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Does knowledge secure warrant to assert?

E. J. Coffman

Abstract This paper fortifies and defends the so called *Sufficiency Argument* (SA) against *Classical Invariantism*. In Sect. 2, I explain the version of the SA formulated but then rejected by Brown (2008a). In Sect. 3, I show how cases described by Hawthorne (2004), Brown (2008b), and Lackey (forthcoming) threaten to undermine one or the other of the SA's least secure premises. In Sect. 4, I buttress one of those premises and defend the reinforced SA from the objection developed in Sect. 3.

Keywords Contextualism · Invariantism · Assertion · Knowledge · Warrant · Justification · Pragmatic Encroachment

1 Introduction

This paper fortifies and defends a recent argument—the so called *Sufficiency Argument* (SA)—for the conclusion that the truth-value of a knowledge-ascribing (-denying) sentence can vary across conversational contexts differing only with respect to *practical facts* (i.e., facts about what's important to people in the contexts). The SA threatens *Classical Invariantism*, the view that the truth-value of a knowledge-ascribing sentence is invariant across contexts *and* independent of practical facts—and so, can't vary across contexts differing only with respect to practical facts. In Sect. 2, I explain the version of the SA formulated but later rejected by Brown (2008a), along the way clarifying a key notion at play in both the SA as well as other important recent epistemological work—viz., *epistemically proper assertion*. In Sect. 3, I show how cases of a kind described by Hawthorne

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(2004), Brown (2008b), and Lackey (forthcoming) yield a formidable objection to the SA—roughly, that reflection on such cases undermines one or the other of the SA's least secure premises. In Sect. 4, I buttress one of those premises and defend the reinforced SA from the objection developed in Sect. 3. I conclude that the fortified SA is (at a minimum) a promising argument against Classical Invariantism that merits additional careful evaluation.

2 Explaining the SA

The SA takes off from a pair of cases like the following[1]:

Low Ann and Bob drive past the bank late Friday afternoon. They see that the bank is very busy. Ann reminds Bob that they needn't deposit their paychecks before Monday. She then asks him whether he plans to stop now. Having visited the bank a week ago last Saturday, Bob believes truly that the bank will be open tomorrow. Bob expresses his true belief about the bank by asserting: "I was there the Saturday before last and saw the hours posted. The bank will be open tomorrow."

High Ann and Bob drive past the bank late Friday afternoon. They see that the bank is very busy. Ann reminds Bob that it's extremely important that their paychecks be deposited before Monday. She then asks him whether he plans to stop now. Having visited the bank a week ago last Saturday, Bob believes truly that the bank will be open tomorrow. Bob expresses his true belief about the bank by asserting: "I was there the Saturday before last and saw the hours posted. The bank will be open tomorrow."

From here, Brown's formulation (2008a, pp. 89–90, 94–96) of the SA goes like this:

1. In any conversational context, 'Bob knows the bank will be open tomorrow' is true *only if* Bob is in a good enough epistemic position to assert that the bank will be open tomorrow.
2. In *High*, Bob is *not* in a good enough epistemic position to assert that the bank will be open tomorrow.
3. So: in *High*, 'Bob knows the bank will be open tomorrow' is not true. (1,2)
4. In *Low*, 'Bob knows the bank will be open tomorrow' is true.
5. So: the truth-value of 'Bob knows the bank will be open tomorrow' varies across *Low* and *High*. (3,4)
6. *Low* and *High* differ only with respect to practical facts.

C So: the truth-value of a knowledge-ascribing sentence can vary across contexts that differ only with respect to practical facts. (5,6)

We've already noted that anyone accepting (C) must abandon

[1] Many readers will recognize these as variants of DeRose's (1992, pp. 913–914; cf. 2009, pp. 1–2) famous "Bank Cases".

Classical Invariantism The truth-value of a given knowledge-ascribing sentence *neither* varies across contexts *nor* depends on practical facts.[2]

Positions open to those endorsing the SA include

Standard Contextualism (C) + Practical facts *do* help determine which propositions get expressed by knowledge-ascribing sentences (for the meaning of 'knows that' varies across contexts differing only with respect to practical facts); but such facts *don't* help determine the truth-values of propositions expressed by knowledge-ascribing sentences (the truth-values of such propositions are completely fixed by non-practical, truth-relevant facts)[3]

and

Interest-Relative Invariantism (C) + Practical facts *do* help determine the truth-values of propositions expressed by knowledge-ascribing sentences (for whether a person knows P depends in part on how important it is to the person that P is true); but such facts *don't* help determine which propositions are expressed by knowledge-ascribing sentences (the meaning of 'knows that' is invariant across contexts).[4]

Clearly, much hangs on whether the SA succeeds. Its only questionable steps are 1, 2, and 4. Few will seriously consider rejecting 4, though. That's because 4's denial is (to put it mildly) in serious tension with *knowledge fallibilism*, the (nearly) universally accepted view that "someone can know that P, even though their evidence for P is *logically consistent* with the truth of not-P" (Stanley 2005a, p. 127). So, the only potentially viable escape route from the SA is to reject 1 and/or 2. What can be said in support of those premises?

