**Weak assertives and faultless disagreement over vague predicates**[*]

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**Abstract** One of the challenges that any theorist of vagueness faces is to account for there being two kinds of disagreement over vague predicates like "tall" and "rich": canonical disagreements concerning clear cases and faultless disagreements concerning borderline cases. I'll argue that one needs to maintain that the illocutionary force of borderline utterances is different from that of clear utterances. Whereas the latter might be correct assertions, the former should be assertives weaker than assertions, since they express only a weak belief of the speaker. The degree of commitment to the truth of what is said in a borderline utterance is lower and neither speaker of two opposing verdicts makes a mistake.

## 1. Faultless disagreement involving vague predicates

If Philip is borderline tall and Anna says "Philip is tall" while Betty says "Philip is not tall", their exchange looks like a disagreement, but it appears faultless: we are inclined to say that both may be right.[1] The meaning of "tall" does not dictate whether Philip should be described as tall or not. On the other hand, were Philip clearly tall, such an

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[1] One cannot be just tall, you're always tall relative to some comparison class. If Anna and Betty have different comparison classes in mind, then they are not really disagreeing: they are talking past each other. Their utterances are not contradictory: Philip can be tall for a football player and not tall for a basketball player at the same time. I'm assuming here that Anna and Betty think of the same comparison class and I will ignore relativization to comparison classes in what follows.

exchange would be considered a canonical disagreement[2] in which either Anna or Betty must be wrong. In that vague predicates like "tall" and "red" differ from aesthetic and personal taste predicates, for which all disagreement seems faultless. If Anna says "That cheesecake is tasty", while Betty says of the same cheesecake "That cheesecake is not tasty", they both may say something true, even when the cheesecake in question is the best cheesecake that can be. On the other hand, if Anna and Betty are talking about the height of basketballers and Anna says of a player who is 2,2 m tall that he is tall, were Betty to disagree, she would be clearly mistaken and the disagreement wouldn't be faultless. Thus, whereas philosophers and linguists analyzing aesthetic and personal taste predicates need to account for the fact that all disagreements concerning such matters might be faultless,[3] for a theorist of vagueness the challenge is to provide an account that would make a disagreement concerning clear cases canonical while making a disagreement concerning borderline cases faultless. Hence, it appears that the treatment of clear cases has to be different from that of borderline cases.

Faultless disagreement concerning borderline cases is not easily accommodated within the extant theories of vagueness[4]. For instance, it appears that epistemicism *à la* Williamson cannot allow it: according to this version of epistemicism vague predicates have sharp boundaries, we just don't (and cannot) know where those boundaries are located. As a result only one of the two speakers, who disagree whether a given borderline case is tall or not, can be right and their disagreement is not faultless (one makes a factual mistake). According to traditional supervaluationism vague predicates have no sharp boundaries and vague sentences are true at precisifications. Vague predicates have several admissible precisifications, which introduce sharp boundaries at different points in the penumbra. Sentences concerning clear cases of a given predicate are true at all admissible precisifications, and hence supertrue, whereas sentences concerning borderline cases are true on only some precisifications[5] and hence are not supertrue[6]. If we assume that one can correctly assert only those sentences that are supertrue, then faultless disagreement is impossible. The perspectives for faultless

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[2] By canonical disagreement I mean disagreement that is over literal content and such that only one of the utterances can be true. See Plunkett & Sundell 2013.

[3] Provided other conditions are met (e.g. the sincerity condition).

[4] See e.g. Odrowąż-Sypniewska 2021a.

[5] I mean here simple sentences like "*a* is *P*". There are sentences concerning borderline cases that are true at all precisifications, e.g. "Either *a* is *P* or *a* is not *P*".

