

## Assertion, Practical Reasoning, and Epistemic Separabilism

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### Abstract

I argue here for a view I call *epistemic separabilism* (*ES*), which states that there are two different ways we can be evaluated epistemically when we assert a proposition or treat a proposition as a reason for acting: one in terms of whether we have adhered to or violated the relevant epistemic norm, and another in terms of how epistemically well-positioned we are towards the fact that we have either adhered to or violated said norm. *ES* has been appealed to most prominently in order to explain why epistemic evaluations that conflict with the knowledge norm of assertion and practical reasoning nevertheless seem correct. Opponents of such a view are committed to what I call *epistemic monism* (*EM*), which states that there is only one way we can be properly evaluated as epistemically appropriate asserters and practical reasoners, namely in terms of whether we have adhered to or violated the relevant norm. Accepting *ES* over *EM* has two significant consequences: first, a “metaepistemological” consequence that the structure of normative epistemic evaluations parallels that found in other normative areas (namely, moral evaluations), and second, that the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning are no worse off than any alternatives in terms of either explanatory power or simplicity.

### 1. Introduction

Proponents of a knowledge norm of assertion (like Peter Unger (1975), Timothy Williamson (2000), Keith DeRose (2002), and others) argue that it is appropriate to assert

proposition  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$ . Assertions of propositions that are not known are thus in some ways improper, and, in turn, are subject to criticism. Specifically, epistemic criticism: we are deemed insufficiently well-positioned epistemically towards  $p$  to assert that  $p$ . Almost immediately, however, one can come up with plenty of cases in which the knowledge norm of assertion seems too strict. The most common cases typically take one of the following forms:

*Justified False Belief (JFB)*: S asserts that  $p$ . S is *justified* in believing that  $p$ , but  $p$  happens to be false (perhaps for reasons that S would not typically be expected to take into account).

*Gettiered*: S asserts that  $p$ . S is justified in believing that  $p$ , and  $p$  is true, but S does not know that  $p$  (perhaps for reasons that S would not typically be expected to take into account)<sup>1</sup>.

When S has a justified but false belief that  $p$  or has a justified true belief that  $p$  that S does not know, we are often not inclined to criticize S for asserting that  $p$ , despite S's lack of knowledge in both cases. Now, one test for the plausibility of a norm is that it generally coheres with intuitive judgments: we expect that if one asserts appropriately, it is *because* one has adhered to the norm of assertion, and, similarly, if one asserts inappropriately it is *because* one has violated the norm of assertion. Thus if our judgements about the JFB and Gettiered cases are that one is not epistemically criticisable in these cases, and if intuitive criticisability is taken to be a mark of norm violation, then these cases seem to be counterexamples to the knowledge norm of assertion.

Other norms face the same problem. Proponents of a knowledge norm of practical reasoning (like Stanley and Hawthorne (2008), Fantl and McGrath (2002, 2009), and others) argue that it is appropriate to treat  $p$  as a reason for acting only if one knows that  $p$ . And again,

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<sup>1</sup> I take Gettiered to encompass traditional Gettier cases as well as other kinds of justified true beliefs that fall short of knowledge, such as barn facade cases and their kin (see Goldman (1976)). *Gettiered* is named after Edmund Gettier's famous (1963).

the knowledge norm of practical reasoning seems too strict: it often seems that someone who treats a proposition as a reason for acting when they justifiably believe that  $p$  when  $p$  is false, or when they have a justified true belief that  $p$  that they do not know, are not liable to be criticized because of how epistemically well-positioned they are towards the relevant proposition. Once again, if a norm of practical reasoning needs to be able to accommodate a wide range of intuitive judgments of propriety in order to be plausible, the above cases seem to be counterexamples to the knowledge norm of practical reasoning.

We might, then, choose to reject the knowledge norms in favor of some other norms that are better able to accommodate a wider range of our intuitive judgments; indeed, much of the debate concerning the norms of assertion and practical reasoning are guided by finding a replacement for the knowledge norm that does not admit of what seem to be such ready counterexamples. Defenders of the knowledge norms, however, deny that there is such a strict connection between criticisability and norm violation. Instead, they have argued that one can be epistemically criticisable for one's assertions and instances of practical reasoning in two different ways: one, in terms of whether one has adhered to the relevant norm, and another, in terms of whether one is epistemically criticisable for one's primary level improprieties. The idea, then, is that although the JFB and Gettiered cases are instances in which one's assertion or treatment of a proposition as a reason for acting are inappropriate in terms of being in violation of the relevant norm, we can still accommodate the intuition that there is something epistemically appropriate about them by noting that by virtue of one's relationship to the fact that one has violated the norm, one might not be criticisable for it.

Call *evaluative separabilism* the view that intuitive propriety judgements can be indicative of either one's adherence to or violation of a norm, or whether one should be, in some

way, criticisable for said adherences or violations. Evaluative separabilism is common in other normative areas. For example, it is widely accepted that there are two different kinds of ways that we can evaluate someone as a *moral* subject, one that pertains to whether our actions are *morally permissible* (i.e. whether our actions adhere to the relevant moral norms), and another that pertains to whether we are *blameworthy* for them. For example, my action might be morally impermissible because, say, it causes a significant amount of avoidable pain, but I might not be morally blameworthy for it, perhaps because I had good reason to think that my action was going to have different results. We thus accept a kind of separabilism when it comes to certain kinds of moral judgments. Call the epistemic version of evaluative separabilism *epistemic separabilism*:

*Epistemic Separabilism (ES)*: A view of the norms of assertion or practical reasoning admits of epistemic separabilism iff the view accepts that there are two different ways that we can be evaluated as epistemic agents in relation to the norms of assertion and practical reasoning, namely by either adhering to or violating those norms, or in terms of whether we are criticisable in terms of the way in which we have adhered to or violated those norms.

Accepting ES is what allows the proponent of the knowledge norm to accept what appear to be intuitive judgements of the propriety of our assertions and actions in the JFB and Gettiered cases, namely, not as judgments not about the permissibility of the relevant act, but rather whether we are criticisable for violating the relevant norm.

