

A Social Epistemology of Assertion

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1. Introduction

There is little to no doubt that assertion plays a key role in social epistemology. After all, it is the central vehicle for sharing knowledge. At the same time, the bulk of the epistemology of assertion is surprisingly individualistic. Consider the perhaps most central debate in the epistemological literature on assertion which concerns the epistemic norm governing assertion. It is widely agreed in this debate is that there is exactly one epistemic norm of assertion, that it specifies a condition that speakers must satisfy in order to assert permissibly and that whether or not an assertion is epistemically good depends on whether the speaker complies with the epistemic norm. The main disagreement concerns the content of the key norm. Here the literature has witnessed a flurry of proposals, with the most popular contenders being knowledge and justification.

That social epistemology itself is often conducted in too individualistic a manner has increasingly been an point of concern amongst contributors to the debate.¹ The central aim of this chapter is to extend this concern to the debate on the normativity of assertion and to sketch an alternative according to which it is social at its very core. In particular, we will argue that assertion has an etiological function that is distinctively epistemic, to wit, generating knowledge in hearers. It is this function that is at the very basis of our account of the normativity of assertion. More specifically, we will argue that given that assertion has this function, a norm about what a good assertion is follows straightaway and that it makes sense to operate a variety of prescriptive norms for assertion. Since the bulk of these norms crucially involve the hearer, our functionalist approach breaks with the individualism that's prevalent in present literature and offers an alternative that places the normativity of assertion squarely in the field of social epistemology. Furthermore, we argue, this social normative picture of assertion also serves to give us a novel form of anti-reductionism for the epistemology of testimony.

¹ See e.g. (Goldberg 2018, 2014, 2010), (Goldman and Blanchard 2018).

Here is the game plan: In Section 2, we motivate a shift towards a more social epistemology of assertion in line with the general methodological shift in social epistemology at large. We then develop our preferred account of functions and the distinctively functionalist normative framework it supports (Section 3). Section 4 turns to the normativity of assertion. We argue that assertion has the epistemic function of generating knowledge in hearers and use this result to develop our distinctively social account of the normativity of assertion. In Section 5, we outline some implications of our view for the epistemology of testimony.

2. Assertion Individualism

2.1 Standard Accounts of the Normativity of Assertion

We traffic in assertions. When we assert something, we are putting ourselves on the line in the sense that we make ourselves liable to criticism. ‘You shouldn’t have said this!’ is one familiar way of criticising assertions. The fact that by asserting we make ourselves liable to criticism strongly suggests that assertion is governed by norms. This is in a way hardly surprising. After all, assertion is a speech act and action in general is governed by a variety of norms, including moral norms and practical norms. Suppose you say something mean to a friend. That’s something you ought morally not to do. Or suppose you tell your supervisor at work that he has ugly shoes. That’s an imprudent thing to say, something that you ought practically not to do. ‘You shouldn’t have said this!’ is one way of making just these points.

While all actions are governed by norms, including moral and practical ones, there are some types of act that are governed by specific norms. For instance, inner-city driving is governed by a norm that prohibits driving faster than 50km/h, chess moves are governed by the rules of chess and so on. As a result, we are liable to further kinds of criticism when engaging in these types of act. ‘You shouldn’t be driving so fast!’ and ‘You can’t move the rook diagonally!’ are ways of driving home such criticisms.

Is assertion governed by a norm that specifically governs assertion? We think that the answer to this question is ‘yes’. More specifically, we take it that assertion is governed by a distinctively epistemic norm according to which it is epistemically permissible (henceforth just ‘permissible’ for short) for one to assert that p if and only if p satisfies a certain condition, C . Following Williamson (2000), we will call this the C Rule of Assertion, or CRA for short.

The question that has been at the forefront of the debate on the normativity of assertion concerns the identity of this condition. While there is no shortage of proposals it is fair to say that the two main contenders are the knowledge rule of

assertion (KRA) and the justification rule of assertion (JRA). According to KRA, roughly, C is the condition that p is known by one (e.g. Benton 2011, DeRose 2002, Hawthorne 2004, Simion 2016, Slote 1979, Turri 2016, Unger 1975, Williamson 2000) and, according to JRA, it is that one has justification for p (e.g. Douven 2006, Lackey 2007, Kvanvig 2009).²

We evaluate assertions. Assertions can be good or bad. For instance, your assertion that London is the capital of the United Kingdom is a good one, whereas my assertion that my apartment is haunted by ghosts isn't. Under what conditions is an assertion a good one? There is a near universal consensus that an assertion is good if and only if it complies with the rules governing assertion. Most importantly for present purposes, an assertion is epistemically good if and only if it complies with the epistemic rule of assertion. In what follows, we will refer to this thesis as LINK.