[6] They are not superfalse either, so they are gappy: devoid of (super-)truth-value.

disagreement are much better from the point of view of subvaluationism, according to which sentences are also true and false at precisifications, but there is no supertruth. Truth is truth at a precisification. Borderline sentences are both true and false (in different precisifications). On such a view it appears that neither of the speakers uttering opposite borderline claims makes a mistake: both their utterances are true and false. Thus, it seems that the resulting dispute is indeed faultless, it is less clear whether it should be classified as a disagreement. If both "*a* is *P*" and "*a* is not *P*" are true and false, there is no reason for the speakers to disagree. Moreover, if Anna says "*a* is *P*" and Betty says "No, *a* is not *P*" strictly speaking this is infelicitous and misleading, since Betty in fact does not contradict Anna.

Another way of accounting for faultless disagreement consists in interpreting the exchange concerning a given borderline case of "tall" metalinguistically as a disagreement over the adequate standard of tallness that should be adopted in a given conversation (see Barker 2002, 2013; see also Plunkett & Sundell 2013). According to Barker, someone who utters "Feynman is tall" as a response to the question "What count as tall here?" in a situation in which Feynman's height is known to both the speakers, is giving "guidance concerning what the prevailing relevant standard for tallness happens to be in our community" (Barker 2002: 40). Such assertion doesn't give knowledge about the world, but it constrains vague standards.

Disagreements about vague predicates arise when people fail to negotiate such standards. For Barker, "negotiating standards is a normal, typically automatic, part of ordinary discourse" (2013: 241). If one speaker says "Feynman is tall" and the other disagrees "No, Feynman is not tall", it will be a sign that negotiation failed. The resulting disagreement is faultless however, since Feynman is assumed to be a borderline case and neither speaker has authority over the other. Hence, one's judgement is as good as the other's and both may be right in a sense.

However, metalinguistic interpretation is plausible only for some conversations and in particular it cannot be used to explain the forced march version of the sorites paradox. Cappelen notices that the question "What counts as tall in your country?" is hardly typical and there is no reason to model other conversations on this unusual one (2018: 178). Usually when people disagree over whether a given (borderline) case is tall or not they disagree how to classify that person and not about the standards applicable in the ongoing conversation. Common conversations are mainly object-language and not metalinguistic. Moreover, it is hard to see how metalinguistic explanation could be

applied to a case of disagreement that occurs during the forced marched version of the sorites paradox. Let's assume that Anna and Betty assess one by one the whole sorites series of men differing just by one millimeter in height. When they are in the borderline region at some point Anna says "That man is tall" while Betty says of the same man "No, that man is not tall". If we were to apply the metalinguistic solution here and say that they disagree over the applicable standard, then – since when they started they were clearly talking about men and their heights rather than about standards – we would have to maintain implausibly that at some point they unknowingly switched from talking about men to talking about standards.

Another way might consist in saying that disagreement concerning borderline cases is faultless, since there are no linguistic rules that dictate how one should assess such cases and each of the opposite judgments is permissible (see e.g. Shapiro 2003). Shapiro maintains that vague predicates are judgement-dependent in their borderline areas and argues that the following open-texture thesis is in force: If $a$ is a borderline case of $P$, then "a speaker is free to assert $Pa$ and free to assert $\neg Pa$, without offending against the meanings of the terms, or against any other rule of language use". (2003: 43).

There are obviously certain limits to speakers' freedom: they have to take into account what has been said earlier in the conversation. So, for instance, if the speakers have just agreed that $a'$, which differs only minutely from $a$, is $P$, then they cannot declare that $a$ is not $P$.

This solution accounts well for the faultlessness of the exchange, because however the speaker decides she is in the right. Nevertheless, the intuition of disagreement seems to be lost. If both judgments are equally permissible and the speakers are aware of this, they shouldn't have the feeling that they are disagreeing and they shouldn't see the point in disagreeing. If Betty knows that both opposite judgements are permissible, she shouldn't contradict Anna.

