Discursive justification and skepticism

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Abstract   In this paper, I consider how a general epistemic norm of action that I have proposed in earlier work should be specified in order to govern certain types of acts: assertive speech acts. More specifically, I argue that the epistemic norm of assertion is structurally similar to the epistemic norm of action. First, I argue that the notion of warrant operative in the epistemic norm of a central type of assertion is an internalist one that I call 'discursive justification.' This type of warrant is internalist insofar as it requires that the agent is capable of articulating reasons for her belief. The idea, roughly, is that when one asserts that p, one is supposed to be in a position to give reasons for believing that p. Bonjour's reliable clairvoyant Norman, for example, is not in an epistemic position to make assertions regarding the president's whereabouts— even if Norman knows the president's whereabouts. In conclusion, I briefly consider whether a type of skeptical argument—often labeled Agrippa's Trilemma—is motivated, at least in part, by the fact that responses to it violate the relevant epistemic norm of assertion.

Keywords   Norms of assertion · Skepticism · Discursive justification · Agrippa's Trilemma · Epistemic warrant · Dogmatism

1 Introduction

The primary aim of this paper is to pursue an account of the epistemic norm of assertion. A secondary aim is to briefly connect it to a brand of skepticism. My guiding assumption is that since assertion is a species of action, the epistemic norm of assertion may be modeled on an account of the epistemic norm of action. According to my

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previously proposed epistemic norm of action, the Warrant-Action principle (WA), the degree of warrant for believing that p that is required to meet the necessary epistemic conditions to act on p varies with the subject's deliberative context (Gerken 2011).[1] However, assertive speech acts are distinctive—and distinctively sophisticated—kinds of acts, and this should be reflected in the epistemic norms governing them. I will argue that part of what distinguishes assertion as a species of action is the species of warrant that an asserter must possess in a central type of conversational context. This is an internalist species of warrant that I call *discursive justification*.

I will proceed as follows: In Sect. 2, I motivate the approach of modeling the epistemic norm of assertion on the epistemic norm of action. In Sect. 3, I outline the epistemic norm of action. In Sect. 4, I begin to develop, in a schematic manner, an overarching epistemic norm of assertion, the Warrant-Assertive Speech Act principle (WASA), and a more specific one, the Discursive Justification-Assertion principle (DJA), governing discursive conversational contexts. In Sect. 5, I provide some specification of (DJA)'s characteristic notion of discursive justification. In Sect. 6, I consider the prospects for illuminating a notorious skeptical problem by appeal to (DJA). In Sect. 7, I conclude.

2 Epistemic norms of assertion as epistemic norms of action

When is one in an epistemic position with regards to a proposition, p, such that acting on p is epistemically reasonable? When is one in an epistemic position with respect to a proposition, p, such that asserting that p is epistemically reasonable?

These questions concern the epistemic norms of action and assertion, respectively. The epistemic norms of action and assertion have both received considerable attention in contemporary epistemology (see, e.g., Williamson 2000; Hawthorne and Stanley 2008; Brown 2010). But despite wide agreement that the epistemic norms of action and assertion are related, they are often discussed in isolation. In what follows, I integrate the discussion of the epistemic norms of action and assertion by making a proposal as to *how* they are related. Roughly, the proposal is this: The epistemic norms of assertion are structurally similar to, but substantially different from, the epistemic norm of action.

The proposal is motivated by reflection on the nature of assertion. Assertions are speech acts and, hence, they are acts. When we assert something with a string of words, we do something with those words. Furthermore, we are often held responsible for our assertions in much the same way we are held responsible for our other actions. For example, one may be criticized if one acts on the belief that p although one is clearly unwarranted in believing that p. Likewise, if one asserts that p although one is clearly unwarranted in believing that p, one may be criticized for that reason.

Assertions may be epistemically assessed and criticized partly because their consequences can be very significant. At least since Austin claimed that speech acts have

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[1] The term 'warrant' is used in the sense of Burge (2003): as denoting a genus under which the internalist species, justification, and its externalist counterpart, entitlement, are subsumable. I return to this issue in Sect. 5.

perlocutionary effects, assertions themselves have been taken to be the cause of significant effects (Austin 1962). Asserting that the ice is thick may cause someone to get her skates on. Often assertions are indirect causes of their consequences since the audience generates a belief in the asserted content and acts on that belief.[2] On a related note, it has been argued that the fact that assertion generates certain epistemic commitments partly distinguishes it from other speech acts (see, e.g., Brandom 1994, Chap. 3; for discussion, see Watson 2004; Rescorla 2009b; MacFarlane 2011). A distinct but related approach is Williamson's attempt to "identify the constitutive rule(s) of assertion, conceived by analogy with the rules of a game" (Williamson 2000, p. 238).

My aims will be less ambitious than any of these approaches. The initiation of the present investigation only requires the weaker assumption that assertions are, qua speech acts, subject to epistemic norms. So, at this initial stage, I will not pursue a substantive account of assertion in terms of its epistemic norms or their associated commitments. Nor will I consider any of the complex speech act theoretical frameworks available. Rather, I will just consider some characteristic features of assertion in order to consider whether a general epistemic norm of action may apply to it. I will proceed by first considering the general norm of action and then turning to the distinctive features of assertion.

3 The warrant norm of action

The epistemic norm of action that I will use as my model is based on the idea that the degree of warrant required to be in an epistemic position to act on p (or rely on p in practical reasoning) can vary with variations in one's deliberative context. In one context, a very high degree of warrant is required. In others, less will do. This idea can be presented more explicitly as the following Warrant-Action principle (following Gerken 2011).

(WA)   In the deliberative context, DC, S meets the epistemic conditions on rational use of (her belief that) p as a premise in practical reasoning or of (her belief that) p as a reason for acting **(if and) only if** S is warranted in believing that p to a degree that is adequate relative to DC.

So, in accordance with the basic idea sketched above, (WA) has it that the subject's deliberative context determines the *degree* of warrant for believing that p that is required for acting on p.[3] Roughly, a deliberative context can be thought of as the agent's reasonably presupposed or believed practical context. I will argue that the epistemic norm of assertion is structurally similar to (WA) in that the required degree

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[2]   I think assertions can be direct causes as well. For example, an assertion that constitutes racist or sexist verbal abuse may do so directly. To constitute abuse or to cause a feeling of being abused, an assertion need not amount to a threat or an incitement. Moreover, *if* some performative utterances such as 'you are now married by law' are assertions, then assertions can be directly causally efficacious. Thanks to Kristoffer Ahlström-Vij for the latter suggestion and to Anders Schoubye and Andreas Stokke for discussion.

