Moore's Paradox and Epistemic Norms
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1. Introduction

We shall evaluate two strategies for motivating the view that knowledge is the norm of belief. The first draws on observations concerning belief’s aim and the parallels between belief and assertion. The second appeals to observations concerning Moore’s Paradox. Neither of these strategies gives us good reason to accept the knowledge account. The considerations offered in support of this account motivate only the weaker account on which truth is the fundamental norm of belief.

I. Introduction

In the wake of Williamson’s defence of the knowledge account of assertion, it is not surprising that an increasing number of authors are now defending the thesis that knowledge is the norm of belief. If knowledge is the norm of belief, you should not believe p unless you know p. If you should not believe p unless you know p, it seems that a belief must constitute knowledge in order to be truly justified.

Must we really refrain from believing what we do not know? I think not. I shall respond to arguments offered in support of the knowledge account, show that it delivers the wrong verdicts, and show the considerations taken to support it can be accommodated by alternative views, for example, that belief is governed by the truth norm.

Because the knowledge account seems to have the implication that there are no false, justified beliefs, many will dismiss it out of hand. But dismissing the account in this way does not help those who seek to defend it.

A. Arguments for the Knowledge Account

Skeptics would say that we should not believe anything at all. Such a requirement is unreasonable. The knowledge account, by contrast, requires us to believe validly asserted sentences only if we know them. But knowledge is a very special sort of belief. It does not follow that we should not believe anything.

B. Comments on Skeptical Arguments

Savage argues that it is unreasonable to believe unless you know. But accepting this account does not require us to believe everything we know. We can believe only the things we know that are true.

C. Arguments for the Knowledge Account

Some philosophers argue that the knowledge account is the only account that is compatible with Moore’s Paradox. But we can also say that belief is governed by the truth norm.

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I. Concluding Remarks

We have seen that the knowledge account is not the only account that is compatible with Moore’s Paradox. In fact, we can say that belief is governed by the truth norm. This is a very reasonable requirement. It is not reasonable to believe anything unless you know it. We should not believe anything at all unless we know it.

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I. Introduction

In the wake of Williamson’s defence of the knowledge account of assertion, it is not surprising that an increasing number of author...
arguments inspired by Williamson’s remarks concerning assertion and the aim of belief. Next, I shall examine
the arguments of those who claim that reflection on Moore’s Paradox leads to the conclusion that knowledge is
the norm of belief (e.g., Adler [2002]; Huemer [2007]). If I am right, none of the arguments considered in this
paper supports the claim that belief is governed by the knowledge norm but only the considerably weaker claim
that the fundamental norm of belief is that of truth.
II. Truth and the Aim of Belief
The first argument works from the assumption that all beliefs have a common aim and that our description of the
aim of belief has a kind of normative significance. To say that beliefs aim at X seems to carry with it the
commitment to the further claim that any belief that doesn’t fulfill this aim isn’t as it ought to be. Suppose that
belief really does aim at truth (Velleman [2000]; Wedgwood [2002]; Williams [1973: Ch. 9]). Let us also
suppose that it has no independent aim which a false belief might fulfill that would dispose us to say that the
belief is correct, successful, or (objectively speaking) it should be. Supposing this, it seems natural to say that even
when something good comes of believing something false, such goods

 wouldn’t justify believing something false. If the norms of belief can be derived from the proper description of
the aims of belief, it seems that you should not ever believe p unless p.

Williamson [2000: 241] suggests you can derive the knowledge account of assertion from the assumption that
you ought not to assert what is not true. If the derivation works for assertion, it seems a parallel derivation should
work for belief. If there is such a derivation, it is far from straightforward. Consider the utilitarian view that the
only thing that could justify an action is the fact that the action is optimific. Utilitarians do not think an action
must be known to be optimific to be justified and no one has ever faulted them for this omission. It is not hard to
see that you are courting disaster if you advance a view on which there are positive duties that depend upon more
than just effort or good will and insist that all duties must be knowingly discharged. You will end up having to
say that there are unknowable obligations that can be obligations in so far as they are knowable.

The difficulty is not so acute if we assume that the duties in question are primarily negative duties. If belief is
governed by a truth norm, the norm tells us to refrain from believing what is not true:

T: You should not believe that p is true unless it is true.

The norm does not instruct us to believe everything that is true or anything that crosses our minds that happens to
be true.

To say that the fundamental norm of belief is the truth norm is not to say that this is the sole norm governing
belief. Williamson seems to think that you cannot consistently say there is a norm such as T without also saying
that belief is governed by an evidential norm:

E: You should not believe that p is true unless you have adequate evidence for believing that p is true.

In general, it seems that if it is wrong to F if condition C obtains, it is irresponsible to F unless you can
reasonably assume that C does not obtain. Whether it is reasonable to assume this depends upon whether you have
adequate evidence for believing C not to obtain. So, if we assume that it is prima facie wrong to F irresponsibly, we can say that if T is true and it is wrong to believe p when p is not true, it is impermissible to
believe p without adequate evidence of p’s truth because it would be irresponsible to so believe.