## 2. Varying illocutionary forces of assertives

It seems to me that there is a better way of explaining the disagreements over vague predicates (see Odrowąż-Sypniewska 2021). The idea is that speech acts concerning clear cases have different illocutionary forces than speech acts concerning borderline cases. The speech act which consists in uttering "Philip is tall" when Philip is clearly

tall and the speech act that consists in uttering "Philip is tall" when Philip is borderline tall are different speech acts, since their illocutionary forces are not the same. While the utterances concerning clear cases are straightforward assertions, utterances concerning borderline cases should be assertives weaker than assertions[7]. They belong to what Green calls "the assertive family" (2018: 3) but are not assertions. Borderline utterances should not be full-blooded assertions because typically the speakers do not (strongly) believe in what they say and are not willing to commit to defend (strongly) their claim if challenged[8].

It is widely accepted that the commitment and the psychological state expressed in a speech acts come in degrees. Searle (1975) classifies speech acts according to their illocutionary forces, which are determined by various factors, the most important of which is the illocutionary point. The point of assertives (which he calls "representatives"[9]) is "to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition" (Searle 1975: 354). According to the sincerity condition for assertives the speaker expresses his belief in the propositional content of the utterance, but Searle remarks that:

[i]t is important to emphasize that words such as "belief" and "commitment" are here intended to mark dimensions; they are so to speak determinables rather than determinates. Thus there is a difference between suggesting that $p$ or putting it forward as hypothesis that $p$ on the one hand, and insisting that $p$ or solemnly swearing that on the other. The degree of belief and commitment may approach or even reach zero (…). (1975: 354-5)

He also notices that there are:

[d]ifferences in the force or strength with which the illocutionary point is presented. Both "I suggest we go to the movies" and "I insist that we go to the movies" have the same illocutionary point, but it is presented with different strengths, analogously with "I solemnly swear that Bill

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[7] The proposal is intended to be neutral with regard to the issue how assertions should be defined. It seems to me that the idea that borderline utterances should not be classified as correct assertions is attractive no matter whether one regards assertion as an expression of an attitude, a move defined by its constitutive rules, or a proposal to add information to the conversational common ground.

[8] Regarding the commitment undertaken by the speakers of assertions Walton and Krabbe (1995: 23) write:

"Suppose X asserts that P. Depending on context X may then become committed to a number of things, for example, holding that P, defending that P (if challenged), not denying that P, giving evidence that P, arguing that P, proving or establishing that P and so on". (See also Kibble 2006: 184).

[9] In Searle and Vanderveken (1985) they are called "assertives".

stole the money" and "I guess Bill stole the money." Along the same dimension of illocutionary point or purpose there may be varying degrees of strength or commitment. (1975: 348)

According to Green "the assertive family" is "that class of communicative actions in which a speaker undertakes a commitment to the truth of a proposition" (2018: 3). Besides assertion he mentions conjecture, presupposition, presumption and educated guess. He distinguishes three dimensions of a commitment undertaken by the speaker of the communicative act: liability, frankness and fidelity. Liability means that "becoming committed to a proposition makes one liable to becoming correct or incorrect depending on how things are" (ibid.), frankness means that the speaker believes in the content of her assertion and in asserting she expresses that belief, whereas fidelity comes down to answering to "legitimate conversational challenges" (ibid.). Green specifies that commitments generated by all acts belonging to assertive family have the three dimensions, although in varying degrees. Frankness in the case of assertion comes down to belief that the content of assertion is true, for conjecture and educated guess it is having some reason to think that the content is true. As far as fidelity is concerned in the case of assertion the speaker is obliged to provide strong justification if challenged, in the case of conjecture and educated guess some justification is expected. (Green 2018: 5).

More recently, Marsili has argued that if the speaker says $p$, her assertoric commitment to $p$ being true comes down to the fact that the speaker is accountable and discursively responsible for $p$, where accountability means that "the speaker becomes reproachable if the proposition turns out to be false" (2021: 3259), and discursive reliability means that the speaker becomes committed to act in certain ways, to make certain moves in the conversation. In particular she ought to defend her claim if appropriately challenged (2021: 3260). He also acknowledges that the speaker's degree of commitment maybe be strengthened or diminished (see Marsili 2021: 3261 and the literature cited there). Thus if A says "I swear that Jane left the party", B says "Jane left the party" and C says "I guess/conjecture that Jane left the Party", then the degree of commitment of A is higher than that of B, which in turn is higher than that of C.

