Articulating Reasons:

An Introduction to Inferentialism

Introduction

This is a book about the use and content of *concepts*. Its animating thought is that the meanings of linguistic expressions and the contents of intentional states, indeed, awareness itself, should be understood to begin with in terms of playing a distinctive kind of role in *reasoning*. The idea of privileging *inference* over *reference* in the order of semantic explanation is introduced and motivated in the first chapter. Subsequent chapters develop that approach by using it to address a variety of philosophically important issues and problems: practical reasoning and the role of normative concepts in the theory of action, perception and the role of assessments of reliability in epistemology, the expressive role distinctive of singular terms and predicates (which, as subsentential expressions, cannot play the directly inferential role of premise or conclusion), propositional attitude ascriptions and the representational dimension of concept use, and the nature of conceptual objectivity. Although the discussion is intended to be intelligible in its own right—in each individual chapter, as well as collectively—it may nonetheless be helpful to step back a bit from the project pursued there, and to situate it in a larger context of theoretical issues, possibilities, and approaches within which it takes shape.

The overall topic is the nature of the conceptual as such. This choice already entails certain significant emphases of attention: within the philosophy of mind, on awareness in the sense of *sapience* rather than of mere sentience; within semantics, on specifically *conceptual* content, to the detriment of concern with other sorts of contentfulness, within pragmatics, singling out *discursive* (that is, concept using) practice, from the background of various other kinds of skillful doing. The aim is to focus on the conceptual, in order to elaborate a relatively clear notion of the kind of *awareness* of something that consists in applying a concept to it—paradigmatically by saying or thinking something about it.

Addressing this topic requires making a series of choices of fundamental explanatory strategy. The resulting commitments need to be brought out into the open because they shape any approach to the conceptual in such important ways. Making this background of orienting commitments explicit serves to place a view in a philosophical space of alternatives. Features of an account that otherwise express nearly invisible (because only implicit) assumptions then show up as calling for decisions, which are subject to determinate sorts of challenge and demands for justification. The major axes articulating the region inhabited by the line of thought pursued here can be presented as a series of stark binary oppositions, which collectively make it possible to map the surrounding terrain.

1. *Assimilation* or *differentiation* of the conceptual?

One fork in the methodological road concerns the relative priority accorded to the *continuities* and *dis*continuities between discursive and nondiscursive creatures: the similarities and differences between the judgments and actions of concept users, on the one hand, and the uptake of environmental information and instrumental interventions of non-concept-using organisms and artifacts, on the other. We can ask how sharp this distinction is—that is, to what extent and in what ways the possibility of intermediate cases can be made intelligible. And more or less independently of the answer to this question, it is possible for theorists to differ as to whether they *start* by describing a common genus and go on to elaborate differentiae (whether qualitative or in terms of some quantitative ordering by a particular kind of complexity), as opposed to beginning with an account of what is distinctive of the conceptual, which is only later placed in a larger frame encompassing the doings of less capable systems. Of course, wherever the story starts, it will need to account both for the ways in which concept use is like the comportments of non-discursive creatures, and the ways in which it differs. Theories that *assimilate* conceptually structured activity to the non-conceptual activity out of which it arises (in evolutionary, historical, and individual-developmental terms) are in danger of failing to make enough of the difference. Theories that adopt the converse strategy, addressing themselves at the outset to what is *distinctive* of or exceptional about the conceptual court the danger of not doing justice to generic similarities. The difference in emphasis and order of explanation can express substantive theoretical commitments.

Along this dimension, the story told here falls into the second class: *dis*continuities between the conceptual and non- or pre-conceptual are to the fore. The discussion is

motivated by a concern with what is special about or characteristic of the conceptual as such. I am more interested in what separates concept users from non-concept-users than in what unites them. This distinguishes my project from that of many in contemporary semantic theory (for instance Dretske, Fodor, and Millikan), as well as from the classical American pragmatists, and perhaps from the later Wittgenstein as well.

2. Conceptual *platonism* or *pragmatism*?

Here is another strategic methodological issue. An account of the conceptual might explain the *use* of concepts in terms of a prior understanding of conceptual *content*. Or it might pursue a complementary explanatory strategy, beginning with a story about the practice or activity of applying concepts, and elaborating on that basis an understanding of conceptual content. The first can be called a *platonist* strategy, and the second a *pragmatist* (in this usage, a species of functionalist) strategy. One variety of semantic or conceptual platonism in this sense would identify the content typically expressed by declarative sentences and possessed by beliefs with sets of possible worlds, or with truth conditions otherwise specified. At some point it must then explain how associating such content with sentences and beliefs contributes to our understanding of how it is proper to use sentences in making claims, and to deploy beliefs in reasoning and guiding action. The pragmatist direction of explanation, by contrast, seeks to explain how the use of linguistic expressions, or the functional role of intentional states, confers conceptual content on them.

The view expounded in these pages is a kind of conceptual pragmatism (broadly, a form of functionalism) in this sense. It offers an account of knowing (or believing, or saying) *that* such and such is the case in terms of knowing *how* (being able) to *do* something. It approaches the contents of conceptually *explicit* propositions or principles from the direction of what is *implicit* in practices of using expressions and acquiring and deploying beliefs. 'Assertion', 'claim', 'judgment', and 'belief' are all systematically ambiguous expressions—and not merely by coincidence. The sort of pragmatism adopted here seeks to explain what is assert*ed* by appeal to features of assert*ings*, what is claim*ed* in terms of claim*ings*, the judg*ed* by judg*ings*, and what is believ*ed* by the role of believ*ings* (indeed, what is expressed by expressings of it)—in general, the content by the act, rather than the other way around.

3. Is *mind* or *language* the fundamental locus of intentionality?

Concepts are applied in the realm of *language* by the public use of sentences and other linguistic expressions. They are applied in the realm of *mind* by the private adoption and rational reliance on beliefs and other intentional states. The philosophical tradition from Descartes to Kant took for granted a *mentalistic* order of explanation that privileged the mind as the native and original locus of concept use, relegating language to a secondary, late-coming, merely instrumental role in communicating to others thoughts already full formed in a prior mental arena within the individual. The period since then has been characterized by a growing appreciation of the significance of language for thought and mindedness generally, and a questioning of the picture of language as a more or less convenient tool for expressing thoughts intelligible as contentful apart from any

consideration of the possibility of *saying* what one is *thinking*. The twentieth century has been the century of language in philosophical thought, accelerating into something like a reversal of the traditional order of explanation. Thus Dummett defends a *linguistic* theory of intentionality:

> We have opposed throughout the view of assertion as the expression of an interior act of judgment; judgment, rather, is the interiorization of the external act of assertion.[1]

Dummett's claim is emblematic of views (put forward in different forms by such thinkers as Sellars and Geach) that see language use as antecedently and independently intelligible, and so as available to provide a model on the basis of which one could then come to understand mental acts and occurrences analogically: taking thinking as a kind of inner saying. Such a view just turns the classical early modern approach on its head.

Davidson claims that to be a believer one must be an interpreter of the speech of others, but that:

> Neither language nor thinking can be fully explained in terms of the other, and neither has conceptual priority. The two are, indeed, linked in the sense that each requires the other in order to be understood, but the linkage is not so complete that either suffices, even when reasonably reinforced, to explicate the other.[2]

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[1] *Frege's Philosophy of Language* [New York: Harper and Row, 1973], p. 362.
[2] "Thought and Talk," in *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984], p. 156.

Although Davidson shares some important motivations with Dummett's purely linguistic theory, in fact these two views illustrate an important difference between two ways in which one might give prominence to linguistic practice in thinking about the use of concepts. Davidson's claim, by contrast to Dummett's, serves to epitomize a *relational* view of the significance of language for sapience: taking it that concept use is not intelligible in a context that does not include language use, but not insisting that linguistic practices can be made sense of without appeal at the same time to intentional states such as belief.

The line of thought pursued here is in this sense a *relational linguistic* approach to the conceptual. Concept use is treated as an essentially linguistic affair. Claiming and believing are two sides of one coin—not in the sense that every belief must be asserted nor that every assertion must express a belief, but in the sense that neither the activity of believing nor that of asserting can be made sense of independently of the other, and that their conceptual contents are essentially, and not just accidentally, capable of being the contents indifferently of both claims and beliefs. In the context of the commitment to the kind of explanatory relation between those activities and those contents mentioned above, this approach takes the form of a linguistic pragmatism that might take as its slogan Sellars' principle that *grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word*. James and Dewey were pragmatists in the sense I have picked out, since they try to understand conceptual content in terms of practices of using concepts. But, in line with their generally assimilationist approach to concept use, they were not specifically *linguistic* pragmatists. The later Wittgenstein, Quine, and Sellars (as well as Dummett and

Davidson) are linguistic pragmatists, whose strategy of coming at the meaning of expressions by considering their use provides a counterbalance to the Frege-Russell-Carnap-Tarski platonistic model theoretic approach to meaning.

