

Norms of Assertion

Grice (1989:26-8) provides a taxonomy of norms of assertion.¹ Within the overarching framework provided by “the co-operative principle”—i.e. the principle that “one ought to make one’s conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which one is engaged”—Grice distinguishes four types of norms of assertion.

First, there are norms of quantity, which relate to the quantity of information to be provided: (1) do not provide less information than is required for the purposes of the current exchange of information; (2) do not provide more information than is required for the purposes of the current exchange of information. *Second*, there are norms of quality. Grice assigns these norms an ordering: the “super” norm (1) do not assert that which is not true; and the “more specific” norms (2) do not assert that which you do not believe; and (3) do not assert that for which you have inadequate warrant. (Note that these three norms taken together might plausibly be taken to entail a derivative norm of quality, viz. (4) do not assert that which you do not know.²) *Third*, there is the norm of relation: be relevant. *Fourth*, there are various norms of manner: (1) avoid obscurity of expression; (2) avoid ambiguity; (3) avoid unnecessary prolixity; (4) be orderly; and so forth.³

Grice notes that there are many other types of norms—*aesthetic, social, moral, etc.*—that are typically observed by participants in talk exchanges, but that these other types of norms are not “specially connected ... with the particular purposes that talk ... is adapted to serve and is primarily employed to serve” (28). Moreover, Grice also says that he would like to be able to show that “anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication ... must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstances, in participating in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the Cooperation Principle and the [norms]” (30).

Grice’s norms of quality have frequently reappeared—at least *inter alia*—in subsequent discussions of the norms of assertion (and often with a similar ordering assigned): consider, for example, Price (1998:245-9), who claims that assertion is subject to the “weaker” norms (2) and (3) and to the “stronger” norm (1), or Williamson (2000: 238-269), who claims that assertion is subject to norm (4) and hence, derivatively, to each of the norms (1)-(3). Much of the more recent subsequent discussion has been concerned with the question whether those who embrace minimalist conceptions of truth can consistently endorse Grice’s “super” norm. However, before we proceed to a consideration of this more recent debate, I think that it will be worth spending some time considering in what sense—if at all—Grice’s “super” norm really is a norm of assertion.

The plan of the paper is as follows:

Following time honoured tradition, I begin by drawing some distinctions, and adverting to some disputes upon which I will take up a stance without proper discussion. After briefly considering the distinction between norms that are distinctive of assertion and norms that are shared between assertion and other speech acts, I

spend some time thinking about different ways in which norms can be classified (and, in particular, I consider ways in which the taxonomy of Wright (1992) can be improved upon). Then, after some brief consideration of the distinction between norms and secondary proprieties, I conclude with a rather short discussion of exactly what it takes for a speech act to be an assertion (as opposed to some other kind of speech act that is characteristically performed using declarative sentences).

In the second section of the paper, I turn my attention to the claim that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not know. I argue that the arguments that Williamson (along with others) has offered in defence of this claim fail, and that there are good reasons for rejecting the claim that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not know.

In the third section of the paper, I consider the claim that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true. I argue that the standard argument in favour of this claim fails, and that there is good reason to deny that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true. Moreover, I also argue that there is similar good reason to deny that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that for which one has insufficient warrant. However, I do not go on to reject all of Grice's norms of quality, for I also contend that it is *the* central norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe.

In the fourth section of the paper, I consider some further reasons for supposing that the central norm of assertion is that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe. After noting that it is plausible to suppose that assertion is the sole speech act that has the expression of belief as its proper end, I argue that consideration of the Gricean ambition mentioned above—viz. the ambition to show that *people should be expected to have an interest in participating in conversational exchanges of this kind only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with this norm*—supports the claim that the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion is that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe.

In the fifth section of the paper, I turn my attention to the consequences that the view that I have defended about the constitutive individuating norms of assertion has for a recent dispute about minimalist and deflationary theories of truth. Wright (1992) claims that considerations about the norms of assertion establish that deflationism is an inherently unstable view. Horwich (1998) denies that Wright's arguments establish the conclusion for which he argues. Price (1998) argues that, while Horwich is right to criticise Wright's arguments, it is nonetheless true that there are norms of assertion that deflationary theories of truth fail to capture. I argue that Price's argument fails to establish that there are norms of assertion that deflationary theories of truth fail to capture; and, moreover, I argue that Wright and Price get great mileage from mistaken views about the norms of assertion.

In the sixth, and final, section of the paper, I provide the beginnings of a discussion of the connections that exist between norms of assertion, norms of belief, and norms of inquiry. In particular, I consider the impact that the adoption of the views of Kelly (2005) on the epistemic significance of disagreement have for discussion of the norms of assertion. If we suppose that disagreement between doxastic peers need give none of them reasons to change their minds, then I do not think that we should suppose that

it is even a proximate aim of assertion, *in general*, to secure agreement between parties to a conversation.

1. Preliminary Considerations

1. Grice's norms of assertion can be sorted in ways other than those that he mentions. In particular, it is worth noting that most of these norms apply to a wide range of linguistic phenomena, of which assertion is but one example. Plainly enough, the norms of relation and manner apply to giving orders, asking questions, and so forth, no less than they apply to making statements. (One should avoid irrelevance, obscurity of expression, ambiguity, unnecessary prolixity, disorder, and so forth, in asking questions or giving orders.) Moreover, there is at least an analogue of the norms of quantity that applies in these cases as well. (One should not ask unnecessarily complicated or unsuitably simple questions; one should not give unnecessarily complex or insufficiently detailed orders.) Consequently, if there are norms that are distinctive of assertion—i.e. norms that apply only to assertions and not to other linguistic phenomena—then plausibly these norms will be those assigned by Grice to quality.

2. There are many different ways of classifying norms. Wright (1992: 15-6) mentions three distinctions. *First*, he claims, we may distinguish between descriptive norms and prescriptive norms. (A characteristic of moves in a practice is a *descriptive* norm iff participants in the practice are guided in their treatment of moves by whether moves possess that characteristic. A characteristic of moves in a practice is a *prescriptive* norm iff recognition that moves possess that characteristic provides defeasible reason for specified treatment of those moves, even if these reasons tend to go unacknowledged by participants in the practice.) *Second*, we may distinguish between positive norms and negative norms. (*Positive* norms are tied to the selection/endorsement/permission of moves; *negative* norms are tied to the rejection/condemnation/prohibition of moves.) *Third*, we may distinguish between constitutive and non-constitutive norms. (Roughly, a *constitutive* norm is a norm that “enters constitutively into the identity of the practice concerned” (16). On Grice's account, amongst the identified norms for assertion, only the norms of quality are so much as candidates for consideration to be constitutive norms of assertion.)