Some speech acts wear their illocutionary force on their sleeve ("I swear that $p$", I conjecture that $p$", "I assert that $p$", I insist that p" , "I suggest that $p$") but some others are more difficult to assess. "Let's go to the movies" might be a suggestion as well as an order. "She might be in the bathroom" can be a guess or a suggestion. Borderline

utterances usually are not overtly weak. People say "Philip is tall" rather than "Philip might be tall" or "Perhaps Philip is tall". Nevertheless, since the cases they are talking about are borderline, they should not speak with utter confidence. It is often the case that initially the speaker has no opinion as to whether a given borderline man is tall or not and they make the decision on the spot. If they are aware that this is a borderline case they shouldn't be fully confident in their judgement. I wouldn't go as far as to say that they usually do not believe in what they say, but I think that they weakly believe in it. As Hawthorne, Rothschild and Spectre (2016) argue, the evidential standards required for belief are very low, whereas those required for assertion are much higher. One can believe $p$ even if one has not ruled out the doxastic possibility that $p$ is false; however, if one has not ruled out the possibility that $p$ is false, one cannot assert that $p$. Thus, the speaker who utters a borderline statement $p$ may believe in what he says in the weak sense (without ruling out the possibility that $p$ is false), but cannot assert $p$. She can however utter a weaker assertive.

Green distinguishes two kinds of guesses: sheer guesses and educated guesses (2018: 5). Sheer guesses do not belong to the assertive family. In a sheer guess the speaker commits oneself to the truth of the content of their utterance, but not to defend it when challenged. The speaker may have no reason to think that the content is true and doesn't have to provide justification. On the other hand, educated guesses do belong to the assertive family and commitments generated by them have all three dimensions. Borderline utterances might be likened to educated guesses: the speakers use their knowledge concerning clear and other borderline cases in making a decision whether a given borderline case is to be included or excluded from the extension of a given predicate. They do not know whether what they say is true or not: according to the epistemic account they cannot know this, on the semantic accounts there is nothing to know, because vague predicates have no sharp boundaries. If what the speaker says will be accepted by others and added to the common ground, then it will be regarded as true. But if it is not accepted, it won't become part of the common ground and will not be true.

### 3. Weak assertives or weak assertions?

As we've seen, assertions can be hedged. Hedges serve to weaken the speaker's commitment and can be divided into attitudinal and evidential (Benton & van Elswyk 2020: 3)[10]. Examples of attitudinal hedges involve:

I think that Jane left the party.

Jane, I believe, left the party.

Jane left the party, if I'm not mistaken (2020: 3),

whereas evidential hedges comprise expressions like "perhaps", "maybe", "might", "probably" and "apparently":[11]

Apparently Jane left the party.

Jane reportedly left the party.

Maybe Jane left the party.

Jane left the party, perhaps (2020: 3) .

There are contradicting views on whether hedged assertions are assertions or not. Those who recognize different kinds of assertives are likely to think that hedged assertions are not assertions but a kind of weaker assertives. In particular those who define assertion as an undertaking of a commitment and think that commitment is gradable, will often associate different degrees of commitment with different types of assertives. Since hedged assertions mean lower degree of commitment than unhedged ones, hedged assertions will be assigned to a different type of assertive than assertion.[12] There are exceptions, however. For instance, McKinnon (2015) does not think that distinguishing types of assertives is needed. She mentions guaranteeing, swearing, telling, asserting, conjecturing and guessing and writes:

All of these count as types of the speech act generally referred to as "assertion." I don't think there's particularly good reason to break them up into different speech acts. The differences between telling and guaranteeing (merely of the strength of speaker commitment) aren't like the differences between asserting and commanding." (2015: 162).

