

**AL-MUKHATABAT**

# المخطبات

LOGIQUE – ÉPISTÉMOLOGIE – HUMANITÉS

منطق - إستمولوجيا - إنسانيات

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## AL-MUKHATABAT

Peer-reviewed, quarterly and trilingual, Al-Mukhatabat publishes articles in logic, epistemology and Humanities. Articles are submitted anonymously to two members of the scientific committee of the journal for their evaluation. Sending a document to the Journal means that the author authorizes its publication. The article, which remains the full property of the author, should be sent in docx and pdf format, not exceeding 30 pages (notes and bibliography included), accompanied by a summary in English and French. The author will be notified of the decision of the Journal committee within three months. The Journal aims to familiarize more readers to the subtleties of scientific thought and encourage logical, argumentative and epistemological approaches in the treatment of ethical, social, political, aesthetic, linguistic, cognitive, anthropological, educational, religious, metaphysical...questions, as basis for establishing a genuine and fruitful dialogue between different cultures.

## المخطابات

مجلة فصلية محكمة وثلاثية اللغات (العربية والإنجليزية والفرنسية) تنشر المقالات الجيدة ذات الصلة بالمنطق والإبستمولوجيا والإنسانيات. وعلى الباحث أن يزود المجلة بنسخة من بحثه على عنوانها الإلكتروني والذي لا يجب أن يتعدى 30 صفحة (باحساب الهوامش والبibliوغرافيا) مع ملخص له بلغة البحث وترجمته إلى الإنجليزية والفرنسية. ويتم عرض البحث على نحو سري على محكمين إثنين من المختصين المنتمين إلى الهيئة العلمية ويعني إرسال نسخة منه السماح للمجلة بنشره. ويتم ابلاغ صاحب المقالة بقرار الهيئة العلمية للمجلة في أجل لا يتعدى ثلاثة أشهر. وتبقى حقوق البحث محفوظة بصورة كلية لصاحبها. وتهدف المجلة لتعريف قرائها بمميزات التفكير العلمي وتشجيع النهج المنطقي والحجاجي والمعرفي في معالجة مختلف المسائل الأخلاقية والإجتماعية والسياسية والجمالية واللغوية والمعرفية والأنثروبولوجية والتعليمية والدينية والميتافيزيقية الخ كأساس لإقامة حوار حقيقي ومثمر بين الثقافات المختلفة.

## AL-MUKHATABAT

Revue à comité de lecture, trimestrielle et trilingue, Al- Mukhatabat publie des articles de logique, d'épistémologie et de sciences humaines. Les articles sont soumis de façon anonyme à deux membres du comité scientifique de la revue pour leur évaluation. L'envoi d'un document à la revue signifie que l'auteur autorise sa publication. L'article, qui reste la propriété pleine de son auteur, doit être envoyé sous format docx et Pdf, ne dépassant pas 30 pages (notes et bibliographie incluses), accompagné d'un résumé en anglais et en français. L'auteur sera notifié de la décision du comité de lecture dans un délai de trois mois maximum. La revue vise à familiariser davantage les lecteurs aux subtilités de la pensée scientifique et à favoriser les approches logiques, argumentatives et épistémologiques dans le traitement des problèmes éthiques, sociaux, politiques, esthétiques, linguistiques, cognitifs, anthropologiques, pédagogiques, religieux, métaphysiques, etc., comme base pour instaurer un dialogue authentique et fructueux entre les différentes cultures.

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## Présentation du numéro 16 Octobre-Décembre 2015

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Depuis sa création fin 2011, la revue *Al-Mukhatabat* n'a cessé de chercher à réaliser le triple objectif suivant : (1) promouvoir la logique et l'épistémologie dans les pays arabes, (2) s'ouvrir sur les nouvelles recherches internationales touchant aux diverses branches de la philosophie scientifique contemporaine et (3) les faire connaître dans la sphère de la vie intellectuelle et culturelle arabe. C'est dans cette optique que nous consacrerons aujourd'hui le numéro 16 au philosophe analytique américain contemporain, Robert B. Brandom, né à New York en 1950. Le cas de Brandom est vraiment intéressant à plusieurs niveaux, car en vérité il est inconnu dans les pays arabes et il n'existe aucune traduction en arabe de ses livres ou articles. Sauf erreur de notre part, les ouvrages en langue arabe consacrés à la philosophie américaine ne mentionnent même pas son nom, alors qu'il ne serait pas faux de dire que Brandom représente, avec son projet qui prend forme dans plusieurs livres largement étudiés et critiqués dans les universités du monde, l'une des plus profondes et originales pensées philosophiques qui a fait et continue à faire ses preuves de nos jours dans le sens où elle tend à transgresser le clivage analytique/continental en philosophie. Le cas de Brandom est instructif aussi dans le sens où ce désintérêt dans les pays arabes pour sa pensée et les idées fortes de son projet reflète l'état voire le statut même, dans ces dits pays, de cette activité que nous désignons par le mot philosophie (*Falsafâ*). Ceci dit, ce numéro cherchera à combler ce manque en offrant aux lecteurs arabes et autres une opportunité non seulement de connaître les idées décisives du projet de Brandom et prendre conscience de ses différentes ramifications mais aussi de s'ouvrir sur les plus récentes études analytiques et critiques à son sujet faites par des spécialistes.

Ce dossier spécial Brandom ne pouvait être lancé en vérité sans une contribution de la part de Brandom lui-même. En effet, nous reproduisons ici avec sa permission un texte déjà publié par ses soins chez Harvard University Press en tant que chapitre de son livre *Reason in Philosophy* paru en 2009. Nous le remercions très chaleureusement ainsi que les presses universitaires d'Harvard

de nous avoir autorisés à publier ce chapitre comme préambule à ce numéro spécial. Le papier questionne le rôle du philosophe de nos jours où il s'agit principalement de se focaliser sur la distinction *Sentience/Sapience* et sur la place de l'enseignement de la philosophie dans les établissements universitaires par-delà la simple recherche du plaisir.

Ce texte de Brandom est suivi de près par la contribution d'Alessia Marabini de l'université de Bologna et du centre COGITO en Italie qui s'attaque de front à la sémantique des rôles conceptuels telle qu'elle se donne à penser dans le projet de Brandom. Elle se focalise sur le sens de la saisie des concepts au sein d'une telle sémantique basée sur un engagement inférentialiste sans appel. C'est sur cette base qu'elle questionne la thèse inférentialiste de Brandom qui s'éclaire le mieux en référence à ce que nous pouvons désigner depuis Dummett par les conditions d'assertabilité. Dans ce contexte précis, Alessia se pose la question décisive suivante : D'où provient selon Brandom la structure déductive des activités rationnelles humaines ? Pour l'auteure, cette structure doit être recherchée dans la conception matérielle de l'inférence. En s'inspirant du travail accompli par Paul Boghossian, comme c'était précisément le cas dans son livre publié en italien sur *La conception épistémique de l'analyticité*, Alessia va soumettre cette sémantique brandomienne à un examen critique eu égard au type de rationalité qu'elle déploie et à ses affinités avec la conception substantielle de la signification chez Dummett.

Dans l'entretien avec Brandom, traduit de l'anglais à l'arabe par Farhat Mlayeh, il est surtout question de la place de la philosophie systématique de Brandom au sein de l'histoire de la philosophie analytique. Brandom s'inscrit en vérité dans une perspective qui révolutionne le type de pensée philosophique au sein de cette histoire. Sa philosophie nous invite, comme c'est le cas avec d'autres expériences de pensée propres à des philosophes analytiques reconnus tel Carnap, à avoir un nouveau regard sur le sens et la portée de ce type de pensée qui se fonde sur l'analyse du langage et sur le recours aux divers formalismes logiques et mathématiques. Avec Brandom, l'opposition entre mode de pensée analytique et mode de pensée continental ou littéraire devient caduque et cède plutôt la place au projet de construction d'une nouvelle philosophie systématique où les frontières entre ces deux modes de pensée s'estompent largement.

Dans la même catégorie, nous publions le texte d'un autre entretien accordé par Brandom à Guido Seddone durant son séjour à l'Université de Leipzig en 2008 en tant que professeur-invité. Ce jeu de questions et réponses aboutit à une mise au clair des articulations décisives de la philosophie systématique de

Brandom et de la nature de ses relations avec d'autres systèmes philosophiques.

A son tour, l'étude d'Alain Lecomte de l'université Paris 8, porte sur un ensemble de concepts essentiels que Brandom n'a cessé de défendre et de justifier dans ses ouvrages majeurs tels que *Making It Explicit*, *Articulating Reasons* et *Between Saying and Doing*. Lecomte s'intéresse de près aux concepts d'engagement, d'habilitation et d'incompatibilité et cherche à mettre à nu les mérites et les limites de l'approche de Brandom portant sur eux. Cet intérêt pour ces concepts clés dans la pensée de Brandom et sa critique de la manière avec laquelle ce dernier les aborde sont en vérité guidés par l'horizon dialogique qui a toujours imprégné les travaux d'Alain Lecomte quel que soit le sujet traité. Dans cet article, dialogique et ludique sont les deux mots clés à tel point qu'ils se transforment en deux outils indispensables pour à la fois louer les mérites de l'analyse brandomienne et résorber ses insuffisances. Influencé en cela par la logique de Jean-Yves Girard comme dans la plupart de ses autres textes, Alain Lecomte se donne comme tâche cruciale de *dialogiser* la thèse inférentialiste de Brandom et de remédier ainsi à ses imperfections.

De son côté, Pietro Salis de l'université de Cagliari revient sur la sémantique du rôle inférentiel chez Brandom pour examiner la question qui consiste à savoir si cette Sémantique inférentialiste implique ou non le holisme dans sa version sémantique. L'auteur va déployer tout un arsenal d'arguments pour défendre la thèse holiste contre l'idée selon laquelle elle est incompatible avec la stabilité des contenus cognitifs et parvient ainsi à sauver la Sémantique en question. L'auteur arrive à réaliser son objectif via une analyse de certains schémas de raisonnement contrefactuel chez deux éminents philosophes contemporains, à savoir Sellars et Brandom. La stratégie de Pietro est claire et originale : partir de l'affirmation selon laquelle des inférences contrefactuellement robustes sont constitutives de contenus cognitifs pour arriver à démontrer que c'est aussi le cas avec des inférences non contrefactuellement robustes. L'auteur appelle ce dernier type d'inférences des inférences régies modalement. Il réussit ainsi à défendre une forme de compatibilité entre la thèse du holisme sémantique et la recherche d'une stabilité pour les contenus cognitifs.

Marcel Nguimbi de l'université Marien Ngouabi de Brazaville au Congo, est parmi les très rares chercheurs qui ont consacré un ouvrage entier à la philosophie de Brandom en langue française. Son livre est sorti en Juillet 2015 et compose une profonde réflexion sur le pragmatisme analytique de Brandom. Dans sa contribution ici, Marcel Nguimbi se pose la double question importante qui suit : En quel sens et à quel point les pratiques discursives

constituent-elles un modèle de l'usage du langage ? Tout l'article advient pour répondre à cette double question de façon comparative, en l'occurrence en mettant face à face Brandom et Popper et tirer ainsi profit des aspects positifs de leurs approches respectives. L'auteur se concentre sur deux questions majeures et tente de montrer comment les solutions proposées par l'un comme par l'autre peuvent converger ensemble pour mieux mettre au point les mérites des pratiques discursives et du modèle langagier qu'on peut tirer à partir d'elles. D'abord la question de la vérité en rapport avec l'épistémologie de l'un et de l'autre, ensuite celle du mode selon lequel on peut légitimer la validité des inférences sinon le rapport de conviction/persuasion entre différents agents en dialogue. Tout l'article milite en faveur d'un rapprochement substantiel entre les deux philosophes sur la valeur et la portée du langage discursif.

Selon Giacomo Turbanti de l'université de Pise en Italie, John McDowell reste une bonne référence pour évaluer et critiquer sur des bases objectives les diverses théories philosophiques en pleine expansion actuellement qui se focalisent sur les questions d'inférentialisme, de normativité et de sémantique propres aux contenus conceptuels. La théorie systématique développée par Brandom concernant l'inférentialisme normatif figure parmi ces théories. Tout le débat porte sur la possibilité ou non pour l'inférence de jouer un rôle dans la connaissance empirique et la justification des contenus des jugements d'observation. L'auteur tente de frayer son propre chemin entre la position de Brandom et celle de McDowell par le biais d'une étude pointue des conséquences sémantiques de l'analyse du contenu des jugements empiriques dans les termes de leur rôle inférentiel. A distance claire de McDowell, l'auteur arrive à la conclusion selon laquelle ces jugements empiriques doivent être distingués des paradoxes que McDowell chercherait à tort d'imputer totalement à l'inférentialisme de type brandomien. L'article est en vérité une apologie et une critique de l'approche inférentialiste de Brandom.

L'article de Thomas Dabay de l'université de Vanderbilt aux États-Unis aborde une question très importante dans la philosophie analytique à savoir celle du rapport entre le tournant langagier d'un côté et la métaphysique de l'autre. Il part de la manière avec laquelle Brandom tente d'investir des questions de Métaphysique traditionnelle au moyen des acquis de la révolution linguistique en philosophie. L'auteur tente de fixer l'arrière-plan d'une telle investigation dans le contexte des approches de Carnap d'une part et de Sellars de l'autre. La perspective que nous offre Brandom est, selon l'auteur, une synthèse fructueuse entre le réductionnisme de Carnap et le pluralisme de Sellars qui aboutit à une mise au jour d'un certain parallélisme entre les questions métaphysiques et les questions langagières.

Scott Forrest Aikin, lui aussi de l'université Vanderbilt, aborde la question de la place de la vérité dans la philosophie de Brandom, ou de façon plus exacte le type de rapport entre vérité et philosophie chez lui. Cette question a fait couler beaucoup d'encre mais l'auteur la traite ici de façon originale, à savoir en rapport avec d'autres notions aussi importantes que la vérité, nous voulons dire celles de signification et d'engagement. C'est à la lumière d'une analyse profonde de ce type de rapport entre vérité, signification et engagement que l'auteur tente ici de mettre en question la conception métaphilosophique même de Brandom.

Pour sa part, Gilles Bouché se lance dans une discussion détaillée d'une question centrale au sein de la sémantique inférentialiste de Brandom, à savoir la question de la distinction entre *habilitation*, *engagement* et *incompatibilité*. L'auteur critique Brandom en tentant de montrer qu'il n'aboutit pas à une théorie satisfaisante des différents types d'inféribilité. Cherchant à être plus brandomien que Brandom lui-même, Gilles Bouché va proposer une théorie alternative à celle de Brandom dans laquelle il tentera de saisir toutes les relations d'inféribilité comme induites par l'incompatibilité. L'article est une invitation à considérer la sémantique de l'incompatibilité comme cadre structurel propice pour mettre au clair toutes les relations d'inféribilité.

Ernst Michael Lange tente dans son article de nous donner une piste parmi d'autres pour accéder le plus explicitement possible aux contextes des idées qui animent le projet de Brandom dans son ensemble. Nous pouvons donner un nom à cette piste : ce que Brandom doit à Wittgenstein ou plus précisément les idées ancrées dans la philosophie de Wittgenstein et sur lesquelles Brandom s'engage explicitement. L'auteur tentera donc de jeter une lumière sur la place de ce rapport à Wittgenstein au sein de la philosophie systématique de Brandom dans le but de déterminer le contexte le plus décisif susceptible de nous aider à comprendre l'ensemble des articulations de tout le projet brandomien.

La question du pragmatisme est centrale dans la philosophie de Brandom. Dans son article, Paniel Osberto Reyes Cardenas tend à rendre compte de deux étapes du pragmatisme tel qu'il a été compris et utilisé par les philosophes. Il y a d'abord ce qu'il considère comme étant le versant opérationnaliste du pragmatisme. Ensuite vient ce qu'il désigne comme étant son versant inférentialiste. La première version se trouve exprimée chez Peirce alors que la seconde est explicite dans le projet de Brandom. Entre Peirce et Brandom le choix est impossible. Pour cette raison, Paniel tente dans son article qui clôture

ce numéro spécial de trouver un équilibre authentique entre ces deux pôles importants et inéliminables de la tradition pragmatiste en philosophie.

## Philosophy and the Expressive Freedom of Thought

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### Résumé.

Dans cet article, Brandom étudie le rôle du philosophe en relation à des diverses formes de vie. Il est question de discuter le concept de sagesse (Sapience) en comparaison avec celui de Sentience (le fait d'avoir des expériences et des sensations subjectives). Cette distinction met au clair la raison pour laquelle le but des êtres humains n'est pas la simple recherche du plaisir comme semblent le penser de nos jours beaucoup d'intellectuels. L'article se termine sur un questionnement portant sur le rôle du philosophe aujourd'hui dans l'institution universitaire. L'article a été publié pour la première fois en 2009 comme chapitre du livre de Brandom intitulé *La Raison en Philosophie* chez les Presses universitaires de Harvard.

### Mots-clès.

Philosophie, formes de vie, sentience, sagesse, philosophe, université.

### ملخص.

تدرس هذه الورقة دور الفيلسوف في علاقته بأشكال حياتية متعددة. وتتمّ خلالها مناقشة مفهوم التجربة الذاتية القائمة على الإحساس بالمقارنة مع الحكمة واكتساب أعلى مراتب المعرفة. ويكشف هذا التمييز بين الحكمة من جهة والتجربة الذاتية من جهة أخرى النقاب عن السبب الذي من أجله لا تكون غاية البشر مثلما يتصوّر ذلك عدد كبير من المفكرين مجرد البحث عن اللذة. وتنتهي الورقة عند السؤال عن دور الفيلسوف اليوم داخل المؤسسة الجامعية. ونشر هذا النصّ لأول مرّة عام 2009 كفصل من كتاب براندوم *العقل في الفلسفة* (منشورات جامعة هارفارد).

## كلمات مفتاحية.

فلسفة، أشكال الحياة، حكمة، تجربة ذاتية قائمة على الإحساس، فيلسوف، جامعة.

## Abstract.

This paper examines the role of the philosopher and inspects different forms of life. Sentience in comparison with sapience is discussed. This distinction brings out why the aim of human beings is not merely the pursuit of pleasure, in contrast to what many thinkers have argued. Finally, the role of the philosopher within the university setting is discussed. The paper was first published in 2009 as a chapter of Brandom's book *Reason in Philosophy* (Harvard University Press).

## Keywords.

Philosophy, forms of life, sentience, sapience, philosopher, university.

## I. Introduction: The Metaphysical Strategy, Sentience and Sapience

In this series you have already heard from distinguished and articulate proponents of a life of sophisticated pleasure and a life of honorable political activity. My charge is to speak for a life devoted to the pursuit of philosophical wisdom. My task, however, is in some ways different from that of my predecessors. For one of the defining aims of philosophers is to address just such questions as how we ought to characterize, compare, and assess the worth of these different forms of life. My defense of a life of philosophical activity must include comparisons with these traditionally prominent alternatives. And it must be framed by a discussion of the conceptual basis that justifies a comparative evaluation. Although this topic is an ancient one—pursued most vigorously and memorably in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*—I want to say something about things look from the here-and-now. For I don't just want to talk *about* philosophy this evening, I want to *do* some.

So it is part of my plan to illustrate how philosophers think. It is a distinctive intellectual approach with which any student of the high culture, anyone who seeks to understand contemporary understanding, should be familiar—should be able to lay alongside such other distinctive ways of thinking as those characteristic of the engineer, the lawyer, the economist, the politician,

and the sociologist. At its best the philosopher's way involves working out deep, important metaphysical ideas by crafting, honing, and deploying concepts with immense sensitivity and critical attention to subtleties and details concerning their exact contents. Partly because my intent is in part pedagogical, I'm not going to be bashful about pausing for critical asides about the dangers—in the form of implicit, therefore in the first instance invisible assumptions—involved in using certain concepts, terms, or ways of talking. In the end, I'm after big game; cleaning, oiling and otherwise maintaining the critical equipment the hunt relies on is a critical element of the enterprise—but a means only, never to be mistaken for the end itself.

The aim is essentially *evaluative*: critically to assess the merit of various forms of life. (Here is the first conceptually fastidious aside: Notice that I've said "forms of life". It would not do to substitute here the pop-speak term "life styles"—not because it is meaningless or trendy, but because of *what* it means. Style contrasts in the first instance with substance, and if we have to pick between these, our concern is with the latter. Even if there are cases where it is style all the way down—where there is nothing to assess *except* style—and even if pursuits of that character are not for that reason taken to be irretrievably trivial or light-minded, still one should not build into one's terminology at the very beginning the assumption or presumption that issue of the relative values of lives structured by devotion to different aims should be assimilated to these exceptional cases. Terminology matters, because commitments of various sorts are implicit in choice of vocabulary. End of quibble.) This comparative evaluative task already involves certain important conceptual obligations.

- One is to be clear and explicit about the kinds of lives being compared: what *are* lives of pleasure, political activity, or philosophical contemplation?
- Another, perhaps more fundamental one, is to be clear and explicit about the basis on which *normative* appraisals are to be made. What can justify assessments of *better* and *worse*? Where can one stand—on what ground—to *justify* such evaluations? What is one allowed to presuppose, if one is mindful of the danger of simply assuming at the outset the values that one hopes to justify at the end? On this point we must be vigilant and critical, lest the rabbit later triumphantly produced be smuggled into the hat at this stage.

One of Plato's and Aristotle's big ideas concern the form of an answer to that very basic question: it is to be found in an account of what *kind of creature* we are, an account of *human nature*. The thought is that if we understand what

kind of beings we are, we will have the basis for an assessment of what better or worse lives are for *us*—that is, better or worse for *that* kind of being.

This is an important idea, and it is one that I'll be pursuing in what follows. But just for that reason it is important to go slowly at this point, examine it carefully from different sides, and think about how one can put it without taking on optional or objectionable collateral commitments—commitments that may deflect, deform, or dictate the course of the subsequent investigation.

- To illustrate the sort of pitfall one wants to avoid, let me pick a not very threatening example. One way I just characterized what is to justify assessments of lives as better or worse is an account of “what kind of creature” it is whose lives are being assessed. ‘Creature’ literally means ‘created thing’, ‘part of God’s creation’. We clearly would not want that connotation of the term (in contemporary usage, a largely vestigial resonance—hence the non-threateningness) to tempt us (never mind somehow oblige us) to assume without further argument that the sort of normative assessment underwritten by knowing what kind of creature we are talking about must be “pleasingness to God”, or “consilience with God’s plan or providence.” When I’m being careful about this, I’ll talk about ‘beings’ instead of ‘creatures’. (The German equivalent is ‘Wesen’, which means ‘essence’, and has all the problems that go with the hylomorphic metaphysics in which *that* term is embedded.)
- In order to avoid this possible slide, one might be tempted to go to a different extreme, by substituting the more scientific phrase “kind of organism”. After all, whatever else we are, we surely are organisms—*that* is not a characterization that is controversial in the way that ‘creature’, when read literally, is. But what if on these same grounds we substituted ‘oxygen-breathers’. We are, indeed, oxygen-breathers. But answering the question “what kind of oxygen-breathers are we” does not seem to bear in the right way on the question of what the good life for beings of our sort is. The real issues might be just the same for nitrogen-breathers. By taking this path, we seem to be courting the danger of thinking of ‘us’ too narrowly, picking us out by contingent features, irrelevant to the issue at hand. In the same way “kind of organism” suggests that the notion of kind in question is specifically *biological* kind. Aristotle might have been happy enough with that, at least on some readings. But it is not *obvious* that biology is the right place to look for an account of *human* flourishing. This is a point I’ll return to.
- The other rough, initial characterization I offered of the metaphysical basis for normative evaluation of kinds of life according to the Plato-

Aristotle line was “human nature”. This is a very common and so seemingly innocuous phrase. But it, too, harbors potentially suspect implications. By exploring them we can begin to get into the philosophical meat of our issue.

We could call this general explanatory strategy Plato and Aristotle recommend the “metaphysical strategy” for grounding large-scale normative evaluations. It is predicated on the idea that if we know enough about what we in some deep (I’ve used the term ‘metaphysical’ without saying anything at all about what I mean by it) sense *are*, that that will enable us to draw conclusions about how we *ought* to live, what kinds of activity are *proper*, or *fitting*, or at least *better* or *worse* for us. In some sense, the metaphysical strategy is the only game in town for justifying normative assessments. It is the form of almost *everyone’s* theory, not only of traditional theistic and theological accounts of the good life, and of those due to heavy-duty metaphysicians such as Spinoza and Hegel, and to such different thinkers as Kant, and Hobbes, but even of such avowedly anti-metaphysical thinkers as Nietzsche and Heidegger. But it is worth pointing out that Hume gave us the conceptual raw materials for a thorough-going critique of this way of thinking—of the very idea of a metaphysics of normativity. (And this in spite of the fact that his own naturalistic theory can itself be understood as employing a variant of the same general strategy.) For he denies that one can *ever* justify an inference from *is* to *ought*—from a mere *description* of how things in fact are to a *prescription* of how they *ought* to be. That is a conceptual gap he says no theory can bridge. Of course, he may not be right—and if he *is* right, it is not clear what conclusion we should draw from the in-principle failure of any metaphysical grounding of normative claims. (Should we be nihilists, and deny that normative claims *can* be justified?) But his critique (which I have only stated, not pretended to explain or justify) presents a challenge that would have been absurd to the ancients, but which we cannot today simply ignore—that is one of the deep differences between then and now, them and us. It has been seconded and deepened more recently by pragmatists such as Dewey and Rorty.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Notice that these *sorts* of questions—just how one ought to distinguish the various kinds of life on offer, both the genus to which they belong (what is what I’ve been calling a “form of life”) and the various species (devotion to pleasure, political activity, or philosophy, all in broad senses of the terms), and what could be a justifiable, non-question-begging basis for comparative evaluation of them—are ones the *philosopher* is in a better position to address (indeed, perhaps being in a position to address them *is* being a philosopher). Of course, that by itself is not *dispositive* of the question whether the philosophical is the *best* sort of life. And even claiming—as I, like Aristotle, eventually will—that it is *probative* requires a serious argument. (The

Although objections have been made to it, I want to take seriously the metaphysical strategy for grounding normative appraisals of different forms of life. The conclusions of any such argument are going to be quite sensitive to its starting-point: the metaphysical characterization of the kind of beings we are. One characterization of us that seems to get at something central and important about us (by contrast, say, to our being oxygen-breathers) is that we are *conscious* creatures, creatures with *minds*, subjects of *awareness*. Only creatures of *that* general sort have even the theoretical option of leading lives of pleasure, political activity, or the pursuit of philosophical wisdom. So this much is common ground between them; starting with this characterization begs no questions against one or another of the forms of life.

If we look just a little bit closer at our consciousness or mindedness, we see that it comes in two importantly different flavors. We are *sentient* beings, and we are *sapient* beings—we *feel*, and we *think*. Sentience is *sensuous* awareness, of the generic sort also exhibited by at least our mammalian cousins. Paradigmatic states of sentience are feeling pain, seeing colors, and hearing sounds. Sentient awareness is what an organism has when it is *awake*, but, dreaming aside, not when it is *asleep*. Sapience is *conceptual* awareness—a kind of mindedness that is tied to *understanding* rather than *sensing*. Paradigmatic sapient states are thinking or believing *that* things are thus-and-so (or desiring or intending that they be thus-and-so)—*that* Vienna is the capital of Austria, *that* the Washington Monument is 555 feet high, *that* freedom is better than slavery. In order to be in these sapient states one must grasp the *concepts* that articulate its *content*. The content of sapient states is accordingly something that at least in principle can be *said*: specified by the use of declarative sentences (“The moon is round”), or a sentential ‘that’-clauses (“Sam believes *that* the moon is round”). By contrast, the content of my sentient visual awareness of a red triangle is something particular—an *instance*, or perhaps an *image* of a red triangle. For a sufficiently complex image, or a particular tactile sensation, we will not in general have words that let us exhaustively specify its content. (Can you *say* what a middle-C

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jurisprudential conceptual distinction I’m employing here is between evidential considerations that are decisive and final, that *settle* an issue, and those that merely *bear* on it, that provide *some* evidence, but evidence which may turn out to be outweighed or defeated by other considerations.) Maybe what careful philosophical consideration of the relevant reasons will show is that the philosophical life is not *the* best, not *a* better, nor even a good one. And of course we must be wary of special pleading. Is the fact that when philosophers address this issue, philosophy often turns out to be a highly recommended way to direct one’s energies best explained by those opinions reflecting a fact, which emerges after careful, dispassionate consideration? Or is it a reflection of the prejudices or interests of those undertaking an investigation whose conclusion is already—for them, given their commitments to that sort of life—foregone?

played on a French horn sounds like—even if in some sense you know perfectly well?)