Let's start with 2. Here's what Brown (2008a, p. 95) says on its behalf[5]:

> In *High*, when a lot turns on whether the checks are deposited before Monday, … it seems inappropriate for Bob to assert that the bank will be open on Saturday. Further, the felt sense of impropriety in *High* seems to relate to Bob's epistemic position. […] Given the stakes, he should make further checks before making the assertion, say by going into the bank.

So Brown thinks 2 should be supported by highlighting our sense that, in *High*, Bob's assertion that the bank will be open tomorrow is improper for epistemic reasons (or, incorrect on epistemic grounds). We'll soon consider the question whether Brown's is the best available support for 2 (I'll be arguing it's not).

How might we support 1? Brown (2008a, pp. 90, 95) identifies two general principles that she seems to regard as equivalent:

[2] Prominent defenders of Classical Invariantism include Brown (2005) and Williamson (2005).

[3] Prominent proponents include Cohen (1998, 1999) and DeRose (1992, 2002, 2009).

[4] Prominent proponents include Fantl and McGrath (2002, 2007, 2009), Hawthorne (2004), and Stanley (2005b).

[5] I've lightly edited this quotation to make it fit my versions of *Low* and *High*.

B1 If one knows that P, then one is in a good enough epistemic position to assert that P.

B2 If one knows that P, then one is positioned to make an assertion with which there is nothing epistemically wrong.

Brown's suggestion is that the SA's proponent should present 1 as an instance of the prima facie plausible B1 and/or B2.[6] After arguing that this strategy for supporting 1 fails, I'll propose a more promising basis for 1.

To begin to see that Brown's suggested strategy fails, note that B1 and B2 are quite unclear (accordingly, they're not obviously equivalent). The problematic expressions are 'is in a good enough epistemic position to assert that P' and 'assertion with which there is nothing epistemically wrong'. Absent further discussion of these expressions, it's just not clear what B1 and B2 say, let alone that they are (individually or jointly) capable of supporting 1. Worse, B1 and B2 are obviously unhelpful to the SA's proponent on some of the interpretations closest to hand (which suggests that the requested clarificatory discussion wouldn't help). One readily available interpretation of 'is in a good enough epistemic position to assert P' is 'understands P well enough to assertively utter a sentence expressing P'. But if that's how the expression is read throughout the SA, then 2 is obviously false (obviously, Bob understands the bank proposition well enough to assertively utter a sentence expressing it). Turning to the other problematic expression, one readily available interpretation of 'assertion with which there is nothing epistemically wrong' is 'assertion that has no epistemic defects or shortcomings whatsoever'. But if that's how we read the expression, B2 is obviously false—and so, incapable of supporting 1. Suppose you know P, but don't know that you know P. B2 implies you're positioned to make an assertion of P having no epistemic defects or shortcomings whatsoever. Surely, though, any assertion whose subject doesn't know whether he knows its content has at least one (perhaps very minor) epistemic defect or shortcoming.[7]

So the SA's proponent shouldn't try bolstering 1 with B1 and/or B2. Fortunately, there's a line of support for 1 that's more promising than what Brown has suggested. I propose the following general principle linking knowledge and assertion:

Sufficiency Thesis (ST) If you know that P, then you're positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion that P.[8]

[6] Writes Brown (2008a, p. 90): "In many senses of propriety, that one knows that P is not sufficient for the propriety of asserting P. For instance, even if one knows that one's boss is bald, it may not be polite or prudent to say so. So, one might instead phrase the sufficiency claim [underwriting 1] as the claim that if one knows that P, then one is in a good enough epistemic position to assert that P. This leaves it open that one's assertion is incorrect on grounds other than epistemic ones. It merely claims that, if one knows that P, then there is nothing epistemically wrong with asserting that P."

[7] For an extended version of this argument against certain common interpretations of the slogan "only knowledge warrants assertion," see Coffman (forthcoming).

[8] Explicit advocates of the ST include Williamson (2000), DeRose (2002), and Reynolds (2002). Hawthorne (2004, p. 23, fn. 58) shows sympathy for ST with the following remark: "Though insofar as we can distinguish the 'epistemic correctness' of an assertion [from] other aspects of propriety, it may be arguable that knowledge suffices for epistemic correctness."

Qua candidate for reason to believe 1, ST has this significant advantage over both B1 and B2: ST's consequent—in particular, what's meant by 'epistemically proper assertion'—can be made tolerably clear; and once it's duly clarified, we can see that ST doesn't have either of the problems plaguing (the relevant interpretations of) B1 and B2 in the context of the SA.