Instead, it seems an excuse is called for. While we might say there is some justification for something that is not permissible, it seems that something cannot be justified unless it is permissible. This might be an overly complicated way of stating the obvious point that you should not be epistemically irresponsible and that assuming responsibility obligates refraining from believing without adequate evidence. The argument here is just restating Williamson’s own (2000: 245). The
success of this argument rests on the assumption that if one must refrain from F-ing unless C obtains, one should F only if one has evidence that C does obtain. If this assumption is unmotivated, then Williamson’s argument that the knowledge account can be derived from the assumption that belief aims at the truth and is governed
by the truth norm fails at an earlier step than I am claiming. Note that if knowledge is the norm of belief, this argument would show that it would be irresponsible to believe p unless you had adequate evidence for believing that your belief that p is
true.

Vahid might reject the argument for the knowledge account right from the outset, but as I think the argument fails at a later step I hope to bracket this issue for the purposes of this discussion. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

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4 Clayton Littlejohn On the assumption that belief is governed by the truth norm, we have to reject

FAULT 1: All epistemic wrongs are fault-implying wrongs (i.e., any condition that makes believing p wrongful is a
condition that the believer can be faulted for failing to take account of if she believes p when that condition obtains).

There is nothing wrong with rejecting this while accepting

FAULT 2: Any condition that grounds the charge of epistemic fault is a condition that makes belief wrongful.
It if one must not bury people when they are not dead, then one should not bury them when one lacks evidence that they are dead. It is at best negligent to bury someone without evidence that he is dead, even if he is in fact dead.

Let’s suppose he is right. We do not have a full defence of the knowledge account K, that is K: ‘You ought not to believe p unless you know p.’ We first have to determine what it takes to satisfy the evidential norm. Williamson [2000: 246] says that we do not satisfy the evidential norm unless we have evidence that puts us in a position to know that the belief in question is true. If we think about lottery propositions, it seems we do not have adequate evidence to believe or assert such propositions.

It seems the best explanation as to why this is rests on the observation that the evidence we have for believing lottery propositions without inside information does not put us in a position to know that these claims are true.

There are two ways of reading Williamson’s argument. On the first reading, his remarks concerning lottery propositions give us a clue as to what he thinks it takes to satisfy fault-2. If you allow yourself to believe without first gathering evidence that puts you in a position to know that p, you seem to be at fault even if your belief turns out to be true. After all, you could have weakened your commitment by simply believing that p is likely or probable. On the second, we appeal directly to E and let intuition serve as true would constitute knowledge. If you think such evidence is unnecessary for permissible first-order belief, this is some reason to think that knowledge is not the norm of belief. For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between wrongs and fault, see Gardner [2005: 13]. This is how Williamson explains the observation that you should not assert lottery propositions. It is not universally accepted that such assertions are epistemically improper. Weiner [2005] argues that such assertions violate Gricean maxims, which means he can say that there is adequate evidence for believing and asserting lottery propositions even assuming that the evidence needed for epistemically permissible assertion and belief are the same.

Concerning such cases, not only does it seem we readily ascribe you knowledge, we do not think that it is wrong for you to believe p. This seems to disconfirm both the weak KK thesis and the thought that permissible belief involves more than just knowledge. If we reject both, however, we have to reject fault-3. Here is the second reason to reject fault-3. If combined with the knowledge account, it commits us to the justified-true-belief analysis of knowledge and an infallibilist conception of justification. Epistemic irresponsibility can make an otherwise justifiable belief unjustified. According to fault-3, if you fail to know for...
any reason, you can be charged with epistemic irresponsibility. Thus, if you cannot be charged with epistemic irresponsibility because you are justified in believing $p$, the fact that you are justified in holding your belief is logically incompatible with (a) your belief being mistaken or (b) your belief being Gettiered. One consequence of this is that you cannot satisfy the justification condition if it is possible that someone should have just your reasons but be mistaken about whether $p$. Thus, your reasons must entail $p$ if your belief that $p$ is justified. But, no one seems to think that you must have entailing grounds to permissibly believe $p$. Second, it seems that Fault-3 has the consequence that if someone does not know that $p$, they are not justified in believing $p$, in which case Gettier cases are impossible.15

In the light of these problems, an alternative reading of the argument might be more charitable: that the argumentative burden is shouldered not entirely by assumptions about fault and epistemic responsibility, but also by cases such as those involving lottery propositions.16 The assumptions about fault are supposed to support the idea that some sort of evidential norm governs belief. Our intuitions about lottery propositions are supposed to help us see what it takes to satisfy this evidential norm. We start from the assumption that you should not assert or believe lottery propositions. It is then suggested that the natural explanation for this is that you do not have evidence for believing these propositions that would put you in a position to know that they are true. From here, the argument might go in one of two directions. If someone said that it followed from this alone that you ought not to believe what you do not know, this would repeat the mistakes we have just discussed. All that follows is that you ought not to believe $p$ if you are in a position to appreciate that your evidence does not put you in a position to know $p$. In Gettier cases and in cases where you do not know that $p$ is a lottery proposition, it seems $p$ is not known, you do not know that you are not in a position to know $p$, but it is not obvious that you have violated E. If you think you do violate E, it seems you will once again be forced to accept the justified-true-belief analysis of knowledge and an infallibilist account of justification. If, however, someone were to argue as follows, these difficulties might be avoided:

