Dan Zeman
Mihai Hîncu   *Editors*

Retraction Matters

New Developments in the Philosophy of Language

Synthese Library

Studies in Epistemology, Logic, Methodology,
and Philosophy of Science

Volume 488

The aim of *Synthese Library* is to provide a forum for the best current work in the methodology and philosophy of science and in epistemology, all broadly understood. A wide variety of different approaches have traditionally been represented in the Library, and every effort is made to maintain this variety, not for its own sake, but because we believe that there are many fruitful and illuminating approaches to the philosophy of science and related disciplines.

Special attention is paid to methodological studies which illustrate the interplay of empirical and philosophical viewpoints and to contributions to the formal (logical, set-theoretical, mathematical, information-theoretical, decision-theoretical, etc.) methodology of empirical sciences. Likewise, the applications of logical methods to epistemology as well as philosophically and methodologically relevant studies in logic are strongly encouraged. The emphasis on logic will be tempered by interest in the psychological, historical, and sociological aspects of science. In addition to monographs *Synthese Library* publishes thematically unified anthologies and edited volumes with a well-defined topical focus inside the aim and scope of the book series. The contributions in the volumes are expected to be focused and structurally organized in accordance with the central theme(s), and should be tied together by an extensive editorial introduction or set of introductions if the volume is divided into parts. An extensive bibliography and index are mandatory.

Dan Zeman • Mihai Hîncu
Editors

Retraction Matters

New Developments in the Philosophy
of Language

Editors
Dan Zeman
Department of Analytic Philosophy
Slovak Academy of Sciences
Bratislava, Slovakia

Mihai Hîncu
Department of Political Science and
Communication
Valahia University of Târgoviște
Târgoviște, Romania

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

Contents

Contributors

Pedro Abreu NOVA Institute of Philosophy, NOVA University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

Lwenn Bussière-Caraes Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Laura Caponetto Newnham College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Andy Egan Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA

Jesse Fitts Department of Philosophy, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, USA

Mihai Hîncu Department of Political Science and Communication, Valahia University of Târgoviște, Târgoviște, Romania

Luca Incurvati Department of Philosophy and Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Quill R Kukla Department of Philosophy, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA
Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK

Marcin Lewiński NOVA Institute of Philosophy, NOVA University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

Teresa Marques University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Giorgio Sbardolini Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Julian Schlöder Department of Philosophy, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA

Joseph Ulatowski Philosophy Programme, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Jeremy Wyatt Philosophy Programme, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Dan Zeman Department of Analytic Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

Chapter 1
Introduction

Mihai Hîncu and **Dan Zeman**

Abstract Many times, what we say and think proves to be wrong. It might turn out that what we thought to be a comforting remark was, in fact, making things worse. Or that a joke was inappropriate. Or that yelling out loud was rude. Perhaps more importantly, there are plenty of cases in which what we said turns out to be *false:* we spoke without paying attention, we were misinformed or tricked, or we realize that we made a reasoning mistake. Sometimes we "take back" the assertions we made when we realize they are no longer true. Such speech acts of taking back can be performed in various ways: more formally, as effected in a court of law or when an official speaks to the press, or more informally in our day-by-day interactions. They can also be done explicitly, as in the cases just mentioned, but also implicitly, with our interlocutors taking it for granted that we intend to take something back. These acts of taking back are known as *retraction*.

This introduction sketches the main debates in which retraction has been appealed to, signals the issues the authors think are interesting and worth pursuing, and describes what the contributions to this volume—gathering together for the first time work from the semantics of perspectival expresisons and from Speech Act Theory—amount to.

Many times, what we say and think proves to be wrong. It might turn out that what we thought to be a comforting remark was, in fact, making things worse. Or that a joke was inappropriate. Or that yelling out loud was rude. Perhaps more importantly, there are plenty of cases in which what we said turns out to be *false*: we spoke

M. Hîncu (✉)
Department of Political Science and Communication, Valahia University of Târgoviște, Târgoviște, Romania

D. Zeman
Department of Analytic Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

without paying attention, we were misinformed or tricked, or we realize that we made a reasoning mistake.

A particular instance of this latter phenomenon is when someone changes their perspective and doesn't find previous assertions and thoughts true anymore. For example, say that you used to like licorice as a child, and that you went around saying and thinking things like "Licorice is tasty." But growing up, you find licorice too strong and quite boring; your tastes have changed. While the taste of licorice itself has not changed, you are not going around anymore saying and thinking things like "Licorice is tasty." In fact, in certain cases, you might even think that what you said and believed in your childhood was wrong—at least in light of your present preferences. Or think about a moral belief you had, and which you don't consider to be true anymore because you have gone through a life-changing experience; you have changed your moral outlook.

Sometimes we "take back" the assertions we made when we realize they are no longer true. Such speech acts of taking back can be performed in various ways: more formally, as effected in a court of law or when an official speaks to the press, or more informally in our day-by-day interactions. They can also be done explicitly, as in the cases just mentioned, but also implicitly, with our interlocutors taking it for granted that we intend to take something back. These acts of taking back are known as *retraction*.

