs at least believe that p.

Now, guaranteeing and proffering are usefully compared with what should be distinguished as yet another speech act type, at least on a view that, like the speech-act modifying view, is happy

to allow for a variety of different broadly affirmative speech acts. Consider, for example:

- (15) Fred: I would say/am inclined to think/suspect Mary came back just after midnight.

Fred is not guaranteeing or asserting that Mary came back just after midnight, nor is he proffering this, in so far as the latter is characteristic of IBGAs.¹² Let's say, to introduce a third label, that he is 'venturing' this. When we reflect on how proffering is respectively related to venturing and guaranteeing, it seems not just up for grabs but to have some positive plausibility that proffering is subject to a requirement, for sincerity, of belief. First, it is not required for the sincerity of a venturing that p that the speaker believes that p. It would be rather odd if the requirement for sincerely proffering were as undemanding, as regards the degree of commitment to the truth of p, as for venturing. The Truth/Sincerity Norm prevents this odd result, in that it implies that IBGAing, and so proffering p as its characteristic speech act, is subject to a norm that one believe that p, and so is relevantly stronger than the norm for venturing.

Second, the Truth/Sincerity Norm fits into a pattern of simple-minded yet putatively attractive accounts of the sincerity conditions for guaranteeing, proffering and venturing, respectively. On this account, sincerely guaranteeing that p requires being certain that p; sincerely venturing that p that one is (at least) inclined to think that p; sincerely proffering that p that one (at least) believes that p. If certainty implies belief and belief implies being (at least) inclined to think, but no converse implication holds, then this simple-minded account also captures the sense in which guaranteeing, proffering and venturing have progressively weaker sincerity conditions.

At this point, a critic might object that the comparison, broached over the last few

¹² For evidence that Fred's reply, on any of the indicated options, is perceived as weaker than an IBGA, see Wesson & Pulford 2009.

paragraphs, between IBGAs and other first-personal, present tense CTMPs is a double-edged sword for a proponent of the Truth/Sincerity Norm. For, the objection goes, there are CTMPs for which the straightforward analogue of the Truth/Sincerity Norm does not hold. Broadly parenthetical replies of the form ‘I bet that p’ or ‘I guarantee that p’ does not require for its sincerity or truth that the speaker offers any kind of bet or guarantee – to think otherwise would be ‘the mark of an uneducated man’, as Urmson (1952: 494) says. Likewise, replying ‘I am afraid we are out of milk’ to a request for milk does not require any psychological state of being afraid of the fact that we are out of milk. So why should saying ‘I believe p’ prompt an expectation that one believe p?

However, there are relevant contrasts between ‘I believe’ and the CTMPs just invoked. The sense in which it is uneducated to think a sincere parenthetical usage of ‘I bet/guarantee that p’ requires betting/guaranteeing that p is one in which the latter are construed as acts of offering a bet/guarantee. Now, in (11) above, we saw that it was felicitous to respond to an IBGA with the question ‘Why do you believe that p?’ In contrast, it is not felicitous to ask:

- (16) A: I bet/guarantee that it will be windy tomorrow.
B: ? Why do you offer a bet/guarantee that it will be windy tomorrow?

Such an infelicity arises also for ‘afraid’:

- (17) A: I’m afraid that we are out of milk
B: ? Why are you afraid that we are out of milk?

Example (11) above also illustrates another relevant contrast. As indicated by that example, someone who IBGAs may properly be subjected to forms assessment to which she characteristically would have been subject had she been found to believe that p. If we find that the speaker has no good reason to believe that p, we take that to suggest there is something not quite

right about her outlook, as putatively expressed by her IBGA. In contrast, if we find that it would be unreasonable for the speaker A in (16) to offer a bet/guarantee that it will be windy, or that speaker A in (17) lacks good reason to be afraid that we are out of milk, it would be misplaced to object, on that score, that there is something not quite right about her outlook, as expressed in (16) or (17) respectively.

‘I’m certain that p’ and ‘I’m inclined to think that p’ pattern with ‘I believe’ here, and thus similarly contrast with ‘I bet/guarantee/am afraid’. Someone who replies ‘I’m certain that p’/‘I’m inclined to think that p’ can felicitously be asked ‘Why are you certain that p?’/‘Why are you inclined to think that p?’. If we find that it is not reasonable for the utterer to be certain, or, respectively, to be even inclined to think that p, that again would suggest to us that there is something not quite all right about the speaker’s outlook, as putatively expressed by the relevant reply. We might, then, seem to have a pattern here:

T/S pattern: Reply ‘I am certain/believe/am inclined to think that p’ only if you are certain/believe/are inclined to think that p

Since there are relevant contrasts between the members of this pattern and ‘I bet/guarantee/am afraid that p’, it is not ad hoc to affirm this pattern, and thereby the Truth/Sincerity Norm, without endorsing certain uneducated extensions of the pattern to ‘I bet/guarantee/am afraid that p’.

5. The puzzle

Put together, the Belief^{SNV}, Pragmatic, and Truth/Sincerity Norms seem to cast a dark shadow over IBGAs. A simple argument suggests no IBGA can jointly meet them. Someone who IBGAs either believes that p or not. If not, the Truth/Sincerity Norm is violated. If she does, she either has warrant that p or not, consequently violating either the Pragmatic or Belief^{SNV} Norm. By some such simple reasoning, then, it seems speakers can infer that anyone who IBGAs violates

either a central norm of belief, or corollaries of central maxims of conversation. Why, then, do not IBGAs typically sound odd, or amiss, or transparently ironic, as (7)B above does? Or, to make another comparison, why are they not akin to, say:

(18) I hereby promise you to A, and I have no intention to A.