There are ways in which this account might be tidied up. Perhaps, for example, it would be neater to start with the distinction between positive and negative characteristics—supposing that that distinction can somehow be made out—and then frame the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive norms in terms of contrary pairs of characteristics. (So, for example, the pair of characteristics <true, not true> would be a candidate prescriptive norm of assertion.) If one were to proceed in this way, then one would not need to follow Wright in first defining what it is to be a positive descriptive norm, and then adding on an account of what it is to be a negative descriptive norm.

Moreover, there are other distinctions that require attention (and which, when noted, might lead us to reformulate the distinctions that we already have). For example, there is a distinction between what I shall call *internal* norms and *external* norms. An *internal* norm for a practice is a norm that a participant in the practice is guaranteed to be able to apply in the case of his own moves (provided that he is sufficiently

attentive, intelligent, and so forth); whereas an *external* norm for a practice is a norm that a participant in a practice may not be able to apply to his own moves, no matter how attentive, intelligent, and so forth that participant may be. I suppose that Grice's norms of quantity, relevance, and manner are all internal norms: provided that I am sufficiently attentive, intelligent, etc., I am as well-placed as anyone to judge that my assertions satisfy these norms. However, I take it that at least the first and the third of Grice's norms of quality are external norms: it may well be that other people can see that my assertions are neither true nor adequately warranted, even though these facts are invisible to me (and could remain so even if I were more intelligent, attentive, and so forth).

A second distinction to which attention might be paid discriminates between what I shall call *explicit* norms and what I shall call *implicit* norms. (As with my previous distinction, the choice of labels may not be entirely happy.) An *explicit* norm for a practice is a norm that is explicitly and consciously acknowledged to be a norm by the participants in the practice (and perhaps even is such that one cannot be a fully-fledged participant in the practice unless one explicitly and consciously recognises the norm in question); whereas an *implicit* norm for a practice is a norm that need not be explicitly and consciously acknowledged to be a norm by participants in the practice.

A third distinction, related to the second, discriminates between what I shall call *overt* norms and what I shall call *covert* norms. An *overt* norm for a practice is a norm that is—or must be—borne in mind by participants in the practice when they are carrying out that practice; a *covert* norm for a practice is a norm that is “conformed to” by participants in a practice but which is not borne in mind by participants in the practice when they are carrying out that practice.

A fourth distinction, again related to the distinctions already mentioned, discriminates between what I shall call *individual* norms and what I shall call *group* norms. An *individual* norm for a practice is a norm that governs all of the individual instances of participation in the practice, whereas a *group* norm governs the operation of more significant parts of the practice as a whole. (It might be, for example, that, while it is not an individual norm that an agent ought not to believe that which is false, it is nonetheless a group norm that the group ought not to believe that which is false.) Perhaps we might also wish to distinguish *practice* norms, which govern the operation of the practice as a whole: for example, it might be that, while it is not a group norm that a group ought not to believe that which is false, it is nonetheless a practice norm that inquiry ought not to settle into stable equilibrium on that which is false.

A fifth distinction, also related in complicated ways to the distinctions already mentioned, discriminates between what I shall call *self-regulating* norms and what I shall call *other-regulating* norms. Roughly speaking, an *other-regulating* norm is a norm to which explicit appeal can only be made in order to try to regulate the behaviour of other participants in the practice, whereas a *self-regulating* norm is a norm to which one can make explicit appeal in order to try to regulate one's own behaviour. One might think, for example, that it is a self-regulating norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe, and (hence?) that it is only an other-regulating norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true. (A gap between belief and truth may be visible in the case of others, but not in one's own case.)

There are doubtless further distinctions to be drawn, and also doubtless ways in which the distinctions that I have drawn can be refined. However, we have already done enough to show that it is not a simple matter to ask, for example, whether it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not know. For it may be that our question is concerned primarily with, say, internal, explicit, overt, individual, self-regulating, prescriptive, constitutive norms; and it might also be that the answer would be different if we were asking about, say, external, implicit, covert, group, other-regulating, descriptive, constitutive norms. Given the complexities here, I shall mostly proceed to ignore the distinctions that I have drawn; however, it should be remembered that there is a tacit disagreement in the literature between those who suppose that we are primarily interested in the internal, explicit, overt, individual, self-regulating, prescriptive, constitutive norms of assertion, and those who do not suppose that these are the kinds of norms in which we have primary interest.

3. There is a distinction that has become more or less standard in the literature between primary norms and secondary norms (or secondary proprieties). Given that it is a primary norm that N, it is a secondary norm that one do one's best to conform to N. Moreover, provided that one truly does one's best to conform to N, one is not open to (much) criticism if one fails to conform to N. Nonetheless, while an actor may not be (much) criticised for her failure to conform to N, her action is nonetheless criticisable because *it* fails to conform to N. (See, for example, Williamson (2000:257) and De Rose (2002:180).)

There are clearly distinctions to be drawn here. It is, for example, one thing to conform to a norm, and a quite different thing to reasonably take oneself to have conformed to a norm. Similarly, as Williamson and De Rose observe, it is one thing to have taken every measure that one could be reasonably expected to take in order to try to conform to a norm, and another thing to actually succeed in conforming to the norm. However, it is worth noting that these kinds of distinctions have much more significance for some kinds of norms than they do for other kinds of norms. For example the gap, between conforming to a norm and reasonably taking oneself to be conforming to a norm, is much larger in the case of external norms than it is in the case of internal norms. If a norm is internal—i.e. is such that a participant in the practice is guaranteed to be able to apply the norm in her own case provided that she is sufficiently attentive, sensitive, intelligent, and so forth—then the gap between conforming to the norm, and doing everything that one could reasonably be expected to do in order to try to conform to the norm, is occupied only by cases in which agents are constitutionally unable to attain the levels of attention, sensitivity, intelligence, and so forth that are required in order to be able to apply the norm in one's own case (and perhaps there is no gap at all between conforming to the norm and reasonably taking oneself to be conforming to the norm). On the other hand, if a norm is external—i.e. is such that there is no guarantee that a participant in the practice is able to apply the norm in her own case, no matter how attentive, sensitive, intelligent, etc. she may be—then there is much more scope for agents to violate the norm while nonetheless reasonably taking themselves to be conforming to it.