Retraction is present not only in situations involving ordinary conversations (as the example with licorice illustrates), but also in contexts of critical discussion (Walton & Krabbe, 1995; Krabbe, 2001) and contexts of scientific research (Fleisher, 2021). Issuing retractions, as a discursive behavior, is a delicate issue which seems to justify contradictory assessments of its benefits: while retraction is a *sine qua non* condition of any critical discussion in which it is mandatory to withdraw inconsistent or evidentially unsupported claims, it is also true that too much retraction in a conversational context leads to a crisis point and blocks the interlocutors' cooperative efforts (Krabbe, 2001). In this connection, defining a rational balance point between these conversational edges and specifying the permissibility conditions of retraction are matters whose elucidation would substantially contribute towards an account of the conversational dynamics in the types of contexts mentioned.

Thus, from a philosophical point of view, retraction is an interesting and important phenomenon. While the situations mentioned above might be intuitive enough, it is not very easy to properly characterize retraction, nor to give a philosophical account of it. Yet, the phenomenon has played an important role in several philosophical disputes. This volume aims to bring together the preoccupations with retraction from these disparate disputes, highlighting their potential to offer precious insight and to complement each other. To better situate the papers in the volume, in the remainder of this description we sketch the main debates in which retraction has been appealed to, signal the issues we think are interesting, and describe what the contributions to the volume aim to do in this connection.

One place in which the phenomenon of retraction has played an important role is the debate over the semantics of the types of expressions known as *perspectival*

expressions: predicates of personal taste like "tasty" (mentioned above), "disgusting", "fun" etc., aesthetic adjectives like "beautiful", "balanced" etc., moral terms like "good", "bad", "ought to" etc., epistemic modals like "might" and "must", and other expressions. While these expressions differ significantly, one trait they have in common is that their interpretation depends on the provision of a *perspective* (or a standard or a judge). They are thus "perspectival" (or subjective—in opposition to objective ones that don't require the provision of a perspective for their interpretation).

There are four broad views in the literature that are the main contenders in the contemporary debate about such expressions. According to *contextualism* (e.g., Dreier, 1990; DeRose, 1992; Stojanovic, 2007; Glanzberg, 2007, 2022; López de Sa, 2008; Cappelen & Hawthorne, 2009; Schaffer, 2011, Sundell, 2011, Silk, 2016; Zakkou, 2019a), perspectives are part of the semantic content of our utterances. There are many versions of contextualism, which differ on the exact mechanism by which perspectives are contributed in the semantic content of utterances: by means of giving values to one (Stojanovic, 2007; Schaffer, 2011 etc.) or more (Glanzberg, 2007) relevant variables in the syntactic configuration of the target sentences, by treating the target expressions as indexicals (on the model of Rothschild and Segal's (2009) view about color terms), via optional pragmatic processes (in the sense of Recanati (2002, 2004)) etc. This difference between contextualist views will not play a big role in what follows; it is more important to focus on what all versions of contextualism have in common, namely that perspectives are part of the semantic content of utterances—or, in other words, that their semantic contents are *perspective-specific*.

In contrast to contextualism, *relativism* (e.g., Kölbel, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2015a, b, 2022; Lasersohn, 2005, 2016; Kompa, 2005; Recanati, 2007; Stephenson, 2007; Brogaard, 2008; MacFarlane, 2003, 2009, 2011, 2014; Kolodny & MacFarlane, 2010), takes perspectives to belong not to the semantic contents of utterances, but to the set of parameters relative to which utterances are to be evaluated (known from Kaplan (1989) as "circumstances of evaluation"), standardly taken to comprise possible worlds, times, etc. As with contextualism, there is variety in relativism too. For example, according to less radical versions of the view, the context responsible for providing the perspective relative to which utterances are to be evaluated is the *context of utterance* (that is, the one determined by the situation in which the utterances have been made), whereas according to more radical versions of the view, it is the *context of assessment* (that is, the one determined by the situation in which utterances are assessed and which can differ from the context of utterance) that provides the perspective. Again, the difference between these two versions is not what is most important here, but rather their common denominator: namely, that perspectives are an aspect of the circumstances of evaluation—or, in other words, that the semantic contents of utterances are *perspective-neutral*.

While contextualism and relativism are the most widely held views on the semantics of perspectival expressions, they are not the only ones. For example, while both contextualism and relativism take declarative utterances containing perspectival expressions to be in the business of making assertions, *expressivism* (e.g.,

Gibbard, 1990, 2012; Buekens, 2011; Ridge, 2014; Gutzmann, 2015, 2016) takes such utterances to be chiefly in the business of expressing positive or negative non-cognitive attitudes of speakers. Expressivism comes in many varieties, too, among which two broad categories can be discerned: pure expressivism (which holds that the unique role of utterances of sentences containing perspectival expressions is to express attitudes) and hybrid expressivism (which holds that, besides expressing attitudes, utterances of such sentences have also the role of making assertions). Another view in competition to the above is *absolutism*. According to it, there is no need to postulate perspectives in the semantic apparatus of expressions like those focused on here because they are simply not perspectival—or, at least, their semantic content isn't (e.g., Schafer, 2011; Hills, 2013; Eriksson & Tiozzo, 2016; Wyatt, 2018). Both these views and their varieties are worth taking into consideration, and they have played a role in recent literature.