The strategy of defending the knowledge norms by appeal to epistemic separabilism is employed by several authors, but in different ways. For example, Keith DeRose (2002) defends the knowledge norm of assertion against judgments about cases like JFB and Gettiered in the following way:

As happens with other rules, a kind of secondary propriety/impropriety will arise with respect to [the knowledge norm of assertion]. While those who assert appropriately (with respect to this rule) in a primary sense will be those who actually obey it, a speaker who broke this rule in a blameless fashion (one who asserted something she didn't know, but reasonably thought she did know) would in some secondary sense be asserting properly. (180)<sup>2</sup>

Stanley and Hawthorne (2008) take a similar tack, although they refer to a notion of one being “excused” for violating the norm of practical reasoning:

If someone asserts that *p* without knowing it and knowing that they don't know that *p*, they will have no excuse for their failure to adhere to the norm that one should assert only if one knows. If on the other hand, they assert that *p*, do not know that *p*, but cannot be expected to know that they don't know that *p*, we may be willing to deem their failure to comply with the norm excusable. The conceptual structure, one familiar from the normative realm, explains suitable appraisal in terms of a combination of norms and excuses for failure to comply with them. (573)

Timothy Williamson (2000) employs the same strategy in defense of the knowledge norm of assertion, but appeals instead to a notion of “reasonableness”:

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<sup>2</sup> As opposed to the other authors considered here, DeRose is a *contextualist*, i.e. a proponent of the view that the semantic value of a knowledge ascription depends on the context of the ascriber. Contextualism, I think, does not have any better way of handling the JFB and Gettiered cases when it comes to a contextualist-knowledge norm of assertion or practical reasoning: one can still have a justified but false belief in a context, and assert the content of that belief in that context, thus violating the knowledge norm but still seemingly doing something epistemically appropriate. Similarly, I mentioned Fantl and McGrath (2002;2009) as proponents of a knowledge norm of practical reasoning. Fantl and McGrath are proponents of *interest-relative invariantism* (IRI), i.e. the view that whether one has knowledge that *p* depends at least in part on practical factors surrounding the truth or falsity of *p*. Again, the proponent of IRI is going to face problems like JFB and Gettiered, since one might be justified in believing a proposition which happens to be false in a situation in which there are no relevant stakes standing in the way of one knowing that *p*.

The [knowledge norm of assertion] makes knowledge the condition for permissible assertion, not reasonable assertion. One may reasonably do something impermissible because one reasonably but falsely believes it to be permissible. In particular, one may reasonably assert *p*, even though one does not know that *p*, because it is very probable on one's evidence that one knows that *p*. (256)

All of the proposals from DeRose, Stanley and Hawthorne, and Williamson attempt to account for the judgements that we are liable to have in response to the JFB and Gettiered cases in terms of some other epistemic evaluative notion, one that pertains to the way in which one is situated epistemically towards whether one has adhered to or violated the relevant norm. All of these proposals, then, reflect a commitment to ES.

What kind of evaluative notion, exactly, are we positing when we appeal to epistemic separabilism? The three proposals above conceive of the relation between the conditions for the adherence to a norm and our being criticisable for them in three different ways: in terms of being “excused” from the norm, in terms of being “blameless” for violating it, and in terms of being “reasonable” while violating the relevant norm. So which one is the right one? I will not decide amongst them here. Rather, my interest in epistemic separabilism is a structural one, namely whether there is any additional sense that we can be evaluated *as an epistemic agent* in terms of our adherences to or violations of norms of assertion and practical reasoning. It is *this* claim, that there are two different ways we can be evaluated as epistemic subjects, that the defender of the knowledge norm in particular needs to appeal to in order to accommodate those judgments that by asserting or treating a proposition as a reason for acting in a JFB or Gettier case one is doing something that is epistemically appropriate. We can, of course, be “blameless” for our epistemically inappropriate assertions and instances of practical reasoning in ways that have

nothing to do with our epistemic relationships or the ways in which we are positioned epistemically towards whether we have adhered to or violated the relevant norm. For instance, my assertion of a known falsehood might violate a norm of assertion, but I might not deserve blame for it, in some sense, because it was the best thing to do overall (perhaps I told a lie to spare someone's feelings). But this is not the kind of case I am interested in looking at here. Rather, the driving notion behind epistemic separabilism is to capture a way in which we can still find something epistemically appropriate about an assertion or instance of practical reasoning that violates the relevant knowledge norms.<sup>3</sup>

With that being said, epistemic separabilism has received considerable backlash. We can divide its main criticisms into three general themes: first, that ES is implausible because there is no “conceptual room” for a properly epistemic evaluation of assertion or practical reasoning that does not consist in the adherence to or violation of the relevant norm; second, that by accepting ES we are unable to give straightforward advice about what to do; and third, that norms that appeal to ES account for our judgments of the epistemic propriety of assertions and actions in an unparsimonious way. Those who deny the plausibility of epistemic separabilism are committed to what I will call *epistemic monism (EM)* for assertion and practical reasoning: intuitive judgments of epistemically appropriate or inappropriate assertions and actions reflect our adherence to or violation of the relevant norm. We cannot consistently adhere to the knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> Here I am discussing norms of assertion and practical reasoning, but one might wonder whether we should also add norms of *belief* to the discussion, since debates concerning the correct norm of belief has faced similar issues in determining the epistemic conditions for its proper formation. I leave out beliefs here for two reasons: first, the literature on the norms of belief is too extensive to do proper justice to in this space. Second, it is not clear to me whether the discussion of the norms of belief are really that similar to those of assertion and practical reasoning. Specifically, assertions and practical reasoning both involve *action* (in that assertions are actions and that practical reasoning is directed towards action) in a way that, arguably, forming a belief does not (in that a belief is not an action, nor is it necessarily directed towards action). This is not, however, to say that epistemic separabilism is necessarily concerned solely with norms that somehow involve actions; whether this difference between assertions, instances of practical reasoning and beliefs does, in fact, say anything important about the underlying epistemic issues is not an issue I can deal with adequately here.

norms and the intuition that our judgments in the JFB and Gettiered cases are apt if we also accept EM. Thus those who accept EM give up the knowledge norms in lieu of norms which are governed by some other epistemic condition. We will see below that there have been abundant proposals for a replacement for the knowledge norms, and that the impetus for proposing them is a commitment to EM.

In what follows I will defend epistemic separabilism against these criticisms. The consequences are twofold: first, there is the “metaepistemological” consequence that epistemic evaluations do indeed parallel evaluations in other normative areas (such as moral evaluations), and second, that the knowledge norms of assertion and practical reasoning are capable of accommodating apt judgments of the JFB and Gettiered cases in a way that is no less complicated than any other proposed norm.

## **2. The Conceptual Plausibility of Epistemic Separabilism**

The first kind of criticism I will consider pertains to whether there is enough “conceptual space” for epistemic separabilism. Pascal Engel (2008), for example, argues that a distinction between primary and secondary propriety is “spurious,”

because there is only one way of violating a norm: simply by not doing or believing what it prescribes. The fact that I am unaware that I crossed the yellow line does not make me less liable to receive the fine from the policeman who notices my bad driving behaviour. That may excuse me, but that does not change the fact that I have violated the rule. The fact that one is unaware of violating the norm does not change one’s status with respect to the norm (56).

