Title: Disagreement, mistake, and norms in discourse

Is it possible to conceive assertions as inherently norm-following speech-acts, whose evaluative norms are relative to each speaker's own context? How can we reject or disagree with such an assertion? In this paper, I explore how the idea of context-sensitive and pluralistic norms for assertion could accommodate the possibility of falsehood and disagreement. The paper will have three sections:

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I begin in §1 with an introduction to the speech-act-theoretic approach to assertions. Assertions, according to such approach, must have two basic features: they are *a) commitment-based*—A speaker makes an assertion iff she makes a performative commitment to the discursive propriety of the asserted content—and *b) discursive*—To assert is to convey information to the hearer, which, when successful, results in the hearer's integration of the information into his own beliefs. (Our discourse can thus be regarded as a language-game of giving and asking for reasons.)

Assertions, in this sense, are not just descriptive statements of purely semantic truths as such; rather, they must be able to be demarcated as utterances that understand themselves as inherently knowledgeable and norm-following acts. Furthermore, I argue that the norms for evaluating the propriety of our assertions must be *context-sensitive* and hence *pluralistic*—I will give an example of sorting plants, to show that there could be a plurality of discursively appropriate assertions due to the very plurality of legitimate constitutive norms among different agents—The speaker's comprehension of the content's truth, therefore, refers to the conformity to the epistemic standards and norms implicit in the background knowledge of the context of her speech. In other words, demarcating assertions and their truth-values is a question of demarcating the pluralistic background norms at their contexts.

In an ideal conversation, the related evaluative norms are symmetric between the speaker and the hearer, so that the hearer can accept the information frictionlessly and integrate it into his beliefs without the need to abandon or revise any existing belief. (The interlocutors enjoy maximum level of mutual intelligibility and context-

transparency.) Nonetheless, the norms in a conversation could be conceivably *asymmetric* between its interlocutors—In fact, we find most cases of our discourse as being polemical: Our discourse usually invokes frictions and dissonance; and whenever dissonance (i.e. disagreement) occurs, the interlocutors need to coordinate their background knowledge and hence the norms implicit in their interpretations of the content at stake. Therefore, understanding disagreement and the asymmetry of constitutive norms in a conversation is crucial for us to understand assertion and assertion-evaluation.

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In §2, I examine two typical candidate approaches, which I call *(Lewisian) contextualism* and *social constructivism*, respectively. The contextualism correctly addresses that whenever we interpret or evaluate an assertion we must take the speaker's own demarcation of background norms into account. However, the contextualist strategy insists that to do so we must always preserve the speaker's 'upstream' context, which is obviously expensive and time-consuming. Worse still, it eventually ends up making the assertion-evaluation across contexts and persons impossible—The Lewisian contents, so to speak, cannot be Fregean contents— Moreover, I argue that such feature of contextualism can be compared to the much debated 'faultless disagreement': For a faultless disagreement, the context and hence the constitutive norms of the content have been shifted away from the 'downstream' context of evaluation. The conversation is hence not intrinsically evaluative but exonerative.

We must distinguish faultless disagreements from the genuine (the intrinsically evaluative) ones. Unlike faultless disagreements, to genuinely disagree with an assertion is not simply to iterate (fictively) the content at its 'upstream' context; rather, it concerns changing the assertion's original context and its constitutive norms into the context and the norms of 'downstream' evaluation—The social constructivists (e.g. John MacFarlane) typically argue in this direction: Contrary to contextualism, the social constructivist strategy is inexpensive and time-efficient since we no longer need to preserve the speaker's original context and background norms. But while the contextualism hampers the 'downstream' norms in evaluation, I will argue that the social constructivism minimalizes the significance of

'upstream' norms. Therefore, I think both contextualism and social constructivism fail to account for the distinction between faultless and genuine disagreements.

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In §3, I suggest that in a discourse with genuine disagreement, the constitutive norms must undergo a *dynamic change*: a change from the iteration of the assertion at the 'upstream' context of use (with preservation of the speaker's norms and hence the assertion's appropriateness) to the revision or reevaluation of the assertion at a 'downstream' context (so that the speaker's original demarcation of norms will be no longer considered as appropriate). According to the dynamic view, our discursive disagreement concerns neither the content's sheer differences in truth-values across different contexts nor the instantiations of its different constitutive norms as such; rather, to evaluate a content it is essential to have its context coordinated, while such coordination is a unique and explanatorily primary dynamic process of 'internalization' of norms that motivates disagreement-resolution and conceptual innovation.

We might regard Robert Stalnaker's idea of proposition-diagonalization as a precursor of such a dynamic view. But unlike his typically metasemantic approach, which exclusively concerns the elimination of possible worlds and reduction of common grounds (while our everyday discourse, by contrast, is usually nonmonotonic), I suggest that we must have a fundamentally normative approach to the dynamics of change: I will indicate that an important aspect of genuine disagreement is that it aims at the hearer's *acknowledgement of mistake*—Accurately speaking, it aims at the hearer's recognition of a norm as counterfactually constitutive of his previous assertion, which renders that assertion neither 'simply' false nor exonerated but having a unique and irreducible normative feature of 'regretfulness'. (I will indicate that such an irreducibly normative feature can be found in our linguistic expressions with the so-called 'backtracking counterfactual' phenomenon.)

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I conclude that we need a better understanding of the normative feature of mistake-acknowledgement, which is crucial for us to understand normative reasons, the

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