Notes on Normative Pragmatics

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1 Clips from (Millson 2014b)

Introducing queries with the illocutionary force (though not the logical complexity) associated with interrogative utterances of the form "How do you know that p?" into the DSK model is a complicated business. First, there is the problem that questions do not stand in obviously inferential relations to one another in the way that the contents of declaratives do.[1] This problem is not nearly as daunting as it first appears. The notion of 'inference' with which Brandom's model operates is quite liberal. Deferring to the authority of an interlocutor, issuing observation reports, even acting intentionally are all performances that get analyzed in terms of dispositions to adopt normative attitudes, and are, thus, the exercise of broadly inferential capacities. So long as normative statuses and attitudes can be coherently associated with queries, their content ought to be explicable within an extended inferentialist framework. Indeed, the question-answer relation looks custom-made for representation in normative-pragmatic terms.

Second, there is the problem of assigning normative statuses to RSQs. One way to do so would be to take the querier as imputing a particular commitment to the queried agent, namely, a commitment to defeasibly license the querier to (re)assert p herself. Such a commitment can be called *apokritic*—from the Greek verb *apokrino*, which means 'to give an answer' or 'to reply to a question'. An apokritic commitment obliges the addressee to answer the speaker's question. In the case considered here, answering the question is just a matter of justifying the claim that p.

Third, there is the issue of accounting for the second-personal character of these acts—the pragmatic force of queries that directs it at a particular individual, '*you*'. To tackle this problem, we can introduce a third deontic attitude, in addition to those of acknowledging and attributing normative statuses. This new attitude, call it *addressing*, makes a demand upon its addressee to recognize her new status. Kukla and Lance (2009) propose this sort of analysis of second-personal addresses, according to which the demand for recognition is 'inescapable'—no matter what subsequent performances an addressee undertakes, they will either have the significance of acknowledging the demand or rejecting it; there is no way to passively ignore it. Such an attitude may not be as foreign to DSK as first appears. Wanderer (2010) argues that assertions are in fact second-personal addresses, since they bind "asserter and assertee in a normative nexus that, among other things, precludes the possibility of ignoring the address and allows the latter to defer to the former if challenged to do so." Treating addressing as a kind of deontic attitude on the level of acknowledging and attributing allows us to make sense of this claim. In asserting that p, an agent addresses entitlement to p to others, calling upon them to reassert p on her authority.

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[1] Even if it can be shown, as Wiśniewski (1995) has, that a model-theoretic semantics for declaratives can represent relations of implication among interrogatives—what he calls *erotetic* implication, from the Greek *erőtésis*, meaning 'that which pertains to questions'—it remains doubtful that there are *material* erotetic inferences of the sort Brandom's account demands. The chief difficulty is that even the simplest questions, polar questions, can only be expressed in languages that contain negation. Thus, inferential relations among even polar questions appear to be unavailable to minimally discursive agents.

Where part of the normative significance of assertions is captured by the address of assertional *entitlement*, the pragmatic force of queries can be understand as involving an address of *commitment*, namely apokritic commitment. Addressing a commitment to another player would thus be quite different from attributing one, since in the latter case, there is no *prima facie* deficiency incurred by ignoring an attributed status. Furthermore, if queries require the speaker to address an *apokritic* commitment to another player, and if apokritic commitments associated with queries like "How do you know that *p*?" are demands for justification, then such queries easily satisfy the essential structural role of challenges in DSK.