4. The genus of conceptual activity: *Representation* or *expression*?

Besides this issue about the original *locus* of the conceptual, there is an issue about how to understand the *genus* of which it is a species. (As indicated above, this is no less urgent for theories that concern themselves in the first instance with what is distinctive of the conceptual species of that genus than it is with those adopting the assimilationist order of proceeding.) The master concept of Enlightenment epistemology and semantics, at least since Descartes, was *representation*. Awareness was understood in representational terms—whether taking the form of direct awareness of representings, or of indirect awareness of representeds via representations of them. Typically, specifically conceptual representations were taken to be just one kind of representation of which and by means of which we can be aware. This orienting thought remains active to this day, surviving the quite substantial transformations required, for instance, for naturalistic and broadly functional accounts of awareness by and of representations. The result is a familiar, arguably dominant, contemporary research program: to put in place a general conception of representation, the simpler forms of which are exhibited already in the activity of non concept using creatures, and on that basis elaborate ever more complex forms until one reaches something recognizable as specifically *conceptual* representation.

This representational paradigm[3] of what mindedness consists in is sufficiently ubiquitous that it is perhaps not easy to think of alternatives of similar generality and promise. One prominent counter-tradition, however, looks to the notion of *expression*, rather than representation, for the genus within which distinctively conceptual activity can become intelligible as a species. To the Enlightenment picture of mind as *mirror*, Romanticism opposed an image of the mind as *lamp*.[4] Broadly cognitive activity was to be seen not as a kind of passive reflection, but as a kind of active revelation. Emphasizing the importance of experimental intervention and the creative character of theory production motivated an assimilation of scientific to artistic activity, of finding as constrained making—a picture of knowing nature as producing a second nature (to use da Vinci's phrase).

The sort of expressivism Herder initiated takes as its initial point of departure the process by which inner becomes outer when a feeling is expressed by a gesture.[5] We are then invited to consider more complex cases in which attitudes are expressed in actions, for instance when a desire or intention issues in a corresponding doing, or a belief in saying. So long as we focus on the simplest cases, an expressivist model will not seem to offer a particularly promising avenue for construing the genus of which conceptual activity is a species (though one might say the same of the representational model if attention is

[3] This is not exactly the same as what in Chapter One I call 'representationalism', which concerns commitment to a more specific reductive order of semantic explanation.
[4] A theme adumbrated in M. H. Abrams' classic work *The Mirror and the Lamp: romantic theory and the critical tradition* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1953].
[5] cf. Isaiah Berlin's discussion in *Vico and Herder: two studies in the history of ideas* [New York: Viking Press, 1976].

focused on, say, the imprint of a seal on a wax tablet). But a suitable commentary on the model may be able to repair this impression somewhat.

First, we might think of the process of expression in the more complex and interesting cases as a matter not of transforming what is inner into what is outer, but of making *explicit* what is *implicit*. This can be understood in a pragmatist sense, of turning something we can initially only *do* into something we can *say*: codifying some sort of knowing *how* in the form of a knowing *that*. Second, as suggested by this characterization of a pragmatist form of expressivism, in the cases of most interest in the present context, the notion of explicitness will be a *conceptual* one. The process of explicitation is to be the process of applying concepts: conceptualizing some subject matter. Third, we need not yield to the temptation, offered by the primitive expressive relation of gesture to feeling, to think of what is expressed and the expression of it as individually intelligible independently of consideration of the relation between them. At least in the more interesting cases, specification of what is implicit may depend on the possibility of making it explicit. And the explicit may not be specifiable apart from consideration of what is made explicit. On such a view, what is expressed must be understood in terms of the possibility of expressing it. Such a *relational* expressivism will understand linguistic performances and the intentional states they express as each essential elements in a whole that is intelligible only in terms of their relation. According to such an approach, for instance, one ought not to think that one can understand either believing or asserting except by abstracting from their role in the process of asserting

what one believes (that is, this sort of expressivism has as a consequence a relational linguistic view of the layout of the conceptual realm).

Understanding the genus of which the conceptual is a species in representational terms invites a platonist order of explanation. That it does not demand one is clear from the possibility of psychologically or linguistically functionalist accounts of representational content. Nonetheless, expressivism is particularly congenial to a pragmatist order of semantic explanation, as is indicated by the formulation of the relation between what is implicit and what is explicit in terms of the distinction between knowing how and knowing that. The account presented in the body of this work is one kind of constitutive, pragmatist, relationally linguistic, conceptual expressivism. The commitment to trying to make expressivism work as a framework within which to understand concept use and (so) conceptual content sets this project off from most others on the contemporary scene. For a representational paradigm reigns not only in the whole spectrum of analytically pursued semantics, from model theoretic, through possible worlds, directly counterfactual, and informational approaches to teleosemantic ones, but also in structuralism inheriting the broad outlines of de Saussure's semantics, and even in those later continental thinkers whose post-structuralism is still so far mired in the representational paradigm that it can see no other alternative to understanding meaning in terms of signifiers standing for signifieds than to understand it in terms of signifiers standing for other signifiers. Even contemporary forms of pragmatism, which are explicitly motivated by the rejection of platonist forms of the representational paradigm, have not embraced nor sought to develop an expressivist alternative.

5. Distinguishing the conceptual: *Intensionalism* or *inferentialism?*

I am not in this Introduction pretending to argue for any of the methodological commitments I am rehearsing. My aim is to offer a quick sketch of the terrain against the background of which the approach pursued in the body of this work (and at greater length and in greater detail in *Making It Explicit*) takes its characteristic shape—to introduce and place those commitments, rather than so much as to begin to entitle myself to any of them. I said at the outset that I am particularly interested in what *distinguishes* the conceptual from the nonconceptual. This is not a topic that has attracted as much philosophical attention in contemporary circles as I think it deserves. Insofar as there is a consensus answer abroad, I think it must be that the conceptual (or the intentional) is distinguished by a special sort of intensionality: intersubstitution of coreferential or coextensional expressions or concepts does not preserve the content of ascriptions of intentional states, paradigmatically propositional attitudes such as thought and belief. (This is a datum that is relatively independent of how that content is construed, whether in representational terms of truth conditions or of propositions as sets of possible worlds, or as functional roles of some sort, in information theoretic terms, assertibility conditions, and so on.) Quite a different approach is pursued here.

The master idea that animates and orients this enterprise is that what distinguishes specifically *discursive* practices from the doings of non-concept-using creatures is their *inferential* articulation. To talk about concepts is to talk about roles in reasoning. The original Romantic expressivists were (like the pragmatists, both classical and

contemporary) *assimilationists* about the conceptual. My way of working out an expressivist approach is *exceptionalist*, focusing on the differentiae distinctive of the conceptual as such. It is a *rationalist* pragmatism, in giving pride of place to practices of giving and asking for reasons, understanding them as conferring conceptual content on performances, expressions, and states suitably caught up in those practices. In this way it differs from the view of other prominent theorists who are pragmatists in the sense of subscribing to use theorists of meaning, such as Dewey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Dummett, and Quine. And it is a rationalist expressivism in that it understands *expressing* something, making it *explicit*, as putting it in form in which it can both serve as and stand in need of *reasons*: a form in which it can serve as both premise and conclusion in *inferences*. Saying or thinking *that* things are thus-and-so is undertaking a distinctive kind of *inferentially* articulated commitment: putting it forward as a fit premise for further inferences, that is, *authorizing* its use as such a premise, and undertaking *responsibility* to entitle oneself to that commitment, to vindicate one's authority, under suitable circumstances, paradigmatically by exhibiting it as the conclusion of an inference from other such commitments to which one is or can become entitled. Grasping the *concept* that is applied in such a making explicit is mastering its *inferential* use: knowing (in the practical sense of being able to distinguish, a kind of knowing *how*) what else one would be committing oneself to by applying the concept, what would entitle one to do so, and what would preclude such entitlement.

What might be thought of as Frege's fundamental *pragmatic* principle is that in *asserting* a claim, one is committing oneself to its *truth*. The standard way of exploiting this

principle is a platonist one: assuming some grip on the concept of truth derived from one's semantic theory, an account of the pragmatic force or speech act of assertion is elaborated based on this connection. But the principle can be exploited in more than one way, and linguistic pragmatism reverses the platonist order of explanation. Starting with an account of what one is *doing* in making a claim, it seeks to elaborate from it an account of what is *said*, the content or proposition—something that can be thought of in terms of truth conditions—to which one commits oneself by such a speech act.

What might be thought of as Frege's fundamental *semantic* principle is that a good inference never leads from a true claim(able) to one that is not true. It, too, can be exploited in either of two reductive orders of explanation.[6] The standard way is to assume that one has a prior grip on the notion of truth, and use it to explain what good inference consists in. Rationalist or inferentialist pragmatism reverses this order of explanation also. It starts with a practical distinction between good and bad inferences, understood as a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate *doings*, and goes on to understand talk about truth as talk about what is preserved by the good moves.

6. *Bottom-up* or *top-down* semantic explanation?