[3]   The parenthetical '(if and)' is due to the putative need for restricting (WA)'s left-to-right direction—an issue that requires independent investigation that is beyond the aims of this paper.

of warrant varies from context to context. However, I will argue that assertion is distinctive in that it is the subject's *conversational* context, rather than her *deliberative* context, which determines the relevant degree or kind of warrant. So, it is worthwhile to briefly consider the idea of a deliberate context.[4] Among the determiners of deliberative context, DC, the following four figure in Gerken (2011):

  (i)   Alternative *courses of action*,
  (ii)   Availability of *further evidence*,
  (iii) Considerations of *urgency* and
  (iv)   The *stakes* associated with the action.

Upon further reflection, I would like to add an additional DC-determiner:

  (v)   The *social roles* and *conventions* associated with the action.

One might take the issues that pertain to social roles and conventions to fall under the category of stakes. However, there may be cases in which the deliberative context is demanding because the stakes are high although the social roles and conventions are held constant in a similar low-stakes case. Consider, for example, a basketball referee who reviews a play in order to make a call that has little significance in an insignificant game. Later in the season, the same referee may be reviewing a similar play in order to make a call that will determine the championship. Although the social roles and conventions will remain the same, the referee should in the latter case review more carefully and consult a fellow referee.

It is less clear that deliberative contexts may vary with variances in social roles and conventions although the stakes are held constant. But there are at least candidate cases of such variance with social roles and conventions. If S is making a certain call in a game, it matters whether S is a volunteer found among the audience just before the game or an official referee hired for the game. There is some reason to regard the official referee's actions as being subject to stricter epistemic constraints than the volunteer's actions—even if the stakes associated with the specific call are the same for the professional referee and the amateur. After all, the official referee has been entrusted and paid to referee on the basis of her competence whereas her amateur counterpart has only agreed to referee.

Since it appears that social roles and conventions can be separated from stakes, it will be useful to separate these as two categories of determiners of deliberative context.[5] In spite of this addition, however, the list of determiners of deliberative context is unlikely to be exhaustive.[6] For example, it may, for some purposes, be important to

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[4] I set aside the subtleties pertaining to the extent to which the determiners of deliberate context need to be doxastically available to the agent. On the one hand, the mere fact that there is easily available evidence, for example, does not automatically bear on S's deliberative context. For example, if S has a warranted background belief that further evidence is not easily available, the fact that he is wrong will not change his deliberative context. On the other hand, I do not think that belief that there is easily available evidence is required for a change in deliberate context.

[5] For a nice discussion of the relevance of social roles, see Wright (2011). I disagree with some of Wright's verdicts about her cases and with her conclusion. But the emphasis on social roles and, less explicitly, conventions is called for.

[6] For example, Nikolaj Jang Pedersen has provided a principle congenial to (WA) that makes the epistemic conditions on action relative to the goal of the action (Pedersen, Ms.).

keep social roles and conventions apart. But in the present investigation, I group these determiners of deliberative context together. Moreover, I set aside an investigation of how the various parameters interact to determine a deliberative context that, in turn, determines the degree of warrant required for action.

I assume that the determiners of degree of warrant are the traditional ones that are related to truth-conduciveness. Put more negatively, I assume that practical matters do not bear on the extent to which someone is warranted. This is an additional assumption that is not entailed by (WA). However, (WA) may be invoked in a strict invariantist explanation of phenomena that have been taken to compromise the view. But on this occasion, I assume, rather than defend, that epistemic warrant is determined by traditional truth-related factors and not by pragmatic factors.[7]

4 Towards the epistemic norms of assertion

The fact that assertion is a speech act and, hence, an act provides a *prima facie* reason for modeling the epistemic norm of assertion on the epistemic norm of action. However, it should not be assumed that the epistemic norm of assertion is a mere instance of a more general norm of action (Brown 2012, Sect. 4). So, I am not simply seeking to derive the epistemic account of assertion from the epistemic account of action. Moreover, I reject what Brown labels "commonality"—i.e., "the claim that there is a common epistemic standard for assertion and practical reasoning" (Brown 2012). A candidate example of a discrepancy between the epistemic standard for assertion and action/practical reasoning is a case in which a subject, S, is warranted in believing that p and asserts that not-p in order to deceive her audience. In this case, S apparently meets the epistemic constraint on action/practical reasoning although S apparently violates the epistemic norm of assertion.[8] More generally, the proposed similarity between the epistemic norms of action and assertion is compatible with assuming that a subject may be in an epistemic position to act on p without being in an epistemic position to assert that p and vice versa. The proposed similarity concerns the *structure* of the epistemic norms and assertion.

Thus, I make no claim to the effect that there is communality in terms of the degree or kind of warrant required for action and assertion, respectively. Assertion is a distinctive kind of act, and we should not simply apply (WA) to assertion without considering its distinctive features. Yet, there is a broad theoretical rationale for taking the epistemic norm of assertion to have a structure very similar to the epistemic norm of action. As mentioned, assertion is plausibly a speech act that generates certain epistemic commitments that the subject can be blamed for violating (Brandom 1983, 1994;

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[7] This assumption is defended in Gerken (2011, Sect. 7). See also Gerken (forthcoming a, footnote 19).

[8] The case was first called to my attention by an anonymous referee, but it also figures in Brown (2012, Sect. 4). I call it a 'candidate' example and qualify the diagnosis with 'apparently' because the case involves insincerity and may, therefore, require a special treatment. For example, it might be argued that if the norm of sincerity is violated, the epistemic norm of assertion is ipso facto defunct. If this is so, the epistemic norm of assertion would not be violated in the case at hand. I will not pursue this matter since I agree that there are cases in which S meets the epistemic norm on action/practical reasoning and simultaneously violates the epistemic norm of assertion.

Watson 2004). So, just as a subject can be blamed for failing to meet the epistemic requirements on an action, a subject can be blamed for failing to meet the epistemic requirements on the speech act of assertion. Indeed, patterns of blame for action and assertion appear to be rather similar. For example, if I only have an unwarranted hunch that the restaurant where we have a time-limited reservation is down the street on the right, I will be criticized both for the action of walking down the street and for the unqualified assertion that the restaurant is down the street. As mentioned, there may be discrepancies between the cases in which one will be blamed for one's actions and one's assertions. But despite this important qualification, a significant structural similarity remains: In the cases of action and assertion alike, the relevant epistemic requirements vary with contextual features. The central difference, then, may be taken to lie in the contextual factors that determine the relevant degree or kind of warrant that the subject must possess rather than in the structure of the norms of action and assertion.

Assertions are, at least typically, uttered in conversations (broadly construed) and they do, at least typically, have an audience (broadly construed). These features of assertion impact not only the *degree* but also the *kind* of warrant that an asserter must possess. Different kinds of conversational contexts set forth quite different epistemic requirements on the asserter. More specifically, I will argue that in a common type of conversational context, a speaker must possess a distinctively internalist kind of warrant. However, it may be useful to begin the investigation by considering a general, schematic epistemic norm of assertion modeled on the Warrant-Action principle, (WA). I will call this the Warrant-Assertive Speech Act principle or (WASA) for short:

(WASA) In the conversational context, CC, S meets the epistemic conditions on appropriate assertion that p **(if and) only if** S's assertion is appropriately based on a degree of warrant for believing that p that is adequate relative to CC.