Standard approaches to the normativity of assertion endorse both a version of CRA and LINK.³ The conditions for good assertion are then derived from CRA and LINK. In this way, standard approaches to the normativity of assertion qualify as *rule-based accounts of assertion* (RAA).

2.2 An Individualistic Framework

Note just how individualistic RAA is. The epistemic normativity of assertion turns fully on what is going on with the speaker. Whether an assertion is good depends on

² While KRA and JRA are arguably the two leading views on the market, a number of further candidates have been defended, including the truth rule of assertion (e.g. Weiner 2005, Whiting 2013), the belief rule of assertion (e.g. Bach 2008, Hindriks 2007), the safety rule of assertion (e.g. Pelling 2013, Pritchard 2014), as well as second-order accounts such as the believe-that-you-know rule of assertion (e.g. Thijsse 2000), the rationally-believe-that-you-know rule (e.g. Madison 2010), and contextualist accounts (e.g. McKinnon 2015, Goldberg 2015).

³ Two potential exceptions are (Turri 2014) and (Sosa 2011). Turri defends a view that clearly distinguishes between good assertions and permissible assertions in (Turri 2014). According to Turri, roughly, good assertions must satisfy KRA and assertions that satisfy JRA but not KRA are permissible but suberogatory. However, Turri now agrees that this view is too concessive to champions of JRA and has explicitly recanted it in his 2016 book. (Sosa 2011) defends a normatively pluralistic view of the normativity of assertion, which, on the face of it, may allow him to be neutral on LINK. Sosa distinguishes assessment norms of evaluation from minimal standards, and the latter from criticism norms. The assessment of a performance is the evaluative dimension, and from it one can establish minimal standards (in Sosa's view, in the case of assertion, the minimal standard in question is knowledge). In turn, criticisability can map on to either the evaluative or the minimal standards dimension, or both. Since the view is normatively pluralistic, Sosa's account can remain neutral on LINK.

whether the speaker asserts permissibly. And whether the speaker asserts permissibly, in turn, depends on whether they satisfy a certain condition. The speaker calls the normative shots entirely.

Now, one might think that this is surprising. After all, assertion is one of our central sources of knowledge, perhaps the most important one. To see this, just note that the vast majority of the things we know, we know on the basis of the say-so of others. You know that Mount Everest is the highest peak on Earth, that Phnom Penh is the capital of Cambodia, how much your monthly mortgage payments come to, and that I had yoghurt for breakfast based on the say-so of others. You even know what your own name is in this way.

What's even more surprising is that standard approaches to social epistemology in general have been rather individualistic. To take just one example, and the most relevant one for present purposes, consider the epistemology of testimony. The central task here has been to explain under exactly what conditions hearers are entitled to believe what they are told by a speaker. And the central divide in this literature has been between reductionists who maintain that testimonial entitlement requires further reasons to believe the speaker on the part of the hearer and anti-reductionists who deny this claim. Standard approaches to the epistemology of testimony place hearers central stage and pay comparatively little attention to speakers.

That said, recent social epistemology has witnessed a shift towards a more social construal of social epistemology. Several prominent philosophers⁴ have proposed to abandon the traditionalist methodology and to focus on the epistemic significance of social factors. These philosophers put the social first in their analysis. They argue that social norms operative in contexts of information exchanges determine how much epistemic work the individual needs to do: in settings where we have norms of truth-telling, for instance, less work is needed on the hearer's part than in settings where such a norm is not operative.

While there has been a social turn in social epistemology, it is fair to say that the debate on the normativity of assertion has, with very few exceptions,⁵ not equally shifted. Instead has remained firmly within the individualistic framework. What's more, despite the move to a more social form of social epistemology, social epistemologists have generally not taken the normativity of assertion to fall within the purview of their field. To the best of our knowledge, there is no encyclopedia

⁴ E.g. (Goldberg 2018, 2014, 2010, Goldman and Blanchard 2018, Graham 2010, Greco 2015, Simion Forthcoming, Simion and Kelp 2018).