We can start clarifying epistemically proper assertion by noting the obvious fact that assertion is an essential source of information: it's one of the main ways we affect each other's beliefs. In light of this point, it's quite plausible that assertions can promote or frustrate achievement of *epistemic* goals (goods, values)—i.e., those goals (goods, values) that constitute the *epistemic* perspective or viewpoint. This is especially so on a "pluralist" construal of the epistemic viewpoint, according to which the epistemic viewpoint is constituted by such values as (e.g.) each person in your intellectual community's having a large and diverse belief set with a high percentage of beliefs that are strong candidates for knowledge.[9] Such points should help mitigate whatever initial skepticism there may be about the very idea of epistemically proper *assertion*.

We can further clarify epistemically proper assertion by considering certain well-chosen pairs of sample assertions. Consider, e.g., the following pair of assertions that DeRose contrasts in his (1996, p. 568):

> In some lottery situations, the probability that your ticket is a loser can get very close to 1. Suppose, for instance, that yours is one of 20 million tickets, only one of which is a winner. Still, it seems that… [y]ou are in no position to flat-out assert that your ticket is a loser. 'It's probably a loser', 'It's all but certain that it's a loser', or even, 'It's quite certain that it's a loser' seem quite alright to say, but, it seems, you are in no position to declare simply, 'It's a loser'. […] Things are quite different when you report the results of last night's basketball game. Suppose your only source is your morning newspaper, which did not carry a story about the game, but simply listed the score, 'Knicks 83, at Bulls 95', under 'Yesterday's Results'. Now, it doesn't happen very frequently, but, as we all should suspect, newspapers do misreport scores from time to time. […] Still, when asked, 'Did the Bulls win yesterday?', 'Probably' and 'In all likelihood' seem quite unnecessary. 'Yes, they did', seems just fine.

The "score" and "lottery" assertions DeRose contrasts here serve to illustrate the difference between (respectively) *epistemically proper* and *epistemically improper* assertion, thereby tightening our grasp on the key epistemic notion ST's consequent involves (which I'll further clarify in the next section).

Footnote 8 continued

Williamson is better known as a proponent of the view that you're positioned to make an epistemically proper—in his terminology, *warranted*—assertion that P *only if* you know P. But see his (2000, pp. 241, 252), where he says (respectively) that (a) "If an assertion satisfies the [C rule, which soon becomes the thesis that warranted assertability requires knowledge], whatever derivative norms it violates, it is correct in a salient sense [=warranted]" and (b) "To have the (epistemic) authority [=warrant] to assert p is to know p."

[9] For articulation of, and supporting arguments for, such a "liberal" conception of the epistemic perspective, see e.g. Kawall (2002) and Kvanvig (2003).

As promised, we're now positioned to see that epistemically proper assertion can't be equated with either of the notions discussed above in connection with B1 and B2. An epistemically proper assertion isn't simply one whose subject understands its content well enough to assert it. Further, an epistemically proper assertion needn't be one without epistemic defect or shortcoming.[10] Consequently, invoking ST on 1's behalf won't lead to either of the problems that arise when (the relevant readings of) B1 and/or B2 are so employed—viz., an obviously false reading of 2 (in the case of B1) or an obviously false supporting principle for 1 (in the case of B2).

If we buttress the SA with ST (instead of B1 and/or B2) as I've been suggesting we should, we'll need to modify premises 1 and 2 as follows:

1* In any conversational context, 'Bob knows the bank will be open tomorrow' is true *only if* Bob is positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion that the bank will be open tomorrow.

2* In *High*, Bob is *not* positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion that the bank will be open tomorrow.

Let's call the resulting argument against Classical Invariantism *the fortified SA*. This is the version of the SA we'll focus on in what follows. As we're about to see, even the fortified SA needs further reinforcement and defense. For careful reflection on certain recently described cases yields a serious problem for proponents of this argument.

3 An objection to the fortified SA

The problem arises from cases showing that an assertion whose subject knows its content may nevertheless be improper for epistemic reasons. We find four main kinds of such cases in the recent literature. Here are prominent instances of the different kinds (we'll distinguish among them below):

> *Conjunction* Even granting that knowledge is necessary for proper assertion, it is not sufficient. […] Now suppose a person knows each of a long sequence of propositions and has deduced and thereby comes to believe the conjunction. Suppose, further, that while she believes [and thereby knows] the conjunction, she believes that she does not know the conjunction (perhaps on the grounds of Preface-style considerations: "There's an excellent chance that I've made a mistake somewhere"). Her own belief that knowledge is absent explains well enough the dubious status of the assertion 'The conjunction is true' in her mouth… (Hawthorne 2004, p. 50)

[10] I assume that an assertion's having a probability less than 1 on its subject's (noncircular) evidence for it suffices for the assertion's having at least one (perhaps very minor) epistemic defect or shortcoming. It's also worth noting here that hardly anyone is tempted to equate epistemically proper *belief* with *belief* having no epistemic defects or shortcomings whatsoever.

Affair[11] 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.

Husband: Why didn't you say she was having an affair? You've known for weeks.