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[10] Benton & van Elswyk divide attitudinal hedges further into those that contain attitude verb and those that have the form of a conditional, and evidential hedges into adverbial and modal. See ibid.

[11] Benton & van Elswyk notice that hedges might either contribute to the content or to the force of the speech act. If "Jane probably left the party is an answer to the question "Who probably left the party?" then it is not strictly speaking a hedge and does not weaken the speech act. On the other hand, if "Jane probably left the party" is uttered as an answer to "Who left the party?" it works as a hedge and weakens the commitment of the speaker. (2020: 4)

[12] Similarly those who think that the characteristic feature of assertives is that they represent the speaker as occupying a particular epistemic position. Since the epistemic position of the speaker of hedged assertion is clearly different than that of the speaker of unhedged assertion, hedged assertion will be classified as a different type of assertive. By revealing that their epistemic position is weaker than knowledge (as in "I think that Jane left the party") speakers weaken their commitment, so hedged assertion is an assertive but not an assertion. (See Benton & van Elswyk 2020: 7) See below footnote 11.

She doesn't discuss hedged assertions but presumably they also qualify as assertions on her view, since for her all members of the assertive family are assertions. Incurvati & Schlöder take utterances of the form "Perhaps X or Y will win" to be weak assertions, even though they claim that "perhaps" is a force-modifier, i.e. it modifies the illocutionary force of the utterance rather than its content[13]. Thus, they seem to accept that assertions may have different illocutionary forces. Mandelkern and Dorst in a recent paper argue that assertion in general is weak. As I've mentioned above Hawthorne et al. argue that belief is weak but assertion is not. In other words they reject Entitlement Equality, which is a claim that an epistemic situation entitles you to believe *p* iff it entitles you to assert *p*. Mandelkern and Dorst argue that Entitlement Equality can be preserved, since assertion is as weak as belief. According to them "people make weak assertions all the time" (2022: 4). One of the examples they give is the following (2022: 4-5):

Miriam has one ticket in a fair, 2000-ticket lottery.
Lucy: Miriam, are you going to start saving for retirement this year?
Miriam: No, I entered the lottery instead.
Lucy: That's nuts. You're not going to win the lottery.

Even though Lucy's credence in the proposition that Miriam will not win the lottery is less than 1 and she does not know that Miriam will not win the lottery, her utterance is entirely reasonable. They give many more examples in which even though it is obvious to everyone that the speaker doesn't know or even doesn't strongly believe that *p*, uttering *p* is appropriate. Mandelkern and Dorst say however that they "have no attachment to the word "assertion" to describe the category of speech act [they] have been investigating" (2022: 7) and are open to the suggestion that the acts that they have been studying are in fact predictions, guesses or speculations. They stress however that those acts

in fact constitute an interestingly unified class of speech acts. For, even if we can draw finer-grained distinctions, there are two rather striking normative facts which bind together all communicative uses of declarative sentences. First, all speech acts across this class are subject to a kind of anti-Moorean constraint: conjoining any of them with expressions of uncertainty

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[13] See also Restall 2020.

(⌜p, but I don't know p⌝) leads to striking infelicity (…). Second, across this whole class, it is generally unacceptable to say something unless you think it is true (2022: 7).

It's worth stressing that as a result, to this class belong also explicit sheer guesses,[14] which might be seen as an unwelcome consequence. However, even if we agree that the group in question forms a pretty unified category, one might think of this class as class of assertives rather than assertions. It is not as if nothing differentiates them. Guesses and (strong) assertions are distinguishable in terms of commitments and discursive responsibility, so it is much more theoretically fruitful to think of the large class as assertives and keep assertions and guesses in their separate compartments within that large group than mix them together and ignore the differences. Even if we agree with McKinnon that the differences between telling and guaranteeing are not as significant as differences between asserting and commanding, it still might be productive to differentiate between types of assertives. After all, we do distinguish between asking to do something and ordering to do it, and the difference between asserting and guessing seems at least as significant[15].