2   Clips from (Millson 2014a) Ch.5

To grasp the contrast between attitudes of attribution and those of addressing, lets see how it applies to normative-perspectival structure of assertions developed in Brandom's scorekeeping model and developed by Wanderer's analysis of second-person speech acts. According to Brandom, undertaking an assertional commitment is doing something that makes it appropriate for others to attribute it. As I reiterated above, undertaking a commitment can be achieved without an overt acknowledgment of the commitment, if, for instance, it is undertaken consequentially. Even when one acknowledges a commitment, and thereby performs in a way appropriate to one's attributed status, this acknowledgment need not involve a *recognition* of that attribution. I can successfully take my friend to be committed to some claim which she subsequently acknowledges by overtly asserting it, though she does not do so *because* I take her to be committed to it; she may be totally ignorant of my attribution to her. In MDPs, attributions are only ever made implicitly and so can not demand that agents recognize them. Agents become aware of an attributed commitment, if they do at all, either when they undertake a commitment incompatible with it or when they fail to demonstrate entitlement in the face of a challenge. In ordinary discourse, we are permitted to ignore implicit attributions; in MDPs, agents are largely *ignorant* of them. Indeed, one of Brandom's central claims in *Making It Explicit* is that the perspectival structure of interpretation can be understood in terms of the potential discrepancy between attributed and acknowledged statuses. This discrepancy is a *feature* of discursive practices, not a *defect* of their participants. Even when agents' behavior fails to accord with the statuses attributed to them, that failure is neither directed at anyone—there is no obligation to anyone—nor does it count as a *rejection* of the attribution. Thus, there is no temptation to think that assertional commitments are *addressed* to others. They are *attributed*.

What, then, are we to make of Wanderer's scorekeeping account of assertions as second-person addresses? The answer is that it is not assertional commitments which are addressed to others but rather *entitlement* to them. When a scorekeeper acknowledges an assertional commitment, she takes her interlocutors to be entitled to acknowledge it as well. From her perspective, anyone who comes into contact with her assertion is thereby authorized to re-assert its content. This communicative inheritance of entitlement depends upon the normative relationship forged between speaker and audience. In acknowledging an assertional commitment, the speaker *addresses* its entitlement to her interlocutors, calling upon them to recognize this address.

Recognizing the address of an assertional entitlement does not require the addressee to overtly re-assert claims to which she is communicatively licensed—deferring or being disposed to defer justificatory responsibility to the speaker—although doing so is perhaps the paradigmatic way of appropriately responding to an assertional address. Rather, recognition is offered by implicitly acknowledging one's communicative entitlement to the addressed claim. Acknowledging assertional commitments in MDPs is an overt affair, but acknowledging *entitlements* to claims is something one *does* simply by not challenging them. So long as an interlocutor does not challenge the speaker, she counts as recognizing the speaker's default entitlement

and hence her *own* communicative entitlement. Whatever the hearers and over-hearers of an assertion do subsequently, their acts will either count as (implicitly) acknowledging their own entitlement to re-asset its content or as a rejection of the speaker's (and their) right to make it. There is no way to passively ignore the address of assertional entitlement.

Furthermore, if I acknowledge an assertional commitment that is incompatible with one that you have acknowledged, I thereby do something that violates the normative relationship established in your address. My incompatible assertion is a violation addressed from me to you. Likewise, if you fail to adequately defend your claims to which you have addressed entitlement (to me), then you have failed *me*. The normative structure of assertional entitlement thus exhibits the telltale reciprocity of the addressing attitude.

The scorekeeping interpretation of assertings I am offering develops Brandom's original version and explicitly locates their second-personal dimension among the complex of deontic attitudes that institute them. On my account, a successful speech of act of asserting requires the speaker to acknowledge an assertional commitment and to address its entitlement to others. In order to take or treat another as asserting a claim, scorekeepers must *attribute* assertional commitment to the speaker and *recognize* the latter's address either by implicitly acknowledging entitlement to re-assert her claim or by challenging it.

Now that the attitude of addressing has been added to the set of attitude-types available to participants in MDPs, I will proceed to make the case for the inclusion of two new commitments, which are together necessary for representing the pragmatic force typically associated with ISQs. Once this has been done, I will utilize the concept of addressing to explain the attitudes speaker's adopt toward these new commitments (and entitlements) so as to institute performances with the force of queries. As we shall see, addressing is central to the structure of minimally inquisitive practices.

2.1 Erotetic and Apokritic Commitments

Since I am assuming that the scorekeeping practices into which queries are to be introduced are just those that confer assertional significance on performances—even if, following my diagnosis of justificatory stalemate, those practices *by themselves* will fail to institute such significance—the only type of queries that will be available to their participants will be information-seeking queries (ISQs), i.e. queries that seek to update of a speaker's assertional score. Given this restriction, we can now ask the crucial question: what is the pragmatic force of queries, i.e. ISQs, according to the deontic scorekeeping model of MDPs? In this subsection, I propose an analysis of this structure that involves the acknowledgment and attribution of two new normative statuses, both of which can be understand as varieties of discursive commitment.