⁵ (Goldberg 2015, Graham 2010, Kelp 2018, Milikan 1984, Simon 2018).

entry, handbook or volume on social epistemology that mentions the normativity of assertion as a topic in social epistemology, not to mention featuring a section or chapter on it.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will mount a case that this is a mistake: the normativity of assertion falls squarely within the purview of social epistemology. To this end, we will sketch the contours of a view that we have defended in recent work.⁶ Unlike RAA, it derives the conditions for good assertion not from CRA but from assertion's etiological function of generating knowledge in hearers. Building on this, we go on to argue for a whole plethora of further norms governing assertion, targeting both speakers and hearers, all of which are in the service of ensuring that assertion fulfils its function reliably. In this way, we are proposing a *functionalist account of assertion* (FAA) on which the normativity of assertion comes out as social through and through.

3. Functionalist Normativity

3.1 Etiological Functions

To begin with, we would like to investigate the relation between etiological functions (or 'e-functions') and certain kinds of norms. To begin with, we take it that a functional kind has the e-function of producing effect E if and only if, roughly, (i) instances of the functional kind produced E in the past, (ii) producing E was beneficial and (iii) the past benefit explains why the functional kind continues to exist.⁷

Consider the human heart, which plausibly has the e-function of pumping blood. On the present account, this is because (i) human hearts pumped blood in the past, (ii) this was beneficial and (iii) this benefit contributed to explaining why the human heart continues to exist.

While the human heart is a paradigm case of an item with an e-function, we'd also like to look at a slightly more complex case (or, perhaps, a slightly different case with a bit more explicit structure). Consider a simple economic system (SES) that is constituted by a producer, a product, a consumer, and a return such that the

⁶ (Simion 2016, Forthcoming, Kelp 2018, Simion and Kelp 2018).

⁷ Etiological accounts of functions are the most widely accepted accounts in contemporary literature. Prominent champions include Ruth Millikan (1984), Karen Neander (1991), Peter Godfrey-Smith (1994) and David Buller (1998). For applications to epistemology see e.g. (Milikan 1984, Graham 2012, 2014). In fact, *E-Function* is close to Peter Graham's (2014) account of e-functions. It differs from Graham in explicitly opting for a weak account of e-functions along the lines of Buller (1998).

producer produces products, which may be consumed by consumers in exchange for a return.

Products in an SES may (and often will) have the e-function of producing a certain effect, *E*, in consumers. By *E-Function*, products will have the e-function of producing *E* in consumers if and only if (i) products produced *E* in past consumers, (ii) *E* was beneficial, and (iii) this benefit contributes to explaining why the product continues to exist.

We take it that it is pretty clear how (i) and (ii) may be satisfied in a given SES in virtue of the fact that *E* was beneficial for past consumers. (iii) may benefit from a little further explanation: it will often be satisfied in a given SES because the beneficial effect produced in the past motivated consumers to continue to offer returns for products, which, in turn, motivated producers to continue producing products, thus contributing to the explanation of why the product continues to exist.

3.2 *E-Functions and Normative Import*

In what follows we will argue that e-functions have normative import. To get there, we will first have to get some preliminaries out of the way.

We'll start with some further conceptual machinery in the theory of e-functions. The first concept we need is the concept of *function fulfilment*. For any e-functional kind, there is such a thing as function fulfilment. Roughly, an instance of the e-functional kind fulfils its function if and only if it produces the relevant beneficial effect. Second is the concept of *normal functioning*. For any e-functional kind, there is such a thing as normal functioning. This is the way in which instances functioned when the kind acquired its e-function. The third and last concept is the concept of *normal conditions*. For any e-functional kind, there is such a thing as normal conditions. These are the conditions in which instances were situated when the kind acquired its e-function.

The second preliminary point we'd like to make is to introduce a distinction between two broad normative categories. While this distinction is widely recognised in the literature (e.g. Nolfi 2014, Smith 2005, Tappolet 2014, Thompson 2008), different contributors have used different terminology to mark it. Here we will adopt Conor McHugh's (2012) terminology who introduces it as a distinction between *prescriptive* and *evaluative norms*. Prescriptive norms forbid and require certain forms of conduct: they are 'ought-to-dos.' Examples of prescriptive norms include many moral norms, such as the norm forbidding stealing, and traffic norms, such as the norm requiring drivers to stop for at least three seconds at a stop sign. In contrast, evaluative norms are not prescriptive in this way. They don't tell agents

what to do. Rather, they specify conditions of attributive goodness, i.e. goodness as it pertains to a certain kind.⁸ Examples of evaluative norms include: 'A good knife is a sharp knife' and 'a good sprinter runs fast'.⁹ They are 'ought-to-bes' rather than 'ought-to-dos'.

