

A Defense of Knowledge Norm Parity

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Abstract

This paper defends Knowledge Norm Parity: the thesis that knowledge is the norm of both assertion and belief. More specifically, it details some commitments a proponent of Knowledge Norm Parity could reasonably adopt to meet a challenge from van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle (forthcoming) regarding how ‘I believe’ functions as a hedge. Crucial to success in meeting the challenge is a model I develop for Knowledge Norm Parity. It has three noteworthy features: it affirms that knowledge is an important necessary, but nevertheless insufficient, condition on (epistemically) proper assertion, it upholds a distinct type of Fallibilism about knowledge, and it accepts the univocality of ‘I believe.’

Keywords: Knowledge Norms; Belief; Assertion; Hedging; Fallibilism

1 Introduction

Knowledge is the norm of assertion,¹ or so I maintain. This is ‘KNA.’

A question arises for those of us who would want to pair KNA with a closely related

¹See Williamson (2000) Ch. 11 for seminal discussion. Though, unlike Williamson, I’m not committed to a view about how it is that knowledge is the norm of assertion beyond my formal characterization of it in §2 and the remarks about KNA’s distinction as *the* norm of assertion in §3.2.

claim: how could it make sense to hedge with ‘I believe’ if knowledge is the norm of belief² as well (call this ‘KNB’)?

To appreciate the question, consider what I’ll call the ‘argument from hedging’ from Peter van Elswyk and Christopher Willard-Kyle.³ Hedging one’s assertion of *p* with ‘I believe’ signals a “weaker” stance toward *p* than whatever epistemic position one must occupy to make an un-hedged assertion of *p*; so, if KNA is true, then what’s required for hedging with ‘I believe’ is “weaker” than knowledge; but, if what’s required for hedging with ‘I believe’ is something “weaker” than knowledge, it follows that KNB is false (since, presumably, one believes when they hedge with ‘I believe’).

In order to reasonably uphold KNA and KNB—call this conjunction ‘Knowledge Norm Parity’—one must defend against the argument from hedging. In this paper, I offer a defense.

After I’ve given a more detailed version of the argument from hedging in §2, I’ll develop a model for Knowledge Norm Parity in §3 that accepts, contrary to some of van Elswyk’s and Willard-Kyle’s interlocutors, that ‘I believe’ is univocal.⁴ My model has different distinguishing features. I’ll explain why, consistent with a commitment to KNA and KNB is the view that, though knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for proper⁵ belief that *p*, it is necessary but *not* sufficient for proper assertion of *p* (see §3.1 and §3.2). Having adopted this view, I’ll then lay out a commitment to a type of Fallibilism about knowledge—what I’ll call ‘Reed-style Fallibilism’ (see §3.3).⁶ On this view, knowledge is a determinable with specific knowledge relations as determinates. Equipped with this position, I’ll explain why mere knowledge is often not enough for proper assertion: context often requires that the

²I’ll provide a characterization of this thesis in §2. But see Williamson (2000), Sutton (2005), Sutton (2007), Huemer (2007), Jackson (2012), Smithies (2012), Simion et al. (2016), and Schulz (2021) (among others) for endorsements of a similar claim.

³van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle (Forthcoming). What I give in this introduction is a shortened version of *one* of their main arguments. I’ll develop it more in §2. I’ll also engage with a different but related argument from the authors regarding the pragmatics of ‘I know’ in §4.2.

⁴The authors cite Huemer (2007), Smithies (2012), Jackson (2012), Nes (2016), and Schulz (2021) as representative of approaches that might challenge the assumption in the argument from hedging that ‘I believe’ is univocal.

⁵Throughout the article, when I use such terms as ‘proper’ or speak of a type of propriety, it’s propriety of the epistemic variety that’s at issue unless I note otherwise.

⁶I have in mind the fallibilist view of knowledge developed in Reed (2013).

speaker possess a specific knowledge relation to what's asserted (see §3.4).

In §4, I'll appeal to my model for Knowledge Norm Parity in a defense against the argument from hedging. As I'll argue, it's precisely because specific knowledge relations are required for purposes of assertion that speakers can hedge with 'I believe' *even in cases where their beliefs count as knowledge* (see §4.1). Additionally, I'll argue that my model can explain the pragmatic differences between 'I believe' and 'I know' to which van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle draw attention (see §4.2).

Finally, in §5, I'll defend my endorsement of Knowledge Norm Parity against the point that, intuitively, one can permissibly believe that p even when p is probably false on one's evidence. This is a problem for Knowledge Norm Parity's commitment to KNB on the assumption that one cannot *know* p if p is probably false on one's evidence. After I've charted one possibility for those who might go in for my model—that it's possible to know that p even when p is probably false (see §5.1)—I explain why both proponents of Knowledge Norm Parity like myself and opponents like van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle do well to resist the implication that it's sometimes permissible to believe p when p is probably false on one's evidence (see §5.2). So, I put forth an error theory: we confuse faultlessly believing for believing without violating a norm (see §5.3).