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. (Brown 2008b, pp. 176–7)

Doctor Matilda is an oncologist at a teaching hospital who has been diagnosing and treating various kinds of cancers for the past fifteen years. One of her patients, Derek, was recently referred to her office because he has been experiencing intense abdominal pain for a couple of weeks. After requesting an ultrasound and MRI, the results of the tests arrived on Matilda's day off; consequently, all of the relevant data were reviewed by Nancy, a competent medical student in oncology training at her hospital. Being able to confer for only a very brief period of time prior to Derek's appointment today, Nancy communicated to Matilda simply that her diagnosis is pancreatic cancer, without offering any of the details of the test results or the reasons underlying her conclusion. Shortly thereafter, Matilda had her appointment with Derek, where she truly asserts to him purely on the basis of Nancy's reliable testimony, "I am very sorry to tell you this, but you have pancreatic cancer." (Lackey forthcoming, pp. 3–4 of ms.)

Food[12] Jennifer's neighbor Ken is a connoisseur of fine dining. As they were leaving Starbucks this afternoon, Ken told Jennifer that the food at a new local restaurant about which she was previously quite unfamiliar, Quince, is exquisite, though being in a hurry prevented him from offering any details or evidence on behalf of this claim. While Jennifer talked with her friend Vivienne later in the day, Vivienne was fretting over where to take her boyfriend to dinner for Valentine's Day. Jennifer promptly relieved Vivienne's stress by truly asserting, "The food at Quince is exquisite." (Lackey forthcoming, pp. 9–10 of ms.)

These cases will yield a challenging objection to the fortified SA. Notably, though, the objection I have in mind is somewhat less direct than you might initially think. Let me explain.

I think we should grant that these cases serve their primary purpose: they show that an assertion whose subject knows its content may nevertheless be improper for epistemic reasons (or, incorrect on epistemic grounds). Each case highlights an assertion that either was, or would have been, improper due to certain of its subject's epistemic shortcomings. *Conjunction*'s subject thinks she doesn't know the content of her assertion. Friend (in *Affair*) didn't tell Husband about the affair because he never actually saw the most incriminating events "with his own two eyes"

[11] Similar cases include the one Brown calls *Result* (2008b, p. 177) as well as two that Levin presents in (2008, pp. 373–375).

[12] I've lightly edited Lackey's text, which is written in the first person.

(otherwise, he wouldn't have described himself as having not been absolutely sure). As for Matilda (in *Doctor*) and Jennifer (in *Food*), they have only (what Lackey calls) "isolated secondhand knowledge" concerning (respectively) the diagnosis and the restaurant. So each of the indicated (actual or counterfactual) assertions seems improper, and for epistemic reasons (or, on epistemic grounds). But, we're to suppose, each subject knows the proposition in question—respectively: *The conjunction is true*, *Wife is having an affair*, *Derek has pancreatic cancer*, *The food at Quince is exquisite*.[13] Thus, each case shows that one's assertion may be somehow incorrect on epistemic grounds *even if* one knows the assertion's content.

It doesn't follow immediately, however, that any of the cases are counterexamples to ST.[14] That follows immediately if, but *only* if, *being improper for epistemic reasons* suffices for *being epistemically improper*. But a little reflection reveals the falsity of that biconditional's right-hand-side: as familiar examples establish, an item that's somehow improper for epistemic reasons may nevertheless be epistemically proper or justified.[15] Consider the following familiar passage from Chisholm (1977, pp. 12–13):

> [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. For example, a man may have the duty to believe that the members of his family are honest or faithful without in fact knowing that they are. Or 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.

A person in circumstances like those Chisholm describes may form a belief that's epistemically proper or justified *yet* improper in some nonepistemic way for epistemic reasons. To see this, suppose you've come to believe a certain negative moral proposition, P, about a close relative, R—e.g., *R is dishonest and manipulative*. Now you don't have *conclusive* evidence for P: your total evidence leaves you some room to doubt P. As a result, you (morally) should be letting R

[13] Nate King pointed out that some will sensibly think *Conjunction*'s subject's belief that she's ignorant of the conjunction prevents her belief in the conjunction from constituting knowledge. I'm inclined to agree, but am granting the subject knowledge of the conjunction for argument's sake.

[14] For a prominent suggestion to the contrary, see Lackey (forthcoming). Consider the following two quotations in which Lackey articulates her paper's target (she calls it 'KNA-S*'):

> [P]roponents of the KNA-S* emphasize that knowing that *p* is sufficient for possessing the requisite *epistemic credentials* to properly assert that *p*. (Forthcoming, p. 25 of ms.)

> These general considerations provide further reason to reject the thesis that knowledge is sufficient for epistemically proper assertion. Let us now turn to some responses that may be offered on behalf of the KNA-S*. (Forthcoming, p. 17 of ms.)

These and other passages strongly suggest that Lackey (mistakenly, in my view) equates the property of *meeting all the epistemic requirements on properly asserting P* with the property of *being positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion of P*.