Recall from the previous analysis that queries impose upon their addressee's a commitment to license an update of the speaker's normative status. In the case of ISQs, discharging this commitment requires the addressee to entitle the querier to make some assertion from among a set of alternatives. Call this responsibility that an addressee incurs as a consequence of being queried APOKRITIC COMMITMENT. In being queried regarding some set of assertional commitments, Q, I become apokritically committed to Q. This means that I am responsible for licensing others to undertake some assertional commitment from Q. Loosely speaking, I am responsible for answering the question. I discharge this commitment whenever I succeed in entitling others to one of the members of Q, that is, when I 'give' them an answer.

How does one speaker license another to make an assertion in the deontic scorekeeping model? We have already seen the answer: A scorekeeper authorizes others to undertake those assertional commitments whose entitlement she addresses to them in acknowledging those commitments herself, i.e. asserting the claims herself. This public authorization of re-assertion is secured by the speaker's having undertaken a commitment to justify her claims if challenged. Challenges to subsequent re-assertions can be 'passed along' to the original asserter by deferrals. This communicative inheritance of commitment depends upon the social

recognition of *default entitlement*. It is only in virtue of the fact that a querier takes my claims to have entitlement by default that I can entitle her to my claims *merely* by making them. Thus, one way, perhaps the paradigmatic way of licensing a scorekeeper to undertake an assertional commitment is to acknowledge the assertional commitment oneself.

Of course, a speaker can pick up entitlement to an assertion through a combination of communicative and (strictly) inferential means. If I assert *p* and, according to your score book, *p* entitles one to *q*, then I have in effect entitled you to assert *q*. This combination of assertional licensing mechanisms suggests that the distinction between direct and indirect answers to a question is irrelevant to the discharge of apokritic commitments. If we think of the direct answers to a question the set of assertional commitments associated with an ISQ, then an indirect answer to an ISQ is just an assertion which, together with certain collateral commitments, entitles one to infer a direct answer, i.e. a member of that set. Thus, indirect answers are every bit as appropriate to the discharge of apokritic commitments as direct answers are. As promised above, the austerity of the scorekeeping account has depopulated the space of possible responses to queriers, in this case, by obviating the distinction between direct and indirect answers.

Another oblique way to discharge an apokritic commitment would be to draw the scorekeeper's attention to some feature of her environment to which she has a non-inferential disposition to respond by undertaking the assertional commitment in question. For example, I can satisfy your query regarding the whereabouts of the TV remote by lifting up the couch cushion. Such a performance fulfills my apokritic responsibility without my having to assert anything. In scorekeeping terms, 'giving an answer' to a query is just a matter of entitling others to undertake an assertional commitment from among the set of alternatives.

When I am queried *by* someone, I take on an apokritic commitment. I am responsible for providing an answer, though not in the sense that would require me to perform any particular speech act. However, apokritic commitment does not exhaust the normative significance of queries. There is, I contend, another sort of responsibility involved in asking a question, one that was not represented in the account of queries that I developed in terms of Lance and Kukla's normative-functionalist pragmatics. The missing responsibility is incurred by the querier herself. To query is to seek out an answer. In searching for something, we commit ourselves, even if only tentatively, to there being something to find. When we ask questions, we typically take them to have answers. It is an oddity for someone to pursue a question she admits to be unanswerable. Roughly, we can say that in performing a query an agent commits herself to its answerability.

What does it mean to commit oneself to the answerability of a question? If the scorekeeping analog to an answer is any member of the query's set of assertional commitments, then a commitment to the answerability of a question is a commitment to undertake an assertional commitment from among the set of alternatives. But commitment to the answerability of question is not simply a commitment to obtain *some* answer. Rather, it is a commitment to obtain *the* answer, that is, the *correct* answer. A correct answer is just an assertional commitment belonging to the set of alternatives to which one is *entitled*. Thus, the responsibility that a querier undertakes has the scorekeeping significance of a commitment to acknowledge an assertional commitment (from among the query's set of alternatives) to which one is entitled. Call this a querier's EROTETIC COMMITMENT.

