Two Mistakes about Epistemic Propriety

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Abstract. Important recent work in epistemology depends on one or the other of two claims: (1) Impropriety due to lack of a particular epistemic feature suffices for epistemic impropriety; and (2) Having justification to believe P suffices for having warrant to assert P. I present and defend several arguments against both claims. These arguments undermine (among other things) (a) the main counterexamples to the view that knowledge suffices for warrant to assert; (b) a main argument that justified belief suffices for knowledge; and (c) a prima facie promising defense of the Credit Requirement on knowledge.

1. Introduction

I’m going to expose as mistakes the following two claims:

**Mistake 1 (M1):** If an “epistemically evaluable” item (e.g., a belief, an assertion) is somehow inappropriate because it lacks a particular epistemic feature, then the item is (on balance) epistemically inappropriate.

**Mistake 2 (M2):** If you have justification to believe a proposition (i.e., you’re positioned to form an epistemically appropriate belief in the proposition),\(^1\) then you have warrant to assert the proposition (i.e., you’re positioned to make an epistemically appropriate assertion—a **warranted** assertion—of that proposition).

In what follows, I’ll present and defend several arguments against both M1 and M2. That is, I’ll argue for the following two theses:

\(^1\) My use of ‘justification’ throughout this paper mirrors that found in (e.g.) Pryor (2005).
• Even if a given epistemically evaluable item is somehow inappropriate because it lacks a particular epistemic feature, the item might nevertheless be epistemically appropriate.2

• Even if you lack warrant to assert a proposition, you might nevertheless have justification to believe the proposition.

A range of important recent work in epistemology depends on one or the other of M1 and M2. To help ensure widespread interest in my arguments against M1 and M2, I’ll start by identifying some of this work. I’ll show how one or the other of M1 and M2 underwrites (among other things) (a) the main counterexamples to the view that knowledge suffices for warrant to assert3; (b) a main argument that epistemically justified belief suffices for knowledge4; and (c) a prima facie promising defense of the Credit Requirement on knowledge.5 I’ll be arguing that you’re justified in endorsing some or other of (a)-(c) only if you’re justified in believing one or the other of M1 and M2.

2 It’s generally accepted that an epistemically evaluable item’s being somehow (e.g., morally or prudentially) inappropriate doesn’t suffice for the item’s being epistemically inappropriate. That’s to say, the following thesis is generally rejected: If an epistemically evaluable item is somehow inappropriate, then the item is epistemically inappropriate. This claim—call it Obvious Mistake (OM)—differs from M1 in at least two important respects: (1) M1 is logically weaker than OM (OM entails M1, but M1 doesn’t return the favor). (2) As we’re about to see (§2), a range of important recent work depends on M1 (which is not true of the generally rejected OM).

3 Levin (2008) and Brown (forthcoming).


5 Riggs (forthcoming).
Equivalently: If you’re not justified in believing either of M1 or M2, then you’re not justified in endorsing any of (a)-(c).

2. (Some of) What’s at Stake

(a) Much recent work on assertion centers on the question how having warrant to assert (‘warranted assertability’) relates to knowledge. Many philosophers have jointly built an impressive prima facie case that you have warrant to assert P only if you know P.\(^6\) Call this thesis **Knowledge Is Necessary (KIN)**. Others aim to undermine the case for KIN by arguing that the data it appeals to are explained at least as well by certain weaker requirements on warranted assertability.\(^7\) Most parties to the debate over KIN seem to agree, however, that knowledge suffices for warranted assertability: provided that you know P, you have warrant to assert P. Call this **Knowledge Is Sufficient (KIS)**.\(^8,9\)


\(^7\) See, e.g., Weiner (2005), Douven (2006), Kvanvig (2003, forthcoming-a), Lackey (2007a), and [suppressed].

\(^8\) For explicit endorsement of KIS, see (e.g.) DeRose (2002) and Hawthorne (2004: 23).

\(^9\) Notably, some of those who discuss the view that knowledge suffices for warrant to assert don’t always formulate it quite like I do here. Here are two alternative statements recently suggested by Jessica Brown (2008: 89-90; forthcoming: 1-2): (1) You know P only if you’re positioned to make an assertion of P that’s not incorrect on epistemic grounds. (2) You know P only if you’re positioned to make an assertion of P with which there’s nothing epistemically wrong. These alternative statements of KIS incorrectly equate an assertion’s being (on balance) epistemically proper (the property involved in both KIS and KIN) with (respectively) an assertion’s not being (somehow) incorrect on epistemic grounds and an assertion’s having no epistemic defects. My arguments against M1 (§3) will show that the former equation is incorrect; and the latter equation is intuitively wrong (even if an item falls short of some or other positive epistemic status, it may well be on balance epistemically appropriate).
The apparent widespread agreement on KIS is noteworthy, as the view bears importantly on various central debates in epistemology. For example, when combined with a couple other prima facie plausible claims, KIS entails the falsity of so called

**Classic Invariantism**\(^\text{10}\) —the two-part thesis that (i) ‘S knows P’ expresses the same epistemic property across all conversational contexts, and (ii) whether a belief has this property is determined entirely by “truth-relevant” factors (e.g., being well supported by one’s total evidence, being produced by a reliable process). Keith DeRose (2002) combines KIS with KIN to argue for **Contextualism**—the thesis that ‘S knows that P’ expresses different epistemic properties in different conversational contexts.\(^\text{11}\)

Though there’s widespread agreement on KIS, the view has recently come under attack. Janet Levin (2008) and Jessica Brown (forthcoming) describe what they regard as counterexamples to KIS, cases in which a person knows P yet lacks warrant to assert P. After relaying a couple of representative cases, I’ll argue that Levin’s and Brown’s counterexamples depend on M1. To begin, consider the following example from Levin (2008: 374-5):