Utterances of the above form are evidently odd. Plausibly, this stems from the fact that no utterance of this form can jointly meet norms of truth or sincerity, on the one hand, and the central norm of promising that one intends to do what one promises, on the other. The Belief^{SNV} Norm is supposed to be on a par with the latter norm on promising, in so far as it articulates a nondiscretionary condition on proper belief. If IBGAs are rather easily seen to be prohibited by this norm of cognition in conjunction with norms of conversation we all acknowledge, why is it that IBGAs typically do not sound odd at all?

Perhaps it will be suggested that it is the structure of (7)B and (18) that accounts for their oddity, in particular their having a conjunct that explicitly denies a condition of the proper statement of the other conjunct. Since IBGAs lack such structure, perhaps we should not expect them to be odd in these ways. However, elaborating IBGAs so as to make them structurally analogous to (7)B and (18) does not make them comparably odd:

- (19) A: When did Mary return last night?
- B:
- a. I don't know, but I believe she came back before midnight.
 - b. I believe she returned before midnight, but I don't know that she did.
 - c. I believe she returned before midnight, but I don't have the grounds/am not in a position to assert outright/without qualification that she did.

If warrant is knowledge, (19)B.a and b here are tantamount to 'I believe p and I do not have

warrant that p'. Whether warrant is knowledge or some other epistemic standing, (19)B.c is tantamount to 'I believe p and I do not have warrant [i.e. what it takes to be in a position to assert, without qualifying or guarding one's words] that p'. Neither of the above is as evidently odd or irrational as (18) is or invites the perception of irony in the way (7)B does. The presumption that speaker B in (19) is rational and cooperative does not require us to think she is not speaking sincerely. Putative affirmations that one is in breach of Belief^{SNV} are not, then, odd in the way in which apparent affirmations that one is in breach of the intention-norm on promising are, or in the way in which apparent affirmations that one is in breach of the truth-norm on belief are, as in the classical commissive Moore's paradox 'I believe p, but not p'. This is puzzling if Belief^{SNV} spells out an acknowledged non-discretionary requirement on belief.

6. A quick defence of the Same Norm View

A Same Norm theorist might reply that whatever the puzzle we have developed shows, it cannot show that the Same Norm View is incorrect. For, she argues, we find phenomena corresponding to those documented for 'believes' in IBGAs with 'asserts': just as 'I believe' can function as a guarding device, so can 'I assert'.¹³ Consider:

- (20) A: May a 'mason' be any large bottle of beer?
 B: a. I assert that it is strictly a bottle of bock.
 b. No, it is strictly a bottle of bock.

If speaker B goes with option (a) here, does she not convey somewhat greater uncertainty with respect to the proposition that a 'mason' is strictly a bottle of bock than she would have had gone with (b)? Is not her affirmation of that proposition somewhat more guarded? An indication that

¹³ I am grateful to Timothy Williamson (in discussion) for drawing my attention to (without necessarily endorsing) this option for a Same Norm theoretical response.

this is so, the Same Norm theorist might continue, is the observation that (21)a and (22)a below are less odd than respectively (21)b and (22)b:

- (21) a. I assert that p , but I might be wrong (about whether p).
- b. ? p , but I might be wrong about whether p .
- (22) a. I assert that p , but it might be that not- p
- b. ? p , but it might be that not- p .

To be sure, this Same Norm theorist continues, it may be puzzling how it can be that the reply ‘I assert that p ’ is more guarded than the outright reply ‘ p ’. Yet whatever this puzzle shows, it cannot show that the act or attitude that the verb ‘asserts’ expresses is not subject to the same epistemic norm as assertion, as assertion trivially is subject to the same norm as itself.

However, I do not think we can be satisfied with this response to the puzzle developed in section 3. First, even if the suggested parallel between IBGAs and ‘I assert p ’ established that that puzzle cannot show the Same Norm View to be false, we would still lack an account of how the View escapes the puzzle. Second, and more importantly, IBGAs seem to be guarded in certain ways that go beyond the ways in which the reply ‘I assert that p ’ may be more guarded than the assertion that p . So, even allowing that there is some parallel here, the parallel does not go far enough to show the Same Norm View to be safe. Let me explain.

Replies of the form ‘I assert p ’ typically have the role of placing the proposition p in a certain dialectical context, viz. one in which the speaker has argued, or is prepared to argue that p . Correlatively, in thus conveying that p is something to be argued for, it is conveyed that p is not proposed to be added to the stock of propositions that can be treated as presupposed, and thus as shared common ground for further inferences, for the purposes of further conversation. Since the assertion that p involves a proposal for p to be added to such a common ground, this amounts to a

sense in which ‘I assert p’ is qualified in a way in which the assertion that p is not. It also suggests why (21)a and (22)a above should be less odd than respectively (21)b and (22)b. For, as Stalnaker (1970: 286-7) has suggested, to affirm ‘it might be that not-p’ is to make ‘explicit that [p] is not presupposed in the context’.

As suggested in section 3, IBGAs are not typically associated with conveying that the proposition *p* is something the speaker is prepared to argue for or defend against objections. Thus an account of how IBGAs that *p* are more guarded than assertions that *p* that appeals just to the former having such a dialectical role is implausible. Connectedly, IBGAs are guarded in certain ways in which ‘I assert p’ replies are not. For example, compare the replies at B.a and B.b below to the question at A:

- (23) A: May a ‘mason’ be any large bottle of beer?
- B: a. I believe it is strictly a bottle of bock. Although the latest *Ale Aficionado* (which I haven’t read) apparently has an in-depth article that challenges many received views on ale terminology.
- b. I assert it is strictly a bottle of bock. Although ... [as in (23)B.a].