2 The argument from hedging

Let's start by noting the difference between the following dialogues:⁷

(1) (a) What was the talk about?

(b) The talk was about population ethics.

(2) (a) What was the talk about?

(b) I believe that the talk was about population ethics.

⁷These are variations of van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's examples.

(1b) and (2b) provide the same answer to the same question; namely, that the talk was about population ethics. But (1b) communicates that answer with greater force than (2b). Intuitively, to answer with (2b) is to take less responsibility for potentially communicating something false (supposing the talk wasn't about population ethics). That's because (2b) shares the same information as (1b) with the hedge 'I believe.' As we might put it, then, whereas (1b) serves as an assertion of the proposition that the talk was about population ethics, (2b) serves as a *hedged* assertion of that same proposition.⁸

That (2b) functions as a hedged assertion is something we get clued into by the context of utterance. Note that a response of the form (2b) *wouldn't* serve as a hedged assertion in this dialogue:

(3) (a) What do you believe the talk about?

(b) I believe that the talk was about population ethics.

(3b) is not the hedged counterpart of (1b). Rather, it serves as a mere report about one's psychology.

Nevertheless, as far as semantics are concerned, (2b) and (3b) should get the same treatment on the plausible assumptions that there's a meaningful distinction between semantics and pragmatics and that we shouldn't multiply semantic contents beyond necessity. These assumptions encourage an analysis of the differences between (2b) and (3b) according to which they are strictly pragmatic. Therefore, in both dialogues, we see a report of one's state of belief, where the meaning of 'I believe' is univocal; but in only one of the dialogues does 'I believe' perform the pragmatic function of a hedge.⁹

With this information, we can get a clearer sense for van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's contention that the hedging function of 'I believe' is trouble for Knowledge Norm Parity. I'll share one of their arguments here.¹⁰

⁸See Benton and van Elswyk (2020) for a more general discussion about hedged assertion.

⁹See sections 3.1 and 3.2 in van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle (Forthcoming) for a more developed version of this argument.

¹⁰As noted in footnote 3, I'll share a different hedging related argument from the authors in §4.2.

We proceed on the assumption of KNA:

KNA: You must: Assert that p only if you know that p .

In conjunction with the considerations relevant to hedging just laid out, KNA is said to make trouble for KNB:

KNB: You must: Believe that p only if you know that p .

Here lies the trouble according to van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle:

Supposing KNB (and given KNA), qualifying one's statement of p with 'I believe' in constructions like 'I believe that p ', ' p , I believe' or ' p or so I believe' would not be weaker than a flat-out assertion, even in an attempt to hedge. Here's why. When one qualifies with 'I believe,' one commits oneself to believing that p . But KNB requires that one knows what one believes. So hedging with a construction that commits the speaker to belief *also* commits them to knowledge via KNB. Accordingly, attempting to hedge with 'I believe' would never be weaker if KNB was true: speakers who hedged with 'I believe' would still be committed to knowing. But we have seen with a variety of examples that it is possible, indeed commonplace, for 'I believe', when appended to a declarative, to weaken assertoric force by hedging: speakers who hedge with 'I believe' *aren't* committed to knowing. That's what enables them to hedge. It follows that KNB is false.¹¹

The challenge here is clear enough for a proponent of Knowledge Norm Parity: if you accept KNA, then, in light of the hedging use of 'I believe,' you have to explain where this argument goes wrong.

¹¹van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle (Forthcoming) Pg. 11.

3 A model for Knowledge Norm Parity

van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle address several objections in order to strengthen their challenge to Knowledge Norm Parity. In my estimation, they competently shoot down the objection that ‘I believe’ is ambiguous, the objection that the hedging use of ‘I believe’ is loose speech, and the objection that the KNB is best understood as invoking a purely theoretical notion of belief.¹²

Yet none of these objections is to the point in my view. I accept the univocality of ‘I believe.’¹³ But, as I’ll argue, van Elswyk’s and Willard-Kyle’s challenge can be met without questioning this semantic point.

To appreciate the position I want to offer, we’ll have to take a step back and tidy up our thinking about the normativity and nature of knowledge. Toward that end, this section has two aims: to address what, strictly speaking, a commitment to knowledge norms does and doesn’t require (§3.1 and §3.2), and to introduce a view of knowledge that’s congenial to the answer I give to this question (§3.3 and §3.4). What’ll emerge is a defensive strategy for proponents of Knowledge Norm Parity that van Elswyk’s and Willard-Kyle’s argument from hedging overlooks.

3.1 On the standards for assertion and belief

While the following point might sound odd given a commitment to Knowledge Norm Parity, it needs to be emphasized: *the standards for proper assertion and proper belief can diverge*.