On our view 'weak assertion' (whether hedged or not) is not in fact an assertion but a weaker assertive from the assertive family. Borderline utterances usually are not overtly hedged, but they might be, for the speaker could use attitudinal hedges:

John is tall, I think.

I believe that John is tall.

Wright remarks:

the impression of a case as borderline goes along with a readiness to tolerate others' taking a positive or negative view—provided, at least, that their view is suitably hesitant and qualified and marked by a respect for one's unwillingness to advance a verdict (2003: 93).

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[14] The example is that even if someone asks you to guess when the Seven Years' War started and knows that you do not know when it started, then if you say "Ok, hm. The war started in 1760", saying "The war started in 1760, but I don't know whether it started in 1760" or "The war started in 1760 but I'm not sure that it started in 1760" is inappropriate despite the fact the initial utterance was perfectly appropriate. (2022: 6-7) In this situation your answer seems to be a sheer guess (and not an educated guess).

[15] McKinnon does acknowledge that they differ in the degree of commitment, she just thinks that they form a continuum from guessing to guaranteeing. NB according to her the speaker may assert *p* if she has adequate supportive reasons for *p*, which in different context may refer to different epistemic relations. (See McKinnon 2015). This variantism seems to be a reason why she doesn't see the differences between types of assertives as significant. For someone who thinks that assertions require knowledge, while for guessing belief is enough, the difference between the former and the latter in the epistemic position which they represent will be crucial. (See Benton & van Elswyk 2022).

In some cases the speaker might use a hedge to mark that hesitation and willingness, but in other cases it might be clear from the context. Hedges would be out of place only if John were a clear case of tallness (we're assuming here that the height of John is known to the speaker). Wright's observation helps explain why the ensuing disagreements might be faultless: if the verdict is uttered as a weak assertive, it is easier to tolerate it, even if its content is contradictory to our assertive.[16]

## 4. Assertions as social commitments

Sometimes private commitments are distinguished from public or social commitments (see e.g. Guerts (2019), Condoravdi & Lauer (2011), Kibble (2006)). Private commitments are beliefs or intentions of the speakers, while public commitments are commitments to act as though the speaker believes the literal content of their utterance. Such commitments are social relations that constrain i.a. communicative dispositions (see Guerts 2019: 4). For Guerts communication consists in negotiating social commitments. He argues that by making an assertion with the content $p$ the speaker commits to 'act in a way that is consistent with the truth of $p$' (Geurts 2019: 4), whereas Condoravdi & Lauer claim that: "when we say 'an agent is committed to believing the proposition p', this is short for 'the agent is committed to act as though he believes $p$'" (2011: 7). They also stress the public character of the commitment: when the speaker asserts $p$, the content of her assertion publicly commits her to act as though she believes $p$. Crucial from my point of view is the observation that social commitment need not entail belief. Already Hamblin has noted that

[a] commitment is not necessarily a "belief" of the participant who has it. We do not believe everything we say; but our saying it commits us whether we believe it or not. (Hamblin 1970: 264, see also Kibble 2006: 184).

Those observations help explain what happens when assertives involving borderline cases are concerned. Borderline utterances are like social commitments made either without or – more typically – with a weak corresponding private commitment: the

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[16] Wright claims further that: "[t]he central manifestation of borderline cases is (…) in weakness of confidence in such verdicts as are offered, in their instability, and in the unwillingness of some to endorse any verdict." (2003: 94)