4. Before we can discuss the standing of norms of assertion, we need to determine what is to count as *assertion*. This is by no means a straightforward matter. Williamson (2000:258) proposes that assertion is the *default* use of declarative sentences. It is not clear that this is acceptable. There are many things that can quite

properly be done using declarative sentences: swearing, conjecturing, guessing, betting, suggesting, predicting, explaining, opining, story-telling, and so forth. Given the many and varied proper uses of declarative sentences, it seems that we need some further guidance in order to determine which uses of declarative sentences are the default uses.

I think that it is a mistake to try to give an account of assertion in terms of a restriction on the class of uses of declarative sentences. Instead, I would prefer an account that ties assertion to belief: the proper function of assertion is to express belief. Since there is a range of mental states other than belief that are quite properly expressed using declarative sentences, we should resist any suggestion that assertion can be analysed in terms of the default uses, or the proper uses, or the conforming-to-implicit-convention uses, of declarative sentences. (Of course, the view that I am suggesting here is enormously controversial, and requires much stronger defence than I can hope to supply. Nonetheless, I need at least to mention it, since it has some role to play in the subsequent discussion.)

Enough of these preliminary discussions! I turn now to an examination of the claim—arguably implicit in Grice’s account of the norms of assertion, and recently defended with considerable vigour by Williamson—that one ought not to assert that which one does not know.

2 Assertion and Knowledge

Williamson (2000:238-69) defends the view that there is just one constitutive individuating norm of assertion: *one may assert that p only if one knows that p*. To say that this norm is the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion is to say that all other norms for assertion are the joint outcome of this constitutive individuating norm and other considerations that are not “specific to assertion”. Williamson introduces the technical term “simple” to describe any theory of the norms of assertion according to which there is just one constitutive individuating norm or assertion. Williamson acknowledges that it might well turn out that the correct theory of the norms of assertion is not simple: there might be several constitutive individuating norms of assertion, or there might be none; and he also offers nothing more than “theoretical satisfaction” as a reason for supposing in advance that the correct account of the norms of assertion is simple. However, many of the arguments that Williamson gives are arguments for the conclusion that it is at least a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that p if one does not know that p; it is these arguments to which we shall be attending here.

Williamson offers two main reasons for supposing that it is at least a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that p if one does not know that p. First, he claims that the supposition that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that p if one does not know that p provides a better explanation of the inadequacy of probabilistic grounds of assertion that do accounts which suppose that there is some other norm of assertion. Second, he claims that there are various kinds of “conversational patterns” that confirm the suggestion that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that p if one does not know that p.

In support of the first claim described in the preceding paragraph, Williamson discusses the example of someone who asserts that a given ticket in a lottery with many equiprobable tickets did not win on the *sole* grounds that it is massively unlikely that that ticket won (and the generalised example of someone who asserts a proposition on the *sole* grounds that it is overwhelmingly likely that the proposition is true). Williamson claims that an “obvious moral” of his discussion is that “one is *never* warranted in asserting a proposition by its probability (short of 1) alone” (250). Moreover, he contends: (1) that this “obvious moral” is well-explained by the observation that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that *p* if one does not know that *p* (essentially because “the standard of probability 1 on one’s evidence is no more demanding than the standard of knowledge”); and (2) that this “obvious moral” is not well-explained by any “weaker” norms of assertion.

Despite Williamson’s claims to the contrary, it seems to me that the “obvious moral” is actually quite a sceptical one. Suppose, for example, that something like standard quantum mechanics is known to be true and that there are very small—but non-zero—probabilities for events such as a stationary marble tunnelling through the wall to which it is adjacent. By ordinary standards, if I place a chair in an otherwise empty room, and then close the only door to the room behind me as I leave, the closing of the door—and the subsequent loss of eye-contact with the chair—does not bring it about that I do not know that there is a chair in the room. But, given standard quantum mechanics, once the door is shut, my sole grounds for believing that there is a chair in the room are probabilistic: there is a *tiny* chance that the chair has tunneled from the room since I shut the door. So, Williamson will have us say that, if something like standard quantum mechanics is known to be true, then we do not know a huge number of the things that we ordinarily take ourselves to know; and, moreover, he will also have us claiming that, if something like standard quantum mechanics is known to be true, then we violate the norms of assertion when we say such things as that there is a chair in the unoccupied room next door. Since it is not out of the question that something like standard quantum mechanics *is* known to be true, I take it that these are not acceptable results: one *might* be—and perhaps even can be—warranted in asserting a proposition by its probability (short of 1) alone. But, if that’s right, then—without considering the remaining steps in Williamson’s argument—we can conclude that considerations about lotteries and the like do not end up supporting the claim that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not know.⁴

In support of the second of the two contentions mentioned several paragraphs back, Williamson offers several types of conversational evidence that he takes to confirm the suggestion that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that *p* if one does not know that *p*. (1) One standard response to assertions is to ask “How do you know that?” That this question constitutes an implicit challenge to the assertion provides support for the claim that one ought not to assert that which one does not know (and is hard to explain if this claim is rejected). (2) A more aggressive response to an assertion is to ask, “Do you really know that?” That this question is more aggressive is well explained if it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not know (and hard to explain otherwise). (3) There is something wrong with any assertion of the form “A, but I do not know that A”. That there is something wrong with any assertion of this form is easy to explain if it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not know (and hard to explain otherwise).

The support that is offered by this conversational evidence for Williamson's central contention is weak. I think it is clear that one can find lots of cases in which assertions are made in which it is proper to respond with "How do you know that?" and "Do you really know that", because there are lots of cases in which assertions are properly construed as claims to knowledge. However, there are other central cases of assertion in which it would not be proper to respond with these kinds of questions, and in which it seems very odd to construe assertions as claims to knowledge. Consider, for example, the case of assertions about the future. Suppose, for example, that we are discussing the upcoming Test. I assertively utter the words "Australia will win". This looks like a perfectly straightforward and normatively unobjectionable kind of assertion. But, if challenged, I would immediately concede that I don't *know* that Australia will win. Indeed, if pushed, I'd be quite happy to say: *Of course, I don't know that Australia will win, but (nonetheless) Australia will win.* The general point here is that there is an important family of declarative sentences of the form "It will be that..." of which it cannot plausibly be maintained that their default use is governed by the norm that one ought not to assert that which one does not know. Moreover, while one can argue about whether acts of swearing, conjecturing, guessing, betting, suggesting, explaining, opining, story-telling and so forth are assertions, it seems very hard to deny that standard uses of sentences of the form "It will be that ..." are assertions.