**Theft:** There are… cases in which it seems normatively inappropriate to assert… a proposition, even if one counts as knowing it… If I can’t find the expensive ring you gave me, and have overwhelming reason to believe that it’s been stolen


\(^{11}\) Briefly, the argument is this (DeRose [2002: 187-8]): Suppose both KIS and KIN are true. It follows that the truth conditions for ‘S has warrant to assert P’ are identical with the truth conditions for ‘S knows P’. But the truth conditions for ‘S has warrant to assert P’ differ across conversational contexts. So, the truth conditions for ‘S knows P’ differ across conversational contexts. So, if KIS and KIN are true, then Contextualism is true.
(I’ve heard that there were jewel thieves in the neighborhood, and saw a masked figure slip out of my bedroom window as I was walking up the steps to my house), I may refuse to assert this, and continue to look for it—not because I don’t know that it’s been stolen, but because I want to show you how important it was to me.\textsuperscript{12}

And here is Brown’s initial counterexample to KIS (forthcoming: 11-12):

\textbf{Affair:} A husband is berating his friend for not telling him that his wife has been having an affair even though the friend has known of the affair for weeks.

\textbf{Husband:} Why didn’t you say she was having an affair? You’ve known for weeks.

\textbf{Friend:} Ok, I admit I knew, but it wouldn’t have been right for me to say anything before I was absolutely sure. I knew the damage it would cause to your marriage.\textsuperscript{13}

Brown (forthcoming: 12) offers the following commentary on \textit{Affair}:

Intuitively [cases like \textit{Affair}] put pressure on [KIS]: in [such cases], a subject claims that… she… knows that p but that it would be inappropriate for her to

\textsuperscript{12} For another attempted counterexample to KIS, see Levin (2008: 373-4). Readers may easily apply my treatment of \textit{Theft} to Levin’s other example.

\textsuperscript{13} For Brown’s other putative counterexample to KIS (‘RESULT’), see (forthcoming: 11). As before, readers may easily apply my treatment of \textit{Affair} to Brown’s other example.
assert that p. Further, it seems that the relevant intuition is that the subject is not in a good enough epistemic position to assert p despite knowing p. For instance, in AFFAIR, the friend says, ‘Ok, I admit I knew, but it wouldn’t have been right for me to say anything before I was absolutely sure. I knew the damage it would cause to your marriage.’

Both of these counterexamples to KIS depend on M1: you’re justified in thinking them counterexamples to KIS only if you’re justified in believing M1. Contraposed, my contention is this: if you’re not justified in believing M1, then you’re not justified in thinking the above cases counterexamples to KIS. Let me explain.

As many readers will have noticed, Levin’s and Brown’s own commentaries suggest that what’s clearly true of their subjects is this: because those subjects bear somewhat suboptimal epistemic relations to the relevant propositions (*The ring was stolen, Your wife is unfaithful*), neither is positioned to make an assertion that’s both morally and prudentially appropriate. In Theft, the subject’s asserting that the ring was stolen would have conveyed a lack of care or concern. In Affair, the friend’s telling the husband about his cheating wife would have damaged the marriage. Presumably, if the relevant propositions had been (say) epistemically certain for the subjects, such assertions at least might have been morally and prudentially appropriate. But absent a better epistemic relation to those propositions, it wouldn’t have been morally or prudentially appropriate to assert them.

What’s clearly true, then, of the Levin/Brown subjects is that certain assertions would be morally or prudentially improper for them because they bear somewhat
suboptimal epistemic relations to the relevant propositions. But you can’t justifiably infer from that last claim that the subjects lack warrant to assert those propositions unless you’re justified in believing M1—in particular, unless you’re justified in believing that an assertion’s being somehow inappropriate because it lacks a particular epistemic feature suffices for its being epistemically inappropriate. We can conclude that if you’re not justified in believing M1, then you’re not justified in regarding Levin’s and Brown’s cases as counterexamples to KIS—i.e., as cases involving a subject who knows a proposition yet isn’t positioned to make an (on balance) *epistemically* proper assertion of it. In this way, Levin’s and Brown’s alleged counterexamples to KIS depend crucially on M1.

(b) Jonathan Sutton (2005, 2007) argues that epistemically justified belief suffices for knowledge: you hold a justified belief in P only if you know P. Call this *Justification Entails Knowledge* (JEK). Obviously, Sutton’s arguments for JEK threaten numerous common views—e.g., that there can be justified false beliefs; that “Gettierized” beliefs are justified but not knowledge; that you can justifiably believe you’ll lose the lottery without knowing it; that we can use *epistemic justification* to provide a noncircular analysis of *knowledge*; and so on. In what follows, I’ll show how one of Sutton’s main arguments for JEK—the so called *Assertion Argument*—depends on M2 (the view that justification to believe suffices for warrant to assert).  

Here is Sutton’s Assertion Argument for JEK ([2005: 375-6]; cf. [2007: 44-8]):

14 For critical assessment of Sutton’s other two arguments for JEK, see [suppressed].
[S]uppose that Andy has a justified... belief that $p$ that does not amount to knowledge that $p$... [Andy] asserts that $p$ to Bob who has, we can suppose, the very best reasons for thinking—indeed, he knows—that Andy is expressing what is for him a justified belief. [footnote omitted] Bob, then, has acquired a... belief that $p$ that is justified... And yet, the knowledge rule\footnote{That is, the claim that “warranted assertion requires knowledge” (Sutton [2005: 374]), what we’re here calling Knowledge Is Necessary (KIN).} tells us, Andy should not have asserted that $p$. This is exceptionally puzzling... If the beliefs transmitted [from one thinker to another via assertion] meet the primary standards governing good belief for both speaker and hearer..., it would be mysterious if the assertions transmitting the beliefs failed to meet the standards governing good assertion. On the contrary, the assertions in question have to meet the standards governing good assertion impeccably since they transmit impeccable beliefs. It is not, however, the knowledge rule that is at fault... It is our initial supposition that was at fault. There are no justified... beliefs falling short of knowledge...