According to such an inferentialist line of thought, the fundamental form of the conceptual is the *propositional*, and the core of concept use is applying concepts in propositionally contentful *assertions, beliefs,* and *thoughts*. It claims that to be propositionally contentful is to be able to play the basic inferential roles of both premise

and conclusion in inferences. Demarcating the conceptual realm by appeal to inference accordingly involves coming down firmly on one side of another abstract methodological divide. For it entails treating the sort of conceptual content that is expressed by whole declarative sentences as prior in the order of explanation to the sort of content that is expressed by subsentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates. Traditional term logics built up from below, offering first accounts of the meanings of the concepts associated with singular and general terms (in a nominalistic representational way: in terms of what they name or stand for), then of *judgments* constructed by relating those terms, and finally of proprieties of *inferences* relating those judgments. This order of explanation is still typical of contemporary representational approaches to semantics (paradigmatically Tarskian model-theoretic ones). There are, however, platonistic representational semantic theories that begin by assigning semantic interpretants (for instance, sets of possible worlds) to declarative sentences. Pragmatist semantic theories typically adopt a top-down approach because they start from the *use* of concepts, and what one does with concepts is apply them in judgment and action. Thus Kant takes the judgment to be the minimal unit of experience (and so, of awareness in his discursive sense) because it is the first element in the traditional logical hierarchy that one can take *responsibility* for. (Naming is not a doing that makes one *answerable* to anything.) Frege starts with judgeable conceptual contents because that is what pragmatic *force* can attach to. And Wittgenstein's focus on use leads him to privilege sentences as bits of language the utterance of which can make a move in a language game. I take these to be three ways of making essentially the same pragmatist point about the priority of the

[6] Of course, as is generally true with the methodological oppositions considered here, one need not take either element as autonomously intelligible and try to account for the other in terms of it. One may instead

propositional. Again, the connection between propositionalism and pragmatism in the broad sense of approaching meaning from the side of use is not a coercive one, since a functionalist version of this approach might privilege contents associated with subsentential expressions. Inferentialism, however, is an essentially propositional doctrine.

In this respect, inferentialism and expressivism dovetail neatly. For the paradigm of expression is *saying* something. And what can play the role of premise and conclusion of inference is a saying in the sense of a *claiming*. Expressivism, like inferentialism, directs our attention in the first place to *propositional* conceptual contents. A further story must then be told about the *de*composition of such contents into the sort of conceptual contents that are expressed (in a derivative sense) by subsentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates. (And about their subsequent *re*composition to produce novel contents. Such a story is presented in Chapter Four.) Representationalism, by contrast, is motivated by a designational paradigm: the relation of a name to its bearer. In one standard way of pursuing this direction of explanation, one must then introduce a special ontological category of states of affairs, thought of as being represented by declarative sentences in something like the same way that objects are represented by singular terms.

Rationalist expressivism understands the explicit (the sayable in the sense of claimable, the form something must be in to count as having been expressed) in terms of its inferential role. Coupled with a linguistic pragmatism, such a view entails that practices of giving and asking for reasons have a privileged, indeed defining, role with respect to

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simply explore and unpack the relations among the different aspects.

linguistic practice generally. What makes something a specifically *linguistic* (and therefore, according to this view, discursive) practice is that it accords some performances the force or significance of *claimings*: of *propositionally* contentful commitments, which can both serve as and stand in need of reasons. Practices that do not involve reasoning are not linguistic or (therefore) discursive practices. Thus the 'Slab' Sprachspiele that Wittgenstein introduces in the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* should not, by these standards of demarcation, count as a genuine *Sprach*spiel. It is a *vocal*, but not yet a *verbal* practice. By contrast to Wittgenstein, the inferential identification of the conceptual claims that language (discursive practice) has a *center*; it is not a motley. Inferential practices of producing and consuming *reasons* are *downtown* in the region of linguistic practice. Suburban linguistic practices utilize and depend on the conceptual contents forged in the game of giving and asking for reasons, are parasitic on it. Claiming, being able to justify one's claims, and using one's claims to justify other claims and actions are not just one among other set of things one can do with language. They are not on a par with other 'games' one can play. They are what in the first place make possible talking, and therefore thinking: sapience in general. Of course we do *many* other things as concept users besides applying concepts in judgment and action and justifying those applications. But (by contrast to the indiscriminately egalitarian picture presented by contemporary neo-romantic theorists such as Derrida) according to this sort of semantic rationalism, those sophisticated, late-coming linguistic and more generally discursive activities are intelligible in principle only against the background of the core practices of inference-and-assertion.

7. *Atomism* or *holism*?

Closely related to the issue of top-down or bottom-up semantic explanation is the issue of semantic *holism* versus semantic *atomism*. The tradition of formal semantics has been resolutely atomistic, in the sense that the assignment of a semantic interpretant to one element (say, a proper name) is taken to be intelligible independently of the assignment of semantic interpretants to any other elements (for instance, predicates or other proper names). One does not need to know anything about what other dots represent, or what blue wavy lines represent, in order to understand that a particular dot stands for Cleveland on a map. The task of formal semantics is the bottom-up one of explaining how semantically relevant whatsises can systematically be assigned to complex expressions, given that they have been assigned already to simple ones. Atomism adds that the assignments to the simple ones can be done one by one. By contrast, inferentialist semantics is resolutely *holist*. On an inferentialist account of conceptual content, one cannot have *any* concepts unless one has *many* concepts. For the content of each concept is articulated by its inferential relations to *other* concepts. Concepts, then, must come in packages (though it does not yet follow that they must come in just one great big one). Conceptual holism is not a commitment that one might be motivated to undertake independently of the considerations that lead one to an inferential conception of the conceptual. It is rather a straightforward consequence of that approach.

8. *Traditional* or *rationalist e*xpressivism?

The heart of any expressivist theory is of course its account of expressing. What is expressed appears in two forms, as implicit (only potentially expressible) and explicit

(actually expressed). To talk of expression is to talk about a process of transformation of what in virtue of its role in that process becomes visible as a *content* that appears in two *forms*, as implicit and then as explicit. As indicated above, traditional romantic expressivism took as its paradigm something like the relationship between an inner *feeling* expressed by an outer *gesture*. The *rationalist expressivism* informing the present account is quite different. Where, as here, explicitness is identified with specifically *conceptual* articulation, expressing something is *conceptualizing* it: putting it into conceptual form. I said at the outset that the goal of the enterprise is a clear account of sapient awareness: of the sense in which being aware of something is bringing it under a concept. On the approach pursued here, doing that is making a claim or judgment about what one is (thereby) aware of, forming a belief about it—in general addressing it in a form that can serve as and stand in need of reasons, making it *inferentially* significant. The image of conceptualizing the unconceptualized is a familiar focus of philosophical attention, and it has given rise to a familiar panoply of philosophical pathologies. The rationalist expressivist course pursued here is distinguished by the particular strategy it employs for understanding the relation between the merely implicit and the conceptually explicit.

That strategy depends on a constellation of related inferentialist ideas. The first, and most fundamental idea, already mentioned above, is a way of thinking about conceptual explicitness. To be explicit in the conceptual sense is to play a specifically *inferential* role. In the most basic case, it is to be *propositionally* contentful in the sense of being fit to serve both as a premise and as a conclusion in inferences. According to the relational

linguistic view, to be thinkable or believable in this sense is to be *assertible*. The basic way of working out the pragmatist explanatory strategy is to understand *saying* (thinking, believing…) *that* such-and-such (adopting a *propositionally contentful* attitude) in terms of a distinctive kind of knowing *how* or being able to *do* something. Inferentialism picks out the relevant sort of doing by its *inferential* articulation. Propositional (and more generally conceptual) contents become available to those engaging in linguistic practices, whose core is drawing conclusions and offering justifications. Merely reliably responding differentially to red things is not yet being *aware* of them *as* red. Discrimination by producing repeatable responses (as a machine or a pigeon might do) sorts the eliciting stimuli, and in that sense classifies them. But it is not yet *conceptual* classification, and so involves no awareness of the sort under investigation here. (If instead of teaching a pigeon to peck one button rather than another under appropriate sensory stimulation, we teach a parrot to utter one noise rather than another, we get only to the vocal, not yet to the verbal.) As a next stage, we might imagine a normative practice, according to which red things are *appropriately* responded to by making a certain noise. That would still not be a conceptual matter. What is *implicit* in that sort of practical doing becomes *explicit* in the application of the *concept* <u>red</u> when that responsive capacity or skill is put into a larger context that includes treating the responses as inferentially significant: as providing reasons for making other moves in the language game, and as themselves potentially standing in need of reasons that could be provided by making still other moves. The first advantage that this rationalist pragmatism claims over earlier forms of expressivism is provided by this relatively clear inferential notion of conceptual explicitness.