## II. Sentience and Pleasure

Let us see what help the distinction between sentience and sapience can give us in thinking about the life of pleasure and the life of political activity (I'll get to the philosophical life later on). At first blush, the relevance of the distinction to the life of pleasure may seem straightforward. There is such a thing as *sensuous pleasure*, paradigmatically associated with the satisfaction of various mammalian drives: for food, drink, and sex. Sensuous pleasure is a sentient state, which even non-sapient creatures such as dogs and cats can experience. And it has a sort of intrinsic *normative* significance: pleasure is sentiently experienced *as* good, and pain is experienced *as* bad. As sentient beings we know that normative character of the experiences as it were from the 'inside', that is, just from *having* pleasurable and painful experiences, from *being* sentient. And we can confirm it from the third-person, rather than the first-person point of view by noting that pleasurable experiences *positively* reinforce the behavior that brings them about, while painful ones *negatively* reinforce it.<sup>1</sup> Here the move from 'is' to 'ought' is underwritten by the felt character of the experience: a sentient being that actually *is* in pain *feels* that it *ought not* to be.

These considerations motivate an argument of the following form:

- 1) Pleasure is the natural good for sentient beings as such, and pain is the natural bad for sentient beings as such.  
So:
- 2) A life of pleasure is the best life for sentient beings.
- 3) We are sentient beings.  
So:
- 4) A life of pleasure is the best life for us.

When it is thus baldly put, the fallacy in this voluptuary syllogism ought to be obvious. We are not only sentient beings, we are also sapient beings. If the as-it-were 'natural' good for *sapient* beings as such is something other than

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<sup>1</sup> There are subtleties concerning how to characterize the repeatable behavior-kinds that are properly understood as the objects of such reinforcement, and those subtleties matter a great deal for disputes between behavioristic approaches to animal behavior and representationalist ones more characteristic of contemporary cognitive science. But for present purposes those subtleties can safely be ignored.

sensuous pleasure, the premises of this argument could all be true without them settling that the conclusion is also true. For they do not provide grounds for adjudicating the claims between what is best for us *as* sentient beings and what is best for us *as* sapient beings.

There is also a subtler way in which the fact that we are not only sentient but sapient bears on this line of thought. For our sapience means that it would be a mistake to equate 'pleasure' with '*sensuous* pleasure' in our case, however much sense such an equation makes for the non-sapient beasts of forest and field. Our sapience is not just something added to our sentience, leaving that base undisturbed. Sapience fundamentally transforms our sentience, turning mere inchoate *sensation* into articulated *perception*. Our sentience is not that of the beasts. What we share with them is only the physiological raw materials for our conceptually articulated sensuous experiences. Our seeing starts off as seeing-as. Pigeons can in one straightforward sense see red triangles—but we see them *as* red triangles. And so it is with even the most sensual of our pleasures. They are—one wants to say, using a term already flagged as potentially dangerous—distinctively *human* pleasures. Food is for us a thoroughly cultural affair. And the more pleasure one takes in it, the more *knowledge* and *understanding*, the more carefully *cultivated* practices are involved. For cooking to be an art, eating must also be one. We don't just *eat*, we *dine*. (The German language marks this point with the distinction between 'essen' and 'fressen'.) And the same point holds for the pleasures of drink. Beyond the bases subsistence level of those dying in the desert, the most characteristic feature of this form of life is the seemingly ineluctable drive to *connoisseurship*: not just in wine, but in whiskey, beer, tequila, tea, coffee, even water. We don't just drink, we sip and savor, we compare, contrast, assess, develop and articulate preferences. And the point is most obtrusively and ostentatiously manifest for the case of sexual pleasure. Since each of us can elaborate and illustrate it from our own experience, I will say about it only that it is not for nothing that the guiding precept and most important lesson of all those who study sexual phenomena—not just culturally, but just as much from the point of view of pure physiology—a slogan drummed into every student and emblazoned over the door of every research laboratory, is that overwhelmingly the most important human sexual organ is the *brain*.

So while we sapient *do* experience pleasures that have a significant sensual element, our pleasures are not for that reason to be identified with, or understood on the model of the pleasures of *merely* sentient beings. Even our sensuous pleasures are never *merely* sensuous. Our sapience penetrates them to their core. As William James said: "The trail of the human serpent is over all." This is why no sophisticated defender of the life of pleasure as the good life for

us ought to allow the identification of the pleasures in question with those that are displayed already in—as Aristotle puts it—the lives of grazing animals. Defending the life of pleasure does not require simply ignoring sapience in favor of sentience.

In fact, the distinction bears on our understanding of the life of pleasure in another way as well. For among the pleasures of sapient beings are to be found some that seem to owe little if anything to our sentience: distinctively *intellectual* pleasures. They are experienced in answering questions, satisfying curiosity, solving puzzles, unraveling mysteries, producing explanations, constructing theories, and in general achieving various kinds of *understanding*. Throwing pleasures of this sort into the mix motivates a famous line of thought—originating already in Aristotle, but perhaps most prominently defended by John Stuart Mill—that seeks to appeal to intellectual pleasures to undermine the distinction between a life of pleasure and a life of intellectual contemplation. The claim is that the pursuit of wisdom is not *not* a life of pleasure—it is just a life aiming at the *purely* sapient intellectual pleasures of *understanding*, rather than the hybrid sapient-sentient sensuous pleasures of *feeling*. If we then ask which of these sorts of pleasure is *better*—hence, which of the life of intellectual pleasure and that of sensual pleasure *ought* to be preferred—the thing to do is to look to the testimony of those who have thoroughly experienced *both*. And what one will find, the claim is, is that the *only* ones who doubt the superiority of the intellectual pleasures to the sensual are those who have only experienced the sensual, and know nothing of the joys of intellectual understanding. If and insofar as that empirical claim is right, it supports the conclusion that the intellectual pleasures are *experienced as* better than the sensual ones, in much the same sense that sensual pleasure is experienced as better than pain. In that sense, then intellectual pleasures are *intrinsically*, that is, *as experiences*, better than sensual ones. And this is a reason to classify the pleasures of understanding as *higher* pleasures, and the pleasures of the senses as *lower* ones, without relying on the suspect identification of our sensual pleasures with those of the ‘lower’, i.e. non-sapient, animals.

There is certainly something to this celebrated line of thought—though the crucial empirical premise has been hotly contested by some. But it *not* the way I am going to argue in defense of the philosophical life. The argument I will offer turns on features of *sapience* that are independent of its relation to sentience.

We’ve seen how focusing on ourselves as sentient can provide raw materials that can serve as inputs to the metaphysical strategy for justifying normative assessments—including those that bear on the goodness of a form of life

(though I've not attempted a comparison of forms of life along this dimension). For some sentient states are *felt as* good or bad. Indeed, we could use the terms 'pleasure' and 'pain' in very broad senses, as generic for *whatever* sentient states exhibit that sort of intrinsic positive or negative normative character, just *as* feelings—for whatever *feels good* or *feels bad*. So we can ask: Does the fact that we are *sapient*s provide any corresponding prospects for employing the metaphysical strategy for underwriting normative judgments about better and worse lives for us? Of course, the answer depends on how one unpacks the notion of sapience. I'll consider three ways of doing that, following out in more contemporary terms philosophical ideas we owe to Hume, Kant, and Hegel.

### III. First Model of Sapience: Instrumental Rationality

The first may be called the *instrumental* model of normativity. According to it, what is in the most explanatorily basic sense *good* is getting what you *want*: satisfying desires and fulfilling intentions. What is *bad* is the frustration of desires and the failure of intentions. The metaphysical basis for normative assessments appealed to here is that intentional states such as desire and intention come with conditions of satisfaction, fulfillment, or success. Desires and intentions intrinsically, as the kind of sapient states they are, say how things *ought*, according to them, to be.

It is the *conceptual content* of sapient states of desire, intention, and also belief that determine what *counts* as success or satisfaction. If I desire that the ball go through the hoop, or intend that the international monetary fund is reformed, my desire is satisfied and my intention fulfilled just in case the ball goes through the hoop and international monetary system is reformed—and those facts can be the intentional contents of my beliefs about those matters.

What makes the content determining these conditions of satisfaction *conceptual* content, and so qualifies the states exhibiting it as *sapient* states and distinguishes them from merely sentient states such as pleasure and pain, which are devoid of specifically conceptual content is the way desires, intentions, and beliefs interdigitate in practical *reasoning*. To be conceptually contentful is in the most basic sense to be the sort of thing that can serve as or stand in need of *reasons*—that is, to be able to serve as premise or conclusion in an *inference*. In the paradigmatic case of practical reasoning, beliefs and desires together serve as *premises* providing reasons for an intention, which serves as *conclusion*. A sample bit of practical reasoning might go like this:

I want to stay dry. [Desire]

Only opening my umbrella will keep me dry. [Belief]

So:

I shall open my umbrella. [Intention]

The primitively *good* case, in this instrumental sense, is where I *succeed* in opening the umbrella, *fulfilling* the intention and that *does* keep me dry, *satisfying* the desire. The primitive instrumental normative *bad* is failure to fulfill the intention or frustration of the desire. The conceptual contents of the intentional sapient states are what make the beliefs, desires, and intentions fit together *rationally*, in the sense that beliefs and desires can provide *reasons* for intentions.

On the instrumental conception, rationality is intelligence in the sense of a generalized capacity for getting what one wants. The most sophisticated contemporary way of working out the instrumental picture of rationality and sapience is rational choice theory, based on the mathematical formulations of decision theory (in the one agent case) and game theory (in the multiple agent case). It is one of the dominant conceptual frameworks of contemporary social science—not just economics (which is in some sense its home), but also in such other disciplines as political theory and even sociology.

Whatever the merits of this framework may be when put to work in a social-scientific context, I do not think it will do as a way of understanding the sort of normativity that is most fundamental for rational (that is, sapient) creatures as such. For it takes for granted at the outset intentional states understood as conceptually contentful, as part of the explanatory raw materials from which is to be elaborated a notion of rationality as effectiveness at satisfying desires and fulfilling intentions—or, in the full-blown rational choice version, maximizing probabilistically expected utility (where utility is the measure of preference). And I think that one needs to appeal to the role of intentional states in *inference*, hence in reasoning, in order to see them as conceptually contentful at all. If that is right, the normativity distinctive of reasoning must come into the explanatory story already in understanding the conceptual contents of sapient states, and is not itself to be explained later in terms of them, as on the instrumental model. But I'm not going to try to argue for that claim here.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I want to sketch a different approach.

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<sup>1</sup> *Making It Explicit* [Harvard University Press, 1994] is an extended argument for that claim. More compact arguments for the conclusion that one cannot underwrite conceptual content in

#### IV. Second Model of Sapience: Kant

Sapient creatures are knowers and agents. They make judgments and perform intentional actions. Perhaps Kant's most basic idea is that what distinguishes judgments and intentional actions from the responsive behavior of merely sentient creatures is that judgments and actions are things that we are in a distinctive sense *responsible* for. They express *commitments* of ours; they are exercises of *authority*, stands we authorize. Responsibility, commitment, authority—these are all *normative* statuses. We sapient beings are at base *normative* beings.

Further, Kant understands the *contents* of our normatively significant sapient states to be *rules* that determine *what* we have made ourselves responsible for, *what* we have committed ourselves to, *what* we have authorized. And his name for those content-articulating rules is '*concepts*'. So he understands what one is doing in judging as applying a concept: a concept that determines how one is *taking* things to be, how one is committing oneself to things being, how they must be if the commitment one has authorized and made oneself responsible for is to count as *correct*. And he understands what one is doing in acting intentionally also as applying a concept: a concept that in the case of this sort of act determines how one is committing oneself to *make* things be, how they must turn out if the practical commitment one has authorized and made oneself responsible for is to count as *successful*. In a strict sense, *all* kantian sapient beings can do *as such* is to apply concepts, in judgment and action. Understanding concepts as rules that determine what we have committed ourselves to by applying them is a radically *non-psychological* concept of concepts. For Kant, what matters is not our grip on concepts—how well or clearly we understand them—but their grip on us, how they bind us by articulating our commitments and responsibilities.

Part of what one is committing oneself to, part of what one is responsible for, in applying a concept is having *reasons* for doing so. Indeed, the way concepts settle *what* one is committing oneself to by applying them in judgment or action is by articulating what is a *reason* for what: what follows from applying the concept and what is a reason for or against applying it. Conceptual content is *rational* content, in the sense that it determines the *role in reasoning*—whether theoretical, in judgment, or practical, in agency—of concept-applications. So where on the instrumental model of sapience one appeals to a notion of conceptual content as an explanatory primitive, and then builds out of it

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purely instrumental terms can be found in "Unsuccessful Semantics" *Analysis* [ref.] and "When Philosophy Paints its Blue on Grey" *boundary 2* [ref.]. A more focused critique of rational choice theory is offered in "What Do Expressions of Preference Express?", in [ref.].

notions of instrumental rationality and normative appraisal of satisfaction and success, on the kantian model of sapience, normative notions of rationally articulated commitment and responsibility are appealed to at the ground level, to explain what it is to be conceptually contentful.

Sapient beings are beings that are sensitive to conceptual norms, which is to say beings that can act for *reasons*. Being sensitive to the normative force of the better reason—the phenomenon that so puzzled and fascinated the ancient Greek philosophers—is what kantian *freedom* consists in. Understood in this way, freedom is the capacity constitutive of sapience: the capacity to undertake conceptually articulated responsibilities, to make commitments, the capacity to respond not just to *natural properties*, but to *normative proprieties*. Real freedom comes not from the *absence* of an externally imposed *cause*, but from the *presence* of an internally endorsed *reason*. Becoming the subject of normative statuses such as responsibility, commitment, and authority is, for Kant, moving from being a *denizen* of the *realm of nature* to being a *citizen* of the *realm of freedom*.

Kant's conception of the freedom that consists in the capacity to *bind* oneself by conceptual norms, to undertake responsibility, to make commitments, to exercise and acknowledge authority was a radically original one. The tradition had thought of freedom as *negative* freedom: freedom *from* constraints of various sorts. Kant focuses instead on *positive* freedom: freedom *to* do something. It is the freedom *to* act for *reasons*. Freedom in that sense is freedom *to* bind or constrain oneself by norms, to commit oneself, to make oneself responsible. For sapient beings, the relevant and essential contrast between freedom and unfreedom is not that between lack of constraint and constraint, but between *normative* and merely *natural* constraint—the difference between constraint by *reasons* and by *causes*. This constellation of ideas about normativity in the form of responsibility and commitment, reasons and concepts, and a positive conception of freedom is what Heidegger is talking about when he refers to “the dignity and spiritual greatness of German Idealism.”

These Kantian ideas are deep and important ones. One way to see that is to think about the significance of this way of thinking about the essential metaphysics of sapience for assessing the two strands of irrationalism whose twentieth-century advocates are Foucault and Derrida. The first develops ideas championed already by Nietzsche in the second half of the nineteenth century. It sees the practice of giving and asking for *reasons* as just the distinctively modern form of *power*. Instead of controlling people by threatening them with violence, one systematically manipulates the language they use to understand and interpret themselves and their world. And the thought is that that is *all*

reason is. (At the end of his life, even Foucault admitted that doing it that way at least represented an improvement over threatening to hurt or kill people, but he still insisted that the concept of rational persuasion—moving someone by the special normative force of reasons—was a mere ploy by the powerful.) The second line of thought has its roots in the Romanticism of the early nineteenth century. It claims that giving and asking for reasons is just *one* game one can play with words, and that only a self-serving conspiracy of philosophers and scientists has convinced people that it deserves any privilege at all over all the other playful and artistically creative things one can do with language.

It is natural and easy to respond to these challenges to what they denominate as the "hegemony" of reason simply by recoiling from their anti-intellectualism and irrationalism. But I would argue that these criticisms deserve to be taken seriously—and that they should then be contested on their own ground and in their own terms. Since the Enlightenment, reason has tended to be identified with science (*thought* with *scientific* thought). So in rejecting the intellectual hegemony of natural science, the Romantics tended to reject the claims of *reason* more generally. The importance of idealism was the disentangling of these two: the realization that the rejection of *scientism* need not be a form of *irrationalism*. If Kant is right, the practice of giving and asking for reasons is not just one, optional, strategy among others for controlling our fellow citizens, nor is it one optional game among others we can play with words. It is what makes it so much as possible for us to think and act, to entertain determinately contentful plans, to commit ourselves, to exercise authority, to undertake responsibility—in short, to be sapient *persons* at all. It provides the conceptual basis on which exercises of power and the playing of games rest, and cannot properly be understood in terms of those late-coming possibilities. The picture of us as creatures of our own rational commitments provides a positive response to the irrationalist challenges that are so characteristic of our times.

## V. Third Model of Sapience: Hegel

Hegel transforms these Kantian ideas by combining them with three others. First, he understands *normative* statuses such as responsibility, commitment, and authority, as essentially *social* statuses. There were no such normative statuses until people adopted practical normative *attitudes* towards each other—that is, until they started *holding* each other responsible, *treating* each other as committed, *acknowledged* each other's authority. Adopting those attitudes towards one another is what he calls '*recognition*'. On his view, adopting normative statuses—being a free Kantian agent, able to judge and act intentionally—is in principle possible only in the context of a community.

Those communities form the social substance in which we normative creatures live and move and have our being—what Hegel calls ‘Geist’, Spirit. Normative communities are synthesized by reciprocal recognition. Sapience is not a wholly individual achievement: it takes a village.

The second of Hegel’s contributions is an *expressive* account of positive freedom. The aspect of sapient life exhibits the normative structure of Geist in its purest, clearest form is *language*—the ultimate medium of expression.<sup>1</sup> Language is a social practice. Performing speech acts such as asserting, promising, and commanding should be understood as doing things that have the social significance of undertaking commitments, taking on responsibilities, exerting authority. Engaging in discursive practices is accordingly the paradigmatic exercise of Kantian positive freedom. In doing so, we bind ourselves by norms articulated by the contents of the concepts we apply. If I claim that the coin is copper, I have said something that, whether I know it or not, is *correct* only if the coin would melt at 1084° C., and would *not* melt at 1083° C.. If you promise to drive me to the airport at 3 tomorrow, it is not up to you what would count as fulfilling that promise. The positive freedom to adopt these normative statuses requires and partly consists in constraining oneself by conceptual norms.

A classic, perennial, in some sense defining challenge of political philosophy has always been to explain how, and on what grounds, it could be *rational* for an individual to accept communal constraints on his will. What could *justify* the loss of negative freedom—the freedom *from* constraint—that conformity to the norms of a community or institution requires? Even if it can be justified from the point of view of the collective—which cannot exist without such constraints on individual behavior—can it also be understood as rationally justifiable from the point of view of the individual herself? The positive expressive freedom—the freedom *to* do something—that is obtainable only by constraining oneself by the conceptual norms implicit in *discursive* social practices provides an attractive affirmative answer to this challenge. Talking requires complying with a daunting variety of norms, rules, and standards—and here I don’t just mean those that pertain to speaking or writing *well*, but the more basic ones that are involved in being intelligible at all. (This fact can fade so far into the background as to be well-nigh invisible for our home languages, but it is an obtrusive, unpleasant, and unavoidable feature of working in a language in which one is *not* at home.) What sort of positive freedom does one get in return for constraining oneself in these multifarious ways?

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<sup>1</sup> As Hegel says: “Language is the Dasein of Geist.” [ref.]

The astonishing empirical observation with which Chomsky inaugurated contemporary linguistic theory is that almost every sentence uttered by an adult native speaker is radically *novel*. That is, not only has that speaker never heard or uttered just that sequence of words before, but neither has anyone else—ever. “Have a nice day,” may get a lot of play, but any tolerably complex sentence is almost bound to be new. Quotations aside, it is for instance exceptionally unlikely that a sentence chosen at random from the story I’ve been telling has ever been used before. And this is not a special property of professor-speak. Surveys of large corpora of actual utterances (collected and collated by indefatigable graduate students) have repeatedly confirmed this empirically, and it can be demonstrated on more fundamental grounds by looking at the number of sentences of, say, thirty words or less that a relatively simple grammar can construct using the extremely minimal 5000-word vocabulary of Basic English. (For comparison, you probably actively use 25,000 and understand 75,000—and any of your professors, many more.) There hasn’t been time in human history for us to have used a substantial proportion of those sentences, even if every human there had ever been always spoke English and did nothing but chatter incessantly. Yet I have no trouble producing, and you have no trouble understanding, a sentence that (in spite of its ordinariness) it is quite unlikely anyone has happened to use before, such as:

We shouldn’t leave for the picnic until we’re sure that we’ve packed my old wool blanket, the thermos, and all the sandwiches we made this morning.

This capacity for *radical semantic novelty* fundamentally distinguishes sapient creatures from those who do not engage in linguistic practices. Because of it we can (and do, all the time) make claims, formulate desires, and entertain goals that no-one in the history of the world has ever before considered. This massive positive expressive freedom transforms the lives of sentient creatures who become sapient by constraining themselves with linguistic—which is to say conceptual—norms.

So in the conceptual normativity implicit in linguistic practice we have a model of a kind of constraint—loss of negative freedom—that is repaid many times over in a bonanza of positive freedom. Anyone who was in a position to consider the trade-off rationally would consider it a once-in-a-lifetime bargain. Of course, one need not be a creature like us. As Sellars says, one always could simply *not speak*—but only at the price of having nothing to say. And non-sapient sentients are hardly in a position to weigh the pros and cons involved. But the fact remains that there *is* an argument that shows that at least *this* sort of normative constraint is rational—that it pays off by opening up a dimension of positive expressive freedom that is a pearl without price, available in no

other way. Hegel's idea is that this case provides the model that every other social or political institution that proposes to constrain our negative freedom should be compared to and measured against. The question always is: what new kind of expressive freedom, what new kinds of life-possibilities, what new kinds of commitment, responsibility, and authority are made possible by the institution? The strategy is to use an understanding of the basic metaphysical structure of sapience as such as the basis for normative assessment of lives and institutions.

Hegel's third idea is that sapient beings are the subjects of developmental processes that exhibit a distinctive structure. Sapience is a kind of consciousness. Concept users are beings things can in a distinctive sense be something *for*. And concept use allows a kind of *self*-consciousness not available to mere sentients: being something *for* oneself. (Since this is one of the payoffs of sapience, of being a concept-user, for Hegel it is fundamentally a *social* achievement.) The selves of self-conscious creatures exhibit a distinctive structure: what they *really* are, as Hegel says, what they are *in* themselves, depends on what they *take* themselves to be, in Hegel-speak, what they are *for* themselves. And that means that a self-conscious being can change what it is *in* itself by changing what it is *for* itself. Self-conscious creatures accordingly enjoy the possibility of a distinctive kind of *self-transformation*: *making* themselves be different by *taking* themselves to be different. Because what they are in themselves is at any point the outcome of such a developmental process depending on their attitudes, essentially self-conscious beings don't have *natures*, they have *histories*. Or, put differently, it is their nature to have not just a *past*, but a *history*: a sequence of partially self-constituting self-transformations, mediated at every stage by their self-conceptions, and culminating in them being what they currently are. Understanding what they are requires looking retrospectively at the process of sequential reciprocal influences of what they at each stage were for themselves and what they at each stage were in themselves, by which they came to be what they now are. Rehearsing such a historical narrative (Hegel's 'Wiederholung') is a distinctive way of understanding oneself *as* an essentially historical, because essentially self-conscious, sort of being. (The twentieth century existentialist slogan "Existence precedes essence," is an attempt to express a weak, watered-down version of this Hegelian conception.)

## VI. Three Versions of the Aim of the Political Life

I want now to use the conceptual raw materials I've assembled so far to say something briefly about the life of political activity, and then about the philosophical life. The first thing to notice is that ways of thinking about what the good life consists in for creatures like us—rooted in ways of thinking about

what kind of beings we are—come into play *twice* in thinking about the life of political activity. It is itself, of course, one of the forms of life to be assessed. But it is also true that one of the central *aims* of political activity is to *enable* and *promote* the freedom of one's fellow citizens (*our* freedom) to live the best lives possible. Here *enabling* is increasing *negative* freedom, freedom *from* constraints that hinder living normatively good lives, and *promoting* is increasing *positive* freedom, freedom *to* live those lives, by making available resources that can be deployed in the service of living *well*, living *better*, and living the *best* lives possible. So devoting oneself to a life of political activity requires practically endorsing a view about how to address the normative question of what makes better lives for beings like us. Since that is a principal question that philosophers must address, the *content* of *political* life depends on the answer to a distinctively *philosophical* question.

I want now to consider what difference it makes for the understanding of the aims of political life which of the three metaphysical conceptions of us discussed above one adopts as the basis for this sort of normative assessment. The three are:

- a conception of us as essentially *sentient* beings whose good is *pleasure*,
- a conception of us as essentially *sapient* beings in the Humean-instrumental sense, whose good is satisfying our desires or maximizing utility, and
- a conception of us as essentially *sapient* beings in the Kantian sense as elaborated by Hegel: expressive beings whose good consists in exercising their capacity for self-conscious self-constitution and self-transformation.

My main concern, however, is with the last of these, since I think the metaphysical views of us that ground the first two are ultimately unsustainable. But I can here only gesture at the reasons.

One *can* lead a life of political activity premised on an understanding of us as essentially *sentients*, so of the good life for us as one of sensuous pleasure. Doing that is taking as one of one's principal aims enabling and promoting the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. I'm not going to say a lot about this. From the point of view of those of us who think what matters is not biology but sapience, discursivity, Hegelian Geist, this way of thinking about us is too narrow. It is a kind of biological chauvinism—a morally objectionable parochialism. Sentience is merely a *medium*; the *message* lies in sapience. The point of *feeling* is not its mere *intensity*, positive or negative. It is that its modulations can articulate *thoughts*, which turn us from mere *animals* into *selves*.

But this biological way of picking *us* out is also too *wide*. Here the debate over whether embryos are *persons* is a good case in point. Here the question is: should moral respect go with *sapience* or with *biology*? Sentience-utilitarians such as Singer say the latter because they see *morality* as normatively driven by the intrinsic *sensuous* evaluation implicit in the phenomena of *pain* and *pleasure*. But we kantians see the normative basis of morality as derived from the *positive freedom* of giving and asking for *reasons*. Mammalian sensuousness, sentience, is at best a *necessary* condition of that, not a *sufficient* one. According to this line of thought, it is the capacity to engage in *conceptual* activity, being a subject of *sapience*, not of *sentience*, that is in the first instance *morally* significant. This does not, of course, *settle* it that we should not accord *respect* and *rights* to embryos, as *potential* moral persons, or for that matter, to non-human *animals*. But in each case the argument appeals to an *indirect* connection to the *primary* subjects of moral respect and (so) rights: discursive creatures. Kant certainly thought it was wrong to cause pain to animals for no reason—but that is not in the first instance because of what it does to *them*, but because of what doing that to *them* does to *us*.

In any case, since the political life itself is a life of sapient activity, there is something odd about devoting it to enabling and promoting *sensuous* self-indulgence on the part of one's fellows—a vision of the politician as civic designated-driver, or as the only adult in a community of children.

By contrast, it certainly makes sense as a public political aim to enable and promote the pursuit of *happiness* by one's fellows, where happiness is thought of instrumentally, as a matter of their getting whatever it is that they privately want, of their succeeding in the pursuit of whatever projects they have taken on. But a devotee of the political life who consulted *this* philosopher would be told that the instrumental conception of the rationality that structures sapience is radically defective. I can't pursue here the reasons for this assessment, but I'll register one familiar source of discontent. At a practical level, this model of sapient rationality puts the endorsement of ends or goals ultimately beyond rational assessment, except as some serve as sub-goals to others. Reason is understood as *exclusively* concerned with means to already-adopted ends. But this seems wrong: the formation of preferences should also be subject to rational assessment.