Focus on this key explicit premise of Sutton’s Assertion Argument: “[Assertions like Andy’s] have to meet the standards governing good assertion impeccably since they transmit impeccable beliefs.” Employing this premise commits the Assertion Argument’s proponent to the following more general claim: \textbf{If} you are (like Andy) positioned to express an epistemically proper belief in $P$, then you’re positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion of $P$. And that more general claim seems to carry commitment to M2: it’s exceedingly difficult to see how you could sensibly endorse the former while being disposed to reject—or even withhold on—the latter. So, it seems...
you’re not justified in believing the above key explicit premise unless you’re also justified in endorsing M2. As the Levin/Brown counterexamples to KIS depend on M1, the Assertion Argument for JEK depends on M2.

(c) The so called Credit Requirement (CR) on knowledge says that “S knows that p only if being right about p in this instance is attributable to S as a cognitive agent” (Riggs [forthcoming: 1]).\(^{16}\) We get different versions of CR by plugging in different analyses or explications of the attributability relation that CR invokes. Depending on the analysis of that relation a given strain of CR employs, it may sidestep objections that target versions using a different analysis of the attributability relation.

That said, some philosophers have presented what they regard as counterexamples to any version of CR, no matter what analysis of the attributability relation it employs.\(^ {17}\) Among the most widely discussed such examples is one Jennifer Lackey describes in (2007b). After relaying Lackey’s counterexample, I’ll show how a prima facie promising attempted defense of CR (Riggs [forthcoming: 12-13]) depends on both M1 and M2.

Lackey claims her example involves a subject who gains knowledge from a testimonial exchange yet doesn’t deserve credit for acquiring the relevant true belief. Here’s her case and subsequent commentary (2007b: 352):

**Chicago Visitor:** Having just arrived at the train station in Chicago, Morris wishes to obtain directions to the Sears Tower. He looks around, approaches the

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\(^{16}\) Different strains of CR are developed and defended by, e.g., Greco (2003, 2007), Riggs (2007, forthcoming), Sosa (2007), and Zagzebski (1996).

\(^{17}\) See, e.g., Pritchard (2005), Lackey (2007b), and Kvanvig (forthcoming-b).
first adult passerby that he sees, and asks how to get to his desired destination. The passerby, who happens to be a Chicago resident who knows the city extraordinarily well, provides Morris with impeccable directions to the Sears Tower by telling him that it is located two blocks east of the train station. Morris unhesitatingly forms the corresponding true belief. [...] There is nothing that is particularly unusual about [Chicago Visitor], and it is nearly universally accepted that a situation such as Morris’s not only can but often does result in testimonial knowledge. Yet it is precisely this sort of case that shows [CR] to be false… [I]t is the passer-by’s experience with and knowledge of the city of Chicago that explains why Morris ended up with a true belief rather than a false belief. Moreover, notice that Morris approached the first adult passer-by that he saw, and so even the fact that he received the information from one source rather than another cannot be attributed to Morris. Thus, though it is plausible to say that Morris acquired knowledge from the passer-by, there seems to be no substantive sense in which Morris deserves credit for holding the true belief that he does…

Wayne Riggs (forthcoming: 9-11) develops what’s perhaps the most promising attempt to defend CR from cases like Chicago Visitor.18 It’ll prove useful to quote Riggs’s defense at length (emphases mine unless otherwise noted):

[Recognizing the fact that Morris could reasonably withhold belief in the stranger’s testimony] opens up the possibility of claiming that it is epistemically

18 Other recent defenses include Greco (2007) and Sosa (2007).
inappropriate for Morris to believe the stranger’s testimony. It gives us room to raise our standards a bit regarding testimonial belief. Not every casual transfer of information need be acknowledged as a transfer of knowledge. Indeed, we frequently acknowledge this in our behavior.

For example, imagine that a few moments after Morris speaks to the stranger, someone mistakes him for a Chicago native, and asks him where the Tower is. He has not yet been there, nor is it visible from where they are standing… [W]hat is it epistemically reasonable for [Morris] to say? If he took himself to know [Riggs’s emphasis] the location of the Tower, he would presumably tell the new stranger straightforwardly and with no caveats, that the Tower is that [Riggs’s emphasis] way. But what we would expect a reasonable person to do, I maintain, is to say, at most, “Someone just told me that the Tower is that [Riggs’s emphasis] way.” […] This suggests that we do not take ourselves to know things on the basis of the kind of casual testimony described in Lackey’s original example.

So we now see that the apparent costs of denying that Morris has testimonial knowledge—[which include] creeping skepticism…—are merely apparent. These are not costs that we would be forced to bear if we raise the standards for testimonial knowledge. Perhaps there are other costs that I have not considered, but I hope to have provided some reasons for accepting higher standards for testimonial knowledge.
The overall argument expressed in these passages is meant to “address the objection… that if Morris does believe, then he knows, and yet he fails to deserve credit for being right” (forthcoming: 10). I think that a careful reconstruction of Riggs’s argument reveals its dependence on both M1 and M2. Let me explain.