With these preliminaries in play, here is one key thesis concerning the normative import of e-functions. E-functions give rise to evaluative norms: any instance of e-functional kinds may or may not be a good such instance. What does it take to be a good instance of a functional kind? One answer that naturally suggests itself is in terms of function fulfilment. An instance of an e-functional kind is a good instance, if and only if it fulfils its function. On reflection, this can't be quite right. The function of a knife is to cut well. But a knife can clearly be a good knife even if it is destroyed before it is ever used. If so, it can be a good knife without ever fulfilling its e-function. This takes us back to the question of what it takes to be a good instance of a functional kind. The answer, we want to suggest, is that what matters is the right disposition. More specifically, an instance of an e-functional kind is good if and only if it has the disposition to fulfil its e-function (by functioning normally when in normal conditions – while important in principle, in what follows we'll take this additional clause as read). On this view, a knife that is destroyed before ever being used can still be a good knife. After all, it does have the disposition to cut. Note also that our proposal tallies nicely with the claim that a good knife is a sharp knife. After all, sharpness is exactly the property in which it's disposition to cut well resides.

This evaluative norm holds for e-functional kinds in general. Now we would like to turn to prescriptive norm for SESs in particular. What's more, unlike in the case of the evaluative norm, we will not argue here that the prescriptive norms we will look at actually govern any SES. Rather, what we will argue is that if a given SES has certain features, it makes sense to operate the relevant prescriptive norms. Our aim here is normative: it concerns which prescriptive norms we should operate. If, in addition, we do operate norms that we should operate, our argument serves to provide a rationale for these norms, i.e. an explanation of why these norms should be in place.

⁸ The notion of attributive goodness is due to Peter Geach (1956). Characteristic of this attributive sense of 'good' is that the reference of 'good *K*' does not divide into 'is good' and 'is a *K*'. Note that Geach also claims all uses of 'good' are attributive. In particular, there is no such thing as good simpliciter, independently of a kind. We want to stay neutral on this latter issue. What matters is that there is such a thing as attributive goodness, which seems safe enough.

⁹ Evaluative norms use 'good' in Geach's (1956) attributive sense (McHugh 2012, p.22), where 'good' functions as a predicate modifier, rather than as a predicate in its own right.

Typically, in SESs it will matter that products fulfil their function reliably. Now, consider an SES in which it does matter. If a certain prescriptive norm can make a contribution to ensuring that products fulfil their function in this SES reliably, it will make sense to operate this norm in this SES. In short, if reliability matters and if a prescriptive norm contributes to ensuring reliability, we should operate the norm.

In order to make a contribution to ensuring reliability, prescriptive norms must be able to influence behaviour. We take it that they can do so in the following way: Prescriptive norms licence criticisms. If you violate a norm, you are liable to criticism. At the same time, agents in SESs – i.e. producers and consumers – are criticism-averse human beings. As a result, operating a given prescriptive norm in an SES will lead agents to favour behaviour that doesn't lead to criticism, at least given that all else is equal. In other words, operating a given prescriptive norm in an SES will lead agents to favour norm compliance, all else equal.

Suppose, then, that we have a prescriptive norm for an SES such that compliance with it contributes to ensuring reliability of function fulfilment. In that case, it makes sense to operate this prescriptive norm. Accordingly, the key questions are (i) whether there are any prescriptive norms that fit this bill and (ii) if so, what they are.

Before moving on to looking at these questions in more detail, we'd like to distinguish between two ways in which a given norm can make a contribution to ensuring reliability. First, a given norm can make a contribution to increasing (or sustaining) the ratio of cases in which products fulfil their function to cases in which they don't. Let's call any norm that makes this kind of contribution 'quality-assuring'. Second, a given norm can make a contribution to increasing (or sustaining) the number of cases of product production. Let's call any norm that makes this kind of contribution 'productivity-assuring'.

With these points in play, let's return to the questions of (i) whether there are any prescriptive norms that fit this bill and (ii) if so, what they are. Unsurprisingly, we think that the answer to (i) is positive. What's more, we will defend this answer by identifying some norms that fit the bill, i.e. by answering (ii). That said, while we think that there are some prescriptive norms that it makes sense to operate in SESs quite generally, others are more bespoke. We will now argue for a couple of general ones and return to more bespoke ones in our discussion of the normativity of assertion.

Our first example is a prescriptive norm that it makes sense to operate in any SES is a norm that requires consumers to give the relevant return in exchange for the

product. To see this, note that if the return is not given, producers will lose their motivations to continue to produce the product. The number of products produced will go down and the SES threatens to be destabilised. In fact, note that a consumer who does not give the relevant return in exchange for the product will do the producer an *injustice*. Since we have a moral right not be done injustices, it follows that the duty consumers have to give the relevant returns in exchange for the product is (at least also) a moral duty. Finally, note that this norm is a productivity-assuring one.