What I do want to talk about are the relations between political and philosophical activity according to the richer, more interesting conception of sapience that Hegel develops out of Kant's insights. I've already indicated how thinking of us as *expressive*, self-constituting and self-transforming beings provides a linguistic model for the *political* justification of constraint by

communal norms—how sufficient gains in the positive expressive freedom that is the good for sapient on this metaphysical understanding can justifiably be seen to compensate for a corresponding loss of negative freedom. That line of thought is one of the conceptual gifts the philosopher can give the politician. But on this line of thought, philosophers have a still more important role to play. We sapient are self-constituting beings because what we are *for* ourselves is an essential element of what we are *in* ourselves. One of the central tasks of philosophy is to craft vocabularies we can use to interpret, understand, constitute, and ultimately transform ourselves. The production of potentially self- and community-transforming vocabularies is not, to be sure, the exclusive province of philosophers. For instance, film-makers and novelists (imagers and imaginers of lives and projects), poets (sculptors of language and linguistic images), and such hard-to-classify thinkers as Marx and Freud are all practitioners of this arcane, human-alchemical art.

But philosophers not only craft vocabularies rich with the possibility of re-describing, re-conceiving, and (so) re-constituting ourselves, they are also the ones whose province within the high culture it is to study and theorize *about* the vocabularies that enable and promote sapient self-development. It is the philosophers' job to come to *understand* the process by which expressive, self-interpreting, self-constituting historical creatures produce and consume those vocabularies so as to become what they (then) are. This is what the philosophers I have been talking about—Aristotle, Hume, Kant, and Hegel—do. They produce new vocabularies in which we can understand ourselves and each other, and they do that *by* thinking about the kinds of being we are, and about role of such vocabularies in instituting and constituting the conceptual normativity that is the medium in which beings like us live our lives. Specifically philosophical vocabularies are the principal organs of self-consciousness for expressive beings.

On the Hegelian conception of us, then, one of the great goods for us is the availability of an inexhaustible supply of new vocabularies in which to express, develop, constitute, and transform ourselves and our institutions, and for understanding the process by which we do that. This is the great positive, expressive freedom that makes us what we are. As the part of the good for us, it is also a *telos* of political activity—that which those who take *our* good as *their* practical aim are thereby obliged to enable and promote. And that is to say that a central aim of a *political* life must be to enable and promote the living of specifically *philosophical* lives—as well as those of the other, less self-conscious, conceptual sculptors of vocabularies for self-redescription. That conclusion expresses the metaphysical basis of a division of labor between these two sorts of paradigmatically sapient forms of life.

## VII. The Life of Philosophical Activity

What of the life of philosophical activity itself? I've taken what may have seemed a somewhat roundabout path to this question. But I've done that because the best way to see what goods are secured by philosophical activity is not to talk *about* it, but to *do* a bit of it. The ideas I've put on the table let us pick out distinctively *philosophical* activity by a series of nested characterizations. On the conception of us as sapience I have been suggesting, we are to be understood to begin with as *normative* creatures, hence as essentially *social* ones. Because those norms are *conceptual* norms, which is to say norms governing inferential practices of giving and asking for reasons, we are *rational, discursive* beings. Binding ourselves by conceptual norms that go beyond mere causal constraint makes possible the positive *expressive freedom* think new thoughts, make new claims, and to describe and understand ourselves and our recognitive communities in new ways, achieving a new sort of self-consciousness. With that expressive freedom and self-consciousness comes the possibility of *transforming* ourselves by adopting new vocabularies, redescribing and so reconstituting our selves and discursive institutions. While all of us are in some sense *consumers* of such new vocabularies, it is the special calling of some to *produce* them. And among those producers some take the construction of unique, potentially transformative vocabularies as the project by commitment to which they understand and define themselves. Among that group, some seek to produce those new vocabularies precisely *by* trying to understand the phenomena of sapience, normativity, conceptuality, reason, freedom, expression, self-consciousness, self-constitution, and historical transformation by subversive, empowering vocabularies. Those are the philosophers. They are charged neither with simply understanding human nature (human history), nor with simply changing it, but with changing it *by* understanding it.

All the goods of sapient life flow from participation in the great human conversation. Producing the vocabularies that, as the medium in which that conversation is conducted, are the discursive, expressive organs of self-consciousness, self-constitution, and self-development for sapients is accordingly an especially important sort of contribution one can make to that conversation. And sculpting conceptual tools for *understanding* the nature, history, and potential for such self-conscious expressive self-transformation enables and promotes the deepest, grandest form of self-consciousness of which we are capable.

Doing that is exercising a unique kind of expressive freedom—the kind characteristic of the philosophical life. And the goods distinctive of that life flow from that sort of positive freedom. The philosopher is responsible for

and committed to digesting the most profound thoughts and mastering the most intricate and powerful vocabularies that have been developed for articulating our sapience, and for producing from them new such thoughts and vocabularies—new forms of self-consciousness—for our own times.

It does not go without saying that societies provide environmental and institutional niches within which those doing the sort of work I am talking about can flourish. That depends, after all, on the vision and abilities of the politicians who—I've urged—are specially charged with enabling and promoting it. For instance, Medieval Muslim culture provided ample institutional opportunities—and nourished many good and some great philosophers and other transformative thinkers—while contemporary Muslim culture has so far provided only stony ground for such seeds. Courtly patronage from Renaissance Italy to the France of the *ancien régime* was one institution that made room for, and even supported philosophical work, even if fitfully and unevenly. But the principal institutional locus of environmental niches suitable for philosophical lives in the modern world is the *university*. In its contemporary form, as independent of the Church, it largely and nineteenth century development—owing a surprisingly extensive debt to the intellectual vision of Hegel and the institutional genius of Humboldt. Even in developed Western countries, its role as a haven for the most abstract sort of speculation and vocabulary construction—as opposed to an engine for applied technological progress—is always fragile and often threatened.

But in that favored environment, academic philosophers enjoy to an unusual extent the peculiar individual positive freedom of the intellectual. Prime among these is control over one's own time and problems. Almost anyone who can do this work could make lots more money doing something else; this is what we've gotten in return for foregoing that. What we think about and work on is wholly up to us: the *only* consideration is what we find most interesting and promising, what we think we can use, can make something important of. Equally smart and well-educated people in other professions—think of law, medicine, business, politics—are almost exclusively obliged to think about problems and issues that are important to *other* people, that are made pressing by the passing demands of events or institutions over which they have little control. The resources at our command are not massive; we don't supervise large teams of eager subordinates, can't bring to bear large capital investments. But we are free to deploy our own time and efforts as we see fit—free to waste them if we make bad judgments. Though one is always uncomfortably aware of the ultimately weightier judgments of one's work that will eventually be made by colleagues as yet unborn, on a day-to-day and year-to-year basis, academics are free to work on what *they* care about.

Almost uniquely, academics are also granted the positive freedom to take whatever time, invest whatever energy, they deem necessary for the task to which they are committed: paradigmatically, digesting or producing a text, a contribution to the great Conversation in which one is but a link connecting the mighty dead to the mighty to come. If one asks capable and committed people across modern culture generally what they find most objectionable about their professional situations, a great number will say that it is that their institutions do not, for one reason or another, allow them to do their work properly—to take the time to get it right. Everything is a rush, a compromise, a make-do solution that could be vastly improved were one only allowed to. We are allowed and even encouraged to agonize, to hone, to polish—to take the time and make the effort to make the work the best it can be. I spent eighteen years writing my big book *Making It Explicit*, for instance—though that was not *all* I was doing, it was my principal project. And I've been at my nearly-finished (I think) Hegel book for more than twenty. I'm not working under journalistic constraints—the remarkable thing is that it can be done at all. Our projects are ones that can be undertaken without depending on the acquiescence or co-operation of others. (Compare the frustration of an architect with a compelling idea who is not allowed even to work it out in detail, never mind to see it constructed, until and unless a client can be persuaded to pay for it.) And how good our products turn out to be is wholly a matter of how good *we* make them. There is no-one else on whom to blame flaws of conception or execution. (Compare the frustration of a film-writer or director, whose vision must be distorted in many ways in order to be implemented, since it depends in so many ways on the efforts of so many other people.) Of course, having no excuses can be difficult, too. As Nietzsche said “Hard is it to be alone with one's own judge and executioner.” But having the positive freedom to find out what one is really capable of—in a way that the journalist, architect, or director may never be able to—is still a substantial satisfaction.

These forms of the public freedom of the philosopher are institutional reflections of a kind of private freedom that is harder to characterize: the freedom of thought itself, the medium in which we sapientia live and move and have our being. It is the freedom exercised by the theoretical mathematician. When she says “Let  $y$  be a function of  $x$ ,” God and all his angels cannot say “Let's not.” It may be a foolish, pointless, or fruitless stipulation, it may lead to any number of difficulties. But the capacity to bind oneself by that sort of discursive commitment, to explore its consequences (what one has thereby made oneself responsible for) and possible ways of justifying it (what authority one could claim for it) is the normative, discursive freedom constitutive of thought itself. That realm of freedom is our ownmost domain. And it is the

philosophers who are most self-consciously and explicitly at home in that freedom.

### VIII. Conclusion

I started my story with the question of how one might ground normative characterizations and comparative assessments of different forms of life. The answer that comes down to us from Plato and Aristotle is what I called the “metaphysical strategy”: start with an account of the kind of beings we most deeply are. Focusing on consciousness or awareness in the broadest possible sense as what is characteristic of us, I then distinguished two fundamentally different dimensions of mindedness: sentience and sapience. Identifying ourselves as sentient valorizes a life of sensuous pleasure. I then marked out three ways in which we can instead describe and demarcate ourselves in terms of the sapience that distinguishes us from the beasts of forest and field.

- With Hume, we can think of ourselves as choosing, goal-pursuing beings, whose good consists in satisfying conceptually contentful desires and preferences. Reason, which articulated concepts, is understood as *practical*, instrumental intelligence—the capacity to deploy means deliberately and successfully to achieve ends. This sort of self-description underwrites a life primarily devoted, not to procuring more or less fleeting episodes of sensual pleasure, but to enjoying longer term states of *satisfaction* of articulated, consciously endorsed desires, plans, and projects.
- Kant offers a still richer picture of sapience as a *normative* achievement—the positive ability to commit oneself, to take on responsibilities, to acknowledge and exercise authority. The conceptual contents of those commitments and entitlements are a matter of what counts as good *reasons* for adopting them—on a much broader conception of reason than the Humean-instrumental.
- The third, most sophisticated conception of sapience is Hegel’s account of us as creatures of our positive expressive freedom—beings whose essence it is to have no essence, no nature, but only a history structured and driven by the description of ourselves that we endorse at each stage in our development—hence self-creating beings, who can change what we are *in* ourselves by changing what we are *for* ourselves, by identifying with new descriptions of ourselves, by adopting new vocabularies.

Each of these metaphysical meta-vocabularies for describing ourselves—as sentient, and as sapient thought of the three different ways I’ve sketched,

offers a different view of the kind of flourishing that we should seek, and that it should be a principal aim of the political life to enable and promote. It is up to the philosopher, however, to assess the merits of the competing claims of these ways of thinking about ourselves. According to the metaphysical strategy, that requires deciding which is the best metaphysical vocabulary to use in describing us. It is *true* of us that that we are sentient, and that we are sapient in all three of the senses considered: Humean, Kantian, and Hegelian. But which best characterizes what is *essential* about us—which makes us *us*? Note that the Hegelian offers a special kind of answer to this question: there is no once-and-for-all, matter-of-factual answer to that question, privileging one of the vocabularies for describing us. For what we really, essentially, are, *in* ourselves, depends on what we are *for* ourselves. It depends on which vocabulary for self-description we adopt, endorse, interpret ourselves in terms of, and so identify with. Fans of sentience, Hume, Kant, and Hegel himself have done their philosophical work well, and offered us candidate vocabularies whose adoption *makes* us into different sorts of being. The lesson we should learn from studying their efforts is *not* a decision about who is *right*, but one concerning the importance of coming up with new, ever-more-interesting such vocabularies as candidates to identify with, as expressive tools allowing us to *take* ourselves to be new kinds of being, and so to *make* ourselves into something new and different, preserving and accumulating previously disclosed possibilities and projects, while transforming and adding to them. That is the job of the philosophers. As Henry James said on behalf of all those who devote themselves to this sort of meta-sapient labor:

We do what we can. We give what we have. We work in the dark. Our doubt is our passion, and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art.



## Brandom's inferentialist Theory and the Meaning Entitlement Connection

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### Résumé.

Selon la sémantique des rôles conceptuels de Brandom, saisir un concept implique un engagement à tirer certaines conclusions. Ceci est une conséquence de la thèse inférentialiste qui consiste à dire que le sens d'un terme est donné par sa justification moyennant des conditions d'assertabilité. Les engagements inférentiels sortent d'une notion *matérielle* de l'inférence qui sous-tend le discours rationnel et l'activité humaine. Dans cet article, je discute un prétendu problème relatif à la sémantique de Brandom soulevé par un argument de Paul Boghossian contre la conception substantive de la signification de Dummett et de Brandom. Je soutiens que le diagnostic de Boghossian survole une différence importante entre les positions de Dummett et de Brandom liées respectivement à une conception monotone contre une vue non monotone de la signification comme norme de souscription.

### Mots-clés.

Brandom, Boghossian, Signification, inférentialisme, non-monotonie, norme, règle, sémantique des rôles conceptuels, concept, Dummett.

### ملخص.

وفقًا لسيمانطيقا الدور التصوري عند براندوم، يتضمن الأخذ بتصوير ما الالتزام بوضع استدلالات معينة. ويأتي هذا كنتيجة للأطروحة الاستدلالية القائلة أن معنى تصوير ما يقوم على تبريره من خلال شروط قابلة للتأكيد. وتخرج الالتزامات الاستدلالية عن إطار المفهوم المادي الذي يُسلم بالنشاط والخطاب العقلي الإنساني. وسوف أناقش في هذه الورقة مشكلة مفترضة في سيمانطيقا براندوم، أثارها حجة لـ «بول بوغوسيان» ضد التصور الموضوعي للمعنى عند كل من «دامت» و«براندوم». وأزعم أن تشخيص «بوغوسيان» يُلقي نظرة عامة

على أحد الفوارق الهامة بين موقفى دامت وبراندوم المرتبطين على التوالي بوجهة النظر التواترية ووجهة النظر غير التواترية للمعيار الحاكم للمعنى.

### كلمات مفتاحية.

براندوم، بوغسيان، معنى، نزعة استدلالية، لا تواترية، معيار، قاعدة، سيمانطيقا الدور التصوري، تصور، دامت.

### Abstract.

According to Brandom's conceptual role semantics, to grasp a concept involves a commitment to drawing certain inferences. This is a consequence of the inferentialist thesis that the meaning of a term is given by its justification through assertibility conditions. Inferential commitments come out from a *material* notion of inference which underwrites human rational discourse and activity. In this paper I discuss an alleged problem of Brandom's semantics raised by an argument of Paul Boghossian against Dummett's and Brandom's *substantive* conception of meaning. I contend that Boghossian's diagnosis overlooks an important difference between Dummett's and Brandom's positions linked respectively to a monotonic against a nonmonotonic view of the norm underwriting meaning.

### Keywords.

Brandom, Boghossian, meaning, inferentialism, nonmonotonicity, norm, rule, conceptual role semantics, concept, Dummett.

According to Brandom, a content is substantive when it leads to inferences that are valid in virtue of the contents of the words featuring in them because of their *material* properties. This fact, according to Boghossian, doesn't explain how it is possible genuine disagreement about commitments one would not like to endorse. (Cf. Boghossian, 2003a). Moreover, it does not take into account the possibility of knowledge extension in front of new experience. I focus first on *Boche*-like concept which gives raise to the problem, where 'Boche' is derogative term standing for 'German' and meaning 'cruel German', which, according to Dummett's diagnosis, expose a lack of harmony between circumstances and consequences of the concept's application in assertions.

With regard to *Boche*-like concepts, Brandom doesn't seem to think that these cases uncover a problem of his view. For the apparent problem can be explained away simply in terms of acceptance or refusal of commitments. Dummett's notion of 'harmony' implies that to introduce a concept, for instance 'boche', be a conservative extension of previous concepts already

involved in the theory before its introduction, but figuring in its introduction and elimination inferential rules.

Brandom (Cf. Brandom, 2000: 70-72 ) rejects Dummett's underlying idea and rather emphasizes that evaluating introduction and consequences of Boche involves, not determining whether the inference is one that is already endorsed, so that no new content is really involved as Dummett would put it, but, rather, determining whether that inference is one that *ought* to be endorsed. He argues that Boche-like concepts are problematic only because the correlated inferential commitments introduce novel and *substantive* content to which the speaker would be entitled to, in line with a material notion of inference.

What I want to show is that, nonetheless, Brandom's argument, differently from Dummett's one, does preserve the possibility of disagreement, and is thus able to dismiss Boghossian's criticism. It follows the argument. Following Boghossian (Cf. Boghossian, 2003a: 241-244; 2003b: 10-11) I call the particular kind of connection between meaning and assertibility conditions the 'Meaning Entitlement Connection', for simplicity 'MEC'. In this paper I consider Boghossian's criticism of Brandom's (and Dummett's) MEC relating to the alleged difficulty of allowing disagreement about the extension of the *Boche*-like concept. Also I show Boghossian's proposal of MEC\* as a possible solution of a revised MEC in light of those difficulties. The criticism seems to be attributed to the alleged lack of a purely linguistic version of concept's definition of meaning in MEC, which Boghossian's view, differently, can give. Finally I contend that Brandom's arguments about the *non*-monotonic character of the pragmatic normativity related to his substantive notion of meaning, differentiate them from Dummett position. They do not correspond any way to the alleged MEC and are able to defuse this criticism.

### §1.

This work aims to defend Brandom's conceptual role semantics. According to Brandom's conceptual role semantics, to grasp a concept involves a commitment to drawing certain inferences and endorsing and defending the inferential commitments implicit in the concepts that these inferences in turn employ. This is a consequence of the inferentialist thesis that the meaning of a term is given by its justification through assertibility conditions. Inferential commitments come out from Brandom's pragmatic normativity approach to meaning as strictly interwoven with a *material* notion of inference which underwrites human rational discourse and activity. In this paper I discuss an alleged problem of Brandom's semantics raised by an argument of Paul

Boghossian against Dummett's and Brandom's *substantive* conception of meaning.

According to Brandom, a content is substantive when it leads to inferences that are valid in virtue of the contents of the words featuring in them because of their *material* properties.

I focus on the *Boche*-like concepts, which give rise to the criticism, where 'Boche' is derogative term standing for 'German' and meaning 'cruel German'. According to Dummett's diagnosis, it exposes a lack of harmony between circumstances and consequences of the concept's application in assertions. With regard to '*Boche*-like' concepts, Brandom doesn't seem any way to think that these cases uncover a problem of his view. For the apparent problem can be explained away simply in terms of acceptance or refusal of commitments. Brandom emphasizes that evaluating introduction and consequences of Boche involves, not determining whether the inference is one that is already endorsed, so that no new content is really involved as Dummett would put it, but, rather, determining whether that inference is one that *ought* to be endorsed. Dummett's notion of 'harmony' implies that to introduce a concept, for instance boche, be only a conservative extension of previous concepts already involved in the theory before its introduction, but figuring in its introduction and elimination inferential rules.

Brandom (Cf. Brandom 2000: 75-76) rejects Dummett's underlying idea which results for Brandom in some sense similar to the one underwriting the formally valid inference implying conditional 'detachment'. He argues that Boche-like concepts are problematic only because the correlated inferential commitments introduce novel and *substantive* content to which the speaker would be entitled to, in line with a material notion of inference. But this fact according to Boghossian, does not explain how it is possible genuine disagreement about commitments one would not like to endorse.

Moreover, doesn't take into account the possibility of knowledge extension in front of new experience. (Cf. Boghossian, 2003a: 246). The reason seems to be attributed to the alleged lack of a purely linguistic version of concept's definition of meaning, which Boghossian's view, differently, can give. What I want to show is that, nonetheless, Brandom's argument, differently from Dummett's one, does preserve the possibility of disagreement, and is thus able to dismiss Boghossian's criticism. According to Brandom, a content is substantive when it leads to inferences that are valid in virtue of the contents of the words featuring in them because of their *material* properties. Following

Boghossian (Cf. Boghossian, 2003a: 241, 2003b: 10) I call the particular kind of connection between meaning and assertibility conditions the ‘Meaning Entitlement Connection’, for simplicity ‘MEC’. In this paper I consider Boghossian’s criticism of Brandom’s MEC relating to the alleged difficulty of allowing disagreement about the use and the content of the *Boche*-like concept and knowledge extension in front of new empirical experience. Also I show Boghossian’s proposal of MEC\* as a possible solution of a revised MEC in light of those difficulties. Finally I contend that Brandom’s arguments about the *non-monotonic* character of the pragmatic normativity related to his substantive notion of meaning do not correspond any way to the alleged MEC and are able to defuse this criticism.

The paper is organized as follows: §2 introduces Brandom’s view of *broad* inferentialism as linked with a *material* notion of inference and what is it like to have conceptual content in this view. The emphasis will be on the particular kind of the *broad* inferential *commitment* and substantive notion of meaning that understanding a concept leads to. §3 concerns Brandom’s model of discursive practice which turns out to be involved in Brandom’s inferential semantics. A central position is covered here by assertibility conditions of sentences uttered with assertoric force within a *normative* pragmatic approach to conceptual content. Assertibility conditions appear here to be given in two different and complementary ways which aim to guarantee respectively objectivity, on one side, and the individual speaker’s subjective use of the concept in individual inferences, on the other. These main statuses of the pragmatic norm underlying content are guaranteed by the different kinds of interaction between upstream inferential antecedents and downstream inferential consequents of assertable contents. Normativity of meaning recovering the role of grounding rationality, is this way conceived by Brandom as *non-monotonic*. §4 deals with *boche*-like concepts and Brandom’s conception of *substantive content* (meaning) which involves *material* inference *commitments* in the light of some criticism. §5 contends that it is dubious that Boghossian’s criticism of the substantive view of content in ‘boche-like’ cases can show that it doesn’t allow disagreement and knowledge extension on the use of the concept. §6 presents Boghossian’s proposal for a revised Meaning Entitlement Connection, for simplicity MEC\* §7 argues that the alleged criticism against Dummett-Brandom MEC overviews an important difference between Dummett and Brandom substantive view of meaning based on a different conception of its normative character, which is *nonmonotonic* rather than *monotonic* in Brandom’s view. §8 draws my conclusions.

According to Brandom, conceptual content is accounted for by a kind of rationality which depends on Brandom's particular conception of *material inference*. Let me now introduce a brief characterization of it. Brandom says that conceptual content is explained by its role in reasoning (Cf. Brandom 2000: 72) and it takes the form of an holistic approach to concept meaning. These features identify what he calls the *inferential demarcation of conceptual* (cf. Brandom 2000: 60). But Brandom's view is distinct from other forms of inferentialism also because of: the characterization of inference as 'material' inference, which gives rise to the so called "broad inferentialism". This approach intends inference as depending on the words' *content*, and subsequently in a sense *broader* than what seems to be implied in a notion of formally valid inference depending on a mere logical calculus.

A formally valid inference is understood in terms of a conditional which makes the conclusion "detached" and which is assumed to be an implicit suppressed premise of the argument. For instance, an inference of the kind:

It's raining. Therefore, the streets will be wet.

is generally considered to be an enthymeme as implicitly involving the conditional "If it's raining, then the streets will be wet". With this implicit premise, the inference is an instance of the formally valid schema of conditional *detachment*.<sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, for Brandom's *broad inferentialism*, a *material inference* doesn't involve any implicit suppressed premise. For instance, one's asserting "Pittsburgh is to the *east* of Princeton" enables one to materially infer from it: "Princeton is to the west of Pittsburgh". And from "Lightning is seen now" it is materially inferable "Thunder will be heard soon". These inferences are

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<sup>1</sup> A problem with this view called by Sellars the "received dogma" (cf. Brandom 2000) is that it is too narrow, as not just all apparently correct inferences are based on this form. Furthermore, this view seems to take what Dummett calls the *retrograde step*, which elicits the problem discussed by Lewis Carroll in "Achilles and the Tortoise". Formal valid inferences, in Brandom's view, are only one kind of valid inference. For inference can be explained only in a broad sense as *broad inferentialism* opposed to *narrow* one. For *broad inferentialism* Brandom means the view according to which we can speak of an inferential commitment from circumstances of application of a concept to consequences of its use even in the case of concepts like "red" that have *non-inferential* circumstances of application or "ought" which manifest *non-inferential* consequences of use. This view is opposed to *narrow inferentialism* which on the contrary corresponds to the *hyper-inferentialist* view that inferential articulation is strictly necessary. This explains why formal valid inference can be given account through material inference and not the other way round.

material because they depend on, not their logical-formal articulation, but the contents of some words featuring in the involved claims.

A *material* inference is also described by Brandom as a kind of inference whose correctness determines the conceptual content of premises and conclusions. The contents of the words *east* and *west* in the first inference above and the contents of the words *lightning* and *thunder* in the second are those which make, respectively, the two inferences appropriate and, in turn, endorsing these inferences is part of grasping the concepts “east”, “west”, “lightning” and “thunder”. (Cf. Brandom 2000: 72)

This view plus the idea that content is explained by its role in reasoning, leads to, in Brandom terms, a *broad* notion of commitment. This is due to another relevant distinction about conceptual content. This is the distinction between the notion of a mere behavioural *disposition* and the one of understanding a conceptual content. While the first refers, for Brandom, to a purely *causal* connection, the second refers to a practical ability: the one of giving and asking for reasons. Thus, for instance, the use of the non-inferential perceptual term “red” in the statement “This is red” uttered by a parrot is an example of behavioural disposition as a mechanical response to a stimulus. For the parrot is unable to ask for and give reasons related to its use of “red”. On the other hand, understanding the content of “red” for a person uttering “This is red” requires that ability. We would not say that the parrot possesses the mastery of the concept of red from its uttering “It’s red”, for its ability is not a cognitive matter. In fact the parrot doesn’t possess the mastery of the expression “red” because, for instance, it is unable to infer from the statement “It’s red” other statements such as “It’s not green”.

One important consequence of this view is that understanding a concept involves *always* a *commitment* to drawing inferences. For commitments, according to the previous considerations, consist in fact in admitting as inferential also concepts like “red” which, as we have seen above, are not strictly inferential as regards *circumstances* of application, and concepts for normative vocabulary like “ought”, which are *not strictly* inferential as regards *consequences* of application (Cf. Brandom: 21)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Strong’ inferentialism differentiates from what Brandom calls the ‘narrow’ and the ‘weak’ inferentialism. According to ‘weak’ inferentialism the inferential articulation of a concept is a necessary condition, while for the ‘narrow’ version it is a sufficient condition. The ‘strong’ inferentialism introduces instead a *broad inferential* conception of the conceptual as it admits *non-inferential* practical use as consequences or circumstances of concepts use like in ‘ought’ term or ‘red’ term cases (Cf. Brandom, 2000: 21)

In turn commitment so understood has consequences about the way to understand meaning and content which is called by Brandom a ‘substantive’ notion of meaning. This notion intends content as given by the set of inferential *commitments* according to a *broad* version of inferentialism and material inference. Substantive meaning is what represents the focus of my argument here. For according to some critics it is affected by problems. For instance, a problem would be exposed by Boghossian’s argument against Brandom’s solution for the so called ‘boche-like’ concepts.

So let me now briefly introduce the issue. ‘Boche’ is a derogatory term for ‘German’ which means ‘Cruel German’, similar for instance to the term ‘nigger’ for black people, or ‘terrone’ for southern Italians. I have anticipated above that a content is generally explained in Brandom’s inferentialist approach as given by its circumstances and consequences of use. For what concerns logical terms, circumstances are intended as the way to introduce the term in a language using other terms not involving it, while consequences as the way to eliminate the term in favour of other expressions of the language. ‘Boche’ is a *predicate* rather than a logical connective. Furthermore, it is characterized by these introduction and elimination rules:

$$\begin{aligned} &I\text{-rule: } 'If\ x\ is\ German,\ then\ x\ is\ Boche' \\ &\qquad\qquad\qquad and \\ &E\text{-rule: } 'If\ x\ is\ Boche,\ then\ x\ is\ cruel' \end{aligned}$$

If these rules are implemented, it turns out that, for any x, if x is German, then x is cruel, which is clearly unacceptable. This issue was first brought to light by another advocate of the inferentialist approach. In Dummett’s original discussion, Boche-like concepts uncover the *harmony* problem – that is to say, the problem of lack of harmony between circumstances of application of the concept in terms of inferential antecedents and inferential consequences of its use (Cf. Dummett LBM, 1991: 246-251).