Jennifer Lackey (2007) agrees with Engel. She argues that,

either a speaker is behaving appropriately and is not subject to criticism *qua* asserter, in which case she has not violated a norm of assertion, or she is behaving inappropriately and is subject to criticism *qua* asserter, in which case she has violated a norm of assertion. There is simply no room for acts being secondarily proper or improper. (604)

In other words, according to Lackey one violates a norm of assertion if and only if one is subject to criticism *qua* asserter. The “*qua* asserter” qualification is crucial. There are, after all, plenty of instances in which one might be subject to criticism for making an assertion in ways that do not pertain to one’s having violated the norm of assertion: perhaps the content of the assertion was insensitive, off-color, otherwise socially unacceptable, etc. But while an asserter is certainly subject to criticism in these instances, criticism is directed at the asserter *qua* moral agent, *qua* joke-teller, *qua* dinner guest, etc., and not *qua* asserter. As we have seen, we need to take care not to confuse a claim of evaluative separabilism with a general claim about evaluations of adherences to or violations of norms, namely *defeasibility*. The norms of assertion and practical reasoning are defeasible inasmuch as the best overall action given one’s circumstances might not be the one that the relevant norm dictates is permissible: again, it might be necessary to make a bad assertion in order to do the best thing overall.

Although Lackey does not conceive of her argument in the terms I have presented here, her claim that “there is simply no room for acts being secondarily proper or improper” is a clear indication of support for epistemic monism. As we’ve seen, the epistemic monist thinks that there is a tight connection between those instances in which we are criticisable for an act of  $\phi$ ’ing and the norms that govern proper  $\phi$ ’ing. Lackey illustrates the connection between criticisability and norm violation via discussion of Toby, the hapless (American) football quarterback who, during a game, loses a contact lens before unwittingly stepping over the line of scrimmage prior

to attempting a forward pass (such a manoeuvre is illegal according to the rules of football). We stipulate that his blurred vision in this instance gives Toby a justified but false belief that he has not crossed the line of scrimmage prematurely. Regardless, Toby is clearly in violation of the rules of football. And while he may not be subject to criticism qua fallible human being, he is certainly still subject to criticism qua football player. Indeed, criticism is quickly and justifiably doled out in the form of a penalty.

As in our JFB case above, Toby has a justified but false belief that his action is permissible according to the relevant standards. However, Lackey argues there simply does not seem to be any way in which Toby, *qua football player*, does anything appropriate, in any sense, when stepping over the line of scrimmage; there is, after all, nothing in the rulebook that forgives understandable mistakes. Evaluations that pertain to football propriety, then, seem to be *monistic*: one can only be properly evaluated *qua football player* in terms of whether one has adhered to or violated the rules of football.

Similarly, Toby might again lose his contact lens but, as a matter of luck, just-so-happen to keep his feet on the correct side of the line of scrimmage, all while completing a forward pass. In this instance, we stipulate that Toby's blurred vision gives him no specific reason to think that he has not crossed the line of scrimmage prematurely. However, no flags are thrown and no yards are deducted. Toby might be a lucky son-of-a-gun for completing a legal pass given his circumstances, but again there does not seem to be any sense in which Toby is doing something inappropriate *qua football player* by getting lucky and completing the pass: nothing in the rules of football penalizes a player for dumb luck. Thus, just as getting lucky with regards to remaining onside in football is not something that we should be criticized for, getting lucky with regard to the truth of a proposition that we assert is not something that we should be criticized

for, either. Assertion, then, is supposed to be an activity that is analogous to football, with rules that govern each in the same way. Lackey concludes that since we are evaluative monists about football, we should similarly be epistemic monists when it comes to assertion.

While some have argued that there is a principled difference between the way we evaluate inappropriate assertions and the way that we evaluate infractions in sports (see Maitra, 2011), I think the problem with Lackey's argument is not the strength of her analogy, but is rather a failure to recognize that even in the realm of sports, evaluative monism is implausible. Consider, to stretch the analogy further, basketball player Bobby. Bobby's team, the Canines, is down by two points with 20 seconds left in the game, and his opponent's team, the Arachnids, has possession of the ball. A rule of (professional, North American) basketball states that teams can possess the ball for 24 seconds before taking a shot that touches the rim, otherwise possession changes to the opposing team. Thus, all the Arachnids have to do to win the game is to run out the clock by refraining from shooting for 20 seconds. Another rule of basketball states that certain forms of intentional physical contact constitutes a foul, and as a result, free throws are often given to the player on the receiving end of the offense. Committing a foul, however, also stops the clock and can result in a favorable circumstance for the fouling team if the fouled team misses their free throws. Knowing all of these rules and the consequences for breaking them, Bobby intentionally commits a foul on the Arachnid's player holding the ball.

In basketball, Bobby's situation is common<sup>4</sup>. The point is the following: Bobby is clearly in violation of a rule of basketball by committing a foul. But fouling the player on the other team is clearly also an appropriate thing to do; indeed, if Bobby did *not* foul the Arachnid's player, he

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<sup>4</sup> Other similar situations are ubiquitous in sports: a soccer player might illegally stop an otherwise sure goal with his or her hands in order to risk the consequences of a penalty shot; better a slim chance at preventing a goal than a guaranteed goal against (infamously, such a manoeuvre was attempted – successfully – in the 2010 World Cup, for example). Similar situations occur in hockey and, I am sure, in many other sports that I am less familiar with.

would be heaped with criticism for failing to do so. If Bobby commits the foul he is still in some sense deserving of criticism (this is indicated by the fact that he is penalized by the referee), and if Bobby does not commit the foul he is in some sense not criticisable, since he receives no penalty. But in the former case Bobby is in another sense clearly *not* criticisable (since he exhibits excellent strategy), and the latter he *is* in another sense clearly criticisable (since he exhibits poor strategy). Importantly, Bobby is, in all the above cases, criticisable or not *qua basketball player*: failing to stop the clock by not taking the opportunity to commit a foul makes Bobby a criticisable *basketball player*, specifically. We should accept, then, evaluative separabilism when it comes to basketball, i.e. that one can be properly evaluated as a basketball player either in terms of whether one has adhered to the rules of basketball, or in terms of the way in which one has adhered to or violated those rules. This kind of evaluative separabilism can then account for the fact that Bobby can be subject to a penalty for violating a rule of basketball and thus criticisable in one way, while also being commendable *qua basketball player* and thus not criticisable in another way. Lackey's case, then, does not adequately establish that there is insufficient conceptual space for the separability of evaluations of propriety in sports and, by analogy, does not give us reason to reject epistemic separabilism for norms of assertion and practical reasoning.