To see our second example, consider an SES in which there are a variety of different ways of producing the product. Moreover, the various ways of producing the product differ in the degree of reliability with which the product fulfils its e-function. In this case, it makes sense to operate a norm that prescribes ways of producing the product that attains a sufficiently high degree of reliability. The ratio of cases in which products fulfil their functions to cases in which they don't is increased (or sustained) and the SES is thereby stabilised. Note also that this norm is a quality-assuring one.

4. The Normativity of Assertion

4.1 The E-Function of Assertion

One key suggestion is that linguistic practices, including practices of producing and consuming linguistic devices such as assertions, can be viewed as SESs. Producers are speakers, linguistic devices such as assertions are products, and consumers are hearers. This much is easy.

However, SESs also feature a type of return. What is the return in the case of linguistic practices in general and in the case of assertion in particular? To answer these questions, consider first the following passage from Millikan:

Language devices will produce effects that interest speakers often enough to encourage continued replication only if hearers replicate hoped-for cooperative responses often enough. (Millikan 2004, 25)

What comes to light here is that linguistic practices do feature a return, *viz.* a *cooperative response* on the part of the hearer. Moreover, taking another leaf from

Millikan, we want to suggest that, in case of the practice of producing and consuming assertions, the cooperative response is *belief* on the part of the hearer.¹⁰

Given that the practice of producing and consuming assertions can be viewed as an SES (henceforth also 'SES-Assertion'), here is a key thesis: assertion has e-function of generating knowledge in hearers. This is because (i) past assertions generated knowledge in hearers, (ii) this constituted a benefit for hearers, and (iii) this benefit explains of why assertion continues to exist.

(i) is a highly plausible empirical claim and (ii) is a highly plausible normative claim. To see why (iii) holds, consider the following (suitably adapted) argument from Millikan/Graham: speakers continue to produce a linguistic device only if this often enough produces the cooperative response on the part of hearers. Since, in the case of assertion, the desired hearer response is belief, hearers will respond cooperatively to the production of an assertion only if they benefit from responding in this way. In the case of assertion, gaining knowledge is the main benefit for hearers. Had hearers not gained knowledge sufficiently often by responding to assertions with belief, they would before long have stopped responding to assertion with belief with the result that the practice of producing and consuming assertions would have been discontinued.

4.2 *The Evaluative Norm of Assertion*

Given that assertion has the e-function of generating the knowledge in hearers, and given that e-functions give rise to evaluative norms in the way outlined in the previous section, we get the following evaluative norm of assertion (henceforth also ENA for short): one's assertion that p is good if and only if it has the disposition to generate knowledge that p in one's hearer(s).

Note that ENA is backed by independently plausible accounts of e-functions and their normative import. In this way, there is independent reason to think that ENA holds. In fact, if our claims about the normative import of e-functions and about the e-function of knowledge are both correct, we will be committed to ENA. At the same time, note just how dramatically ENA differs from standard accounts of good assertions, i.e. RAA. Recall that, according to RAA, whether an assertion is a good one depends on whether the speaker complies with CRA. Standard accounts thus analyse good assertion in terms of conditions on the speaker. In contrast, the

¹⁰ (Millikan 2004, 26) and (Graham 2010, Section 4). It may be worth noting that Millikan states her argument in terms of "indicative sentences". Even so, it is easy to see that the argument will work just as well for assertion, not in the least because we typically make assertions by means of indicative sentences.

present view (FAA) analyses good assertion in terms of conditions on the hearer. Most importantly yet, by shifting the normative focus from speaker to hearer, FAA abandons RAA's individualistic approach to the normativity of assertion in favour of a distinctively social approach. If what a good assertion is has to do with what it can do for the hearer, we have already gone a long way towards placing the normativity of assertion squarely in the field of social epistemology.

4.3 Prescriptive Norms Governing Assertion: General

We said earlier that we take the practice of making and consuming assertions to be an SES (SES-Assertion). What's more, we saw that in SESs such that it matters that the product fulfils its e-function reliably, it makes sense to operate prescriptive norms that contribute to ensuring reliable function fulfilment. Now, it is hard to deny that, in SES-Assertion, it does matter that the product fulfils its e-function reliably. After all, the function is to produce knowledge in hearers. Crucially, if assertion doesn't produce knowledge in hearers reliably, it doesn't produce it at all. By the same token, there is reason to believe that if it ever matters that a product in an SES fulfil its e-function reliably, it matters in SES-Assertion.