Intuition tells us that evidence is needed for permissible belief. Intuitions about lottery cases tell us that beliefs in lottery propositions are defective because there is not adequate evidence for believing them outright.17 The best explanation of the observation that you do not satisfy E unless your evidence puts you in a position to know that the relevant proposition is true is that K is the fundamental norm of belief.18

This argument rests on a pair of assumptions. First, the argument assumes that beliefs in lottery propositions do not constitute knowledge. Second, it assumes that you ought not to believe lottery propositions. Were we to reject the first assumption, we could not appeal to intuitive verdicts about lottery cases to motivate the knowledge account. If we were to reject the second assumption while accepting the first, lottery cases would provide counter-examples to the knowledge account. In response to this argument, I want to say two things. The knowledge account cannot give the best explanation if independent considerations show that K is not a norm that governs belief. The verdicts the knowledge account delivers for covert lottery beliefs and for Gettier cases are counterintuitive. In addition, cases involving covert lottery beliefs suggest that while the knowledge account delivers the right verdict about some familiar lottery cases, it gives the wrong reason for thinking this is the right verdict. Intuitions concerning cases of covert lottery beliefs suggest that the reason we ought not to believe lottery propositions is not that they cannot constitute knowledge per se, but that subjects who believe

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15For further discussion, see Williamson’s [2000: 145] remarks concerning iterations of knowledge and margins of error. 16To bring the knowledge account in line with epistemic intuition, we should distinguish between a believer who is justified in believing $p$ and a belief that is justified. For discussion of this distinction, see Bach [1985], Engel [1992], Littlejohn [forthcoming], and Loewy [1978]. Because the knowledge account tells us that just belief does not constitute knowledge, if you accept the knowledge account, you can say that Gettier cases are possible if you think of such cases as cases in which the subject’s belief is unjustified but the subject is justified in believing $p$. However, for a believer to be justified on Bach’s view, the believer must be epistemically responsible. According to Fault-3, however, it is impossible for the believer to be justified if the belief does not constitute knowledge, which means that Gettier cases are impossible on this view.

17I am only suggesting that one way to take Williamson’s remarks about fault would be to offer the sort of argument offered above. In their defence of the view that you must never reason from premises that you do not know to be true, Hawthorne and Stanley [2008] appeal to the observation that it is ‘prima facie negligent’ to reason from $p$ when one does not know that $p$. The qualification ‘prima facie’ makes it difficult to interpret this remark, but I see no obvious connection between fault, negligence, and knowledge. If they are saying that whenever someone does not know that $p$ but reasons from the belief that $p$ their ignorance counts towards our saying that they are negligent, this seems to call into question the very coherence of the notion of non-culpable ignorance.

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lottery propositions are wrong to do so in the light of considerations accessible to them (i.e., considerations about the kinds of grounds they have for believing lottery propositions). While such grounds might not put the subject in a position to know, the normative significance of this is not what the knowledge account takes it to be. The distinction between covert and overt lottery beliefs is a familiar one, but the terminology is not. Let us say that a covert lottery belief is a belief whose truth or falsity depends on the outcome of a lottery when the believer is not in a position to appreciate that this is so. Let us say that an overt lottery belief is a belief in a lottery proposition held by someone who has no inside information. If you look at your bank statement and see that you are down to your last few dollars, you might reasonably believe that you will not be able to go on safari. If your mother has just purchased you a ticket for a lottery draw being held later this afternoon without telling you, that belief is a covert lottery belief. Were you to believe that the ticket that your mother bought you will lose, that would be an overt lottery belief. (We are assuming that you know that you would be able to afford to go on safari if only you were to win the lottery draw being held this afternoon.) It seems that overt and covert lottery beliefs will either both constitute knowledge or neither will. If you think that safety is necessary for knowledge, it will be just as easy for a covert lottery belief to turn out to be false as an overt one to turn out to be false. If you think that some suitably formulated closure principle holds true, someone will be in a position to know that a covert lottery belief is true only if this subject is in a position to know that an overt lottery belief is true. Assuming, as we are, that overt lottery beliefs fail to constitute knowledge, it seems we have two reasons for thinking that covert lottery beliefs similarly fail to constitute knowledge.

If this much is correct, the knowledge account commits us to saying that you should not hold or form covert lottery beliefs. If this much is not correct, I think this undermines the arguments from lottery propositions to the knowledge account. If someone were to say that overt lottery beliefs constituted knowledge, there would be no surprising facts for the knowledge account to explain. If someone were to say that such beliefs did not constitute knowledge but were permissible held, we would have our counterexample to the knowledge account. If someone were to say that overt lottery beliefs fail to constitute knowledge and ought not to be held, but held that covert lottery beliefs did constitute knowledge, this would bring the knowledge account in line with the intuition that it is not wrong to harbour covert lottery beliefs. However, that would require denying the closure principle and that safety is necessary for knowledge.