[15] For an extended version of the upcoming objection to the indicated sufficiency claim—as well as an application of it to DeRose's (2002, pp. 187–188; cf. 2009, pp. 106–107) influential argument from variable assertability conditions against Classical Invariantism—, see Coffman (forthcoming).

benefit from the room you have to doubt P: you should be "giving R the benefit of the doubt". Still, for all we've said, your belief in P may well be based on evidence strong enough to make it epistemically proper or justified.[16] Suppose your belief in P is so based. Then your belief is epistemically proper, notwithstanding the fact that it's morally improper for epistemic reasons (your evidence leaves you some room to doubt P). So, while *impropriety on epistemic grounds* and *epistemic impropriety* may often travel together, they sometimes part ways. This has the following implication for the four cases described above: while each one highlights an (actual or counterfactual) assertion that's *improper for epistemic reasons* even though its subject knows its content, none of those assertions is thereby automatically a counterexample to ST—i.e., an *epistemically improper* assertion whose subject knows its content. For, as familiar cases remind us, *being improper on epistemic grounds* isn't a sufficient condition for *being epistemically improper*.

So the objection to the fortified SA arising from the above cases isn't quite as simple as the claim that some or other of the cases are clear counterexamples to ST (they're not). The envisaged critic will instead employ the cases to argue that the fortified SA's second premise isn't clearly well founded.[17] Recall that premise:

2* In *High*, Bob is *not* positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion that the bank will be open tomorrow.

The only potential support we've seen for 2* is what Brown (2008a, p. 95) offered on 2's behalf—viz., that "the felt sense of impropriety in *High* seems to relate to Bob's epistemic position". But we've just seen an example establishing that being somehow improper for epistemic reasons isn't a sufficient condition for being epistemically improper. Worse, for all we can now tell, the sense of impropriety surrounding Bob's assertion supports 2* *no better than* the sense of impropriety surrounding your negative moral belief about R supports the claim that that belief is epistemically improper or unjustified. So, for all we can now see, the sense of impropriety surrounding Bob's assertion constitutes *little to no* reason to believe 2*. As things presently stand, even the fortified SA fails because it employs a premise that isn't clearly well supported. This strikes me as a tough objection to the fortified SA.

Tough, but not obviously fatal. In the next section, I'll argue that the fortified SA can be developed so as to survive the above objection. After identifying a somewhat different (from Brown's) potential basis for 2*, I'll defend my conviction that the indicated basis well supports 2* without also undermining 1* (i.e., it doesn't conflict with ST). If there *is* such a basis for 2*, then the resulting fortified SA qualifies (at a minimum) as a promising argument against Classical Invariantism meriting further careful evaluation.

[16] If need be, we can safely suppose that certain other relevant factors are in place—e.g., reliability on such subject matter, proper function of relevant cognitive faculties, and so on.

[17] The following argument is similar to the argument Brown develops in Sect. 4 of (2008a) against the initial version of the SA explained above.

4 Reinforcing and defending the fortified SA

I want to propose as an alternative basis for 2* the following prima facie plausible principle concerning what we might call "normative seemings":

> *Principle* *If* an item (i) seems to you improper for reasons of normative kind K[18] *and* (ii) doesn't seem to you improper in any *other* way (than K), *then* (other things equal) you have good reason to think the item is K-ly improper.

Less formally: Absent apparent impropriety of some kind *other* than K, that an item seems to you improper on grounds of kind K is a prima facie good reason to think the item is K-ly improper.

Principle enables the following reply to the above objection to the fortified SA, an argument that 2* is indeed well founded:

> In *High*, Bob's assertion seems improper due to certain of his epistemic shortcomings relative to its content. Simply put, Bob's assertion seems wrong, and for epistemic reasons (or, on epistemic grounds). Further, Bob's assertion needn't strike us as suffering from some or other nonepistemic kind of impropriety. So, by Principle (and given that *ceteris* are indeed *paribus*[19]), the sense of impropriety surrounding Bob's assertion constitutes good reason for us to think Bob's assertion is epistemically improper—and so, to believe 2*.

If this attempt to secure 2* succeeds, the fortified SA will constitute a significant challenge to Classical Invariantism. What should we make of this argument from Principle to the claim that 2* is indeed well founded?

I anticipate at least two sorts of worries about my Principle-based attempt to shore up 2*. First, you might worry that its linchpin—viz., the claim that Bob's assertion needn't strike us as suffering from some or other nonepistemic kind of impropriety—is false; that is, you might worry that, no matter how we construct

[18] E.g., moral, prudential, epistemological, professional, conversational, or aesthetic reasons.

[19] E.g., we lack strong reason to think the sense of impropriety surrounding Bob's assertion *doesn't* reliably indicate epistemic impropriety ("undercutter"), or that Bob's assertion really *is* epistemically proper after all ("rebutter").

I can imagine someone proposing the following line of reasoning as a rebutter we have for the belief that Bob's assertion in *High* is epistemically improper:

> Knowledge suffices for epistemically proper assertion (=ST). And Bob's epistemic position relative to the bank proposition in *High* is as strong as it is in a different case where he knows the bank proposition (viz., *Low*). So Bob knows the bank proposition in *High*, and his assertion of it is epistemically proper.