For the reasons outlined above, (WASA) is not a mere instance of (WA). Specifically, the notion of conversational context operative in (WASA) is different from the notion of deliberative context operative in (WA). This is why it may be that, in the same situation, S's deliberative context may require one degree or kind of warrant and simultaneously S's conversational context may require another degree or kind of warrant.

The phrase "S's assertion is appropriately based on a degree of warrant for believing that p" occurring in (WASA) replaces the phrase "S is warranted in believing that p to a degree…" in (WA). While the formulation in (WA) does not require that S believes that p, the formulation in (WASA) emphasizes that S can be epistemically in a position to assert something she believes to be false. One such putative case is Jennifer Lackey's much discussed case of a creationist teacher (see, e.g., Lackey 2007, pp. 609–610). Such cases raise some hard questions about the complex relation between S's assertion, belief and warrant that are better set aside here. Since the basing relation between the speaker's warrant and her assertion must be specified before it may be determined whether the right-to-left direction of (WASA) holds, it is stated parenthetically. Since the left-to-right direction will be central to the present discussion, I set aside discussion of the right-to-left direction.

I conjecture that in some conversational contexts the warrant mentioned in (WASA) *may* be of an externalist kind—i.e., an entitlement. For example, I conjecture that there are conversational contexts in which S may assert something although S is unable to provide any reason for it (see, e.g., Brandom 1994; Adler 2002; Watson 2004; Leite 2005). I consider some candidate cases below in Sect. 5.2. Here I focus on the conversational contexts where the interlocutors share a presupposition that an asserter must be able to back up unqualified assertions by reasons. Since I will propose a specific epistemic norm for assertion in this kind of conversational context, I will label it a *discursive conversational context*.[9]

It is at least prima facie reasonable to take discursive conversational contexts to be a proper subset of conversational contexts. But it is not easy to provide an exact criterion of when a conversational context is a discursive one. For the present purposes, however, we only need a grasp of the distinction that allows us to identify some clear cases of discursive conversational contexts. Discursive conversational contexts are not a peripheral or esoteric phenomenon. If one asserts something and someone else challenges it by appeal to explicit reasons, it is in many conversational contexts inappropriate to stick to one's assertion if one has no reason to offer in response. An indication that such conversational contexts are common is that it would ordinarily be reasonable to blame someone who asserts that p but who is unable to articulate any defense of p.

Of course, someone might object that the speech acts in discursive conversational contexts are not assertions.[10] But for the present discussion, I will ignore this objection. Rather, I will focus on the epistemic norms of assertion within *discursive* conversational contexts in which being a cooperative speaker involves being sensitive to reasons for and against what is asserted.

Recall that the modus operandi is to begin by regarding assertion as a distinctive kind of action and then to specify the relevant epistemic norm in accordance with the more specific features of assertion in discursive conversational contexts. The resulting account—the Discursive Justification-Assertion account, (DJA), looks like this:

(DJA) In the discursive conversational context, DCC, S meets the epistemic conditions on appropriate assertion that p **(if and) only if** S's assertion is appropriately based on a degree of discursive justification for believing that p that is adequate relative to DCC.

The key notion of discursive justification will be introduced in the next section. But a few preliminary remarks are in order. (DJA) preserves the broad Gricean idea that

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[9] In philosophy, the term 'discourse' has a strong connotation to a reason-based conversation (broadly construed). Rescorla, for example, uses the label 'reasoned discourse' whereas Leite uses the label 'justificatory conversation' (Rescorla 2009a,c; Leite 2005. There are differences between those notions cf. Rescorla (2009c, pp. 105–106)).

[10] My view shares a feature with John Turri's, namely that changes in conversational context may yield changes in epistemic requirements on the speaker (Turri 2010). But Turri claims that as the context changes, the kind of speech act changes from assertion to other declarative speech acts *or* that the speaker by way of assertion performs a different speech act, with different epistemic requirements. According to the present view, we can assert in a wide variety of different conversational contexts, and the epistemic requirement on *assertion* may therefore vary with context.

"the accepted purpose and direction of the talk exchange" determine what counts as adequate warrant for conversationally appropriate assertion.[11] Like my preceding principles, (DJA) is distinctive in that the relevant epistemic property is *gradable* rather than binary. In this regard, (DJA)—as well as (WASA)—differ from Douven's otherwise similar *rational credibility rule*: "One should assert only what is rationally credible to one" (Douven 2006, p. 449). Here the operative notion of rational credibility is a *binary* one.[12] In contrast, the gradability of discursive justification enables (DJA) to accommodate the assumption that the relevant epistemic requirement varies with variations in discursive conversational context: In some discursive conversational contexts, little discursive justification for asserting that p is required. But other discursive conversational contexts demand a high degree of discursive justification for appropriate assertion. It will turn out to be important that a speaker can be warranted, and even discursively justified, but still not be in an epistemic position to assert. The reason why is that a speaker can be in a discursive conversational context that is so demanding that her degree of discursive justification is inadequate. This phenomenon can be accounted for by taking the relevant epistemic property to be gradable or to be sensitive to contextual variances in discursive conversational context. As mentioned, (DJA) is distinctive in that it assumes the former: that the relevant epistemic property is gradable. I assume, in addition, that the degree of discursive justification that S *does* possess is determined by purely epistemic factors. It is only the degree of discursive justification that S *must* possess, in order to meet the epistemic requirement on assertion, which is partly determined by practical factors.

The right-to-left direction of (DJA) is stated parenthetically for the same reasons that call for caution in the cases of (WA) and (WASA). As it stands, (DJA) is too schematic to ground a verdict as to whether contextually adequate discursive justification is epistemically sufficient for appropriate assertion. In particular, in order to have the basis for such a verdict, the notion of discursive justification must be specified.

I have emphasized that the discursive conversational context relevant for an epistemic assessment of S's assertion may set forth an epistemic requirement on assertion that is different, in both degree and in kind, from the epistemic requirement on action set forth by the subject's deliberative context. Nevertheless, some of the parameters that determine discursive conversational contexts are broadly similar to those that determine deliberative contexts of actions generally. So, as a first approximation, we may take S's conversational context—and, hence, S's *discursive* conversational context—to be at least partly determined by her reasonable presuppositions or beliefs about the following parameters:

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[11] Indeed, (DJA) bears resemblance to Grice's Maxim of Evidence that occurs as a sub-maxim falling under the category of Quality: *Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence* (Grice 1989). However, (DJA) differs substantially from Grice's maxim. For example, it avoids the imperative formulation. Moreover, (DJA)'s central epistemic notion is that of discursive justification rather than that of evidence.

