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CI

Introduction

CI.P1 This is an essay in epistemology and the philosophy of language. It concerns epistemology in that it is a manifesto for epistemic independence: the independence of good thinking from practical considerations. It defends the independence of thought from the most prominent threat that has surfaced in the last twenty years of epistemological theorizing: the phenomenon of shiftiness of proper assertoric speech with practical context. It concerns philosophy of language in that it defends a functionalist account of the normativity of assertion in conjunction with an integrated view of the normativity of constative speech acts.

CI.P2 Roughly, the foe of independence argues as follows: proper assertoric speech and proper thought go hand in hand. Intuitively, proper assertoric speech is shifty with practical stakes. Therefore, proper thought is shifty with practical stakes.

CI.P3 This book argues that the foe's argument does not go through, and that shiftiness of assertoric speech is exactly what we should expect in a picture where epistemically proper thought is practical-context-invariant. To do that, it defends a view of the normativity of constatives sourced in their epistemic function, which neatly delivers the goods: shiftiness of proper assertoric speech in conjunction with independence of proper thought from practical considerations.

CI.P4 The book does three main things:

CI.P5 First, it puts forth a new, generalized dilemma for practical-context-independent views of epistemic normativity. I argue that the foe's argument against the independence of proper thought from the practical threatens to dangerously generalize in three ways: first, it threatens to generalize to all context-invariant norms of assertoric speech. Second, it threatens to generalize beyond mere assertives, to all constative speech acts. Third, it threatens to generalize beyond knowledge, to epistemic

Shifty Speech and Independent Thought: Epistemic Normativity in Context. Mona Simion, Oxford University Press (2021). © Mona Simion. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192895288.003.0002

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normativity as a whole. All in all, I argue, the foe's argument is more dangerous for epistemic independence than we took it to be.

CI.P6 Second, the book looks at extant views that attempt to preserve the independence of thought in the face of assertion's practical shiftiness and argues they remain ultimately unsuccessful. First, Assertion Sensitivism—embracing a context-variant view of the normativity of assertion—is shown to be strongly incompatible with uncontroversial value theoretic claims, and thus to be rejected on prior plausibility grounds. Second, pragmatic warranted assertability manoeuvres are shown to fail to generalize beyond assertions featuring knowledge attributions. Last, views appealing to higher-order knowledge to explain away the data threatening the independence of proper thought are shown to fail on normative grounds.

CI.P7 The third and central aim of the book is to go on a rescue mission on behalf of independence. To this effect, I first show that, against orthodoxy, the foe's argument from practical shiftiness of proper assertoric speech against the independence of proper thought from the practical does not go through, for it rests on normative ambiguation. Second, I defend a non-shifty, functionalist account of the epistemic normativity of assertion. Third, I generalize my account to all constative speech and I develop the first integrated account of the epistemic normativity of constatives in the literature. Last, I defend my view for the particular cases of conjecturing, telling, and moral assertion.

CI.P8 While the book hangs nicely together for someone with my knowledge-centric, purist taste in epistemic normativity, several results in this book also hold independently of it. For instance, one need not be a knowledge norm champion, nor a Classical Invariantist, in order to accept that the argument for the incompatibility of the two doesn't work, due to normative ambiguation. Indeed, foes of Classical Invariantism can take this result as a challenge, while defenders of other non-shifty norms (e.g. justification norms) can just enjoy the good news, since the result generalizes. Also, one need not like the knowledge norm in order to like and embrace the functionalist picture of the normativity of assertion defended here: keeping the functionalist structure fixed, a different view of the function may deliver a different normative account. Last but not least, the results in the third part of the

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book can survive even readers who are not inclined to buy into anything that happened in the first two parts, since the accounts there are defended on largely independent grounds.

CI.P9 As some readers may be interested in different parts of the book, in what follows I give a brief sketch of its contents.

CI.S1 ## Game Plan

CI.P10 **Chapter 1: The Context Shiftiness Dilemma Generalized.** Most actors in the debate assume that the intuitive variability of proper assertion with practical stakes (the *Shiftiness Intuition*) motivates the following dilemma: either 1) we embrace a knowledge norm of assertion, and are forced into a view that takes knowledge, or 'knowledge', to be sensitive to practical stakes, or 2) we stick to our Classical Invariantist guns, but then the knowledge norm goes out the window and we get practical sensitivity in the normativity of assertion (the *Shiftiness Dilemma*). This chapter brings this dilemma to centre stage and argues that it threatens to generalize in three ways: to all context-invariant norms of proper assertoric speech, to all constative speech acts, and to all epistemic normative constraints. If this is right, we should be more worried about this dilemma than we've been so far. The following three chapters look at views that attempt to safeguard the independence of thought in the face of assertion's practical shiftiness.

CI.P11 **Chapter 2: Epistemic WAMs.** This chapter looks into the feasibility of preserving the independence of epistemically proper thought from practical considerations via the second horn of the Shiftiness Dilemma. For people who like Classical Invariantism about knowledge attributions, the jump from variation in assertability with stakes to contextualism or pragmatic encroachment seemed rushed. As such, these authors venture to account for the Shiftiness Intuition under a Classical Invariantist umbrella by arguing for context-sensitivity of proper assertability. This chapter argues that the view fails on prior plausibility due to being incompatible with the following highly uncontroversial value-theoretic claim: norms of type X are associated with values of type X.