Whereas (23)B.a is commonplace, the reply at (23)B.b is odd. Moreover, the oddness is at least in part connected with the grounds for doubting whether a ‘mason’ is strictly a (large) bottle of bock that implicitly are acknowledged by the speaker, and that puts pressure on the hearer to question whether the speaker should assert that *p* (as she in some sense represents herself as doing).¹⁴ The contrast with (23)B.a here suggests that IBGAs are tolerant of such doubts in a way in which ‘I assert p’ is not. At least, (23)B.a does not in the same way make vivid to the hearer the question

¹⁴ In saying that someone who replies ‘I assert p’ represents herself as asserting that *p*, I mean to leave open whether she in fact indirectly asserts that *p*, perhaps as held e.g. by Lewis (1970), or fails to assert that *p*, as argued by Pagin (2004).

whether the speaker should believe that p (as she in some sense represents herself as doing). If assertion and belief are subject to just the same acknowledged epistemic requirements, as the Same Norm View holds, this contrast is indeed rather puzzling: why should a belief seem to be any better off than an assertion, epistemically, in this case? Thus the comparison between IBGAs and replies of the form ‘I assert p’ is at best a double-edged sword for the Same Norm theorist. It cuts against her in so far as it seems to make vivid, in another way, how we do not hold beliefs, in so far as these are revealed by IBGAs, to the same standards as assertions, in so far as these are revealed by otherwise parallel replies of the form ‘I assert p’.

7. Responses to the puzzle within the framework of the Same Norm View

One response to the puzzle we have outlined would be to jettison the Belief^{SNV} Norm, and thus the Same Norm View, arguing, say, that assertion requires knowledge whilst belief calls only for some decent, not necessarily knowledge-grade, justification. Such a lesson was, in effect, drawn by Slote (1979). The Same Norm theorist, on the other hand, has broadly three options. The first is to concede IBGAs cannot jointly meet the Pragmatic and Truth/Sincerity Norms along with Belief^{SNV}, but contend we can live with this result. The second is to propose a modification, or perhaps clarification, of the Pragmatic Norm as a route to admissible IBGAs. The third is to promote a modification, clarification, or even rejection of the Truth/Sincerity Norm as a route to admissible IBGAs. I shall now consider one variant of the first, one of the second, and two of the third type of response.

7.1 Living with non-compliance

If the Belief^{SNV}, Pragmatic, and Truth/Sincerity Norms each holds, IBGAs cannot jointly meet them, and some simple reasoning shows this is so, why are they not found odd? Could it be

that the simple reasoning just does not occur to people? Or might people have various reasons for not minding the clash, if it does?

The suggestion that the simple reasoning is available but just doesn't occur to people needs supplementation by a special account of why the reasoning is ignored. A broadly Gricean or cognitivist approach to pragmatics would be doomed if blockage of simple reasoning from acknowledged pragmatic principles were widespread. Yet it is hard to see any plausible special reason for a blockage here – it seems unlikely that, say, some Freudian defence mechanism overlaps with the domain of IBGAs.

What about the suggestion that people spot the violation but for some reason do not mind it? Perhaps it will be suggested that, if someone wants to convey that p as being at least quite likely but lacks warrant that p, it would be worse to (a) assert that p, on the assumption that doing so would violate the Assertion Norm, than to (b) IBGA, on the assumption this would involve some breach of either Belief^{SNV}, Pragmatic or Truth/Sincerity. Perhaps IBGAing is the least bad of several norm-violating options? However, this suggestion loses its force when we recall that IBGAing is not the only familiar alternative to asserting that p here. Others include 'I guess/assume/surmise/suspect/would say p'. Plausibly, at least by the lights of the Same Norm View, none of guessing, assuming, surmising, or suspecting is subject to as demanding a norm as assertion. Alternatively, one could say 'probably, p' or 'it is likely that p', again without getting entangled in obvious violations of acknowledged norms.

7.2 Assertion as driving up epistemic standards

Arguably, assertion itself may drive up epistemic standards, making it more difficult to have warrant that p than it otherwise would be. If such standards-raising is admitted, and if the Pragmatic Norm is understood in a certain 'wide scope' manner, a route to admissible IBGAs

seems to open up.

To fix ideas, suppose warrant is knowledge. It has influentially been argued that the question whether someone, S, knows that p depends on the stringency of the epistemic standards applying to S, and that these standards vary in interesting ways either between different conversational contexts in which people talk about S (contextualism) or between S and other subjects in other circumstances (subject-sensitive invariantism, SII). For our purposes, it facilitates presentation to work with the SSI version of the idea.¹⁵

On SSI, the standard for knowing that p may be raised notably though raised practical stakes for the subject whether or not p. Now, asserting that p often raises the stakes for a speaker whether or not p. Others may rely on your word in ways that are consequential not only for them but also indirectly for yourself, as when they begrudge you for misinforming them. So, on SSI, assertion can raise standards for knowledge. Therefore the question whether you can assert that p knowing what you assert can come apart from the question whether you can believe that p knowing what you believe. Suppose they do come apart in a given case. Then there can be a way for you to IBGA whilst meeting the Truth/Sincerity, Pragmatic and also the Belief^{SNV} Norm. At least, there can be such a way if we allow the Pragmatic Norm to be spelt out as follows:

Pragmatic' Norm: If you have warrant that p *such that you are in a position to assert that p whilst having warrant for what you assert*, do not IBGA that p.