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takes them to be unacceptable for the very same reason. It says neither piece of reasoning is acceptable because both bits of reasoning involve, crucially, beliefs not known to be true. That the knowledge account delivers the wrong verdict in the case of covert lottery beliefs suggests that K does not govern belief. Additionally, it suggests that the knowledge account gives the wrong explanation for the unacceptability of the first bit of reasoning. The knowledge account seeks to explain the unacceptability of this reasoning in terms of a fact that is not accessible to the individual engaged in this bit of reasoning (i.e., that one of the beliefs involved in the reasoning is not known to be true). However, if overt and covert lottery beliefs have different normative statuses (i.e., one ought never to hold overt lottery beliefs but may permissibly hold some covert lottery beliefs), it seems that the proper explanation as to why you should not reason from overt lottery beliefs should be given in terms of features distinctive of overt lottery beliefs (e.g., the kinds of ground available for overt lottery belief) rather than ignorance, per se.

We have not found a route from the truth norm or the thesis that belief aims at the truth to the knowledge norm. It is not for lack of trying. Williamson is right that anyone who thinks there is a truth norm should think there is an additional evidential norm governing belief, but we know from Gettier that there is more to conforming to the knowledge norm than conforming to these two.21

III. Knowledge and the Aim of Belief

Rather than try to derive the knowledge account from the truth norm, we might try a different approach: belief does not aim at just the truth. Belief aims at knowledge. Any belief that fails to constitute knowledge is wrongful precisely because there is no distinct aim a belief serves that could potentially provide a justification for believing without knowing.

Since the argument assumes nothing about justification and fault, it should not face the problems the previous argument did.

The argument assumes that the aim of belief is knowledge (Bird [2007: 93]; Sutton [2007]; Williamson [2000: 48]). The problem with the argument is simple: knowledge is not the aim of belief. To test proposals about aims, we should consult our intuitions to determine what an external observer would say if she knew that another’s belief fails to constitute knowledge. We know that belief aims at the truth, for example, because we know that if someone knows that someone else’s belief about p is not true, this outside observer has sufficient warrant for asserting that this belief is incorrect or mistaken. On the hypothesis that belief also aims at knowledge, we should expect that those who know we don’t know that p for any reason will be disposed to say we have made a mistake, we were wrong to believe what we did, or that we should suspend judgment. This is not what we find. If this is how we evaluate claims about the epistemic aim and the epistemic ought, we not only fail to find support for the knowledge account, but we also find evidence for denying that belief is governed by the knowledge norm. If beliefs that fail to conform to no norms are justified, we find evidence for denying that knowledge of p’s truth is necessary for the justification of the belief that p.

Suppose you think you saw a barn. You did, but you did not realize that you were in the land of fake barns. Because the hills were filled with convincing fakes, I, who know this, do not think your belief constitutes knowledge. Knowing this, however, I do not think that your belief failed to fulfil its aim. Knowing both that you do not know and why your belief is not knowledge, I would not be disposed to tell you that you are wrong to believe what you do or that you have made a mistake by believing that you see a barn. If a belief such as this does not miss its mark, nothing is left of the view that belief aims at knowledge. The fakes prevent your belief from fulfilling its aim only when you fool me into believing a fake barn is genuine.22 Moreover, if we set aside the question about aims and focus on the normative question, it seems that if someone said that you should not believe it is a barn knowing that your belief fails to constitute knowledge simply because the belief is Gettiered, it seems that they have made the mistake, not you. If that is right, there is nothing left of the view that knowledge is what is necessary for permissible belief.

In saying that it is not epistemically wrong to believe p if that belief has been Gettiered, it might seem I am denying something Reynolds [2002: 150] says in his discussion of Gettier cases and warranted assertion. He says the locals who know that you have been driving through fake barn country would not say that you should believe you saw a barn.23 They know that you were reasonable in holding this belief, but they know that given the

21 The considerations offered in support of the knowledge account might not show that you should not believe p unless you know p, but they might be taken to show that you should not believe p if you are in a position to appreciate that you cannot know p given your epistemic position. We shall later see that we do not need to assume that knowledge is the norm of belief to explain why this is an epistemic requirement on permissible belief.

22 There is a second argument in favour of the knowledge account of assertion worth considering. It is not uncommon to say things like ‘If you didn’t know where the restaurant was, you should not have said we should have taken that exit’. Why is it that learning that someone did not know p leads us to challenge the propriety of the assertion and belief expressed if knowledge is not the norm of assertion and belief? This is an interesting question. It is true that in some contexts when we learn that someone did not know p we say they had no right to assert p and say in a critical tone that they ought not to have asserted p. I do not think, however, that we imply that someone lacked the authority simply because they did not know p. We might say that they should not have told us to get off the exit having learned that they were mistaken about the restaurant’s location. We might say that they should not have told us to get off the exit having learned that they were guessing at the
grounds on which your belief is based, you did not have the power to distinguish fake from genuine barns. This may be true, but the knowledge account is not necessary for explaining why the locals would not (and ought not) say it is permissible for you to believe you saw a barn. Reynolds says the locals do not know whether the particular belief you have formed is true. They only know that your grounds are not effective for determining whether your belief is true. Because of this, it would be wrong for them to assert that you should believe what you do because they do not have a true and reasonable belief that your belief satisfies the truth norm. Once we give the locals the additional piece of information that your belief is correct and they know that the sole reason you fail to know has to do with factors beyond those that determine whether you are justified or you are right, speakers are not disposed to think you should revise your beliefs and suspend judgment. Without this information, however, we cannot use their responses to evaluate the respective merits of the knowledge account or the weaker truth account.

