# A Critique of Turri's Experimental Research on Selfless Assertions

## – Grzegorz Gaszczyk –

**Abstract:** In this paper, I show that Turri's (2015a) experimental study concerning selfless assertions is defective and should therefore be rejected.[1] One performs a selfless assertion when one states something that one does not believe, and hence does not know, despite possessing well supported evidence to the contrary. Following his experimental study, Turri argues that agents in fact both believe and know the content of their selfless assertions. In response to this claim, I demonstrate that the conclusions he draws are premature in this regard. More specifically, I criticize his methodology, showing that his study is not only incomplete but also yields contradictory results. In closing, I propose how such a study should be conducted in order to receive comprehensive results.
**Keywords**: assertion, selfless assertion, knowledge, belief, norms, experimental philosophy, John Turri.

## 1. Introduction

According to the normative approach, an assertion is defined by a certain constitutive rule. Although many candidates have been proposed for such a rule (e.g., truth,[2] belief,[3] justification,[4] certainty,[5] to mention but a few), the prevailing view prefers the knowledge rule,[6] classically formulated as follows:

**KR** One must: assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*.[7]

In her 2007 paper, Lackey argues that knowledge is too strong a candidate for the norm of assertion. In support of her claim, she provides cases of so-called selfless assertions and lists the following set of properties to characterize them:

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[1] See Lackey (2007).
[2] Weiner (2005).
[3] Bach (2008).
[4] Kvanvig (2009).
[5] Stanley (2008).
[6] E.g. Williamson (1996, 2000); DeRose (2002); Hawthorne (2004).
[7] Williamson (1996, 2000).

> **NON-BELIEF:** a subject, for purely non-epistemic reasons, does not believe (and hence does not know) that *p*;
> **EVIDENCE:** despite this lack of belief, the subject is aware that *p* is very well supported by all of the available evidence; and
> **ASSERTION:** because of this, the subject asserts that *p* without believing and, hence, without knowing that *p*.[8]

Various analyses of selfless assertion have been offered. Predominantly, they are developed in the normative framework, with researchers arguing that selfless assertions are governed by their favored norm. The examples include but are not limited to the following: the supportive reasons norm of assertion,[9] various versions of the safety account,[10] the knowledge provision account,[11] the robustly epistemic norm of assertion,[12] the function first account,[13] and the knowledge account in general.[14] In a majority of cases, the goal is to explain selfless assertions in the form presented by Lackey.

Recently, Turri[15] proposed an extensive experimental research, arguing for KR, in which he distances himself from this approach: *contra* Lackey, Turri[16] claims that when making selfless assertions that *p* the agents have both belief and knowledge that *p*, and provides experimental results in its support. According to Turri's study, thus, the NON-BELIEF condition does not hold in the scenarios presented by Lackey, and hence one of the properties of selfless assertions is not met.

The goal of my paper is to offer a criticism of Turri's experimental study concerning selfless assertions. My aim is to show that selfless assertion scenarios, as presented by Lackey, do in fact present coherent stories. After reconstructing Turri's experiments, my primary aim is to criticize his research on various levels and, finally, propose how such a study should be conducted in order to receive more comprehensive results.

## 2. Turri's experimental study

Turri discusses two cases of selfless assertions. The first one is as follows:

> **DISTRAUGHT DOCTOR**
> Sebastian is an extremely well-respected pediatrician and researcher who has done extensive work studying childhood vaccines. He recognizes and appreciates that all the scientific evidence shows that there is absolutely no connection between vaccines and autism. But shortly after his apparently normal 18-month old daughter received one of her vaccines, she became increasingly withdrawn and was soon diagnosed

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[8] Lackey (2007): 599.
[9] McKinnon (2013, 2015).
[10] Pelling (2013a); Pritchard (2014).
[11] Pelling (2013b).
[12] Goldberg (2015).
[13] Kelp (2018).
[14] Montminy (2013); Turri (2014); Milić (2017).
[15] Turri (2015b, 2016a, 2016b).
[16] Turri (2015a).

with autism. Sebastian is aware that signs of autism typically emerge around this age, regardless of whether a child received any vaccines. But the grief and exhaustion brought on by his daughter's recent diagnosis caused him to abandon his previously deeply-held convictions regarding vaccines. Today, while performing a well-baby checkup on one of his patients, the child's parents ask him about the legitimacy of the rumors surrounding vaccines and autism. Recognizing that the current doubt he has towards vaccines was probably brought about through the emotional trauma of dealing with his daughter's condition, and recognizing that he has an obligation to his patients to present what is most likely to be true, Sebastian replies, "There is no connection between vaccines and autism."[17]