Given the discussion to this point, I think that we are in a position to conclude: (1) that Williamson's arguments do not establish that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not know; and (2) that there are considerations that weigh heavily in favour of the claim that it is not, in fact, a general norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not know. Moreover, I think that we are also in a position to conclude that these very same consideration weigh heavily against some "modifications" of the position that Williamson defends, e.g. that it is at least a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe that one knows, and that it is at least a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one does not rationally believe that one knows. Considerations about assertions about the future (and perhaps also considerations about assertions based on merely probabilistic grounds) strongly suggest that one can quite properly make assertions of that which one does not believe that one knows, and of that which one does not rationally believe that one knows.

3 Assertion and Truth

Williamson supposes that the chief competitor to the view that he defends is the simple theory that maintains that the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion is that one may assert that *p* only if it is true that *p*. While he supposes that it is, indeed, a (derivative) norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true, Williamson contends that this norm could not be the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion, because there is no way of deriving evidential norms of assertion from this norm. Given that it seems plausible to suppose that there is no way of deriving the claim that one may assert that *p* only if it is true that *p* from evidential norms of assertion, one might think that, if Williamson is right to claim that there is no way of deriving evidential norms of assertion from the claim that one may assert that *p* only if it is true that *p*, then the argument of the preceding section gives

us good reason to think that there is no correct *simple* account of the norms of assertion. However, even if Williamson is right to claim that there is no way of deriving evidential norms of assertion from the claim that one may assert that p only if it is true that p, but wrong to claim that it is a norm of assertion that one may assert that p only if one knows that p, it does still remain open that there is a correct simple account of the norms of assertion: for it might yet turn out that it is not a norm of assertion that one may assert that p only if it is true that p.⁵

It may seem obvious that it is, in fact, a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true. After all, one might think, it is clear that we very often object to, or criticise, assertions on precisely these grounds. If, for example, someone asserts that p in circumstances in which one knows, and perhaps even knows that one knows, that not p, then—at least other things being equal—one will be entirely justified in pointing out to the person in question that they are mistaken because what they said is simply not true. How could one always be *pro tanto* justified in pointing out that one who has made a false assertion has made a mistake unless it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true?

I do not believe that this is the decisive consideration that some take it to be. Certainly, it should not be denied that someone who makes a false assertion is subject to a certain kind of liability; but it does not follow from this fact that they have violated one of the norms of *assertion*. Suppose that we agree that it is one of the norms of assertion that one ought not to assert that which one believes to be false. Suppose further that we are dealing with a case in which a speaker is conforming to this norm, so that when they make the false assertion that p, this is because they have the false belief that p. Then it plainly remains open to say that, while the person violated no norm of *assertion* in expressing their false belief that p, they are nonetheless mistaken in believing that p. (If we were so inclined, we could go on to claim that they must have violated one of the norms for belief, namely that norm which enjoins that one believe that p only if it is true that p. I shall return to consider this proposal later.) Perhaps we might go on to allow that there is a kind of secondary or derivative “norm” of assertion to the effect that one ought not to assert the false *because* one ought not to believe the false⁶; but this allowance is perfectly consistent with the proposal that the central norm of assertion is that one ought to assert only that which one believes. Indeed, for all that the considerations currently under examination can show, it *may* be that the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion is that one may assert that p only if one believes that p.

There is a general point here that deserves to be made explicit. The practice of assertion does not exist in isolation; rather, it is one amongst many practices that are related in various ways. Given the variety of relations that hold between assertion and other practices, it may be that what appear to be norms that are specific to the practice of assertion are not really as they appear to be: for the norms of assertion and the norms of other practices may jointly issue in what are merely apparent norms of assertion. Moreover, this general point does not rely upon the correctness of the example which I have used to illustrate it: it might be that there is something other than norms of belief to which one might appeal in an attempt to explain the merely apparent norm that one ought to assert only that which is true.

If it is conceded that one might, in the way suggested, undermine the obvious argument in favour of the claim that it is a norm of assertion that one ought to assert only that which is true, then it seems to me that it ought also to be conceded that we cannot hope to determine the norms of assertion simply by thinking about general kinds of criticisms that are specific to assertions. Even if it is true that assertions are unique amongst speech acts in always being open to criticism on grounds of falsity, that in itself does not necessarily provide a strong reason for thinking that it is a norm of assertion that one ought to assert only that which is true.

So far, then, perhaps, we have managed to neutralise the suggestion that there is a straightforward argument for the conclusion that it is a norm of assertion that one ought to assert only that which is true. But is there any plausible argument for the conclusion that it is not, after all, a norm of assertion that one ought to assert only that which is true? In order to answer this question, I think that we shall need to think a bit harder about what we take the main function of assertion to be.

There is widespread acceptance of the view that the primary function of assertion is to facilitate transmission of information from speaker to hearer: for example, the speaker is able to pass on knowledge to the hearer (Williamson (2000:267)); or the speaker is able to pass on truths to the hearer (Grice (1989:26-8)); and so forth. But, given that we have a transactional or transferential view of the primary function of assertion, it seems to me to be more or less inevitable that we shall end up supposing that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true. After all, it seems that nothing less would suffice to guarantee the quality of that which is transferred: transactional quality control seems to require that the information to be transmitted meets the standards of truth.

We can certainly imagine communities in which the primary function of assertion would be to facilitate transmission of information from speaker to hearer. Imagine, for example, a world in which agents have a general need to be apprised of as many facts as they can be and in which agents are perfect detectors of facts to which they are directly exposed, but in which direct exposure to facts is rare. In communities of agents in this imagined world, it is plausible that the primary function of assertion would be to facilitate the transmission of information from speakers to hearers.

But our world is very different, and the communities of agents to which we belong are also very different, from those that I have just imagined. In our world, agents have very imperfect and partial access to information, and very different background beliefs into which information must be accommodated. Moreover, and most importantly, all agents in our world are prone to form mistaken beliefs about very many different kinds of things (including, often, things that it is important not to be mistaken about). In our world, except in special circumstances—such as, perhaps, the elementary school classroom—transmission of information from speaker to hearer is not in any way a straightforward matter. However, having a practice in which agents put forward their beliefs for comparison with the beliefs of other agents is a plausible mechanism for improving the beliefs of all who engage in the practice. What assertion makes possible is debate, criticism, consideration of alternative perspectives that one would not have otherwise considered, and the like: and it makes this possible because it has the primary norm that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe. (Debate, criticism, and so forth could not lead to improvement in belief unless people

actually put forward their *beliefs* for debate, criticism, and so forth. Wholesale departure from the norm that one ought only to assert that which one believes would undermine the role that the practice of assertion has in improving agents' systems of belief.)