Lackey suggests that we can determine whether an act “is in accordance with the norms governing proper  $\phi$ 'ing” (where we can think of “ $\phi$ 'ing” either as asserting or treating something as a reason for acting) if we answer the following question in the affirmative: “relative to the goal of proper  $\phi$ 'ing, should the agent have performed  $\phi$  or not?” (605)<sup>5</sup> Applied to Bobby's

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<sup>5</sup> Talk of the “goal” of proper  $\phi$ 'ing should not be taken to imply that the norm of assertion is *only* applicable inasmuch as we desire to assert appropriately, i.e. that in those cases in which I want to assert properly, I should meet certain epistemic conditions. Rather, our assertions are proper or improper regardless of what our goals are: we are subject to evaluation as epistemic subjects just be asserting.

case, we thus ask the following question: relative to the goal of proper basketball playing, should Bobby have committed a foul or not? The answer is, I think, ambiguous: on the one hand, avoiding committing a foul is surely a mark of proper basketball playing. On the other hand, Bobby would clearly in some way be a poor basketball player by not committing an intentional foul, given his circumstances. The ambiguity is explained by evaluative separabilism as applied to basketball.

One might think that the answer to Lackey's question when directed at Bobby is, in fact, not actually ambiguous: it is clear that Bobby *should* commit a foul, one might say, and thus there is no need to appeal to any other sense of propriety since there is no ambiguous answer to explain. But answering Lackey's question in this way gives us the strange result that a norm governing proper basketball playing should include committing intentional fouls; after all, if we accept that the only way in which one can be appropriately evaluated as a basketball player is in terms of adhering to or violating the rules of basketball, then if Bobby's act is appropriate, it must be *because* he has adhered to a rule of basketball. If this were the case, however, there would be no sense in which we should consider Bobby's action to be a *foul*. Indeed, if Bobby's, say, hitting the hands of the Arachnid's player were unambiguously acceptable, the referee's penalization of the Canines' player would be out of line. But no such thing is the case.

Here is a possible objection to my interpretation of Bobby's case: I might be mixing up two different kinds of evaluations of "proper basketball playing," namely one that pertains to following the rules that govern the act, and another that pertains to what is presumably a *goal* of Bobby's, namely to win the game of basketball. However, the objector continues, it's not clear whether the way that we evaluate Bobby as someone who is pursuing his interests should affect the way that we evaluate his standing with regards to the rules of basketball. Are we, then, just

talking about two completely different ways that one could evaluate Bobby, i.e. as a basketball player and as someone who is doing what he needs to do in order to achieve his goals? If this is the case, then the apparent separability of evaluations of Bobby is not at all surprising. We can, after all, evaluate people in all sorts of different ways: Bobby might be a great basketball player but a compulsive liar, or a bad basketball player but a snappy dresser, etc. But our evaluations of Bobby as morally reprehensible or aesthetically astute do not say anything about how we should evaluate Bobby's relationship with the rules that govern basketball. So why should it matter if Bobby is good at *winning* basketball, if what we are interested in is his relation to the rules that govern playing basketball?

In order to address this concern we need to make careful to distinguish between evaluations of a subject made *across* evaluative domains (i.e. evaluating someone as bad at sports but good at picking out clothes) and those made *within* evaluative domains. Lackey's argument was that there was insufficient conceptual space to allow us to make different evaluations of the same subject within the same evaluative domain when it came to playing sports; hence the crucial qualification that we evaluate a  $\phi$ 'er *qua*  $\phi$ 'er. However, if separating evaluations of an agent *qua*  $\phi$ 'er (that is, within the same evaluative domain) is not ruled out when it comes to sports, then, by analogy, neither is it ruled out when it comes to evaluations of other ruled-governed activities like assertion and treating something as a reason for acting. If there are two different ways that we can evaluate someone as an epistemic subject when asserting or treating a proposition as a reason for acting, then this kind of evaluative separabilism *does* say something about the epistemic conditions that warrant assertion and practical reasoning; namely, it supports the ES thesis.

Igor Douven (2006) presents a different kind of argument concerned with the adequacy of conceptual space for epistemic separabilism. He argues that:

[I]f one can consistently violate a given norm without being blameworthy, provided one obeys a less stringent norm, then the former is not really a norm at all. Suppose, for instance, it is claimed that the following is a (or the) norm for serving alcoholic beverages:

One ought to serve alcoholic beverages only to persons of age 18 or older. (+)

At the same time it is declared that anyone who serves alcoholic beverages to persons of age 16 or older is blameless. It would then appear that the practice of serving alcoholic beverages is really governed by the norm that one ought to serve such beverages only to persons of age 16 or older rather than by (+). (Douven, 2006: 480)

Thus, since we typically judge that instances of assertions of JFB and Gettiered are epistemically appropriate, instead of accounting for these judgments according to some sense of propriety that does not pertain to whether we have adhered to the norm of assertion, the correct norm of assertion should instead *incorporate* the conditions that make these assertions intuitively appropriate. Douven is again arguing from a position of epistemic monism: instead of separating different kinds of epistemic evaluations, we should instead make sure that intuitive propriety judgments are accommodated solely by the conditions of the norm itself.

The problem with Douven's objection is that there are many cases in which one can consistently be blameless in violating a norm, yet the conditions that determine whether one is blameless should clearly not be made part of the norm. Surely it would not be the case that we would declare as blameless anyone who served a drink to a 16 year-old. But now consider a specific class of 16 year-olds that one *would* always be blameless in serving: those 16 year-olds

that are extremely cunning, who make use of convincing fake IDs, facial prosthetics, and casual references to the 1980s. If anyone were to serve a member of *this* group of people alcohol, they would surely be blameless in doing so. Yet it is equally clear that no one would recommend amending the minimum drinking age laws to include just the extremely cunning 16 year-olds.