The story is adapted from Lackey[18] in several respects. First, Turri replaces "assert" with "reply" in order to simplify the language in the story. Secondly, he uses the term "conviction" instead of "belief" so as to avoid suggesting to the participants of the experiments whether the agents in the stories believe that *p* or not. Finally, he removes the last sentence from Lackey's version altogether:

In spite of this, at the time of this assertion, it would not be correct to say that Sebastian himself believes or knows this proposition.[19]

Turri claims that adding this kind of stipulation at the end of the scenario would prevent the participants of the experiments from properly assessing the story.

The second case which Turri discusses is as follows:

**CREATIONIST TEACHER**
Stella is a devoutly religious person employed as a fourth-grade teacher. Her religious views are grounded in a deep faith that she has had since childhood. Part of this faith includes a belief in the truth of creationism and, accordingly, the falsity of evolutionary theory. Despite this, Stella fully recognizes that there is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence against creationism and in favor of evolutionary theory. Moreover, Stella does not think that religion should be imposed on fourth-grade students. Instead, she regards it as her duty as a teacher to present material that is best supported by the available evidence, which clearly includes the truth of evolutionary theory. As a result, while presenting her biology lesson today, Stella tells her students, "Modern humans evolved from more apelike ancestors called hominids".[20]

As with the first scenario, Turri made similar changes by omitting the final clause from Lackey's example, namely "though she herself neither believes nor knows this proposition".[21]

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[17] Ibidem: 1223–1224.
[18] Lackey (2007): 598–599.
[19] Ibidem: 599.
[20] Turri (2015a): 1227.
[21] Lackey (2007): 599.

Turri's goal is to test how people most naturally understand examples of selfless assertions. When testing Sebastian's case in his experiments, Turri asks whether participants agree with the following statements:[22]

(1) At least on some level, Sebastian believes that there is no connection between vaccines and autism.

(2) Sebastian believes that there is no connection between vaccines and autism.

(3) At least on some level, Sebastian knows that there is no connection between vaccines and autism.

(4) Sebastian should tell the parents that there is no connection between vaccines and autism.

In the case of the experiment on Stella's case, some statements are analogical:

(1*) At least on some level, Stella believes that modern humans evolved.

(4*) Stella should tell the students that modern humans evolved.

(5) In your opinion, morally speaking, how good or bad would it be to not tell schoolchildren that modern humans evolved?[23]

Given that the overall aim of Turri's study is to show that selfless assertions are governed by KR, Turri asks (1)-(3) and (1*), to see whether the participants will attribute belief and knowledge to Sebastian and Stella. Further, asking (4) and (4*) aims to verify the so-called "assertability" claim, i.e., whether people judge selfless assertions as statements which should be made in the given contexts. By asking (4) and (4*), Turri argues, we are testing whether people consider selfless assertions as assertions. The claim is straightforward: if people agree that these statements should be made, it would mean that they are genuine assertions.

Turri received positive answers to each of his questions (ranging in the second half of the Likert scale, from "Somewhat Agree" to "Strongly Disagree"). In Experiment 1, the participants agreed with the content of statements (1) and (4) on a very high level (89% and 84%, respectively). However, when Turri asked (2), namely a statement without the adverbial phrase "at least on some level", and then (4), in Experiment 2, the positive answers dropped to 73% and 67%, respectively.[24]

In Experiment 3, Turri asked about Stella's case. The results were again positive: participants assessed statements (1*), (4*) and (5) affirmatively, providing answers above 80% in each case. This time, Turri added statement (5) to verify whether people morally disapprove of Stella not teaching children the theory of evolution. Although participants gave a positive answer to (5), Turri himself admits that one could still have doubts whether Stella's assertion is genuine since "[…] Stella's case is morally charged and could lead people to say, on moral grounds, that Stella 'should' make the assertion; this raises the possibility of false positives on the assertability rating."[25]

Finally, Turri tests Sebastian's story in the form closer to Lackey's original scenario. He changes the term "conviction" into the original "belief" and adds the following

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[22] Turri (2015a): 1223–1230.

[23] All responses, except question (5), were collected using a standard 6-point Likert scale with options from "Strongly Disagree" (=1), to "Strongly Agree" (=6). The question (5) had the same scale, but different options ranging from "Very bad" (=1) to "Very good" (=6).

[24] I will comment on this later.