If the claims that I have made in the previous paragraph are plausible then we do in fact have a reason for denying that it is a norm of *assertion* that one ought to assert only that which is true. True enough, there is a sense in which one's assertions go better for one if one non-accidentally asserts that which is true. But one's non-accidentally asserting that which is true is not an indication that one is more closely tuned to the primary function of assertion than one who fails to non-accidentally assert that which is true. Insofar as we merely pay attention to the (primary) function of assertion, one does all that is required of one if one's assertions are expressions of one's beliefs. Of course, if one's beliefs are substandard, then there is a derivative sense in which one's assertions will be also: but this does not mean that one's assertions are failures *qua* assertions.

The position that I have been outlining in the preceding paragraphs may well seem absurd. After all, not only have I denied that it is a norm of assertion that one should not assert that which is not true, but I have also (implicitly) denied that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that for which one has insufficient warrant. Moreover, I have not motivated these denials by focussing exclusively on the first-person perspective (even though, of course, one cannot *now* discriminate between those of one's *present* beliefs that are true, those that are false, those that are sufficiently warranted, and those that are not sufficiently warranted: if I believe that p, then I take it that it is true that p, and I also take it that I am warranted in believing that p). However, as I have already noted, I have insisted on a distinction between the claim that it is in *some sense* better that one's assertions are true and possessed of sufficient warrant and the claim that one ought not to assert that which is false or that for which one has insufficient warrant.⁷ Provided that one conforms to the genuine norm of assertion—viz. that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe—then the sense in which one is better off if one's assertions are true and possessed of sufficient warrant is precisely that one's beliefs are true and possessed of sufficient warrant (and there is arguably no mystery about why this is good for one).

4 Meeting the Gricean Constraint

1. Against the claim that the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion is that one ought not to assert that which is not true, Williamson (2000:244) objects that assertion is not the only speech act to aim at truth. Consider conjecturing, for instance. While it is somehow good to conjecture the true and bad to conjecture the false, conjecturing that p is not a way of asserting that p. Given that conjecturing is not asserting, this does seem to provide a reason for rejecting the simple theory according to which the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion is that one ought not to assert that which is not true. But there is no similar objection to the claim that the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion is that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe. It does seem plausible to claim that assertion is the only speech act to have the expression of *belief* as its proper end. When one conjectures—or guesses, or opines, or suggests, etc.—one is not giving expression to that which one believes (and so examination of this consideration suggests that the simple theory

which takes belief to be the sole individuating constitutive norm of assertion does track the intuitive conception of assertion).

2. One of the objections to his own preferred account of the norms of assertion that Williamson (2000:255ff.) considers is that it is often reasonable to believe that *p* in circumstances in which one knows that one does not know that *p*; from which it follows, on Williamson's preferred account that the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion criticises one for doing what it is reasonable for one to do. Williamson responds to this claim by drawing a distinction between that which it is reasonable for one to do and that which it is permissible for one to do: in his view, one may reasonably assert that *p* in circumstances in which one ought not to assert that *p*. More generally, he suggests that we should think of "the knowledge rule" as giving the condition on which a speaker has the authority to make an assertion. In his view, "the distinction between having a warrant to assert that *p* and reasonably believing oneself to have such a warrant becomes a special case of the distinction between having the authority to do something and reasonably believing oneself to have that authority" (257).

Moreover, when faced with the suggestion that "the knowledge account" seems to imply that speakers should always be at great pains to verify a proposition before asserting it (since the one constitutive individuating norm of assertion is that one ought not to assert that which one does not know), Williamson responds that "when assertions come cheap, it is not because the knowledge rule is no longer in force, but because violations of the rule have ceased to matter so much" (259) and goes on to insist that "when we are relaxed in applying the rule, we feel entitled to assert that *p* whenever we are not confident that we do not know that *p*. We still try to obey the knowledge rule, but we do not try very hard." (259)

The suggestion that one is entitled to assert that *p* whenever one is not confident that one does not know that *p* is, I think, in the same ballpark as the suggestion that one is entitled to assert that *p* whenever one believes that *p*.⁸ Setting aside worries about the move from proscription to entitlement—it is, after all, one thing to suggest that one ought not to assert that *p* if one does not believe that *p*, and quite another to suggest that one is entitled to assert that *p* whenever one believes that *p*—we might plausibly conclude that Williamson recognises—or, at any rate, has the resources to recognise—a category of "cheap assertion" for which the one constitutive individuating norm is that one ought not to assert that *p* if one does not believe that *p*. Given that the view defended in the previous section has the resources to recognise categories of "strict assertion"—e.g. a category of assertion that is governed by the norm that one ought not to assert that *p* if one does not know that *p*—one might be given to wonder whether there is really a substantive debate to be engaged in here.

Perhaps there is something to be said in favour of the view which takes assertion to be governed by a fairly undemanding constitutive individuating norm, and then allows that there are specialised categories of assertion that are required to conform to more demanding norms (e.g. knowledgeable assertion, authoritative assertion, carefully considered assertion, and the like). If a constitutive individuating norm is to *govern* every assertion, then it has to make sense that every act of assertion is criticisable in light of that norm. This requirement will be satisfied if the constitutive individuating norm for assertion is relatively undemanding: knowledgeable assertion, authoritative

assertion, carefully considered assertion, and the like are all property criticisable in light of the norm that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe. On the other hand, if assertion is taken to be governed by a very demanding norm, then there is at least some reason to say that categories such as that of “cheap assertion” are not really species of assertion at all: it doesn’t really make sense to criticise “cheap assertions” for failing to live up to the standard that one ought not to assert that which one does not know. Given that assertion is governed by a very demanding norm, “cheap assertion” is no more assertion than plaster ducks are ducks.

Even setting this kind of consideration aside, I do not think that it is plausible to suppose that there is no substantive issue between those who favour undemanding constitutive individuating norms and those who favour very demanding constitutive individuating norms. For there are constraints that must be met by any candidate constitutive individuating norm for assertion. In particular, there is the constraint that is suggested by the remark of Grice’s that I cited in the opening paragraphs of this paper: a constitutive individuating norm for assertion must be a norm which satisfies the condition that *people should be expected to have an interest in participating in conversational exchanges of this kind only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with this norm*. If it is plausible to suggest that a less demanding putative constitutive individuating norm meets this constraint whereas a more demanding putative constitutive individuating norm does not, then that will be a strong reason for supposing that it is actually the less demanding putative constitutive individuating norm that actually governs practice.