Reckoning this line of reasoning a rebutter of the indicated belief assumes that the view that knowledge *doesn't* supervene on practical facts—often called *intellectualism* (Stanley 2005b, p. 6) or *purism* (Fantl and McGrath 2007, p. 558)—has a presumption in its favor, that it's "innocent until proven guilty". By contrast, I'm assuming here that neither side of the indicated debate has a presumption in its favor: if this dispute can be rationally resolved, that will happen only via substantive argumentation. That's how things seem to me, anyway. Those who disagree may understand my assessment of the above Principle-based argument for the reasonableness of 2* as having a conditional form: "*If* the two sides of the debate over intellectualism/purism are initially on a par, *then*…" (Thanks to Mylan Engel for suggesting this kind of rebutter in conversation.)

High, Bob's assertion is going to strike us as improper in some nonepistemic way.[20] If that's true, then Principle can't combine with *High* to shore up 2* after all. Second, you might worry that Principle will combine with some or other of the four cases described above to imply that we have reason to deny ST. If that's true, then my Principle-based attempt to secure 2* turns out to undercut 1*, and so is in a clear sense self-defeating.

In what follows, I'll try to mitigate these two pressing worries about my argument from Principle to the reasonableness of 2*. Since the "self-defeat" worry can be dealt with more quickly than can the "falsity" worry, I'll start with the former. The self-defeat worry can be mitigated by arguing that each of the (actual or counterfactual) assertions in the four cases described above (Sect. 3) suffers from some or other kind of nonepistemic impropriety. If that's correct, then none of the assertions satisfies Principle's antecedent, and so none can be combined with Principle to threaten ST.

We'll consider the assertions in the order they were introduced. Starting with *Conjunction*, the subject's asserting 'The conjunction is true' would clearly seem conversationally inappropriate to us. For that assertion would (among other things) obviously generate the false implicature that the subject does not now take herself to be ignorant of the conjunction.

In *Affair*, Friend makes clear that he lacked certain important kinds of evidence for the affair's occurrence—e.g., Friend never saw the most incriminating events "with his own two eyes" (otherwise, he wouldn't have described himself as being less than absolutely sure). Given that Friend lacked such evidence, his flatly telling the husband that the wife has been unfaithful would have seemed at least somewhat morally and/or prudentially questionable to us. I speculate that our sense of moral and/or prudential impropriety here would stem at least partly from considerations like the following. For starters, intervention by an "outsider" like Friend is often wrong in such scenarios because it takes away the offending party's opportunity to "come clean" on their own. Moreover, since (as he indicates) Friend *did* harbor some doubt about the affair's occurrence, he morally ought (for the time being, at least) to have given the wife the benefit of his doubt, and so refrain from telling the husband that his wife has been unfaithful. Finally (and on a related note), since there was *some* chance (for Friend) that the situation wasn't exactly what it appeared to be, by telling the husband that his wife has been unfaithful Friend would have run

[20] You might (reasonably) think, e.g., that epistemically improper assertions are typically (though not necessarily) conversationally improper as well. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this basis for the indicated worry.)

It's worth noting, at least in passing, that an assertion's being epistemically improper doesn't *entail* that it's also conversationally improper (cf. Lackey 2007, p. 617). Suppose, for argument's sake, that any epistemically improper assertion generates the false implicature that the assertion is epistemically proper. Still, that an assertion generates such a false implicature doesn't entail that it's conversationally improper. For an assertion is conversationally improper due to a false implicature only if the implicature is misleading relative to the purpose(s) of the conversation in which the assertion is made. But there can be conversations whose purpose is actually furthered—or at least, not thwarted—by the generation of a false implicature that a given assertion is epistemically proper. So, even if an assertion generates a false implicature that it's epistemically proper, it may yet be conversationally proper.

the risk of seriously upsetting the husband and (at least temporarily) damaging the marriage for no very good reason.

Turning next to *Doctor*, Matilda's flatly telling Derek that he has pancreatic cancer clearly seems, in the first place, *professionally* improper. We're inclined to say: "Matilda behaved unprofessionally." For when she tells Derek that he has pancreatic cancer, Matilda can't convey to him *any* of the "reasons underlying [the diagnosis]". All she can say in support of her distressing diagnosis is "That's what my competent student Nancy tells me". Given how woefully unprepared Matilda is to discuss Derek's condition with him, starting that discussion as she does seems quite unprofessional. Given her apparent failure to fulfill important professional responsibilities, Matilda's behavior will also strike many as both morally *and* prudentially problematic.