[12] I say 'the operative notion' because it might be argued that the notion of rational credibility is reducible to that of rational graded belief. Another approach would be to contextualize the notion of rational credibility, see Douven (2006, fn. 49). Thanks to Igor Douven for helpful correspondence.

  (i)   alternative assertions[13]
 (ii)   the availability of evidence for the asserted content
(iii)   the urgency of conveying the asserted content
(iv)   the relevant stakes
 (v)   social roles and conventions.

There is much more to be said about how conversational contexts, in general, and discursive conversational contexts, in particular, are determined. Assertive speech acts are special kinds of acts that lie at the foundation of human interaction. Further investigation may reveal considerable asymmetries between the notion of a deliberative context occurring in (WA) and the notion of a discursive conversational context occurring in (DJA). But for the present purpose, it is worth emphasizing the structural parallels, bearing in mind that deliberative contexts and discursive conversational contexts are distinct in manners that allow them to set forth very different epistemic requirements on action and assertion, respectively.[14]

As in the case of action, generally, I assume that pragmatic matters do not partly determine the degree of discursive justification that S has for believing the content of her assertion. Given this assumption, I will begin to specify the pivotal notion of discursive justification occurring in (DJA). The reason for this focus is that (DJA) is characterized by the notion of discursive justification. Indeed, the principle is distinctive, in large part, by invoking an epistemically internalist species of warrant. So, specifying the notion of discursive justification provides a central contribution to the specification of (DJA) itself.

5 Discursive justification

The notion of discursive justification that figures centrally in (DJA) is an *internalist* notion of warrant. So, before introducing it, I will briefly clarify my central working hypothesis in the internalism–externalism debate: epistemic pluralism.

5.1 The internalist–externalist distinction and epistemic pluralism

The internalism–externalism debate in epistemology remains a central source of dispute. On this occasion, I adopt a working hypothesis, *epistemic pluralism*, that I defend elsewhere (Gerken forthcoming b). According to epistemic pluralism, there are two kinds of epistemic warrant—an internalist one, justification, and an externalist one, entitlement.[15]

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[13] I will take this to include the option of *qualifying* the assertion in some manner. If one is not in an epistemic position to assert that p outright, the conversationally appropriate thing to do may be to qualify one's assertion that p.

[14] For example, the *weighting* of the parameters may be different in deliberative contexts and discursively conversational contexts.

[15] Often the internalism-externalism dispute is taken to concern the necessary conditions for knowledge. But there is another question that concerns whether there are both internalist and externalist species of warrant. This is the question that I am concerned with here. I set the internalism-externalism dispute in the

How to draw the internalist-externalist distinction in the theory of warrant is a matter of dispute even among epistemic pluralists. However, a *cognitive accessibility require-ment* is the most commonly invoked way to draw the distinction. But this idea may be developed in a number of ways. For illustration, one version of this requirement has it that S's warrant is a justification just in case S has the conceptual resources required to appreciate at least part of the warrant-determining factors by first-person methods and otherwise it is an entitlement.[16] For example, S's ability to appreciate that a testifier is both sincere and reliable contributes to S's justification for a belief acquired by testimony (Gerken forthcoming b, Sect. 3.2). However, the above characterization of cognitive accessibility is a rough characterization that requires both development and specification. Moreover, the cognitive accessibility requirement may be specified in substantially different ways. An advantage of this is that sub-species of justification may be individuated accordingly. This is not to say that every specification of the cognitive access requirement should be taken to correspond to a sub-species of jus-tification. Some specifications fail to specify a viable notion of justification (Gerken forthcoming b). Here I only consider the problems and prospects of a specification that characterizes the sub-species of justification that occurs in (DJA): *discursive justification*.

5.2 Discursive justification approximated

Roughly, discursive justification differs from other brands of warrant (including other brands of justification) by a cognitive accessibility requirement that is an *articulability* requirement. It seems reasonable to take cognitive accessibility to a putative justifier to be a necessary but insufficient condition for articulability. For example, S might have cognitive access to a very fine-grained color-phenomenology that contributes to the justification for some of her judgments. But she might lack sufficiently fine-grained color terms to articulate the basis for her judgment. But although she is, quite literally, at a loss for words, I think she should nevertheless be regarded as justified.

The requirement that the asserter can articulate reasons for believing the content of her assertion to be true appears, at least prima facie, to be a suitable constraint on assertion in discursive conversational contexts. At least, it is not clear what good it is to have cognitive access to reasons for p, if one cannot in any way articulate them in a discursive conversational context in which reasons for one's assertions are expected. Bonjour's influential case of Norman is apt to motivate the discursive significance of justification as characterized by an articulability version of the accessibility constraint.

Footnote 15 continued

theory of knowledge aside (although I think that gaining clarity about the question in the theory of warrant may illuminate it). Here I just state my approach. For arguments, see Gerken (forthcoming b). For similar approaches, see Burge (2003) and Sosa (2007).

[16] This formulation draws on Burge (2003). I think that entitlement and justification can be co-instantiated and that there can be entitlement without justification. I am inclined to think that there can be justification without entitlement although this is a harder question. Thanks to Nikolaj Jang Pedersen and Christoph Kelp for discussion of this issue.

Norman, under certain conditions that usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against this belief. In fact the belief is true and results from his clairvoyant power under circumstances in which it is completely reliable. (Bonjour 1985, p. 41)

According to an epistemic pluralist account of (an appropriately specified version of) the case, Norman is entitled to his clairvoyance-generated beliefs but unjustified in holding them.[17] The cognitive accessibility requirement explains the latter assumption. For it is stipulated in the case that Norman has no access to the fact that he has an unusual but reliable cognitive ability (Gerken forthcoming b). What I want to emphasize here is how the lack of justification, and a fortiori, discursive justification, leaves Norman in a precarious discursive predicament. Norman is warranted in believing that p but the warrant is, by stipulation, of a nature that lies outside of Norman's cognitive grasp. In particular, Norman is not in a position to articulate any reasons whatsoever for believing that p or for an assertion that p.[18] There may be *deliberative* contexts in which Norman may reasonably act on his belief that p or invoke it in practical reasoning. In contrast, it is quite hard to conceive of a *conversational* context in which he is in an epistemic position to assert that p without qualification (but see below for an attempt).

One account of this situation is that in order to be in an epistemic position to assert something in a discursive conversational context, Norman must be able to provide reasons for his assertion. But since it is stipulated that he has no access to any such reasons in the case in question, he is not in a position to assert anything—at least not without qualification. I think that this account is roughly right although it calls for specification and development to address special cases. For example, it may be that there are conversational contexts in which an assertion that p is conversationally appropriate without any warrant whatsoever. I will state a couple of candidate cases before considering how to diagnose them.

