

Assertion, knowledge, belief and degree of belief

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ABSTRACT The making of assertions is a rule- or convention-governed social practice. In making assertions one takes on commitments: commitments to the consistency of what one asserts and commitments to the logical consequences of what one asserts. The fundamental grounds for these commitments are, I claim, that in making assertions one is (i) aiming at truth, and (ii) putting forward propositions for others to use as evidence in the furtherance of their epistemic projects.

Although there is no quick link between belief and assertion—assertions do not express beliefs—the dialectical requirements on assertion feed back into normative constraints on belief, or at least on those beliefs constituting and agent's evidence. In making an assertion one represents oneself as having a justified, true belief, perhaps even as knowing that which one asserts. (I shall briefly discuss a challenge to the knowledge norm for assertion recently made by Jennifer Lackey.)

Degrees of belief raise an interesting issue, one which I do not know how to resolve. If, as is widely assumed, (i) we are not certain of many of our beliefs, and (ii) that uncertainty is modelled in terms of probabilities, then there is at least *prima facie* incoherence between, on the one hand, the normative constraints on belief that match the dialectical requirements on assertion and, on the other, the (normatively required) probability-like structure of degrees of belief.