[25] Turri (2015a): 1228.

statement into the story: "Sebastian does not believe that there is no connection". He does that to stipulate the belief even stronger. With these modifications, Turri asks for an evaluation of the statements (1), (4), and (3), in this specific order. The results are again positive: participants attributed belief to Sebastian (80% positive answers to (1)), they agreed with the assertability claim (76% positive answers to (4)), and they attributed knowledge (74% positive answers to (3)).

According to Turri, his experiments provide direct proof that people attribute belief and knowledge to agents performing selfless assertions, and they see them as "assertable" (i.e., as statements which should be made in contexts discussed).[26] This leads him to the conclusion that selfless assertions are genuine assertions which are governed by KR and, as such, present yet another argument in favor of the dominant approach in the debate. The outcome of Turri's study is that the NON-BELIEF condition should be rejected. According to his studies, this condition does not belong to the properties of selfless assertions, portraying selfless assertions as being similar to ordinary assertions, rather than a special class.

Finally, I would like to make two important remarks concerning Turri's methodology. First, Turri deliberately avoids testing all of the cases of selfless assertions proposed by Lackey. The so-called "racist juror" case is, according to him, too provocative and emotional, and so could conflict with people's assessment. Secondly, and more importantly, Turri argues that cases of selfless assertions are too complicated and "[i]ntroduce irrelevant factors that could easily cause performance errors or otherwise degrade social cognition."[27] He concludes that we should be sceptical regarding thought experiments which attribute something incoherent to agents in the stories (as in the case of Sebastian, when we ask the participants to first imagine that an agent knows something, then question it, then identify it as unscientific and end with not knowing what he really believes). Nevertheless, he ascertains that his results are coherent with his main claim that knowledge is the norm of assertion, and that it is this that his studies corroborate.

## 3. A critique of Turri's experimental study

In the next section, I will argue that Turri's attempt at explaining the phenomenon of selfless assertions is unsatisfactory. My critique is divided into two parts: I start with the methodological issues before moving on to criticize the general adequacy and consequences of Turri's experiments. Finally, I outline a positive approach to the experimental study of selfless assertions.

### 3.1. Arguments against the methodology applied by Turri

My first line of critique concerns the methodology applied by Turri. It seems that Turri's experimental vignettes are poorly constructed, at least in part, and thus the results do not correctly test the presented stories. Turri's modifications of the scenarios omit some of the important features of selfless assertions. While Lackey's formulation does not leave any

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[26] Ibidem: 1232–1233.
[27] Ibidem: 1232.

doubt that the NON-BELIEF condition is satisfied, participants of Turri's experiments could have a reasonable doubt whether Stella and Sebastian do not believe what they say. Lackey assures the reader about asserters' disbelief by emphasizing at the end of each story that the agent neither believes nor knows the proposition expressed. Turri, on the other hand, removes these clauses and therefore makes the stories less clear. This poses a justified question that the participants of the experiments might not comprehend what is essential to the story.

In reply, Turri may respond that although he modifies Lackey's original scenarios, in his versions it is still stated that the agents do not believe in what they say. The stories state that Sebastian abandoned his previous beliefs and that Stella never believed in what she says in the first place. However, he also agrees that the selfless assertion scenarios are too complicated to comprehend. Thus, he should make sure that the participants are able to understand everything and draw proper conclusions. Because the NON-BELIEF condition is essential, its importance should be stressed in the presented scenarios.

In his vignettes, Turri asks what mental states participants of the experiments attribute to Sebastian and Stella. He asks directly only whether Sebastian believes or knows that there is no connection between vaccines and autism. In most cases, however, Turri adds the stipulation "at least on some level" to the questions for the participants. With this addition, we cannot really know what kind of mental states participants attribute to agents in the stories. Further, it is unclear what believing that *p* "at least on some level" really means and how participants of the experiments understand it. This problem is seen when Turri asks questions with and without the adverbial phrase "at least on some level". Namely, removing it from the beginning of a sentence results in a decrease of the belief attribution by almost 20%. The results after cutting the adverbial phrase are around 70%. Thus, we should ask how to interpret the fact that around 30% of participants do not attribute the relevant belief to the agents. The problem is even more striking when we consider the question of knowledge attribution, since Turri asks about it only with the adverbial phrase and the results are at around 70%. I would venture that if he would ask the same question without this phrase, and the decrease would be similar to that in the previous experiments, we would end up with a result of slightly more than 50%. Although this is only hypothetical, Turri himself should take such a possibility into consideration. This prediction is justified not only on the basis of his experiments concerning selfless assertions, but also on other experimental studies where this kind of stipulation is used.[28] It can be concluded that Turri's findings on belief and especially on knowledge attributions are controversial and inconclusive.