This problem arises in first instance for purely formal concepts such as the *tonk* one<sup>1</sup>, but also for concepts with *material* content such as the Boche one.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Tonk’ is conceived of, in Prior’s example (Cfr. Prior, 1960) as a new *connective* for which these introduction and elimination rules hold:

Tonk:

$$p \rightarrow (p\ tonk\ q) \text{ (if } p \text{ then } p\ tonk\ q)$$

and

$$(p\ tonk\ q) \rightarrow q \text{ (if } p\ tonk\ q \text{ then } q)$$

In accordance to tonk’s rules, it is possible to infer any q from whatever p, which looks absurd. The case of ‘Boche’ is slightly different.

So a challenge for Brandom's view is how to solve this difficulty.

One main point of Brandom's solution bears on the particular notion of assertibility conditions which is strictly interwoven, in his view, with a normative pragmatic conception of meaning. My aim here is to show that, notwithstanding the common generally substantive conception of content, Brandom's solution is better and more forceful than Dummett's requirement of *harmony*, contrary to Boghossian's diagnosis and attack. Let me now explain the point.

### §3.

One important feature of Brandom's view is that *broad* commitment is also intended to be closely related to a notion of pragmatic norm underwriting content, which corresponds to assertibility. An analysis of the normative "ought" term will constitute then the main thesis of Brandom's position (Cf. Brandom, 2000)

I have observed above that inferential commitments are given as assertibility conditions of a sentence uttered with a particular force. About this, one peculiarity of Brandom's position is a non-standard notion of assertion. Within the inferentialist approach, assertibility has been traditionally associated with 'truth' notion, and conceptual content has been explained in terms of the truth conditions of a sentence uttered with assertoric force, in line with an 'ideal' conception of content.

The broader conception of inferentialism, on the contrary, introduces the variant of conceiving of assertibility as a kind of pragmatic *norm* governing practical reasoning, in line with a material notion of inference. Assertibility conditions can be taken as asking if the speaker is blameworthy in having fulfilled the obligations that a given speech act requires. This is the reason why an analysis of the 'ought' term constitutes a central question for Brandom. The normative status at the basis of meaning and content can be divided in two aspects, which are respectively the *commitment* and the *entitlement* (Cf. Brandom, 2000: 125). The first being a kind of *responsibility* that the speaker must endorse in the use of that content in term of its consequences, while the second being a sort of *justification* in introducing it in judgments and assertions<sup>1</sup>. In preserving a certain kind of *entitlement* a speaker will show to give particular emphasis to a certain *content*, like in the following example, the content 'staying dry'. For

instance a speaker who takes: “If it’s raining I shall open my umbrella” to be entitlement preserving will also believe a set of inferences like the following:

a'. Only standing under the awning will keep me dry, so I shall stand under the awning.

a". Only remaining in the car will keep me dry, so I shall remain in the car. (Brandom 2010: 90)

This pattern of inferences shows that he is implicitly attributing a preference to the content ‘*staying dry*’.

Other different patterns of inferences are nonetheless associated to the same normative term ‘ought’. In the case of 2) “I am a bank employee going to work, so I shall wear a necktie”, entitlement (or commitment) to the conclusion is preserved by a different underwritten kind of norm which is associated with a *certain* status, that of being a bank employee.

‘Being an employee’ is then a reason in the objective sense of good reason for action (Cf. Brandom 2000, p. 91), it is a reason for A (the bank employee) to wear a necktie. Taking it to be a norm undertakes *doxastic commitment* to the claim that A is a bank employee. This means that this claim is a good reason for action, or wearing necktie. The norm here is expressed by a cluster of other norms connected to the first social institutional norm, that of being bank employee, such as:

b’) I am a bank employee going to the work, so I will not wear a clown costume  
 b”) I am a bank employee going to the work, so I will comb my hair etc. which constitute a pattern of inference.

Normative vocabulary like ‘ought’, ‘prefer’, ‘obliged’ is what makes explicit the endorsement of a *pattern* of material practical inferences. So that assertibility is explained here in terms of moves in a rule-game plus the variants of their different possible relations. For undertaking one commitment rationally obliges one to undertake others related to the first as its consequences and these relations articulate the conceptual content or content of the commitment in terms of responsibility for an act of assertion.

More importantly, different patterns of inference should be understood then as corresponding to different sorts of *practical* norms. But one problem that this conceptual role semantic theory of content must face is how to preserve the stability of content while allowing in the meanwhile change in

commitments and beliefs variations in the use of the same concept from speaker to speaker (cf. Brandom, p. 29: 40). The norm is then conceived by Brandom as split up in two parts: the one which follows 'truth' and which can guarantee the aim of 'objectivity' in the practice of communication, and the one which preserves the contact with the speaker's experience of new facts and evidence, in terms of commitment and entitlement.

Nonetheless, the representational dimension of conceptual content is not only inferentially but also socially articulated. A second aspect of the practice of assertion is the 'critical' dimension which is linked with the necessity to assess the commitments. In fact the attribution of beliefs to another speaker is given in terms of the attribution to her of commitments and entitlements, while 'objectivity' of content in terms of 'truth' can be explained as the subsequent attribution to oneself of the same commitments attributed first to others.

But this social character introduces also the possibility of a critical dimension of changing and vary beliefs. This fact can be explained by the interaction of the two normative dimensions upstream inferential antecedents and downstream inferential consequents of assertable contents which lead to *incompatibility* and *inclusive* relations. So, two assertable contents can be 'incompatible' in case the commitment to one sentence, for instance 'this swatch is red', rules out entitlement to the commitment to another asserted sentence, like 'this swatch is green'. On the contrary, they can be 'inclusive' when they provide relations among sets of sentences that correspond to inferential relations among the sentences. So, for instance, the content of the claim expressed by 'the swatch is vermillion' entails the content of the claim by the assertion of the sentence 'the swatch is red' because everything incompatible with being red is incompatible with being vermillion.

A consequence of the kind of interaction between inferential antecedents and inferential consequences of two assertable contents that correspond to 'incompatibility' and 'inclusive' relations is also the triadic normative structure of rationality<sup>1</sup>. The 'committive' relation, namely, the *commitment preserving relation*, is at the base of the *deductive* inference and reasoning, also corresponding to formally valid inference in the narrow sense<sup>2</sup>. While the 'permissive' relation is conceived at the basis of *inductive* inference. 'Incompatible' relation deals

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom at this point also says that these inferential consequence relations can vary for their strength: all incompatibility entailments are commitment-preserving though not vice versa, and all commitment-preserving inferences are entitlement-preserving though not vice versa.

<sup>2</sup> For a notion of 'narrow' inferentialism see note 3.

rather with *modal inference* as it supports *counterfactual* reasoning, which holds in sets' incompatibility or, on the contrary, in inclusion relations.

This characteristic is of fundamental importance in explaining the change in beliefs and the different commitments involved in the use of the same concept by different speakers. And it is allowed by a *non-monotonic* conception of the norm underlying content and more generally human rationality. In fact it also explains why the fact that conjoining a premise incompatible, for instance, with the individual desire to stay dry would turn the inference into a bad one does not show that the desire was functioning as an 'implicit' premise of the inference as the Davidsonian would say. Neither would say, more importantly, that the conditional, the norm expressing content is a bad one.

Given a sketch of the norm underlying content, in fact Brandom can say that the inference from

B. It is raining  
∴The streets will be wet.

can be treated in the same way as the inference from

A. It is raining  
∴I shall open my umbrella.

According to Brandom, the second is generally considered to be incomplete because, as I anticipated in the previous section, the inference doesn't go through if I did not want to stay dry. The Davidsonian concludes from this fact that this is so because 'I want to stay dry' is an *implicit* suppressed premise of the inference. It turns out that if we call  $p$  the sentence 'It's raining',  $q$  the sentence 'The streets will be wet', and  $r$  the sentence 'I want to stay dry', it is as if the inference from  $p$  to  $q$  is a good one meant that the inference from  $p$  &  $r$  to  $q$  *must* be a good one (Cf. Brandom, 2000: 87) and, more importantly, the fact that the latter is *not* a good argument meant it that the first is not either. In addition the Davidsonian would interpret the inference as including as a 'detached' premise a *conditional* corresponding to the inference involved having as antecedent  $p$  &  $r$  and as a consequent  $q$ . The conditional including 'r' would be in this view a prerequisite for the inference.

In Brandom's view, nonetheless, this can be so only if the material inference is meant to be monotonic, while this is not the case of material

inference. At least in ordinary discourse and in many sciences, for instance special sciences like medicine and often in physics.

This is a very important consideration. Take for example the following conditionals mentioned by Brandom:

5. If I strike this dry, well-made match, then it will light. ( $p \rightarrow q$ )
6. If  $p$  and the match is in a very strong electromagnetic field, then it will *not* light. ( $p \ \& \ r \rightarrow \sim q$ )
7. If  $p$  and  $r$  and the match is in a Faraday cage, then it will light. ( $p \ \& \ r \ \& \ s \rightarrow q$ )
8. If  $p$  and  $r$  and  $s$  and the room is evacuated of oxygen, then it will *not* light. ( $p \ \& \ r \ \& \ s \ \& \ t \rightarrow \sim q$ ) (Brandom, 2001: 88).

These conditionals show how it is possible to construct in reasoning inferential hierarchies with oscillating conclusions like the ones above mentioned. So they show how reasoning in ordinary discourse, as well as in many special sciences, is resolutely *non-monotonic*.

This requisite constitutes one core peculiarity of the notion of pragmatic norm underlying *broad* content as it is allowed by a material notion of inference. This move is suggested by the need to intend conceptual content as a kind of norm which can guarantee at the same time communication between individuals and subjective use of concepts within one's individual utterances. Not to say evolution of content in face of new experiences. Moreover, it explains why the same conditional *if p then q* (If it's raining then I shall open the umbrella) corresponding to the inference can in fact lead to a valid inference or, on the contrary, could not go through depending on other detached premises. For instance a detached premise like 'r'

c) r = 'I want to stay dry'  
or the opposite.

d) r = 'I don't want to stay dry',  
would reveal *compatibility* relation with the premise of the inference, the antecedent  $p$  of the conditional, or rather an *incompatibility* relation to that same premise. It is in fact valid in case  $c$ , where 'I want to stay dry' is compatible with premise  $a$  'if it's raining' and its conclusion  $b$  'I shall open the umbrella'. On the contrary case  $r$  'I don't want to stay dry' it turns out to be *incompatible* with premise  $a$  and its conclusion  $b$  'I shall open the umbrella'.

So the peculiarity of Brandom's view is that even if this fact gives rise to different individual patterns of inferences from speaker to speaker, it *does not infect the norm* as it is expressed by the conditional *if p then q* if it is meant anyway as *non-monotonic*, that is not including as a 'suppressed' *implicit* premise the sentence *r*. Simply adding *c* or alternatively *d* premise to the inference will produce a valid or invalid inference. That would mean considering also material and natural causes at the base of content as interfering with inference validity correctness of reasoning. Notice how these considerations contribute to explain the importance in Brandom's view of intending the commitment as a substantive notion. For an 'incompatibility' inferential relation between premise and desire to stay dry is given rise only in consideration of the material proprieties, that is, physical and natural of the new added content (to stay dry).

#### §4

In light of the previous considerations let me now return to the 'harmony problem' raised by the 'boche' predicate introduced at the beginning of this paper<sup>1</sup>. According to some critics (Cfr. Boghossian, 2003b: 11, 2003a), a problem stems from the fact that the material inference and its correlated notion of commitment seems to require the impossibility to disagree on conceptual content. This fact becomes clear with respect to some problematic cases like in ordinary language the 'Boche' concept, already known by Dummett and other philosophers, Brandom included.

The reason of the impasse, according to Boghossian, is the thesis that meaning is a *substantive* notion due to the role that material inference plays within it. For it doesn't take into account the possibility of knowledge extension in front of new experience. Moreover, it does not explain how it is possible genuine disagreement about commitments one would not like to endorse. The reason seems to be attributed to the alleged lack of a purely linguistic version of concept's definition of meaning, which Boghossian's view, differently, can give.

What I want to show is that, nonetheless, Brandom's argument, differently from Dummett's, does preserve the possibility of disagreement, and is thus able to dismiss this criticism.

Let me go back first to Dummett's notion of *harmony* to elucidate how it figures in Brandom's view. Subsequently, I will go through Boghossian's

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Boghossian, 2003a.

argument. In the last session I will show how Brandom's solution differentiates from Dummett's, and why it is in fact immune to Boghossian's criticism.

Concept use in assertions, in Dummett's inferentialist view, can be seen as the capacity to draw inferences involving it. The demand of harmony between circumstances and consequences of its application is expressible as the requirement that the addition of a new term to a language produce a conservative extension. But this addition produces a conservative extension if and only if it doesn't enable new inferences involving old expressions already present in the language that were not allowed before introducing the new concept. Thus, in our case, according to Dummett, Boche doesn't seem to be conservative with respect to the meaning of the concept 'German', which is involved in circumstances of application of the concept and included in the original language.

Whereas, according to Dummett, what goes wrong with the Boche concept is that its addition to the rest of language constitutes a non-conservative extension<sup>1</sup>, for Brandom the criticism of Boche-concept only shows that this expression has *substantive content*. This means that it implicitly involves a *material* inference that is not already implicit in the contents of other concepts being concurrently employed<sup>2</sup> – in particular, the concept of German. So the problem to be solved becomes if it the inferences that it implies *ought* to be endorsed. The focus of our attention shifts then to an analysis of the functioning of the 'ought' term in ordinary discourse. Let me now deal with the second criticism; that is to say, Boghossian's attack on Brandom's solution given in terms of a substantive notion of meaning.

## §5

I have emphasized up to this point how the relation between material inferential commitments and entitlements among contents, in terms of *compatibility* and *incompatibility* relations is what amounts for Brandom to a

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<sup>1</sup>For an explication of what Dummett means with the expression 'conservative extension' see below p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Brandom stresses that this fact is not uncommon outside logic – for instance in science, where conceptual progress requires introducing novel contents (Cf. Brandom 2000: 82).

substantive conception of meaning. I mentioned before Boghossian's criticism of Brandom's solution to the 'Boche' problem, which, I said, he attributed to this particular kind of *substantive* conception of meaning involved in the alleged Brandom's Meaning Entitlement Connection (MEC) (Cf. Boghossian, 2003b: 11). In light of my previous considerations, let me now concentrate on Boghossian's interpretation of the alleged MEC attributed to Peacocke, Dummett and Brandom to ascertain whether its *substantive* character, in Brandom's terms, really fails to give an account of disagreement.

Boghossian's theory can be placed among a cluster of theories of analyticity that, even through different strategies of solution, are similar with respect to a common approach labelled 'semantogenetic' (Cf. Horwich, 2000: 151). The shared feature is the idea of a stipulation as a link between an inferential rule and a term of which meaning it is constitutive. Knowledge of the truth of this kind of definition, or stipulation, is said to be given independently of experience, then 'a priori'. Is then given an entitlement for the inferential rule figuring in the stipulation. In it consists, in synthesis its analyticity. The point, anyway, regards the way in which meaning is given. Some accounts refer, then, to how it is 'used' in discourse, as a path through which we could distinguish the right stipulations. So we could catch the genuine 'constitutive' inferential rules of meaning, among others not constitutively relevant to it. One main problem is then that of explaining away how *acceptance*<sup>1</sup> of genuine stipulations is given. Boghossian instead of requiring an *explicit* decision regarding those selected inferences constitutive of meaning, among a cluster of inferences involving that term, propend for an *implicit* definition

The strategy followed by Boghossian avoids acceptance by introducing a link between the notion of 'acting according to a rule' and a 'belief' as a mental state. This way though the strategy is *a priori* it does not require a previous justification for meaning. Rather a different kind of *weak, fallible*<sup>2</sup> a priori is being introduced which can be described better as a kind of general 'indefeasibility' instead of a logical impossibility of its falsity (Cf. Casullo, 2005). Defeasibility, in the future is then not excluded respect to new evidence. This because of the presence of cognitive *blind spots* relative to human nature and rationality in general.

I leave the question of the a priori open, as it is not central to my argument, and I concentrate now on Boghossian's criticism of Brandom's position.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Horwich 2000, Marabini 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Casullo 2005.

One of the problems of Brandom's view, which Boghossian assimilates to MEC is, according to him, that it doesn't seem true that if my taking A to be a reason for believing B is constitutive of my believing B, that automatically absolves me of any charge of epistemic blameworthiness. As there are cases in which acceptance of an inference is written in the possession condition of a concept but where it is clear that the inference is not one to which the thinker is entitled to (Boghossian, 2003: 241). Tonk's<sup>1</sup> Prior famous example shows this. But also racist or abusive Boche-like concepts, discussed by Dummett, seem to expose the same problem, as it has been stressed before.

For instance, a thinker possesses the concept of Boche just in case he is disposed to infer according to its introduction and elimination rules we have described above (see p. 6). So Dummett and Brandom's MEC, in Boghossian's view, should be described as given by rules of respectively introduction and elimination, which form a theory 'T' of the concept, seen as the constitutive rules for 'Boche'. And our stipulation for the term meaning would result something of this kind:

$$T(\text{boche}): (1) Gx \rightarrow Bx \ \& \ (2) Bx \rightarrow Cx$$

Where 'T' is a theory for 'boche' given by its introduction and elimination rules. Yet no one is entitled – Boghossian stresses – to the view that all Germans are cruel, but that is exactly what would be implied by the MEC. (Cf. Boghossian, 2003b: 10, Boghossian 2003a: 242). According to Boghossian, the problem with this approach to MEC, is that it requires a commitment to the existence of the property corresponding to the concept, in grasping its introductory and eliminatory rules. Problems are more evident with concept we would never commit to, like our 'Boche', of a racist and immoral kind for many of us.

Boghossian's ensuing proposal, then, is to restrict the MEC to just certain concepts from which the *entitlement* really does flow. (Cf. Boghossian 2013a: 242). This general way of conceiving of MEC is strongly modified by Boghossian in a way that depends on its conception of the normativity of meaning, not strictly correctness-based.

Let me now explain Boghossian's proposal in more detail. I said above that the interesting strategy is that of giving a link between the epistemic state of

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<sup>1</sup> See note 8.

acting according to a rule and a belief state. This link reflects the idea that what is primarily normative is a belief because it has a link with the truth, as it is constitutive of belief its aiming at truth, whereas meaning is not genuinely normative: it only derives its link to truth from belief. In this way we derive a sort of modal 'ought' that makes the content of belief like a norm for us without requiring additional state like motivation and so on.

So the kind of correctness involved here goes in the direction of inquiring the nature of the 'ought' so generated from belief. An important fact is that the 'ought' might be intended in two ways (Cf. Boghossian, 2005). These appear to correspond, following Gibbard, to an *absolute* sense and a more *relative* sense of belief:

1) 'ought' as corresponding to belief in an absolute sense (genuinely normative rule), as explained by the sentence

(AR) We ought to believe everything that is true,

and

2) 'ought' as corresponding to belief in a regulative, prescriptive sense (prescriptive rule, derived normativity), as explained by the sentence

(RR) If something is true, we should believe it.

Since (AR) is impossible for us to follow (because we, as humans have limited capacities and we can't believe all that is true), we act in practice as (RR) requires. Although (AR) is a principle of belief, we act more like a regulative (prescriptive) rule (RR) requires. We adopt in fact some rules to approximate to principles that are impossible for us to follow. Meaning has a nature of this kind, even if it is indirectly tied also to belief in the first sense. From this it follows that if it is belief in the strong sense, that is strictly connected to the truth, then, according to Boghossian (Cf. Boghossian, 2005: 210), meaning, which is connected to belief in the second sense of belief, has a link to the truth only in this derivative way. So all this has some bearings on the way we conceive (a) *rules* (intended as *prescriptive* rules, of derivative normativity) and (b) *principles*, the primarily normative rule.

An example of this difference makes its appearance in questions regarding

the justification of our inferential and epistemic rules<sup>1</sup>. Once the notion of the norm underlying meaning has been clarified, let's go back to Boghossian's revised notion of MEC, now called MEC\*. Note that one important feature of our concepts appears to be that of permitting us to disagree about their extensions. For example, for ordinary scientific terms like 'neutrino', we don't think of the rules of our possession condition of the concept as corresponding to the propositions that would be actually believed by a proponent of neutrino's theory. Rather, we think of these rules as corresponding to the propositions that one who was *conditionalising* on the truth of neutrino's theory would be willing to believe.

So the revised 'T' theory for *boche*, otherwise called '#P', is represented here by a conditional which Boghossian borrows from Carnap. According to Boghossian's view, the link between the expression 'P' of a concept and its theory '#P', thought of as a cluster of inferences characterized by the introduction and elimination rules, is now a *normative* commitment which characterizes the expression 'P' in first instance as a *principle*. This should have

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of inferential and epistemic *rules* and inferential and epistemic *principles* are the following:

Principles (normative rules)

(Epistemic) (EP1) If S is in good lighting conditions and ..., then if it visually appears to S that there is an x in front of him, S is *prima facie* justified in believing that there is an x in front of him.

(Inferential):

(EP2) If S is justified in believing p and in believing 'If p then q', and S infers q from p, then S is *prima facie* justified in believing q.

Rules (prescriptive rules)

(Epistemic)

(ER1) If lighting conditions are good and ..., and it visually seems to you as if there is an x in front of you, then believe that there is an x in front of you.

(Inferential)

(ER2) If you are justified in believing that p, and in believing that 'If p, then q', then believe q or give up one of the other beliefs.

ER1 and ER2 are examples of RR normativity, while EP1 and EP2 are examples of normativity of AR rules kind. In Boghossian's view EP1 and EP2 encode objective facts not accessible to us, but which we should think as 'real' any way. If we want to allow for true beliefs. We will see how the difference between principle and rules, based on the double nature of belief, absolute intended, or embedded in ordinary context, will turn out to be fundamental. In other passages that are not directly object matter of our inquiry here, we see how the supposed difference has a role in explaining the kind of entitlement, that is of a priori justification, that rules RR will receive in taking account of cognitive 'blind' spots in our human reasoning (Cf. Boghossian 2001: 2-4; Marabini 2013: 232 ).

the advantage of giving an account of the openness of the meaning of ‘f’ and its continuous evolution.

The new form of the theory #f for Carnap’s conditional expressing meaning (M)

(M)  $(\exists x)fx \rightarrow \#f$

bears on the way to intend the constraint that allows for the selection of the sentences, among all those including f, which are relevant to determine the meaning of f. (Cf. Wright and Hale, 2000) Here ‘f’ is the expression of a concept, for instance ‘Boche’, while the theory #f for f is given by its introduction and elimination rules: I-rule, E-rule of the concept denoted by f following the inferential Dummettian manner in a Gentzen Natural Deduction fashion. According to Boghossian’s MEC\*, our T theory is split up in two parts:

A Ramsey sentence

S)  $(\exists x) fx$

[There exists a property for ‘f’]

A Carnap conditional<sup>1</sup>

M)  $(\exists x) fx \rightarrow \#f$

[If there exists a property for ‘f’, then its theory is given by f-introduction and f-elimination rules].

Accordingly, the alleged Dummett-Brandom

T (boche): (1)  $Gx \rightarrow Bx$  & (2)  $Bx \rightarrow Cx$  turns into this proposition:

T(CondBoche):  $\exists F T(F) \rightarrow T(\text{boche})$

[If there is a property ‘F’ such that T(F), then this property is T(boche) which corresponds to the inferential rules stated in ‘T’ for ‘boche’](Boghossian, 2003a, 2003b: 13-14)

This corresponds to the Carnap *linguistic* M conditional mentioned above.

A novelty of this conception of definition is, as I already said, that the cluster of inferences which constitute the #f theory – i.e. the introduction and elimination rules – is not thought of as constitutive of a meaning conceived of as a substantive notion, in Brandom and Dummett’s fashion. Rather, this

<sup>1</sup> *Carnap conditional* is borrowed by Boghossian from Carnap’s analysis of the meaning of theoretical concepts like *temperature*. A theory of meaning for these scientific terms results here as factorized in due parts of which one is the conditional (Cfr. Carnap 1956, 1958, 1963, 1966).

cluster of inferences is intended to be – in line with a non-substantive *linguistic* conception of meaning – an ‘open’ notion.

According to Boghossian, the Brandom-Dummett’s substantive notion requires a commitment to the belief in the inferences that define the meaning of the relevant concept/term. This would involve believing that the Germans are cruel every time the expression ‘Boche’ is used, perhaps even when it is used to express just disagreement on this concept’s extension. By replacing it with a genuinely normative conception of meaning, it becomes possible to think of the possession condition of the concept of ‘boche’ as given only by the linguistic conditional M alone, and not by S as well, which constitutes the empirical, substantive content. Now it becomes possible to wonder whether there is anything which falls under it and to disagree about whether there is.

For Boghossian, this view characterizes *non-defective* concepts, which is what can answer the challenge of boche-like concepts that was first posed by Dummett and then Brandom’s inferentialist theory in making evident the consequences that endorsing the required commitments was leading to. Inferences are then constitutive of the linguistic, rather than material, *norms* underwritten by the M conditionals expressing meaning. So meaning is expressed by the norm underwritten by the *relation* expressed by the entire conditional. This view corresponds, for Boghossian, to a *new version* of Meaning Entitlement Connection (MEC\*) (Cf. Boghossian 2003: 16), according to which entitlement would follow from a more genuine conception of meaning and inferentialism.

## § 6.

Let me make now two points:

As we have seen, for Brandom, the norm of rationality is not monotonic. Take for instance the case of the bank employee just considered. Here, this norm is the one underwritten by a cluster of inferences of the same kind which refer in that example, to the institutional role of a ‘bank employee’ taken into account. Moreover it is made explicit by terms like ‘ought’. The case looks not so different from Boghossian’s M conditional conception of content.

Anyway, as we have seen, the kind of ‘ought’ underwritten by Boghossian M conditional expressing meaning normativity refers to the norm of belief. According to Boghossian, this norm is truth conducive, as the state of belief always aims at the truth (Cf. Boghossian 2005).

Now the norm of belief is the norm of a mental state which, according to Boghossian, should be conceived of, not objective in a classic conception of objectivity which requires the belief in *everything* that is true (Cf. Boghossian, 2005: 210), rather the objectivity of the *principle* requires the belief *only of* what is true, as we have remarked above. This different conception of the norm as representative of the objectivity of the principle, and then of the status of belief as a mental state, permits us to take into account, so to speak, the blind spots of human reasoning. Following an objective norm, according to Boghossian, doesn't mean to be able to give account of *all possible* examples it grounds. Rather, it means to be able to give account of the ones that the speakers are able to conceive of as human beings. These considerations bear on Boghossian's conception of the 'ought' at the base of semantic content. Where this semantic content is, as we have seen above, split in two components of which only the second represents the norm of belief and so of the rationality grounding the normative conception of meaning. Given a normative and not substantive conception of meaning, a different kind of connection between meaning and entitlement follows. It leads in fact to the idea that introduction and elimination rules, or more generally inferential rules, are constitutive of a linguistic *norm* characterizing meaning (MEC\*), rather than meaning conceived as substantive (MEC) (Cf. Boghossian, 2003a: 244, 2003b: 16) as in Brandom's view.

Boghossian's view of meaning is intended to allow for disagreement on concept extension and factual import that are not genuinely taken into account in other conceptions of meaning and inferentialism, such as Brandom's. A problem arise nonetheless, in my opinion, because the M linguistic conditional expressing normative meaning of terms like 'Boche' for instance, though more open than previous accounts of inferentialism, cannot take into account of new factual import. This is due to the particular nature of the theory T or #f figuring in the consequent of Carnap's conditional. Notice that Brandom's conditional on the contrary for the non-monotonic character and its material notion of inference seems to allow factual import. But I will not pursue this issue here, as it is not central to my main focus.

#### § 7.

The criticism of Boghossian's view that I would like to articulate here is this: it neglects an important difference between Dummett's and Brandom's conception of substantive meaning. This is due to a diverse notion of the norm underwriting it. With regard to 'Boche-like' concepts, Brandom doesn't seem to think that these cases uncover a problem of his view. Rather he thinks that

these concepts reveal important features of meaning and conceptual content in relation to the commitments they lead to. For the apparent problem can be explained away simply in terms of acceptance or refusal of commitments. Brandom emphasizes that evaluating introduction and consequences of Boche involves, not determining whether the inference is one that is already endorsed, so that no new content is really involved as Dummett would put it, but, rather, determining whether that inference is one that *ought* to be endorsed. Dummett's notion of 'harmony' implies that the 'boche-like' concept be only a conservative extension of previous concepts already involved in the theory before its introduction, but figuring in its introduction and elimination inferential rules.