In one class of cases, asserting that p will have good consequences independently of whether p is true or false. For example, an assertion that the aquatic environment is

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[17] The case must be specified because some externalists reject that reliable belief-formation is sufficient for entitlement, see, e.g., Burge (2003) and Graham (forthcoming). But the case can be specified as to meet additional constraints. For example, it may be stipulated that Norman's inaccessible cognitive power is akin to an evolved reliable perceptual competence. Moreover, to ensure that he is not in a position to warrant his clairvoyance-generated beliefs by induction or abduction, it should be stipulated that Norman has forgotten his successful track-record. Generally, while the case is complex and other qualifications may well be required, I think it is nevertheless illustrative.

[18] Here is another way in which the case may be insufficiently described: Norman's belief that p will likely (and perhaps necessarily) be associated with some phenomenology. For example, that Norman may be assumed to have a type of phenomenology sometimes called a Feeling of Rightness (FOR) (Thompson 2009). Given this specification, Norman could provide *some* reason for his assertion. He might say "I sense that p." So, depending on the further specification, Norman might have minimal discursive justification although it would, in most conversational contexts, remain conversationally inadequate.

threatened might, in certain conversational contexts, be appropriate in virtue of calling attention to an issue. A somewhat similar case is one in which I assert, just prior to my anxious job-seeking friend's interview, that the hiring committee will find the outfit she or he is wearing perfectly acceptable. The assertion might be conversationally appropriate in virtue of calming the job-seeker, although I am entirely fashion-challenged and have no warrant whatsoever for believing anything whatsoever about the acceptability of outfits.

Perhaps the determiners of conversational context can be specified as to provide a candidate case in which it would be conversationally appropriate for Norman the clairvoyant to assert that the president is in NYC. Assume that the stakes regarding the president's whereabouts are high and that there are no alternative assertions easily available to Norman. (Let's say that he communicates via a medium that has severe capacity limitations.) Assume further that conveying that the president is in NYC is extremely urgent and that further evidence is not accessible to Norman. This conversational context is a candidate of one in which Norman's entitlement for believing the content of his assertion that the president is in NYC is conversationally adequate.[19]

All of these cases are controversial and hard to diagnose. For example, some of them may not be cases of assertion in *discursive* conversational contexts. Recall that discursive conversational contexts are constitutively characterized by a common presupposition to the effect that one must be able to provide reasons for one's assertion. If my assertion is appropriate because I thereby call attention to an issue or calm my friend, my reasons for believing the content might be irrelevant in a manner that renders the conversational context non-discursive. Likewise, the conversational context in which Norman asserts that the president is in NYC may be one in which Norman's ability to provide reasons is irrelevant given that his assertion gets the crucial point across.

So, a candidate diagnosis of some of the cases is that the conversational context is not discursive. If this is right, the assertion is not governed by (DJA) but by (WASA) according to which the epistemic requirement on assertion may be met by an entitlement. But this is not the only available diagnosis. In some of the cases, the assertion might violate the relevant epistemic norm of assertion although doing so is the only way to meet some overriding non-epistemic conversational norm or a non-conversational norm. For example, the asserters in some of the sketched cases may be argued to violate a conversational norm in order to meet a moral norm. Likewise, it may be argued that no conversational norm applies or that the speaker is excused from violating the applicable norm.[20]

I will not here attempt to decide the correct diagnosis of the cases above. What is important here is that all that (DJA) claims is that for assertions in discursive conversational contexts, discursive justification is relevant for epistemic assessment. Moreover,

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[19] Relevantly similar cases involve "death bed" assertions (cf. Watson 2004, p. 69). Watson use such cases to argue that the primary commitment for asserting p is "…the commitment to the defensibility of *p*" (Ibid. p. 68). Such cases are tricky but, tentatively, my approach is to reject that "death bed" assertions occur in *discursive* conversational contexts.

[20] I am suspicious of an overly general appeal to excuses, for the reasons stated in Douven (2006), Gerken (2011), Sect. 4–6). But this suspicion is compatible with the assumption that in some cases the agent is excused from violating (DJA).

the distinguishing feature of discursive justification is not merely a minimal require-
ment of cognitive accessibility but the ability to *articulate* reasons. Recall that the
problem with externalist brands of warrant to which the agent has no conceptual
access is that such a warrant is discursively impotent. A similar worry applies to a
species of justification that only requires, say, that S has the cognitive access to some
of the warrant-determining factors. If S has such cognitive access but cannot articulate
reasons for believing the content of the assertion, she does not meet the conversational
expectation of being able to back her assertions up with reasons. This is the conver-
sational expectation that is characteristic of discursive conversational contexts. So,
the ability to articulate reasons for believing the content of the assertions in a manner
adequate for the discursive conversational context marks the internalist requirement
that distinguishes the relevant sub-species of justification. In order to make it termi-
nologically transparent that this is only a sub-species of justification (i.e., internalist
warrant), we may provisionally specify *discursive justification* as follows:

(Discursive Justification)
S's warrant for believing that p is a discursive justification iff S is able to articulate
some epistemic reasons for believing that p.

Since discursive justification comes in degrees, it naturally figures in (DJA). How-
ever, it is not easy to specify the degree of discursive justification because it can be
evaluated in terms of epistemic as well as dialectical force. Often the two go hand in
hand. But, in some conversational contexts, strong epistemic reasons are dialectically
weak. For example, they might be question-begging. In other conversational contexts,
weak epistemic reasons may be dialectically strong. For example, they may speak to
a bias or irrational emotion of the audience. So, determining the degree of discursive
justification is a highly complex matter.

However, the epistemic force of the reasons in question should be given consider-
able priority. Recall that (DJA) only concerns the epistemically necessary conditions
for conversational propriety. A nuclear physicist can meet this epistemic requirement
on an assertion although she can only back it up with reasons that her audience can-
not appreciate. In contrast, a slick politician does not meet the epistemic constraint
on assertion even though she has the rhetorical tricks to articulate pseudo-reasons
that would convince the audience. Nevertheless, discursive justification concerns the
ability to articulate epistemic reasons in *discourse*. So, the articulability requirement
involves some constraints on comprehensiveness.[21]

Let us take stock: if the conversational context is a discursive one in which partici-
pants are communicating in a reason-based manner, the epistemic requirement is best
articulated by (DJA) given the present notion of discursive justification. But (DJA)
is not intended to govern all conversational contexts in which assertions are made.
In some conversational contexts, assertion might not be governed by any epistemic
constraint at all and, in some, entitlement might do. Moreover, epistemic propriety or

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[21] I will set aside the following very important question that requires a paper of its own: can discursive
justification that begs the question against an opposing audience nevertheless meet the epistemic constraint
on appropriate assertion?

impropriety of an assertion may be overridden by other non-epistemic conversational norms as well as by non-conversational norms.