We have covered a considerable amount of ground. Let’s take stock. You cannot derive the knowledge account from descriptions of the aim of belief. If we start from only the proposition that belief aims at the truth, we get no further than the claim that you ought not to believe p unless you faithfully and faultlessly represent the world by having that belief. That is to say, you should not believe p unless you satisfy T and E. Intuitions concerning Gettier cases and covert lotteries suggest that belief does not aim at knowledge. It does not seem that beliefs that fail to constitute knowledge for purely Gettierish reasons are incorrect, mistaken, erroneous, or fail to fulfill some essential aim. It also seems it’s not necessarily the case that you ought not to hold beliefs that fail to constitute knowledge for Gettierish reasons. The Gettier cases are counterexamples to not only the justified-true-belief analysis of knowledge, but also the analysis of permissible belief as knowledge.

IV. Moore’s Paradox and the Norm of Belief

We shall now look at arguments that appeal to observations about Moore’s Paradox in the hopes of motivating the knowledge account. Consider the statement ‘Custer died at Little Big Horn, but I believe he did not’. It seems contradictory to assert this statement, but it easily could have been true. (I know next to nothing about the history of the United States.) What accounts for the appearance of contradiction in the absence of contradiction? One suggestion is that anyone who holds the beliefs associated with Moorean absurd statements holds beliefs that conflict with the rational commitments that come with those very beliefs (Adler [2002]; de Almeida [2001]; Huemer [2007]). For example, it is thought that belief has as its aim

\[\text{What is a ‘rational commitment’? In speaking of rational commitments, someone might have one of two notions in mind. On one reading, to say that by } F \text{-ing } S \text{ has violated some rational commitment is to say that given further attitudes of } S \text{, } S \text{ violates what Broome [1999] refers to as a ‘normative requirement’, a requirement that can be expressed by a statement where the ‘ought’ takes wide-scope and enjoins or forbids } S \text{.}
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the truth, and someone who holds the beliefs associated with ‘Custer died at Little Big Horn, but I believe he did not’ would be committed to denying the accuracy of the belief expressed by the first conjunct. That is akin to a contradiction. The appearance of contradiction is explained in terms of the conscious conflict between the beliefs of which the subject is aware and the rational commitments that come with the beliefs associated with the Moorean absurd statements (e.g., such as the fact that, by her lights, she has misrepresented how things stand by believing Custer died at Little Big Horn). The arguments we are about to consider rest on a methodological assumption that I shall accept for the purposes of this discussion:

MA: Anyone who holds the beliefs associated with a Moorean absurd statement holds beliefs that conflict with the rational commitments that come with those very beliefs.

The first argument tries to establish that knowledge is the norm of belief on the basis of two assumptions, one of which is undeniable and one of which is thought to follow from MA. According to the second, our intuitions will lead us to classify types of statements as Moorean absurdities that could only have that status if knowledge is in fact the norm of belief. According to the third, alternatives to the knowledge account are too weak to explain why certain kinds of Moorean absurdities have that status.

Huemer [2007] defends the thesis that knowledge is the norm of belief as follows: Consciously believing p rationally commits you, upon reflection, to comprehensively, epistemically endorsing your belief that p (MCP). Knowledge attribution is the most comprehensive epistemic endorsement (ETK). If you believed p it would be wrong to have that belief without endorsing it as knowledge. But, you should not endorse that belief as knowledge unless it is knowledge. Therefore, you ought not to believe p unless you know p.

To form, or to hold, certain attitudes in combination. For example, it seems irrational to believe that the world was created in under seven days while believing it must have taken at least eight. Anyone who holds such beliefs will violate the normative requirement that states, in effect, you must not believe the world was created in under seven days and at least eight days. On another, to say that by F-ing S has violated some rational commitment is to say that S’s F-ing violates some norm which can be expressed by a statement where the ‘ought’ takes narrow scope and enjoins or forbids S to form or refrain from forming attitudes under certain conditions.

Think about the knowledge norm. It enjoins S to refrain from believing p if S does not know p. While it seems plausible to think that minimally rational agents can be charged with irrationality for violating normative requirements, it seems far less plausible to think that every failure to conform to a norm is less than fully rational. It seems more charitable to think of talk of rational requirements that come with belief in terms of normative requirements. The arguments for the knowledge norm,
that p while holding the belief that p, and ETK and MCP

Once we replace MCP with this, we have undermined the argument for the knowledge account. According to Shoemaker [1996].