The underlying idea results for Brandom in some sense similar to the one underwriting the formally valid inference implying conditional 'detachment' that I have previously considered to elucidate its difference respect to material inference. An example can clarify this case.

Given  $p$  = 'it's raining' and  $q$  = 'the streets will be wet', and  $r$  = 'There is an awning', there is no point, for Brandom, in deducing that from the fact that  $p$  &  $r \rightarrow \sim q$  (if it's raining *and* there is an awning, then the streets will not be wet) one can derive that the norm expressed by the conditional

$p \rightarrow q$  (if it's raining, then the streets will be wet) (Brandom, 2000: 88)

it's not a good argument.

But this is, for Brandom, exactly what Dummett's wrong argument of harmony risks to amount to, in front of the so called 'Boche-like' concept fallacy.

Brandom's strategy, on the contrary admits the possibility to intend 'boche-like' content as *novel* content in a way similar to the introduction of theoretical expression like in science the term 'temperature', that are introduced by conditionals that do not require conditional "detachment", but that at the same time, manifest a norm *ceteris paribus*.

This *ceteris paribus* requirement compatible with a non-monotonic character is what renders Brandom's normativity of meaning apt to discuss of a same content allowing disagreement and different individual perspectives on it. Brandom's strategy aims to propose an alternative to Dummett's requirement of 'harmony' between circumstances and consequences of application of the concept.

This difference is due to the diverse view of the norm underlying conceptual content which amounts to a monotonic view in Dummett's requirement of 'harmony' rather than a *non-monotonic* character in Brandom's notion of conceptual content. And the same differentiation seems to me at the end to distinguish Brandom's inferentialism from Boghossian's critical approach.

This fact shows once more the way Brandom intends his notion of commitment. For one could criticize the concept on the basis of *substantial belief* without allowing the inference from premises to conclusion. In this way one would not in fact commit oneself to the inference from the obvious fact that there is someone, an x, and x is German to the conclusion that x is cruel. This move involves the idea that material inference commitments are a necessary part of the practices that include material *doxastic* commitment. 'Harmony' then becomes, for Brandom, a question of which material inference, and then of which concepts we *ought* to endorse (Cf. Brandom, 2000: 75) without rejecting the conditionals representing the rules underwriting the use in communication of the concept 'Boche'.

To go back to our case, there is no need for Brandom, to refuse the conditional 'if x is boche, then x is a cruel German' expressing the *normative* content of 'boche' to use the term meaningfully while at the same time assessing it. What a speaker must do it is rather to refuse to accept its *validity* by refusing to endorse the corresponding belief. The refusal would be, for Brandom, the result of an 'incompatibility' relation coming out of an interaction between assertional inferences, the commitments, and consequential inferences, the entitlements to other inferences that the concept would lead to. Therefore, for Brandom the perceived problem does not consist in the concept of Boche turning out to be novel once we consider the material inferential commitments it involves. The perceived problem is, rather, that the *commitments appear inappropriate* so that we could *not* be entitled to them.

## §. 8

So let me now draw my conclusions. In Brandom's view someone who rejects a word such as, for instance, 'boche' does so because he does not want to permit a transition from the grounds for applying the term to the consequences of doing so. A concept can be criticized if it involves a material

inference not already implicit in the other contents employed, on the basis of substantive beliefs. About this Brandom makes an important observation

Outside of logic, this is no bad thing. Conceptual progress in science often consists in introducing just such novel contents. The concept of temperature was introduced with certain criteria or circumstances of appropriate application, and certain consequences of application. As new ways of measuring temperature are introduced, and new theoretical and practical consequences of temperature measurements adopted, the complex inferential commitment that determines the significance of using the concept of temperature evolves. The proper question to ask in evaluating the introduction and evolution of a concept is not whether the inference embodied is one that is already endorsed, so that no new content is really involved, but rather whether that inference is one that *ought* to be endorsed. The problem with ‘Boche’ or ‘nigger’ is not that once we explicitly confront the material inferential commitment that gives the term its content it turns out to be novel, but that it can then be seen to be indefensible and inappropriate—a commitment we cannot become entitled to. We want to be aware of the inferential commitments our concepts involve, to be able to make them explicit, and to be able to justify them. But there are other ways of justifying them than showing that we were already implicitly committed to them before introducing or altering the concept in question. (Cf. Brandom, 2001: 71)

First, against Dummett’s requisite of ‘harmony’ to answer the criticism raised against the inferentialist approach by the ‘boche-like’ concepts, Brandom suggests here, that there are other ways of justifying the commitments that our concepts involve, than showing, - I add- like Dummett would say- that we were implicitly committed to them before introducing the concept in question. Second, contrary to Boghossian’s criticism, this passage emphasises an important aspect of the substantive conception of meaning undertaken by Brandom’s argument. First of all, a relevant question regards ‘blindness’. The term refers, for Brandom, to what corresponds to the blindspots of reasoning, namely, those parts of reasoning that the speakers must consider reliable without any inferential structure before being able to articulate them in patterns of inferences, like the case of ‘red’ or ‘ought’ terms we have spoken of above. Although in Brandom’s view, their content structure bears on a material notion of inference that is a substantive conception of meaning, nonetheless Brandom characterization of content is given in terms of the norm which underwrites it. But this norm, as I have indicated above, is not undermined in case the same gives rise to an invalid argument when an implicit premise is added to the present premise. This fact, as Brandom remarks, doesn’t show that the norm

was an invalid one, and doesn't commit anyone to refuse it. Simply it is still possible to treat it as a norm for which a 'ceteris paribus'<sup>1</sup> alleged propriety, except in particular cases, can still be preserved, but to indicate its *non-monotonicity*. An interlocutor can still make discussion about this conceptual content and evaluate it, simply he will not endorse it. What makes explicit the endorsement of a pattern of material practical inferences (practical rules) in appreciating or evaluating a norm is the normative vocabulary like 'ought' 'prefer' 'obliged'. I didn't stress this point before, but it is important to emphasize that different patterns of inference should be understood as corresponding to different sorts of norms, underwriting content. And it doesn't preclude in my view the possibility of a disagreement on its extension while in the meantime allowing meaning implementation and knowledge extension in a continuous comparison with experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Brandom 2000: 88.

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# مغامرة الاستدلال حوار مع روبرت براندوم

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Traduction<sup>1</sup> de l'anglais par Farhat MLAYEH (Education Inspector)

## Résumé.

La philosophie analytique, du moins dans les études littéraires, semble une quête aride axée sur les problèmes techniques du langage, souvent véhiculés dans les symboles mathématiques de la logique formelle. Cependant, tout comme la théorie littéraire est tout à fait différente des portraits communs de celui-ci, la philosophie analytique diffère de ces images et a considérablement changé depuis Rudolph Carnap. Robert Brandom est un philosophe analytique : loin de suivre une tradition rationaliste, il plaide pour une perspective révisionniste, estimant que nous obtenons le sens par inférence plutôt que par référence à un état de choses. A la place des arguments bien compartimentés de la philosophie analytique, souvent pris dans un seul essai, il se donne pour but de construire plutôt une philosophie systématique, notamment dans son livre *Making It Explicit : Reasonnement, Représenter, et engagement discursif* (Harvard UP, 1994).

## Mots-clés.

Brandom, philosophie analytique, sens, engagement, inférence

## ملخص.

تبدو الفلسفة التحليلية - على الأقل بالنسبة إلى المشتغلين بالدراسات الأدبية - مسعى قاحلاً يُركز على المشكلات التقنية للغة، والتي تتجلى غالباً في الرموز الرياضية للمنطق الصوري. ومع ذلك، فكما أن النظرية الأدبية تختلف تماماً عن الصور الدارجة الممثلة لها، فإن الفلسفة التحليلية تختلف كذلك عن مثل تلك الصور، وقد تغيرت بشكل ملحوظ منذ أيام «رودلف كارناب». وعلى الرغم من كون «براندوم» فيلسوفاً تحليلياً مخلصاً للتقليد العقلاني، إلا أنه دافع عن منظور تنقيحي يقضي بتحصيل المعنى من الاستدلال بدلاً من الإشارة إلى حالة بعينها. وعضواً عن الحجج المجتزأة في جُل الفلسفة التحليلية، والتي يتم

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<sup>1</sup> تجدر الإشارة إلى أن العنوان العربي من وضع المترجم لنص الحوار بين براندوم وجيفري ويليامس بديلاً للعنوان الأصلي "رجل الاستدلال".

الظفر بها غالبًا في مقال واحد ، اتجه «براندوم» إلى بناء فلسفة نسقية، لاسيما في كتابه «لنقلها صراحةً: الاستنتاج، التمثيل، والالتزام الخطابي» (منشورات جامعة هارفارد، 1994)

**كلمات مفتاحية.**

برندوم، فلسفة تحليلية، معنى، اشتباك، استدلال.

**Abstract.**

Analytic philosophy, at least to those in literary studies, seems an arid pursuit focused on technical problems of language, often conveyed in the mathematical symbols of formal logic. However, just as literary theory is quite different from common portraits of it, analytic philosophy differs from such images and has changed considerably since the days of Rudolph Carnap. Robert Brandom is an analytic philosopher, but while following in its rationalist tradition, he argues for a revisionary perspective, holding that we obtain meaning through inference rather than reference to a state of affairs. And rather than the compartmentalized arguments of much analytic philosophy, often captured in a single essay, he has aimed to construct a systematic philosophy, notably in his book, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Harvard UP, 1994).

**Keywords.**

Brandom, analytic philosophy, meaning, commitment, inference.

تبدو الفلسفة التحليلية – على الأقل عند أصحاب الدراسات الأدبية - مضمارا جافًا يركز على المشاكل التقنية للغة وعادة ما يكون محملا الرموز الرياضية للمنطق الصوري، غير أن تصوّر النظرية الأدبية مختلف تمام الاختلاف عن حقيقة الفلسفة التحليلية إذ لاصلة لها بهذه الارتسامات إضافة إلى ما طرأ عليها من تغييرات حاسمة منذ أيام رودولف كارناب (Rudolph Carnap). ويعتبر روبرت براندوم (Robert Brandom) فيلسوفا تحليليًا لكنه عوض مجازاة التقاليد العقلانية لهذه الفلسفة فقد اتخذ أفقا للمراجعة اعتبر بمقتضاه أننا نحصل على المعنى من طريق الاستدلال بدلا عن الاستناد إلى حالة الوقائع، وعوض الاعتماد عن الحجج المجزأة والمفردة المبتوثة في سائر أعمال الفلسفة التحليلية، فإنه قصد إلى بناء فلسفة نسقية خصوصا في كتابه ذي 741 صفحة الموسوم ب: ( *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive* )

(Commitment (Harvard UP, 1994)، ومن مواقفه الجديدة أيضا إدماج بعض المذاهب غير التقليدية في تصوّره الخاص للفلسفة التحليليّة من قبيل البراجماتية (pragmatism) والفلسفة الهيكلية، وعضوا عن تجاهل تاريخ الفلسفة فهو غالبا ما يستحضر "الموتى الكبار"

لقد اكتسب روبرت براندوم قبل أن ينشر كتابه (Making It Explicit) سمعة من خلال مقالاته وبحوثه غير المنشورة ودروسه باعتباره منتميا إلى مدرسة بيتسبورغ (Pittsburgh School) للفلسفة رفقة زملاء من بينهم ويلفريد سيلرز (Wilfrid Sellars) وجون ماكديويل (John McDowell) وآخرين، إضافة إلى ذلك فقد شارك في تأليف كتاب (The Logic of Inconsistency, Blackwell, 1980) مع زميله نيكولا راشر (Nicholas Rescher)، ثم عقب نشره لكتابه (Making it Explicit) تولى شرح نسقه في كتاب جديد بعنوان (Rescher Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism, Harvard UP, ) وفي كتابه التّالي (Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the ) (2000). وفي كتابه (Metaphysics of Intentionality (Harvard UP, 2002) قدّم رحلته الخاصّة في تاريخ الفلسفة من لايبنيّز (Leibniz) وهيغل (Hegel) مروراً بـ فريجة (Frege) وصولاً إلى سالرس (Sellars)، ومن خلال كتابه اللاحق (Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism (Oxford UP, 2008) عرض مساهمته في فلسفة المنطق. وفي كتابين آخرين يحمل الأول عنوان (Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas Harvard UP, 2009) ويحمل الثاني عنوان (Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, ) (UP, 2009) وجمع براندوم بعض محاولاته مُنهيًا مصنّفًا طال انتظاره حول هيغل.

بالإضافة إلى ذلك نشر براندوم مجموعة من الكتب حول سيلرز (Sellars) وحول أستاذه ريتشارد رورتي (Richard Rorty)، من بينها كتابه (Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind (Harvard UP, 1997) الذي اهتم فيه بمحاولات سالرس حول الموضوع، ومن بينها أيضا كتابه (Rorty and His Critics (Blackwell, 2000) وكتابه (In The Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars (Harvard UP, 2007). ثمّة أيضا بعض الكتب الأخرى التي ألّفت حول أعمال روبرت براندوم ومنها الكتاب الذي ألفه جيرمي

واندرر (Jeremy Wanderer)<sup>1</sup>، والكتاب الذي أشرف عليه كلٌّ من برنارد وايس وجيري واندردر<sup>2</sup>، وكتاب ثالث أكثر شموليّة ألفه شانسي ماير (Chauncey Maher)<sup>3</sup>، ويمكن أيضا التّظّر في مقالة ريشارد رورتي حول براندوم الواردة في كتابه الذي يحمل عنوان الحقيقة والتّطوّر<sup>4</sup>.

ولد براندوم سنة 1950 بنيويورك وتحصل على الليسانس من جامعة يال سنة 1972 ثم على الدكتوراه من جامعة برنستون سنة 1976 حيث عمل مع ريشارد رورتي ودافيد لويس وتلقّى دروسا عن دونالد دايفدسون (Donald Davidson) وآخرين، ثم تولى التّدرّيس بجامعة بتسبورغ منذ ذلك الحين رغم أنّه يقدّم أغلب محاضراته في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكيّة وأوروبّا.

جرى هذا الحوار يوم 9 جويلية 2013 في مكتب روبرت براندوم بجامعة بتسبورغ، وأداره أستاذ اللغة الانجليزيّة بجامعة كارنيجي ملّون جيفري ويليامس (Jeffrey J. Williams)، ودوّنته طالبة ماجستير اللغة الانجليزيّة بريجيت جين باورس (Bridgette Jean Powers) بنفس الجامعة.

جيفري ويليامس: ما هي الفلسفة عندك باختصار؟

روبرت براندوم: أعتقد أنّ الفلسفة موصولة بكلّ ما يجعل منّا بشرا، كثير من الأشياء موصولة بهذا المعنى غير أنّ الفلاسفة يهتمون تحديدا ببعد واحد، هو البعد الذي يُدرجنا ضمن الثقافة الأعلى أي ما يجعلنا مخلوقات تطلب وتُعطي بدوافع معلومة وذلك بعض ما أفهم مما يُدرج تحت مُسمّى الاستدلال. ما العقل فينا؟ ما الذي يجعلنا كائنات عاقلة؟، من يحيي العقل؟ ومن يحتاجه؟ إنّي أهتم بفهم بني البشر باعتبارهم كائنات تُعرّف بكونها كائنات تحيا في فضاء نمطيّ للعقل، هذه الاهتمامات وسمت أصول

<sup>1</sup> Robert Brandom (McGill/Queen's UP, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> Reading Brandom: On Making It Explicit (Routledge, 2010)

<sup>3</sup> The Pittsburgh School of Philosophy: Sellars, McDowell, and Brandom (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Brandom on Social Practices and Representations," in Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 3* (Cambridge UP, 1998)

الفلسفة في اليونان القديمة حيث فتنت القوة النمطية للعقل الأمثل كلاً من أفلاطون وأرسطو وحيّرتهم، وكذا الحال بالنسبة إلى الفلاسفة المعاصرين.

جيفري ويليامس: يمكن الإقرار أيضاً بأنّ الأدب والفنّ يهتمان بمعنى الإنسان وبأنّ علم النفس وعلم الاجتماع وعلم السياسة تهتم بكيفية التصرف كإنسان.

روبرت براندوم: من الممكن أن يعتني منظرو الأدب بكينونتنا اللسانية غير أنّ ما يُميز الفلاسفة أنّ اهتماماتهم تتسع لتشمل كينونة لسانية تستخدم الاستدلال والحجاج والقياس. يمكن لعلماء النفس أن يهتموا بالتعميمات الاختبارية لطريقة تعقلنا، غير أنّ الفلاسفة يهتمون بالأفكار بما هي نمط، يهتمون بما يتعين فيه التفكير، يهتمون بالأفكار التي تُمكننا أو تُجبرنا على التفكير في بعض الأشياء التي تبدو مستقلة عن الأفكار التي نؤمن بها في الوقت الحاضر. أمّا منظرو السياسة فيهتمون بوجودنا الاجتماعيّ الزاخر بالأفكار والمحتاج لها في آن، وبنفس القدر يهتمون بالعلاقات القائمة على منطق القوة، تلك العلاقات التي لا تتعايش بالضرورة مع القوة النمطية للعقل الأمثل، لقد دافع فوكو (Foucault) على أن منح الأفكار أو استدعاءها بات سمة تمييزية أو شكلاً حديثاً تثوي فيه علاقات القوة، غير أنّ هذا المشغل هو مشغل فلسفيّ أكثر من كونه مشغلاً سياسياً أو تنظيرياً.

جيفري ويليامس: أنا مهتمّ بمعرفة رأيك في السياسة لكن ما مدور الفلسفة اليوم؟

روبرت براندوم: إنّ الفكرة الفلسفية المميّزة في القرن العشرين كانت اعتبار اللّغة شكلاً حاملاً لمعيارية الخطاب، وهذا الأمر صحيح سواء من جهة الفلسفة القارية أو الفلسفة التحليلية، ذلك أنّ فلاسفة اللّغة اليوم في العالم الأنجلو أمريكي يبحثون خصوصاً في الأساليب التي نستعملها لبيان مدى وجاهة أفكارنا، إنهم يحاولون من جهة فهم التنوع الحاصل في أشكال التفسير من قبيل حجج المعرفة الشرطية، ومن جهة ثانية يحاولون فهم الكيفية التي بها تسم العبارات المعيارية وتنوع الضروقات القوة المعيارية للأفكار التي

ننتجها أو نتقبلها، إنَّ المعيارِيَّ ينقل فهمنا للسلطة والمسؤولية والالتزام والاستحقاق. وإني أعتقد أنَّ أفضل إضافة قدَّمتها الفلاسفة المعاصرون للثقافة أتهم طوَّروا مفهوم المعيارية الأخلاقية باعتبارها تختلف عن أيِّ مفهوم دينيٍّ مضمون أو مُسقط للمعايير، إنَّ فلسفة التنوير التي بلغت ذروتها مع كانط (Kant) هي التي أنتجت أساساً فكرة المعيارية الأخلاقية التي لم تكن أبداً ذات طبيعة قانونية أو تحوطية أو دينية. إنَّ اهتمامي المركزيَّ ينصبُّ على المعيارية الضمنيةِّ فينا باعتبارنا كائنات خطيبة أيِّ باعتبارنا كائنات تعتمد التصرُّور، مما يمكن وصله بالمعيارية الأخلاقية بطرق شديدة التعقيد.

جيفري وليامس: يرى كثيرون في النَّقد الأدبي أن عبارة المعيارية ليست مناسبة إذ يرون فيها قيوداً اجتماعياً مسلطاً على الأفراد، غير أنَّ الطَّرِقة التي يفهم بها أغلب الفلاسفة المعيارية تبدو بمعنى آخر أكثر تقنية متى اتَّصلت بالمعنى اللسانيِّ.

روبرت براندوم: إنَّ المفهوم الاساسيَّ للقيمية يتجسَّد في المعنى الذي بمقتضاه أُلزم نفسي بنتائج معينة من خلال تطبيق بعض التصرُّورات، هذا الأمر يخولني للقيام ببعض الخطوات ويمنعني من القيام بأخرى. أعتقد أنَّ هذا المعنى هو من الاكتشافات المترتبة عن تطوُّر مفهوم القيميَّة بعيداً عن مقابلته مع مفهوم الحرية ذلك أنَّ مفهوم التقيد بالقيم في الوقت الحاضر يجعل من مفهوم الحرية ممكناً...نحن مقيِّدون بالقيم بديلاً عن تقيدنا بقوانين الطبيعة والنسبة إلى كانط وفي التقاليد المثالية الألمانية عموماً فإنَّ مفهوم الحرية باعتباره مفهوماً مغلولاً بالقيم هو جزء من مفهوم الاستقلالية.

لا تكون القيم ملزمة إلا بقدر ما دعمها الفرد واعتمد عليها، وعندما أُلزم نفسي بقيم الخطاب لاسيما ما اتَّصل منها بمحتوى التصرُّورات فإنَّ ذلك بمثل أساس حرية التعبير الكبرى، تماماً مثلما ابتنى شومسكي لنا بيتاً طيلة النَّصف الثاني من القرن الماضي، ذلك أنَّ تفكير شومسكي يبدأ من ملاحظة أنَّ كلَّ جملة يُنتجها متكلِّم كهل هي جديدة كلياً لا فقط من جهة أنَّ المتكلِّم لم ينتج أو لم يسمع تركيباً شبيهاً للكلمات من قبل بل هي

جديدة أيضا من جهة أنه يكاد يكون من المؤكد أن لا أحد في تاريخ العالم أنتج أو سمع جملة على هذا النحو. إنَّ حرّية التعبير هذه تمكّنتنا من تقبّل إمكانات جديدة لماهيّة طبيعة الأشياء أو ما يمكن أن تكون عليه، إنَّها تمكّنتنا أيضا من تقبّل أهداف وخطط جديدة... إنَّ هذا المفهوم للقيميّة الخطابية باعتبارها قيما مُحرّرا يُعدّ أحد الأفكار الاساسيّة للمثاليّة الألمانيّة.

جيفري ويليامس: يمكن تصنيف أعمالك ضمن التقاليد التحليليّة، وقد يرى بعض النّاس المتعاطفين مع التقاليد القاريّة بأنّ الفلسفة التحليليّة شديدة الجمود وتكاد تتحوّل إلى الوضعيّة. يبدو لي أنّ الفلسفة التحليليّة في طور مراجعة الأن وإن كانت كذلك فهل بإمكانك أن تحدّثنا عن منزلتها.

روبرت براندوم: أنا لا أعتبر نفسي فيلسوفا تحليليا، صحيح أنّي تدرّبت لأكون فيلسوفا تحليليا ولكن رفقة أستاذي ريشار رورتي (Richard Rorty) عرفت أنّ قوّة الفلسفة التحليليّة في ما طرحه من تساؤلات حول الوضوح الذي نعبر به عن التزاماتنا التي نضطلع بها و المواقف التي نبحث فيها، أعتقد أنّ أفضل ما أقوم به هو أن أقارب الفلسفة التحليليّة بمنهجية واحدة، لكن بالنسبة إلى الفيلسوف القاريّ يحتاج الفهم الواحد للإشكاليّات الفلسفيّة كثيرا من التّفكير.

جيفري ويليامس: هذا ما يجعلك مختلفا عن فلاسفة تحليليين كثيرين.

روبرت براندوم: في الواقع، أعتقد أنّه من المهمّ أن نُثمن تغيّر الفلسفة التحليليّة ونموّها خلال القرن العشرين وهذا القرن، لقد وُلدت الفلسفة التحليليّة خارج فهم الأفراد للغة، لكن مع الدفقات الأولى لوصولنا إلى ملاحظة الدلالة الصّوريّة والرياضيّة والتّقنيّة والمنطقية للغات، فإنّ الفلسفة التحليليّة قد أُعيد تشكيلها حول الفكرة القائلة بأنّ فهمنا لهذه اللّغات الصّوريّة هو مفتاح فهمنا للغات الطّبيعيّة. لقد كان الأمل إمكان إرساء علم دلالة رياضيّ وفي مستهلّ الأمر كنّا نراقب تقنيّا وعلميّا فهم المعاني وهو ما لم

يحدث من قبل مطلقان إنَّ الفكرة المثيرة التي رافقت ميلاد الفلسفة التحليلية هي أنَّ الأدوات التقنية التي مكنتنا من الظفر الرياضي بالمعنى في اللغات المنطقية والرياضية هي ذاتها يمكن توسيعها لتجعلنا قادرين على مهم المعاني المعبر عنها في اللغات الطبيعية حتى في الاستعمالات الأدبية. إنَّه من الإنصاف القول بأنَّ هذا الأمر أصبح أكثر صعوبة مما كان يعتقد النَّاس في البداية ذلك أنَّ إشكال العلاقة بين علم الدلالة النَّاجع في اللغات الصناعيّة وبين فهمنا الدلاليّ للغات الطبيعيّة، يظلّ مجالاً للجدال ومركزاً للبحث صلب الفلسفة التحليلية، لكن من المهمّ أن نُدرك بأنَّ الفلسفة التحليلية كانت قد بدأت شأنًا أقلّيًا منبوذاً في الفلسفة الانقلاوأمريكية. وفي طريقها لتحقيق ضرب من الهيمنة التي تتمتع بها اليوم في علم اجتماع الاختصاص بالعالم الناطق بالإنجليزية، فإنَّ من بين الأسلحة التي تستعملها هو نوع من المبدأ الإقصائي الذي لا فقط يدفع باتجاه أن الفلسفة تكون من سبيل واحد أوحد بل يدافع هذا المبدأ الإقصائي على كون السبيل الأخرى لا تحقّق الفلسفة مطلقاً، إنَّهم ينجزون شيئاً أكثر قدماً وأقل قيمة مما أصبحت عليه الفلسفة وهذه النظرة وهذه النبرة كانتا متحكمتين في الفلسفة التحليلية خلال الستينيات.

جيفري ويليامس: إذا بالتالي فإنَّ الميتافيزيقا والتقاليد من هيغل (Hegel) إلى الفلسفة القارية المعاصرة محكومة بالظلال.

روبرت براندوم: إنَّ الميتافيزيقا هي بالمطلق خارج الحدود من ذلك أنَّ راسل (Russell) ومور (Moore) مؤسسي الفلسفة التحليلية قد رفضا مثاليتهما البريطانية الشابة والمستوحاة من هيغل (Hegel) و أسسا حركة جديدة ضدّه هيغل، إنَّهما يعتقدان في الواقع بأنَّ التسوّس المثالي قد تمكّن مع كانط (Kant) وإنَّ سماحه له بالاندراج ضمن شريعة الفلاسفة الماثورين سيجلب بشكلٍ حتّي هيغل (Hegel) إلى صفّه، وآن وعلى مدى الجيل الجديد شهدنا انبعثاً كبيراً للمشغل التحليلي عند كانط (Kant) وقد بدأنا بعدُ في ملاحظة ولادة جديدة للاهتمام بهيغل (Hegel) حتّي عند الفلاسفة التحليليين، هذا من بين الأشياء الأساسية عندي وكذا الأمر بالنسبة إلى زميلي

جون ماك دويل (John McDowell) في البرهنة عن المركزية المطلقة لكانط وهيكل لأي مهتم بطبيعة العقل ومعياريّة الخطاب، إذًا من التّادّار أن تجد بعض أقسام الفلسفة التحليليّة التي لها هذه التّزعّات الإقصائيّة..لقد عاد التّفكير المنهجيّ من جديد مُحترما تاريخ الفلسفة لا من جهة اعتبارها تخصّصا أثريا بل باستعمال ذات اللّغة التي يستعملها الفلاسفة المعاصرون وهذا يعدّ جزءا من الحكمة المتواضع عليهما في أيّامنا غير أننا نسمع بين الحين والآخر أصداء من القدامى بنبرة أكثر حدّة لكتمها تظلّ فعليّا شيئا عفا عليه الرّمن.