Finally, consider *Food*. Here, Jennifer takes on the role of *advisor* with respect to an issue about which she has only "isolated secondhand knowledge". Further, she takes on this role *voluntarily*, and by way of an unqualified assertion (as opposed to hedging with something along the lines of "Well, someone *I* trust about such things told me…"). Finally, Jennifer gained her belief about Quince from a source (Ken) that Vivienne (Jennifer's testifee) hasn't acknowledged as an authority on the relevant subject matter. In light of all this, Jennifer's assertion should strike us as imprudent; and I suspect some readers will feel her assertion was at least a touch morally questionable as well. Considerations like the following give rise to a sense of prudential and/or moral impropriety surrounding Jennifer's assertion. Suppose (as Jennifer should think at least somewhat likely) Vivienne responds to the assertion in any of a wide range of very natural ways—e.g., "So tell me about its ambience…" or "Which dishes do you recommend?" Or suppose Vivienne has a bad experience at the restaurant and subsequently brings it up with Jennifer: "What did *you* have there?" or "*Your* service must have been *much* better than ours was…" Even in the best case, Jennifer would suffer nontrivial embarrassment for no very good reason; in the worst case, her friendship with Vivienne would be somewhat damaged.

All four cases, then, highlight (actual or counterfactual) assertions that do (or would) seem clearly to suffer from some or other sort of *nonepistemic* impropriety (conversational, moral, prudential, professional, …). Accordingly, none of those assertions meets Principle's antecedent. But then none of the assertions can be combined with Principle to threaten ST after all. We should conclude that ST—and more broadly, 1* of the fortified SA—survives confrontation with the four cases described in Sect. 3, even with Principle in play.

So much for the self-defeat worry: the fortified SA's proponent can employ my Principle-based argument for the reasonableness of 2* without putting 1* in danger of being undercut by Sect. 3's cases. How about the other worry—the "falsity" worry? Is it really the case that Bob's assertion in *High* needn't engender in us a sense of *nonepistemic* impropriety? I'll defend the affirmative answer by defeating each of a series of attempts to identify in *High* some or other of the kinds of nonepistemic impropriety present in Sect. 3's cases. The end result will be a slightly amplified version of *High* that arguably (via Principle) provides good reason to believe 2* of the fortified SA.

Starting with professional impropriety, it's obvious there's no such impropriety lurking in *High*. For unlike (say) Matilda's assertion in *Doctor*, Bob's assertion in *High* isn't made in any kind of professional capacity (e.g., qua bank employee). Bob's assertion in *High* can't qualify as unprofessional.

Some (perhaps many) will worry that Bob's assertion was *morally* inappropriate. I think the most promising way to try to bring out the alleged moral impropriety of Bob's assertion is to invoke something like the following claim: Bob's assertion displays culpable insensitivity to Ann's obvious deep concern about the paychecks being deposited over the weekend.[21] Notice, however, that we can amplify *High* so that Bob follows up his assertion with an offer prompted by Ann's obvious concern:

> I was there the Saturday before last and saw the hours posted. The bank will be open tomorrow. But we can definitely stop now if you'd like me to go in and check.

In this slightly amplified version of *High*, Bob's assertion about the bank still seems improper due to certain of his epistemic shortcomings relative to its content. The assertion still seems wrong, and on epistemic grounds. But Bob also now seems duly sensitive to Ann's obvious concern about their paychecks. I conclude, then, that supplementing the SA with the slightly amplified version of *High* protects it from the proposal that Bob's assertion is somehow morally inappropriate.

Further, Bob's assertion needn't strike us as conversationally inappropriate. Granted: if Bob had just said something like "Nope, no need to stop today: the bank will be open tomorrow", that might have generated the false implicature that he has different and stronger evidence for the bank proposition than he actually has (say, confirming testimony a little while ago from the manager on duty).[22] But recall that Bob prefaces his assertion of the bank proposition by describing the grounds on which he's basing his belief in that proposition: "I was there the Saturday before last and saw the hours posted."[23] By prefacing his assertion with this accurate description of the grounds he's basing his bank belief on, Bob cancels various false implicatures about his evidence that might have been generated otherwise. So it's hard to see that Bob's assertion *must* have been conversationally inappropriate.

I think the best way to press the "falsity" worry about my Principle-based argument for 2*'s reasonableness is to argue that Bob's assertion was imprudent owing to his epistemic shortcomings relative to its content. I'll consider two versions of this critical strategy. The first tries to assimilate Bob's assertion in *High*

[21] Thanks to Nathan Ballantyne and Mark Jensen for suggesting this strategy.

[22] The rule of conversational propriety generating this implicature might be something like: "Don't say that for which you lack evidence making it prudent (rational) for you and your audience to act as if the proposition in question is true." (Thanks to Matt McGrath for this suggestion.)

[23] We can even have Bob close with something like "In fact, it'd be imprudent *not* to stop now." With this extra detail in place, Bob's assertion is sandwiched between (a) an accurate description of the grounds he's basing the relevant belief on *and* (b) a concession that it'd be imprudent not to stop now. By so "sandwiching" his assertion, Bob cancels various false implicatures concerning his evidence that might have been generated otherwise. (Would the suggested closing line make Bob's speech in *High* incoherent? Not that I can sense. Adding such a line would make Bob's speech quite similar to, e.g., Friend's perfectly coherent speech in *Affair* [see Sect. 3]. For other relevantly similar speeches that seem perfectly coherent, see the cases Brown [2008b, pp. 176–177] calls *Surgeon* and *Result*.)

to Jennifer's clearly imprudent assertion in *Food*. The second claims that Bob's assertion meets a prima facie plausible sufficient condition for imprudent assertion.