As I understand it, Riggs’s argument is supposed to provide reason to deny that Morris knows the content of the stranger’s testimony (The Tower is two blocks east of the station—call this T). It’s supposed to do so by making plausible the claim that Morris lacks justification to believe T. And the key support for that claim is that Morris lacks warrant to assert T. More precisely:

I. Given Morris’s suboptimal epistemic relation to T, he isn’t positioned to make an “epistemically reasonable” assertion of T—i.e., Morris lacks warrant to assert T.

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19 Notably, in a recent discussion of Riggs’s defense of CR from Chicago Visitor, Lackey (2009) doesn’t address the important argument that Riggs develops in the lately quoted passages. The following assessment of Riggs’s argument can thus be viewed as filling a gap in recent work on CR.

Riggs seems to concede that, in Chicago Visitor, Morris believes T yet lacks credit for holding his true belief in T. Given this concession, the only way to defend CR from the conditional just quoted is to argue that Morris doesn’t know T. Further, we can understand Chicago Visitor so that Morris holds an “ungettiered” true belief in T. On such a reading, Morris fails to know T only if he lacks justification to believe T. (Cf. Riggs [forthcoming: 14]: “…I [have argued] that truly casual, unreflective acceptances of testimony simply do not result in knowledge. Indeed, they ought not result in belief.”)

21 Couldn’t we understand Riggs to be making a different claim here than that Morris lacks warrant to assert T? For example: couldn’t we understand Riggs’s use of ‘epistemically reasonable’ so that one’s not believing one knows P suffices for one’s not being positioned to make an “epistemically reasonable” assertion of P? This use of ‘epistemically reasonable’ expresses a relation that’s logically independent of the relation here expressed by ‘warrant to
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Writes Riggs: “[Morris] has not yet been [to the Tower], nor is it visible from where they are standing… [W]hat is it epistemically reasonable for [Morris] to say? […] [W]hat we would expect a reasonable person to do… is to say, at most, ‘Someone just told me that the Tower is \textit{that way.}’”

2. \textbf{If Morris is justified in thinking he knows T, then} he has warrant to assert T.

Writes Riggs: “If [Morris] took himself to \textit{know} the location of the Tower, he would presumably tell the new stranger… that the Tower is \textit{that way.}” Now why interpret this as 2? Well, Riggs needs to combine this claim with 1 to get something he can then use to argue that Morris lacks justification to believe T. Given this constraint, 2 seems the best available reading of the quoted bit above.

\[\text{assert}’. \text{ For you can be positioned to make an epistemically appropriate assertion of } P \text{ even if you don’t believe you know } P. \text{ And on the other hand, you can lack warrant to assert } P \text{ even if you believe you know } P.\]

Here’s a problem with interpreting Riggs according to the above suggestion. On that reading, Riggs clearly hasn’t earned the conclusion he’s after. As I understand him, Riggs is trying to defend CR from Chicago Visitor by arguing (contra Lackey) that Morris doesn’t know T. Now it seems you can know P even if you don’t believe you know P—indeed, it seems you can know P even if you believe (incorrectly) that you don’t know P. Hence, interpreting 1 so that it denies to Morris just the kind of “epistemic reasonableness” to assert described above won’t give Riggs adequate raw material from which to derive his target conclusion (again, that Morris doesn’t know T). On the other hand, interpreting 1 so that it denies Morris warrant to assert T at least promises to provide such raw material (note, e.g., that proponents of KIS would immediately conclude that Morris doesn’t know T). In light of these considerations, I favor my reading of 1 over the reading suggested above. (Thanks to Aidan McGlynn for comments that led me to add this footnote.)
3. So: Morris isn’t justified in thinking he knows T. [1,2]

4. If Morris isn’t justified in thinking he knows T, then he isn’t justified in believing T.

As I understand him, Riggs argues that Morris doesn’t know T by arguing that Morris lacks justification to believe T. 4 is the obvious way to get from Morris’s lack of justification to think he knows T to its being “epistemically inappropriate for Morris to believe” T.

C. So: Morris isn’t justified in believing T—and thus, doesn’t know T. [3,4]

If this argument succeeds, then (contra Lackey) we can—without “going skeptical”—plausibly defend CR from Chicago Visitor by denying that Morris knows the content of the stranger’s testimony.22

So reconstructed, Riggs’s defense of CR depends on both M1 and M2. 2 and 4 jointly entail M2. To see that the defense depends on M1 as well, notice that Morris’s predicament seems quite similar to that of the subjects in the Levin/Brown counterexamples to KIS (§2a). What’s clearly true of Morris is this: due to the suboptimal epistemic relation he presently bears to the content of the stranger’s testimony, it’d be somewhat prudentially and/or morally inappropriate for him to flat-out assert that content to his new audience. But this point won’t justify you in believing 1 unless you’re justified in believing M1—in particular, unless you’re justified in believing

22 Thanks to Aidan McGlynn for extremely helpful discussion of my reconstruction of Riggs’s defense of CR.
that an assertion’s being somehow inappropriate because it lacks a particular epistemic feature suffices for the assertion’s being epistemically inappropriate.

I conclude, then, that unless you’re justified in believing both M1 and M2, you shouldn’t accept Riggs’s attempted defense of CR from Chicago Visitor. Riggs’s defense depends on both M1 and M2.

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In §3, I’ll present and defend several arguments against M1 and M2. Before moving on, though, I want to highlight a few other important recent pieces of epistemology that depend on M2.