There are clearly cases, then, in which judgements that a given act of  $\phi$ 'ing is appropriate despite violating the relevant norm should not be accommodated by the conditions of the norm itself. How, then, can we determine whether a case in which one does not seem criticisable for violating a norm is one that should be accommodated by the norm itself as opposed to some additional evaluative notion? In other words, how can we tell when a case is a legitimate counterexample to the plausibility of a norm, and when it is just indicative of a different normative relationship?<sup>6</sup> I don't have a definitive answer to this question. It seems, however, that the *frequency* in which the potential counterexample occurs cannot be the deciding factor (consider: there are a plethora of instances in which we are morally blameless, but this fact in itself should not lead us to reconsider the norms that we are blameless for violating). Rather, the case should say something significant about the nature or purpose of the rule itself. Consider again Douven's (+) rule: the purpose of such a rule is (in theory) to try and make it such that alcohol is only sold to those who are mature enough to make responsible decisions. The rule that says that one ought to only sell alcohol to those of 18 years of age or more has nothing to do with whether we can identify one's age in any given situation. If we were to follow Douven's advice and incorporate the conditions under which one would always be blameless for violating the rule into the condition of the rule itself, then we would be adding unwelcome conditions to our rule: it would be antithetical to the purpose of the rule. Now, if it turned out that we would always be blameless for serving a 16 year-old alcohol *because*, as it turns out, there is no significant difference in

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<sup>6</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me on this question.

maturity between 16 year-olds and 18 year-olds, then it seems that we should, in fact, amend the (+) rule. Similarly, unless one can show that that intuitively appropriate assertions in the JFB and Gettiered cases say something significant about the act of assertion itself, then just because we might typically be considered undeserving of criticism for asserting or treating as a reason for action a proposition that we are justified in believing but happens to be false does not mean that we should amend a norm of assertion or practical reasoning to make these cases permissible in terms of the relevant norm.

The fact that evaluative separabilism can admit of kinds of cases in which one is always or nearly always blameless for violating a norm does not mean that we should change or amend the norm such that these cases are no longer instances of being blameless, but rather instances in which one has, in fact, adhered to the norm. We could, of course, still propose a *different* norm that could accommodate these cases without the need to appeal to any kind of evaluation beyond the conditions of the norm; indeed, as we will see below, proposing such a norm is Douven's strategy, as it is the strategy of many others. I will argue that this strategy is unsuccessful. Before getting there, I will consider one more complaint aimed at the plausibility of epistemic separabilism.

### **3. The Problem of Normative Guidance**

Jonathan Kvanvig (2011) argues that if one conceives of norms as admitting of a "secondary dimension of epistemic propriety" then we cannot answer a crucial question in a helpful way: what is it that we should do? Here's his complaint in full:

What we do not want and cannot tolerate is multiple answers to the questions of what to do and what to think. If a theorist says, "well, if you do A you will be justified in so doing, and if you refrain, it will be excusable," the appropriate reply is simply to repeat

the request: tell me what to do. The conjunctive reply, distinguishing primary and secondary notions, is simply non-responsive. (243)

By distinguishing between primary and secondary propriety, Kvanvig claims, we can at best offer a “conjunctive reply” if we are asked what to do. This is, of course, not the kind of guidance we want: we want to know what to do, full stop, not what to do “in some sense,” and what to do “in some other sense.”

To see the problem in full, we need to see how epistemic separabilism differs from evaluative separabilism in other normative areas. We are concerned here with giving advice from an epistemic standpoint: what should we do, given that we are subject to evaluation as an epistemic subject. Consider, in comparison, giving moral advice. We have seen how it is much more widely accepted when it comes to consequentialist moral evaluations that there is a distinction to be made between doing something morally impermissible and being blameworthy for it. When one asks for advice about what one should do from a moral standpoint, we are advising them as someone who is subject to moral evaluation. In the case of moral advice, however, evaluative separabilism is seemingly not a problem: if we are, for instance, aware that one is about to do something morally impermissible, but that, were they to perform the act, they would be blameless in doing so, it would be preposterous to give the conjunctive reply that they should, in some sense, perform the act, but that in another sense they shouldn't. This is because when we are asked for moral advice we are not being asked what we should do if we are interested in being blameless for our actions, but rather what the morally permissible thing to do is. Simply differentiating between evaluations of moral permissibility and blameworthiness thus does not in any way obligate us to give conjunctive advice. Similarly, we might think that when we are asked about what we should treat as a reason for acting or what we should assert, we are

asking for advice in relation only to what is epistemically permissible, a question that does not require a conjunctive answer.

However, one might be concerned that the analogy between moral and epistemic evaluations in terms of their separability conditions break down. Here's why: to be blameless for one's moral transgression is often taken to be, at least in part, a function of one's epistemic relationship with the relevant moral facts<sup>7</sup>. The epistemic case is perhaps more complicated. Primary epistemic propriety is an evaluation of whether we are epistemically well-positioned enough with a proposition to assert it or to treat it as a reason for acting. But if secondary epistemic propriety is like a kind of moral blameworthiness, then the conditions that determine whether our assertion or action would be secondarily epistemically appropriate *is itself a function of how epistemically well-positioned we are*, namely how epistemically well-positioned we are towards the fact that we have violated the relevant norm. We have seen in proposals above that this is the case: DeRose claims that one's assertion is secondarily appropriate when one "reasonably thought" that one knew it; Stanley and Hawthorne claim that one's assertion is excusable when one has "every good reason" to think one knew it, etc. Thus it seems that when we are being asked what we should do as epistemic agents in those cases in which a potential action would violate the relevant norms but that we would be "blameless" in performing, we would be epistemically well-positioned in one way, but not another. Since when we ask what we should do as epistemic subjects we are asking what we are most epistemically well-positioned to do, by accepting ES we are committed to saying that we can be epistemically well-positioned in different ways, and thus we would seem to be committed to giving conjunctive advice.

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<sup>7</sup> For an extensive treatise on the epistemic conditions that determine moral culpability, see Sher (2009). The other component of moral culpability is often taken to be that the act was performed "freely", or as a function of the agent's "agency". See, however, Arpaly (2003) for a dissenting view.

However, even though there seems to be a difference between the ways that moral blameworthiness relates to norms of right action and epistemic blameworthiness relates to norms of proper  $\phi$ 'ing, we are still not committed to giving conjunctive advice in the epistemic case. This is because when we are asked about what we should do when it comes to assertions and instances of practical reasoning, we are being asked not about our overall epistemic standing, but our standing towards a particular proposition – namely, that proposition that we are asserting or treating as a reason for acting. Consider an epistemic analogue for the moral advice case above, a case in which we know that someone has a justified but false belief that  $p$ , and in which they do not realize that their belief is false. When they ask what they should assert, we will certainly not give the advice that Kvanvig thinks we are forced to, namely that one should, in one sense, not assert that  $p$ , but that in another sense they should (rather, we will no doubt say that the subject should *not* assert the proposition). We may find it understandable why they do not realize that this is the case, but this is no reason to change the advice that we give. But we can accept all of this and still accept ES. This is because when someone asks for advice about what to assert, they are asking whether they are epistemically well-positioned enough *towards the proposition that they are asserting*, not whether they are epistemically well-positioned towards the fact of their adherence to or violation of the norm of assertion. To give advice concerning the latter, or to give advice concerning both the former and the latter is to misunderstand how to properly give advice in that situation. Thus one's epistemic position towards  $p$  can be insufficient for proper assertion, whereas one's epistemic position towards "I know that  $p$ " can be sufficient for non-criticisability. We can, and do, give advice that pertains to the former and not the latter. ES thus does not require us to give conjunctive advice.