How can this be if Knowledge Norm Parity is true? We’ll get clarity by recognizing what our formulation of KNA does and doesn’t imply. It’s equivalent to a wide-scope norm according to which one ought not: assert that *p* and fail to know *p*. Naturally, then, it supports the following:

¹²Sections 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 respectively in van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle (Forthcoming).

¹³I’m choosing to remain quiet on whether or not “belief is weak” in the sense that’s relevant to Hawthorne et al. (2016) (see Rothschild (2020) and Clarke (Forthcoming) for more discussion). Though I will weigh in on what appears to be a datum in support of the weakness of belief in §5.

A-Necessity: If S is properly epistemically positioned to assert that p, then S knows that p.

But, crucially, KNA does *not* put us on the hook for the following:

A-Sufficiency: If S knows that p, then S is properly epistemically positioned to assert that p.¹⁴

To bolster this, consider a remark from Benton (2016) on the temptation to infer A-Sufficiency from KNA:

One idea behind the temptation goes roughly like this: if knowledge that p is required for epistemically permissible assertion that p (as per [KNA]), then knowing p is what positions one, epistemically speaking, for properly asserting that p; thus [A-Sufficiency] follows from [KNA]. But this argument is flawed. [KNA] might be true though [A-Sufficiency] false: if one can know that p, and thereby meet [KNA], but be in a conversational context where something ‘stronger’ than knowledge is also required for permissible assertion (say, certainty, if certainty can come apart from knowledge), then in that context one would not be properly epistemically positioned to assert that p even while knowing p, and [A-Sufficiency] would be false. Similarly, one might know p but be in a conversational context in which one must know p on particular grounds in order to assert p flat-out in that context.¹⁵

So, KNA requires A-Necessity but doesn’t require A-Sufficiency.

For the same reasons, KNB requires a corresponding necessity claim but not a corresponding sufficiency claim:

¹⁴One might compare A-Necessity and A-Sufficiency to principles with different labels in Lackey (2011).

¹⁵Benton (2016) pg. 3. I have inserted my labels “KNA” and “A-Sufficiency” where Benton uses synonymous terms.

B-Necessity: If S is properly epistemically positioned to believe that p, then S knows that p.

B-Sufficiency: If S knows that p, then S is properly epistemically positioned to believe that p.

That is, by itself, acceptance of KNB doesn't require B-Sufficiency; and that's true even if KNB does require B-Necessity.

That said, rejection of B-Sufficiency is implausible. Knowing entails believing. Thus, it appears that rejection of B-Sufficiency would imply that I should sometimes stop knowing that p after coming to know it. I'll take for granted that this can't be right.

But, now, it's less clear whether something about the nature of knowledge implies that an assertion of p is proper in any case in which p is known.¹⁶ And, as Benton points out in the quote above, it at least appears to be compatible with knowing that p in a context that something in addition to knowledge is required for a proper assertion of p in that context.

So, this is how the standards for assertion and belief may diverge even if Knowledge Norm Parity is true. Even if B-Necessity and B-Sufficiency are implicated in one's commitment to KNB, one might commit to no more than A-Necessity in their commitment to KNA. The fact that A-Sufficiency might fail means that the standard for proper assertion of p might be more demanding than the standards for proper belief that p. As we'll see, my defense of Knowledge Norm Parity requires that the standards for assertion and belief diverge in just this way.

To be clear, I've not said anything to justify the claim that the standards for assertion and belief ever actually diverge. But I'm not going to do the work others have already done to support the kind of divergence I have in mind; namely, give cases in which knowledge isn't sufficient for proper assertion. Suffice it to say that there are cases that put pressure on A-Sufficiency.¹⁷

¹⁶Of course, there are philosophers who think this (see footnote 18). Schaffer (2008) endorses what is perhaps the strongest such link between knowledge and assertion.

¹⁷See, for example, Lackey (2011) and Brown (2011). Depending on one's view of the matter, the Beth

3.2 Would knowledge still be *the* norm of assertion?

You might worry that I’m overlooking the importance of A-Sufficiency for a commitment to KNA.¹⁸ “Even if A-Sufficiency isn’t implied by KNA” you might think, “A-Sufficiency is still needed if we’re going to distinguish KNA as *the* norm of assertion as Knowledge Norm Parity does.”