Pragmatism about the conceptual seeks to understand what it is explicitly to *say* or *think that* something is the case in terms of what one must implicitly know *how* (be able) to *do*. That the relevant sort of doing is a constellation of asserting and inferring, making claims and giving and asking for reasons for them, is the essence of rationalist or inferentialist pragmatism about the conceptual. But once such an inferential notion of explicitness (propositional, or more generally, conceptual contentfulness) has been put in place, we can appeal to this notion of expressing (what is explicit) to understand various senses in which something can be expressed (what is implicit). The inferentialist picture actually puts in play several notions of implicitness. The first is what is made explicit by a claim or becomes explicit in it: a proposition, possible fact, what is said (sayable) or thought or believed. But in another sense we can talk about what still remains implicit in an explicit claim, namely its inferential consequences. For in the context of a constellation of inferential practices, endorsing or committing oneself to one proposition (claimable) is implicitly endorsing or committing oneself to others, which follow from it. Mastery of these inferential connections is the implicit background against which alone explicit claiming is intelligible. Actually drawing inferences from an explicit claimable (something that can be said, thought, and so on) is exploring the inferential relations that articulate its content. Since in *saying* that things are thus-and-so, for instance that the cloth is red, one is not in the same sense *saying* (making explicit) that it is colored and spatially extended, those consequences count as only implicit. Since they articulate the content of the original saying, they are at least implicit in it. This sense of 'implicit' is once again given a relatively clear inferential sense, but one that is distinct from the

sense in which the fact that the cloth is red (to which one can reliably respond differentially) is made explicit in the claim. In different but related senses, an explicit claim has implicit in it:

a) proprieties governing inferential moves to and from the commitments to the claimable content in question,
b) the other claims that are inferential consequences of the first one, according to the practical proprieties mentioned in (a), and
c) the conceptual content of the claim, which is articulated by the inferences in (a).

These notions of implicitness are direct products of the basic inferential model of explicitness.

9. Is the semantic task of logic *epistemological* or *expressive*?

One standard way to think of logic is as giving us special epistemic access to a kind of truth. Logic is for establishing the truth of certain kinds of claims, by *proving* them. But logic can also be thought of in expressive terms, as a distinctive set of tools for *saying* something that cannot otherwise be made explicit. Seeing how this can be so depends on making a further move: applying the original model of explicitness to the inferential consequences that are implicit (in the sense just considered) in any explicit claim. According to the inferentialist account of concept use, in making a claim one is implicitly endorsing a set of inferences, which articulate its conceptual content. Implicitly endorsing those inferences is a sort of doing. Understanding the conceptual content to which one has committed oneself is a kind of practical mastery: a bit of know how that consists in being able to discriminate what does and does not follow from the claim, what

would be evidence for and against it, and so on. Making explicit that know how, the inferences one has implicitly endorsed, is putting it in the form of a claim *that* things are thus-and-so. In this case a central expressive resource for doing that is provided by basic *logical* vocabulary. In applying the concept lion to Leo, I implicitly commit myself to the applicability of the concept mammal to him. If my language is expressively rich enough to contain *conditionals*, I can say that *if* Leo is a lion, *then* Leo is a mammal. (And if the language is expressively rich enough to include quantificational operators, I can say that if *anything* is a lion, then it is a mammal.) That Cleo is a cephalopod is good (indeed, decisive) evidence that she is not a lion. If my language is expressively rich enough to contain *negation*, I can make that implicit inferential component articulating the content of the concept lion explicit by saying that *if* Cleo is a cephalopod, then Cleo is *not* a mammal.

By saying things like this, by using *logical* vocabulary, I can make explicit the implicit inferential commitments that articulate the content of the concepts I apply in making ordinary explicit claims. Here the original inferential-propositional model of awareness (in the sense of sapience) is applied at a higher level. In the first application, we get an account of *consciousness*—e.g. *that* Leo is a lion. In the second application we get an account of a kind of semantic *self*-consciousness. For in this way we begin to *say* what we are *doing* in *saying* that Leo is a lion. For instance, we make explicit (in the form of a claimable, and so propositional content) that we are committing ourselves thereby to his being a mammal, by saying *that* if something is a lion, then it is a mammal. An account along these lines of the expressive role distinctive of logical vocabulary as such is

introduced in the first chapter of this book. It is applied and extended in subsequent chapters to include such sophisticated locutions as normative vocabulary (in Chapter Two) and intentional tropes such as some uses of 'of' and 'about' (in Chapter Five), which are not usually put in a box with conditionals and negation. Inferentialism about conceptual content in this way makes possible a new kind of expressivism about logic. Applying the inferential model of explicitness, and so of expression, to the functioning of logical vocabulary provides a proving ground for that model that permits its elaboration at a level of clarity and exactness that has (to say the least) been unusual within the expressivist tradition. Two dimensions along which philosophical payoffs can be expected from this fact are explored in Chapters Four and Five, which present an expressive account of the nature and deduction of the necessity of the use of singular terms (and predicates), and an account of the expressive role characteristic of explicitly intentional and representational vocabulary, respectively.

Conditional claims—and claims formed by the use of logical vocabulary in general, of which the conditional is paradigmatic for the inferentialist—express a kind of semantic self-consciousness because they make explicit the inferential relations, consequences, and contents of ordinary nonlogical claims and concepts. It is possible to use the model of (partial) logical explicitation of nonlogical conceptual contents to illuminate certain features of ordinary making explicit in nonlogical claims. For instance, the conceptual content of a concept such as red, for instance, has as a crucial element its *non*inferential circumstances of appropriate application (which, recall, are appealed to in the *broadly* inferential notion of content, since in applying the concept one implicitly endorses the

propriety of the inference from the concept's circumstances of appropriate application to its consequences of application, regardless of whether those circumstances are themselves specified in narrowly inferential terms). Part of the practical skill that forms the implicit background of knowing how against which alone a broadly inferentialist semantic theory can explain the practice of explicitly claiming that something is red, then, is the capacity noninferentially to respond appropriately and differentially to red things. Chapter Three discusses how this part of the implicit background of explicit application of concepts of observables can itself be made explicit, in the logical sense, by first tracking it with a corresponding *reliability inference*, and then codifying that inference with a conditional. In inferentialist terms, the reliability inference *conceptualizes* the initially nonconceptual capacity to respond differentially to red things. Once it appears in this inferential guise, the aspect of the content of the concept red that is still implicit (in another sense) even when presented in the form of a reliability inference can be made explicit by using a conditional, just as for any other inferentially articulated aspect.

This development of the relation of expression between what is explicit and what is implicit is guided throughout by the fundamental idea of demarcating the conceptual by its specifically inferential articulation. At the first stage, that idea yields an understanding of the end result of making something explicit in a claimable (judgeable, thinkable, believable), that is, propositional content, of the sort expressed by the use of basic declarative sentences. At the second stage, the same inferentialist idea leads to an expressive model of the conceptual role distinctive of logical vocabulary, which serves to

make explicit in the form of claimables (paradigmatically, conditional ones) the inferential relations that implicitly articulate the contents of the ordinary nonlogical concepts we use in making things explicit in the sense specified at the first stage. At the third stage, the notion of the expressive relation between what is explicit and what is implicit that was developed at the second stage in connection with the use of distinctively logical concepts is applied to illuminate further the relation between what is explicit in the sense of the first stage and what is made explicit thereby. The result is an account with a structure recognizable as Hegelian: a rationalist, expressivist account of (a kind of) consciousness (namely, sapient awareness) provides the basis for a corresponding account of (a kind of) self-consciousness (namely, semantic or conceptual self-consciousness), which is then called upon to deepen the original story by providing a model for understanding the sort of consciousness with which the account began.

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At the very center of this account is its *rationalism*: the pride of place it gives to specifically *inferential* articulation, to playing a role in practices of giving and asking for *reasons*. It provides the answer I offer to the question of how to demarcate the distinctive realm of the *conceptual*. Specifically *linguistic* practice is picked out (and recognized as discursive) by its incorporation of inferential-and-assertional practices: attributing and undertaking commitments to the propriety of making certain moves and occupying certain positions whose contents are determined by their places in those practices. The resulting *rationalistic pragmatism* is importantly different in just this respect from that of other semantic pragmatists such as Dewey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Quine, and Rorty.

Again, *rationalistic expressivism* has important conceptual resources and advantages denied to traditional romantic expressivism. This version of expressivism offers a framework within which it is possible to do detailed semantic work (the argument presented in Chapter Four is emblematic). And that same framework enables an expressivist approach to *logic*, which provides potentially important new insights—for instance, into the expressive role distinctive of *normative* vocabulary (discussed in Chapter Two), and the expressive role distinctive of *intentional* or explicitly *representational* vocabulary (discussed in Chapter Five).

Empiricism has been the fighting faith and organizing principle of philosophy in the English speaking world since at least the time of Locke. Its distinctive twentieth century form, developed by such thinkers as Russell, Carnap, and Quine, joins to the classical insistence on the origin of knowledge in *experience* an emphasis on the crucial cognitive role played by *language* and *logic*. A central goal of this book is to introduce a way of thinking about these latter topics—and so about meaning, mind, and knowledge—that swings free of the context of empiricist commitments that has shaped discussion within this tradition.