جيفري ويليامس: أعتقد أنّ هذا الأمر سيكون مفاجئا على الأرجح بالنّسبة إلى المشتغلين بالدرّاسات الأدبيّة، ويبدولي أنّك تهتمّ بشيء واحد في أعمالك هو أن تجمع بين تقاليد عدّة على سبيل المراجعة، أنت تحاول التّأليف بين تاريخ الفلسفة والدّرانيّة وقطعا هيكل (Hegel) والفلسفة التّحليليّة ثمّ تعود إلى النّظام، للفلسفة التّحليليّة على الأقلّ في نظري نفور من النّظام وهذا النّفور مشترك مع الفلسفة والنّظريّة القاريّة بقدر ما يهاجم الميتافيزيقا.

روبرت براندوم: إنّ دوافعي وميولي الشّخصيّة تآليفيّة بطبيعتها، ومن بين التّقاليد المعارضة لما تعرّف به الفلسفة التّحليليّة نفسها خصوصا في أمريكا، نجد الدّرانيّة الأمريكيّة التي كانت مهيمنة رسميا في شكلها الظّاهر عند ديوي (Dewey) في العشرينيات والثلاثينات من القرن المنصرم، ولم تكن كذلك لاحقا في مرحلة التّجسيد باهتمامها خصوصا بفلسفة العلوم الفيزيائيّة والمنطق الرّياضي الذين كانا من مركز الفلسفة التّحليليّة، وإذًا فإنّ أحد مظاهر الإقصاء الذي وسمت به الفلسفة التّحليليّة نفسها أواسط القرن كان الدّرانيّة. لقد أمعنت النّظر في شارلس ساندرس بيرس (Charles Sanders Peirce) ثمّ في جايمس (James) وديوي (Dewey) وثلاثتهم ذرّانيون أمريكيون من الجيل الذّهبي، لقد اهتمّ بيرس (Peirce) بفلسفة العلم وكان أحد أشهر المناطق في أيّامه، وعدّ ما تقدّم جزءا من ذرّانيّته وكانت مأخذه على الدّرانيّة دفعني إلى اعتماد طريقة رورتي (Rorty) في التّفكير، تلك الطّريقة التي غيرت من التّقاليد الدّرانيّة

الأمريكية، لقد كانت برنستون (Princeton) في السيتينات المركز أو فاتيكان الفلسفة التحليلية في تلك الأيام ثم أخذت المشعل عنها هارفارد اذ اشتغلت رفقة دافيد لويس (David Lewis) وريشارد رورتي (Richard Rorty). وكان لويس بالمثل في مركز ما عليه الفلسفة التحليلية اليوم أما رورتي فقد كان ذرائعياً مجدداً شهيراً في جيله. لقد قمت في قراءات لوك (Locke) بأكسفورد "بين القول والفعل" (Between Saying and Doing) بتلخيص التقاليد الذرائعية والتقاليد التحليلية وذلك دون الاهتمام باللغة باعتبارها بنية شكلية بل باعتبارها سمة للتاريخ الطبيعي للوجود تماماً مثلنا نحن، إن ما وجدناه بصورة عامة في التقاليد التحليلية هو تصوّر انتروبولوجي لافقط عند ديوي (Dewey) بل أيضاً عند هايدغار (Heidegger) في كتابه (الكينونة والزمان/Being and Time) وعند فتجنشتاين (Wittgenstein) في كتابه (مباحث فلسفية/ The Philosophical Investigations)، بالتالي فإنّ وعياً ذاتياً قد بدا تأليفاً بين تفكير التقاليد الذرائعية في اللغة والتقاليد التحليلية، وتمّ استثماره من قبل علم الدلالة الشكلي للرياضيات واللغات الصناعية. وبالنظر في الأفكار الثورية للمثالية الألمانية وخاصة ما تعلق بالمعيارية الخطابية والعلاقة بين العقل والحرية اللتين أشرت إليهما آنفاً، بالنظر إلى ذلك وجدت نفسي منشداً إلى قراءة كلّ من كانط وهيجل فقد ساعداني في التفكير في مواضيع أجدني باعتباري فيلسوفاً تحليلياً للغة مهتماً بها، إنّ المسارات العامة للمعرفة التي أقدمها تميل شيئاً فشيئاً إلى التأليف بين المثالية الألمانية والفلسفة التحليلية، وفي الواقع إلى الإمام بفتوحات الذرائعيين الأمريكيين والمثاليين الألمان تلك الفتوحات التي كان كل من بيرس وديوي واسعي المعرفة بها. إذا في اعتقادي لكلّ من التقاليد الثلاثة، الذرائعية الأمريكية والمثالية الألمانية والفلسفة التحليلية، نفس القدر من الأهمية على الرغم من أنّها كانت من ضمن الفلسفة التحليلية التي استوعبت هذه التأثيرات الأخرى.

جيفري ويليامس: تحدّثت في فصل من فصول كتاب "توجهات في الذرائعية" (Perspectives on Pragmatism) عن وجود نظرة واحدة للذرائعية تجسدها باعتبارها ربيبة فقيرة للفلسفة الأوروبية أو نسخة أمريكية للاستهلاك، غير أنّه توجد نسخة أخرى أكثر قوة.

روبرت براندوم: إذا ما سألت فيلسوفا ألمانيا معاصرا حول الذرائعية فإنه سيصفها بكونها نظرية اختزالية نفسانية تحاول فهم المعيارية كما لو كانت استيعابا لأنانية صاحب متجر بورجوازيّ يجيب عن كلّ سؤال يوجّه إليه بالقول: "حسنا ما وجه فائدتني في أمر كهذا؟ كيف أحصل بعض الفوائد منه؟"، هذه إجابة اختزالية وظيفية للأسئلة النظرية والابستمولوجية في صلة بالفلسفة العملية عند بنتام (Bentham) وميل (Mill). غير أنه توجد طريقة أخرى في التّظر إلى المسألة، تلك الطريقة التي قالها رورتي (Rorty) وليست أقل من تنوير ثان. لقد حكمت التنوير الأوّل فكرة الوجود الإنساني في وجهه العمليّ ضدا إزاء سيطرة بعض السلط غير البشرية رغم أنّ بعض المعايير التي يجب أن تحكم تفاعلاتنا في ما بيننا يمكن أن تُقرأ ميتافيزيقيا من خارج العالم، وهذا الأمر يعارض القول بأن من واجبنا اكتشاف المعايير الأخلاقية وتقرير نوعيّة السلوك المطلوب والواجب، وفي رؤية رورتي للذرائعية قد تحررنا من الفكرة القائلة بأنه في تطوّرا لطبيعة الأشياء فإننا خاضعون للمعايير التي كتبها أحدهم وضمّمها تصوّره لطبيعة العالم بدلا عن التّفكير في أنشطتنا العرفانية باعتبارها التزاما اجتماعيا حيث تُكتشف معايير الواجهة وتحدّد من قبل طالبي المعرفة. إنّ نظرتي الخاصّة للذرائعية تختلف شيئا ما عن نظرة رورتي لها ولكننا رغم ذلك نتقاسم القول بأنّ الذرائعيين ينبغي أن يُنظر إليهم في خطّ من كانط إلى هيقل، ومن خلال هذا التصوّر فإن أغلب الأفكار الاساسية لكانط تتحدّث عن عارفين أكبر من مجرد كائنات طبيعية، لقد أعاد كانط تصميم ذاتنا باعتبارنا كائنات معيارية، وقد حوّل هيقل هذا الإقرار الكانطي الأساسي إلى مفتاح اجتماعي، ذلك أنّ كلّ الأوضاع المعيارية هي بالنهاية أوضاع اجتماعية نتجت عن الاعتراف المتبادل، وقد استلهم فيتجنشتاين (Wittgenstein) الأخير هذا المفهوم دون أن يشتقه من كانط وهيقل غير أنه أعاد اكتشاف الفكرة في حياتنا بما هي حياة موسومة بالمعيارية الخطابية، هذه الفكرة مثلت موضوعا للمعايير الضمنية في الممارسة الاجتماعية. إنّ الذرائعيين الأمريكيين استلهموا في الظاهر من كانط وهيقل صورة للإنسان على أنّه كائن معياريّ ومن هذه المعيارية كانت المعيارية الاجتماعية، وقد مثل هذا الأمر إعادة فهم جذريّ لما يعنيه انسان، ما يميّز الوجود البشري وهو ما

راديكاليًا كما أرى الأشياء في رؤية الفلاسفة التحليليين هو أنّ اللّغة هي فضاء المعياريّة الاجتماعيّة.

جيفري ويليامس: لقد جمعت بين براغماتيّة هيقل وفتقنشتاين ، ومن الواضح أنّهما يشكّان جزءًا مهمًا من نظامك، وإنيّ لأتعبّب من أمر واحد، هل تعدّ هذه الصّلات من الخصوصيّة ؟ وهل باتت الفلسفة موضوعًا لأنظمة متنوّعة ومنفصلة وعليك أن تختار النّظام الذي يناسب اعتقادك فيما تكون داخله أو خارجه؟

روبرت براندوم: أعتقد أنّه توجد عديد التيارات التي تجمع وتفرّق في الفلسفة الانجلو أمريكية المعاصرة، ومن بين أمجاد الفلسفة التّحليليّة أنّها غيرت الخطاب الفلسفيّ منهجيًا ليصبح منوالًا مبنيا على العلم على نحو من الوعي الذاتيّ وعلى نحو بدت فيه الفلسفة مؤسسة تشاركيّة تجمع بين أناس يحترمون مواقف بعضهم البعض. في الكتاب الذي نشرته حول رورتي، بيّن جاك بوفراس (Jacques Bouveresse) أنّ ابتعاد رورتي عن الفلسفة التّحليليّة لا يمكن أن يجعلنا نغفل عن استثنائيّة هذه الروح التّشاركيّة وقيمها الكبيرة، هذا الأمر يمثّل جزءًا من الفهم الذاتيّ للفلسفة التّحليليّة الذي يبدو فهما قويًا في حلقة فينّا التي تشكّلت حول كارناب (Carnap) ، وهي حلقة من الجهة السياسيّة على يسار ما ذهب إليه أغلب الفلاسفة الانقليز في هذا المجال.

جيفري ويليامس: دعني أسألك عن الاستدلاليّة، ثمّة كتاب حول الوجوديّة كان مشهورًا إبّان الستينات والسبعينات وعنوانه (الرجل اللاعقلاني/*Irrational Man*) وصاحبه ويليام باريت (William Barrett)، وعندما كنت أفكّر في العنوان المحتمل لحواري معك خطرت ببالي تسمية (الرجل الاستدلالي/*Inferential Man*) فأنت في قلب التقاليد العقلانيّة التي تعتقد أنّ الانسان عقلائيّ لكن ليس بسبب كوننا مرجعيّين، إنّنا عقلانيون لأننا استدلاليون. أعتقد أنّه بإمكانك أن تتحدّث قليلًا عن النّظريّة التي تعرفها أكثر من غيرك خصوصًا في كتابك (اجعله صريحًا/*Making It Explicit*)

روبرت براندوم: دعني أبدأ في تفسير ذلك انطلاقاً من وجهة نظر معيارية، من نتائج نظرة كانط المعيارية أن كُنَّا كائنات خطابية وكائنات معيارية تقيّد نفسها بالمعايير في الحكم والحركة، إنّ مفهوم المنطق عند كانط يبدأ من مذهب في المفاهيم أو المصطلحات منقسم إلى خصوصيات وعموميات وعلى هذا المذهب بُني مذهب آخر هو مذهب الحكم المتّصل بالتصنيفية عن الآخرين وعلى هذا المذهب أسس مذهب آخر هو مذهب النتائج، إنّ مسار صاعد من التفسير، غير أنه بالنسبة إلى كانط فإنّ الوحدة الأساسية للمعرفة هي الوحدة الأصغر في سلّم مسؤولياتنا وهي وحدة الحكم لا وحدة المفهوم، إنّ تصوّر المفاهيم وظائف للحكم، وهذا معنى أن تفهم المفاهيم من جهة الأدوار التي تلعبها في إصدار الأحكام، إذا في هذه التقاليد الكانطية فإنّ بدأ التفكير الدّهبي في المعنى هو التفكير في المعنى المنتج من الجمل لا خارجها، إنّ ما نحتاجه مجدداً لدى كانط عند تحمّل مسؤولية الحكم، هو إدماج هذه المسؤولية مع بقية الالتزامات والاعتراف بنتائج هذه الالتزامات، إنّ الاعتراف بالالتزام أن نعرف أسبابه ومؤداه والتخلّي عن الادعاءات الأخرى غير المتوافقة معه، وهذا يعني بأنّ الحكم يتكوّن على نطاق واسع من العلاقات الاستدلالية بين الناس بعضهم ببعض. لقد بدأت التقاليد الفلسفية الحديثة للتفكير في المعنى بمفهوم التمثيل، وهو ما أهداه ديكرت للبشرية في العصر الحديث، في حين أنّ أغلب التقاليد الفلسفية القديمة والوسيطه قد اهتمت بالعلاقة بين المظهر والحقيقة من جهة منوال التماثل، لقد نظر ديكرت في التقدّم العلمي واستمع إلى كوبرنيكوس يخبرنا أن ما يظهر من ثبات الأرض وحركة الشمس لا علاقة تماثل له ابداً بحقيقة ثبات الشمس وحركة الأرض. لقد ذكر غاليليو بأنّ كتاب الطبيعة قد كُتب بلغة الهندسة وأنّه حصل أفضل ما يمكن أن يُحصّله بشر حول حركة الأرض بأشياء من قبيل تمثيل تسارع جسم داخل مساحة المثلث، ليس ثمة من تماثل على الإطلاق، لقد كان جديد ديكرت أن قدّم أكثر من مفهوم مجرد للتمثيل المتحرّر من التماثل وبصنيعه هذا كان قد فتح إمكاناً شكلياً ما كان قبل التماثل، إذا بطريقة أو بأخرى فإنّ التقاليد الفلسفية قد اهتمت أساساً بالتمثيل باعتباره مفتاح المعنى والفهم والمعرفة.



## Interview with Robert Brandom<sup>1</sup>

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### Résumé.

Il s'agit ici du texte de l'entretien accordé par Brandom en qualité de Professeur-invité à Guido Seddone durant le semestre d'été 2008 à l'Université de Leipzig.

### Mots-clés.

Brandom, tâche de la philosophie, rationalité expressive, normativité, Hegel.

### ملخص.

تحتوي هذه الورقة نصًا للحوار الذي أجراه «جويدو سدونة» مع «براندوم» حين كان الأخير أستاذًا زائرًا بجامعة لايبزج خلال الفصل الدراسي الصيفي سنة 2008.

### كلمات مفتاحية.

براندوم، مهمة الفلسفة، عقلانية تعبيرية، معيارية، هيغل.

### Abstract.

This paper is the transcription of the interview gave by Brandom as Leibniz-Professor (Visiting Professor) at Leipzig University to Guido Seddone during the summer Semester 2008.

### Keywords.

Brandom, The task of philosophy, expressive rationality, normativity, Hegel.

### Introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Leipzig, 30/06/2008. Weblink of the video interview:

<http://www.filosofia.it/multimedia/videointervista-a-robert-brandom>.

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Prof. Brandom, you are one of the most important and influent thinkers in the analytical philosophy; your book *Making It explicit* is translated in many languages and is object of discussions and debates in many Universities of the world. Nonetheless your philosophical interested are also addressed to the philosophers of the tradition like Leibniz, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger. You have important relations with many European Universities like the Leipzig University, where we are and where in this summer Semester 2008 you are Leibniz-Professor (visiting Professor).

**Question 1:** In *Making It explicit* you maintain that the task of the philosophy is to make explicit what in our practice remains implicit. This introduces the idea of expressive rationality; can you explain better this argument?

**Answer:** Well, I think of us as essentially normative beings, that what sets us apart from the other animals is our capacity to commit ourselves, our worrying about whether we are entitled to those commitments, whether it's a cognitive commitment as to how things are or a practical commitment as to how things shall be. I think of us as discursive beings and that means that our normativity is inferentially articulated. We're beings who engage in practices of giving and asking for reasons. And I think these two dimensions—the normative dimension and the rational dimension—are what set us apart from beings that can feel but can't think. And I think of logic and philosophy as having the task of making explicit what is implicit in those normative and rational practices.

**Question 2:** Another famous point of your thought is the concept of scorekeeping, which explain the way by which persons reach a shared point of view. The scorekeepings are committive practices and you inherited this concept from the philosophy of Wilfrid Sellars and from his Idea of logical space of reasons. By a scorekeeping are produced the beliefs and the certainties of a group in pragmatic and not ideological way and this allows the persons to have a common vision or shared point of view about their problem and about the world out there. Can you explain the role of this concept and can you also explain why it's a pragmatic answer to the problem of the sociality?

**Answer:** Well, I think of what we do when we understand each other as a matter of our having to know what we've committed ourselves to by saying something or doing something, and thinking about what it would take to entitle us to those commitments. So what we keep score on in the metaphor are those commitments and entitlements. Each time we give a reason, each time we make a claim, what we're committed to and what we're entitled to changes. I think of the task of communication not as being exclusively a matter of coming to share

opinions, but rather of navigating rationally between our different opinions, projects, plans and so on. Understanding each other is—as when you and I speak now face to face—to be understood in I-Thou terms from which we build up a social structure, rather than in I-We terms as is traditional where we think, well, there's the community and then there's me as the individual in the community relating to it. Scorekeeping is something that's done on an I-You or an I-Thou basis. When you and I understand each other it doesn't require, it doesn't demand that you and I agree in all of our positions. It means that you know what I'm committed to, that you keep track of what I am—according to you—entitled to and vice versa. I think of language as a way of navigating between the different perspectives that individuals inevitably have because of their different interests, because of just the different trajectories we take through the world and the different information that we have. So I think of language and discourse not principally as a means of cooperation—though, of course, it is for that too—but simply as a matter of getting clear on what each other's commitments are.

**Question 3:** By the scorekeeping we obtain also the concept of the tenability of our statements. The statements are normally about the world around us. How can we grasp the non-inferential facts and how can we bring them in our discursive practice, which are inferentially constituted. Is your thought about this problem a form of weak empiricism?

**Answer:** Well, if one's empiricism is weak enough, then I think everyone's an empiricist, that is, we can't know anything about the world around us without sensory experience of it. That's the weak empiricism that that's a necessary condition. But for me the form of the conceptual is an inferential form. To be conceptually contentful is to be inferentially articulated. So the question for me—the question that you asked—becomes: how do reliable causal connections in the world come to be transferred into an inferentially useable form. And I think the answer is that we can, as sentient beings, reliably differentially respond to the world around us. And those reliable, responsive dispositions can be tracked inferentially. So I take you to be a reliable observer of red things because I'm prepared to infer from your claiming that something is red that it's red. That's a reliability inference. I'm taking the causal connection between you and red things and putting it into an inferential form where your saying something, your undertaking a commitment, gives me a reason to undertake a commitment. And in that way we come inferentially to track reliable connections in the world.

**Question 4:** In your book *Tales of the mighty dead* you write « My interpretive claim here will be that the idealist thesis is Hegel's way of making the pragmatist thesis workable, in the context of several other commitments and insights. My philosophical claim here will be that we actually have a lot to learn from this strategy about contemporary semantic issues that we by no means see our way to the bottom of otherwise». My questions are, is it possible to conceive that the several figures in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are a kind of a big historical scorekeeping? Is it for you the history a committive practice? Can the ordinary language of the Pragmatism be compared with the idealistic language?

**Answer:** Well, I do think of the *Phenomenology* as a large allegory and that what it's an allegory for is a story about conceptual contents, about selves and about the kinds of normative communities that we institute by our re-cognitive relations to one another. I think one of the principal lessons that we can learn from the *Phenomenology* is indeed the lesson that the classical American Pragmatists learned from it and is what deeply binds together German Idealism and American Pragmatism and Neo-pragmatism. And that is that we'll never understand our interaction with the world if we think in antecedent terms of what subjects are—say the way Descartes did—and what objects are—say the way contemporary natural science tells us they are—and somehow try to clamp those two together to understand subjects as able to know about objects and act on objects so understood. Hegel's recommendation—what was taken up by the Pragmatists—was that we have to think about our interaction. We have to start with the transactions that we have with things, the skilful practical doings that we build on. And we have in a more sophisticated form what one can already see primitive versions of among animals dealing skilfully with their environment. There's a cycle of perception and thought and action, followed by perception of the results of action, that lets us calibrate what we do to what's happening, to what we're making, to what differences we're making in our environment. And it's by thinking about that sort of skilful, practical interaction with our environment that we'll come to understand what knowing subjects and intentional agents really are, that we can then abstract notions of subject and object of mind and world from.

**Question 5:** In your Philosophy is very important the role of the conceptual contents to determinate the dimension of the normative; you argue that Kant and Hegel have a different approach to the question of the normative. Can you explain this difference and your point of view about the question of the conceptual content in these two classical thinkers?

**Answer:** Well, Kant's great insight is that we're fundamentally normative creatures, that the difference between knowers and intentional agents, on the one hand, and merely natural creatures, on the other, is that the judgements that potentially express knowledge and our intentional doings are things that we are in a distinctive sense responsible for. They express commitments of ours. Those are normative notions. I believe Hegel's great insight is that to understand the nature of that normativity—the way in which it's possible for us to bind ourselves by concepts—we have to think of normative statuses as essentially social statuses. Hegel had the idea that social substance—normative substance—and the self-conscious individuals who become self-conscious by coming to be able to bind themselves by conceptual norms are synthesized by reciprocal recognition. Reciprocal recognition is a matter of my making myself responsible for something, in part by doing something that socially makes it appropriate for others to hold me responsible. And his idea was that the notion of responsibility didn't make sense outside of a context in which others could hold me responsible. I have to be recognized by them as doing something that has that normative significance, and I have to recognize them as able to recognize me in that way in order for me genuinely to be responsible for anything. So I see Kant as having had this fundamental insight into the essentially normative character of human being and Hegel as having had the insight into the essentially social character of that normativity.

**Question 6:** In your interpretation of the dialectics between Master and Slave, you maintain that the concept of Mastery is strongly related to the concept of Autonomy. Can you explain better this topic?

**Answer:** Kant distinguished normative constraint from causal compulsion by using a criterion of autonomy that he had developed from the earlier philosopher, Rousseau. According to this view, what makes something genuinely, normatively binding on me is that I take it to be normatively binding on me. Only I can normatively bind myself, commit myself. Anything that doesn't depend in that way on my acknowledgement of it as authoritative is not normatively authoritative, but is some sort of non-normative compulsion. This was Kant's development of a fundamental Enlightenment idea: that normative statuses like authority and responsibility, commitment and entitlement, are not part of the pre-nonhuman, the pre-human world or even any supernatural world. They're in the end creatures of our normative attitudes. Until people held each other responsible, treated each other as authoritative, as committed, as entitled, there were no such normative statuses. This dependence—of normative status on normative attitudes—Kant came to see as one of the great achievements of the Enlightenment, and his notion of autonomy was a

development of that. Hegel's discussion of the dialectic of the master and slave is an attempt to show that asymmetric re-cognitive relations are metaphysically defective, that the norms they institute aren't the right kind to help us think and act with, to make it possible to think and act. Asymmetric recognition in this way is authority without responsibility, on the side of the master, and responsibility without authority, on the side of the slave. And Hegel's argument is that unless authority and responsibility are commensurate and reciprocal, no actual normative statuses are instituted. This is one of his most important and certainly one of his deepest ideas, though it's not so easy to see just how the argument works.

**Question 7:** In Hegel's philosophy it's central the constitution of the Self; the basis of the Self is the self-consciousness in the relation with the other self-consciousness; the structure of this relation is for Hegel an historical structure of desire and recognition. In a second stage from this structure come all the institutions like society, states, rights. In which way is this Hegelian conception a pragmatic conception?

**Answer:** One of Hegel's big ideas is that once we've understood from Kant that we're normative beings—that to be a self is to be able to be responsible and authoritative in distinctive ways, in ways that are conceptually articulated, because in cognitive judgement we commit ourselves by applying concepts, committing ourselves as to how things are (in intentional agency we commit ourselves by applying concepts as to how things are to be)—Hegel's idea that once we've understood those normative statuses to be social statuses, we'll see that the notion of self-conscious selves, selves who can apply concepts and take themselves to be applying concepts theoretically and practically, is a fundamentally social achievement. Self-consciousness is not something that happens principally between our ears. It's something that happens between our selves; it's a social achievement, a matter of reciprocal recognition. I am what I'm recognized to be by those I recognize as having the authority to determine what I really am. I have authority over whom I recognize in that sense, but I'm granting them authority over me in turn. Hegel has a very delicate and sophisticated account of the relation between self-conscious individual selves and the normative re-cognitive communities that they constitute by their re-cognitive practical attitudes to one another. This social notion of self-consciousness—this notion of self-consciousness as a fundamentally social achievement because it is fundamentally a normative status—is one of his 88 most important ideas.

## Sémantique, inférentialisme et ludique

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### Abstract.

We study concepts introduced by R. Brandom in *Making It Explicit* and *Articulating Reasons*, in particular concepts of commitment and entitlement, and the notion of incompatibility developed in *Between Saying and Doing*. After seeing the importance of dialogue in the inferentialist perspective and recalling the distinction Brandom introduces between formal semantics and philosophical semantics, we consider some criticism introduced by D. Porello, to which he responds by using the phase semantics, and we show that the frame of Ludics, invented by Jean-Yves Girard seems appropriate to give a correct representation of GOGAR. It allows for a better characterization of incompatibility, based on the geometrical notion of orthogonality, and it allows to give a precise definition of the material implication: a notion materially implies another one if the bi-orthogonal of the first is included into the bi-orthogonal of the second, that means that, inside a dialogue, every notion which interacts with another one in the same way that the first also interacts with it in the same way that the second.

### Keywords.

Signification, inferentialism, game, engagement, Brandom.

### ملخص.

ندرس في هذه الورقة بعض التصورات التي قدمها «براندوم» في كتابيه «نقلها صراحة» و«عقول ناطقة»، وبصفة خاصة تصوري «الالتزام» و«الأهلية»، وكذلك مفهوم «عدم التوافق» الذي قدّمه في كتابه «بين القول والفعال». وبعد التنويه بأهمية الخطاب من المنظور الاستدلالي، والتذكير بالتميز الذي وضعه «براندوم» بين السيمانطيقا الصورية والسيمانطيقا الفلسفية، ننظر في بعض أوجه النقد التي أثارها «دانييلي بوريلو»، والتي تمت الاستجابة لها باستخدام السيمانطيقا الطورية، ونوضح أن إطار أنساق التلاعب التي ابتكرها «جان إيف جيرار» ملائمة لتقديم تمثيل صحيح للعبة طرح وطلب الأسباب GOGAR

التوافق يقوم على مفهوم التعامد الهندسي، ويتيح أيضًا تقديم تعريف دقيق للزوم المادي: فال مفهوم يشمل ماديًا مفهومًا آخر إذا كان التعامد الثنائي للأول متضمنًا في التعامد الثنائي للثاني؛ بمعنى أن كل مفهوم – في مجرى الحوار – يتفاعل مع مفهوم آخر بذات الطريقة التي يتفاعل بها المفهوم الآخر مع الأول، والعكس صحيح.

### كلمات مفتاحية.

مغزى، نزعة استدلالية، لعبة، اشتباك، براندوم.

### Résumé.

Nous étudions quelques concepts introduits par R. Brandom dans *Making It Explicit* et dans *Articulating Reasons*, en particulier ceux d'engagement et d'habilitation et la notion d'incompatibilité développée dans *Between Saying and Doing*. Après avoir insisté sur l'importance du dialogue dans la perspective inférentialiste et rappelé la distinction introduite par Brandom entre sémantique formelle et sémantique philosophique, nous reprenons certaines des critiques formulées par D. Porello, auxquelles celui-ci remédie par la sémantique des phases et nous montrons que le cadre de la ludique, inventé par Jean-Yves Girard, semble approprié pour donner une bonne représentation du jeu d'offre et de demande de raisons (GOGAR), qu'il permet de donner une meilleure caractérisation de l'incompatibilité, basée sur la notion géométrique d'orthogonalité, et qu'il permet d'autre part de donner une définition précise de l'implication matérielle : une notion implique matériellement une autre si le bi-orthogonal de la première est inclus dans celui de la seconde, ce qui signifie que, au sein d'un dialogue, tout ce qui interagit avec une autre notion de la même manière que la première interagit également avec elle de la même manière que la seconde.

### Mots-clés.

Signification, inférence, jeu, engagement, Brandom.