Consider first the so called Belief/Assertion Parallel (BAP), which has it that “belief is a species of assertion, to wit, subvocalized assertion…” (Douven [2006: 453]).23 Contemporary proponents of BAP include Michael Dummett (1981), Timothy Williamson (2000), Jonathan Adler (2002), and Igor Douven (2006). Williamson expresses BAP this way: “[O]ccurrently believing p stands to asserting p as the inner stands to the outer” (2000: 255). BAP plays a prominent role at the intersection of epistemology, philosophy of language, and action theory. For example, Adler (2002) builds and defends what is perhaps the literature’s strongest case for BAP, which in turn is a key premise in his argument for the position he calls Strong Evidentialism.24 Endorsing Adler’s pro-BAP argument, Douven (2006: §1) uses BAP to undermine the

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23 The label ‘Belief/Assertion Parallel’ is due to Jonathan Adler (2002). See Peirce (1934) for an earlier expression of BAP.

standard cumulative case for KIN. What’s most important about BAP for present
purposes, however, is that it entails M2: supposing that justification to believe P suffices
for justification to believe P *occurrently*, BAP entails that justification to believe P
suffices for warrant to assert P (since to believe P [*occurrently*] *just is* to assert P
[subvocally]).

Second, consider the following anti-KIN argument sketched by Crispin Wright
(1996: 935):

[W]arranted assertion… is simply the exterior counterpart of warranted *belief*
and there is, prima facie, no plausibility whatever in the suggestion that
possession of a sufficient reason to believe a proposition demands nothing less
than knowledge of it.

Notice that this argument “reverses” Sutton’s Assertion Argument (cf. Sutton 2005: 394):
whereas Sutton argues from M2 and KIN to JEK, Wright argues from M2 and ~JEK to
~KIN. The important point here is that Wright’s argument depends on M2 no less than
does Sutton’s.

A third and final important recent bit of epistemology that quite obviously
depends on M2 is Alexander Bird’s argument for the thesis that “the norms for judgment
and assertion must be identical, whatever they are” (2007: 95). Writes Bird:

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25 I have in mind here the argument Williamson develops in chapter 11 (“Assertion”) of (2000).
26 In light of the point that BAP entails M2, we can see that Williamson’s (2000) endorsement of
BAP doesn’t sit well with his commitment to both KIN *and* the existence of justified false beliefs.
If one is entitled to judge that $p$ one should be entitled to assert that $p$ to oneself. [...] At the same time, what one is entitled to assert to others one is entitled to judge. [...] This... shows that the norms for judgment and assertion must be identical, whatever they are.\textsuperscript{27}

Combine all this with the preceding material in §2 and you can see that, besides being interesting in its own right, the question whether M1 and M2 are correct bears on several important epistemological issues. Recognition of such facts motivates the following critical assessment of M1 and M2.

3. Against M1 and M2

(a) My first consideration against M1 is an argument from analogy. Its key premise is that analogues of M1 for other kinds of propriety are clearly false. I’ll focus on analogues of M1 for moral and prudential propriety:

**Moral Analogue of Mistake 1 (MAM1):** If a “morally evaluable” item is somehow inappropriate because it lacks a certain moral feature, then the item is morally inappropriate.

\textsuperscript{27} One of Bird’s hidden premises is that you have warrant to assert P to yourself iff you have warrant to assert P to others: having warrant to assert to oneself is equivalent to having warrant to assert to others. John Turri points out potential counterexamples involving such propositions as I’m not making an assertion to others and I’m not making an assertion just to myself.
Prudential Analogue of Mistake 1 (PAM1): If a “prudentially evaluable” item is somehow inappropriate because it lacks a certain prudential feature, then the item is prudentially inappropriate.

I begin with an argument against MAM1. Suppose I perform at noon an act that’s morally permissible—though not obligatory—for me to perform around noon: I send you an e-mail. Suppose also that you had offered me a modest monetary reward for performing at noon an act I’m obligated to perform around noon—e.g., providing lunch for my kids. Assuming I could just as easily have fed my kids at noon, sending you an e-mail then was somewhat imprudent: by sending you a note instead of feeding my kids, I sacrificed that modest reward you had offered. By hypothesis, though, sending you that e-mail was morally permissible (I’m not obligated to feed my kids at noon, just around noon). So, sending you the e-mail was morally permissible but imprudent because it lacked a certain moral feature—viz., being an act I’m obligated to perform around noon. I conclude that a thing’s being somehow inappropriate due to lack of a certain moral feature does not suffice for the thing’s being morally inappropriate. MAM1 is false.

Now for an argument against PAM1. Presumably, there can be prudent acts that aren’t preceded by or “based on” an explicit calculation of expected utilities. Suppose that one evening I prudently work on a paper of my own instead of grading my students’ exams. This act wasn’t preceded by an explicit calculation of expected utilities. Now, while I didn’t promise my students I’d grade their exams that evening, I did make them the following conditional promise: I promised to work on my paper only if I found this

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28 If the reward had been sufficiently large, perhaps it would have been morally impermissible for me to sacrifice it in this way. Pretend the reward was not that large.
course of action to be the one favored by an explicit calculation of expected utilities. Fill in the details so that I’ve done something morally wrong in breaking this conditional promise to my students. Then (by hypothesis) working on my paper was prudent but morally wrong because it lacked a certain “prudential” property—viz., being preceded by an explicit calculation of expected utilities. I conclude that a thing’s being somehow inappropriate due to lack of a certain prudential property does not suffice for the thing’s being prudentially inappropriate. PAM1 is false.