This raises the question as to what prescriptive norms it makes sense to operate in SES-Assertion. In our discussion of the normative import of e-functions for SES in general, we argued that in any SES, consumers have a duty to give the relevant return in exchange for the product. Since, in SES-Assertion, the relevant return is belief, it follows *that hearers have a duty to believe what is asserted*. What's more, another result that we get is that any violation of this duty will constitute an injustice against speakers. In this way, our view also promises to accommodate one of the most widely discussed phenomena in recent epistemology, to wit, testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007).

Let's move on to the second prescriptive norm for SESs in general we discussed. Recall that we argued that when there are a variety of different ways of producing the product, which differ in the degree of reliability with which the product fulfils its e-function, it makes sense to operate a norm that prescribes ways of producing the product that attains a sufficiently high degree of reliability. It is easy enough to see that SES-Assertion fits the bill. After all, one can assert based on a mere guess, an educated guess, an unjustified belief, justification, knowledge, a priori certainty, and so on. There are significant differences in how reliably these ways of producing assertions will generate knowledge in hearers. Most importantly, the latter three are much more reliable than the former three. Given that this is so, it does make sense to have a norm in SES-Assertion that prescribes ways of producing

assertions. Moreover, note that this norm targets speakers. In fact, it places exactly the kind of requirement on speakers that we find in standard rule-first accounts of assertion. What we get here is CRA.

What is the precise content of the norm that we get? In other words, what is the identity of the crucial condition C? Note that this question is slightly more complicated than it might at first appear. While CRA is what we call a quality-assuring norm, considerations concerning productivity matter as well. To see this, note that, as far as quality-assurance is concerned, a rule that requires one to have a priori certainty for assertion will achieve the best results. The trouble is that since a priori certainty is so few and far between, an a priori certainty rule of assertion threatens to reduce assertion's productivity dramatically, so much so that the practice of making and consuming assertions is in jeopardy. What we need is a rule that achieves a good balance between assuring quality and preserving productivity.

In our view, KRA is best candidate. This is because, first, knowledge is widely and readily available, in a wide range of areas. Knowledge is also easy to come by in a way in which neither a priori certainty nor belief that falls short of knowledge is. Knowledge is our default way of being in cognitive contact with the world around us. What's more, knowledge readily transmits across testimony. All else absent, if a speaker knows what they assert and a hearer comes to believe it, then the hearer comes to know what the speaker asserted. In this way, KRA promises to preserve productivity. At the same time, note that cases in which testimony transmits knowledge predominate and cases in which testimony generates knowledge are rare exceptions. That is to say, in the vast majority of cases, a hearer acquires testimonial knowledge that p only if the speaker knows that p also. As a result, knowledge is also well-placed to score highly when it comes to quality-assurance.

While we think that there is a case to be made for KRA in particular, what matters most for present purposes is how FAA arrives at whatever the correct version of CRA turns out to be. What matters is the rule's contribution to ensuring the reliability of assertion fulfilling its function of generating knowledge in hearers. In contrast, standard rule first accounts take CRA to be either primitive or else to be derived from other norms targeting the speaker. Once again, FAA sets itself apart from RAA by placing the hearer at the heart of the normativity of assertion. In this way, our view offers a distinctive alternative to the individualism of standard approaches. Once again, FAA makes important progress towards finding a home for the normativity of assertion in social epistemology.

4.4 Prescriptive Norms of Assertion: Bespoke

When we discussed the normative import of e-functions for SESs, we mentioned that it may make sense to operate bespoke prescriptive norms. In what follows, we will countenance a few such norms that it makes sense to govern SES-Assertion by. The first is a duty to object¹¹ on the part of the hearer. This is a duty to object to assertions that do not satisfy CRA. Since on our view, KRA is the correct interpretation of CRA, this duty is a duty to object to assertions that violate KRA. Now, note that to object one must make an assertion oneself. And this assertion will itself be governed by KRA. What this duty amounts to, then, is this: one has a duty object to a speaker's assertion that p if and only if one knows that the speaker does not know that p.

A related but slightly different norm that it may be worth noting is the duty to raise concerns on the part of the hearer. This is a duty to raise concerns about assertions that there is some reason to believe violate KRA. Again, to raise a concern one must make an assertion, which is governed by KRA. What this duty amounts to, then, is this: one has a duty raise a concern about a speaker's assertion that p if and only if one knows that there is some reason to believe that the speaker does not know that p.