In turning away from empiricism I do not mean to be denying that consideration of perceptual practices must play a crucial role in our epistemology and semantics. What might be called *platitudinous empiricism* restricts itself to the observations that without perceptual experience, we can have no knowledge of contingent matters of fact, and more deeply, that conceptual content is unintelligible apart from its relation to perceptual

experience.[7] These are not controversial claims. (Indeed, I think it is very difficult to find any philosophers who have *ever* disputed them, including the most notorious candidates. But I won't try to support that claim here.) The theoretical and explanatory commitments of philosophically substantial empiricisms go well beyond these platitudes. My main target is the semantic theory that I see as underlying empiricist approaches to meaning, mind, knowledge, and action. Empiricism is a current of thought too broad and multifarious, with too many shifting eddies, backwaters, and side channels to be confined within the well-defined banks of necessary and sufficient conditions. Its general course, though, is marked out by commitment to grounding theoretical and practical reasoning and concept use in the occurrence of episodes we immediately find ourselves with: sense experiences on the cognitive side, and felt motivations or preferences, on the active side. In the forms I find most objectionable, having these experiences is thought of as not requiring the exercise of specifically *conceptual* abilities. It is understood rather as a *pre*conceptual capacity shareable with non-concept-using mammals. Its deliverances are accordingly conceived of as available to explain what concept use consists in, and as providing the raw materials conceptual activities work on or with. (Traditional abstractionist and associationist strategies are just particular ways of working out this line of thought; many others are possible.)

[7] Here I speak with the vulgar, so as to avoid lengthy paraphrase. 'Experience' is not one of my words. I did not find it necessary to use it in the many pages of *Making It Explicit* (though it is mentioned), and the same policy prevails in the body of this work. I do not see that we need—either in epistemology or, more importantly, in semantics—to appeal to any intermediaries between perceptible facts and reports of them that are non-inferentially elicited by the exercise of reliable differential responsive dispositions. There are, of course, many *causal* intermediaries, since the noninferential observation report is a propositionally contentful commitment the acknowledgement of which stands at the end of a whole causal chain of reliably covarying events, including a cascade of neurophysiological ones. But I do not see that any of these have any particular conceptual or (therefore) cognitive or semantic significance. The strongest arguments to the contrary, from the point of view presented in this work, are those presented by my colleague John McDowell in *Mind and World* [Harvard University Press, 1994].

Classical empiricist philosophy of mind takes immediate perceptual experiences as the paradigm of awareness or consciousness. Classical empiricist epistemology takes as its paradigm of empirical knowledge those same experiences, to which it traces the warrant for and authority of all the rest. As the tradition has developed, it has become clearer that both rest on a more or less explicit semantic picture, according to which the content of experience, awareness, and knowledge is to be understood in the first instance in *representational* terms: as a matter of what is (or purports to be) represent*ed* by some represent*ing* states or episodes. In contemporary incarnations, this notion of representational content is most often unpacked in terms of what objects, events, or states of affairs actually causally elicited the representation, or which ones would reliably elicit representations of that kind under various conditions. This way of thinking about the content of empirical knowledge, to begin with perceptual experience, is then naturally seen to be complemented by a philosophy of language that focuses on reference, denotation, and extension, following the pattern of extensional model theoretic semantics for the language of first order predicate logic.

Empiricism attempts to understand the content of concepts in terms of the origin of empirical beliefs in experience that we just find ourselves with, and the origin of practical intentions in desires or preferences that in the most basic case we just find ourselves with. The *rationalist* order of explanation understands concepts as norms determining what counts as a *reason* for particular beliefs, claims, and intentions, whose content is articulated by the application of those concepts and which such statuses can be reasons

for. Its impetus is a classically rationalist thought, which Sellars says (in an autobiographical sketch) motivated his philosophical development starting already in the '30s: the thought that

> What was needed was a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than supposed origin in experience, their primary feature.[8]

The difference is most telling when we ask about the relation between awareness and concept use. The empiricist understands concept use as an achievement to be understood against the background of a prior sort of awareness, which justifies or makes appropriate the application of one concept rather than another. To play this latter role, the awareness in question must amount to something more than just the reliable differential responsiveness of merely irritable devices such as landmines and pressure plates that open doors in supermarkets. For the rationalist, on the contrary, awareness of the sort that has a potentially normative significance (the genus of which cognitive significance is a species) consists in the application of concepts. One must already have concepts to be aware in this sense. Of course, this immediately raises the question of how one could come to be a concept user unless one could already be aware of things. But to this a pragmatist such as Sellars can reply with a story about how initially merely differentially responsive creatures can be initiated into the implicitly normative social practice of giving and asking for reasons, so that some of their responses can come to count as or

[8] In *Action, Knowledge, and Reality*, H. N. Castaneda (ed.) [Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1975] p 285.

have the social significance of endorsements, of the making or staking of inferentially articulated *claims*.[9]

Besides rejecting empiricism, the rationalist pragmatism and expressivism presented here is opposed to *naturalism*, at least as that term is usually understood. For it emphasizes what distinguishes discursive creatures, as subject to distinctively conceptual norms, from their non-concept-using ancestors and cousins. Conceptual norms are brought into play by social linguistic practices of giving and asking for reasons, of assessing the propriety of claims and inferences. Products of *social* interactions (in a strict sense that distinguishes them merely from features of populations) are not studied by the *natural* sciences—though they are not for that reason to be treated as spooky and *super*natural. In conferring conceptual content on performances, states, and expressions suitably caught up in them, those practices institute a realm of *culture* that rests on, but goes beyond, the background of reliable differential responsive dispositions and their exercise characteristic of merely natural creatures. Once concept use is on the scene, a distinction opens up between things that have *natures* and things that have *histories*. Physical things such as electrons and aromatic compounds would be paradigmatic of the first class, while cultural formations such as English Romantic poetry and uses of the terms 'nature' and 'natural' would be paradigmatic of the second. The relations between these categories is a complex affair. Physical, chemical, and biological *things* have natures rather than histories, but what about the disciplines that define and study them? Should physics itself be thought of as something that has a nature, or as something that has a

[9] I tell such a story in more detail in the first three chapters of *Making It Explicit* [Harvard University Press, 1994].

history? Concluding the latter is giving a certain kind of pride of place to the historical, cultural, and conceptual. For it is in effect treating the *distinction* between things that have natures and things that have histories, between things studied by the Naturwissenschaften and things studied by the Geisteswissenschaften, as itself a cultural formation: the sort of thing that itself has a history rather than a nature. Grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word—and uses of words are a paradigm of the sort of thing that must be understood historically. In this sense even concepts such as electron and aromatic compound are the sort of thing that has a history. But they are not *purely* historical. For the proprieties governing the application of those concepts depend on what inferences involving them are *correct*, that is, on what *really* follows from what. And that depends on how things are with electrons and aromatic compounds, not just on what judgments and inferences we endorse. (To say that is to say that our *use* of the corresponding words should not be thought of as restricted to our dispositions to such endorsements.) Understanding the relevant sort of dependence—the way what inferences are correct, and so what we are really committing ourselves to by applying them, and so what their contents really are (the contents we have conferred on them by using them as we do), as opposed to what we take them to be—is a delicate and important task. Some essential raw materials for it are assembled in the final three chapters of this book. Chapter Four offers an account of what it is to talk about *objects*. Chapter Five says what it is to take our talk to be *about* objects. And Chapter Six shows how the structure of reasoning makes it possible to understand subjecting our claims to assessments according to a kind of correctness in which authority is invested in the things we are talking about, rather than in our attitudes towards them. None of these is a naturalistic account.

In addition to rejecting empiricism and embracing nonnaturalism, the rationalistic semantic theory introduced here is unusual in not taking *representation* as its fundamental concept. A methodological commitment to beginning an account of concept use (and so, eventually, of conceptual content) with reasoning rather than representing does not require denying that there is an important representational dimension to concept use. Indeed, the unusual explanatory starting point has the advantage of bringing into relief certain features of conceptual representation that are hard to notice otherwise. The final three chapters highlight some of these, while beginning the process of cashing the promissory note issued by an inferentialist order of explanation—that is, offering an account of *referential* relations to objects in terms ultimately of *inferential* relations among claims. Of course, *non*inferential language entry moves in perception and language exit moves in action play a crucial role in the story too. But the specifically *inferential* articulation of the acknowledgments of propositional commitments that result from observation and result in intentional performances are to the fore in understanding the cognitive and practical *normative* significance of the reliable differential responsive capacities exercised in those processes.

I call the view that inferential articulation is a *necessary* element in the demarcation of the conceptual '*weak* inferentialism.' The view that inferential articulation *broadly construed* is *sufficient* to account for conceptual content, I call '*strong* inferentialism.' The view that inferential articulation *narrowly* construed is *sufficient* to account for conceptual content, I call '*hyper*inferentialism.' The difference between the broad and

the narrow construal of inferential articulation is just whether or not *non*inferential circumstances of application (in the case of concepts such as red that have noninferential reporting uses) and consequences of application (in the case of concepts such as ought that have noninferential practical uses) are taken into account. The broad sense focuses attention on the inferential commitment that is implicitly undertaken in using any concept whatever, even those with noninferential circumstances or consequences of application: the commitment, namely, to the propriety of the inference from the circumstances to the consequences of application. The view endorsed here is strong inferentialism.[10]

Inferentialism of any sort is committed to a certain kind of semantic *holism*, as opposed to the *atomism* that often goes hand in hand with commitment to a representationalist order of semantic explanation. For if the conceptual content expressed by each sentence or word is understood as essentially consisting in its inferential relations (broadly construed) or articulated by its inferential relations (narrowly construed) then one must grasp many such contents in order to grasp any. Such holistic conceptual role approaches to semantics potentially face problems concerning both the *stability* of conceptual contents under change of belief and commitment to the propriety of various inferences, and the possibility of *communication* between individuals who endorse different claims and inferences. Such concerns are rendered much less urgent, however, if one thinks of concepts as *norms* determining the *correctness* of various moves. The norms I am binding myself to by using the term 'molybdenum'—what actually follows from or is

[10] Sellars' seminal inferentialist tract "Inference and Meaning" [pp. 257-286 in *Pure Pragmatism and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, J. Sich (ed), [Reseda CA: Ridgeview Publishing, 1980] does not make these distinctions. Accordingly it may be subject to the criticism that it assembles

incompatible with the applicability of the concept—need not change as my views about molybdenum and its inferential surround change. And you and I may be bound by just the same public linguistic and conceptual norms in the vicinity in spite of the fact that we are disposed to make different claims and inferential moves. It is up to me whether I play a token of the 'molybdenum' type in the game of giving and asking for reasons. But it is not then up to me what the significance of that move is. (And I don't take the case to be significantly different if I play such a token internally, in thought.)