A more developed version of this thought now. Suppose you accept KNA but also think there are cases in which you might need, say, certainty that *p* in order to assert that *p*. Assume knowledge doesn’t require certainty and that, therefore, A-Sufficiency is false. In that event, there’s a worry that, whatever story you tell about why mere knowledge isn’t enough for assertion in some cases, you’ll be working with KNA and a set of *ad hoc* epistemic norms that are tailor made for the cases when an otherwise simple epistemic norm of assertion could have done all of the explanatory work. Consider that you could straightforwardly account for such cases with the view that certainty, not knowledge, is the epistemic norm of assertion.¹⁹

With this in mind, there’s reason to think that a commitment to KNA should be accompanied by A-Sufficiency.²⁰ Without A-Sufficiency, KNA might seem like it lacks distinction as the norm of assertion. But, with A-Sufficiency, a proponent of the KNA would have just cause to explain away the cases where it seems like something stronger than knowledge is needed for assertion.²¹

case from Ninan (2022) might be taken as a case demonstrating the failure of A-Sufficiency; though Ninan takes it to show the radical claim that one can lose knowledge by changing temporal location. See Cariani (2021) Ch. 13 for more discussion.

¹⁸A small (not exhaustive!) list of KNA sympathizers who accept A-Sufficiency: DeRose (2002), Reynolds (2002), Hawthorne (2004), Hawthorne and Stanley (2008), Simion (2021) and Kelp and Simion (2021).

¹⁹Petersen (2019), Beddor (2020), and Goodman and Holguín (2022).

²⁰Here’s a slightly different take on an interest in defending A-Sufficiency than the one I discuss. You might think A-Sufficiency is needed to capture something important about the value of knowledge. Sticking to the topic of assertion, we may help ourselves to a metaphor to explain the idea. Think of epistemically permissible assertion as a door to be unlocked. According to one view of the value of knowledge, knowledge is the key that unlocks that door. And, more generally, one might think that the value of knowledge that *p* is that it unlocks all manner of practical epistemic propriety regarding *p*.

²¹Impressively, proponents of KNA have been rather resilient with this strategy. See Simion (2016), Simion (2018), Simion (2021), and Kelp and Simion (2021) Ch. 3.

There’s much to say about this pitch for A-Sufficiency given a commitment to KNA. But I’ll settle for describing an alternative approach to distinguishing KNA as the norm of assertion and proceed on the assumption of that alternative.

Plausibly, KNA is the fundamental epistemic norm of assertion. What this “fundamentality” claim means is that KNA is the most explanatorily basic epistemic norm of assertion from which all other epistemic norms of assertion, if they are epistemic norms of assertion, must be derived. Additionally, among the general constraints on the epistemic propriety of assertion, it’s plausible that knowledge is the strongest. Pick any belief the assertion of which is epistemically proper. What this “strength” claim means is that, though this selected belief counts as knowledge, it might not be anything stronger than knowledge (like certainty).

I assume that KNA has a right to be called *the* epistemic norm of assertion because of these fundamentality and strength claims. No need to adopt A-Sufficiency, then.

3.3 Reed-style Fallibilism

Why might knowledge that *p* fail to be enough for a proper assertion of *p*? Here I’ll introduce an answer to this question that relies on a particular view of knowledge. I’m going to be taking advantage of the kind of Fallibilism about knowledge that’s developed in Reed (2013).

There are a few ways to define Fallibilism. Many of them come to the same thing. The idea is that knowledge that *p* doesn’t require epistemic certainty that *p*.²² Or, if we want to put matters in terms of epistemic probability, Fallibilism implies that you can know that *p* even if the epistemic probability of *p* on your evidence is less than 1.²³

But Reed’s Fallibilism is unique. For Reed, there are many knowledge relations, and these relations are best understood on the model of a determinable with many determinates.²⁴ Just as teal is a determinate of the determinable blue, being epistemically certain is a determinate

²²See Beddor (2023) for a recent formulation like this.

²³This is congenial to the definition given in Brown (2018).

²⁴Wilson (2023).

of the determinable knowing. And the same goes for other ways in which one might know a proposition.

According to Reed, this scheme explains the variety of ways in which we talk about knowledge:

[L]ike ‘blue’, ‘knows’ and ‘knowledge’ have a variety of uses:

- (1) They can be used to refer to *any* degree of knowledge: “Given the confusion, can they be said to know it at all?”
- (2) They can be used to refer to *every* degree of knowledge: “The modern university is devoted to the acquisition of knowledge.”
- (3) They can be used to refer to the *determinable* knowledge: “Knowledge is justified true belief.”
- (4) They can be used to refer to a *particular* degree of knowledge: “She knows that they borrowed the car—Peter told her.” In this case, reference to a particular knowledge relation is established by mentioning the specific justification that grounds it.
- (5) They can be used to refer to a *present* instance of knowledge: “My knowing the answer just now saved us a bit of embarrassment.”
- (6) They can be used to refer to a *standard* degree of knowledge: “Most people know that World War II ended in 1945.” This is a standard degree of knowledge because most people know this in roughly the same way—say, through learning it in school.
- (7) They can be used *anaphorically*: “Stephanie knows that the job will be filled soon, but she hasn’t yet told me how she knows it.”²⁵

But we’ll be concerned with how this scheme allows us to explain why knowledge *simpliciter* might not be enough for assertion.