Now, I have, in effect, already given my reason for thinking that only the less demanding putative constitutive individuating norm meets the Gricean constraint. It is, of course, true that there are—or, at any rate, could be—circumstances in which people only have an interest in participating in conversational exchanges that are conducted in accordance with the constraint that one assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*. However, in general, it is not true that assertoric exchanges are such that people are interested in participating in them only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with this norm. Or, at any rate, so I contended in the previous section of this paper in which I argued that, in fact, assertoric exchanges are such that people have an interest in participating in them even if they are only conducted in general accordance with the norm that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe. Given the interest that people can be expected to have in debate, criticism, consideration of alternative perspectives, and the like, one would expect people to have an interest in participating in assertoric exchanges whose sole constitutive individuating norm is that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe. The Gricean desideratum supports the view that I have developed (and counts against Grice’s own claims about the further norms of quality that he postulates).

5 Consequences for a Dispute about Deflationism

Wright (1992: 12) claims that considerations about the norms of assertion can be used to show that “deflationism about truth is an inherently unstable position”. His argument for this claim has two key planks: first, he defends the view that deflationism about truth is committed to the claim “that ‘T’ and ‘warrantably assertible’”, coincide in positive normative force” (12); second, he argues that deflationism about truth is committed to the claim that “‘T’ and ‘is warrantably

assertible' have to be regarded as registering distinct norms—distinct in the precise sense that although aiming at one is, necessarily, aiming at the other, success in the one aim need not be success in the other” (23). From these two key supporting arguments, Wright concludes that “because deflationism, in holding that, *modulo* a flourish or two, the truth predicate is merely a device of endorsement of assertions, is thereby committed to the idea that warranted assertibility is the only norm operative over assertoric discourse, the finding is, as advertised, that deflationism about truth is an inherently unstable position” (32).

I do not propose to argue with the second of the two key claims that Wright defends: I agree that even minimalists about truth should agree that “... is true” and “... is warrantably assertible” are not guaranteed to be co-extensive. However, I do not think that even minimalists about truth should agree that truth and warranted assertion provide the same norm for assertion; and nor do I think that even minimalists about truth should agree that truth and warranted assertion provide the only norm that is operative over assertoric discourse. Of course, given the arguments of the previous section of this paper, it is plain that *I* think that neither truth nor warranted assertion provides a norm for assertion; but at least one of the issues now before us is whether minimalists can endorse the reasons that I have given in support of the claim that neither truth nor warranted assertion is a norm of assertion.

Let me begin with a rather extended quotation in which Wright (1992:18f.) gives his reasons for claiming that deflationists must concede that truth and warranted assertibility “coincide in positive normative force”:

Consider the practice of the sincere and literal use of the sentences in the range of the T-predicate. In order for these sentences to be determinate in content at all, there has to be a distinction, respected for the most part by participants in the practice, between proper and improper use of them. And since they are sentences with assertoric content, that will be a distinction between cases where their assertion is justified and cases where it is not. It follows that a norm, or complex of norms, of warranted assertibility will hold sway, both prescriptively and descriptively, over sincere and literal use of the sentences to which the T-predicate applies: prescriptively, because to have reason to think that a sentence is warrantably assertible is, trivially, to have (defeasible) reason to assert it, or endorse its assertion—the “moves” distinctive of assertoric linguistic practice; descriptively because (or so it seems plausible) unless participants in the practice for the most part try to respect the norms of warranted assertion which govern it, it is not clear in what the fact could consist that its ingredient sentences have the content which they do. But now, given the explanatory biconditional link effected by the Disquotational Schema between the claim that a sentence is T and its proper assertoric use, it follows that “T” is likewise, both prescriptively and ... descriptively, a predicate which is normative of assertoric practice. “T” is prescriptively normative, because any reason to think that a sentence is T may be transferred, across the biconditional, into reason to make or allow the assertoric move which it expresses. And “T” is descriptively normative in the sense that the practices of those for whom warranted assertibility is a descriptive norm are exactly as they would be if they consciously selected the assertoric moves which they were prepared to make or allow in the light of whether or not the sentences involved were T. We already

noted the plausible thought that a distinction between warranted and unwarranted assertion must be respected to a substantial extent by actual assertoric practice if assertions are to be determinate in content; accordingly, the biconditional dependence effected by the DS between predication of “T” and warranted assertion ensures that, to that substantial extent, any actual assertoric practice will be just as it would be if T were a self-conscious goal. In fact, though, the conclusion we ought to draw is stronger than the claim merely that ‘T’ is normative of any assertoric practice. Say that two predicates coincide in (positive) normative force with respect to a practice just in case each is normative within the practice and reason to suppose that either predicate characterises a move is reason to suppose that the other characterises it too. Then what we may conclude is that ‘T’ and ‘warrantedly assertible’ ... coincide in (positive) normative force. For reason to regard a sentence as warrantably assertible is, naturally, reason to endorse the assertion which it may be used to effect, and conversely; and reason to endorse an assertion is, by the DS, reason to regard the sentence expressing it as T, and conversely. So reason to regard a sentence as T is reason to regard it as warrantably assertible, and conversely.

Suppose minimalists agree—as I think they should—that there is good reason to hold that there is at least one constitutive individuating norm of assertion. Wright claims that this agreement alone forces minimalists to concede that truth is both descriptively and prescriptively normative for assertion, since minimalists accept all instances of the schema “It is true that p iff p”. There are several reasons why this claim of Wright’s just seems wrong.

1. It is true—given the schema—that I shall take myself to have warrant to assert that p just in case I take myself to have warrant to assert that it is true that p. However—as we have already seen in our discussion of Williamson’s views—there is a distinction to be drawn between that which is it reasonable for one to do (given the norms that govern a particular practice) and that which it is permissible for one to do (given the norms that govern that practice). Whether I *am* warranted in asserting that p is not the same question as whether I (reasonably) take myself to be warranted in asserting that p. Even if the T-schema does effect a plausible connection between (reasonably) taking oneself to be warranted in asserting that p and (reasonably) taking oneself to be warranted in asserting that it is true that p, there is no sense in which *this* shows that truth coincides with warranted assertion in positive normative force.