Differences between the views succinctly described above determine differences in how various linguistic and interpretational phenomena are treated. This has given leeway for heated disputes between the views mentioned. There are essentially two types of arguments to be found in the literature. One concerns judgments people have ("intuitions") about sentences containing the target expressions in various conversational scenarios such as disagreement (Kölbel, 2004; Lasersohn, 2005, 2016; Huvenes, 2012; Zouhar, 2014; Hîncu, 2015; Stojanovic, 2019; Zeman, 2020; etc.), eavesdropping (Egan et al., 2005), and retraction (Egan et al., 2005; MacFarlane, 2014; etc.). The other consists in syntactic considerations, involving linguistic phenomena like licensing, control, binding, sluicing, floating, ellipsis, anaphora or crossover effects (Glanzberg, 2007, 2022; Schaffer, 2011; Collins, 2013; Snyder, 2013; etc.).

Together with disagreement, retraction has been considered the main argument in favor of a relativist semantics for perspectival expressions. According to the proponents of the argument, the main data to be considered consists in situations in which a speaker "takes back" a previous assertion involving a perspectival expression. To focus on predicates of taste, consider the following scenario:

A (at time *t*):	Licorice is tasty.
A (at time *t' > t*):	I was wrong. Licorice is not tasty.

A's speech act at time *t'* is considered a retraction insofar as she admits that the previous assertion is wrong ("I was wrong."). However, in order for *A* to be able to retract, the semantic content of the initial assertion has to be perspective-neutral (that is, to be something like *licorice is tasty*, period), otherwise the perspective encoded in the semantic content of the initial assertion (in this case indexed to time) would make retraction both unnecessary and impossible.

There has been a strong opposition to the argument from retraction based on intuitive cases like the one above. Two different types of reactions can be distilled from the literature. The first consists in "armchair" considerations, involving putting forward various cases in which the initial data are contested or supplemented with

other reactions to retraction scenarios, as well as contesting certain claims that relativists have made alongside appealing to retraction as supporting their view. One such claim is that retraction is *mandatory*; perhaps most prominently, this claim is reflected in MacFarlane's proposal for what he dubs the "retraction rule":

> An agent in context c_2 is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of p made at c_1 if p is not true as used at c_1 and assessed from c_2. (MacFarlane, 2014, p. 108)

Both the (empirical) claim that retraction is mandatory, and the corresponding (normative) profile of retraction illustrated by the rule above have been contested, the first by cases in which people intuitively refuse to retract (see, for example, the examples in von Fintel and Gillies (2008, 2010), Dowell (2011) or Raffman (2016)), the second by considerations related to reasonableness and rationality (e.g., Marques, 2018; Zakkou, 2019b). Even if the particular examples and considerations put forward in reaction to the argument from retraction miss the mark or can be eventually incorporated into the relativist picture, the question that remains concerns the issue of what drives retraction and in what conditions it should be made (if ever).

The second type of reaction to the argument from retraction has been to conduct empirical studies that have a higher chance of providing a better insight into how perspectival expressions are used in retraction scenarios. There is now a burgeoning range of experimental studies involving more than one type of perspectival expression. Thus, after the pioneering paper by Knobe and Yalcin (2014), that had the effect of weakening the support retraction was thought to offer relativism, similar studies trying to replicate or challenge their findings have been flourished: Dinges and Zakkou (2020), Kneer (2021, 2022), etc. What most of these studies have in common is not only the result that retraction is not as solid a phenomenon as the relativist has assumed, but also that the data gathered in fact support contextualism over relativism when it comes to retraction. And while some of these results have been addressed from a relativist perspective (Beddor and Egan's (2018) paper responds to Knobe and Yalcin (2014), for example), as of now, there are no comprehensive discussions of the phenomenon of retraction and of the empirical and conceptual challenges recently found in the literature.

Given this dialectic, the question that needs to be addressed as the next logical step in the debate is this: how much of the dialectical power of the argument from retraction remains after taking these objections into consideration? One straightforward goal of the research in this area should then be getting clear on the status of the argument from retraction and its dialectical role in the debate focused on. Among the relevant sub-questions are the following: How robust is the phenomenon of retraction? Is retraction mandatory? What exactly do the experimental studies on retraction show vis-à-vis the semantic debate about perspectival expressions? What are the best theoretical arguments in favor of and against using retraction to support certain semantic views? Assuming the phenomenon is robust, is retraction uniform across domains of discourse? What is the connection between retraction and disagreement (retraction has been, after all, conceived as an act of "disagreeing with one's previous self")? Some of these questions are addressed in this volume.

Another research direction where retraction has been in focus is Speech Act Theory. First of all, it has to be stressed that retraction is a speech act (Caponetto, 2020). The tripartite distinction between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, originating in the pioneering work of John L. Austin (1962), is today a *locus communis* of all the theoretical approaches focused on the ways language is used. From this viewpoint, insofar as any retraction can target a variety of illocutionary speech acts, like assertions, promises, commands etc., it has to be understood as a second-order speech act (Caponetto, 2020).

Once an illocution is present on the conversational table, the performance of a retraction act cannot target the speech act itself, only its conventional, or deontic, effects (Caponetto, 2020). In calling off illocutions, participants intend to explicitly signal changes in the sets of commitments engendered by past statements (Krabbe, 2001, p. 142). According to the influential discourse model proposed by Stalnaker (1978, 2002), the set of propositions to which the discourse participants are publicly committed serves to represent the common ground (CG) of a conversation by encoding all the mutually presupposed information among speakers. In this framework, each linguistic interaction unfolds against this *unique* set of public commitments that all the parties involved in the conversation accept and, as a conversational move, a speaker's assertive contribution is understood as a proposal to modify the CG by augmenting it with the statement's propositional content.