²⁵Reed (2013) Pg. 55.

To simplify matters, let's assume that a determinate knowledge relation can be understood along two dimensions: its *source* (acquaintance, memory, perception, testimony, etc.) and its *epistemic probability* (think here of rational credence). That in mind, my contention is that knowledge might not be enough for proper assertion because context might require a specific knowledge relation. Even if you know that *p*, it might be that, if you don't know it via testimony, say, or with certainty, then you don't have the right knowledge relation for assertion.

3.4 What decides which knowledge relations are called for?

In a conversational context, what determines which knowledge relation is required for the purposes of assertion? There may not be one thing. But that's to be expected given the different ways knowledge might be salient in light of the diversity of knowledge relations.

To illustrate the point, we can compare and contrast some cases.²⁶ Consider: I might have amazing inductive grounds for believing that Bloody Marys are disgusting even though I've never had one (I've tried plenty a tomato-based drink; they're all bad); I think I know that Bloody Marys are disgusting; still, I might not be properly epistemically positioned to assert that Bloody Marys are disgusting because the question I was asked—'how do Bloody Marys taste?'—requires knowledge by acquaintance for assertion of an answer. Now consider the case of a doctor who hears from her assistant that her patient has pancreatic cancer. Supposing the doctor knows nothing else about the matter at hand (she never looks at her patient's charts and so forth), then, her knowledge from testimony that her patient has pancreatic cancer notwithstanding, the doctor doesn't know in a way that's adequate for an assertion to her patient that he has pancreatic cancer.

These cases are similar in that they both feature a need for a particular knowledge relation for purposes of assertion. Yet they differ in that the explanations for why a particular knowledge relation is required are different. In the doctor case, plausibly, the doctor is sub-

²⁶I borrow the examples in this paragraph from Lackey (2011).

ject to institutional norms that entitle her patient to expect a specific source of knowledge to back the doctor’s assertion. In the Bloody Mary case, whether as a matter of semantics, pragmatics, or convention, my assertion that Bloody Marys are disgusting licenses an acquaintance inference on the part of my hearer.²⁷ But there aren’t any institutional norms affecting our assertions about Bloody Marys.

Now, that said, if we have to shoehorn something general here about why it is that knowledge might not be enough, we might plausibly defer to the fact that, as social beings, we have *normative expectations* of each other to know things in particular ways.²⁸ Even if a doctor never does her job, her patient is entitled to expect her to do so because she’s a doctor. In that sense, the doctor is *normatively expected* to know things in particular ways. But there are many such normative expectations, and which normative expectations are at play and which knowledge relations are called for will depend on the particulars of the case at issue.

A final matter before closing out here. Why think that the normative expectations we have of each other should impact the *epistemic* propriety of assertion? Since this question deserves a paper in its own right, let me share two points by way of brief response before getting back to van Elswyk’s and Willard-Kyle’s arguments.

The first point is that, since the normative expectations at issue have an epistemic content—that the speaker bears a specific knowledge relation to what’s asserted—and meeting these expectations is a matter of acquiring a particular type of knowledge, then, all else equal, we should conclude that these expectations impact the epistemic standards for assertion. I’m aware of resistance to this line of reasoning (see especially Simion (2016) and Simion (2018)). But, rather than defend it, let me just note that there’s precedent in the literature to grant the kinds of normative expectations I mention a pride of place in the theory of knowledge (see Goldberg (2017) and Goldberg (2018).)

²⁷See Ninan (2014) for more discussion on taste predicates and the acquaintance inference.

²⁸This is in contrast to a *predictive* expectation, which is what one expects based on track-record information.

The second point is that, even if it turns out that our need for particular knowledge relations for purposes of assertion doesn't reflect anything about the *strictly* epistemic standard for assertion, much of what I'll argue next should still go through. Ultimately, what matters is that mere knowledge is often not enough for *broadly* epistemically proper assertion.²⁹ That's what allows us to hedge with 'I believe.'

4 In defense of Knowledge Norm Parity

Getting back to the point of departure, how does the model I've sketched relate to van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's argument from hedging against Knowledge Norm Parity? Put simply, it allows for a defense against that argument.

4.1 The rejoinder

To illustrate how the defense works, let's go back to the contrasting dialogues from earlier:

(1) (a) What was the talk about?

(b) The talk was about population ethics.

(2) (a) What was the talk about?

(b) I believe that the talk was about population ethics.

If the model I sketched for Knowledge Norm Parity in the last section is right, then what's going on is as follows given Knowledge Norm Parity.