So, analogues of M1 for moral and prudential propriety are false. Given that epistemic propriety is in many ways similar to these other kinds of propriety, the falsity of MAM1 and PAM1 constitutes some reason to think M1 is false too. Of course, there are also important differences between epistemic propriety, on the one hand, and moral and prudential propriety, on the other. So I won’t rest my case against M1 just yet. Let’s look around for a straightforward counterexample to it.

Consider the following passage from Chisholm (1977: 12-3):

[I]t is at least conceivable that a man may have the duty to accept a true proposition which he does not know to be true… [A] sick man, who has various unfulfilled obligations, may have the duty to accept certain propositions [about his prospects for recovery] if, by accepting them, he can make himself well and useful once again.

I assume that being preceded by an explicit calculation of expected utilities is a “prudential” property in the same way that (e.g.) being an instance of knowledge is an “epistemic” property, being an act I’m obligated to perform is a “moral” property, being an instance of C-fiber stimulation is a “physical” property, and being an instance of pain is a “mental” property.
It’s generally accepted that a person in circumstances like those Chisholm describes may have epistemic justification to believe propositions it would be morally and prudentially inappropriate for her to believe. For example, we can imagine a scenario in which it’d be morally and prudentially inappropriate for you to believe your prospects for recovery are dim, notwithstanding your having epistemic justification to believe this. Further, it seems we can add the following detail to the above scenario: while you’re not presently positioned to know your recovery prospects are dim, if you were positioned to have such knowledge then it’d be morally and prudentially okay for you to acquire such knowledge. In sum, it looks like you could have epistemic justification to believe a proposition it’d be morally and prudentially appropriate to believe if—but only if—you were positioned to know the proposition.

We now have all we need to run a strong argument against M1. Possibly, you have justification to believe P, but aren’t positioned to know P. Further, it’s possible that it would be morally and prudentially appropriate for you to believe P if—but only if—you were positioned to know P. Under such conditions, you might form an epistemically justified belief in P that falls short of knowledge. While epistemically appropriate, your belief in P is both morally and prudentially inappropriate because it falls short of knowledge. So, there could be a belief that’s epistemically appropriate but morally and prudentially inappropriate because it lacks a certain epistemic feature—being knowledge. M1 is false.

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What about the argument from Sutton we considered above (§2b) for the thesis that justified belief suffices for knowledge? Is my claim here dialectically appropriate, given the dialectical context? In a word, Yes. Sutton’s Assertion Argument does not depend on M1 (the thesis I’m currently arguing against). Rather, it depends on M2, which I argue against below.
Of course, a strong argument for M1 would at least partially offset my arguments against it. But I’m not aware of any promising arguments for M1.\textsuperscript{31} It’s worth noting that my argument from analogy against M1 reveals that we can’t sensibly argue to M1 from parallel principles involving moral and prudential propriety, for such principles are clearly false.

On the basis of the arguments presented above, then, I conclude that M1 is false. This conclusion impugns any project dependent for its success on the plausibility of M1—e.g., the Levin/Brown counterexamples to KIS, and Riggs’s attempt to defend CR from Lackey’s Chicago Visitor case.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{(b)} Let’s turn to M2. I’ll soon present four arguments against M2—three “example-driven”, one “theory-driven”. First, I want to make a couple preliminary points in order to soften up readers for the forthcoming anti-M2 arguments.

Justification to believe and warrant to assert are doubtless similar in many ways. So, if the forthcoming arguments succeed and M2 is indeed false, then it’s possible that

\textsuperscript{31} Notably, none of the “M1-dependent” work discussed in §2 offers so much as a hint of an argument for M1.

\textsuperscript{32} In her (2008: 99-102), Jessica Brown suggests that cases like Affair (see §2a above) may well be counterexamples to the following claim: if an assertion is somehow inappropriate because it lacks a particular epistemic feature, then the assertion breaks some or other constitutive rule of assertion—alternatively: …the assertion is not “a legal move in the game of assertion”. As we’ve seen, however, Brown also reckons cases like Affair counterexamples to KIS. Apparently, then, Brown wouldn’t equate \textit{being in accord with all constitutive rules of assertion} with \textit{being an epistemically appropriate assertion}. For a variety of reasons, I (like Brown) hesitate to equate \textit{being an epistemically appropriate assertion} with \textit{being in accord with all the constitutive rules of assertion}, and to reckon Affair a clear counterexample to M1. Accordingly, there’s a need for direct counterexamples to M1 like the one proposed a couple paragraphs back.
you bear *some but not all* of a group of quite similar relations to a given proposition or state of affairs. But this point does not in itself lend even a whit of support to M2, since it clearly is possible that you bear some but not all of a group of quite similar relations to a given proposition or state of affairs. Examples abound; here’s one that doesn’t involve epistemic relations. Unlike some of those who legitimately attend departmental meetings (e.g., student representatives), I have the authority to *move* that the meeting be adjourned, and also to *vote* that the meeting be adjourned. Unfortunately, I don’t (yet!) have the authority to adjourn departmental meetings—i.e., to directly bring it about that a departmental meeting is adjourned. So, I have the departmental authority to bear *some but not all* of a group of similar relations (*moving that, voting that, directly bringing it about that*) to *The departmental meeting is adjourned*. If the forthcoming anti-M2 arguments succeed, then you could find yourself in the following predicament which is relevantly similar to my “departmental” predicament: though you’re well positioned enough relative to P to *justifiedly believe* it, you’re not well positioned enough relative to P to *warrantedly assert* it.