27 Huemer [2007] defends both the view that you should not believe what you take yourself not to know (i.e., that there is a normative requirement to the effect that you should not believe both that p is true and that p is not known to you) and that there is a sense in which a belief that fails to constitute knowledge for any reason

In defence of MCP, remember that MA tells us that whenever someone utters a Moorean absurdity, they have uttered something absurd because the beliefs associated with that statement conflict with the rational commitments that come with those beliefs and so those beliefs cannot be comprehensively endorsed. 27 As for ETK, there seems to be no more comprehensive epistemic endorsement of a belief than one that says the belief constitutes knowledge. 28

Suppose we were to grant ETK. Here is an initial worry about Huemer’s strategy. His argument implicitly assumes that each of the conditions that figure in a comprehensive epistemic evaluation pertains to the permissibility of belief. 29 This does not seem right. Consider moral evaluation. A moral evaluation that focused on just the permissibility of some action would not be a comprehensive evaluation. A comprehensive evaluation of an action should not only tell us whether the act was permissible, but also whether the act had moral worth. That my act lacks moral worth does not show that I have acted impermissibly and so does not show that my act lacked justification. Similarly, that my action was not supererogatory similarly does not show that my action calls for a justification. Huemer offers no reason to think that a comprehensive evaluation of belief would concern only a belief’s deontic status. Thus, even if we assume ETK, it would not be surprising if some of the conditions necessary for knowledge were not necessary for permissible belief. We need some reason for thinking that a comprehensive epistemic endorsement is only concerned with properties that are of deontic significance, and he gives us no such reason. We have already seen some reason to think that the permissibility of believing p does not turn on that belief’s being properly endorsed along all lines of epistemic evaluation. Suppose you thought that if a belief constitutes knowledge, that belief is more valuable from the epistemic point of view than a belief that fails to so constitute knowledge. Along one line of evaluation, a true belief someone is justified in holding might be less valuable than an item of knowledge. (Think of Gettier cases and covert lottery beliefs.) The additional value that attaches to beliefs that constitute knowledge would only be necessary for permissible belief if we were to say that you should never harbour covert lottery beliefs or hold beliefs in Gettier cases. So, we either have to say that a comprehensive epistemic

endorsement concerns more than just that which bears on the permissibility of belief or deny the evaluative claim that items of knowledge are epistemically more valuable than beliefs that fail to do so. 30 If a comprehensive epistemic endorsement concerns more than just those properties of a belief that are of deontic relevance, a belief might not be one we can endorse and not amount to knowledge even if it is permissively held. Maybe this worry is relatively minor. This next worry is much more serious. While the knowledge account does seem to follow from MCP and ETK, you also get the result that you should not believe p unless you know that you know that you know (etc.) that p. Clearly, the argument needs revision. It is not hard to find the needed fix. We simply have to rewrite MCP and say that consciously believing p requires that you should not believe yourself to fail to satisfy the standards of a comprehensive epistemic endorsement while also consciously believing p. This revision is independently motivated. It is simply not true that if you permissibly believe p, you ought to believe that your belief satisfies a comprehensive epistemic endorsement. Failing to have any belief about whether you know p when you happen to believe p (and happen not to be wrong to do so) is no sin at all. What rationality requires is that you revise your beliefs if you believe that you cannot comprehensively endorse them (i.e., by judging that they are false, that they don’t amount to knowledge, etc.).

We should replace MCP with:

MCP:- Consciously believing p rationally commits you, upon reflection, to refrain from believing both p and that p cannot satisfy the standards of a comprehensive epistemic endorsement. 31

Once we replace MCP with this, we have undermined the argument for the knowledge account. According to ETK and MCP, all that permissibly believing p requires is that you do not both believe that you do not know that p while holding the belief that p, and that is a requirement you could easily satisfy even if you did not know
that p. All it takes to satisfy this requirement is not conceding that you do not know p.

Adler [2002] offers a similar argument for the knowledge account, but it seems not to suffer from the same difficulties. He thinks we can use our intuitive sense of which combinations of attitudes would constitute
movements. Many assume that knowledge is epistemically more valuable than mere true belief. For discussion, see Kvanvig [2003]. The assumption here is slightly different. I am assuming that a subject’s having knowledge that something is true is more valuable than a proper subset of the ‘parts’ of this subject’s knowledge. For a helpful discussion of strategies designed to explain why this is so, see Pritchard [2007].

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MCP—should do for the purposes of a normative solution to Moore’s Paradox. Remember that the justification for MCP was the thought that someone who would believe the beliefs associated with a Moorean absurd statement would be conscious of violating some fundamental norm of belief, not that they hadn’t bothered to affirm that every proposition they believed was in fact as it should be. Violations of MCP are sins of commission, whereas violations of MCP, such as they are, can be sins of omission. As noted above, if you simply fail to believe you know p, and believe p, there is nothing irrational, odd, contradictory, or untoward about that.