#### **4. The Necessity of Epistemic Separabilism**

So far I have argued that there is conceptual space for epistemic separabilism, and that by accepting ES we do not face any specific problems when it comes to giving advice about what to do. The last criticism that I will consider is one of parsimony: it certainly seems that epistemic separabilism is more *complex* than epistemic monism as a way of evaluating instances of assertion and practical reasoning. Christopher Hill and Joshua Schechter (2007), for example, argue that simplicity should be a component in determining whether we should admit of a kind of secondary epistemic propriety:

A practice that involves a rule linking assertion to knowledge but allows minor violations of the rule is more complex than a practice that is based on a less demanding rule... In a practice of the former sort there will have to be a convention allowing excuses together with one or more rules specifying the gravity of various forms of infraction. Moreover, each participant in such a practice will have to keep track of the various psychological and epistemic factors that determine whether particular infractions should be excused.

(110)

Douven (2006) argues in the same vein:

A first remark is that it seems simpler, and thus methodologically preferable, to explain our intuitions about false but reasonable assertions without having to appeal to an extra story about how one can breach rules blamelessly, or about there being two senses of proper assertability. (478)

Simplicity is, in general, something that we want from a norm. And it does seem that by accepting epistemic monism we get simpler explanations for the epistemic propriety of our assertions and actions. As we saw earlier, accepting epistemic monism requires us to come up with new norms of assertion and practical reasoning to replace the respective knowledge norms.

However, once we actually undertake this project, we see that epistemic separabilism is unavoidable. This is because, for any epistemic condition that one posits as warranting proper assertion or practical reasoning, we will be able to construct counterexamples analogous to those presented for the knowledge norms; specifically we can create JFB cases for any proposed replacement norms. The purpose of this last section is to argue that since any other proposed norm of assertion or practical reasoning will require us to accept epistemic separabilism, considerations of parsimony become irrelevant, since there is no plausible epistemically monistic norm of assertion or practical reasoning that can entirely account for apt judgements of epistemic propriety.

As we saw above, one of the ways that we can accommodate intuitive judgments that someone who asserts in a JFB or Gettiered situation does so in an epistemically appropriate way is to replace the knowledge norm with some other norm of assertion. One such proposal has been a *truth* norm, which states that it is appropriate to assert that  $p$  just in case  $p$  is true (see, for example, Weiner (2005)). Proponents of a truth norm, however, are going to need to appeal to epistemic separabilism, as well, to explain judgments that assertions of justified but false beliefs are nevertheless appropriate<sup>8</sup>. So this kind of norm provides explanations that are no more parsimonious than those provided by the knowledge norm. Other proposals take the form of a *justification* norm, i.e. that it is appropriate for one to assert a proposition or treat a proposition as a reason for acting only if one is justified in believing it. The motivation for proposing a justification norm is that it can accommodate the JFB and Gettiered cases without needing to appeal to any notion of secondary epistemic propriety. After all, if justification is the necessary epistemic condition for appropriate assertion or action, then since the subjects in both the JFB

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Weiner appeals explicitly to such a normative structure to explain how the truth norm can accommodate our intuitions of cases like JFB (2005: 243).

and Gettiered cases are justified in believing the propositions they assert or treat as a reason for acting, we are able to account for the intuitive judgments that their assertions or actions are epistemically appropriate without appeal to ES. Since the justification norm does not need to appeal to any other dimension of propriety in order to explain the judgments of the above cases, it can provide more parsimonious evaluations than the knowledge norm; as a result, some version of it has become the go-to replacement for the knowledge norm (I will outline several such proposed replacements below).

I will argue that the apparent parsimoniousness of the justification norm is short-lived once we look at an even wider range of cases. Of course, “justification” is a nebulous concept, so in order to establish the point in general we would need to look at the many different interpretations of what it means to be justified that have been proposed. Such a task would be tedious; here I will look at a representative sample of such theories, and argue that none of them are capable of providing more parsimonious explanations of our evaluations of assertions and instances of practical reasoning. The argument goes as follows: just as the JFB and Gettiered cases required us to either abandon the knowledge norms or accept ES, we can generate analogous problem cases for any initially plausible replacement norms, and thus will similarly be faced with the option of abandoning it or appealing to ES. No matter what, then, if we are interested in our norms being coherent with intuitive judgments of epistemic propriety, then we are forced to accept ES.

I’ll consider a couple of toy examples first, before looking at some actual proposals that have recently been put forth as variations on a justification norm. Consider, first, a norm that states that one’s assertion that  $p$  is appropriate just in case one is justified in believing that  $p$ , where one is justified in believing  $p$  just in case one’s belief was formed via a *reliable process*

(call this a “basic reliabilist” view of justification). According to such a conception of justification, I might be justified in believing a proposition while also having a lot of misleading evidence that  $p$  is false, or at least no particular evidence that  $p$  is true (consider something like Keith Lehrer’s “Truetemp” case (see Lehrer, 1990)). In this case, although I have a justified belief that  $p$ , it still seems that there is something inappropriate about either asserting that  $p$  or treating  $p$  as a reason for acting. Basic reliabilist justification cannot accommodate a wide range of intuitive judgements of inappropriate asserting or practical reasoning.

We have two options: reject the basic reliabilist justification norm in lieu of some other justification norm, or attempt to explain the impropriety of our assertion by appeal to some other dimension of epistemic evaluation. We might say, for example, that the impropriety of my assertion comes from the fact that I am ignoring evidence that I am mistaken (even if it turns out to be misleading), or that I have no particular reason to believe that  $p$  is true, etc. As the proponent of the knowledge norm responded to cases like JFB and Gettiered, if we want to maintain the reliabilist justification norm in the face of intuitive judgments that seem to conflict with it we need to adhere to an evaluative structure in which propriety is not determined solely by violating or adhering to the norm. A basic reliabilist justification norm, then, requires an appeal to ES.