As has already been remarked, inferentialism also carries with it a commitment to the conceptual primacy of the *propositional*. Thus inferentialism semantic explanations reverse the traditional order: beginning with proprieties of inference, they explain propositional content, and in terms of both go on to explain the conceptual content expressed by subsentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates. Chapter Four describes how this last step (which has not been much attended to by recent inferentialists such as Sellars and—on my reading—Dummett) might be accomplished.

The rationalist form of expressivism pursued here also involves rejecting conventional wisdom about the nature and philosophical significance of *logic*. Logic is not properly understood as the study of a distinctive kind of *formal* inference. It is rather the study of the inferential roles of vocabulary playing a distinctive *expressive* role: codifying in explicit form the inferences that are implicit in the use of ordinary, nonlogical vocabulary. Making explicit the inferential roles of the logical vocabulary then can take

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evidence for weak inferentialism, and then treats it as justifying a commitment to strong inferentialism, or even hyperinferentialism.

the form of presenting patterns of inference involving them that are formally valid in the sense that they are invariant under substitution of nonlogical for nonlogical vocabulary. But that task is subsidiary and instrumental only. The task of logic is in the first instance to help us *say* something about the conceptual contents expressed by the use of nonlogical vocabulary, not to *prove* something about the conceptual contents expressed by the use of logical vocabulary. On this picture, *formal* proprieties of inference essentially involving logical vocabulary derive from and must be explained in terms of *material* proprieties of inference essentially involving nonlogical vocabulary, rather than the other way around. Logic is accordingly not a canon or standard of right reasoning. It can help us make explicit (and hence available for criticism and transformation) the inferential commitments that govern the use of all our vocabulary, and hence articulate the contents of all our concepts.

Finally, the views presented here turn on their head prevailing humean ideas about practical reasoning. According to this common approach—which is very much in evidence in Davidson's writings on action, and of rational choice theorists and others who approach the norms of rationality through decision theory or game theory—the norms governing practical reasoning and defining rational action are essentially *instrumental* norms, which derive their authority from intrinsically motivating preferences or desires. Those states are the empiricist analogs, on the side of agency, to the preconceptual episodes of awareness to which epistemic authority is traced on the side of cognition. Chapter Two offers an account in which statements about what an agent prefers or desires are interpreted instead as codifying commitment to certain

specific patterns of practical reasoning, selected from among a wide variety of patterns that are codified by the use of other normative vocabulary. The concepts of desire and preference are accordingly demoted from their position of privilege, and take their place as having a derivative and provincial sort of normative authority. Endorsement and commitment are at the center of rational agency—as of rationality in general—and inclination enters only insofar as rational agents must bring inclination in the train of rational propriety, not the other way around.

So I am putting forward a view that is opposed to many (if not most) of the large theoretical, explanatory, and strategic commitments that have shaped and motivated Anglo-American philosophy in this century: empiricism, naturalism, representationalism, semantic atomism, formalism about logic, and instrumentalism about the norms of practical rationality. In spite of my disagreements with central elements of the world-view that has animated analytic philosophy, I take my expository and argumentative structure and the criteria of adequacy for having made a claim with a clear content, argued for it, and responsibly followed out its consequences resolutely from the Anglo-American tradition. I don't think those standards need be taken to entail or be warranted only by this one constellation of ideas. Indeed, though the enterprise I am engaged in here is not happily identified with *analysis of meanings* in a traditional sense, it is properly thought of as pursuing a recognizable successor project. For what I am trying to do is in a clear and specific inferential sense make *explicit* what is *implicit* in various philosophically important concepts. Among the examples treated in the following pages

are concepts such as conceptual content, logic, ought, reliable, singular term, what is expressed by the 'of' or 'about' of intentional directedness, and objectivity.

Sellars once said that the aim of his work as a whole was to begin moving analytic philosophy from its *Humean* phase into a *Kantian* one. The full implications of this remark include reverberations contributed by many of the chambers and corridors of the Kantian edifice. But at its heart, I think, is the conviction that the distinctive nature, contribution, and significance of the *conceptual* articulation of thought and action has been systematically slighted by empiricism in all its forms. Although the addition of logic to the mix in the twentieth century was a promising development, there was from Sellars's point of view a failure to rethink from the beginning the constraints and criteria of adequacy of the enterprise in the light of the expressive power the new formal idioms put at our disposal. The result was the pursuit of traditional empiricist visions by other means—ones that could not in principle do justice in the end to the normativity of concept use that finds its expression variously in the distinction between laws of nature codifying inferential relations among facts, on the one hand, and mere regularities regarding them on the other, and in the difference between acting for a reason and merely moving when prompted. The more promising alternative is to focus to begin with on the conceptual articulation of perceptually acquired and practically pursued commitments and entitlements rather than on the experiences and inclinations with which we simply find ourselves. That kantian strategy is a better one for the same sort of reasons that lead us to expect that one will learn more about a building by studying blueprints than by studying bricks.

My teacher Rorty has described the enterprise to which this volume is a contribution as an extension of Sellars's: to make possible a further transition, from a *Kantian* to a *Hegelian* approach to thought and action.[11] The justice of this characterization can be understood in terms of the strategic options already rehearsed here. First, I am interested in the divide between *nature* and *culture*. In this context we can identify the realm of the cultural with activities that either consist in the application of concepts in judgment and action, or that presuppose such capacities. The Geisteswissenschaften have as their proper aim the study of concept use and things made possible by it—activities of which only concept users are capable. One of my principle goals is to present and explore the consequences of a particular sort of principle of demarcation for the realm of culture, so understood. Although of course cultural activities arise within the framework of a natural world, I am most concerned with what is made possible by the emergence of the peculiar constellation of conceptually articulated comportments that Hegel called 'Geist'. Cultural products and activities become explicit as such only by the use of normative vocabulary that is in principle not reducible to the vocabulary of the natural sciences (though of course the same phenomena under other descriptions are available in that vocabulary). Indeed, the deployment of the vocabulary of the natural sciences (like that of any other vocabulary) is itself a cultural phenomenon, something that itself becomes intelligible only within the conceptual horizon provided by the Geisteswissenschaften. The study of natures itself has a history, and its own nature, if any, must be approached

[11] In his Introduction to the recent reprinting of Sellars's "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", to which I contributed a Study Guide [Harvard University Press, 1997].

through the study of that history. This is a picture and an aspiration that we owe to Hegel.

A second dimension of Hegelian influence is his *pragmatism* about conceptual norms. One of Kant's great insights is that judgments and actions are to be distinguished from the responses of merely natural creatures by their distinctive *normative* status, as things we are in a distinctive sense *responsible* for. He understood *concepts* as the norms that determine just what we have made ourselves responsible for, what we have committed ourselves to and what would entitle us to it, by particular acts of judging and acting. However, Kant punted many hard questions about the nature and origins of this normativity, of the bindingness of concepts, out of the familiar phenomenal realm of experience into the noumenal realm. Hegel brought these issues back to earth by understanding *normative* statuses as *social* statuses—by developing a view according to which (as my colleague John Haugeland put the point in another context[12]) *all transcendental constitution is social institution*. The background against which the conceptual activity of making things explicit is intelligible is taken to be implicitly normative essentially *social* practice.

Pragmatism about the norms implicit in cognitive activity comes down to us in the first half of this century from three independent directions: from the classical American pragmatists, culminating in Dewey, from the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, and from the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In trying to work out how the insights of these traditions (partly common, partly complementary) could be applied to make

progress within contemporary philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, however, I found myself driven back to Hegel's original version. For unlike all three of these more recent sorts of social practice theory, Hegel's is a *rationalist* pragmatism. By contrast to their conceptual assimilationism, he gives pride of place to *reasoning* in understanding what it is to say or do something.

Again, Dewey and James[13], the early Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein each resisted, in his own way, the *representational* semantic paradigm. But none of them evidently provides an alternative paradigm that is structurally rich enough and definite enough either to do real semantic work with—of the sort done by model theoretic developments of representationalism, including possible worlds semantics[14]—or to provide an account of the distinctive function of *logical* vocabulary. Hegel's *rationalistic*, inferentialist version of the romantic *expressivist* tradition he inherited, it seemed to me, holds out the promise of just such an alternative paradigm. Hegel's version of expressivism is further attractive in that it is not only pragmatic and inferentialist about the conceptual, but also *relational*, in the sense that the implicit and the explicit are each at least in part constituted by their expressive relation to one another.[15] The inferentialist understanding of explicitness is just what is needed to make an expressive alternative to

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[12] "Heidegger on Being a Person," John Haugeland "Heidegger on Being a Person." *Nous* **16,** (1982).