My last strictly methodological point concerns the crucial dissimilarity between Turri's testing of belief and knowledge attributions. When it comes to the assessment of belief attribution, the general approach is to ask participants to choose an option on a scale, as Turri does himself. The idea originates from the general and as such, uncontroversial, observation that belief is a gradable feature.[29] On the other hand, asking about knowledge as a gradable feature is much more problematic. When inquiring about

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[28] See Buckwalter, Rose and Turri (2015).
[29] There is a vast literature supporting this view, e.g., Milne (2009, 2012); Clarke (2013); Hawthorne, Rothschild and Spectre (2015).

knowledge attribution, many researchers ask the participants simply whether an agent does or does not know (often adding a third option such as "unclear" or "hard to say").[30] Although it does not appear that there is just one proper approach for testing knowledge attribution, asking the participants whether they simply know or not can provide much more transparent and accurate results than when we query about the same thing on a scale. The former way of asking questions, however, could not favor Turri's thesis since now he uses two techniques to strengthen his results, asking about knowledge on the scale and adding the stipulation "at least on some level".

### 3.2. Arguments against the coherence of Turri's experiments

The second line of critique provides arguments against accepting the general adequacy of Turri's questions regarding belief and knowledge attribution. The statements which Turri considers in experimental vignettes are not the best choice to properly examine the relevant cases of selfless assertions. What Turri wanted to achieve is to prove that selflessly asserted propositions are both believed and known by the agents. Moreover, he asked about this matter in special conditions, to wit, he properly tailored the stories and asked questions with the adverbial phrase "at least on some level". However, asking about belief and knowledge attributions in these cases is not as obvious as Turri takes it to be. This can be shown by comparing the statements with belief and knowledge attributions with those concerning "assertability" claim, namely, (4) and (4*):

> (4) Sebastian should tell the parents that there is no connection between vaccines and autism.
>
> (4*) Stella should tell the students that modern humans evolved.

Turri questions these statements in order to verify whether people consider selfless assertions to be genuine assertions. He treats both types of statements in the same manner, although there seems to be an important asymmetry between them.

Let us focus on statements concerning the "assertablity" of *p*, i.e., whether, when asked, the agent should say that *p*. We can test experimentally such statements since the results could show whether people assess them as statements which should be made or not. There is a couple of reasons why we can ask about people's intuitions here. In general, people have certain expectations concerning those who perform public duties. Both asserters in our scenarios, a doctor and a teacher, are expected to act according to a certain agreed upon public standard when performing their duties. A teacher is expected to teach children what is in the textbook and a doctor is expected to answer patients' questions in accordance with the best medical evidence. In short, people have specific expectations about how such duties should be performed and this is a known fact. These expectations, their scope and how strong they are in all sorts of cases, are definitely a problem worth exploring both theoretically and empirically.[31] This does not

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[30] For an example of research when belief is treated in a gradable way and knowledge as something which we have or have not, see Nagel et al. (2013).

[31] There is an extensive literature on mutual expectations in communication theories and in debates concerning assertion specifically, e.g., Goldberg (2015) defines an assertion in terms of common knowledge or expectations between the speaker and the hearer.

mean, however, that questions (4) and (4*), as Turri argues, track something unique only for assertions. I will return to this issue later.

Questions concerning the participants' assessment of belief and knowledge attribution are of a different kind to these concerning assertability. In the former case, questions concern what is directly stated in the stories. Thus, they verify the inferential skills of the participants of the experiments and whether they understood the story. In the latter case, we ask the participants about what is not in the story: we require from them to make inference both from the story and from their experience (it is legitimate to answer to this question by asking oneself what one would do in such a case). From positive answers to such questions we cannot, contrary to Turri, draw too substantial conclusions.

Consider questions concerning belief and knowledge attributions by comparing Sebastian's and Stella's stories. The NON-BELIEF condition states that an agent does not believe, and hence does not know, that *p*. Both Sebastian and Stella satisfy this condition, although in a different way. Let us focus on Sebastian first. He starts from believing that there is no connection between vaccines and autism and ends with *not* believing that there is *no* connection. Thus, we cannot say that he believes that there is a connection or that he believes that there is no connection, as this would be a misrepresentation of the story. Lackey[32] characterizes Sebastian as confused at the moment of making a selfless assertion. Thus, he rather withholds belief whether there is a connection between vaccines and autism and the correct characterization of his state seems to be that he does not know what to think about it anymore. At this point, Turri could argue that he tests empirically precisely those cases because he wants to verify in what doxastic state Sebastian is. However, Turri must explain why he states directly in the story that Sebastian does not believe that *p* and then does not even comment when the participants respond that Sebastian believes that *p*.[33] I do not claim that we can assess the state of Sebastian without a doubt, however, we cannot ignore what is stated in the story, i.e., that, at the time of performing the selfless assertion, Sebastian does not believe that *p*.