speaker says that $p$ but his commitment is "merely social, half-hearted" (Geurts 2019: 24) and it expresses at most a weak belief of the speaker. The speaker utters it for social reasons, in order to help in coordinating future action. She commits to act in a way that is consistent with the truth of what she says but she does not fully commit to the truth of it. She'll be accountable and discursively responsible for $p$ but to a much lesser degree than she would be accountable and responsible were she to utter an assertion. Even though not a full-blooded assertion, her speech act is to have has some impact on the future course of the conversation. First of all, in order to be consistent the speaker committing (in this sense) to $p$, cannot commit to not $p$ (See Geurts 2019: 25). Thus, although in principle the speaker is free to choose how she is going to describe the borderline case, once she makes her choice, she cannot change her decision (unless she retracts the previous verdict). Secondly, if we think of assertions as ways of adding propositions to the common ground, the aim of a weaker assertive will be different than that of an assertion. Namely, it's recently been argued that the aim of someone who makes a weak assertion $p$ is to prevent not $p$ from being added to the common ground. Restall distinguishes positive common ground and negative common ground and claims that to strongly assert $p$ is to bid to add it to the positive common ground, whereas to weakly assert that $p$ is to bid to retract or block it from the negative common ground (2020: 3). Similarly, Incurvati & Schlöder (2019: 755) have argued that the aim of the speaker in making weak assertion $p$ is to prevent *not p* from being added to the common ground. Both Restall and Incurvati & Schlöder focus on utterances featuring "perhaps", such as "Perhaps X or Y will win the election", but it appears that the same may be said concerning the aim of borderline assertions. The weak assertives that Incurvati & Schlöder are concerned with are overtly marked as such, since they involve explicit hedges. As we've seen, assertives concerning borderline cases are often not so marked, but they are weak since speakers realize that the cases they are talking about are not clear.[17]

The worry might arise whether such speech act can ever be correct if the speaker does not fully believe in what she says, for one might argue that such a speaker is not sincere. However, Geurts observes that it is sufficient for the speaker to be sincere in saying that $p$ if she does not believe that not $p$. This requirement is strengthened and the speaker

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[17] Moreover at one point they write "weakly asserting *X or Y will win* excludes assent to the negative of X or Y will win" (2019: 754) which suggests that one might weakly assert content without explicit hedges.

is required to believe that $p$, whenever it is common ground that the speaker either believes that $p$ or believes that not $p$ (see Geurts 2019: 26)[18]. But this is precisely what is not the case where borderline cases are concerned. Speakers confronted with a borderline case $a$ of the predicate $P$ initially may have no opinion whether $Pa$ or not $Pa$. They weakly assert $Pa$ and thereby commit to decide to act in a way that is consistent with the truth of $Pa$, but they are well aware that the opposite verdict is equally permissible. Nevertheless, once they make their choice and make the relevant commitment, they expect others to follow suit. They try to preempt the opposite verdict from being formulated by making theirs first and will be disappointed if their tactic doesn't work.

## 5. Conclusion

My account allows to explain why typical disputes concerning borderline cases are faultless and yet seem to be disagreements. They are faultless, because both utterances are permissible as correct weak assertives. They are tentative proposals to add their content to the common ground and their speakers commit to their content to a lesser degree than they would if they uttered a strong assertion. Two weak assertives with contradicting contents may both be correct (which of course would not be the case if the contradictory utterances were (strong) assertions). The disputes feel like disagreements, since the contents of the utterances are contradictory and their aim hasn't been fulfilled: the speakers did not succeed in preventing the opposite claim from being made.

On the other hand, disagreements involving clear cases are genuine and resolvable: the utterances in question are assertions with contradictory contents, so only one of the speakers can be right and the other one must be making a mistake.

It should be noticed that I'm not claiming that *all* disagreements concerning borderline cases are faultless. If the speaker doesn't realize that the case she is interested in is

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[18] I'm appealing here to various aspects of Geurts's view (namely to his distinction between private and social commitments, his notion of inconsistency and sincerity), but I do not endorse his overall view of commitment. The main reason is that his notion of commitment is particular in that it is not gradable (see Geurts 2019a: 5-7), so from our point of view it is unacceptable.

borderline or if she does realize it but nevertheless utters a strong assertion, then she makes a mistake and in consequence the resulting disagreement will not be faultless.

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