To clarify, your warrant that p puts you in a position to assert that p whilst having warrant for what you assert as long as it is a warrant that p such that the very act of asserting that p will not deprive you of the warrant in question. The Pragmatic' Norm is a plausible reading of the Pragmatic Norm if the Assertion Norm ('Do not assert that p if you lack warrant that p') is read, following, e.g.,

¹⁵ For a defence of SSI, see e.g. Hawthorne 2004.

Williamson 2000: 241-3, as a wide-scope norm, i.e. as the norm ‘One should: assert that p only if one has warrant that p’. So read, the norm prohibits realising a state of affairs in which: you assert that p and do not have warrant that p. Now, suppose you are in a scenario where asserting that p drives up epistemic standards for p, and that your evidence that p is such that, as long as you do not assert that p, you do know that p, but asserting that p will drive up the standards to a point where you no longer know that p. So, if you assert that p, you bring about a situation in which you assert that p not knowing what you assert, contrary to the Assertion Norm. You are not, then, in a position legitimately to assert that p in this scenario. That is a pragmatically legitimate motive for IBGAing rather than asserting that p. So the Pragmatic Norm should not be construed as prohibiting IBGAing in this scenario. The (re-)phrasing in the Pragmatic Norm ensures that IBGAing is admissible here. In this scenario, you are moreover free to believe that p compatibly with Belief^{SNV}, provided that IBGAing does not drive up epistemic standards as much as asserting p does (which we may allow). So, while complying with Belief^{SNV}, your IBGA may comply also with the Truth/Sincerity Norm.

If SSI is granted, this account has the virtue of showing how some IBGAs may be unproblematic, even on the supposition that the Belief^{SNV} holds alongside the Pragmatic and Truth/Sincerity Norms. However, it does not succeed in laying the puzzle to rest. Even if assertion lifts standards, it is hardly generally true that, in situations where IBGAing is a likely option for a speaker, asserting that p would lift standards in such a way as to take her from knowing that p to not knowing it. If you are to drive me to the airport in a hurry, and ask me ‘Where are the car keys?’, I can properly reply ‘I believe I left them in the pocket of your coat’. The stakes of the keys being in your coat are no higher for you than for me – it matters much more to me than to you that the keys are found so that we get to the airport quickly etc. The salience of epistemic riskiness,

such as the possibility of suffering from an unreliable memory, may well be even higher to me, independently of whether I assert p or not, than to the audience of any assertion of mine on this matter. Whatever little difference asserting versus not asserting makes to applicable epistemic standards here, that difference seems pretty negligible to, and unlikely to be decisive of, whether I have knowledge that p and not. Yet an IBGA uttered in such a context seems admissible.

Connectedly, in some such cases, I may prefer to IBGA in part because I do not take myself to know that p, quite independently of whether I were to assert it or not. That we do not regard this as an incoherent stance is brought out by the putatively admissible conjunctions in (19) above. The present account does not illuminate why this stance seems coherent and such conjunctions admissible.

7.3 IBGAs as driving down standards for belief

Just as one might propose that assertion is associated with heightened standards for knowing or having warrant, one might propose that IBGAs are associated with lowered standards for belief. Although one could develop the idea of varying ‘doxastic’ standards within either a contextualist or a SSI framework, a contextualist framework is most natural for present purposes, since the requisite lowering of standards of belief needs systematically to be triggered by the linguistic act of IBGAing.¹⁶ Moreover, as noted in section 4 above, the idea that IBGAs are associated with lowered standards for belief fits in with the suggestion that prosodic features can alter contextually operative standards, given the observation that ‘believe’ in IBGAs not untypically has a hesitant fall-rising intonation.

Such a contextualist view would force a rethink of the Truth/Sincerity Norm. On

¹⁶ For contextualist views of ‘believe’, see Weatherson 2005 and Shiffer 2005.

contextualism, what should matter to the truth/sincerity of an IBGA that p is whether the speaker can truly characterise herself as ‘believing p’ in the context of her IBGA (or whether someone else, in a context with no more demanding doxastic standards, could characterize her in those terms; I will leave this tacit henceforth). Thus the norm should be given the following contextualist gloss:

Truth/Sincerity^{Contextualist} Norm One should: IBGA that p only if one is in a state falling, in the context of one’s IBGA, under ‘believing that p’.

Now, this would not help with solving our puzzle if the doxastic states that fall under ‘believe that p’, in an IBGA context, still are acknowledged to be subject to the requirement that one have warrant that p. The contextualist, then, would need to provide some suitable gloss also on the Belief^{SNV} Norm. She might argue that the spirit, if not the letter, of the latter norm could be retained on contextualism, as follows. Let’s suppose there are certain contexts in which we rightly criticize someone for (as we put it in those contexts) believing that p given that they lack warrant that p. Let’s dub those contexts ‘exacting contexts’. We may then propose the following gloss on the Belief^{SNV} Norm:

Belief^{SNV-Contextualist} Norm One should: be in a state falling, in an exacting context, under ‘believing that p’ only if one has warrant that p.

Let’s suppose that states falling under ‘believes that p’ in the IBGA contexts are not normally such that they fall under that ‘believes that p’ in exacting contexts. In other words, that it is comparatively easy to count as believing that p in IBGA contexts, and that reasonable people who IBGA at most have this low-standards belief, whereas it takes more to qualify as believing in those higher-standard context in which we properly require the thinker to have warrant. So, if a subject who IBGAs lacks warrant that p, she is in the clear not only as regards the Pragmatic Norm but

also, normally, with respect to Belief^{SNV-Contextualist}. Provided she is in whatever doxastic state is required fall under ‘believes that p’ in the IBGA context, she is likewise in the clear as regards Truth/Sincerity^{Contextualist}.