On the other hand, Stella's story starts and ends with the same belief state, namely, that modern humans did not evolve or that creationism is true. She never believed in the theory of evolution even though she is well aware of all the scientific evidence in favor of it. Thus, Stella believes that not *p*, i.e., she believes that modern humans did not evolve. It seems that Stella's story is not too complicated and not too far-fetched. We can easily imagine that there are people who believe in creationism (which is a widespread belief) and, at the same time, that they perform certain public duties, such as teaching in schools where they transfer knowledge from textbooks independently from their personal beliefs.

Let us go back to Turri's vignettes and the statements presented there. Turri asks whether "Sebastian believes that there is no connection between vaccines and autism" and whether "Stella believes that modern humans evolved". In other words, he asks whether they believe (and know) the content of selfless assertions. I argue that participants' affirmative answers to these questions are problematic for him. To show this, let us focus on the consequences of accepting Turri's results. Turri does not consider the

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[32] Lackey (2007): 620, fn. 13.
[33] See Turri (2015a): 1230.

obvious issue that participants of his experiments have to ascribe contradictory mental states to Sebastian and Stella. Both of them, at the time of performing a selfless assertion that *p,* are portrayed as not believing that *p*. Turri receives contradictory results and cannot simply state that they believe that *p* since in the story it is explicitly stated that Sebastian and Stella do not believe that *p*. Stella's case is especially difficult to comprehend since we know that she never believed in the theory of evolution to begin with. She may understand it and be well aware that there is overwhelming scientific evidence in favor of it. Nevertheless, she can still remain faithful to what she was taught as a child. If we agree with Turri that Stella believes in the theory of evolution, we must explain the contradiction that the participants ascribe to Stella a different mental state from the one stated in the story. Perhaps we can ascribe to her contradictory mental states or argue that she somehow believes both in evolution and creationism, however, on the basis of Turri's studies we cannot say that she does not believe in creationism. His experiments do not account for this dilemma. We could verify it by simply asking the participants whether Stella believes in creationism or, alternatively, whether she believes that modern humans evolved. Oftentimes, during their experiments, researchers ask such questions in order to verify whether the participants understand the story and are able to infer basic facts about it. Adding these control questions could provide a broader picture to selfless assertions phenomenon. The problem is that participants probably are aware of this contradiction but they are not asked how they understand it. Therefore, the direct consequence of Turri's study is the problem of ascribing contradictory mental states to the agents in the stories.

Finally, I want to return to the so-called "assertability" claims, i.e., asking whether Stella and Sebastian should tell that *p*. Answering such claims positively is supposed to show that selfless assertions are genuine ones. Turri argues that this is the case because the participants assess that these statements should be made. However, this is not the only way to explain this result. On the one hand, one can assess particular assertions as performed correctly for numerous reasons. For instance, in some contexts, the norm of assertion can be overridden by different, pragmatic considerations. A selfless asserter might feel obliged to say that *p* despite her disbelief that *p*. If that were the case, her act would violate the norm of assertion, but could be seen as pragmatically proper.[34] On the other hand, despite its name, Lackey's selfless assertions are not indubitably assertions. Namely, there could be strong interferences on the side of social expectations. By means of example, we expect from doctors to answer our questions following the best available medical knowledge. This does not mean that we are asking for their assertions, viz., personal opinions in these matters, although we usually assume that they believe what they tell us. Moreover, in such professional contexts, we can agree that something which we do not know or are uncertain about is something that should be said, and we do not necessarily consider those speech acts as assertions. Thus, Turri's claim is insufficiently supported in this regard as well.

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[34] Williamson gives the following example of such a case: "I shout, 'That is your train,' knowing that I do not know that it is, because it probably is and you have only moments to catch it." Williamson 1996: 508.