According to MA, if any judgment that expresses the belief that p is coupled with the acknowledgment that some condition C does not obtain, you are cognizant of, by holding these beliefs, you violate rational requirements on holding those beliefs. The judgment expressed by ‘p but I do not know it’ is incoherent in the way Moorean absurdities are. Therefore, in judging that you do not know p, you know there is something wrongful in believing p—namely, that you do not know p.

This is an advance because the argument does not assume the Metac- herence Principle. Instead, it relies on the incoherence test:

If it is incoherent, in the way Moorean absurd statements are, to F while acknowledging that C does not obtain, in acknowledging that C does not obtain, you are cognizant of something that makes it wrong to F—namely, that C does not obtain.

Given our methodological assumption concerning the proper resolution of Moore’s Paradox (i.e., that Moorean absurdity is due to the way in which a subject would consciously violate the rational requirements by consciously affirming the attitudes that constitute the absurd thought), it seems we can test proposals concerning the norms of belief as follows. If it is incoherent to simultaneously believe p while believing C does not obtain in the way a Moorean absurd thought is (i.e., apparently contradictory without being a belief in a contradiction), there is a norm that enjoins us to refrain from believing p when C does not obtain. For example, it seems incoherent to believe the following:

(1) I believe Custer died at Little Big Horn, but he did not.

In representing the belief about Custer as being false, it seems we have an incoherent combination of attitudes without a contradiction. Perhaps this is due to the fact that belief is governed by the truth norm. It seems similarly incoherent to believe:

(2) I believe Custer died at Little Big Horn, but there is no reason for me to think that.

On the assumption that the only thing that could be a reason for me to believe is a piece of evidence, it seems we can infer from the fact that (2) is a Moorean absurd thought that the belief about Custer is governed by an evidential norm. It has been observed that it is incoherent to believe both that p is true and that this belief fails to satisfy one of the conditions necessary for knowledge. It is also incoherent to believe that p but that p is not known to be true. So, by similar reasoning, it seems that we ought to accept that knowledge is the norm of belief.

Unfortunately, this test is insufficiently discriminating and might be useful only for uncovering normative requirements governing combinations of belief rather than useful for uncovering the norms that govern those beliefs individually. To appreciate the first problem, consider an example:

(3) God hates my atheism and it is raining outside.

This is a Moorean absurd thought. However, there is no norm that enjoins us to refrain from believing that it is raining outside unless God forgives the non-believer. It is no mystery as to why (3) is incoherent. It is incoherent because the belief that God hates my atheism is a Moorean absurdity in its own right. At the very least, IT needs to be reformulated to avoid these sorts of example. Even if we grant that for every incoherent pair of attitudes there is something you are cognizant of that makes one of the attitudes you are conscious of wrongful, we could say what makes it wrongful is precisely that it is held in combination with the belief that C does not obtain. It might be that this belief alone is absurd, irrational, or contravenes an epistemic norm. We might say, as it were, that whenever believing p while believing C does not obtain constitutes a Moorean absurdity, all that follows is that:

(4) You should not believe: p and that C does not obtain. That is different from:

(5) If C does not obtain you should not believe p.

The former is a normative requirement and the ‘ought’ takes wide scope. The latter is a norm in which the ‘ought’ takes narrow scope. The former tells us what combinations of attitudes we ought to avoid. The latter tells us what sorts of conditions bear on whether to hold the belief in question. As we are trying to derive norms such as the knowledge norm (i.e., if you do not know p you must not believe p) from judgments about rational combinations of attitudes (i.e., it is irrational to believe both that p is true and not known to be true), we need some reason to think that we can proceed from intuitive judgments about irrational combinations of attitude to judgments about attitudes we have reason to refrain from holding when certain non-mental conditions obtain
(i.e., that we have reason to refrain from believing falsehoods or those beliefs not known to be true even when we have no clue that our beliefs are false or fail to constitute knowledge).

Maybe these problems are not insuperable. To deal with the first, we can revise IT as follows:

**IT2:** If it is incoherent in the way Moorean absurd statements are to F while acknowledging that C does not obtain and the belief that C does not obtain is not itself incoherent, in acknowledging that C does not obtain, you are cognizant of something that makes it wrong to believe the F—namely, that C does not obtain.

To deal with the second and more fundamental problem, we might say this. The reason that it is irrational to believe both that p is true and that C does not obtain is that in representing your present situation as one in which C does not obtain you thereby appreciate that if that belief is correct, you should expect there to be reason not to believe p. Moreover, if that belief is incorrect, it is still by your lights a situation where there is reason not to believe p. To believe against what you take to be good reasons is itself a kind of epistemic wrong.33 Perhaps this suffices to address the difficulties that arose for IT, but while we might have saved the test we have revised the test in such a way that it no longer lends support to the knowledge account. To appreciate this, note the following. The test only applies when the belief that C does not obtain is a belief that is not incoherent taken on its own. While we might grant that if C is a condition necessary for knowledge it is incoherent to believe both that p is true and that C does not obtain, we only find confirmation of the knowledge account if we assume also that for any condition C, such that C is a condition necessary for knowledge, it is coherent to believe on its own that C does not obtain. This is not what we find.