Even though Stalnaker defined the joint, collective set of discursive commitments constituting the CG in terms of participants' commitment sets and of their intersection (in contrast to, for example, Gunlogson (2003) who understands it as union operation on the individual commitment sets), the theoretical benefits of maintaining a separation between these two sets of public commitments have been pointed out only recently (Farkas & Bruce, 2009; Rawlins, 2010; Malamud & Stephenson, 2014).

First, letting the discourse commitment set (DC) of each participant in a dialogue to be an independent component of the discourse model allows us to represent some critical conversational moves that react to assertions, such as disagreements and retractions (Farkas & Bruce, 2009). Second, besides that it enables us to understand that by issuing a retraction someone makes transparent the discrepancy between the individual and collective public commitments (Farkas & Bruce, 2009), fragmenting the set of the discourse commitments into two shows that the action of withdrawing a statement can target not only the set CG of joint public commitments, but also the set DC of non-mutual discourse commitments, and therefore that both information sets are amenable to retraction moves (Malamud & Stephenson, 2014, p. 2). Finally, the participants' DCs, understood as sets containing all the individual public commitments which do not constitute objects of mutual agreement among interlocutors help explain (i) the conversational bias towards an informational increase of the CG, by transforming DCs into collective public commitments, and (ii) how the states of a discourse evolve until reaching its stability limit, by deciding all the relevant issues under discussion, and *a fortiori* removing them from the conversational table (Farkas & Bruce, 2009). In this regard, it has to be highlighted that the speech act of

retraction constitutes an *efficient* means by which a conversation can reach a stable state (Farkas & Bruce, 2009, p. 102).

Even though retraction acts can downgrade a participant's set DC of individual commitments, there is a considerable portion of it which remains fundamentally intangible, hence immune to retraction. Among the informational elements of the set DC, we should discern between manifest, "light-side" individual discourse commitments which speech acts overtly engender in a conversation, and their "dark-side" counterparts which, not being explicitly incurred by the author of a speech act, "can only be surmised from the subject's general background or behavior, including utterances not made within the dialogue; these may at times remain hidden even for the subject him- or herself." (Krabbe, 2001, p. 146). Insofar as this latter type of individual commitment is not conversationally manifest, it seems that there is a way to methodologically circumscribe the limit of retractability inside the set DC. In a similar vein, it should be emphasized that the withdrawal of a manifest individual commitment from the set DC may have a *cascade effect*, triggering multiple retractions of the informational consequences of the initially recanted individual commitment (Krabbe, 2001, p. 145). Last but not least, that proper part of the DC set consisting of manifest, retraction-apt individual commitments can be divided into (i) dependent and independent commitments (Gunlogson, 2008), with regard to the informational sources providing evidential support to discursive commitments, and (ii) strong and tentative commitments, with respect to the speakers' degree of confidence in the propositional contents to which they are committed (Malamud & Stephenson, 2014).

All the above conceptual distinctions are crucial for a better understanding of retraction's dynamics and for the construal of accurate, empirically informed, formal models capturing its interactions with both commitment sets CG and DC. From this viewpoint, one pressing question is whether speech acts, in general, and retraction, in particular, traditionally conceived as objects belonging to the domain of pragmatics, are indeed independent from grammatical and syntactic patterns, and from semantic operations. In this regard, recent linguistic evidence calls into question this separation of domains and the independence of speech act operators. Latest research on the grammar of speech act modifiers and cross-linguistic investigations of the ways in which different discourse particles affect speech acts empirically motivate a *neo-performative*, syntactically-oriented account of speech acts (Haegeman & Hill, 2013; Hill, 2013; Tang, 2015; Heim et al., 2016). Also, there is linguistic evidence confirming not only that there are, in natural languages, linguistic mechanisms by means of which an entire speech act (not only its semantic content) can be grammatically embedded under discourse particles, but also that, insofar as the speech acts operators are responsive to semantic operations, compositionality fundamentally operates at the highest discourse level (Krifka, 2015; Heim et al., 2016; Wiltschko, 2017; Law et al., 2019). At this stage of research, the following question naturally arises: is there any linguistic evidence for the existence in natural languages of discourse particles which, acting as higher-order operators, can grammatically embed and, consequently, semantically manipulate the speech act of retraction?

Another critical question is this: when a speech act of retracting, modeled as a proposal to remove from the conversational table an initially asserted propositional content, transparentizes a modification of the assertor's set of individual discursive commitments, how should this change of the speaker's DC be understood theoretically? We may wonder if, by retracting a statement, a speaker publicly signals an individual commitment to the complementary denotation of the original assertion, or they just want to explicitly convey that they are no longer disposed to uphold the denotation of the initial speech act.

It goes without saying that the retraction of conversational moves cannot be completely understood independently of their correlative *cognitive dynamics*, insofar as the felicity condition for retraction requires a change in one's previous perspective (Bledin & Rawlins, 2016, p. 637). Logically, this change of perspective may be represented as an elimination from the speaker's set of doxastic possibilities of all those alternatives corresponding to the individual commitments placed on the conversational table up to the time of retraction. Also, in order to ensure that false individual commitments can be retracted and that they remain outside the CG set, it is better to understand the union of the set DC of a speaker with the set CG of mutual public commitments as a subset of the discourse participant's set of doxastic possibilities (Farkas & Bruce, 2009, p. 86).