Furthermore, the contextualist view can account for why the conjunctions in (19) above seem admissible. They seem and indeed are admissible because we implicitly recognise that the ‘beliefs’ spoken of in them, in so far as they are IBGA contexts, are not of the more demanding sorts for which we properly require warrant.

Although this contextualist response to the puzzle has attractions, it comes at a significant price for a Same Norm theorist. It upsets the parallelism between norms of assertion and of belief, dear to such Same Norm theorists as Bach (2010), Douven (2006), Sutton (2005) and Williamson (2000). We can argue this by cases. Either there is some relevant contextual variation in standards that a broadly affirmative utterance that p needs to meet to be an assertion that p, or there is not. If there is none, we have a disanalogy with the case of belief. If there is some such variation, either it parallels that in the Belief^{SNV-Contextualist} Norm, in so far as the requirement of warrant only applies in high-standards, exacting contexts for assertion, or not. If not, we again have a lack of parallelism. If there is such parallelism, then a grave flaw afflicts the contextualist response to the puzzle. It now needs to be shown that situations in which IBGAing that p is a likely option for a speaker are not normally ones where non-exacting, low-standards form of assertion that p also is an option. If there were such an option of low-standards assertions, considerations of brevity, simplicity, ease of processing, etc. again seem pragmatically to favour taking that option over IBGAing that p. In effect, the original puzzle would arise anew. Even if it could be shown that easy assertion is not normally an option in situations where IBGAing is, a relevant disanalogy between belief and assertion remains, viz. that it is commonplace for easy belief to be an option

but at best rare for easy assertion to be an option. In any case then, we either are led into reinstating the puzzle or to upsetting the parallel between assertion and belief.

Let's suppose, as it implicitly is assumed in the contextualist account of the puzzle, that there is no relevant easy form of assertion not subject to the epistemic requirement of warrant. Then the contextualist cannot hold that there quite generally is an epistemic requirement of warrant applying to belief. At best, there is *some* form or notion of belief, viz. that attributed in exacting contexts, for which warrant is a requirement, yet this is only one among several bona fide notions or forms of belief. For at least some of the rest warrant is no requirement. Moreover, it is not as if these less demanding versions of belief are not subject to any epistemic norms at all. As we saw in (11) above, we go in for epistemic assessment of the cognitive states expressed in IBGAs, which the present contextualist admits as counting as beliefs. To give another illustration:

- (24) A: What will it be like for our race tomorrow?
 B: I believe that it'll be windy.
 C: Why do you think it'll be windy? We've had no indication or reports that
 the wind will be picking up, and we all know it is generally calm this time
 of year. It is not reasonable for us to believe it'll be windy.

C is here criticizing B, on the strength of the latter's utterance, for being unreasonable or unjustified. The target of this criticism is plausibly the doxastic state that speaker B, on the contextualist view, correctly characterizes as one of believing that it will be windy. The propriety of such assessment reflects that such comparatively low-standards beliefs are subject to an epistemic norm, one that requires that one has some justification for, or is reasonable in, believing that p. This has implications for what warrant can be, on a Same Norm View. If having warrant that p itself requires no more than that have some justification for, or be reasonable in, believing p,

then the required difference between the more demanding warrant-requiring norm upon beliefs truly attributable in exacting contexts and the less stringent norms upon belief truly attributable in IBGA contexts evaporates. Another implication is the following. On the contextualist view, the warrant-requiring epistemic norm on (a certain version of) belief, i.e. the Belief^{SNV-Contextualist} Norm, is just one among several epistemic norms on (various versions of) belief. This considerably dilutes its character of being a Same Norm View. At least, a Same Norm theorist has a motive for seriously considering what alternative responses to the puzzle may be open.

7.4 IBGAs as approximations

An alternative is to approach IBGAs in light of the widespread phenomenon of only approximately correct speech. Commonplace examples include:

- (25)
- a. The Pebble Time is square. [In fact, only approximately]
 - b. The meeting started at 1 pm and lasted for an hour. [In fact, soon after 1 pm and for approx. 57 min]
 - c. I hate it when an update requires a restart. [In fact, I am frustrated and annoyed when this happens]

Ordinarily, when people affirm any of the above, there is no problematic violation of a truth norm, as long as their utterance is at least roughly true, and no problematic violation of a sincerity norm, at least as long as they believe their utterance to be at least roughly true. It is convenient that only roughly correct statements often are admissible, as a demand for strict accuracy often would entail disproportionate prolixity and inquiry.

Let's suppose, pro tem, that 'I believe' in IBGAs contributes to truth-conditions, and that it is required, for the strict and literal truth of an IBGA, that the speaker believes *p*. We can then put the present suggestion as follows. IBGAs are, ordinarily, not strictly but only roughly correct; nor

do speakers ordinarily expect any more than rough correctness from them. As such, IBGAs are akin to, or perhaps a special case of, loose talk, such as (25)a-b, or conventional (and fairly mild) hyperbole, such as (25)c. So we should either simply reject the Truth/Sincerity Norm, or at least modify it so that someone who IBGAs that p are required only approximately to believe p.¹⁷ In any case, speakers would not perceive any problematic clash with a truth/sincerity norm in IBGAs, even given that they presume the Pragmatic and Belief^{SNV} Norm to be met (we must assume, though, on pain of the original puzzle re-arising, that they treat the Belief^{SNV} Norm as being limited to belief strictly speaking).