Since we are currently in the business of finding a justification norm that does not require appealing to epistemic separabilism, we will reject the basic reliabilist conception for a different one. Consider instead a notion of justification wherein being justified requires that one have a degree of belief that is above a certain threshold, e.g. one is justified in believing that  $p$  iff one has credence  $\alpha$  in  $p$ , where  $\alpha$  is greater than some specified value – call this the “Lockean threshold view” of justification. The problem with this notion of justification is no doubt

familiar. Consider a so-called “lottery case” where one believes that one will lose the lottery, and in which the odds are tremendously in favor of this belief being true. For any reasonably chosen value of  $\alpha$  one will be able to generate a “lottery example” in which one has a credence above level  $\alpha$  in  $p$  but nevertheless can neither appropriately assert that  $p$  nor incorporate  $p$  into one’s practical reasoning: one is never in a strong enough epistemic position to appropriately assert “I will lose the lottery,” no matter the odds (see Williamson (2000: 251) for an appeal to this data in support of the knowledge norm of assertion). What’s important to take away from the lottery example is that on the Lockean threshold view of justification, there will be instances where we will have a justified belief that  $p$  but it will not be appropriate to assert it or treat it as a reason for acting. As in the basic reliabilist case, we can accommodate this judgment in one of two ways: reject a Lockean threshold conception of justification as the epistemic component in norms of assertion and practical reasoning, or explain these judgments by appealing to an additional sense of epistemic propriety. Once again, since we are in the market for a norm that does not require such an appeal, for the reasons that we rejected the reliabilist justification norm we need to also reject the Lockean threshold justification norm.

Neither a basic reliabilist nor a Lockean threshold view of justification are, I think, popular choices for a norm of assertion or practical reasoning. So let’s consider some other views. Mikkel Gerken (2011) defends the following variation of a justification norm of practical reasoning:

*Warranted Action (WA)*: In the deliberative context DC, S meets the epistemic conditions on rational use of her belief that  $p$  as a premise in practical reasoning or of her belief that  $p$  as a reason for acting (if and) only if S is warranted in believing that  $p$  to a degree that is adequate relative to DC. (530)

According to WA, whether S is sufficiently well-positioned epistemically towards  $p$  is partially dependent upon the nature of S's deliberative context. (WA differs from a Lockean threshold view, then, in that there will be no cases in which one meets the relevant justification threshold in a context but is not justified enough to act appropriately in that context.)

Like the other justification accounts, however, there will be cases in which one is able to intuitively treat a proposition as a reason for acting in an epistemically appropriate way despite failing to meet the conditions of the WA norm. Such cases trade on the fact that one might not necessarily be aware of what one's deliberative context consists in, and thus one might have good reason to believe that one is adhering to the WA norm when one is, in fact, violating it. For example, Gerken lists the following (non-exhaustive) criteria that determine a deliberative context: available alternative courses of action, availability of further evidence, considerations of urgency, and the practical stakes associated with available actions (534). It seems that none of these factors are ones that I am necessarily aware of in my practical reasoning (although I certainly *could* be aware of them in different situations). Furthermore, it seems that there will be instances in which I would not be reasonably expected to know what my deliberative context is: perhaps there is a lot of available evidence that is outside of my personal ability to acquire, or perhaps it is unclear just how much is at stake in acting in such-and-such a way, etc.

There will thus be situations in which I have good reason to believe that I have met the criteria for being warranted in believing that  $p$ , but in which I am not, in fact, warranted in believing that  $p$ . Such situations form the basis of a counterexample for the WA norm, analogous to that which was posed for the knowledge norms:

JFB-WA: S treats  $p$  as a reason for acting. S fails to meet the conditions of WA (for whatever reason), although S has good reason to think that S adheres to them. One is

likely to judge that in such an instance  $S$ 's treatment of  $p$  as a reason for acting is appropriate.

We can generate specific examples based on the above general case. For example, let us say that I take myself to have available to me two possible courses of action, and I have good reason to think that following one of them will help me achieve my goals. My deliberative context, however, is such that there is a third course of action of which I am unaware. Furthermore, my unawareness is not the result of my consciously ignoring evidence or my exercising a bad method of reasoning, or being epistemically vicious in any other way. Rather, I am unaware of the full nature of my deliberative context because I simply have no reason to think that I have not exhausted the potential courses of action before me. In such a case, WA dictates that my treating the relevant proposition as a reason for action is inappropriate. I thus have a justified but false belief that I have adhered to the norm governing my treating something as a reason for acting. Since cases of justified false beliefs were ones for which we thought that one could nevertheless act appropriately when evaluating the plausibility of the knowledge norm, we should have the same judgments in the JFB-WA case (and, indeed, as shown in the above example, it seems that we do). Thus we again need to appeal to epistemic separabilism in order to accommodate the full range of apt judgments that we have of actions that violate the WA norm.

Consider another norm, this time for assertion, that attempts to accommodate the JFB and Gettiered cases without appeal to epistemic separabilism, Jennifer Lackey's (2007) "Reasonable To Believe Norm of Assertion":

(RTBNA) One should assert  $p$  only if (i) it is reasonable for one to believe that  $p$ , and (ii) if one asserted that  $p$ , one would assert that  $p$  at least in part because it is reasonable for one to believe that  $p$  (608).

What does it mean for it to be reasonable for one to believe that  $p$ ? Here is what Lackey takes to be a “plausible answer”: “it is reasonable for  $S$  to believe that  $p$  only if  $S$  has epistemic support that is adequate for  $S$ ’s justifiedly believing that  $p$  were  $S$  to believe that  $p$  on that basis” (611)

There will be situations, then, in which  $S$  is not actually justified in believing that  $p$ , but in which  $S$  can properly assert  $p$  since  $S$  has the same strength of epistemic position towards  $p$  required for justified belief. However, the RTBNA now faces the same problems that the above views faced: I might not necessarily be aware that I am failing to meet the conditions of the RTBNA, and my lack of awareness may be due to factors that I would not normally be expected to take into consideration. In other words, I might have a justified but false belief that I am adhering to the RTBNA, and, in such instances, it seems that we are not liable to criticize someone for making an assertion in such an instance. In other words, we can generate a general problem case for the RTBNA:

JFB-RTBNA:  $S$  asserts that  $p$ .  $S$  does not meet the conditions of the RTBNA (for whatever reason), although  $S$  has good reason to think that  $S$  does meet those conditions.

One is likely to judge that in such an instance  $S$ ’s assertion is appropriate.

Again, I might have good reason to suspect that my epistemic support for  $p$  is stronger than it actually is. In such cases, the RTBNA alone is unable to explain what is intuitively appropriate about my assertion that  $p$ .