Building on this, a final question that imposes itself concerns the way in which the doxastic background of the conversational move of retraction should be understood, and in consequence modeled. More precisely, is the retraction engendered by a *revision* of the propositional content expressed by the doxastic counterpart of an initial, antecedent assertion, or rather its motivation is related to a *suspension* of belief triggered by a lack of evidence? While such questions will not be taken up directly in the contributions to this volume, they are nevertheless in the background of the issues tackled, thus proving useful for understanding and situating the role of retraction in the conversational dynamics of both our daily linguistic interactions and in scientific inquiry. They also illustrate the ramifications the issue of retraction has for a variety of questions, debates, and research programs in philosophy.

*

About 20 years have passed since the argument from retraction has entered the philosophical scene. Although not completely ignored, it has been less popular than other arguments in the literature about the semantics of perspectival expressions—e.g., the argument from *faultless disagreement*. There is also a substantial lack of consensus both about the reach and robustness of the phenomenon and about its implications for semantic issues. For these reasons, a more in-depth assessment of the argument and its place in the debate over the semantics of perspectival expressions is sorely needed. Part I of this volume aims at filling this gap, with each of the featured papers offering what could be seen as a more or less direct assessment of the argument. But the volume is much wider in scope than this. Part II gets to the more foundational issues: the papers in this part all investigate the conditions for the possibility or felicity of retractions (of various kinds), aiming at providing

necessary and sufficient conditions by connecting the phenomenon with various discursive models, and by stressing its deep social nature. In the final part of this introduction, we briefly present each paper, its place in the volume, and the contribution it makes to the elucidation of some of the aforementioned issues.

The opening article, by Jeremy Wyatt and Joseph Ulatowski ("Taste Predicates and Retraction Data: An Improved Framework"), rehearses the importance of retraction for the debate between various semantics views of perspectival expressions. The authors confirm that the data involving retraction is important, but they think that it has been dialectically misused. Thus, they argue that the norm of retraction proposed by one of the leading relativists (MacFarlane, 2014) as underscoring our use of predicates of personal taste is flawed, and that when it comes to the data all views on the market (except absolutism) are equally well-positioned to account for it. This reconceptualization of the significance of the data also leads to a different interpretation of the empirical data. In this connection, the authors focus on some of the recent experimental work—by, e.g., Kneer (2021, 2022)—and argue that the results pose a problem not for relativism, but for absolutism about predicates of personal taste.

The following paper, Teresa Marques' "Falsity and Retraction: New Experimental Data on Epistemic Modals", is critical towards retraction's ability to support relativism. Marques both replicates some of the experimental findings in Knobe and Yalcin (2014) and provides new data (refreshingly moving away from the mainstream by focusing on data from Spanish data about epistemic modals) about retraction that align with those of Kneer (2021, 2022). The core of Marques' argument is that retracting is not required, and if one focuses on it being appropriate, then its loose connection to falsity deflates the relativist argument. In the final part of the paper, she engages with Zeman's and Wyatt and Ulkatowski's contributions to this volume, arguing that their move towards a flexible relativist view doesn't solve the main issue, and concludes that contextualism remains the better view in the debate.

In his paper, "Relativism and Retraction: The Case Is Not Yet Lost", Dan Zeman aims to counterbalance the critical stance towards retraction as supporting relativism by showing that there are still several moves available to the relativist. In connection to "armchair" objections, Zeman argues they are not decisive, but that they require what seems to be an important concession: giving up the claim that retraction is mandatory. However, Zeman points out (*pace* Marques, for example) that relativism remains a distinct view even if this concession is made and is still better suited than its rivals to account for the data. Regarding recent empirical work, Zeman doubts that the results arrived at by Kneer (2021, 2022) or Marques (this volume) mark the fall of relativism, due to what he identifies as a flaw in the experimental setup. He also shows that the data are compatible with a radically flexible relativist view, which he develops starting from the important work by Beddor and Egan (2018).

Part I closes with a paper by Jesse Fitts entitled "Relevance in Epistemic Modal Disagreement". In it, Fitts focuses on the same debate as the previous papers, but is interested at a more general level in the possible reactions one could have in disagreement/challenge scenarios. Fitts argues that the felicity of various reactions

(including "digging in" and retracting) can be explained by attending to (i) a distinction between first-person and third-person information sources; (ii) a distinction between realistic and non-realistic information; and (iii) the particular conversational goals in a given context. Fitts shows how their interaction can be modelled and applies the model to the many examples of exchanges he considers. The paper ends with pointing towards a few issues for further research. Fitts' paper can also be seen as connecting the two kinds of literatures mentioned above, and as providing a nice segway into Part II of the volume.

This part focuses on the more foundational question of what exactly retraction is. To this effect, the authors featured dedicate a lot of effort to investigating what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for an act to count as a retraction. Considerable attention is also paid to how to model assertion, and to which model offers the best theoretical advantage. Part II thus opens with Laura Caponetto's contribution, which offers a tour into the "illocutionary fabric of retraction", investigating issues like which illocutionary category retraction belongs to, what are its felicity conditions, what normative changes it effects, etc. After distinguishing between annulments, amendments and retractions, and in line with her previous work, Caponetto proposes that retraction be understood as a higher-order speech act that cancels the normative update of previous, lower-level, speech act. After offering a very detailed account of the general felicity conditions for retraction, Caponetto engages critically with Kukla and Steinberg's (2021) view, pointing out similarities and differences between the two approaches.