2. The established equivalence between ‘p’ and ‘it is true that p’ surely does nothing at all towards establishing that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true. Perhaps the easiest way to see this is to suppose, for the sake of argument, that the sole constitutive individuating norm of assertion is that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe, and then add to this the minimalist claim that the content of the truth predicate is entirely fixed by the disquotational schema. There is just no way of deriving the claim that one ought not to assert that which is not true from the disquotational schema together with the claim that one ought not to assert that which one does not believe.

3. Wright claims that truth is a prescriptive norm of assertion because “any reason to think that a sentence is T may be transferred, across the biconditional, into reason to make or allow the assertoric move which it expresses” (24). But—as Price (1998)

points out—there is something seriously wrong here: that a sentential operator *S* figures in a true biconditional of the form “*Sp* iff *p*” is plainly not sufficient to establish that there is a norm of assertion to the effect that one ought not to assert that *p* unless *Sp*. (Moreover, this same point applies even if the biconditional is necessary and *a priori*.) While it is true that any reason to suppose that *p* is reason to suppose that it is true that *p* (and vice versa), this does nothing at all towards showing that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that *p* unless it is true that *p*.

For these reasons—and others—it seems that we are justified in rejecting Wright’s claim that deflationists are committed to the claim that truth and warranted assertibility coincide in positive normative force. However, I do not think that the difficulties for Wright’s view end here; for the claim that deflationists are committed to holding that warranted assertibility is the *only* norm operative over assertoric discourse also deserves to be treated with suspicion. Even if we allow, with Wright that deflationism is (more or less) committed to the claim that “the truth predicate is merely a device of endorsement of assertions”, it remains open to us to insist that deflationists can allow that assertion is governed by the various norms of quality that Grice proposes. (Could Wright respond by saying that “the” norm of warranted assertibility includes proscription of assertion of that which one does not believe? I don’t think so; that move would take us back to the confusion between having warrant and reasonably taking oneself to have warrant.)

So far, then, I have agreed with Horwich (1998) and Price (1998) that Wright fails to show that considerations concerning the norms of assertion establish that deflationism about truth is an inherently unstable position. However, even if I am right in supposing that Wright’s argument fails, it would (of course) be a serious mistake to suppose that we are now in a position to conclude that there are no considerations concerning normativity that escape the grasp of the deflationist. For all that has been argued thus far, it may yet turn out that there are normative features of the concept of truth that the deflationist is simply unable to capture.

Price (1998) argues for just this conclusion. He claims that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that *p* unless it is true that *p*, and that this is a fundamental feature of the concept of truth that is not captured by the deflationary theory. However, he goes on to insist that there is a sense in which the spirit of the deflationary theory is correct; for the function of the truth predicate is properly given a “minimalist” explanation which shares the anti-metaphysical ambitions of the deflationary theory.

I think that there is at least some reason to claim that Price is wrong on all three of the matters just mentioned.

First, I have already given reason for thinking that it is not a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that *p* unless it is true that *p*. If this is right, then Price’s argument falls over at the beginning. Of course, if it were a norm of belief that one ought not to believe that *p* unless it is true that *p*, then the same set of issues would arise. (Indeed, any norm of the form “one ought not to Φ that *p* unless it is true that *p*” would have this effect.) So, on its own, this is perhaps not an enormously powerful consideration.

Second, it seems to me that, if it were a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that *p* unless it is true that *p*, then the deflationary theorist could accommodate this norm without giving up the claim that the concept of truth is captured entirely by the T-schema. For, after all, the claim that one ought not to assert that *p* unless it is true that *p* can be derived from the claim that one ought not to assert that *p* unless *p* (by way of the T-schema). If the deflationist were to say that it is a norm of *assertion*—nothing to do with truth—that one ought not to assert that *p* unless *p*, then the deflationist can go on to claim that it is a merely derivative norm that one ought not to assert that *p* unless it is true that *p*. (Horwich (1998) uses this kind of strategy in various cases. I do not see why deflationists should not be able to use it just as well (or ill) in the case of assertion.)

Third, I do not think that Price's "minimalist" construal of the function of the truth predicate is satisfactory.⁹ According to Price, the function of 'truth' is to promote agreement in belief:

Roughly speaking, the behavioural effects of beliefs are such that it is in everybody's interests to compare their beliefs to those of others, and to behave as if agreement is good and disagreement is bad—in other words, to behave as if there is a common goal to which everyone is aiming.

I think that the virtues of agreement and consensus are often greatly overrated, and that Price is guilty of such an overrating here. I do not think that it is right to suppose that securing agreement in belief is the primary goal of assertion (though I do agree that one of the benefits of assertion can be that it brings about agreement). If securing agreement in belief were the primary goal of assertion, then we would expect to give much greater approval to brainwashing, indoctrination, ignoring evidence, etc. than we in fact do: there are much easier ways to secure agreement than to engage in the kinds of painstaking inquiries that typify human societies. Plausibly, it is a norm governing communal belief that we ought not to agree that *p* unless *p*; whence, by Price's lights, it seems that there must be a more fundamental norm that escapes his account of truth.

Among the matters not satisfactorily resolved in the above discussion, at least two stand out. First, there is the question whether it *is* a norm of belief that one ought not to believe that *p* unless it is true that *p*. Second, there is the question whether there *are* norms involving truth that cannot be adequately accommodated by the deflationary analysis. While I can't attempt to properly discuss either of these issues here, it is perhaps worth noting that, if one were to deny that it is a norm of belief that one ought not to believe that *p* unless it is true that *p*, it seems plausible to suppose that one will need to say that there is at least some kind of final cause of inquiry that involves truth. Suppose, for example, that one holds that the aim of inquiry is to discover deep and important truths. Is it plausible to suppose that this claim escapes the reach of the deflationary theorist?

For what it's worth, let me add here that there are considerations—e.g. concerning the division of cognitive labour—which suggest to me that it is not a norm of belief that one ought not to believe that which is not true. Too much agreement is stultifying for cognitive life; intellectually healthy societies are societies in which there is reasonably widespread disagreement that traces back not merely to difference in evidential base,

but to difference in assignment of prior probabilities. The norms of belief are essentially norms of belief revision, and they are not much concerned with securing convergence of belief amongst the members of a society. However—as foreshadowed above—believers are members of communities of inquiry, and, I think, there are norms governing communities of inquiry that are particularly concerned with truth. (Disagreement amongst experts is good because it promotes progress towards the attainment of deep and important truths by the community in the longer term. Believers aim, for the large part, at improving their local view, whether or not their views coincide with those of fellow believers. So, the norms of inquiry are connected to truth in a way that the norms of belief are not.)