My second preliminary point is this. A little elementary reflection on the nature of belief and assertion should at least make us wonder whether M2 is true. Things happen when you assert P that don’t happen when you merely believe P. First (and most obviously), when you make an assertion, you “propel a proposition out into a conversation with assertoric force” (Slote 1979: 178). Further, in asserting P you represent yourself as being in certain cognitive states relative to P. For example, you represent yourself as *knowing*—and so, as *believing*—P.\(^{33}\) Finally, one plausible element

of the so called **dialectical model of assertion**\(^{34}\)—on which an assertion is “a move in the game of giving and asking for reasons”—is that “by asserting a proposition, [you] commit [yourself] to defending the proposition when faced with challenges and counterarguments” (Rescorla forthcoming: 3). The point that needs emphasizing here is that none of these things that happen when you *assert* \(P\) happen when you simply *believe* \(P\). By merely *believing* a proposition, you don’t propel that proposition out into conversational space; represent yourself as knowing—or even believing—the proposition; or commit yourself to defending the proposition if an interlocutor challenges it. So, in light of the point that things happen when you assert that don’t happen when you merely believe, it’s worth wondering whether being well positioned enough relative to \(P\) to justifiedly believe \(P\) *ensures* that you’re well positioned enough relative to \(P\) to warrantedly assert it. I’ll now present four arguments that the former does not guarantee the latter.

My first example-driven argument against M2 employs the notion of a **lottery proposition**—i.e., a proposition which “while highly likely, is [one] that we would be intuitively disinclined to take ourselves to know” (Hawthorne 2004: 5; cf. Vogel 1990: 17). Examples include *I won’t win the upcoming lottery I hold a ticket in; The letter I just sent overseas will arrive safely at its destination; The next flight I take won’t crash; and I won’t be in a car accident on my way home from work tonight.* It seems at least possible that a person, S, have justification to believe some or other lottery proposition

\(^{34}\) For helpful recent explanation and discussion of this approach to assertion, see Rescorla (forthcoming). Advocates of this approach include Brandom (1983, 1994), Watson (2004), and Rescorla (forthcoming).
(L). But we can now fill in the details of S’s case so that S lacks warrant to assert L. Here’s one way to tell the story.

Suppose S is “intuitively disinclined to take [herself] to know” L—and so, has justification to think she doesn’t know L. On this occasion at least, S is right: she doesn’t know L (I leave it open whether we ever know lottery propositions; for the record, I think we often do). Now suppose also that, like most of us, S has justification to think herself as a reliable source of information. Accordingly, if S were to assert L, the (mis)information that S knows L would be conveyed to her by a source she’s justified in thinking reliable—viz., herself. So, in asserting L, S would generate evidence for the false proposition that she knows L. And this would (at least temporarily) defeat S’s justification to believe the fact that she doesn’t know L. Hence, in asserting L, S would defeat the justification she currently has to believe a certain fact about L’s epistemic status for her—viz., that she doesn’t know L. Now the following thesis seems plausible: if you’re positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion of P, then you’re positioned to assert P while retaining whatever justification you currently have to believe facts about P’s epistemic status for you. Since (as we’ve seen) S isn’t positioned to make

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35 See Hawthorne (2004) for an argument that denying we can know lottery propositions leads (via modest epistemic closure principles) to implausible skeptical positions.
36 At this point, I reckon the case a counterexample to premise 4 of my reconstruction of Riggs’s defense of CR from Chicago Visitor (§2c): though S is justified in believing L, she’s not justified in believing she knows L. See below for more cases that (arguably) constitute counterexamples to the indicated premise.
37 For interesting discussion of a couple different models of how we get such justification, see Bergmann (2004).
38 I assume that if S were to assert L, she’d thereby represent herself as knowing L—and so, convey (without asserting) that she knows L.
such an assertion of L, it follows that she lacks warrant to assert L. But she is (by hypothesis) justified in believing L. So M2 is false.\(^{39}\)

My second example-driven argument against M2 starts with the plausible thought that a person, S, could have justification to believe she’s not making an assertion. Call a proposition of the form \(S \text{ is not making an assertion} \) a denial of assertoric activity. We can now restate my first premise like this: S could have justification to believe a self-referential denial of assertoric activity. Presumably, though, if S were to assert that self-referential denial of assertoric activity, she’d thereby generate evidence against the content of her assertion—i.e., she’d thereby generate evidence that she is making an assertion. And this would defeat the justification she previously had to believe the proposition in question. But any assertion that defeats its agent’s justification to believe its content is epistemically improper or defective. The upshot: S isn’t positioned to make an epistemically appropriate assertion of the self-referential denial of assertoric activity that (by hypothesis) she now has justification to believe. Thus, S has justification to believe something that she lacks warrant to assert. M2 is false.\(^{40}\)

My third and final example-driven argument against M2 starts with the claim that a person, S, could have justification to believe a so-called Moorean proposition of the form \(P \text{ and } S \text{ doesn’t believe } P\). Here’s one extant proposal for how this could happen (cf. Lackey [2007: 613-6]): while S has justification to believe P, S also has justification to believe he’s presently “in denial” vis-à-vis P. Here’s another proposal: while S has

\(^{39}\) Notably, the above argument that a person can lack warrant to assert a lottery proposition is neutral on (a) the question whether we can ever have warrant to assert a lottery proposition, and also (b) the question whether every “lottery assertion” is somehow improper.

\(^{40}\) Thanks to John Turri for passing along an example that converted easily into this one, which I then found in Green and Williams (2007: 12).
justification to believe P, S is also justified in endorsing requirements on *believing* P that are in fact a good deal too restrictive. Now, provided S has justification to believe a Moorean proposition of the relevant form, there will be ways to fill in the details of his case so that he lacks warrant to assert the proposition. Here’s one way to do this.