Ram Neta (2009) propose another kind of justification norm, again with the goal of providing a more parsimonious replacement for the knowledge norm, this time for practical reasoning:

JBK-Reasons: Where S's choice is p-dependent<sup>9</sup>, it is rationally permissible for S to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting if and only if S justifiably believes that she knows that p. (686)

Neta claims that JBK-Reasons is superior to the knowledge norm of action because it can account for all of the intuitive judgments that the knowledge norm can capture, as well as our judgments of the JFB and Gettiered cases (since, in both of those cases, the subject justifiably believes that she knows the relevant proposition). The motivation for JBK-Reasons is again to explain a wide range of intuitive judgements of instances of practical reasoning without needing to appeal to epistemic separabilism.

Neta does not specify exactly what it means for one to justifiably believe that one knows a proposition. If Neta is requiring that one *forms a belief* that one knows a proposition in order to appropriately treat it as a reason for acting, then this requirement seems too demanding; indeed, it seems that we rarely form such beliefs. Furthermore, although we could describe the JFB and Gettiered cases as one in which one forms a belief that one knows the relevant proposition, we certainly do not need to describe the cases in this way. If, on the other hand, Neta is requiring that one merely be *propositionally justified* in believing that “I know that p” (where one is propositionally justified in believing that *p* just in case one is in a position such that were one to form the belief that *p* then it would be a justified belief), then we face the same problem as the norms above, namely that one can have good reason to think that one is adhering to the requirements of JBK-Reasons while actually failing to. Once again, JBK-Reasons faces a JFB case of its own: one might be justified in believing that one is adhering to JBK-Reasons while

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<sup>9</sup> A choice situation is “p-dependent” just in case one’s preferred choice given that *p* is true differs from one’s preferred choice given that *p* is false. The p-dependency condition is included to make sure that only the propriety of acting on propositions that are relevant given one’s situation are under the jurisdiction of the JBK-Reasons norm (see also Fantl and McGrath, 2002; Stanley and Hawthorne, 2008).

violating it, and such cases require that we explain judgments of propriety that cannot be accounted for by JBK-Reasons alone.<sup>10</sup>

The final proposal I will consider comes from Douven (2006), who proposes what he calls the “rational credibility account” for assertion: “One should assert only what is rationally credible to one” (449). Douven is explicit that he is not in the business of providing a comprehensive theory of rational credibility. Instead, for his purposes a general sketch of rational credibility needs only to fulfil the following conditions: that a theory of rational credibility coheres with our pretheoretic intuitions about what we are rationally credible in believing (457), that what is rationally credible to us is “closed under logical consequence” (458), and that beliefs in lottery propositions such as “this ticket will lose” are not rationally credible (459). Douven takes his rational credibility account to be simpler than the knowledge norm of assertion because it does not need to appeal to any notion of “excuses” for norm violation (480). Douven, then, is in the business of finding a norm of assertion that does not need to appeal to epistemic separabilism.

Douven, like many of the others we have considered thus far, is concerned primarily with accounting for the data that is problematic for the knowledge accounts: the JFB and Gettiered cases. And, like many of the other proposals we have seen, it does seem that the rational credibility account delivers the correct judgments in *these* cases. However, the problem with the rational credibility account is the same as the problems for the previous accounts: there are

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<sup>10</sup> Similar concerns apply to a norm that states that one’s assertion or treatment of a proposition  $p$  for a reason for acting is epistemically appropriate when one believes that one knows that  $p$ , or in which one otherwise takes oneself to be in a position such that one knows that  $p$ , etc. Specifically, if such a view requires that one has actually formed a belief that one knows that  $p$ , then this norm is going to rule out all of those cases in which one simply didn’t happen to form the relevant belief. Having actually formed the belief that “I know that  $p$ ”, however, neither seems like something we typically do, nor does it seem relevant to the propriety of our assertions or actions. If the norm requires that we would be merely disposed to form such a belief then we will again be able to have good reason to think we are adhering to such a norm when we are actually violating it. For additional concerns concerning the plausibility of this kind of rule, see Williamson (2000: 260-262).

plausibly instances in which one could be justified in believing that one has adhered to the conditions of the rational credibility account when failing to, since one might have a justified but false belief that something is rationally credible for one when it, in fact, isn't. Once again, we cannot accommodate judgments of intuitive judgments of epistemic propriety while adhering to epistemic monism. Why, though, should we think that we can be mistaken about what is rationally credible for us? First, note that nothing in Douven's restrictions on rational credibility entails that we *cannot* be mistaken about what is rationally credible for us: the factors that make something rationally credible might be ones that we can be mistaken about having<sup>11</sup>. Second, we might think that a plausible notion of rational credibility is, in fact, one that entails that I can have mistaken beliefs about what is rationally credible to me. For example, Douven places the restriction on rational credibility that lottery beliefs are not rationally credible. However, it would certainly not be odd for someone to think that the proposition "my lottery ticket will lose" *is*, in fact, rationally credible. Once again, we cannot accommodate judgments of intuitive judgments of epistemic propriety while adhering to epistemic monism.

Again, the proposals of Gerken, Lackey, Neta, and Douven comprise only a few of the many conceptions of a norm of action or assertion out there. However, each of them suffers from the same general problem, i.e. that we can be justified in believing that we have adhered to the norms when we are actually violating them. In such cases, we are faced with the judgement that assertions we make or actions we perform on the basis of our epistemic relationship with the relevant propositions are epistemically appropriate. In such instances, then, the defender of the relevant norm should appeal to a different kind of epistemic evaluation, one that pertains not to

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<sup>11</sup> For example, we might think that what is rationally credible for me is a function of the total evidence that I have. If I can have good reason to think that my evidence is different than it actually is, then I can be mistaken about what is rationally credible for me.

whether one has adhered to or violated the given norm, but to a notion that pertains to the way in which one has done so. This is just epistemic separabilism.

### **5. The Epistemological and the Metaepistemological**

Epistemic separabilism is what I have called a metaepistemological thesis: it is a claim about the way that we are evaluated when our actions are under the jurisdiction of epistemically constituted norms. Accepting the metaepistemological thesis, however, has epistemological consequences. When applied to the debate surrounding the norms of assertion and practical reasoning, the most salient consequence is that judgments of propriety or impropriety are not necessarily indicative of adherences to or violations of the norm (and thereby an indication that one is not sufficiently epistemically well-positioned towards the relevant proposition), but are potentially indicative of how epistemically well-positioned we are towards the conditions of the norm themselves. As I have argued above, accepting epistemic separabilism does not crowd the conceptual space, does not require us to give conjunctive advice, and cannot be avoided by positing norms that, on first glance, appear to accommodate cases that are problematic for the knowledge norms.

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