If ‘I believe’ in IBGAs do not contribute to truth-conditions but only serve to modify or mark the speech act type performed, indicating that it is a case of ‘proffering’ that p, then the just-outlined account would need some adjustment. An adjusted account here might run as follows. In IBGAs, ‘believe’ is understood by speakers in a somehow relaxed way, so as to mark the speech act type of proffering as one the sincerity of which requires, and so as one that can be regarded as conventionally expressive of, a state of mind that is not strictly but only approximately a matter of believing p. The adjusted account, then, can still be regarded as a form of approximation account, the approximation entering into computing the sincerity conditions. For concreteness and ease of exposition, I shall work on the basis of a truth-conditional view of ‘I believe’ here; the points made should transpose into a speech-act modifying view.

In favour of the approximation account, it might be contended it extends to IBGAs a view independently plausible for a closely related construction, viz. ‘I’m sure p’, as in:

(26) A: I hear Peter is biking to the meeting, and left from here only five

¹⁷ See Wilson and Sperber 2002 for arguments, relying inter alia on loose use and hyperbole, against truth/sincerity norms.

minutes ago. Will he make it?

B: I'm sure Peter will be there on time.

Let's grant that the literal meaning of 'sure' here is such as to require absolute certainty (being perfectly sure).¹⁸ Then B's reply would often not be taken as literally true, or as purporting to be. Rather, B's reply could be seen as a conventionalised, fairly mild hyperbole. The approximation account would say that the same goes more or less *pari passu* for IBGAs.

The claim that 'believe' in IBGAs, as, arguably, 'sure' in 'I'm sure p', is akin to a conventional hyperbole, and the associated claim that they are taken as having a somehow relaxed or loosened sense, could be buttressed by appeal to views of language change. The conventionalised character of 'I believe', 'I am sure', and several other evidentially functioning CTMPs is well supported. The evidential or broadly parenthetical use of these phrases is widely thought to be at some stage of a process akin to grammaticalization, or, perhaps, of some related process such as 'pragmaticalization' (sometimes viewed as a subtype of grammaticalization; for discussion see, e.g., Brinton 2008, van Bogaert 2011). While the precise nature of the relevant process is disputed, it is widely thought to involve that the conveyed meanings of occurrences of 'believe' etc. in these parenthetical usages are somehow 'bleached' or weakened as compared with their meanings in contexts focused on psychological attribution or explanation. Different views may be taken of just how this bleaching manifests itself here. If the parenthetical usages are regarded as at a relatively advanced stage of grammaticalization/pragmaticalization, it might be held that 'believe' in effect is ambiguous, having a special, weaker literal meaning in IBGAs. On this view, the Same Norm theorist would be free to regard IBGAs as not only approximately but

¹⁸ An alternative, contextualist view, would be that the level of certainty needed to fall under 'sure' varies with context, so one can qualify as 'sure' in some contexts without being perfectly sure. This would, of course, be the analogue of the contextualist view of 'believe'.

literally correct, so that the person who IBGAs typically literally believes *p* in the special sense of 'believe' in play in IBGAs. Even so, the reasons to reject or modify the Truth/Sincerity Norm would remain under this view. Our case for the Truth/Sincerity Norm, in section 4, would, on this view, be riddled with fallacies of equivocation. This view could, then, still be classified as an approximation account, in so far as the truth/sincerity of an IBGA at most would require approximating to believing *p* in the sense of 'believe' ordinarily in play in non-IBGA contexts. On the other hand, if, as van Bogeart (2011: 324) suggests, the grammaticalization/pragmaticalization process is at a more incipient stage, we might instead consider 'believe' as retaining an unbleached literal meaning in IBGAs, the bleaching showing up rather in the propositions hearers routinely perceive as conveyed by the utterance, as in familiar cases of loose use or conventional hyperbole. Between an ambiguity and non-ambiguity view, there are, I think, good reasons, set out by Simons (2007), for preferring the latter.

What sorts of attitudes are, though, needed in a speaker for her at least 'approximately' or 'roughly' to be correct, or for her to speak sincerely, when she IBGAs? A natural suggestion is that she needs some fairly robust confidence or high credence that *p*, where these are doxastic states with the content that *p*, although ones that may (and, for the Same Norm theorist, does) fall short of believing that *p*. That IBGAs are in some sense expressive of such confidence states is in line with evidence indicating that a metacognitive sensitivity to one's level of certainty that *p* develops in preschool years, at least from the age of three if not earlier (Lyons & Ghetti 2011), and thus over the period over which competence with IBGAs and related CTMPs develops (cf., e.g., Thomsen 2015). However, an alternative view has been suggested by Sutton. His remarks on IBGAs from the perspective of a Same Norm View can be construed as a form of approximation account, although Sutton does not relate it to the wider phenomenon of approximate speech. He

writes:

Utterances of the form ‘I believe that p’ and similar forms (‘I think that p’, ‘p, I believe’, ‘I think so’, etc.) often, I suggest, do not express belief in the proposition that p. They express, rather, a belief that p is probable (more likely than not, perhaps). (Sutton 2005: 390)

This echoes Urmson’s (1952: 487) suggestion that ‘I believe’ in IBGAs plays much the same role as ‘probably’ in ‘probably p’. Urmson cautioned against regarding them as synonymous however, and it seems rightly so. There are contexts in which we believe that p is probable (indeed, that p is considerably more likely than not) and would be entirely happy to affirm ‘probably, p’ yet less happy to IBGA. Let’s say, for example, that I am a Southern Californian visiting London in March, knowing that, on average, eight out of ten March days are sunny in LA, now being asked:

- (27) Q. My second cousin is getting married in LA today. What’s the weather like there today?
- A. a. I haven’t checked, but I believe it’s sunny.
b. I haven’t checked, but probably it’s sunny.