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CI.P12 **Chapter 3: Pragmatic WAMs.** In light of embracing the Shiftiness Dilemma, the vast majority of philosophers accept Assertion Incompatibilism: given intuitive variability of proper assertion with practical stakes, Classical Invariantism is incompatible with a biconditional knowledge norm of assertion. There are also a few dissenting voices, however: some invariantists venture to preserve both Classical Invariantism and the Knowledge Norm of Assertion (Assertion Compatibilism). There are two varieties of Compatibilism available on the market. This chapter discusses the first of the two: Pragmatic Compatibilism employs a pragmatic warranted assertability manoeuvre to explain away the shiftiness data. The chapter argues that the view has difficulties with delivering epistemic normative independence for cases of shiftiness of assertions that do not involve knowledge attributions or explicitly tabled error possibilities.

CI.P13 **Chapter 4: KK Compatibilism.** According to KK Compatibilism, the unassertability in the high stakes contextualist cases can be explained in terms of the subjects' lack of higher-order knowledge: Although, strictly speaking, all that is needed for proper action—assertion included—is first-order knowledge, when the stakes are high, we tend to find people who act without knowing that they meet the condition for proper action blameworthy for so doing. This chapter argues that (1) the view misidentifies the epistemic deficit that is explanatorily salient in contextualist cases, in that the absence of second-order knowledge is not a difference maker, and (2) on closer look, the account also requires normative finessing for extensional adequacy.

CI.P14 **Chapter 5: Against the Shiftiness Dilemma.** This chapter argues that the Shiftiness Dilemma is a false dilemma: KNA (the Knowledge Norm of Assertion) is perfectly compatible with Classical Invariantism. Furthermore, it offers independent reason to believe that if KNA and Classical Invariantism are true, variation in proper assertability is exactly what we may expect. More precisely, the chapter advances the debate in two important ways: (1) it identifies a widely assumed assumption concerning epistemic norm individuation (Content Individuation), which gets the Shiftiness Dilemma off the ground; (2) it argues that Content Individuation is false, and that therefore the norm at stake in the debate need not be epistemic.

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CI.P15 **Chapter 6: Assertion Functionalism and Context.** This chapter shows how to reconcile Classical Invariantism with the Knowledge Norm of Assertion. My basic proposal is that we can combine invariantism with a functionalist account of assertion: according to the account I favour, assertion is governed by a knowledge norm in virtue of its epistemic function of generating testimonial knowledge. Requirements generated by other functions of assertion, though, such as its prudential function, can override the constraints imposed by the epistemic function, and render the knowledge requirement either too strong or too weak for all-things-considered permissible assertion. All-things-considered permissible assertion can vary with practical stakes; epistemically permissible assertion does not.

CI.P16 **Chapter 7: Knowledge Norms for Constative Speech Acts.** This chapter is up to an ambitious task: it develops the first integrated account of the epistemic normativity of constatives. In order to do that, it argues for a generalized knowledge-based account of the epistemic normativity of constative speech acts, and it develops the corresponding accounts for, respectively, assertives, predictives, retrodictives, descriptives, ascriptives, informatives, confirmatives, concessives, retractives, assentives, dissentives, disputatives, responsives, suggestives, and suppositives. The chapter argues for a knowledge account from three different angles: (1) the nature of communicative speech acts, (2) the relation between assertion and other constatives, and (3) the normativity of belief together with constatives' epistemic function. In the next three chapters, I look more closely into the epistemic normativity of three constatives—conjecture, telling, and moral assertions—and I examine and account for the contextual variation of their propriety.

CI.P17 **Chapter 8: The Epistemic Normativity of Conjecture.** This chapter has two aims: (1) it breaks new ground in that it develops the first fully fledged account of the epistemic normativity of conjecture in the literature; (2) it goes sharply against orthodoxy, in arguing that the epistemic requirements placed on us by conjecture are stronger than those governing assertion. According to the view developed here, one's conjecture that *p* is permissible only if one knows that one has warrant, but not sufficient warrant to believe that *p*.

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CLP18 **Chapter 9: No Special Treatment for the Epistemic Normativity of Telling.** While recent years have featured a vast amount of literature concerned with the epistemic norm for assertion, comparatively little attention has been paid to the corresponding norm governing acts of telling. One plausible explanation for this is that people have generally taken assertion and telling to fall under the same normative constraints. Recent work, however, ventures to show (1) that this assumption is false, and (2) that the epistemic propriety of instances of telling partly depends on what's at stake for the hearer. This chapter argues that the case against normative commonality for assertion and telling fails due to speech act theoretic and value theoretic inaccuracies. In a nutshell, the chapter argues that there is nothing special about the epistemic normativity of telling.

CLP19 **Chapter 10: A Special Case: Moral Assertion.** This chapter is concerned with moral assertion. In recent years much attention has been given to the epistemic credentials of belief based on moral testimony. Some people think pure moral deference is wrong; others disagree. It comes as a surprise, however, that while the epistemic responsibilities of the receiver of moral testimony have been closely scrutinized, little to no discussion has focused on the epistemic duties of the speaker. This chapter aims to supply this lack: it defends a functionalist account of the normativity of moral assertion. According to this view, in virtue of its function of reliably generating moral understanding in the audience, a moral assertion that *p* needs be knowledgeable and accompanied by a contextually appropriate explanation why *p*.