## I. Introduction: sémantique formelle et sémantique philosophique

La majeure partie des travaux en sémantique, de nos jours, s'inscrivent dans le cadre de la sémantique formelle. Ils reprennent les idées directrices formulées par Frege (encore que la description des langues naturelles fût loin d'être l'objectif principal de l'auteur de la *Begriffsschrift*) puis reprises et abondamment

développées par des auteurs comme R. Montague et D. Lewis<sup>1</sup>, ou plus récemment R. Kaplan, I. Heim ou A. Kratzer<sup>2</sup>. Le paradigme de la sémantique formelle, basé principalement sur les deux principes frégréens de compositionnalité (la signification d'une expression est fonction de celles de ses composants et de la manière dont ceux-ci sont combinés) et de vérité-conditionnalité (comprendre une phrase c'est connaître ses conditions de vérité) consiste dans l'établissement d'une correspondance (ou isomorphisme, ou bijection, ou projection) entre deux algèbres : une algèbre syntaxique et une algèbre sémantique exprimée dans un langage formel, qu'il s'agisse d'un langage du premier ordre ou d'un langage intensionnel. Dans les travaux des dernières décennies, notamment poursuivis dans le cadre des grammaires catégorielles<sup>3</sup>, cette correspondance s'avère être simplement une adaptation de l'isomorphisme de Curry-Howard<sup>4</sup>, bien connu des logiciens et des informaticiens. Cet isomorphisme met en correspondance les opérations de la syntaxe, traduites dans le formalisme catégoriel en règles d'élimination et d'introduction des deux constructeurs de types que sont «/» et «\»<sup>5</sup> et les règles d'application et d'abstraction du  $\lambda$ -calcul. A ce paradigme, Bandom oppose les exigences d'une sémantique philosophique. On peut lire ainsi :

Le projet d'une sémantique formelle autorise le théoricien à stipuler d'emblée une association des interprétants sémantiques à des interprétés primitifs, qui sont typiquement des expressions linguistiques. Cette interprétation se voit ensuite étendue à des interprétés qui sont dérivés de ces interprétés primitifs au moyen d'opérations syntaxiques - qui incluent dans le cas des structures syntaxiques compositionnelles classiques, une concaténation sensible aux catégories, ainsi que différentes transformations grammaticales de ce type de concaténations. Cette extension est réalisée en définissant, pour chaque opération syntaxique sur les interprétés, une opération correspondante sur les interprétants qui leur sont associés, ce qui fournit un nouvel interprétant par là même associé au résultat de l'opération syntaxique concernée. Ainsi le théoricien en sémantique formelle pourrait commencer par associer des valeurs de vérité à des lettres de proposition, pour ensuite introduire, pour chaque connecteur donnant lieu à des phrases composées, une fonction qui transforme des ensembles de valeurs de vérité en valeurs de vérité susceptibles d'être assignées aux phrases composées correspondantes. Ou encore, au lieu des valeurs de vérité, les interprétants sémantiques pourraient être des ensembles de mondes possibles, tandis que les opérations correspondant aux

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<sup>1</sup> Voir Thomason, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Voir Heim et Kratzer, 1998, Chierchia et MacConnell Ginet, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Voir le calcul de Lambek in Moortgat, 1988, Lecomte 2011, Moot et Retoré, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Howard, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> A/B (resp. B\A) est la catégorie d'une expression qui attend à droite (resp. à gauche) une expression de catégorie B pour devenir une expression de catégorie A.

connecteurs de phrases seraient des opérations de théorie des ensembles effectuées sur eux (comme l'intersection dans le cas de la conjonction). Ainsi, la sémantique formelle s'intéresse de façon générale aux projections préservant la structure. Pourtant, tout théorème de représentation mathématique, qui présente une telle correspondance entre les structures d'un type donné et celles d'un autre type, ne mérite pas le nom de sémantique<sup>1</sup>.

Dans ce texte, Brandom résume parfaitement bien la démarche de la sémantique formelle tout en formulant sa réserve principale : il ne suffit pas de mettre en correspondance bijective une structure linguistique avec une structure quelconque pour dire que l'on fait de la sémantique. Il s'appuie sur l'exemple classique de Tarski, élaborant une « sémantique formelle » pour le calcul des prédicats du premier ordre. Tarski établit un théorème de représentation algébrique, mais, selon Brandom, ce qui confère à cette construction son statut de sémantique, ce n'est pas une quelconque propriété intrinsèque des interprétants, mais le seul fait qu'elle permette de reproduire la relation de conséquence logique existant dans ce langage, lequel est, quoi que l'on fasse, un langage construit dans le but d'explicitier une telle relation. Dans le cas du langage naturel, on ne saurait se contenter d'une telle projection car il serait vain, dit Brandom, « *d'attribuer une structure ou un contenu sémantique qui ne réaliserait pas une tâche explicative pragmatique* ». Le langage naturel n'est pas construit dans le but d'atteindre tel ou tel objectif opérationnel, il *est*, simplement, et tout ce que l'on peut faire à son propos est de discerner de manière précise les conditions de son emploi.

La sémantique philosophique est tenue d'expliquer le contenu de concepts comme ceux de contenu, de vérité, d'inférence, de référence et de représentation, tandis que la sémantique formelle se contente de faire usage de ces concepts, en tenant pour acquis qu'ils sont déjà implicitement intelligibles. La différence concernant la mise en oeuvre de ces deux types de sémantique dans le cas des langages artificiels et dans celui des langages naturels est que, dans le premier cas, il n'existe pas de règles de convenance antérieures qui gouverneraient l'usage des expressions et à l'égard desquelles le théoricien serait responsable. Dans la mesure où le langage en question n'est pas déjà en circulation, le théoricien est libre de stipuler une association de certains contenus à certaines expressions, et cela en vue de déterminer comment on doit comprendre leur usage correct. Dans le cas des langages naturels, en revanche, l'usage que fait le théoricien des concepts sémantiques n'est pas synthétique (consistant à déterminer l'usage correct d'expressions, qui n'auraient pas été précédemment sujettes à de telles règles de convenance),

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom, 2010, p. 289.

mais analytique (consistant à codifier et à exprimer des règles de convenance préalablement existantes qui régissent leur usage)<sup>1</sup>.

Autrement dit, on n'atteint les véritables objectifs d'une sémantique qu'en poussant à bout l'analyse des concepts ayant trait à l'idée de signification, et en montrant en particulier en quoi et comment ceux-ci s'enracinent dans la pragmatique, c'est-à-dire l'usage qui est fait d'eux. « *Il n'est pas absurde* », précise-t-il encore, « *de penser que les contenus des expressions linguistiques sont conférés [aux phrases] par la façon dont on les emploie* ». Or, cet emploi, on le sait, est guidé, selon Brandom, principalement par les contraintes liées à l'inférence. Le langage, selon Brandom, aurait en son cœur un jeu central (contrairement à ce que pensait Wittgenstein pour qui les jeux de langage ne pouvaient être unifiés ni, encore moins, reliés à un jeu central qui les dominerait tous) qui est le fameux jeu « de l'offre et de la demande de raisons » (GOGAR). Ce point de vue est, bien entendu, diamétralement opposé à celui que défendait R. Montague, le grand inspirateur de la plupart des travaux en sémantique formelle, quand il prétendait qu'il n'y avait pas de différence fondamentale entre un langage artificiel et une langue réelle. De plus, il s'appuyait sur une conception totalement référentialiste du sens, à terme, le but de la sémantique était bel et bien d'assigner des entités comme référents à des expressions dans des mondes possibles. Brandom remplace cette conception par une conception inférentialiste, reprenant d'ailleurs en cela les premières perspectives exposées par Frege dans la *Begriffsschrift*<sup>2</sup>, lorsqu'il jugeait que deux énoncés n'avaient la même signification que lorsqu'on pouvait inférer d'eux les mêmes conclusions. « *Les contenus de deux jugements – disait le philosophe d'Iéna – peuvent être l'un par rapport à l'autre de deux manières : soit les inférences qui peuvent être tirées à partir de l'un d'eux en relation avec d'autres déterminés, découlent toujours du second en relation avec ces mêmes autres jugements; soit ceci n'est pas le cas. Les deux propositions « Les Grecs ont vaincu les Perses à Platée » et « Les Perses ont été vaincus par les Grecs à Platée » semblent différer. Or, bien que l'on puisse reconnaître une petite différence de sens, la similarité l'emporte. J'appelle alors contenu conceptuel, cette partie du contenu qui est la même dans les deux. Deux affirmations ont le même contenu conceptuel si et seulement si elles ont le même rôle inférentiel. Pour Brandom, comme pour le jeune Frege ou bien Dummett, on ne saisit le sens d'un concept que lorsqu'on maîtrise son rôle inférentiel, autrement dit lorsque l'on sait quelles conséquences peut avoir son usage ainsi que les prémisses nécessaires pour pouvoir l'employer. Ce point de vue s'oppose au représentationnalisme classique hérité de Descartes qui, dit Brandom, « traite le fait d'être doté d'un contenu représentationnel comme un explanans*

<sup>1</sup> Brandom, 2010, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> Frege, *Begriffsschrift*, 1896.

*inexpliqué* »<sup>1</sup>. Autrement dit, nous sommes toujours renvoyés à la même critique: la sémantique formelle se base sur le représentationnalisme et il est alors naturel que, comme lui, elle considère comme admis sans autre forme de procès, des concepts et manières de faire qui, pourtant, demanderaient à être expliqués.

Ainsi, les notions de *valeur de vérité* ou de *référence* ne sont pas perçues comme *primitives* mais au contraire comme dérivées dans une démarche explicative qui met au premier rang la vraie nature des concepts, qui réside dans leur rôle *inférentiel*.

## II. Le jeu d'offre et de demande de raisons

La démarche inférentialiste dont se réclame ainsi Brandom est proche à première vue des conceptions de la logique basées sur la *théorie de la preuve* puisque là aussi, on met les valeurs de vérité et la sémantique vériditionnelle au second plan au bénéfice des règles d'inférence. La déduction naturelle, par exemple, ne se base pas sur une sémantique dénotationnelle a priori, mais sur la qualité d'une syntaxe, il s'agit d'avoir des règles, d'introduction et d'élimination qui, autant que possible entretiennent entre elles des liens de symétrie, voire d'harmonie. Mais elle ne fonctionne bien que dans le cadre intuitionniste, la logique classique introduisant des ruptures qui peuvent sembler *ad hoc* (la règle d'élimination de la double-négation par exemple). C'est la logique linéaire qui réunit les propriétés intéressantes de la logique intuitionniste (sémantique des preuves) et celles de la logique classique (involutivité de la négation), mais alors les schémas arborescents de la déduction naturelle sont remplacés par les réseaux de preuve. Il est toutefois une « sémantique » qui convient bien à la logique linéaire, c'est la sémantique dites *des phases*, sur laquelle s'appuie D. Porello pour faire un certain nombre de remarques intéressantes à propos des thèses de Brandom, sur lesquelles nous reviendrons plus loin.

Toutefois, nous insisterons sur un fait: pour Brandom, le rôle d'une affirmation ne tient pas seulement à son contenu inférentiel *monologique*, autrement dit à sa faculté d'apparaître comme prémisses ou comme conclusions dans un raisonnement. Si l'œuvre de Platon prend la forme de dialogues, ce n'est pas par hasard ou volonté stylistique de la part de leur auteur, c'est bien parce qu'on ne saurait valablement mettre à l'épreuve le contenu conceptuel d'une affirmation qu'en *l'interrogeant*, c'est-à-dire en la soumettant à un jeu de demandes de raisons, autrement dit d'objections éventuelles.

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom 2000 p. 54.

Selon Sellars, « la méthode socratique est une manière de placer nos pratiques sous contrôle rationnel en les exprimant explicitement sous une forme où elles peuvent être confrontées à des objections et des alternatives, forme dans laquelle elles peuvent se manifester comme les conclusions d'inférences cherchant à les justifier sur la base de prémisses avancées comme des raisons, et comme des prémisses dans d'autres inférences explorant les conséquences qui résultent de leur acceptation »<sup>1</sup>.

Brandom en vient donc à soutenir la nécessité de s'inscrire dans un cadre dialogique:

Nous considérons principalement l'inférence sur la seule base de ce qui relie prémisses et conclusion, c'est-à-dire comme une relation monologique entre contenus propositionnels. La pratique discursive, l'offre et la demande de raisons, implique cependant à la fois l'échange des contenus et les relations interpersonnelles. L'idée est la suivante: l'aspect représentationnel des concepts propositionnels qui jouent les rôles inférentiels de prémisses et de conclusion doit s'entendre sur la base de la dimension sociale ou dialogique de raisons communicationnelles, en supposant que les raisons offertes par d'autres possèdent une signification<sup>2</sup>.

On pourrait alors penser que la formalisation la plus adéquate de l'inférentialisme serait une conception dialogique de la logique comme celle proposée par Lorenzen<sup>3</sup>, autrement dit reposerait sur une conception à base de *jeux*, mais la logique dialogique ne prend en compte que les jeux de dialogue basés sur l'emploi des particules logiques (et, ou, si... alors) et des quantificateurs (*pour tout* et *il existe*). Le point de vue de Brandom est différent puisqu'il exige que l'on parte de l'inférence *matérielle*. En effet, pour lui, la logique n'apparaît que comme manière de rendre explicites des pratiques inférentielles qui sont implicites dans le langage. Par exemple, le vocabulaire de la logique propositionnelle n'est là que pour fournir des outils permettant de codifier des pratiques usuelles, mais avant l'usage de ces particules spécialisées, le corps de la discipline inférentielle dans le langage repose sur des contenus et des pratiques qui leur sont associées. Par exemple, il est acquis que s'il pleut, je risque de me mouiller en sortant, cette « inférence » n'a pas besoin, a priori, d'une codification sous la forme d'un syllogisme, celui-ci vient après, lorsqu'on décide de trouver des formes communes et commodes pour regrouper les inférences usuelles. Mais faire une inférence comme « il pleut », donc « je risque de me mouiller en sortant », c'est simplement comprendre le sens des

<sup>1</sup> Cité dans Brandom 2010, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Brandom 2009, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Voir Lorenzen 1960, Marion 2009.

mots et des expressions employées. Il fait partie du concept sous-jacent à « il pleut » que lorsqu'on sort, on risque de se mouiller... Pour le pragmatisme dont se réclame Brandom, il faut donc rendre compte de l'origine des lois logiques à partir des pratiques inférentielles lorsque celles-ci ne contiennent pas encore de codification sous la forme de particules ou de quantificateurs de la logique du premier ordre (ou du second). Si le fondement de la logique est bien dans des jeux, ce ne peut donc être dans des jeux qui contiennent déjà ces particules ou ces quantificateurs, ni dans des jeux qui sont programmés dans le but de retrouver une logique particulière, intuitionniste ou classique. Brandom a un nom pour ce type de jeu. Reprenant, selon son dire, l'expression à Sellars, il parle de jeu *de l'offre et de la demande de raisons* (GOGAR). Un tel jeu pourrait prendre l'aspect d'un jeu où sont avancés des pions en fonction des coups joués sous la forme d'actes de langage, et où un score est enregistré à l'issue de chaque mouvement (il s'inspire en cela d'un article célèbre de Lewis!).

Supposons un ensemble de pions ou de marqueurs tels que le fait d'en produire ou d'en jouer ait la signification d'un coup assertif dans le jeu. Nous pouvons appeler des tels jetons des « phrases ». Dans ce cas, il doit y avoir pour chaque joueur, et ce à tout moment, une manière de répartir les phrases en deux classes, en distinguant d'une certaine façon celles qu'il est disposé ou sinon prêt à asserter. Ces jetons qui se distinguent en ce qu'ils portent la marque du joueur, et en ce qu'ils se trouvent sur sa liste ou dans sa boîte, constituent son score. En jouant un nouveau jeton, en faisant une assertion, on modifie son propre score, et peut-être celui des autres<sup>2</sup>.

Nous aurons l'occasion dans la suite de revenir sur la formulation adéquate d'un tel *jeu*, mais auparavant, il nous faut préciser davantage la nature de ses *règles*.

### III. Sémantique de l'incompatibilité

Une avancée importante de Brandom dans sa réflexion pragmatique concernant les relations interpersonnelles consiste dans le fait de reconnaître que les jeux auxquels les locuteurs se livrent reposent sur des *engagements* et des *habilitations*. Pour un locuteur donné, asserter *p* c'est s'engager sur le contenu de *p*, autrement dit s'attendre à recevoir des objections concernant *p* mais être prêt à les recevoir et déjà posséder les arguments qui permettront de soutenir *p* face à ces attaques. De ce point de vue, les connecteurs propositionnels ont un sens: s'engager envers une conjonction  $p \wedge q$  par exemple c'est s'engager à la fois

<sup>1</sup> Lewis 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Brandom 2000, p. 210.

envers  $p$  et envers  $q$ , s'engager envers une disjonction  $p \vee q$  c'est être prêt à s'engager pour l'un des deux, et ainsi de suite. Comme le souligne Brandom<sup>1</sup>, Dummett avait déjà considérablement contribué à l'inférentialisme en indiquant comment les règles d'introduction et d'élimination des connecteurs devaient s'interpréter. Ainsi, les règles d'introduction correspondent à des conditions suffisantes d'assertion et les règles d'élimination à des conditions nécessaires, autrement dit la liste de tout ce qui découle nécessairement de l'acte ayant consisté dans l'assertion de la phrase contenant le connecteur. Mais il n'y a pas que des engagements dans le dialogue, c'est-à-dire des moments où l'on décide de ce que l'on va dire en possédant de quoi en soutenir le contenu. Dans un contexte donné, à un moment donné, on n'est pas nécessairement *habilité* à prendre tel ou tel engagement. L'engagement que nous prenons est subordonné à une *habilitation* à le prendre, et cela est souvent peu thématé dans le cadre de la logique usuelle. « Ceux qui jouent au jeu de l'offre et de la demande de raisons – dit Brandom – doivent aussi distinguer, parmi les engagements que prend un interlocuteur, une sous-classe à laquelle il est autorisé ». Ainsi :

Fournir des raisons à l'appui d'une affirmation consiste à produire d'autres assertions qui habilitent ou autorisent quelqu'un à faire cette affirmation et qui la justifient. Demander des raisons pour une affirmation, c'est en demander les garanties et demander ce qui autorise son auteur à cet engagement. Une telle pratique suppose une distinction entre les engagements assertionnels auxquels on est autorisé et ceux auxquels on ne l'est pas.

Ainsi y a-t-il non pas un seul, mais deux statuts normatifs qui entrent en compte dans la pratique langagière : engagement et habilitation. Brandom prend bien soin de dire qu'ils ne sont pas indépendants l'un de l'autre et qu'ils entrent en interaction. Car les habilitations sont des habilitations à *s'engager* et, dit-il - et cela sera important pour la suite – « nous pouvons dire que deux contenus assertables sont *incompatibles* là où *l'engagement* à l'égard de l'un exclut l'autorisation à l'égard de l'autre ».

L'incompatibilité des contenus exprimés par des phrases, issue de l'interaction des deux dimensions normatives articulant la force des assertions liées à ces phrases, contient sa propre forme de relation inférentielle. Car à chacune des phrases, il est permis d'associer l'ensemble de toutes les phrases avec lesquelles elle est incompatible, en fonction des règles du jeu assertionnel particulier de l'offre et de la demande de raisons au sein duquel il joue un rôle. Les relations d'inférentielles de ces ensembles entre eux correspondent dès lors aux relations inférentielles des phrases entre elles. Autrement dit, le contenu de l'affirmation exprimée par l'assertion « l'échantillon est vermillon » implique le contenu de

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom 2000, p. 70.

l'affirmation exprimée par l'assertion « l'échantillon est rouge », dans la mesure où tout ce qui est incompatible avec le fait d'être rouge l'est également avec le fait d'être vermillon.

Les engagements et habilitations doivent déjà, selon Brandom, obéir à un minimum de logique : un engagement envers  $p$  est évidemment incompatible avec toute habilitation à soutenir  $\neg p$  ou quelque proposition  $q$  que ce soit dont  $\neg p$  pourrait découler. C'est la raison pour laquelle, Brandom inscrit sa démarche dans le cadre d'une *logique de l'incompatibilité*, laquelle se trouve formalisée dans [Brandom 2008]. Or il nous semble que cette formalisation est trop hâtive et, en tout cas, insuffisante pour remplir les offices que veut lui assigner le philosophe.

#### IV. Perspectives critiques

##### La critique de D. Porello

Daniele Porello<sup>1</sup> discute l'analyse de la logique dans l'approche pragmatique de Brandom, et critique en premier lieu l'incapacité de son modèle à prendre en compte différents modèles de raisonnement qui sont pourtant abondamment en oeuvre dans le raisonnement pratique, en particulier les inférences non-monotones et les inférences sensibles aux ressources disponibles. De plus, il propose une sémantique « de l'incompatibilité » qui serait en mesure de raffiner le modèle brandomien, et cela grâce à la sémantique des phases, dont nous avons dit plus haut qu'elle convenait pour la logique linéaire. Sur le premier point, Porello montre aisément que la sémantique de l'incompatibilité proposée par Brandom ne parvient pas à saisir les inférences intuitionnistes (et ainsi, le vocabulaire intuitionniste ne pourrait pas être justifié), non plus d'ailleurs que les inférences linéaires. Sur le second, Porello tente d'établir une sémantique de l'incompatibilité basée sur la logique linéaire. Il part pour cela des propriétés particulières de la négation en logique linéaire, qui doit, à la base, être interprétée comme un échange de perspectives, similaire à celui qui a lieu entre un proposant et un opposant dans un jeu. Du point de vue de la logique linéaire, un certain contenu «  $A$  » peut être interprété comme un ensemble d'actions, ou de joueurs, qui agissent en faveur de  $A$ ,  $A^\perp$  est alors l'ensemble des actions (ou des joueurs) qui contestent  $A$ . Alors  $A^{\perp\perp}$  représente l'ensemble des opposants aux opposants de  $A$ . La négation linéaire étant involutive  $A^{\perp\perp} = A$ , l'opposant d'un opposant est un proposant.

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<sup>1</sup> Porello 2012,

A côté de cette négation en quelque sorte câblée dans le système, il est aussi possible de définir deux autres sortes de négation en utilisant les deux constantes disponibles pour « l'absurdité » :  $\perp$  et  $0$ . La sémantique des phases fonctionne comme suit:  $(P, \otimes, 1)$  est un monoïde commutatif dont les éléments sont supposés être des actions qui comptent comme des raisons dans des contextes particuliers.  $\otimes$  représente la concaténation de telles actions, que l'on peut voir comme des suites de mouvements dans un dialogue. L'unité  $1$  est une action neutre, si  $1$  est une raison pour  $A$ , alors l'accord sur  $A$  est supposé avoir été réalisé. On retrouve alors par ce biais l'implication linéaire:

$$X \multimap Y := \{a; \forall x \in X, a \otimes x \in Y\}$$

Un espace de phases est défini par :

**Définition :**

Un espace de phases  $P$  est un couple  $(P, \perp)$  où  $P$  est un monoïde commutatif et où  $\perp \subset P$  est un sous-ensemble particulier choisi dans  $P$ , appelé le *pôle*.

On interprète alors  $\perp$  comme l'ensemble des actions qui sont considérées comme incompatibles, et l'on peut définir:

$$X^\perp := X \multimap \perp = \{y \in P; \forall x \in X, y \otimes x \in \perp\}$$

Une relation d'incompatibilité peut être définie :

**Définition :**

Une relation d'incompatibilité,  $a \perp b$  entre  $a$  et  $b$  dans  $P$  a lieu si et seulement si  $a \otimes b \in \perp$

Ces définitions permettent de retrouver des caractéristiques désirables dans le cadre brandomien : si un proposant  $P$  effectue une action  $a$  en faveur de  $A$ , alors l'opposant  $O$  conteste  $a$  au moyen d'un élément  $a'$  de  $A^\perp$ , ce à quoi  $P$  peut répliquer par un élément  $a''$  dans  $A^{\perp\perp}$ , mais comme il y a involutivité de la négation,  $P$  ne fait que répondre par une nouvelle raison en faveur de  $A$ . De ce fait, la parfaite dualité des perspectives (entre proposant et opposant) se trouve respectée.

**La ludique**

Le modèle de Porello a de nombreux avantages sur celui de Brandom dans [Brandom 2008], en particulier celui de s'inscrire directement dans un cadre

interactionniste. L'interaction n'a pas ici à être construite de manière *ad hoc* comme si chaque joueur avait sa propre logique et qu'un dispositif méta-logique confrontait ensuite les inférences d'une logique à celles de l'autre. L'intérêt de l'immersion dans la logique linéaire réside dans le fait que les connecteurs de celle-ci puissent d'emblée être perçus dans une interaction. Il est connu (Girard 87, 95) que les connecteurs additifs, par exemple (le  $\oplus$  et le  $\&$ ) s'interprètent comme *des choix*, actif ou passif (dans  $A \& B$ , l'agent a le choix actif entre  $A$  et  $B$ , alors que dans  $A \oplus B$ , il doit s'attendre à l'un des deux sans savoir lequel) et que la négation opère le passage de l'un à l'autre. Très tôt, d'ailleurs, des sémantiques à base de jeux ont été données pour la logique linéaire (Blass 91). Son autre avantage est que, comme on l'a vu, et sans doute à cause de ce qui précède, il respecte totalement la notion de symétrie qui devrait être inhérente au jeu de l'offre et de la demande de raisons. Cependant, il ne met pas l'accent sur *l'aspect preuve* des arguments échangés, et il reste de ce fait, relativement abstrait eu égard aux stratégies des joueurs. Les notions d'engagement et d'habilitation, notamment, n'y sont pas très claires. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous proposons ici un autre modèle de l'incompatibilité, basé, cette fois, sur la ludique, un formalisme inventé par Jean-Yves Girard afin de fournir un fondement interactionnel à la logique (Girard 03, 06, 07).

La ludique est issue d'une analyse fine des preuves en logique linéaire. Il y a deux types de règles de déduction : les règles positives supposent une action particulière (un choix, une séparation d'un contexte) quand on les applique qui fait que l'on ne peut pas en général revenir en arrière sur l'application (on a perdu de l'information), alors que les règles négatives ne font que réordonner différemment le même donné, mais sont donc, de ce fait, parfaitement réversibles. Les pas positifs (resp. négatifs) peuvent être regroupés en séquences maximales de sorte qu'une preuve soit toujours, finalement, une alternance de pas positifs et de pas négatifs. D'où la généralisation des règles à des schémas de règles, resp. positifs et négatifs :

Règle positive :

$$\begin{array}{l} (\xi_i \mid - \Gamma_i)_{i \in I} \\ \text{-----}(+, \xi, I) \\ \mid - \xi, \Gamma \end{array}$$

Cette règle est un schéma abstrait qui peut se lire comme la règle d'un jeu où les  $\xi_i$  seraient des emplacements de jetons disponibles en quantité finie (appartenant à l'ensemble  $I$ ). Les emplacements (appelés aussi *loci*) en partie droite de  $\mid -$  sont dits positifs (cases d'une couleur donnée, blanches par exemple), ceux en partie gauche sont dits négatifs (cases noires si on veut). Ces emplacements correspondront dans notre interprétation à des ouvertures

d'argumentation (places pour des raisons à fournir).  $\Gamma$  est un réservoir a priori de *loci*. Comme on le voit sur cette règle, quand on choisit un locus positif à la ligne du bas, on est autorisé à le décliner selon un ensemble  $I$ , mais sous forme d'autant de *loci négatifs*. Ce faisant les *loci* de  $\Gamma$  sont ensuite distribués avec les différentes déclinaisons du locus choisi. Ainsi,  $I$  est fini et les  $\Gamma_i$  sont des sous-ensembles deux à deux disjoints de  $\Gamma$ .

Règle négative:

$$\frac{(|-(\xi_i)_{i \in I}, \Gamma_I)_{I \in \mathbf{N}}}{\xi | - \Gamma} \text{-----} (-, \mathbf{N})$$

Cette fois, on part (ligne du bas) d'une suite de *loci* où figure un locus négatif. Il est unique, il n'y a donc pas de choix à faire, on va seulement redonner la main aux règles positives sous la forme d'une déclinaison de répertoires  $I \in \mathbf{N}$  où  $\mathbf{N}$  est un ensemble possiblement infini de sous-ensembles finis de  $\mathbf{N}$  et où pour tout  $I \in \mathbf{N}$ ,  $\Gamma_I \subset \Gamma$ .