6 The Doxastic Significance of Disagreement

While I have disagreed with Price’s account of the function of truth, I think that he is right to suppose that we shall make some interesting discoveries if we think about the norms of assertion in the context of an inquiry into the doxastic significance of disagreement. The purpose of this last section of my paper is to give the merest indication of where I think that there is work to be done.

More or less following Kelly (2005), let us say that two individuals are *doxastic peers* with respect to some domain of inquiry just in case: (1) they are equals with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments that bear on that domain of inquiry; and (2) they are equals with respect to general doxastic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, freedom from bias, and so forth. Kelly defends an interesting—and perhaps surprising—thesis about the role that the beliefs of doxastic peers should play in the process of forming one’s beliefs about a given subject matter: namely, that “that role is essentially limited to calling one’s attention to arguments that one might never have considered or to evidence of which one might have been unaware” (168). That doxastic peers believe as they do is not *additional* evidence that bears on the question at hand, above and beyond the other evidence that is available to one.

Kelly’s thesis is controversial but, I think, attractive. Moreover—I believe—it fits naturally with the account of the significance of actual disagreement that I gave several sections back. As Kelly notes, adopting the view that the beliefs of doxastic peers do not constitute additional evidence for the views that they hold does not mean that there is then no role for disagreement to play in a community of inquiry. On the contrary, actual disagreement remains important because the goals of inquiry are best promoted when there is diversity of opinion amongst inquirers (who are doxastic peers): diversity of opinion with respect to given subject matters tends to produce a better pool of evidence (and, more generally, a better pool of beliefs) with respect to that subject matter at later times.

There are various types of subject matters where Kelly’s thesis has significant pull. Perhaps not surprisingly, these subject matters are often ones whose credentials as genuine subject matters have been the target of strenuous objection. Think of those subject matters that the logical positivists simply rejected out of hand (as legitimate domains of cognitive inquiry, and hence as legitimate domains for *belief*): metaphysics, religion, ethics, and so forth. It seems to me that, if you are sympathetic to Kelly’s thesis, then you will also be sympathetic to the notion that it is in precisely *these* kinds of domains that there can be “no fault disagreement” about genuine

matters of fact. Doxastic peers can disagree about (say) whether God exists, without either being required to suppose that the views of the other party give them some additional reason to give up their own views.

Now, suppose that Kelly is right, and consider the case of the norms of assertion as they apply in the case of doxastic peers. It seems to me that it will be perfectly in order for agents to assert their beliefs in circumstances in which they recognise that their fellow conversationalists are doxastic peers with whom they disagree; and for these agents to recognise, too, that it is perfectly in order for their fellow conversationalists to assert their beliefs in these same circumstances. And, by “perfectly in order” here, I mean, *assert without violating any of the norms of assertion*. But this can only be right if we reject the claim that it is a norm of assertion that one ought not to assert that which is not true (or that which one does not know): for, after all, at least one of the parties to a debate between doxastic peers has to be producing falsehoods!

If the above argument is good, then it seems to me that it shows, not merely that truth is not a norm of assertion, but also that truth is not a norm of belief: doxastic peers can disagree without violating any of the norms of belief. This suggests to me that, if we are seeking for some norms involving truth, then, at the very least, we shall need to look beyond individual agents in order to find such norms. However, since it is a little hard to see how the same points can be made at the level of groups of agents, I am inclined to think that we should look instead to something like the aims of inquiry in order to find substantive links involving the notion of truth that *might* trouble deflationary theorists. (Perhaps there are no cases that will trouble the deflationary theorist; but that’s a question for another day. I have taken no stance on that matter in this paper.)

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¹ Strictly, what Grice offers is a taxonomy of “conversational maxims”; however, as we shall see, it is not particularly controversial to suppose that the entire set of “conversational maxims” can be interpreted as a set of norms for assertion.

² According to Williamson (2000:243), this point is noted in Gazdar (1979:46-8).

³ I have tidied up some of these norms, and altered the formulation of others. For instance, I have amended Grice's second maxim of quality—Do not say what you believe to be false—to include proscription of assertion of that which one fails to believe.

⁴ Of course, there are many questions that are raised by this discussion. Even if it is true that one is sometimes warranted in asserting a proposition by its probability (short of 1) alone, it does seem that there is something wrong with the assertions (and claims to knowledge) in the lottery case. Perhaps the chief difficulty is just that the numbers are too small in the lottery that Williamson describes: one in a million is not such an awfully small chance, particularly in comparison with one in 10^{1000} (which is much closer to the quantum probability in question). However—despite Williamson's claims to the contrary—there are also good Gricean grounds for deeming the assertions in Williamson's lottery case to be inappropriate (cf. the discussion in Weiner (unpublished)).

⁵ Of course, it might also yet turn out that it is not the case that there are evidential norms of assertion. This is a matter that we shall get to in due course.

⁶ Perhaps it is worth noting that there is no inconsistency between the claims (1) that one ought only to assert that which one believes; (2) that one ought only to believe that which is true; and (3) that it is not the case that one ought only to assert that which is true. Even if it is a norm of assertion that one ought only to assert that which one believes, and a norm of belief that one ought only to believe that which is true, it does not follow that it is a norm of assertion (nor of anything else) that one ought only to assert that which is true.

⁷ Compare Williamson (2000:245): "Assertion obviously has some kind of evidential norm. It is somehow better to make an assertion on the basis of adequate evidence than to make it without such a basis."

⁸ Nonetheless, the claims are distinct. Plainly enough, we have that, necessarily, if one does not believe that *p*, then one does not know that *p*. If this were sufficient to support that claim that, if one does not believe that *p*, then one is confident that one does not know that *p*, then (by contraposition, and double negation elimination) one would have the claim that if one is not confident that one does not know that *p*, then one believes that *p*. But, alas, there is a gulf here that cannot be bridged: my recognising that I do not believe that *p* may suffice to justify my confidence that I do not know that *p* (should I happen to have that confidence), but this does not guarantee that I will be confident that I do not know that *p* whenever I do not believe that *p*.

⁹ That's not to say that there are no worse views of this kind to be found. Compare Fuhrmann (1997:91): "We assert sentences ... because we believe that doing so serves ... the desire to change other people's beliefs so as to be more like ours". I would prefer to be corrected than to bring other people to share my false beliefs.