I would be entirely happy with (27)b here, but, if I don’t feel particularly confident about what the weather is like just today, I would be less inclined to reply with (27)a. This would stand in need of explanation if (27)a expresses the same belief as (27)b. Conversely, there are cases where we would be much less happy to say ‘probably p’ than to IBGA. If I am asked about someone’s name and immediately feel pretty sure, though not quite sure, that it is ‘Susan’, (28)a below is happy whilst (28)b is odd:

- (28) a. I believe her name’s Susan.
b. Probably, her name’s Susan.

It might be replied that the oddity of (28)b reflects untoward implicatures, e.g. to the effect that I am inferring her name is Susan from some unspecified evidence, and not just relying immediately

on recollection. Yet, if this is implicated here (as it may well be), this plausibly reflects, in part, our conception of how such probability judgements are arrived at. If so, and if (28)a is heard also as expressing a probability judgement, some account is needed why the IBGA does not likewise prompt us to think this judgement was arrived at from some unspecified evidence, not just pulled from memory (it is not as if IBGAs as a class rule out relying on evidence). Moreover, if (28)a expresses the belief that it is probable that the person's name is Susan, some explanation is needed why (28)b should strike us as such an unfamiliar claim to be making.

On Sutton's behalf, it might be ventured that people commonly have two conceptions of probability, an 'aleatory' conception, adverting to relative frequencies or objective propensities, and an 'epistemic' conception, adverting to degrees of confidence, and that these distinct conceptions tend to be associated with somewhat different verbal expressions (see Fox & Ülkümen 2011). When our levels of comfort with replying 'probably, p' and 'I believe p' diverge, perhaps this reflects that the former to some extent favours the expression of aleatory probability while the latter similarly favours epistemic probability? However, since judgements of the epistemic probability of p are supposed here to be sensitive to the nature of someone's confidence that p, it would seem more economical, and more in tune with the underlying psychological states, to construe IBGAs, and other CTMPs such as 'I [am inclined to] think/suspect/assume/guess p', as expressive of these forms of confidence that p, than to see them as expressive of a further belief, somehow based on these states of confidence, in a certain distinct probabilistic proposition.

These doxastic, confidence states that are 'near enough' to believing that p for one properly to IBGA must not, though, for the Same Norm theorist, be subject to an epistemic norm as demanding as that for assertion. Otherwise the original puzzle re-arises. On the other hand, these states are subject to some epistemic requirement. As indicated by examples (11) and (24) above,

someone who sincerely IBGAs is subject to criticism if it turns out that it is unreasonable for her to think that p. It follows that warrant that p (i.e. the epistemic position needed for proper assertion) cannot, for the Same Norm theorist, consist simply in its being reasonable for one to think that p. We obtain, then, as we did within the contextualist response, a constraint on a viable Same Norm View: the epistemic norm for asserting p needs to be more demanding than simply its being reasonable for one to think that p.

The approximation account has some advantages over contextualism for the Same Norm theorist. It does not imply that the form of confidence that p enough for one properly to IBGA is just one among several states potentially falling under 'believes'. It is not pushed to concede that the Belief^{sNV} Norm is just one among several epistemic norms of belief, applicable in different contexts. A less diluted Same Norm view emerges.

Still, the approximation account raises some concerns. I will note three, perhaps progressively more serious. First, in my highly anecdotal experience, folk who IBGA commonly take themselves to believe p. When it is put to them that they do not literally or strictly speaking believe p, but only approximately believe it, they often react with bewilderment. The approximation account implies that they, at least commonly, do not believe that p, and so predicts, somewhat surprisingly, that speakers commonly are mistaken about their own concurrent beliefs, even in a situation in which what they believe on the relevant matter is in some sense in question for them. Second, and relatedly, the approximation posited by the account seems somewhat unusual in how unapparent it is to speakers. In standard cases of loose talk, speakers seem relatively readily aware that some approximation is involved. This shows up in natural ways of responding to challenges the (im)propriety of which turns on the status of the utterances in question as approximations, as in:

- (29) A: The lecture started at 1pm
B: Oh? It seemed to me the professor only started talking at 1:01:15pm...
A: Well, alright. I didn't mean to say it started exactly at 1pm.

Similarly, if we suppose (as we did above) that being literally 'sure' requires certainty, and that speakers are tacitly aware of this, it seems safe to say that when someone utters 'I'm sure p', we are, typically, quite readily aware no commitment to certainty is intended. Again, this shows up in natural ways of responding to challenges akin to those in (29):

- (30) A: I'm sure Peter will be there on time.
B: How can you be certain Peter will make it? People get flat tires, are hit by cars, the road could be blocked by an unannounced rally, ...
A: Yeah, of course. I didn't mean to say I am absolutely/literally/strictly speaking certain.

In the case of IBGAs, however, people seem, at best, rather less easily aware of engaging in some sort of approximation with respect to belief strictly speaking. In the example below, speaker A's IBGAs is met with a challenge whose (im)propriety should turn on the of the status of that utterance as an approximation, at by the lights of the current, Belief^{SNV} Norm-endorsing approximation account. Yet it would seem less natural for A to respond with clarifications paralleling those exemplified by A in (29) and (30).