S is justified in believing he’s a reliable source of information. Accordingly, if S were to assert the first conjunct of the Moorean proposition he now has justification to believe, the information that S believes the indicated proposition would be conveyed to him by a source he’s justified in regarding as reliable—viz., himself. So, in asserting the first conjunct, S would thereby generate evidence *against* the second conjunct. And this would defeat the justification S currently has to believe the Moorean proposition. Thus, if S were to assert the Moorean proposition he now has justification to believe, he’d thereby defeat his justification to believe that proposition. As before, any assertion that defeats its agent’s justification to believe its content is an epistemically inappropriate assertion. So S lacks warrant to assert the Moorean proposition he now has justification to believe. M2 is false.

41 Many theorists argue that Moorean propositions can’t have certain positive epistemic features for us. For a helpful introductory discussion, see Green and Williams (2007). A much more complete development of the prima facie case now under construction would interact with such arguments. I hope to do so elsewhere.

42 I assume that if S were to assert the proposition in question, he’d thereby represent himself as believing the proposition—and so, convey (without asserting) that S believes the proposition.

43 In effect, this argument that a person can lack warrant to assert a Moorean proposition blends elements from different attempts to explain the putative fact that *any* Moorean assertion is *somehow* inappropriate or defective (including the view that when you assert P, you represent yourself as being in certain cognitive states relative to P). For helpful introductory discussion of such attempts, see Green and Williams (2007).
I’ve now offered a handful of “example-driven” arguments against M2. I’ll close by presenting a more “theory-driven” argument against M2.

It’s generally accepted (by “justification internalists” and “justification externalists” alike) that you can have justification to believe P even if you’re not reliable on the question whether P, even if you can’t be counted on to believe truly on the question whether P. For example: you can have justification to believe certain “worldly” propositions—e.g., *I have hands*—even if you’re a massively deceived (handless) brain in a vat. Further, it’s plausible that if you can’t be counted on to get it right as to whether P, you’re not positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion of P. That is, it’s plausible that warrant to assert P requires reliability or trustworthiness on the question whether P: warranted assertion requires reliability. So, warrant to assert requires something unnecessary for justification to believe. M2 is therefore false.

In addition to its intuitive plausibility, the proposed Reliability Requirement (RR) on warranted assertability enjoys support from other sources. For one thing, it’s entailed by the increasingly popular thesis that warranted assertability requires knowledge (KIN). But there are arguments for RR that are independent of KIN, arguments compatible with KIN’s denial. I’ll briefly sketch two such arguments here, leaving thorough development and defense of these arguments for elsewhere.

We have many ways of indicating that a person’s assertion on a particular issue was epistemically defective. One way is to ask a question or make a statement concerning the person’s reliability or trustworthiness on that issue. Examples of such questions and statements include: “Is he reliable on this issue?”, “Can we count on her to

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44 I assume that you know P only if you’re reliable on the question whether P.
45 [suppressed]
be right about this?”, and “He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.” So, a question or statement about one’s (lack of) reliability relative to P can generate evidence that one lacks warrant to assert P. A natural explanation of the fact that evidence of unreliability counts as evidence of lacking warrant to assert is that unreliability on P entails lack of warrant to assert P. So, the fact that you can indicate that an assertion was epistemically defective by indicating that its agent was unreliable on its content is good (albeit defeasible) evidence for RR. Call this the Challenge Argument for RR.

There’s also an Apology Argument for RR. If you make an assertion but then learn that you were in fact untrustworthy on its content, you could sensibly apologize for making that assertion (though perhaps you aren’t required to do so). The fact that you could sensibly apologize for your assertion (as opposed to, e.g., simply regretting that you made it, or apologizing for its consequences) upon learning of your unreliability indicates that your unreliability made the assertion itself somehow inappropriate. Now, while there surely are cases where your unreliability on P renders your assertion of P morally and/or prudentially inappropriate, this won’t always be the case. Plausibly, then, the kind of impropriety had by any assertion whose agent is unreliable on its content is epistemic impropriety: you’re positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion of P only if you’re reliable on P. Like the argument sketched in the last paragraph, this one provides good (albeit defeasible) reason to believe RR.

So, there’s good reason to think warrant to assert P requires reliability on the question whether P. But (again) justification to believe P doesn’t require such reliability.

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46 The following argument owes an obvious debt to Kvanvig (forthcoming-a). In particular, it’s Kvanvig who proposes the “apology test” for whether an assertion itself was somehow improper. (This is not to say that Kvanvig would accept the following argument, however.)
Warrant to assert thus requires something unnecessary for justification to believe: justification to believe doesn’t suffice for warrant to assert. In addition to the three example-driven arguments against M2 above, we now have an additional theory-driven reason to reject M2.

4. Conclusion

We’ve seen that a strong prima facie case can be made against each of M1 and M2. The arguments presented in the last section threaten not only those claims, but also any work dependent on them—e.g., (a) the Levin/Brown counterexamples to KIS; (b) Sutton’s Assertion Argument for JEK; and (c) Riggs’s defense of CR from Lackey’s Chicago Visitor counterexample. In all probability, the influence of M1 and M2 extends well beyond the work identified here. I thus suspect that the above arguments against M1 and M2 threaten to undermine quite a bit of recent work in epistemology.47

47 I presented much of the material in this paper to the Philosophy Department at the University of Tennessee. Thanks to those in attendance for stimulating discussion and helpful feedback. Special thanks to Nathan Ballantyne, Jessica Brown, Jon Kvanvig, David Reidy, Clerk Shaw, Lee Shepski, and John Turri. Extra special thanks to Aidan McGlynn, for numerous extremely helpful comments on, and criticisms of, multiple drafts of the paper.
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