Assertion (1b) is proper only if the speaker knows that the talk was about population ethics. We get this from KNA. But the assertoric force of (1b) signals, not just that the speaker knows that the talk was about population ethics, but that the speaker knows in whatever way is called for given the context of utterance. This is because mere knowledge is

²⁹We may think of a broadly epistemically proper assertion as any assertion that isn't liable to criticism with an epistemic content.

insufficient for proper assertion (A-Sufficiency is false). One must know in a particular way given the diversity of normative expectations.

Meanwhile, (2b) is *also* proper only if the speaker knows that the talk was about population ethics. We get this from KNB. But the “weakness” evinced by (2b) in terms of assertoric force signals, not that the speaker doesn’t know that the talk was about population ethics (KNB is true, after all), but that the speaker doesn’t know in whatever way is called for given the context of utterance. Otherwise, why bother to append with ‘I believe?’

Here, then, is the gist of the rejoinder to the argument from hedging. While it’s true that hedging one’s assertion of p with ‘I believe’ signals a weaker epistemic position toward p than whatever position one must occupy to make a proper un-hedged assertion of p, given only the additional assumption of KNA, it’s *not* true that what’s required for proper use of ‘I believe’ to hedge is a position weaker than knowledge—even granting van Elswyk’s and Willard-Kyle’s claims about the meaning of ‘I believe.’ Why? Because proper assertion of p on the part of a speaker, S, generally requires that S bears a *specific* knowledge relation to p and not merely that S satisfies the norm for believing p: that S bear *some* knowledge relation to p.

4.2 The pragmatics of ‘I know’

Even if my defense of Knowledge Norm Parity in the previous subsection meets the challenge given by the argument from hedging as I detailed it in §2, without further discussion, it’s lacking. It doesn’t address van Elswyk’s and Willard-Kyle’s other hedging-related challenge concerning the pragmatics of ‘I know.’ So, for completeness, let’s get this other challenge on the table and respond to it.

The authors once more:

Supposing KNB, qualifying with ‘I believe’ should be like qualifying with ‘I know’.

It would not merely fail to be weaker—in cases where it had no obvious non-hedging function to fulfill, it would be awkward or pragmatically idle. But it is

not... Supposing KNB, qualifying with ‘I believe’ should be pointless. That’s because the position that would be expected of them in virtue of believing p would be the same as if they had asserted p without qualification.³⁰

van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle demonstrate the awkwardness or pointlessness of qualifying with ‘I know’ with these examples:

- (4) (a) What was the talk about?
- (b) ? The talk was about population ethics, I know.
- (c) I know that the talk was about population ethics.
- (d) ? The talk was about population ethics, I so I know.³¹

Given KNB, according to van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle, we should be able to uniformly substitute ‘I know’ with ‘I believe’ and witness the same pointlessness in (4c) and awkwardness in (4b) and (4d). But we wouldn’t. Swapping in ‘I believe’ would produce hedged assertions.

My model for Knowledge Norm Parity can meet this challenge too. Since the epistemic standard that the speaker must meet to simply believe that the talk is about population ethics is that she bears *some* knowledge relation to this proposition, we shouldn’t expect the naturalness and utility of hedging with ‘I believe’ to be mirrored in similar attempts to use ‘I know.’ Why’s that? By default, the kind of knowledge relation invoked by ‘I know’ will be the most salient one in a context of utterance. This claim should sound plausible to anyone who’s already in the grip of thinking that knowledge is a determinable. Compare: when one uses ‘blue,’ context will settle which determinate of the determinable blue is invoked. Given the model I’ve sketched for Knowledge Norm Parity, then, the determinate knowledge relation invoked by ‘I know’ will be the one that’s required to meet the epistemic standard for flat-out assertion. Hence the pointlessness of ‘I know’ in (4c) and the awkwardness of ‘I know’ in (4b) and (4d).

³⁰van Elswyk and Willard-Kyle (Forthcoming) Pg. 16.

³¹Though these are the authors example, I’ve adjusted the enumeration to fit my numbering scheme.

There's a different concern one might have with my model with respect to the pragmatics of 'I know,' however. You might think, given a commitment to Reed-style Fallibilism, that, rather than being pointless or awkward, 'I know' in (4b-d) should generate the scalar implicature that the speaker doesn't know with an epistemic probability greater than that with which the speaker in fact knows. Since that's not what we witness in (4b-d), my model must be wrong.

Now, I agree that, if the uses of 'I know' in (4b-d) should generate scalar implicatures given Reed-style Fallibilism, then the pointlessness and awkwardness we witness in (4b-d) is evidence against my position. But I deny that Reed-style Fallibilism should lead us to expect the relevant scalar implicatures.

The reason: it's not the case that, in general, the relationship between the determinates of a determinable is scalar, and a proponent of Reed-style Fallibilism is free to deny that any scalar relationship that does obtain between the determinates of knowledge is reflected in the semantics for knowledge terms. To be sure, Reed-style Fallibilism requires that, corresponding to each determinate knowledge relation is an epistemic probability. But that correspondence need not be a part of the semantics of 'knows' and its cognates any more than saturation is a part of the semantics for color terms.