It is easy to see that both of these duties have what it takes to make a contribution to ensuring the reliability with which assertion fulfils its function of generating knowledge in hearers. After all, both objecting to and raising a concern about an assertion provides hearers with a defeater for their duty to believe what has been asserted. In fact, not only will hearers not be under an obligation to believe, they will now not be permitted to believe. (This is because defeaters remove justification (here:) to believe and justification to believe corresponds to permission to believe.) Since we are still assuming that hearers are criticism-averse human beings, it will lead them to favour not responding with belief to assertions that have been objected to. By the same token, both will lead to an improvement of the ratio of assertions that produce knowledge to assertions that produce belief that falls short of knowledge (by preventing belief). In this way, both duties make a contribution to quality-assurance.

The next prescriptive norm that it makes sense to have for SES-Assertion is a permission rather than a duty. It is the right to request sources for the assertion. Given that this right conflicts with a duty to believe, we take it to be conditional upon having some reason for thinking that the duty to believe has been defeated.

¹¹ See (Lackey 2018) for an excellent account.

This right is coupled with a duty on the part of the speaker to reveal their sources when requested.¹²

In tandem, these two norms contribute to ensuring reliability by making a contribution to both quality- and productivity-assurance. To see the contribution to productivity-assurance, note that the right to request sources kicks in when hearers have a defeater for the assertion and thus are in a situation in which, all else absent, they should not respond to the assertion with belief and, given criticism-averseness, would not do so. The right to request sources and the duty to reveal them contribute to ensuring productivity by allowing hearers to assess the sources themselves, thus giving them the opportunity to acquire knowledge in situations in which, all else absent, they would not respond with belief.

The contribution to quality-assurance is a little more indirect. The two norms make a key contribution to track speaker reputations. Asserting on bad sources reflects badly on one's reputation as a speaker, whereas asserting on good sources reflects well. In conjunction with a further norm that requires one to have a good reputation, these norms will lead criticism-averse speakers to additional caution in what they assert. In this way, these norms improve the ratio of assertions that generate knowledge to those that generate belief that falls short of knowledge, thus making a contribution to quality assurance.

Finally, note that all of the bespoke prescriptive norms that it makes sense to have in SES-Assertion crucially involve hearers as they are either duties hearers have (the duties to object and raise concerns), rights hearers have (the right to request sources) or duties speakers have against hearers (the duty to reveal sources). All of them are justified by the contribution they make to ensuring the reliability of assertion fulfilling its function of generating knowledge in hearers. Once again, FAA places the hearer right at the heart of the normativity of assertion, thus further strengthening the case that the normativity of assertion has its proper home in social epistemology.

5. The Epistemology of Testimony

We set out to make a case for a social turn in the normativity of assertion that parallels the social turn in social epistemology that recent literature witnessed. While we have said what we have to say in support of the social turn in the normativity of assertion, we'd like to briefly turn to the epistemology of testimony. We believe that

¹² Cf. (Brandom 1984, MacFarlane 2003, Rescorla 2009, Sellars 1963, and Watson 2004) on the dialectical model of assertion.

the above account of the normativity of assertion can contribute to further the social turn in the epistemology of testimony.

Recall that the central task in the epistemology of testimony has been to explain under exactly what conditions hearers are entitled to believe what they are told by a speaker and that the central divide in this literature has been between reductionists who maintain that testimonial entitlement requires further reasons to believe the speaker on the part of the hearer and anti-reductionists who deny this claim.

Suppose that the kind of functionalist account of assertion that we developed above is true. Suppose, further, that the norms it claims should govern assertion actually do govern assertion. (This is an assumption that, due to limitations of space, we will have to make here without further argument). If so, our functionalist account of assertion has implications for the epistemology of testimony. To see this, note that all the norms that we argued should govern assertion make a contribution towards the reliable generation of an epistemic good, i.e. knowledge. By the same token, there is reason to believe that these norms are distinctively epistemic norms. This means that the duty to believe what is asserted on the part of the speaker is an epistemic duty. However, the duty to believe entails a permission to believe. On our account, then, hearers have a (defeasible) epistemic permission to believe what speakers assert. In this way, our view about the normativity of assertion entails an anti-reductionist epistemology of testimony.

One might wonder whether this isn't a cost to our view. After all, it is a substantive commitment in an independent debate. Here is some reason why we are less worried by this, which also brings out the contribution of our account to the social turn in the epistemology of testimony. While our view does commit us to anti-reductionism, it also serves to address the perhaps most important objections to the view. These are (i) that anti-reductionism licences an unacceptable form of gullibility on the part of the speaker and (ii) that testimony is particularly vulnerable as an epistemic source because of speaker's freedom and ability to lie. We will look at them in turn.