[13] Peirce is, on this issue as on so many others, a more complicated case.

[14] As a quick gesture at the sort of thing I have in mind, consider *adverbs*. A verb such as 'walks' can be assigned a function from objects to sets of possible worlds as its semantic interpretant. Then an adverb such as 'slowly' can be assigned a function from functions from objects to sets of possible worlds to functions from objects to sets of possible worlds. It is then a straightforward matter to represent the semantic difference between attributive and non-attributive adverbs: the difference between adverbs such as 'slowly', where the inference from 'a Fs' to 'a Fs slowly' is a good one, and adverbs such as 'in one's imagination', where the corresponding inference is not a good one. See for example David Lewis's "General Semantics" in G. Harman and D. Davidson (eds.) *Semantics of Natural Language* [Dordrecht: Reidel, 1972].

representationalism viable. As I put the point above, *rationalist* expressivism understands the *explicit*—the thinkable, the sayable, the form something must be in to count as having been *expressed*—in terms of its role in *inference*. I take Hegel to have introduced this idea, although he takes the minimal unit of conceptual content to be the whole holistic system of inferentially interrelated judgeables, and so is not a propositionalist.

Finally, this rationalist expressivist pragmatism forges a link between *logic* and *self-consciousness*, in the sense of making explicit the implicit background against which alone anything can be made explicit, that is recognizably Hegelian. For it offers an account of a kind of *consciousness*, awareness in the senses of *sapience*, which underwrites a corresponding account of a kind of *self*-consciousness: *semantic* or *conceptual* self-consciousness. This notion of what is made explicit by the characteristic use of specifically *logical* vocabulary then makes possible a new appreciation of the sort of consciousness with which the story begins.[16]

I think this is a constellation of ideas has the prospect of enlarging the frontiers of contemporary analytic philosophy. My hope is that by slighting the similarities to animals which preoccupied Locke and Hume and highlighting the possibilities opened up by engaging in social practices of giving and asking for reasons we will get closer to an

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[15] Cf. Chapter III of Charles Taylor's *Hegel* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975].

[16] Hegel is not always read as addressing the topics I see as central to his work—primarily regarding the nature of conceptual norms and conceptual content. But when he is so read, he turns out to have a great deal of interest to say. Developing and justifying this interpretive line is a major undertaking. I foresee that I will write a book about Hegel.

account of being human that does justice to the kinds of consciousness and self-consciousness distinctive of us as *cultural*, and not merely *natural* creatures.

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The six chapters that make up the body of this work present ideas and arguments drawn from or developing out of my 1994 book *Making It Explicit*. There is nothing in them that will come as a surprise to anyone who has mastered that work. They were originally written as lectures, each intended to be intelligible in its own right, apart from its relation to the others. I had in mind audiences that had perhaps not so much as dipped into the big book, but were curious about its themes and philosophical consequences. The lectures have been presented individually on many occasions, to many audiences, whose penetrating questions and lively discussion have helped me avoid at least some errors and to groom and streamline the presentations. The lectures were also written with an eye to mutual reinforcement and cumulative effect, for those occasions when I was afforded the opportunity for a more extended presentation. I delivered versions of all but one (Chapter Three, on reliabilism) as the Townsend Lectures at Berkeley in the Fall of 1997, and a different set of five (all but the last) more recently at the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt in the Winter of 1999. The ancestors of Chapters One, Four, and Five, saw the light of day as my Hempel Lectures at Princeton already in the Spring of 1994.[17] I think

[17] Versions of some of these lectures have been published in other places. An early rendering of Chapter One appeared as "Inference, Expression, and Induction: Sellarsian Themes," in *Philosophical Studies* **54** (1988) pp. 257–285. A fuller account appears as Chapter Two of *Making It Explicit*. Chapter Two appeared in *Philosophical Perspectives* **12**, 1998 *Language, Mind, and Ontology*, James Tomberlin (ed.). A fuller account is given in the second half of Chapter Four of *Making It Explicit*. Chapter Three was published in *Monist*, **81**, Number 3, July 1998: *Reunifying Epistemology*, pp. 371-392. The general line of thought develops themes from the first half of Chapter Four of *Making It Explicit*. Chapter Four presents

experience has proven that the stories told in each of these chapters can stand on their own, and that together they give a good picture of some of the argumentative high points of the approach to language and thought developed at length in *Making It Explicit*. Where questions arise about the presuppositions and context of these arguments, however, it should be kept in mind that that work is what should be consulted, and should be considered as offering the fullest account I can manage—including about the topics put on the table in this Introduction. A number of important motivations, commitments, and developments have had to be omitted in this shorter, simpler book.

The first chapter, "Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism," introduces and motivates two basic ideas. The first is that to have specifically *conceptual* content is to play a certain kind of role in *reasoning*. The most basic sort of conceptual content is *propositional* content: the sort of content expressed by declarative sentences (and the 'that' clauses or content-specifying sentential complements of propositional attitude ascriptions). Because contents of this sort are the right shape to be sayable, thinkable, and believable, they can be understood as making something *explicit*. The claim is that to have or express a content of this kind just is to be able to play the role both of premise and of conclusion in *inferences*. The second idea is that the expressive role characteristic of *logical* vocabulary as such is to make inferential relations explicit. Thus *conditionals* are treated as paradigms of logical locutions. This line of thought makes sense only if one thinks of proprieties of inference as extending beyond those underwritten by logical

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the central argument of Chapter Six of *Making It Explicit*. A version of Chapter Five was published as "Reasoning and Representing," in Michaelis Michael and John O'Leary–Hawthorne (eds.) *Philosophy in Mind: The Place of Philosophy in the Study of Mind*, Kluwer Academic Publishers (Dordrecht) 1994, pp. 159–178. It and Chapter Six both develop themes from Chapter Eight of *Making It Explicit*.

form. That is, one must acknowledge that besides inferences that are *formally* good in the sense of being *logically* valid, there are inferences that are *materially* good in the sense of articulating the contents of the *non*-logical concepts applied in their premises and conclusions.

In the rest of the book, these ideas are applied to shed light on a variety of philosophical issues: *normativity* and practical reasoning in Chapter Two, the ultimately inferential nature of appeals to the *reliability* of cognitive processes such as perception in Chapter Three, how the notion of *substitution* allows the inferential semantic approach to be extended to subsentential expressions (which cannot play the direct inferential role of premises and conclusions) such as singular terms and predicates in Chapter Four, the inferential expressive role characteristic of the locutions that make explicit *the intentional directedness* or representational aboutness of thought and talk in Chapter Five, and the sort of social-perspectival, dialogical inferential articulation that makes possible the *objectivity* of conceptual content in Chapter Six.

The second chapter, “Action, Norms, and Practical Reasoning,” extends the inferentialist paradigm in logic and semantics to encompass practical reasoning, culminating in noninferential discursive exit transitions in the form of intentional actions. Thus it adds an inferentialist approach to the contents of intentions to the inferentialist approach to the content of beliefs. It aims to do three things, corresponding to the three pieces of the title of the chapter:

- To explain in inferentialist terms the expressive role that distinguishes specifically *normative* vocabulary. That is, to say what it is the job of such vocabulary to make explicit. Doing this is saying what 'ought' means.
- To introduce a non-humean way of thinking about *practical reasoning*.
- To offer a broadly kantian account of the *will* as a rational faculty of practical reasoning.

The empiricist tradition seeks to trace back talk of reasons for action and norms governing action to underlying preferences and desires, which are understood both as intrinsically motivating and as the *only* sorts of things that *can* be intrinsically motivating. Thus any complete expression of a reason for action must include a specification of what it is that the agent *wants*, in virtue of which the reason functions (motivationally) as a reason *for that agent*. In the story told here, by contrast to this instrumentalist one, preferences and desires are explained in terms of commitments to certain patterns of practical inference, that is, in terms of what is a reason for what, instead of the other way around. Different sorts of normative vocabulary are presented as making it possible to codify, in the explicit form of *claims* (claimables), commitment to the propriety of different patterns of practical reasoning. Against this background, preferences and desires take their place as one sort of commitment among others, distinguished by its structure rather than by any privilege with respect to either to reasons or to motivations for action.