Turri might try to respond to the above problems as follows. On the one hand, as he argues,[35] the selfless assertion scenarios are too complicated and confusing. He may maintain, thus, that it is hard for the participants to understand these scenarios and to draw appropriate consequences. Although I agree with Turri that selfless assertion scenarios are complicated and could be confusing, he himself acknowledges the validity of the stories by testing them experimentally. After all, he argues that selfless assertions are yet another argument in favor of KR.

On the other hand, Turri's experiments deliver similar results in case of Sebastian and Stella, so he may argue that the applied methodology and questions asked are appropriate. It is of course a virtue that he managed to replicate his studies on two different cases. However, when we take under consideration all counter-arguments discussed above, one might be skeptical regarding the validity of such studies. Firstly, the experimental setting used by Turri is not entirely adequate to capture the phenomenon we are after in the debate about selfless assertions. Secondly, I argued that there is a crucial asymmetry between statements concerning belief and knowledge attribution on the one hand and those concerning assertability on the other, even though Turri treats them in the same way. Thirdly, it does not follow that Turri should not provide an explanation regarding the consequence of ascription of contradictory mental states to Sebastian and Stella just because the results are similar in the two scenarios. Finally, Turri derives somewhat rash conclusions from the fact that the participants assess selfless assertions as statements which should be made. However, there can be various reasons why they think so, and so it does not necessarily mean that selfless assertions are genuine assertions. It seems that, taken together, all these reasons are enough to question the overall adequacy of Turri's experimental study.

## 4. A positive approach to the experimental study of selfless assertions

I would now like to outline a positive approach to the experimental treatment of selfless assertion scenarios. As it has been already highlighted what changes should be made in order to test selfless assertions in a more consistent way, I sum up those remarks here in three points.

Firstly, a proper examination of selfless assertions should contain more precise questions about the agents' mental states. As applied to Stella's case, we should not limit ourselves to asking whether Stella believes that modern humans evolved (which verifies the inferential skills of the participants), but also whether Stella believes that modern humans evolved, or whether she believes in the truth of creationism. Asking the latter question lets us see whether the participants really think that Stella believes that the theory of evolution is true.

Secondly, the vignettes should contain more questions asked in different contexts. For instance, we should not only ask whether Stella should tell the students that modern humans evolved, but also, for instance, whether Stella can tell her husband at home that she believes that modern humans did not evolve. This maneuver would allow us to differentiate between two distinct contexts, the professional and the private. In the former, Stella performs her duties as a teacher, where she does not always say what she

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[35]  Turri (2015a): 1232.

believes. In the latter, she is honest and speaks openly to her husband about her beliefs. My hypothesis is that differentiating between these two contexts could provide us with an explanation why Stella does not hold contradictory beliefs.

This hypothesis could be expanded even further (although this is independent of my critique of Turri). If people in general discriminate between these two contexts and assess these propositions differently, it could be argued that the illocutionary act which Stella performs at home is an assertion, and what she performs at school is another illocutionary act – something like *teaching* or *presenting* the facts. Both illocutionary acts belong to the assertive family, but the latter is different from an assertion since by performing it Stella undertakes a different, weaker commitment.[36] Of course, we cannot ask what kind of an illocutionary act Stella is performing, but by distinguishing features specific only for assertions and for selfless assertions we can differentiate between these two illocutionary acts and propose separate accounts for them.

Finally, it seems that one can ask about knowledge attribution by means of the direct question, i.e., whether Stella knows or does not know. This would deliver much more specific answers to our query. My hypothesis is that people in general will not be willing to attribute knowledge to Stella when performing the selfless assertion. In his study, Turri asks about knowledge attribution only in the case of Sebastian. I argued that the cases of Sebastian and Stella are different with respect to the belief state of the agents performing selfless assertions. In the case of knowledge attribution, it could be analogous. A more accurate study might show that cases of selfless assertions have crucial differences between each other.

## 5. Conclusions

The goal of this paper was to show that Turri's analysis of selfless assertions is, contrary to what he claims, far from final. It is hard to accept that participants in Turri's experiments ascribe both belief and knowledge to Sebastian and Stella without first answering a couple of problematic questions for Turri, among them: how to explain ascribing contradictory mental states to the agents in the stories, or how to explain abstaining from knowledge attribution. Finally, I proposed a potential direction for a proper analysis of selfless assertions. It seems that by changing the circumstances in which the agents perform their statements, Turri's results are not as manifest as they appeared at the outset. This also provides us with a valuable lesson: even if empirical investigations in philosophy present themselves as the ultimate solution to a particular problem, they tend to have implicit or explicit assumptions which can undermine the project.

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[36] A similar idea is developed in detail by Milić (2017).

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