

Why Double-Check?

Elise Woodard
 ewoodard@umich.edu

1 WHAT IS DOUBLE-CHECKING?

DOUBLE-CHECKING: *S* double-checks that *p* at t_2 if and only if:

- (a) *S* inquires into whether *p* at t_2
 - Rules out cases like Eliza’s (reassures her friend)
- (b) *S* had a doxastic attitude toward *p* at t_1 (where $t_1 < t_2$)
 - Rules out cases where one has no attitude
- (c) *S* has not forgotten having formed an attitude toward *p*
 - Rules out cases where you forget having formed a belief

1.1 Synchronic vs. Diachronic Compatibility

THE CENTRAL QUESTION Can *S* simultaneously know and be *rationaly permitted* to double-check *p*?

MY THESIS: SYNCHRONIC COMPATIBILITY THESIS (SCT):

SCT: In some cases, knowing that *p* is compatible with double-checking that *p* at the same time.

- **Normative Component:** Sometimes, it is *rationaly permissible* to know that *p* and double-check that *p* at *t*.
- **Descriptive Component:** Sometimes, it is *possible* to know that *p* and double-check that *p* at *t*.

My opponents endorse the (Mere) DIACHRONIC COMPATIBILITY THESIS (DCT):

DCT: Knowing that *p* is **only** compatible with double-checking that *p* at different times.

2 CASES: WHY DOUBLE-CHECK BEYOND KNOWLEDGE?

- Deming:** double-checks that her door is locked
- Riley:** double-checks their math problem (that $x = 15$)
- Sam:** double-checks that he packed his sriracha bottle
- Carla:** double-checks that dense bodies exist

Reasons why they check:

- (a) certainty
- (b) higher-order epistemic states (e.g. knowing that you know)
- (c) increase confidence/credence
- (d) increase resilience/stability
- (e) increase sensitivity to error
- (f) increase justification

Anti-Skepticism: Knowledge is not a maximally strong epistemic state.

3 CHALLENGE #1: INQUIRING ATTITUDES

3.1 The Argument from Suspension

- (P1) Double-checking is a form of inquiry.
- (P2) All forms of inquiry require suspending judgment.
- (P3) Suspending judgment requires not believing.
- (C1) Therefore, double-checking requires not believing.
- (P4) Knowledge requires belief.
- (C2) Therefore, double-checking requires not knowing.

The Argument from Suspension, more precisely:

- (P1) If *S* is double-checking, then *S* is inquiring.
- (P2) If *S* is inquiring, then *S* is suspended.
- (P3) If *S* is suspended, then *S* ought not believe.
- (C1) Therefore, if *S* is double-checking, then *S* ought not believe.
- (P4) If *S* ought not believe, then *S* ought not know.
- (C2) Therefore, if *S* is double-checking, then *S* ought not know.

I deny P2 (inquiry requires suspension):

- Inquiry requires some form of openness, but the requisite openness is compatible with belief.

3.2 The Argument from Interrogative Attitudes

- (i) Double-checking is a form of inquiry.
- (ii) All forms of inquiry require interrogative attitudes (e.g. wondering, questioning, investigating, suspending).
- (iii) Knowing requires not having an interrogative attitude.
- (iv) Therefore, knowing requires not inquiring.

The Argument from Interrogative Attitudes, more precisely:

- (i) If S is double-checking, then S is inquiring.
- (ii) If S is inquiring, then S has an interrogative attitude.
- (iii) If S has an interrogative attitude (toward *whether* p), then S ought not know (*that* p).
- (iv) Therefore, if S is double-checking, then S ought not know (*that* p).

I deny (ii), i.e. that inquiry requires interrogative attitudes:

- Instead agents might have a *propositional* inquiring attitude.
- We double-check *that*, confirm *that*, corroborate *that*, etc.

4 THE NATURE OF BELIEF/KNOWLEDGE

4.1 Belief is Strong

Objection: Belief is strong in a way that precludes double-checking.

Belief is strong: Full belief requires credence 1 or practical certainty

- requires ruling out the possibility that $\neg p$ at least for practical purposes

Responses:

1. **Irenic response:** only eliminates *some* rationales for double-checking.
2. Double-checking poses a problem for belief is strong, rather than vice versa.
3. Renders beliefs unstable: you lose belief when you double-check.

4.2 Interest-Relative Knowledge

Objection: SCT is incompatible with popular knowledge-action principles, such as:

(KA) S knows that p only if S is rational to act as if p (Fantl & McGrath 2007, 559).

A common test: S knows that p only if S prefers to act as if p both conditional on p and unconditionally.

The worry: Double-checkers prefer to double-check unconditionally, but conditional on p they don't prefer to check. So they don't know.

Responses:

1. Some double-checkers may prefer to double-check *both* conditional on p and unconditionally (ex: Riley, Carla)
2. Use verdicts of double-checking to challenge KA directly
3. KA renders knowledge unattractively unstable

5 IS DOUBLE-CHECKING EVER REQUIRED?

Two possibilities:

1. If the standard for belief can be higher than knowledge.
2. If one has higher epistemic standards than knowledge *for oneself*.

6 BIG PICTURE & BROADER CONNECTIONS

- Picture of inquiry & belief
- Picture of epistemic responsibility & achievement
- Inquiry & process-oriented picture of epistemology
- Further work on further inquiry:
 - When are you *required to* or *should avoid* thinking further about a matter?
 - * Ex: incessant checking or redeliberation; evidence-gathering
 - Social epistemological connections: when are open-mindedness or inquiring further not recommended?
 - * Ex: echo chambers; gaslighting