The third chapter, "Insights and Blindspots of Reliabilism," follows out the application of inferentialist semantic ideas to observation, that is, to perceptual noninferential discursive

entrance transitions. The topic is the taking up into the conceptual order of the reliable differential responsive dispositions—for instance, to respond to red things by applying the concept red—that are essential to the contents of empirical concepts corresponding to observable states of affairs. The issue is approached through a discussion of contemporary epistemological reliabilism, which seeks to put appeals to reliable processes in place of more traditional appeals to inferential justifications—at least in epistemology, and perhaps also in understanding the contents of knowledge claims. Three insights and two blindspots of reliabilism are identified. What I call the *founding insight* points out that reliably formed true beliefs can qualify as knowledge even where the candidate knower cannot justify them. *Goldman's insight* is that attributions of reliability must be relativized to reference classes. The *implicit insight* I discern in the examples used to motivate the first two claims is that attributions of reliability should be understood in terms of endorsements of a distinctive kind of *inference*. The *conceptual blindspot* results from overgeneralizing the founding insight from epistemology to semantics, taking it that because there can be knowledge even in cases where the knower cannot offer an inferential justification, it is therefore possible to understand the content of (knowledge) claims without appeal to inference at all. The *naturalistic blindspot* seeks in reliabilism the basis of a fully naturalized epistemology: one that need not appeal to norms or reasons at all. To avoid the conceptual blindspot, one must appreciate the significance of specifically inferential articulation in distinguishing representations that qualify as beliefs, and hence as candidates for knowledge. To avoid the naturalistic blindspot, one must appreciate that concern with reliability is concern with a distinctive kind of interpersonal inference. Appreciating the role of inference in these explanatory

contexts is grasping the implicit insight of reliabilism. It is what is required to conserve and extend both the founding insight, and Goldman's insight. Thus reliability should be understood in terms of the goodness of inference, rather than the other way around.

The last three chapters take up the challenge of explaining the *referential* or *representational* dimension of concept use and conceptual content in terms of the *inferential* articulation that is here treated as primary in the order of explanation. To make a claim is to purport to state a fact. The fourth chapter offers an inferentialist account of what it is for the facts stated by true claimings to be about *objects*, and an inferentialist argument to the conclusion that facts *must* be about objects. An inferentialist pragmatism is committed to a top-down order of semantic explanation. It must give pride of place to *propositional* contents, for it is expressions with that sort of content that can play the basic inferential roles of premise and conclusion. The utterance of expressions that are suitable to appear in both these kinds of roles can have the pragmatic force or significance of *assertions*, and so the expressions in question can be identified as declarative *sentences*. Some further work is needed to distinguish and attribute conceptual content to *sub*sentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates, since they cannot serve as premises or conclusions in inferences. Frege's notion of *substitution* provides a way to extend the inferentialist account of the conceptual content of sentences to these sorts of subsentential expressions. It gives us a way of making sense of the notion of the contribution the occurrence of a subsentential expression makes to the correctness of inferences it appears in (as an element of a premise or conclusion). For we can notice which substitutions of subsentential

expressions do, and which do not, preserve the correctness of inferences in which the sentences they occur in play the role of premise or conclusion. In that way, subsentential expressions can be accorded a substitutionally *indirect* inferential role.

Chapter Four, entitled "What Are Singular Terms, and Why Are There Any?", falls into two parts, corresponding to the two parts of its title. The first argues that singular terms and predicates can be distinguished by the *structure* of the contributions they make to the correctness of substitution inferences involving sentences in which they occur. The second part argues that this is not a contingent or accidental structure. Very general conditions on inferential practice mandate that *if* inferentially signficant subsentential structure is to be discerned in sentences at all, it *must* take the form of singular terms and predicates—that is, that if we are in the fact-stating line of work at all, the facts we state must be facts about objects and their properties and relations. Although in principle it is coherent to conceive of discursive practices that involve only sentential expressions devoid of internal structure, the expressive power of such languages is severely limited. For the productivity and creativity of language depend on the fact that an indefinite number of novel sentences can be produced and understood because they are constructed out of familiar subsentential elements. The central argument of the chapter is a derivation of the necessity of a singular term and predicate structure (in the precise substitution inferential sense specified in the first part of the chapter) from just two conditions: that there not be arbitrary restrictions on the carving up of sentences with a substitutional scalpel, and that the language contain the minimal expressive resources of *sentential* logic, namely conditionals (or negation). Since according to the inferentialist

expressive view of logic, these are the locutions needed to make explicit within the language the material inferential relations in virtue of which ordinary nonlogical sentences have the conceptual contents they do, this means that singular terms and predicates will be substitutionally discernible within the basic sentences of any productive, projectible language capable of the minimal semantic self-consciousness made possible by the use of conditionals. The conclusion is that any language with sufficient expressive power concerning its own conceptual contents—never mind the character of the world it is being used to talk about—must take the form of sentences containing singular terms and predicates. That is, it must at least purport to state facts about objects and their properties and relations. I call this, rather grandly, *an expressive transcendental deduction of the necessity of objects*. It is certainly the most difficult part of the book, but the argument, though technical, requires no competence beyond familiarity with first order logic.

At this point, then, we have seen in some sense what it is for our talk to be about *objects*. The next chapter, "A Social Route from Reasoning to Representing," complements this discussion by offering a general account of *aboutness*. It pursues a double-barreled expressivist and pragmatist strategy. On the expressivist side, it aims to understand what is *implicit* in what one is *doing* in terms of the kind of *saying* that makes it *explicit*. Here the aim is to understanding the activity of *representing* things as being thus-and-so in terms of the use of the explicitly representational locutions we use to express the representational dimension of concept use. Putting to one side technical, inevitably theory-laden philosophical terms such as 'denotes' and some uses of 'refers' and

'represents',[18] the claim is that the ordinary distinction between what we say or think and what we are talking of thinking *about* is expressed by using terms like 'of' and 'about'—not in phrases such as "the pen of my aunt," and "weighing about five pounds," but when used to express intentional directedness, as in "thinking of Benjamin Franklin," and "talking about wolves." These uses are in turn distinguished as those used to express *de re* attributions of propositional attitudes in the explicit, claimable, form of ascriptions, such as "Adams claimed *of* Benjamin Franklin that he did not invent the lightning rod," (which might be paraphrased as "Adams represented Benjamin Franklin as not inventing the lightning rod."). In the pragmatist phase of the argument, then, we ask how one must *use* expressions in order for them to play the expressive role of explicit *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude. The argument is completed by answering this question by an account of the *inferential* role distinctive of such ascriptions. The claim is that they codify certain *interpersonal* inferential commitments. The result is an account of the role of the explicitly representational vocabulary we use to express intentional directedness as codifying inferential commitments—that is, according to the expressive approach to logic, an account of its specifically *logical* expressive role.

The sixth chapter, "Objectivity and the Normative Fine Structure of Rationality," offers an argument in two parts, again corresponding to the two parts of the title. First is an argument for a thesis about the norms governing any practices recognizable as including the giving and asking for reasons—any practice in which some performances have the implicit force or significance of asserting and inferring—that is, according to the

[18] An inferentialist approach to the expressive role characteristic of this sort of locution is offered in Chapter Five of *Making It Explicit*.

rationalist linguistic pragmatist line of thought pursued here, any genuinely *discursive* or concept-using practices. The claim is that those implicit practical norms must, in order to count as discursive, come in at least two flavors. It must be possible for some performances to have the practical significance of undertaking *commitments*. For asserting something is committing oneself to it, and the beliefs those assertions express involve a kind of commitment. It is such commitments that, in the first instance, stand in practical inferential relations—such as that *by* committing oneself overtly (assertionally) to Leo's being a lion, one thereby implicitly commits oneself (whether one realizes it or not) to Leo's being a mammal. And it the contents of those commitments that stand in the semantic inferential relations that can be made explicit by the use of conditionals. But for such a structure of consequential commitment to count as involving assessments of *reasons*, there must be in play also a notion of *entitlement* to one's commitments: the sort of entitlement that is in question when we ask whether someone has good *reasons* for her commitments. The question whether or not one is committed to a certain claim(able) must be distinct from the question of whether or not one is entitled (by reasons) to that commitment.

What I call here the "normative fine structure of rationality" is the constellation of kinds of broadly inferential relations that is generated once we recognize these two sorts of normative status. For now we can discern and distinguish at least three fundamental ones: commitment preserving inferences, entitlement preserving inferences, and incompatibilities. The first is a class of materially good inferences (that is, ones whose correctness or incorrectness essentially depends on or articulates the content of the

nonlogical concepts that occur in their premises or conclusions) that generalizes what appears in the formalist tradition of logic as *deductive* inferences. The second is a class of materially good inferences that generalizes what appears in the formalist tradition as *inductive* inferences. The third has no classical analog. We can say that two claims are materially incompatible in case commitment to one precludes entitlement to the other. (This is a *normative* relation. One can undertake incompatible assertible commitments as easily and intelligibly as one can undertake incompatible practical ones: for instance by making two promises both of which cannot be kept. What one cannot do is be *entitled* to both—indeed, in standard cases, to either—of the incompatible commitments.) This richer practical inferential structure provides important new resources for *logic*. For instance, one can define the *negation* of *p* as its minimum incompatible: the claim that is commitment entailed by every claim materially incompatible with *p*. It also provides important new resources for *semantics*. The final portion of the chapter shows how this structure of reasoning makes it possible to understand subjecting our claims to assessments according to a kind of correctness in which authority is invested in the *things* we are (in that central normative sense) talking *about*, rather than in our *attitudes* towards them. Thus by the end of the discussion we see how inferentially articulated conceptual norms can underwrite assessments of *objective* correctness of representation.

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June, 1999

Articulating Reasons:

An Introduction to Inferentialism

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