# Review of: "The Ethics of Retraction"

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I accepted Qeios's invitation to review this article in a state of some confusion. Qeios sent me the title, abstract and author's name. On the basis on that information, I wrongly assumed that the retraction with which the article is concerned is the retraction of scholarly articles, perhaps in the context of the so-called culture wars. I (again wrongly) guessed that the article would connect to recent controversies over some controversial journal articles in philosophy, and would perhaps connect to Kukla's public commentary on co-platforming and on issues relating to trans people.

Compounding my confusion, in the introduction, Kukla seems to suggest that they will bring together the literature on journal retractions and the literature on retraction as a speech act. Ultimately, this isn't quite what the article does. Instead, it brings to the speech act side of things the focus on ethics that is more common in the journal retractions literature.

I was a good way into the article before it sank in that the philosophy of language stuff about speech acts was the whole thing, and not prefatory material, and that article retractions would not make a reappearance. While I have some expertise related to article retractions, I don't have expertise in speech acts. But in the way of these things I find myself still having thoughts on the article. I offer these comments, then, as a philosopher, not as a philosopher of language.

I will note too that I love Qeios's constructive, public peer feedback approach, and congratulate Kukla for publishing in Qeios, an excellent model from a distinguished, senior scholar. I will provide my feedback as I would in an anonymous peer review. That is, my comments below are not intended to resemble a published reply but rather aim to provide formative feedback for the author.

I'll start with what I regard as the immediate strengths of the article, move on to a suggestion for revision (already hinted at above), and then suggest some possible further avenues for exploration.

As I note, I came to the article as someone with philosophy, but not philosophy of language, expertise. One of the things that I love about the article is the clarity and capaciousness with which Kukla elaborates concepts and arguments spanning both ethics and philosophy of language. Kukla's useful discussion of the relevant literatures brings these disparate areas together in a way that makes them understandable to readers from across the divide, and indeed prepares readers from across the divide to travel with Kukla as they dig in one some of the puzzles and nuances at the intersection of those areas. The article is at once accessible and challenging – a tough balance to strike, but one that Kukla succeeds in striking.

In general, I found Kukla's own view really plausible. In particular, I am much persuaded by what might be termed their

Goldilocks view – that is, that our account of retraction cannot make it either too easy or too hard to retract speech acts. It must be possible to retract speech acts, but if it were too easy to retract speech acts, then both the speech acts and their retractions would be weakened.

I was also really struck by Kukla's later observation that apology gets too much air-time in the repair literature. I like this a lot, and really like the work that Kukla has done in this article to meaningfully extend philosophical theorizing about repair beyond apology. That said, I would be interested in reading Kukla's reflections on the relationship between speech act retraction and apology as forms of repair. How and how often do retraction and apology travel together? "I am sorry that I said that. I take it back" is an example of a combined apology and retraction. On Kukla's view, what are the scope and limits of such combined modes of repair?

I also really liked the analogy to kintsugi with which the article opened, and the recognition that retraction creates a new (possibly lovely?) thing, not a return to the old thing. Is retraction sometimes lovely in the way that kintsugi is? Is it sometimes even lovelier than the thing that came before from which it was crafted? Is there a danger to such loveliness when we are repairing humans and their relationships rather than porcelain? I am thinking here about examples of people who have done harm and gotten good at eloquently engaging in repair in ways that ends up recentering on them rather than the harmed people. I don't want to take the kintsugi analogy further than it would bear, but I think it would be really interesting to see the analogy explored further.

My suggestion for revision relates to my opening comments. By the time we get to the "What is retraction?" section, article retraction disappears from the article. I would recommend that the title, abstract and introduction should make clear earlier that the article is about speech act retraction, not article retraction. (One tiny point: In the introduction, Kukla writes "There exists a separate literature on retraction taken as a speech act, which will be familiar to most readers of this volume." This volume? Is this phrase a vestige of an earlier version of the article intended for a different venue? Since Qeios is generalist in character, there is no reason to expect that its readers will know the speech act literature particularly well.)

That said, I would actually love Kukla to do the harder thing and include a much more fleshed-out discussion of article retraction in this article in order to consider article retraction and speech act retraction alongside one another. As I read, I kept comparing speech act retraction and article retraction in my mind and wishing there were more of that in the article. The more I compared the two, the more I wondered whether "retraction" is used univocally across those domains. In a way, a publishing retraction is easier because if you say it's retracted, it's retracted, irrespective of what the audience thinks. In a way, though, it's harder because of the material process required to get the retraction published.

As well, the more I thought about the possibly equivocal use of "retraction", the weirder it seemed to me that we can use the same term for two quite different domains. Is the use of this term a metaphor in one of the domains? Is it a metaphor in both domains? Etymologically, to retract is to draw back, like with a retractable awning or extension cord. It's interesting to notice that retractable awnings and extension cords are not gone. They are held back for now. When we retract an article or a speech act do we, in addition to repairing something kintsugi-style, also continue to hold something with(in) us, like a retractable awning or cord?

I also found myself wondering a lot about both the phrase "I take it back" and the childhood admonition "no take-backs." Is there any light to be shed on the ethics of speech act retraction by considering these more idiomatic phrases and what they would seem to imply?

Finally, as I lingered on the relationship between article retractions and speech act retractions, I found myself wondering what the threshold is between an article and a speech act. An article isn't a speech act, but some other things that are kind of like articles seem like speech acts – tweets and Facebook posts, for instance. What ethical considerations apply to the retraction of social media posts?