There is ample room for developing (DJA). But one way to assess whether it is worth developing consists in considering whether it may illuminate relevant phenomena. We would like our theoretical principles to earn their explanatory keep. Consequently, I will not seek to develop (DJA) further on this occasion. Instead I will work with what I have so far and consider whether (DJA) may shed light on a notorious skeptical problem.

6 Towards an application of (DJA) to Agrippa's skeptical trilemma

A prominent trend in the approach to epistemic skepticism throughout the last century has involved the suggestion that skeptical puzzles are, at bottom, puzzles of language. In general, I am skeptical about this brand of anti-skepticism. Some skeptical paradoxes appear to be genuinely epistemological rather than mere artifacts of language, norms of discourse or the like.

However, a particular kind of skeptical argument, which has been around at least since the Pyrrhonian revival (ca. 100 B.C. to A.D. 100), is a better candidate for a brand of skeptical argument in which a core assumption is motivated by appeal to discursive intuitions. To investigate this hypothesis, I will consider the argument in relation to (DJA). It would be irresponsible to try to settle this complex matter within this short final section. So, I will only hint towards how (DJA) might contribute to a diagnosis of the skeptical paradox in question. However, doing so may suggest how (DJA) and the specific skeptical paradox might shed mutual light on each other.

6.1 The target skeptical paradox

Before turning to the target skeptical paradox, a brief methodological point is called for. An investigation of skepticism may consist in arguing back and forth with an imagined skeptic whose only specified trait is to uphold that nothing is known or warranted. I find such a mode of investigation counterproductive. Rather, a fruitful investigation of skepticism requires that a *specific* skeptical paradox is set forth. Skeptical arguments amount to paradoxes because of their unacceptable skeptical conclusion. In Crispin Wright's words "…these arguments are paradoxes: seemingly valid derivations from seemingly well supported premises of utterly unacceptable consequences" (Wright 1991, p. 83).

Given the unacceptable conclusion of skeptical arguments, the doctrines that constitute the set of premises cannot all be accepted. So, skeptical paradoxes force us to critically reconsider a set of epistemological doctrines that we are otherwise inclined to accept. Ridding ourselves of a mistaken epistemological doctrine that we would otherwise accept and uncritically rely on is a central goal of addressing skeptical paradoxes. Relatedly, many epistemologists think that it is a desideratum for a solution to a given skeptical paradox that it explains why the paradox seemed initially compelling (Wright 1991; DeRose 1995).

The skeptical argument that I will consider is an old one that has been rearticu-
lated by Michael Williams, who labels it 'Agrippa's Trilemma' (Williams 2001). He
presents it as follows:

> As an implied claim to knowledge, then, every statement I make invites a new
> challenge; and in the face of these constantly renewed challenges, I can do only
> one of three things:
>
> 1. Keep trying to think of something new to say—i.e., embark on an infinite
>   regress (Mode of Infinity).
> 2. At some point, refuse to answer—i.e., make a dogmatic assumption (Mode
>   of Assumption).
> 3. At some point, repeat something I have already said—i.e., reason in a circle
>   (Mode of Circularity).
>
> None of these gives us what we want. (Williams 2001, p. 62)

Williams' articulation of Agrippa's Trilemma provides an appropriate target for at
least two reasons. First, it is widely discussed and representative of how this brand of
skepticism is conceived of in the contemporary debates.[22] Second, Williams states,
at least prima facie, the skeptical line of reasoning in conversational terms, and he
provides an unusually explicit characterization of the imagined conversation with a
skeptical interlocutor.

Of course, to provide a deductive skeptical argument, Williams' initial assumption
(that 1–3 exhaust the relevant options) and his final assumption (that none of 1–3 "give
us what we want") should be stated as premises proper in an appropriate form. For
the sake of the present discussion, I grant that this can be done. So, I will set aside the
issue of the proper structure of the paradox in order to focus on what appears to be
the *motivation* for the anti-dogmatic assumption figuring in it. Since I will focus on 2
and the question of whether it "gives us what we want", Williams' formulation may
be adopted.

So, what do we want? We want the sort of knowledge or warranted belief that skep-
tical arguments conclude that we lack. And we want more. For example, we want to
be able to cogently argue for our warranted beliefs against someone who doubts them.
But in the absence of a further premise to the effect that our beliefs are warranted or
amount to knowledge only if we can cogently argue for them against someone who
doubts them, the two desiderata are distinct. Since the further premise seems hard
to justify, I will assume that skeptical arguments traditionally target knowledge or
epistemically warranted belief rather than discursively defensible belief.[23]

Dogmatic assertion may be conceived of as assertion which is not backed by dis-
cursive justification. This conception is little but an articulation, in terms of discursive

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[22] See, for example, Fogelin (1994), Moser (1985), Bonjour (1985), Leite (2005), Rescorla (2009c).

[23] This distinction has been defended elsewhere, see, e.g., Alston (1989, p. 26ff), Audi (1993, p. 118ff),
Pryor (2000), Rescorla (2009a). In-house disputes aside, I find it that these authors have made a good case
for a principled distinction between epistemically rational belief and discursively defensible belief. Note,
however, that although the focus on the conversational motivation may provide a diagnosis of a prominent
motivation of Agrippean skepticism, it does not rule out that a non-discursive and genuinely epistemological
motivation may be given.

justification, of the widely recognized idea that my assertion is dogmatic when I have nothing to say in its favor. Moreover, it seems consistent with Williams' approach. But given such a conception of the notion of a dogmatic assertion, the substantive epistemological assumption that discursive justification does not exhaust epistemic warrant is crucial for a proper treatment of the trilemma. Since the trilemma may be regarded as a discursive or an epistemic challenge, it is very important that one may be warranted in a belief expressed by a dogmatic assertion.

I will argue that (DJA) may provide a prima facie motivation for the anti-dogmatic premise in the trilemma conceived of as a discursive challenge. This diagnosis leaves open whether there is any motivation for a genuinely epistemic anti-dogmatic premise. In particular, the diagnosis does not show that there is no cogent motivation for a non-discursive and genuinely epistemic trilemma. However, the proposed diagnosis challenges the epistemological skeptic to provide such a motivation.

6.2 Do dogmatic assertions violate (DJA)?

Given the distinction between epistemic and discursive properties, we may ask: does Agrippa's Trilemma target the former by premises that are motivated by appeal to the latter? More specifically, is dogmatism held to be inadequate by appeal to intuitions that arise from the fact that dogmatic assertions would violate (DJA)?