Let me explain. It is not incoherent to believe that you do not know p because p is false. So, according to IT2 there is a norm that enjoins us to refrain from believing the false. It is not incoherent to believe that you do not know p because your evidence does not put you in a position to know whether p. So, according to IT2, there is a norm that enjoins us to refrain from believing without evidence.34 What of the conditions beyond this necessary for knowledge? So far, we have only confirmed that you should not believe the false and not believe without evidence. The belief that my belief about p is Gettiered, like the belief that God will not forgive my atheism, is incoherent taken on its own. There are many ways to Gettier a belief, but I shall focus on two. In the first sort of case, your evidence for believing p is undermined thanks to true propositions of which you are unaware. In the second sort of case, your evidence for believing p only accidentally leads you to the correct judgment concerning p.

It is reasonably clear why you cannot coherently and correctly believe yourself to be in the first sort of case. To believe yourself to be in such a case, you have to believe of some piece of evidence (i) that you are unaware of it and (ii) that it would, if combined with your present evidence, undermine the justification you have for believing p. However, you would have this evidence in mind if you were to believe this. The case is not possible.35 If you were aware of the evidence you would no longer be justified in believing what you did. This means this would not be a Gettier case.

What about the second sort of Gettier case in which your failure to know that p is due to the accidental connection between your grounds and the belief you actually hold? You cannot coherently believe that you fail to know that p simply because you are only accidentally related to the truth about p. To believe that your connection to the truth is accidental is (roughly) to believe that if p turns out to be true, this is not to be expected. The judgment that you are in this sort of Gettier case amounts to the complex judgment that p is true but that you are not in an epistemic position to expect that it is true. This is a Moorean absurdity in its own right. We can account for its absurdity by noting that someone with such attitudes would take their belief that p is true to fail to fulfil the evidential norm since what is to be expected is a function of the evidence available. The subject’s taking it to be the case that the truth of the relevant belief is not to be expected is acknowledging that by her lights she cannot expect to be right given her evidence. IT2 fails to confirm that this condition is necessary for permissible belief.

The challenging case for those who do not think knowledge is the norm of belief is this one:

6. p but I do not know p.36

If you take yourself not to know that p because you take yourself not to believe p, say, then we have a situation where your second-order belief is transparently falsified by a fact about your own mind. If you take yourself not to know that p because you take it that p is false, we can explain the incoherence by appeal to the truth norm. If you take yourself not to know that p because you have insufficient evidence by your own lights, we can explain this in terms of the evidential norm. That norm in turn can be derived from the truth norm in just the way...
Williamson suggested earlier. And, if you take yourself not to know because you take yourself to be in a Gettier case, we have already seen how the evidential norm can explain the incoherence of that attitude. It seems that we have our bases covered.

If we were to assume that the solution of Moore’s Paradox should be given in normative terms, and assume that MA is true, then, while the knowledge account might have the resources to explain the absurdity of the thoughts we have thus considered, it seems the knowledge account is unnecessary for explaining why Moorean absurd thoughts strike us as contradictory. It seems we can explain the same data using either the truth norm combined with the evidential norm or the evidential norm taken on its own. So, while some might think that MA is a dubious assumption and dispense with the very idea of using Moore’s Paradox as a way of uncovering the norms of belief, MA properly understood does not lead us to endorse the idea that the reason that the concept of knowledge is significant is that it plays an essential role in the formulation of the norms of belief.

V. Conclusion
Because people want to draw parallels between assertion and belief and because the knowledge account of assertion is so popular, it is not surprising that people are taking seriously the suggestion that knowledge is the norm of belief. Those who are willing to seriously entertain the suggestion that knowledge is necessary for permissible belief should be willing to seriously entertain the suggestion that permissible belief is a matter of faultlessly and faithfully representing the world. This view, which takes the truth norm to be the fundamental norm of belief, has no less intuitive support than the knowledge account. It does no worse than the knowledge account does in addressing Moore’s Paradox. As an added bonus, it is motivated by reasonably uncontroversial claims about the aim of belief and does not deliver the wrong verdicts concerning cases of covert lottery beliefs and Gettier cases.

There is something puzzling about the knowledge account. It is not hard to understand why the internal conditions necessary for knowledge could be taken to have normative significance. Someone who believes p without satisfying the internal conditions necessary for knowledge has failed to exercise proper responsibility over her beliefs. It is not difficult to understand why the truth of a belief could be taken to have normative significance. What a belief is supposed to do is offer knowledge. We take as our foundational premise the suggestion that the norm of belief is truth. Because of this, you ought not to believe without adequate evidence, for believing without such evidence shows a lack of proper respect for the good. Because of this, you ought not to believe what is false, for such beliefs fail to promote what matters fundamentally. It is hard to grasp the suggestion that there is always some third way of going wrong. Perhaps you will agree that there is something to be said for the hypothesis that justified belief just is a belief that faithfully, faultlessly represents the world. It might not be much, but it might be more than there is to be said for the idea that only knowledge can earn you the right to believe.
References