- (31) A: I believe Mary returned just after midnight.
B: But you admit, don't you, that, for all you know, the person you heard returning then, sounding a bit like her, could rather easily have been someone else.
A: ? True. But I didn't mean to say I strictly/entirely/fully/exactly/literally/in

any absolute sense believe that she returned then.

On any of the indicated options for the form A's final clarification could take here (or on any alternative I can think of that broadly parallels the final clarifications in (29) or (30)), the utterance is apt to strike us as markedly more odd than the clarifications in (29) or (30). Indeed, rather than denying an intention to express that one strictly speaking or literally believes something, the more natural reaction is one that, at least on the face of it, emphasises that one merely is expressing belief:

A: True. I only said I believe she returned then. I don't claim to know, or to be in a position to assert without reservation, that she did.

At least, then, if IBGAs involve approximation with respect to the literal requirements of 'believes', they seem rather different in the associated degree or form of speaker awareness of this fact than typical cases of loose talk and hyperbole.

Third, consider these examples:

- (32) My noon meeting may run for little more than an hour, but I promise to see you at 1pm [or soon after].
- (33) I don't think anyone should be absolutely certain he will make it, but I am [pretty] sure that he will.

With the bracketed phrase included, these are unproblematic, whereas, with that phrase left out, a certain ring of contradiction or anyhow conflict arises. Now, the bracketed phrase makes explicit that a loosening or broadening from a certain strict construal of 'at 1pm' or, respectively, 'sure' is intended. Given this loosening, there is no conflict with the remark preceding 'but', while, on the unloose, strict construal, there is a conflict. There is conflict since the initial remark in these examples, leading up to 'but', conveys that a certain norm for the proper statement of the remark

following ‘but’, given an unloose, strict construal of the relevant expressions therein, is not met. Examples (32) and (33) suggest the following pattern: when expressions that commonly are used in a loose way occur in a sentence that is prefaced in this manner, the loose use of the expressions in question must be made explicit, as it is with the bracketed phrases, in order to escape conflict. However, it is doubtful that, if, as the approximation theorist supposes, the Belief^{SNV} Norm holds, this pattern extends to IBGAs. Conjunctions of the sort exemplified in (19) above include some where ‘I believe p’ is prefaced in a manner that should, given the Belief^{SNV} Norm, conflict with the unloose, strict understanding of ‘believes’. Yet, unlike in (32) and (33), it seems conflict may be avoided here even without injecting a phrase to make loosening explicit:

- (34) a. I don't know, but I [sorta/kinda/almost/am inclined to] believe she returned just after midnight.
- b. I am not in a position to assert without qualification that she returned just after midnight, but I [sorta/kinda/almost/am inclined] believe she returned then.

Perhaps there is *some* pressure here to inject some of the bracketed phrases, but the pressure seems weaker than in (32) and (33). In light of this putative disanalogy, doubt lingers over how satisfying an account the approximation story offers of the putative acceptability of the (bracketless) conjunctions in (34). At least, if IBGAs exemplify approximate speech, it again seems somewhat different here from paradigm cases of loose talk and conventional hyperbole. So work remains to be done for the approximation theorist, in allaying the present and the two previous concerns, to establish it as a fully satisfying Same Norm theoretical response to the puzzle.

8. Conclusion

Using ‘I believe’ to guardedly affirm a proposition is commonplace. It is natural to think

one sincerely says ‘I believe the station is down that street’ only if one believes the station is down that street. It is also plausible that if one knew – or met whatever epistemic condition is needed for proper assertion – that the station is down that street, it would be pragmatically preferable to say simply ‘The station is down that street.’ But if we acknowledge a norm of belief according to which we should not believe what we do not know – or believe that with respect to which we do not meet the epistemic condition for proper assertion – it is puzzling why rational, sincere and cooperative people ever speak in this ‘I believe’-guarded way.

We have considered a variety of responses to this puzzle. The idea that assertion itself drives up epistemic standards may account for how some IBGAs jointly meet the Truth/Sincerity, Pragmatic, and Belief^{SNV} Norms, but has significant limitations. The contextualist proposal about ‘believe’ also accounts for how IBGAs can jointly meet the three norms, on a certain contextualist re-conception of the latter, but is in tension with the spirit of the Same Norm View. The idea that IBGAs are akin to, or perhaps a special case of, such phenomena as loose talk or, in particular, fairly conventionalized and routinized hyperbole, has several attractions. It fits the widely held view that parenthetical uses of ‘I believe’ and other CTMPs are at some, perhaps incipient, stage of a process akin to grammaticalization, and as such undergoing some ‘bleaching’. Out of the options charted here (and that I have been able to think of), it is perhaps the best bet for a Same Norm theorist. However, as we have argued, concerns can be raised about how comparatively little disposed speakers seem to be to make explicit that some mere approximation to belief is involved in sincerely IBGAing.

I offer, then, a disjunctive verdict. The robust, everyday phenomenon of ‘I believe’-guarded affirmation suggests one of two things. *Either* that people not uncommonly believe what they would not, for epistemic reasons, assert, without manifesting the noteworthy irrationality

characteristic of epistemic akrasia, and so without taking themselves to be in conflict with an epistemic norm they acknowledge belief to be bound by. *Or* that, when sincere, co-operative, rational people use ‘I believe’ in this way, they only approximately believe what they say they believe, whilst being comparatively unaware of only approximating thereto. Either way, ‘I believe’-guarded affirmation has interesting and somewhat surprising implications.

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