Does a dogmatic assertion that p violate a conversational norm? According to the present approach, this partly depends on the conversational context in which it is asserted. Again, Williams' characterization is sufficiently representative to be considered as a starting point:

> Suppose I make a claim—any claim. You are entitled to ask me whether what I have said is something that I am just assuming to be true or whether I know it is the case. If I reply that it is something that I know, you are further entitled to ask me *how* I know. In response, I will have to cite something in support of my claim: my evidence, my credentials, whatever. But now the question can be renewed: is what I cite in defense of my original claim something I am just assuming or something I know? If the former, it will not do the job required of it: you can't base knowledge on a mere assumption. But if the latter, it will in turn need to be backed up, and so on. (Williams 2001, p. 62)

Williams' characterization of the imagined conversational context contains various controversial assumptions. But the primary goal here is to characterize the imagined conversational context well enough to consider whether a dogmatist assertion within it would be governed by (DJA) and, if so, whether it would violate it.

The first thing to note is that the conversational context is presupposed to be governed by an epistemic constraint on assertion. Moreover, each party is presupposed to be sensitive to reasons for and against the contents of the various assertions. The skeptical interlocutor is conceived of as responsive to reason. After all, a skeptical argument is set forth and the challenge is to provide a reasoned rebuttal of it. The challenge facing a theorist in such a skeptical "conversational context," then, is that

of rebutting a Pyrrhonian skeptic by reason. If so, the candidate assertions have the conversational aim of persuading the imagined opponent by reason. So, the conversational context is a discursive one.[24] So, it is reasonable to take it to be governed by (DJA). The question, then, is whether the dogmatist response violates (DJA).

The next thing to note, however, is that the conversational context is so abstractly presented that it does not resemble a real conversation in important respects. This is not an idiosyncratic feature of Williams' presentation. The imagined conversation with a skeptical opponent rarely includes a specification of the normal parameters that determine conversational contexts. After all, a central conversational aim of the imagined conversation is to refute the skeptic. This imagined conversational aim should not be confused with the various *epistemological* aims of considering the imagined conversation. To shed light on epistemological questions, the conversation is typically, and somewhat problematically, imagined as one in which a central aim is to refute or persuade the skeptical opponent. A consequence is that considerations pertaining to alternative assertions, urgency and stakes are abstracted away. Likewise, there is no question of social roles and conventions in the "skeptical dialectic." However, the parameter that concerns the availability of further evidence remains a relevant one.

So, the imagined discursive conversational context is characteristic in that it *abstracts away* most of the determiners of conversational contexts. Doing so may be required for generating a sufficiently general skeptical argument which concludes that we don't know *any*thing. However, this abstract characterization of an imagined conversational context may not be benign.

Although dogmatic assertion is conversationally inappropriate in many real conversational contexts, there may be exceptions to this rule. For example, at a philosophy colloquium, it may be appropriate to make a dogmatic assertion in response to a highly irrelevant question by an audience member who clearly lacks the training and appreciation of philosophical discourse required to make a worthwhile contribution. A rough diagnosis is that a dogmatic assertion can be conversationally appropriate in response to a conversationally inappropriate question or challenge.

In most real conversational contexts, a continuous skeptical questioning is conversationally inappropriate. So, our account should capture two features. First, that a dogmatic assertion appears to be "intellectually unsatisfying" within the imagined skeptical discourse. Second, that a dogmatic assertion to a similar query appears appropriate in many ordinary conversational contexts appears appropriate (cf. Leite 2005, p. 398).

The proposed norm of assertion in discursive conversational contexts may contribute to an account of both these features.[25] As to the first feature, an imagined conversational context that has as a central purpose to answer the query of a skeptical inquirer is governed by (DJA), and a dogmatic assertion appears to violate (DJA). As to the second feature, although the issue is complex, it seems

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[24] Again, Williams' presentation is not exceptional. For example, Leite's presentation involves a discursive requirement that is even stronger insofar as it applies to *justification*: "(2*) In order to be justified in believing any p, one must be able to provide a good reason (or reasons) for believing p" (Leite 2005, p. 402).

[25] Note that such a contextualism concerning the discursive *propriety* of assertion should not be confused with, for example, contextualism about the *truth* of knowledge ascriptions. On the contrary, (WASA) and (DJA) may figure in arguments against the latter type of view.

reasonable to suppose that the skeptic's *question* violates a conversational norm in ordinary conversational contexts. Moreover, I conjecture that this may be argued by an application of (DJA)—*mutatis mutandis* —to questions.[26] Given this conjecture, a dogmatic response to a continued skeptical questioning may, in many real conversational contexts, be appropriate because it is conversationally appropriate, and in accordance with (DJA), to terminate an inappropriate line of questioning. However, I leave this as a conjecture to focus on the first feature: the apparent impropriety of a dogmatic assertion within an imagined conversational context with a Pyrrhonian skeptic.

As mentioned, the abstractly characterized conversational context with the Pyrrhonian skeptic has some intriguing features. A central point of the conversation is that of rationally refuting or persuading the skeptic and the dogmatic assertion is not associated with any actions or stakes. Likewise, there is no consideration of urgency, social roles or conventions that, according to (DJA), partly determine the epistemic requirements that the assertion must meet. Perhaps the absence of the usual determiners of conversational context contributes to an artificially high level of discursive justification required for appropriate assertion. Many of the parameters in question, urgency, for example, typically function to delimit the degree of discursive justification that is required for assertion. So, if there are no limits on the time in which one could in principle inquire further, then asserting something on limited evidence may seem conversationally inadequate. On the other hand, the fact that considerations about stakes are abstracted away should not be confused with the idea that the stakes are low. The latter would typically drive down the level of discursive justification required for assertion. But the former renders the stakes *irrelevant* for determining the level of discursive justification required for meeting the epistemic constraint on appropriate assertion. The idea can be conveyed by way of an analogy: Assume that you have to determine the average value of four parameters, each of which has a value on a scale from 0 to 10. If a parameter has a value of 0, it will, assuming that at least one other parameter has a value larger than 0, decrease the average value. However, *removing* the parameter, such that you are to determine the average of three parameters, might well increase the average value. The analogy is imperfect in several regards. But it illustrates the idea that abstracting away ordinary parameters, such as stakes and urgency, may leave the epistemic requirement on assertion to be determined more exclusively by the conversational aim of rationally persuading or refuting the imagined skeptic. The upshot, I tentatively suggest, is that the abstractly characterized discursive conversational context that one enters by considering skepticism requires an extra-ordinary high degree of discursive justification on assertion. If so, a dogmatic assertion will violate (DJA).