4.3 Is this defense adequately motivated?

I should address a question one might have at this point about the motivation for the position implied by my defense. Given my assumption that A-Sufficiency fails and that context determines which knowledge relation is required for purposes of assertion, why not say, instead of what I actually claim, that the norm of assertion is contextual³² rather than that knowledge is the norm of assertion?

My response will hearken back to what I've already said about KNA's distinction as the norm of assertion. Both because KNA is fundamental and because it's the most substantive

³²Goldberg (2015).

among the general epistemic constraints on assertion, I claim it has a right to be called *the* epistemic norm of assertion. Nothing in my defense undermines this view toward the KNA.

Now, if one wants an additional argument for distinguishing KNA in this way rather than going in for the view that the epistemic norm of assertion is contextual, I don't have the room to answer in depth. But note that a case for A-Necessity—the principle according to which knowledge that *p* is necessary for proper assertion of *p*—should give us most of what we need to rule out a contextual norm of assertion that would rival my endorsement of KNA. Perhaps most familiarly, A-Necessity can explain what's wrong with Moore-paradoxical assertions of the form 'p but I don't know that p.'³³ But, additionally, it can account for a battery of conversational data related to prompts, abstentions, challenges, parentheticals, and mutual reasoning.³⁴ A contextual norm of assertion will have a hard time handling this data without presupposing A-Necessity. And, for that reason, it won't be able to handle this data without committing to what's sufficient for upholding KNA as a norm of assertion. Whatever contextualism resides in the alternative position, then, it will likely mirror the role of normative expectations in my model for Knowledge Norm Parity.³⁵

All considered, then, the defense I've given will be motivated for anyone who's inclined to accept KNB, Fallibilism, A-Necessity, and that KNA has distinction as the epistemic norm of assertion.

5 On believing the improbable

Having given my defense of Knowledge Norm Parity against van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's argument from hedging, the reader might be left wondering how the position I offer might handle related challenges. For example, I've not commented on whether lottery cases present

³³See Moore (1962).

³⁴See Benton (Forthcoming) for a nice discussion of these. To be sure, A-Necessity has its opponents (see Lackey (2007) and Mandelkern and Dorst (2022); but see van Elswyk and Benton (2023) for a broadside defense).

³⁵Though things are complicated if one insists on contextualism about knowledge and not just the norm of assertion. I set this aside.

a challenge for my model for Knowledge Norm Parity.³⁶ So there's at least that lingering issue.

Though I'll have to leave discussion of lottery cases for a different occasion, it's worth considering a worry for my view that's more closely related to the argument from hedging—one that has to do with the apparent propriety of belief that p in cases where p is improbable on one's evidence.

5.1 A different challenge for KNB

Here's a remark from Hawthorne et al. (2016) to get a sense for what I have in mind:

[C]onsider a three-horse race. Assume that horse A is more likely to win than horse B which in turn is more likely to win than horse C (so the probabilities of winning could be known to be 45, 28, 27 %). In this case it seems fine to say 'I think horse A will win' or 'I believe horse A will win'.³⁷

Indeed, it does seem natural to say 'I believe horse A will win' in this case. Though the assertion doesn't involve a hedged use of 'I believe,' and so it's not suggestive of how KNA might be leveraged against KNB, the fact that the belief report seems fine raises trouble for KNB.

More precisely, it makes trouble for KNB given the following assumptions:

PNB: You must: Believe that p only if p is more probable than not on your total evidence.

Probability Condition: S knows that p only if p is more probable than not on S's total evidence.

³⁶See Hawthorne (2004) for the seminal treatment of lottery cases. See McGlynn (2011) for an argument from lottery cases that would put pressure on my endorsement of KNB. My sympathy lies with the view that, in standard lottery cases, you know that your ticket is a loser but can't assert it because you don't have the right knowledge relation for that.

³⁷Hawthorne et al. (2016) Pg. 1400.

The horse race example suggests that PNB is too strong. But, then, given Probability Condition, KNB must be too strong.

This argument poses a challenge to Knowledge Norm Parity by posing a challenge to one of its conjuncts (KNB). For that reason alone, it's worth considering how my endorsement of Knowledge Norm Parity should handle it. Note that it wouldn't be enough to simply deny PNB. For, having conceded that PNB is false, a proponent of KNB can accept what's intuitive about the horse race case only if she's prepared to deny Probability Condition.

And maybe that's exactly what needs to be done. Given my model for Knowledge Norm Parity, perhaps we do well to take on the idea that there's a distinct knowledge relation one might bear to a proposition corresponding to *any* probability that proposition might have on one's evidence.³⁸ I don't rule this out.