Next is a collaboration between Lwenn Bussière-Caraes, Luca Incurvati, Giorgio Sbardolini and Julian Schlöder that focuses on issues like retraction's felicity conditions, its effects on a conversation, how it compares to other speech acts and how it relates to social power dynamics. On the view they put forward in their paper (entitled "Nevermind: On Retraction as a Speech Act"), retractions are proposals to update the context in particular ways that can be accepted or rejected. Operating within a Stalnakerian framework, the authors show in great detail not only how retractions canceling a previous utterance's illocutionary effects can be modeled, but also how to model the cancelation of the effects of certain other speech acts that depended on the retracted act. According to their view, a retraction has two effects: it adds to the conversational record that a retraction was proposed and, if accepted, it cancels the illocutionary effect of the relevant utterance. By going through various examples, they show how power dynamics can influence retraction (in some cases the acceptance of a proposal made by a powerful party may be taken for granted). Finally, on the model they propose retractions are cognitively costly, but—they argue—this is how it should be.

Andy Egan's paper, "Assertion and Retraction", compares two styles of theorizing about speech acts (illustrated also by the proposals in the two previous papers): "norms first" theories and "effects first" theories. The crucial issue tackled is with what view of retraction each of these two types of theories goes better: a reductionist analysis (according to which retraction is always done via some other kind of speech act) or a non-reductionist one (according to which retraction is a *sui generis* speech act). Egan finds that the non-reductionist view is better supported by an

effects-first framework, but takes the opposite package of views to be attractive as well. Egan's main goal in the paper is ultimately to forge a view about assertion, and the view he ends up proposing is that the characteristic effect of assertion is not that of updating the context set with what is asserted, but the imposition of a forward-looking constraint on the context set instead.

The idea of taking responsibility, within our discursive practices of retraction, for the retracted speech acts, is what guides Quill Kukla's paper, "The Ethics of Retraction". Starting from an analogy with Kintsugi (the venerable art of repairing broken ceramics with precious metals), Kukla investigates how the speech act of retraction, as an inherently value-laden act, can function as an act of repair and shows that retractions bear substantive ethical value as central tools for repairing ourselves, as well as our affective and social relationships. This way of understanding retraction opens a novel conceptual space defined by the importance of developing an ethics of retraction. Drawing on previous work, Kukla offers a pragmatic analysis of retraction and its success conditions as second-order speech acts that are not automatic and have "agent-neutral" outputs, and then proceeds to survey the space of modal conditions for retractions by examining the circumstances in which their performances are possible, permissible, or obligatory. They also draw attention to an aspect of speech acts that has not received much attention, namely that not all of them are on an equal footing regarding their performance conditions and explains these differences by appealing to the level at which felicity conditions are set, to how their uptakes are secured, or to both. After illustrating that not all successful retractions are ethically permissible, and that retractions can be used to mitigate and fix harm, Kukla concludes that retraction constitutes a phenomenon which, due to its linguistic and social complexities, should methodologically be placed at the intersection between ethics and pragmatics.

The last contribution to the volume, a joint paper by Pedro Abreu and Marcin Lewiński, deals with an underexplored issue: "verbal retraction"—the phenomenon whereby speakers retract a previous assertion on the basis of a change in the meaning of the words used. After stressing the importance of the verbal/nonverbal distinction in various cross-area disputes and after attending a couple of further distinctions in the literature ("wholly" vs "merely" verbal, disputes involving meta-linguistic negotiations or not), the authors advance their claim that retraction plays a crucial role in drawing the distinction. They show this by showcasing a number of examples of verbal retraction. The conclusion they reach, however, is that whether a certain dispute is verbal or non-verbal is indeterminate due to the ever-present possibility of new conversational moves retroactively redefining its nature, with retraction being such a redefining move.

We would like to end this introduction by pointing out what we take this volume's strengths, besides focusing on a topic of interest, to be. First, both the authors gathered in Part I and those in Part II enter in dialogue with each other, thus discussing either their previous work or their contributions to this volume, which in turn further enhances the debate. Second, while many papers pick up on extant work on retraction (sometimes work by the authors themselves, as many of them have made essential contributions to the literature), they each extend and deepen current

analyses of retraction and tackle new issues and questions. Thus, the papers in Part I strengthen the case for or against certain semantic views of perspectival expressions by appeal to new data, by tackling new objections or by proposing novel reinterpretations of the extant data and of their role in the debate. The papers in this part also have a strong empirical focus, with some of them directly providing experimental evidence or reacting to it. Similarly with the papers in Part II: while starting from previous work investigating retraction from a Speech Act Theory perspective, they all explore new aspects and clarify previous issues. Last but not least, by uniting separate strands and bringing the corresponding research together, the volume illustrates how the various literatures, issues and questions can shine a light on each other and how those involved in the internal debates can benefit from work outside them.