The suggestion that the relevant conversational context yields an extra-ordinarily high requirement of discursive justification might partly explain of why a dogmatist response appears inadequate. But this suggestion need not figure in a distinct (DJA)-based explanation why a dogmatist response is conversationally inadequate. To see this, recall that in contrast to real conversations, the skeptic's questioning is presup-

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[26] See also Williams' attempt to explain why we have the mistaken intuition that repeated questioning is conversationally appropriate (Williams 2004, pp. 134–137).

posed to be conversationally appropriate. To engage in an imagined discourse with the skeptic is to regard the skeptical questioning as conversationally appropriate (for the sake of the discourse). So, it appears that to engage in the imagined discourse is ipso facto to render an, otherwise appropriate, dogmatic response inappropriate. Furthermore, if we understand a dogmatic assertion as one that is made by a speaker who is unable to articulate reasons for it, she will, according to (DJA), trivially violate even a minimal constraint on discursive justification. It appears, then, that (DJA) can contribute to various levels of explanation of why a dogmatic assertion seems like a problematic anti-skeptical response.[27]

The suggested contributions of (DJA) are compatible with the approach according to which a dogmatic assertion appears problematic in virtue of the fact that it violates a norm of conversation rather than because the asserter is unwarranted (Alston 1989; Pryor 2000). More surprisingly, perhaps, the suggested contributions of (DJA) are also compatible with views according to which certain propositions may be asserted dogmatically. According to a prominent species of such an approach, context determines whether an assertion that p may be asserted dogmatically or not (for sub-species see, Adler 2002; Brandom 1994; Williams 2001; Leite 2005). Other versions of the approach emphasize the nature of the asserted propositions. For example, Wright has argued that certain propositions must be relied on since they are *cornerstones* of a cognitive project (Wright 2004; for criticism see Rescorla 2009c).

There are considerable differences between these approaches. What I want to note, however, is only that each of these views owes, even if it is correct, an account of the two above-mentioned features: First, that a dogmatic assertion that p may seem problematic in an imagined conversation with a skeptic and, second, that it may seem unproblematic in many ordinary contexts.[28] So, the idea that (DJA) is violated in the former conversational context and not in the latter may figure in such diagnoses of Agrippa's Trilemma. Moreover, versions of the approach that have it that the dogmatic assertion is in good standing both epistemically and discursively *within the skeptical context* must also explain why a dogmatic assertion appears problematic. However, granting, for the sake of argument, the assumption that the assertion does not violate the norm of assertion because (DJA) does not govern the relevant context, it may still be the case that it *appears* that (DJA) governs the relevant context. So, even if it can be argued that the assertion is, in fact, conversationally appropriate, (DJA) may contribute to an explanation of why the assertion *appears* problematic.[29]

It remains an open question whether there are epistemic, rather than discursive, problems with dogmatism. Since I cannot address this question here, I will only note

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[27] In addition, recall (from footnote 21) the putative constraint on discursive justification that it may not be question-begging against the audience. Such a constraint would render it even harder to satisfy (DJA) in the relevant context.

[28] Of course, some of the mentioned approaches do involve accounts of the two features.

[29] Compare Turri's account according to which the relevant assertion meets the norm of the *speech act* of assertion although it does not meet the requirements on the *dialectical act* of persuasion (Turri forthcoming). The present account allows that the conversational aim of the assertion, such as persuasion by reason, may partly characterize the discursive conversational context and thus, by (DJA), elevate the epistemic requirement on assertion.

a few points. First, if the original skeptical argument contra dogmatism is motivated by discursive considerations, a new and genuinely epistemic skeptical argument must be provided.[30] Second, given the epistemic pluralist framework that I have assumed, it will be a challenge to provide such a skeptical argument. Recall that discursive justification is an especially strong brand of internalist warrant. This leaves open that while we may not have discursive justification that enables us to defeat the skeptic in a conversational setting, our beliefs may still enjoy more modest kinds of warrant—entitlements or even non-discursive justifications. Finally, if entitlements can fulfill the warrant condition on knowledge, Agrippa's Trilemma does not clearly tell against our having knowledge.

The general approach I have pursued has not gone unrecognized.[31] The main novelty here lies in the adaption of epistemic pluralism along with the articulation of a specific epistemic norm of assertion, (DJA). This approach, controversial as it is, suggests a more principled articulation of a familiar idea. This is the idea that while we may lack discursive justification that would enable us to rebut the skeptic, our beliefs enjoy another kind of warrant—entitlement.[32] However, the development and application of (DJA) contributes to meeting the desideratum on a solution to the skeptical paradox that consists in explaining why it was initially compelling.

I reemphasize that I have not, in this brief section, provided a full defense of the view that Agrippa's Trilemma is ultimately a discursive challenge. A full defense requires that at least two things be argued. First, that at least one of the lemmas in the trilemma is motivated by discursive considerations. Second, that it cannot also be motivated by non-discursive genuinely epistemic considerations. Here I have only provided inconclusive reasons for assuming the former.[33]

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[30] While the dialectical issues of skeptical studies are complex, the present arguments may be sufficient for taking the burden of proof to have shifted. Either the arguments for assuming that the original skeptical motivation is discursive must be rebutted or a new genuinely epistemic skeptical argument against dogmatism must be provided.

[31] Williams himself recognizes it and sets forth the following consideration against it (using 'justification' roughly as I use 'warrant'): "Justification is supposed to be *truth-conducive*. Showing that a claim follows from convictions that some or even all of us happen to share, if those convictions rest on nothing at all, does not meet this requirement" (Williams 2001, p. 65). Space does not allow for discerning this passage, but perhaps it may be questioned whether it is genuinely non-discursive given the focus on showing the bases for a *claim*.

[32] I focus here on the contrast between discursive justification and entitlement. But, as mentioned, we might have cognitive access to warranting factors that we lack words to express. Candidate: phenomenal facts. If so, we might have *non*-discursive justification for some of our beliefs. This issue bears on whether someone examining her grounds for belief internally faces a non-conversational analogue of the infelicity with dogmatism. Thanks to Dean Chapman and Daniel Fogal on this point.

[33] As mentioned, I doubt that the present approach extends to all skeptical arguments. First, some skeptical arguments are not *prima facie* motivated by discursive considerations (for examples, see Brueckner 2010; Gerken forthcoming c). Second, some skeptical arguments are *prima facie* compromising both entitlement and justification (for a discussion, see Wright 2008). Third, by focusing on the discursive motivation, I do not deny that epistemological arguments against dogmatism may be given. On the contrary, if the present diagnosis of the conversational motivation is on the right track, non-conversational epistemological arguments should take the center stage of the discussion.

7 Conclusion

The primary ambition of the present paper has been to articulate an epistemic norm of assertion in discursive conversational contexts in which the engaged parties are presupposed to be held epistemically accountable for their assertions. In particular, I have modeled this specific epistemic norm of assertion, (DJA), on a general norm of assertion, (WASA), which is, in turn, modeled on the epistemic norm of action, (WA). In addition, I have argued that what distinguishes (DJA) is that the relevant notion of warrant is of a particular internalist kind: discursive justification.

Finally, I have briefly considered how (DJA) may illuminate a skeptical paradox. Specifically, I have suggested that one of the lemmas in Agrippa's Trilemma is motivated by discursive considerations. While this suggestion is inconclusive, it should be investigated further.

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