Let's start with the first version of the strategy. Careful reflection reveals that Bob's assertion in *High* is relevantly different from Jennifer's assertion in *Food*, and so can't plausibly be assimilated to it. What made Jennifer's assertion imprudent (and perhaps even a touch immoral), recall, is that she voluntarily took on the role of *advisor* by unqualifiedly expressing isolated secondhand knowledge gained from a source that her testifee hadn't acknowledged as an authority on the relevant subject matter. By contrast, Bob's assertion about the bank expresses a belief grounded in both (a) pertinent "firsthand knowledge" (he was recently in the bank on a Saturday) *and* (b) testimony from a source (the bank itself, via its posted hours) that Ann would acknowledge as an authority on the relevant subject matter (the bank's hours into the not-too-distant future). On close inspection, then, we see that Bob's assertion about the bank lacks the very features that made Jennifer's assertion about the restaurant imprudent (and maybe also a touch immoral). Bob's assertion in *High* thus differs in relevant respects from Jennifer's assertion in *Food*. So far as I can see, there's no strong argument from analogy to *Food* in the offing for the thesis that Bob asserts imprudently in *High*. The first attempt to find prudential impropriety in *High* fails.

Now let's consider the second attempt. This critic starts by identifying the following prima facie plausible sufficient condition for imprudent assertion[24]:

- *If* (*i*) P's probability on your (noncircular) evidence for it is less than 1 *and* (*ii*) your asserting P would help move you and your audience toward an action that would have devastating consequences for all of you if P were false *and* (*iii*) there's time to check further to improve your epistemic position relative to P; *then* you're not positioned to assert P prudently.

The critic continues by claiming that Bob's assertion will meet the above principle's antecedent no matter how we construct *High*. The critic concludes that there will (at least on due reflection) always be a sense of prudential impropriety surrounding Bob's assertion in *High*. So, since Bob's assertion will always strike us as improper in some nonepistemic way, *High* can't be combined with Principle to secure 2* after all.

I think this is the strongest objection we've seen to my Principle-based argument for 2*'s reasonableness. I'm also confident, though, that this final objection ultimately fares no better than the preceding ones. I'm willing to grant the above principle and that, as presently constructed, *High* can be understood so as to meet the principle's antecedent—and so, can be understood to involve prudential impropriety surrounding Bob's assertion. But can't we construct *High* so that Bob's asserting P *wouldn't* help move Ann and Bob toward driving on home? I think we can. Suppose, e.g., that Ann had made up her mind that they'd stop at the bank well

[24] Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting the following principle, and the objection it enables. Notably, some may want to weaken the upcoming principle by inserting 'you know that' (or 'you [justifiedly] believe that', or 'you have [good] reason to believe that') between 'if' and clause (i) so that an epistemic operator governs the entire antecedent. The reply I'll eventually offer will also work against such a weakening of the upcoming principle.

before the exchange in *High*; that Bob's asserting the bank proposition would definitely not change Ann's mind about this; and that "what Ann says goes". We can further assume that Bob knows all this to be the case. Clearly, given these additional details, Bob does not meet the above principle's antecedent—specifically, (ii) doesn't hold. Even against the indicated backdrop, though, Bob's outright assertion that the bank will be open tomorrow still seems somehow wrong, and for epistemic reasons. Thus, the second attempt to locate prudential impropriety in *High* ultimately fails as well.

The slightly embellished[25] version of *High* that has emerged from considering the foregoing objections can engender a sense of impropriety on epistemic grounds without any accompanying sense of nonepistemic impropriety. So for the moment at least, I conclude that the embellished version of *High* can be combined with Principle to imply we've good reason to believe 2* of the SA. My Principle-based reply to Sect. 3's challenging objection to the fortified SA can neutralize that objection.

By way of conclusion: The initial formulation of the SA due to Brown (2008a) can be improved in two significant ways. We can buttress the SA's first premise with ST, which is clearer and more plausible than either of the potential bases Brown suggests. And we can secure the SA's second premise by combining *High* with the prima facie plausible Principle. Admittedly, the resulting fortified version of the SA faces a potentially nasty dilemma—viz., that the suggested basis for the second premise *either* employs a false premise *or* conflicts with the support proposed for the SA's first premise. As we've just seen, though, there's reason to think the fortified SA can be successfully defended from this tough objection. My overall conclusion, therefore, is that the fortified SA qualifies (at a minimum) as a promising argument against Classical Invariantism worthy of additional careful evaluation.

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[25] Embellished, remember, with Bob's (a) "sensitive follow-up" *and* (b) knowledge that clause (ii) of the antecedent of the principle proposed above doesn't obtain.

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