We take the primary audience for this volume to be philosophers of language interested in the semantics of perspectival expressions, in Speech Act Theory and in modeling discourse in general—as well as those working in experimental philosophy. This is the first volume in literature that gathers papers dedicated to retraction, and (we hope) an essential resource for future research on the topic. It wouldn't exist (not in its current form, at least) without the insightful contributions of the authors, without the tacit but immensely important work done by the referees, and without the opportunity given to us by Springer. We thank them all.

References

Austin, J. L. (1962). In J. O. Urmson & M. Sbisà (Eds.), *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

Beddor, B., & Egan, A. (2018). Might do better: Flexible relativism and the QUD. *Semantics and Pragmatics, 11*. https://doi.org/10.3765/sp.11.7

Bledin, J., & Rawlins, K. (2016). Epistemic resistance moves. In M. Moroney, C. R. Little, J. Collard, & D. Burgdorf (Eds.), *Semantics and linguistic theory 26* (pp. 620–640). LSA and CLC.

Brogaard, B. (2008). Moral contextualism and moral relativism. *The Philosophical Quarterly, 58*(232), 385–409.

Buekens, F. (2011). Faultless disagreement, assertions, and the affective-expressive dimension of judgments of taste. *Philosophia, 39*, 637–655.

Caponetto, L. (2020). Undoing things with words. *Synthese, 197*, 2399–2414.

Cappelen, H., & Hawthorne, J. (2009). *Relativism and monadic truth*. Oxford University Press.

Collins, J. (2013). The syntax of personal taste. *Philosophical Perspectives, 27*, 51–103.

DeRose, K. (1992). Contextualism and knowledge attributions. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 52*, 913–929.

Dinges, A., & Zakkou, J. (2020). A direction effect on taste predicates. *Philosophers' Imprint, 20*(27), 1–22.

Dowell, J. (2011). A flexible contextualist account of epistemic modals. *Philosophers' Imprint, 11*(14), 1–25.

Dreier, J. (1990). Internalism and speaker relativism. *Ethics, 101*, 6–26.

Egan, A., Hawthorne, J., & Weatherson, B. (2005). Epistemic modals in context. In G. Preyer & G. Peter (Eds.), *Contextualism in philosophy: Knowledge, meaning, and truth* (pp. 131–170). Clarendon Press.

Eriksson, J., & Tiozzo, M. (2016). Matters of ambiguity: Faultless disagreement, relativism, and realism. *Philosophical Studies, 173*(6), 1517–1536.

Farkas, D., & Bruce, K. (2009). On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *Journal of Semantics, 27*, 81–118.

Fleisher, W. (2021). Endorsement and assertion. *Noûs, 55*(2), 363–384.

Gibbard, A. (1990). *Wise choices, apt feelings*. Oxford University Press.

Gibbard, A. (2012). *Meaning and normativity*. Oxford University Press.

Glanzberg, M. (2007). Context, content, and relativism. *Philosophical Studies, 136*(1), 1–29.

Glanzberg, M. (2022). Judges, experiencers, and taste. *Inquiry*. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2135876

Gunlogson, C. (2003). *True to form: Rising and falling declaratives as questions in English*. Routledge.

Gunlogson, C. (2008). A question of commitment. *Belgian Journal of Linguistics, 22*, 101–136.

Gutzmann, D. (2015). *Use-conditional meaning*. Oxford University Press.

Gutzmann, D. (2016). If expressivism is fun, go for it! In C. Meier & J. van Wijnbergen-Huitink (Eds.), *Subjective meaning: Alternatives to relativism* (pp. 21–46). Mouton de Gruyter.

Haegeman, L., & Hill, V. (2013). The syntactization of discourse. In R. Folli, C. Sevdali, & R. Truswell (Eds.), *Syntax and its limits* (pp. 370–390). Oxford University Press.

Heim, J., Keupdjio, H., Lam, Z. W.-M., Osa-Gomez, A., Thoma, S., & Wiltschko, M. (2016). Intonation and particles as speech act modifiers: A syntactic analysis. *Studies in Chinese Linguistics, 37*, 109–129.

Hill, V. (2013). *Vocatives: How syntax meets with pragmatics*. Brill.

Hills, A. (2013). Faultless moral disagreement. *Ratio, 26*, 410–427.

Hîncu, M. (2015). Predicates of personal taste and faultless disagreement. *Logos & Episteme, 6*(2), 160–185.

Huvenes, T. T. (2012). Varieties of disagreement and predicates of taste. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 90*(1), 167–181.

Kaplan, D. (1989). Demonstratives. In J. Almog, J. Perry, & H. Wettstein (Eds.), *Themes from Kaplan* (pp. 481–563). Oxford University Press.

Kneer, M. (2021). Predicates of personal taste: Empirical data. *Synthese, 199*, 6455–6471.

Kneer, M. (2022). Contextualism vs. relativism: More empirical data. In J. Wyatt, J. Zakkou, & D. Zeman (Eds.), *Perspectives on taste: Aesthetics, language, metaphysics, and experimental philosophy* (pp. 109–139). Routledge.

Knobe, J., & Yalcin, S. (2014). Epistemic modals and context: Experimental data. *Semantics and Pragmatics, 7*, 1–21.

Kölbel, M. (2002). *Truth without objectivity*. Routledge.

Kölbel, M. (2004). Faultless disagreement. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 104*, 53–73.