I'd rather not depend on that idea, however. So let me develop a different response to the present challenge—one that, as it happens, is motivated by reflection on belief ascriptions in the context of van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's arguments.

5.2 Dialectical motivation for an error theory

Though I've framed van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's arguments as arguments against Knowledge Norm Parity, their interest is in problematizing KNB more specifically since they assume KNA. If I'm right, their arguments against KNB from observations about hedging with 'I believe' don't succeed. But, even without considering my model for Knowledge Norm Parity, one might suspect that their arguments prove too much.

Why I say this: the self ascription of belief in the horse race case seems just as felicitous as the hedging uses of 'I believe' in van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's examples. So, if we spot the assumption that 'I believe' is univocal in that it invokes satisfaction of the doxastic condition on knowing (and I do), then it appears that van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's arguments show that KNB is mistaken only if they *also* show that PNB is mistaken.

³⁸See Roeber (2019).

This kind of implication shouldn't be overlooked. PNB is plausible in its own right. Since linguistic considerations are the theme here, we might look to the following for support:

(5) ? Horse A will probably lose but I believe horse A will win.

Even if the content of (5) is something the speaker knows, assertion of it sounds odd. It seems like the speaker is asserting something true only if her belief that horse A will win is in violation of a norm. This is nicely accounted for by PNB.

This is by no means the final word on the status of PNB. It's not beyond dispute. But it's not easily dismissed either. My main point is that it appears that proponents of the hedging argument against KNB must choose between one of their crucial premises (that 'I believe' is univocal) or entanglement in substantive disputes about the relationship between probability and belief.

This means that proponents *and even opponents* of Knowledge Norm Parity would do well to consider an error theory regarding intuitions about situations like the horse race case. Proponents, because they have an interest in retaining KNB; opponents, because they should want to be able to split the horns of the dilemma I just mentioned.

5.3 A matter of framing

It would nice to have a view that can explain *both* why it seems fine to self ascribe belief in the horse race case and why an assertion like (5) is defective. If a view like this presupposed PNB, it would vindicate the intuition that (5) is defective while providing an error theory for why self ascription of belief that p seems fine in settings where p is improbable on one's evidence.

Here's such a view. Because PNB is true, we rely on heuristics to abide by it. One such heuristic is to believe p when it seems p is most probable. This heuristic works great in settings where one is simply comparing the probability of p to the probability of its negation. But this heuristic can lead astray in settings where the alternative to p is partitioned into

mutually exclusive alternatives to p .

To see what I mean, let h be the proposition that horse A will win. In betting contexts like the horse race case, one isn't simply comparing the probabilities of h and $\sim h$. Rather, one is comparing the probability of h to the probability of each member of a set of sub-hypotheses under $\sim h$. This framing can distort the truth about how probable $\sim h$ is, as it ignores the hypothesis that any horse besides horse A wins. Given the distortion, one mistakenly (but understandably) takes h to be more probable than the alternative; and so mistakenly (but understandably) takes oneself to have conformed to PNB.

If I'm right, self ascription of belief in the horse race case seems fine precisely because it seems fine, from the perspective of the believer, to believe that horse A will win. After all, the believer is relying on a heuristic that generally helps one conform to PNB. In that sense, the believer isn't at fault. When we evaluate from the third-person perspective, then, we're liable to confuse faultlessly believing for believing without violating a norm.³⁹⁴⁰

6 Conclusion

Knowledge is the norm of assertion and belief. That's Knowledge Norm Parity. Though I've not made a positive case for this position, I've developed a model for it that gives us a defense against van Elswyk's and Willard-Kyle's argument from hedging.

According to the model, though knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for proper belief that p , it is necessary but not sufficient for proper assertion of p . The model also assumes Reed-style Fallibilism according to which knowledge is a determinable with many determinates. Precisely because specific knowledge relations are required for purposes of assertion, the fact that a speaker hasn't acquired some specific knowledge relation allows her to hedge with 'I believe' even in cases where her belief counts as knowledge. What's more,

³⁹See Littlejohn (2012) for development of this kind of distinction.

⁴⁰Perhaps this seems like a "just so" story. But even though more direct empirical support is wanting, my error theory is plausible in the light of well-known evidence about how people are disposed to err in probabilistic reasoning. The literature on partition dependence bias is of special interest here. See Fox and Rottenstreich (2003), for just one example.

we need not question the univocality of ‘I believe.’

I’ve also defended KNB against the objection that, intuitively, one can permissibly believe that p even when p is probably false on one’s evidence. Perhaps someone who goes in for my model should simply adopt the view that one can know that p in such circumstances. But, as I explained, since both proponents and opponents of Knowledge Norm Parity should want to avoid substantive disputes about the relationship between probability and belief, I’ve sketched an error theory one might reasonably adopt: when we intuit that it’s permissible to believe something that’s probably false, we confuse faultlessly believing for believing without violating a norm.

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