The responsibility to assert or believe something for which one has warrant may seem to capture a type of epistemic responsibility to which we are subject independently of any questions we ask. But strictly speaking this is not the case. Were we responsible for believing everything we are warranted in believing, even if only by our own lights, all of us would be found epistemically deficient. That alone is not a reason to think we are nonetheless responsible for having such beliefs, at least implicitly. There is a scorekeeping analog to the notion of implicit or ideal belief. Scorekeepers are held responsible for believing the consequences that follow from their overtly acknowledged commitments (i.e. their explicit beliefs) according to what others take those consequences to be. These are the commitments attributed to speakers by others. Being

responsible for one's attributed commitments captures the ideal or implicit sense of 'belief' according to which we 'believe' all the logical consequences of our explicit beliefs. But note that even this sort of epistemic responsibility does not require speakers to overtly acknowledge consequential commitments. It only precludes us from acknowledging a commitment while denying one of its consequences. Retracting the original commitment is thus a perfectly acceptable way of fulfilling this responsibility. Finally, however we conceive it, epistemic warrant obviously extends far beyond logical consequence. It's absurd to think that we are responsible for believing, even implicitly or ideally, everything for which we have, say sufficient inductive grounds. It is no coincidence that Brandom offers the status of *entitlement* as an analog to epistemic warrant: we are *permitted* to believe that for which we have warrant, but we are not obliged to do so.

While it makes no sense to say we are responsible for believing *everything* we are entitled to belief, it does make sense to say that we are responsible for believing *some* things we are entitled to believe. Lance and Kukla mark this distinction by claiming that we are responsible for knowing those truths that *matter* to 'us'. The scorekeeping model can accommodate this restricted sense of epistemic responsibility even while repudiating the I-We view of discursive sociality in which it is couched, namely, the 'us'. Erotetic commitment is precisely the mechanism by which it does so. When we ask questions we express, *inter alia*, an interest in their answers. The answers to my questions *matter* to *me*. I am in some sense deficient when I ask a question and, having been provided with its (correct) answer, fail to accept it. I might of course have beliefs that contradict the answer, but then there is another sort of epistemic responsibility that kicks in, namely, the responsibility to resolve incompatible commitments. In asking a question, I stake out a discursive territory and claim responsibility for believing whatever I am warranted to believe within it. Erotetic responsibility is thus a kind of *local* epistemic responsibility. Scorekeepers institute this propriety by taking a querier to acknowledge an erotetic commitment to Q, that is, a responsibility to acknowledge an assertional commitment from (among the alternatives in) Q to which she is entitled.

Erotetic and apokritic commitments represent the normative consequences that attach to quering and queried agents, respectively. While apokritic commitment was expressible in the terms laid out by Lance and Kukla's normative-functionalist framework, erotetic commitment was not. The latter more closely resembles the justificatory responsibility incurred by asserters in that it is added to the speaker's scorecard. As the account develops, the relationship between assertional and inquisitive responsibilities will be further articulated. Before we are in a position to do so, however, we need to examine the sorts of deontic attitudes whose adoption characterizes the pragmatic force of queries.

2.2   The Complex Act of Querying

In addition to the set of statuses and attitudes that agents can embody and adopt in Brandom's scorekeeping model of asserting, I have added two new types of commitment (erotetic and apokritic) and one new type of attitude (addressing). With this augmented conceptual tool kit, I now propose to represent the pragmatic force typically associated with queries, specifically ISQs. The following claim redeems the promise embodied in the title of this work: How to ask a question in the space of reasons.

Query: To perform a query regarding some set of alternatives, Q, a scorekeeper must (1) acknowledge an erotetic commitment to Q, or (2) address an apokritic commitment to Q (to others).

The sense of 'or' in *Query* is inclusive; scorekeepers may both undertake an erotetic commitment to Q and address the corresponding apokritic commitment to others. In fact, the pragmatic force *typically* associated with queries is precisely of this sort. Typically, when one agent queries another, she adopts two deontic attitudes and affects two changes in the deontic scores: on one hand, she acknowledges an erotetic commitment (herself), and on the other, she addresses an apokritic commitment to others.