Kölbel, M. (2009). The evidence for relativism. *Synthese, 166*(2), 375–395.

Kölbel, M. (2015a). Relativism 1: Representational content. *Philosophy Compass, 10*(1), 38–51.

Kölbel, M. (2015b). Relativism 2: Semantic content. *Philosophy Compass, 10*(1), 52–67.

Kölbel, M. (2022). Objectivity and perspectival content. *Erkenntnis, 87*, 137–159.

Kolodny, N., & MacFarlane, J. (2010). If and oughts. *Journal of Philosophy, 107*(3), 115–143.

Kompa, N. (2005). The semantics of knowledge attributions. *Acta Analytica, 20*, 16–28.

Krabbe, E. C. (2001). The problem of retraction in critical discussion. *Synthese, 127*, 141–159.

Krifka, M. (2015). Bias in commitment space semantics: Declarative questions, negated questions and question tags. In S. D'Antonio & M. Moroney (Eds.), *Semantics and linguistic theory 25* (pp. 328–345). Cornell University.

Kukla, Q., & Steinberg, D. (2021). "I really didn't say everything i said": The pragmatics of retraction. In L. Townsend, P. Stovall, & H. B. Schmid (Eds.), *The social institution of discursive norms. Historical, naturalistic, and pragmatic perspectives* (pp. 223–247). Routledge.

Lasersohn, P. (2005). Context dependence, disagreement, and predicates of personal taste. *Linguistics and Philosophy, 28*(6), 643–686.

Lasersohn, P. (2016). *Subjectivity and perspective in truth-theoretic semantics*. Oxford University Press.

Law, J. H.-K., Li, H., Bhadra, D., & D. (2019). Questioning speech acts. *Proceedings of Sinn Und Bedeutung, 22*(2), 53–70.

López de Sa, D. (2008). Presuppositions of commonality: An indexical relativist account of disagreement. In M. García-Carpintero & M. Kölbel (Eds.), *Relative truth* (pp. 279–310). Oxford University Press.

MacFarlane, J. (2003). Future contingents and relative truth. *The Philosophical Quarterly, 53*(212), 321–336.

MacFarlane, J. (2009). Nonindexical contextualism. *Synthese, 166*(2), 231–250.

MacFarlane, J. (2011). Epistemic modals are assessment-sensitive. In A. Egan & B. Weatherson (Eds.), *Epistemic modality* (pp. 144–178). Oxford University Press.

MacFarlane, J. (2014). *Assessment sensitivity: Relative truth and its applications*. Oxford University Press.

Malamud, S. A., & Stephenson, T. C. (2014). Three ways to avoid commitments: Declarative force modifiers in the conversational scoreboard. *Journal of Semantics, 31*, 1–37.

Marques, T. (2018). Retractions. *Synthese, 195*, 3335–3359.

Raffman, D. (2016). Relativism, retraction, and evidence. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 92*(1), 171–178.

Rawlins, K. (2010). Conversational backoff. In N. Li & D. Lutz (Eds.), *Semantics and linguistic theory 20* (pp. 347–365). Cornell University Press.

Recanati, F. (2002). Unarticulated constituents. *Linguistics and Philosophy, 25*, 299–345.

Recanati, F. (2004). *Literal meaning*. Cambridge University Press.

Recanati, F. (2007). *Perspectival thought: A plea for moderate relativism*. Oxford University Press.

Ridge, M. (2014). *Impassioned belief*. Oxford University Press.

Rothschild, D., & Segal, G. (2009). Indexical predicates. *Mind and Language, 24*(4), 467–493.

Schafer, K. (2011). Faultless disagreement and aesthetic realism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 82*(2), 265–286.

Schaffer, J. (2011). Perspective in taste predicates and epistemic modals. In A. Egan & B. Weatherson (Eds.), *Epistemic modality* (pp. 179–226). Oxford University Press.

Silk, A. (2016). *Discourse contextualism: A framework for contextualist semantics and pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.

Snyder, E. (2013). Binding, genericity, and predicates of personal taste. *Inquiry, 56*(2–3), 278–306.

Stalnaker, R. (1978). Assertion. *Syntax and Semantics, 9*, 315–332.

Stalnaker, R. (2002). Common ground. *Linguistics and Philosophy, 25*, 701–721.

Stephenson, T. (2007). Judge dependence, epistemic modals, and predicates of personal taste. *Linguistics and Philosophy, 30*(4), 487–525.

Stojanovic, I. (2007). Talking about taste: Disagreement, implicit arguments, and relative truth. *Linguistics and Philosophy, 30*(6), 691–706.

Stojanovic, I. (2019). Disagreement about taste vs. disagreement about moral issues. *American Philosophical Quarterly, 56*(1), 29–42.

Sundell, T. (2011). Disagreements about taste. *Philosophical Studies, 155*(2), 267–288.

Tang, S.-W. (2015). Cartographic syntax of pragmatic projections. In A. Li, A. Simpson, & W. D. Tsai (Eds.), *Chinese syntax in a cross-linguistic perspective* (pp. 429–441). Oxford University Press.

von Fintel, K., & Gillies, A. (2010). Must . . . stay . . . strong! *Natural Language Semantics, 18*(4), 351–383.

von Fintel, K., & Gillies, A. (2008). CIA leaks. *Philosophical Review, 117*(1), 77–98.