It is easy to see that the gullibility worry does not arise on the present view. On the contrary, the duty to object and raise concerns on the part of the hearer as well as the right to request and duty to reveal sources leave little room for a gullible hearer.

Regarding the vulnerability worry, note first that, in previous work (Simion Forthcoming), one of us has defended a Knowledge-First Social Epistemology of testimony, in conjunction with a knowledge-norm-of-assertion-based solution to the

vulnerability problem for anti-reductionism. Here is the view, in a nutshell: it is widely endorsed in decision theory that the presence of norms matters for the utility profile of a state of affairs (e.g. Bolton (1991), Ochs and Roth (1989)): the existence of the social norm affects the utility profile of a particular context. There is future gain to be had from conforming with the social norm – in terms of good reputation, social approval, decreasing risk of being subject to sanctioning. As such, all else absent, in social contexts, norm conformity is the default position, it enjoys default rationality. Furthermore, leaving the default position requires fairly serious incentive; the stakes need to be rather high for the benefits of defecting to outweigh the benefits of conforming. That is, the expected payoff needs to be as high as to make defecting rational, when combined with the probability of being sanctioned.

This, of course, goes a long way towards explaining the intuitive easy entitlement to trust that norm conformity will obtain in social settings, such as at the baker's, in traffic, etc. The presence of the social norm will modify the utility profile such that, absent strong incentives to defect, by default, the baker is rational to give me the loaf of bread in exchange of my two pounds, and drivers are rational to stop at the red light. Conversely, I am entitled to trust that they will. In other words, in virtue of the utility profile generated by the presence of the social norm, the expectation of norm compliance transforms from a merely justified normative expectation (expectation about how the world should be),¹³ to a justified predictive expectation (an expectation about how the world will be).

We think that a similar picture holds for testimonial exchanges too. Note that some epistemic norms are also social norms; plausibly, norms governing speech acts are among the main candidates for this double status. That is not to say that the relevant epistemic normativity reduces to social normativity; rather, the claim is a coincidence claim: some norms are, at the same time, epistemic and social. Plausibly, KRA is among such norms: it is, after all, not only epistemically unacceptable to lie, for instance, but also socially unacceptable. In virtue of its also being a social norm, conforming to KRA will enjoy default rationality on the side of the speaker. All else absent, speakers have incentive to assert knowledgeably. Just like stopping at the red light is the default for drivers, and giving you a loaf of bread in exchange for your two pounds is the default for bakers, the default position for speakers is asserting knowledgeably.

If that is the case, the default position for hearers is entitlement to believe, just like the default position for pedestrians is to cross the street on a green light, and the default position for you is to trust that your baker will give you the loaf of bread in

¹³ Thanks to Sandy Goldberg for pressing us on this point.

exchange of your two pounds. In other words, in virtue of the utility profile generated by the presence of the knowledge norm, the expectation of norm compliance on the hearer's side transforms from a merely justified normative expectation (expectation about how the world should be), to a justified predictive expectation (an expectation about how the world will be).

Of course, just like with any other social norms, strong reasons can come and override the requirements of KRA. If it is urgent to take your wife to the hospital, you might break the traffic norms. If the baker desperately needs both the bread and your money for his children, he might defect and not respond in the expected way. Similarly, if it serves your interests to lie to me, you will. Note, though, crucially, that in all the above cases, the live possibility of norm violation does not affect my default entitlement to trust in norm conformity. In this way, the vulnerability worry for anti-reductionism can be allayed, too.

What the present chapter adds to this is that the work not need to be done by KRA alone. On the account developed here, assertion is governed by a whole network of norms, all not only contributing to making assertion a more reliable epistemic source but also enjoying default status. What's more, notice that this network of norms target both hearers and speakers. In this way, our account breaks not the standard approach, this time to the epistemology of testimony, which places hearers central stage.

6. Conclusion

This paper has outlined a social epistemology of assertion integrating a number of epistemic norms on both sides of testimonial exchanges: we have proposed that, in virtue of their epistemic function, assertions are good just in case they have the disposition to generate knowledge in hearers. Furthermore, we have argued that the function-theoretic framework delivers a whole network of epistemic norms, including KRA as well as duties (to believe, to object) and rights (to ask for sources) on the hearer's side and a knowledge-first anti-reductionist social epistemology of testimony. Finally, it is worth keeping firmly in mind that this network of norms targets both hearers and speakers. In this way, our account breaks with the standard approaches to both the normativity of assertion and the epistemology of testimony. By the same token, it contributes to successfully effecting a social turn in both the normativity of assertion and in the epistemology of testimony.

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