Why Double-Check?

Abstract: Can you rationally double-check what you already know? In this talk, I argue that you can. Agents can know that something is true and rationally double-check it at the very same time. I defend my position by considering a wide variety of cases where agents double-check their beliefs to gain epistemic improvements beyond knowledge. These include certainty, epistemic resilience, and corroboration. Although this phenomenon is widespread, my proposal faces two types of challenges. First, some have defended ignorance norms, on which agents are only allowed to inquire about things they don't already know. Second—motivated by strong conceptions of belief or pragmatic encroachment—some have argued that double-checking destroys knowledge. I argue that these competing views fail to capture both the epistemic value of double-checking and the many reasons why agents might double-check. Moreover, they rely on overly strong assumptions about what inquiry, knowledge, or belief requires. I end by considering some normative and social implications of focusing epistemology on our practices of inquiry.