Having the concept of addressing at our disposal is essential to understanding the normative effect that queries typically have on those to whom they are directed. In querying you, I call upon you to recognize my address of apokritic commitment. Paradigmatically, such recognition is given when the addressee discharges her apokritic commitment by licensing me to undertake a commitment to a member of the set of alternatives, that is, by 'giving' me the correct answer. In addressing a question to you, I treat you not only as bound by a norm but also as bound *to me*. You are responsible *to me* for giving a correct answer. You may, of course, not have the correct answer to give. In this case, merely acknowledging the apokritic commitment I have addressed to you, even if you do not discharge it, will qualify as recognizing my address. This 'acknowledgment-without-discharge' is the scorekeeping effect wrought by those admissions of ignorance which, as we witnessed in the last chapter, can sometimes provide queries with appropriate uptake, though, strictly speaking, minimally inquisitive agents do not have the expressive resources to *say* that they don't know something. I develop this latter point in greater detail below.

Scorekeepers can reject or challenge addresses in several ways. The address of assertional entitlement can be rejected by disavowing the corresponding commitment or by acknowledge a commitment that is incompatible with it. In the case of apokritic commitments, it is also possible to resist address. In addition to certain non-complaint admissions of ignorance, one way to reject an address of apokritic responsibility is to disavow every member of the set of alternatives 'presented' by the query. In the previous chapter I offered a scorekeeping analog to the semanticist's notion of a question's presuppositions—namely, all those commitments that are the committive-consequences of every member of the set of alternatives. Since in disavowing some claim I also disavow any other claims of which the first is a committive-consequence, one way to reject the address of an apokritic commitment to Q is to disavow some committive-consequence of every member of Q. Note that the same rejection can be achieved by undertaking a commitment to any claim *incompatible* with every member of the set of alternatives. The practical significance of either move is to treat the query (to which one is subject) as unanswerable and to repudiate the attempt to hold one accountable for answering it.

What critically distinguishes this model of querying from the one developed in the last chapter is that the act of acknowledging a responsibility oneself (which was entirely ignored in the previous account) and that of imputing a responsibility to another are *separable*, both in principle and in practice. It is possible, on the present account, for a speaker to acknowledge an erotetic commitment without attributing an apokritic commitment and *vice versa*. Believe it or not, these scenarios correspond to queries that we encounter all the time in ordinary discourse. Instances in which we ask so-called *self-addressed questions*, when we 'wonder aloud', when we announce a project of inquiry, or simply *pose* a question to our interlocutors can all be understood as acts in which we acknowledge an erotetic commitment without attributing a corresponding apokritic commitment. Conversely, when we ask so-called *exam-questions* to which we *already* have the answers or pursue *interrogation-questions* to which we think there is *no* correct answer, we can be seen as attributing apokritic commitments without acknowledging the corresponding erotetic commitment. The normative structure of these latter cases, i.e. interrogation-questions, will become particularly significant for the account of reason-seeking queries that follows.

The idea that the responsibilities associated with a speech act could detach from one another and associate with distinct performance-types is not incompatible with the scorekeeping model. Brandom's scorekeeping analysis of assertion, for instance, appeals to two distinct types of responsibility: ampliative and justificatory. While it is the intersection of these normative statuses that represents the pragmatic force of asserting, there is nothing, in principle, that precludes the possibility of performance-types that only institutes *one* of the responsibilities. Such performances may even correspond to speech acts we encounter in ordinary discourse. For instance, undertaking an ampliative responsibility to extract the consequences of one's commitment without thereby undertaking a responsibility to demonstrate entitlement if challenged seems a

reasonable characterization of the normative significance of *conjecturing*. When I conjecture that *p*, I am not required to produce a justification for *p* if challenged, though I am required to undertake those commitments that follow from *p*, at least, to take up the *conjecturing* attitude toward them. Thus, the potential independence of responsibilities whose conjunction represents the normative significance of a particular speech act coheres with the deontic scorekeeping approach to discursive practices.

The picture of queries that is emerging is one of a complex normative acts whose constituents are at least an acknowledgment of an erotetic commitment or an address of apokritic commitment, and typically both. We have already seen how the identification of addresses in deontic scorekeeping reveals the complexity of assertions. Asserting a claim requires a scorekeeper to both acknowledge an assertional commitment and to address its entitlement to others. In contrast to assertions, queries address a commitment rather than an entitlement to others. And unlike queries, assertions *require* the speaker to acknowledge a commitment. The enriched version of deontic scorekeeping that I am presenting represents both queries and assertions as performances that include the adoption of two distinct attitudes regarding two distinct statuses and directed at (at least) two distinct participants.

2.3   Erotetic and Apokritic Entitlement

Scorekeeping practices that include queries must institute and administer two special types of responsibility: erotetic and apokritic. When an agent is erotetically responsible, she is obliged to recognize the entitlement of certain assertional commitments avowed by her interlocutors by undertaking those commitments herself, that is, by re-asserting their contents. An agent who is apokritically responsible, on the other hand, is obliged to entitle her interlocutors to undertake certain assertional commitments by undertaking (though not necessarily explicitly acknowledging) those commitments herself. The addressee is responsible for providing an assertional check, the querier is responsible for cashing it in.

Ideally, when a speaker acknowledges an erotetic commitment to Q and addresses a corresponding apokritic commitment to her interlocutor, the latter is in a normative position to discharge his (apokritic) responsibilities, and when he does so, the speaker is thereby put in a position to discharge her own (erotetic responsibility). The entire erotetic-apokritic transaction is made possible by the communicative transferal of assertional entitlement. By making an assertion that answers her query, the addressee entitles the querier to re-assert his claim by permitting her to defer to his justificatory responsibility. This communicative inheritance of entitlement then detaches the querier's erotetic responsibility, thus *obliging* her to re-assert (or believe) his claim.

The entitlement one has to undertake an apokritic commitment to a set of alternative assertions and the entitlement one has to assert a member of that set are one and the same. We are authorized to take on the responsibility to answer an information-seeking question to the extent that we are authorized to make the assertion that answers that question. Thus, to treat an agent as entitled to an apokritic commitment to a set of alternatives, Q, is just to treat her as entitled to undertake some assertional commitment in Q. It is significant to note that this equivalency permits cases in which a scorekeeper takes a player to be entitled to an apokritic commitment but does not take her to be entitled to any *particular* assertional commitment. In other words, we can and often do treat someone as having the correct answer to a question without knowing what that correct answer is (ourselves).

Let's now turn to the type of circumstances that entitle one to an erotetic commitment. Minimally, one is entitled to take responsibility for a question's answerability if one is entitled to treat at least one member of the set of answers to that question as correct. But if a scorekeeper already has entitlement to an answer, then her question, so long as it is a genuinely information-seeking question, is trivial. Indeed, acknowledging an assertional commitment that answers an ISQ *precludes* an agent from entitlement to

the corresponding erotetic commitment. In other words, commitment to an assertion that discharges an erotetic commitment is *incompatible* with that erotetic commitment. When an agent's scorecard indicates an assertional commitment to one of the members of Q and an erotetic commitment to Q, she is obliged to either retract her assertion or drop her question. The latter course of action is the typical result of an agent recognizing the correct answer to a question to which she is erotetically committed.

Another sort of erotetic incompatibility occurs when an agent is committed to any assertion that is (assertionally) incompatible with all or some of the assertions that comprise the set of alternatives to which she is erotetically committed. In this case, a scorekeeper would no longer be treating a set of alternatives as *possible* answers, since some of her collateral commitments would preclude entitlement to (at least some of) its members. A scorekeeper whose scorecard indicates this sort of erotetic incompatibility is again obliged to retract either the incompatible assertion or the erotetic commitment. Since erotetic commitments are individuated in terms of the set of alternative assertions that constitute possible answers, a scorekeeper may respond to erotetic incompatibility that only bars her from endorsing *some* possible answers by retracting her previous erotetic commitment and undertaking another whose set of alternatives does not include those precluded assertions. That is, she can drop her original question and ask a different one.

Erotetic and apokritic responsibilities thus have conditions which authorize their undertaking just as justificatory and ampliative responsibilities have corresponding conditions of authorization. Likewise, agents can have entitlement to erotetic/apokritic commitments they do not undertake, without exhibiting normative deficiency. I can occupy a normative position that entitles me to ask a question or to make another responsible for answering it, without undertaking or addressing the erotetic and apokritic commitments, respectively. What is not permitted is that an agent ask questions or be asked questions and yet fail to acknowledge or provide answers to which she is entitled.

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