En termes dialogiques, ceci signifiera simplement que chaque nouveau locus introduit est reçu par l'interlocuteur qui doit être prêt à réagir en regard d'une suite d'assertions possibles dépendant de ces *loci*.

A ces règles s'ajoute celle que Girard appelle *le daimon* :

$$\frac{\text{-----} \dagger}{| - \Gamma}$$

Elle n'a pas d'autres fonctions que celle de clore un échange. Le joueur qui la jouera se dispensera de continuer à objecter ou à demander des raisons, il se déclarera satisfait par celles qui ont été données et on peut présumer que, par le même mouvement, il finira par endosser le point de vue de l'autre.

L'intérêt de cette approche par la ludique est que, désormais, nous allons pouvoir suivre les argumentations qui ont lieu en faveur d'une thèse  $T$  pas à pas. Ces argumentations sont organisées selon des enchaînements des règles précédentes (le *daimon* ne pouvant être que terminal) que l'on appelle des *desseins*. Chaque dessein a une base qui peut être soit du type  $| - \Gamma$  (une suite d'emplacements pour des contenus qui sont tous positifs, ce qui exigera de partir d'une règle positive portant choix de l'un de ces contenus) soit de type  $\xi$

| -  $\Gamma$  (une suite d'emplacements dont l'un est négatif, ce qui oblige à démarrer avec une règle négative). On peut par exemple se contenter de bases | - A et A | -, dans le premier cas, un locuteur s'engage en faveur d'un contenu A : il va pour cela décliner un certain nombre de lieux négatifs où pourraient s'inscrire des arguments en défaveur de A, montrant en cela qu'il s'attend à un certain nombre de demandes de raisons. Dans le second cas, le locuteur n'a aucun choix à faire, A lui est donné en quelque sorte, mais sous une forme négative (dans un emplacement négatif) c'est-à-dire en un lieu où, en principe, se rangent des raisons en *défaveur* de A<sup>1</sup>. Il va alors décliner un certain nombre d'arguments possibles qui seront autant de manières de demander des raisons pour A. Supposons que l'on confronte les deux desseins: il apparaîtra une situation analogue à la situation de *coupure* qui existe entre deux réseaux de preuve, autrement dit, on effacera le duo « engagement en faveur de A » – « raisons en attente pour A » pour passer au niveau supérieur, celui où la demande de raison se décline en questions ou assertions explicites, et où cette fois, le premier locuteur se trouve dans la situation duale d'interlocuteur: c'est lui qui est en état, à ce moment-là, d'objecter aux demandes de raisons, autrement dit de se donner la possibilité de continuer par des demandes explicites de raisons aux demandes de raisons (qui peuvent alors être autant de réponses aux arguments du second locuteur). Et ce processus d'interaction peut soit continuer indéfiniment, soit s'arrêter lorsque l'un des deux partenaires a joué sa règle *daimon*, manifestant par là qu'il admet la stratégie de son interlocuteur (et l'on sait à ce moment-là si c'est A ou si c'est A<sup>+</sup> qui est gagnant). Une troisième possibilité est la présence d'un blocage. Ce blocage apparaît lorsque l'action positive choisie (représentée ici par une gamme de jetons D) n'a pas son répondant parmi les attentes formulées dans la règle négative correspondante, qui a été appliquée par l'interlocuteur. Cela signifie tout simplement que le locuteur n'est pas habilité par son interlocuteur à faire le pas qu'il se prépare à faire.

Le processus d'interaction que nous venons de décrire est appelé, techniquement, *normalisation*. Nous dirons que deux desseins convergent si et seulement si le processus de normalisation appliqué à ces deux desseins se termine grâce à l'utilisation opportune de la règle du *daimon* par l'un des deux joueurs. Si D et D' sont deux desseins, nous écrivons:  $D \perp D'$  pour dire que le

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<sup>1</sup> Rappelons ici que, dans tout calcul des séquents ordinaire avec une négation, le séquent A| - équivaut au séquent | - A<sup>+</sup>. Autrement dit, soutenir le jugement A | - revient à avoir des arguments pour le dual de A, qu'on peut interpréter ici comme sa négation (en un sens, il est vrai, non booléen, mais « négation » au sens d'un essai de réfutation de A). Si ce qui vient en appui de | - A (les séquents supérieurs) constitue des arguments en faveur de A, ce qui vient en appui de A | - constitue des arguments *en défaveur* de A.

processus de normalisation entre les deux desseins se termine normalement.  $D^\perp$  désigne l'orthogonal de  $D$  : c'est l'ensemble de tous les desseins qui convergent avec  $D$ .

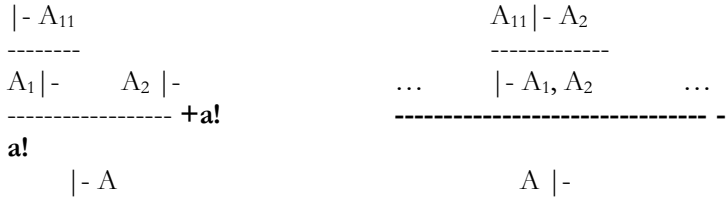
$D^{\perp\perp}$  est le bi-orthogonal de  $D$ . On peut démontrer facilement que  $D \in D^{\perp\perp}$ . Autrement dit,  $D^{\perp\perp}$  contient tous les desseins qui se comportent similairement à  $D$  du point de vue de l'interaction. L'orthogonalité peut donc être vue comme une nouvelle forme d'incompatibilité. En effet, lorsque  $D \perp D'$ , si  $D$  est de base  $|- A$  et  $D'$  de base  $A |-$ , on peut dire que l'un des deux a gagné, mais l'un des deux seulement, autrement dit les raisons en faveur de  $A$  excluent qu'il y ait des raisons en sa défaveur et réciproquement.

La divergence apparaît dans deux situations :

- le processus est infini, il n'y a pas incompatibilité à proprement parler, les deux thèses peuvent être soutenues tant que l'une n'a pas gagné sur l'autre. Notons que c'est une situation plausible. Il y a même des spécialistes de la rhétorique qui prétendent que c'est la situation la plus fréquente! (toute discussion peut être reprise *ad infinitum*),
- le processus se bloque parce que  $I \notin N$  : en général il s'agit d'un cas de violation de présupposé. Par exemple, à la question : *avez-vous cessé de battre votre père?*, il est illégal de répondre: *mais je n'ai jamais battu mon père* car il est présupposé que l'interlocuteur battait son père. Si cela se produit, le dialogue est interrompu. Il peut néanmoins être réparé. Livet a montré que de nombreux actes de langage trouvaient leur origine dans des interactions qui échouent. On peut aussi dire dans un cas semblable que le locuteur *n'est pas habilité* à s'exprimer comme il le fait (la question *avez-vous cessé de battre votre père?* n'habilite pas à mettre en question le fait que l'interlocuteur ait battu son père!).

**Exemple :** un locuteur  $L_1$  défend une thèse  $A$  face à un interlocuteur  $L_2$ . Pour cela il déclare  $A$ , sous la forme d'une action que nous notons  $+a!$  et qui a pour base la base positive  $|- A$ .  $L_2$  enregistre cette thèse en prévoyant d'y objecter des arguments. Pour cela, il développe ce qui constitue, pour lui, le contenu de cette thèse sous la forme d'une alternative entre plusieurs manières de le traiter : ceci consiste en une action « négative »  $-a!$  qui, lorsqu'on lit le schéma du bas vers le haut, revient à passer de la base négative d'enregistrement à plusieurs bases positives de départ possibles pour des déclarations en défaveur de la thèse soutenue par  $L_1$ . De son côté,  $L_1$ , au cours de son action initiale  $+a!$  est passé d'une base positive d'assertion à deux bases négatives exprimant sa disponibilité à recevoir les arguments de  $L_2$ . S'il souhaite continuer à défendre sa thèse

*initiale, il prévoit d'enchaîner sur de futures actions positives qui consisteront à répondre aux arguments de L<sub>2</sub>. Pour que le dialogue puisse se poursuivre, il est nécessaire que les dispositions de L<sub>1</sub> à recevoir des arguments de la part de L<sub>2</sub> correspondent bien à des contenus que L<sub>2</sub> a associés à la thèse A. C'est en cela que l'action positive +a! (qui consiste dans le mouvement entier de la ligne du bas vers la ligne supérieure) doit tenir compte de l'action négative produite par L<sub>2</sub> : L<sub>2</sub> habilite L<sub>1</sub> aux contenus particuliers des échanges futurs.*



## V. Ludique et inférentialisme

### Implication matérielle

Ces considérations ludiques nous permettent de faire un retour à l'inférentialisme brandomien, en l'éclairant et en le complétant. Nous pouvons par exemple reformuler la notion d'inférence matérielle à la manière de Brandom, mais cette fois via la ludique et dire que le contenu de l'assertion « L'échantillon est vermillon » (représentée par un dessein D<sub>V</sub>) implique matériellement le contenu de « l'échantillon est rouge » (représentée par un dessein D<sub>R</sub>) parce que tout dessein orthogonal au second est orthogonal au premier, autrement dit:  $D_V^{\perp\perp} \subset D_R^{\perp\perp}$ . Il n'y a en effet pas d'argument en défaveur de « l'échantillon est rouge » qui soit en faveur de « l'échantillon est vermillon ».

## VI. Engagement et habilitation

Quels liens avec les statuts d'engagement et d'habilitation? Comme dit plus haut, s'engager sur *p* c'est prévoir les manières dont *p* peut être contesté et prétendre avoir les moyens de contrer les objections, or c'est exactement ce que représente un dessein qui serait de base positive et dont aucune ramification supérieure ne se terminerait par l'application du *daimon*. Il n'est donc pas tout à fait exact de dire que les *actions positives* (action = application d'une règle) sont les engagements. Encore faut-il qu'il y ait au-dessus de ces actions des embranchements sans *daimon*. Néanmoins on peut dire qu'un *engagement* (au sens où on le prend et non au sens où on le reconnaît chez un autre) se caractérise par

une première action qui est toujours positive. Nous avons vu par ailleurs qu'une rupture de dialogue survient lorsqu'un pas dans la normalisation bute sur une situation où la ramification I d'une action positive du locuteur n'appartient pas au répertoire fourni par l'interlocuteur au cours d'une action négative ( $I \notin N$ ), c'est donc ici l'interlocuteur qui fournit des habilitations à dire, ou à s'engager, et cela, il le fait au cours d'une action *négative*. Nous savons bien sûr que tout locuteur complète son intervention par une action positive (dût-elle être d'acquiescement, dût-elle être muette). Au-dessus donc de l'action négative qui contient un ensemble d'habilitations pour l'autre locuteur, figure une action positive par laquelle, en général, le locuteur *adresse* les demandes de justifications. Nous ne confondrons donc pas habilitation et demande de justification: une habilitation est négative, une demande de justification est positive (mais n'est pas forcément un engagement!).

## VII. Attitudes discursives et bases cognitives

La ludique offre d'autres possibilités de réflexion sur le dialogue vu comme pratique fondée sur des engagements et des habilitations. Comme le précise Brandom dans [Brandom 2000], les statuts normatifs sont complétés dans le dialogue par des *attitudes discursives* (ou différences de perspective sociale) : il y a une différence, pour un locuteur donné, entre *prendre* un engagement et *attribuer* un engagement. Brandom montre d'ailleurs que notre aptitude à discerner les significations de certains énoncés ambigus (ambiguïté *de re / de dicto*) repose sur notre capacité à faire cette distinction. La phrase « l'avocat de la défense dit qu'un menteur invétéré est un témoin digne de foi » surprend à la première audition parce qu'on a l'impression que l'avocat en question dit que: « menteur invétéré = témoin digne de foi », ce qui est une absurdité, mais cela n'est une absurdité que parce qu'on interprète le jugement porté selon la modalité *de re*. En réalité, cette phrase signifie que l'avocat dit de quelqu'un qui s'avère être un menteur invétéré qu'il est un témoin digne de foi, autrement dit le locuteur de cette phrase répartit les prises en charge des contenus dans la phrase, à lui le jugement que X est un menteur invétéré, à l'avocat dont X parle le jugement que c'est un témoin digne de foi. Autrement dit, à supposer que l'avocat soit remplacé par un « tu » dans le dialogue, en même temps que le locuteur A prend l'engagement que X est un menteur invétéré, il attribue à A l'engagement selon lequel X serait un témoin digne de foi. Pour la prise d'engagement, il n'y a pas de doute: le mouvement est bien conforme à ce que nous avons dit plus haut, A effectue une action positive qui est prélude à un dessein sans branche terminée par un *daimon*.

Pour ce qui est de l'attribution de l'engagement à A', nous pouvons reprendre l'idée de Myriam Quatrini<sup>1</sup> selon laquelle les croyances des locuteurs sont stockées dans ce qu'elle appelle une « base cognitive », qui est une variante des tableaux de score introduits par Lewis et repris par Brandom avec toutefois la différence qu'elles contiennent des objets susceptibles d'interagir ou d'être mis en interaction avec d'autres objets (desseins). Ces propriétés sont utiles pour rendre compte de ce que Brandom qualifie comme l'aptitude des locuteurs à reconnaître et utiliser pratiquement les raisons qui ont pu être introduites par leur partenaire au cours de la discussion. « Prendre un engagement, dit-il (p.183), c'est faire une chose qui autorise les autres à l'attribuer de façon appropriée », et on peut, ajoute-t-il, « reconnaître l'engagement en étant disposé à l'admettre au moyen d'une assertion manifeste, ou bien on peut le reconnaître en l'utilisant comme prémisses dans un raisonnement ». Et « on peut prendre l'engagement de manière conséquente, c'est-à-dire comme une conclusion à laquelle on s'engage parce qu'il s'agit d'une conséquence inférentielle impliquée par ce que l'on reconnaît effectivement ». Autrement dit, la démarche dialogique analysée par Brandom présuppose nos aptitudes à transférer des conclusions depuis les lieux précédents où elles ont été formulées et à reconnaître comme identiques des assertions proposées par les deux locuteurs. Or, la ludique possède un moyen puissant de représenter ces transferts et ces reconnaissances : c'est l'usage qui peut être fait d'une interaction avec un dessein particulier (et infini), dénommé le *Fax*. Le *Fax* peut être vu de deux manières : soit comme moyen de vérifier pas à pas l'identité de deux desseins (phase de reconnaissance), soit comme moyen de transférer un dessein D vers un autre dessein, D'. On peut alors décomposer l'énonciation d'une phrase comme « tu penses qu'un menteur invétéré est un témoin digne de foi » en une première action consistant à transférer des lieux de l'interlocuteur l'engagement de sa part consistant dans l'affirmation que X est un témoin digne de foi (d'abord du dessin de l'interlocuteur vers le tableau de score, puis de ce dernier vers le dessein du locuteur, en inversant toutefois la polarité) suivie d'une seconde qui consiste dans l'action positive contenue dans l'engagement selon lequel X est un menteur invétéré.

### VIII. De l'origine des lois logiques

On notera pour finir que le soubassement ludique ne contient aucune « règle » à proprement parler, qui serait associée à un connecteur, les règles dont nous disposons peuvent se lire comme des règles du jeu abstraites qui sont de pure géométrie : il s'agit principalement de respecter la symétrie et de donner

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<sup>1</sup> Quatrini, 2014.

les bases d'une orthogonalité (= incompatibilité) possible. En ce sens, on peut défendre le point de vue girardien de primauté du géométrique, ce qui est très satisfaisant du point de vue de la genèse des lois logiques, autrement dit du passage, que Bandom caractérise comme *explicitation*, des notions pré-logiques illustrées dans l'implication matérielle aux concepts établis de la logique ordinaire. On notera alors, pour renforcer ce point, qu'il est en effet possible, à partir de la ludique pure, de reconstruire les opérations de base de la logique linéaire (et par extension, de la logique classique). Il suffit pour cela de partir de la notion de *comportement* (les ensembles de desseins  $E$  tels que  $E = E^{\perp\perp}$ ) et de définir sur les comportements des opérations satisfaisant au critère de complétude interne (ainsi appelé parce que traduisant l'idée qu'après construction au moyen d'un opérateur binaire, le résultat obtenu contient bien *tous* les desseins nécessaires pour que ce soit bien un comportement).

## IX. Conclusion

Nous avons voulu dans cet article montrer que l'inférentialisme de Bandom était compatible avec l'approche ludique due à Jean-Yves Girard. Il est notable d'ailleurs que les deux points de vue, celui de Bandom et celui de Girard, se rencontrent en de nombreux points. Comme le souligne Pierre Livet<sup>1</sup>:

Bandom et Girard semblent partager deux positions : 1) le contenu signifiant des dialogues est inférentiel (thèse de Sellars pour Bandom, non extériorité à la logique pour Girard); 2) il réside dans des interactions entre développements inférentiels.

Pour les deux auteurs, la logique ne saurait s'appuyer sur un extérieur à elle, pas plus que ne saurait le faire un langage en général, y compris notre langage naturel. Les tentatives de fonder les propriétés essentielles d'un langage sur un rapport au monde extérieur par le biais de la fameuse *complétude* seraient vaines. Elles occultent des propriétés beaucoup plus fondamentales comme celles qui sont représentées par la dynamique des inférences ou des preuves. Du point de vue strictement logique où se place Girard, ces propriétés sont la normalisation, normalisation d'une preuve en déduction naturelle par exemple, qui prend le nom d'élimination des coupures dans le calcul de Gentzen ou dans la méthode des réseaux de preuves, ainsi que confluence des normalisations (déterminisme) souvent référée au théorème de Church-Rosser. Mais c'est une question ouverte de savoir si du point de vue du langage ordinaire, il n'en va pas de même.

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<sup>1</sup> Livet 2012.

Ici, « l'élimination des coupures » se traduit tout simplement par la possibilité de *communiquer*, c'est-à-dire de produire des engagements et de reconnaître ceux de l'autre en s'appuyant sur des habilitations que les deux participants au dialogue s'attribuent réciproquement. L'avantage de la ludique, par rapport à tout autre cadre, y compris les tentatives faites par Brandom d'élaborer une logique de l'incompatibilité, consiste justement en ce qu'elle se fonde sur rien d'autre que la normalisation d'une interaction, sans requérir ainsi que l'on stipule de l'extérieur un mécanisme de confrontation entre une argumentation et une contre-argumentation.

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## Counterfactually robust inferences, modally ruled out inferences, and semantic holism

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### Résumé.

On affirme souvent que la sémantique du rôle inférentiel (SRI) implique un holisme sémantique aussi longtemps que le théoricien échoue à répondre à la question de savoir dans quelle mesure les inférences, entre autres, sont constitutives de la connaissance. Étant donné que l'analyticité, en tant que vérité en vertu de la signification, est une notion largement laissée de côté lorsqu'il s'agit d'indiquer quelles inférences déterminent la signification, il semble que l'holisme doive en découler. L'holisme sémantique est souvent compris comme rencontrant des problèmes avec la stabilité du contenu et les nombreuses explications habituelles de la communication. Nous devrions ainsi choisir entre abandonner SRI, pour éviter ces implications holistes, ou défendre l'holisme contre cette accusation, pour sauver IRS. J'essaie de poursuivre le second objectif en analysant certains schémas de raisonnement contrefactuel. Wilfrid Sellars et Robert Brandom affirment que, pour défendre IRS, des inférences contrefactuellement robustes sont constitutives de contenu. Bien qu'il soit difficile d'évaluer la validité d'une telle conception, elle implique néanmoins que des inférences non contrefactuellement robustes (que j'appelle "inférences régies modalement") sont constitutives de contenu. Si cela est vrai, et si nous admettons certaines remarques sur la saisie de concept à bord, il existe une manière de restreindre la portée de l'holisme impliqué par IRS en reformulant les problèmes via la stabilité du contenu.

### Mots-clés.

Sémantique du rôle inférentiel, Holisme sémantique, Saisie de concepts, Inférences régies modalement, Inférences contrefactuellement robustes.

### ملخص.

غالبًا ما يُقال أن سيمانطيقا الدور الاستدلالي (س د أ) تستلزم الكلائية السيمانطيقية بقدر ما يُخفق المنظرون في تحديد أي الاستدلالات - من بين كثرة منها - تؤسس للمعنى. وحيث أن التحليلية - باعتبارها سبيلًا للصدق بناءً على المعنى -

هي مفهومٌ مستبعدٌ على نطاقٍ واسع، بالنظر إلى فكرة أن الاستدلالات تُحدد المعنى، فقد يبدو أن هذا يؤدي إلى الكلائية. وحيث أن الفهم السائد للكلائية السيمانطيقية هو أنها غالبًا ما تُواجه بمشكلات ثبات المحتوى وكثرة التفسيرات المعتادة للتواصل، فإن ثمة خيارًا وحيدًا لدينا: إما أن نتخلى عن سيمانطيقا الدور الاستدلالي كي نتجنب هذه الاستلزامات الكلائية، أو أن ندفع عن الكلائية هذه التهمة كي ننقد سيمانطيقا الدور الاستدلالي. وسوف أحاول تعقب الهدف الثاني بتحليل أنماط معينة من الاستنتاج المناقض للواقع Counterfactual Reasoning. ويذهب كل من «ويلفريد سيلرز» و«روبرت براندوم» إلى أن الاستدلالات القوية على نحو مناقض للواقع هي استدلالات مُؤسّسة للمحتوى. ورغم صعوبة تقييم صلاحية هذه الوجهة من النظر، إلا أنها تستلزم أن الاستدلالات القوية بشكلٍ غير مناقض للواقع (والتي أَدعوها «استدلالات مستعدة جهويًا») هي استدلالات غير مُؤسّسة للمحتوى. ولئن كان هذا صحيحًا، وإذا وضعنا أمامنا ملاحظات بعينها حول فهم التصورات، فربما أمكننا القول أن هذه طريقة للحد من نطاق الكلائية اللازمة عن سيمانطيقا الدور التصوري، إلى درجة إعادة تشكيل المشكلات المتعلقة بثبات المحتوى.

### كلمات مفتاحية.

سيمانطيقا الدور الاستدلالي، كلائية سيمانطيقية، فهم التصورات، استدلالات جهوية، استدلالات قوية بشكلٍ مناقض للواقع.

### Abstract.

It is often argued that inferential role semantics (IRS) entails semantic holism as long as theorists fail to answer the question about which inferences, among the many, are meaning-constitutive. Since analyticity, as truth in virtue of meaning, is a widely dismissed notion in indicating which inferences determine meaning, it seems that holism follows. Semantic holism is often understood as facing problems with the stability of content and many usual explanations of communication. Thus, we should choose between giving up IRS, to avoid these holistic entailments, and defending holism against this charge, to rescue IRS. I try to pursue the second goal by analyzing certain patterns of counterfactual reasoning. Wilfrid Sellars and Robert Brandom claim that, to defend IRS, counterfactually robust inferences are content-constitutive. While it is difficult to assess the goodness of such a view, it nonetheless entails that noncounterfactually robust inferences (which I call “modally ruled out inferences”) are not content-constitutive. If this is true, and if we take certain remarks about the grasp of concepts on board, there is a way to

restrict the scope of the holism entailed by IRS to the extent of reshaping problems with the stability of content.

**Keywords.**

Inferential Role Semantics, Semantic Holism, Grasp of Concepts, Modally Ruled Out Inferences, Counterfactually Robust Inferences.

## 1. Summary

According to inferential role semantics (IRS), concepts are determined by their inferential role, the set of inferences a concept is involved in. It thus follows that IRS is a holistic theory of conceptual content. If one cannot answer the question about which inferences are constitutive of content—as Fodor and Lepore (2002) have forcefully claimed—it seems that inferentialism will turn out to be an unreasonable view; the holism involved is so strong that it faces many big problems with the stability of content. In this study, I first (section 2, below) present the problem and then (2a) examine the main reasons why strong holism is an unreasonable option. Thereafter, I explore (3) the possibility of endorsing a conception of a grasp of concepts that is not compromised, *per se*, with such strong semantic holism. Then (4), I focus my attention on the account provided by Sellars (and recently seconded by Brandom) about which inferences are content-constitutive; these are the counterfactually robust inferences, those encoded in counterfactual conditionals. If the proposal works, we can avoid the bad holistic entailments for inferentialism. While cogent arguments in support of this view appear to be missing, I wonder whether indirect ones are available. At this point (5), I introduce a perspective (which is a consequence of Sellars' view) that I find useful in avoiding the worst consequences of holism for inferentialism (and in indirectly supporting Sellars' view): modally ruled out inferences (inferences that are *not* counterfactually robust) are not content-constitutive. Inferences involving *C* that are not counterfactually robust are not constitutive of *C*. Since these are not content-constitutive, we have evidence that there are many inferences we can subtract from the inferential roles of concepts, circumscribing the problems of stability of content given by strong holism; inferential roles will thus appear to be sufficiently smaller than they seemed to be. Problems with holism will then seem less pressing (also given the fairly minimal requirements for the grasp of concepts). Then (5a), I offer many examples of modally ruled out inferences, showing that they belong to a general pattern. In the following subsection (5b), I provide an argument to prove that modally ruled out inferences actually belong to a general pattern and that they can indeed rescue inferentialism from strong semantic holism. Finally, modally

ruled out inferences *may not* be the proof that counterfactually robust inferences are content-constitutive, but they can, unless the contrary is proven, count as a robust clue in that direction. The criterion for not being constitutive that emerges, in fact, is being counterfactually non-robust: by this very criterion, then, counterfactually robust inferences are putatively “(not non-)constitutive.”

## 2. IRS in question

According to IRS, concepts are determined by their inferential role, the distinctive role they play in reasoning. Such a role encompasses, for the concept *C*, all the good premises for *C* and all the sentences that we can appropriately infer from *C*. A theory that appeals to these ideas is that of Robert Brandom (1994).<sup>1</sup> The inferences that determine content are those that are *materially good*. Their goodness must be understood as “material:” it depends on the nonlogical concepts involved. For instance, if I infer from “cats are felines” that “cats are mammals,” the inference is good in virtue of the content of *feline* and *mammal*.<sup>2</sup>

Since the content of a concept is determined by a set of inferences, it follows that IRS is a holistic theory. Roughly, semantic holism entails that to grasp, know, and master a particular concept *C*, one needs to grasp, know, and master many further concepts.

Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore (F&L) have raised many doubts about IRS in general and Brandom’s view in particular (F&L, 1992; 2002: 13, 139). They claimed that IRS<sup>3</sup> entails the adoption of a *strong* form of holism and that this

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom gave a pragmatic account of how inferences articulate the content of speech acts within the social practice of “giving and asking for reasons.” He explained inferential norms in a pragmatist way, making them dependent on discursive practice. The game of “giving and asking for reasons” determines what the correct inferential moves are and which beliefs are correct in the light of their consequences and of the best reasons at one’s disposal. The score-keeping activity implicit in such a practice determines the normative statuses of our linguistic utterances and behaviour; we should distinguish between “commitments” and “entitlements.” This practice, which is aimed at assessing which commitments can receive an entitlement and which cannot, is supposed to enable us to make explicit, through the exploration of the actual entailments of the inferences that we draw, the difference between simply undertaking a particular commitment and being entitled to something.

<sup>2</sup> See Brandom (1994: 97–105) and Sellars (1953). In general, Brandom uses “inference” to indicate a transition between propositions (which may play the role of premises and/or of conclusions). A proposition *A* entails a proposition *B* (and a proposition *B* follows from a proposition *A*) if the inference from *A* to *B* is a materially good one. An inference that is good only because of its logical form is what Brandom calls a formal one (standard deductive inferences). See Brandom (1994: 97–102).

<sup>3</sup> At least, versions of IRS provided without a tenable analytic/synthetic distinction; read further.

would imply big problems for any semantic theory committed to it: the concepts needed to master *C* could be, in principle, all the other concepts in the language/conceptual system, or a very large section of it. Problems associated with holism led F&L to claim that IRS is unacceptable (see below).

F&L asked Brandom directly, *Which inferences are meaning-constitutive?*<sup>1</sup> If you cannot say which inferences among many are constitutive, you must conclude, in fact, that all are constitutive. This would mean that all the inferences are, in principle, constitutive of every single concept. An IRS that cannot solve the “which inferences” (WI) problem then seems to entail the strong holism that F&L elsewhere say is unacceptable. A weak version of holism, the claim that the content of a concept depends on many other concepts belonging to a relatively limited set, does not represent a threat for IRS; in this case, there would be a reasonably small set of constitutive inferences.

The inferential role theorist needs some criteria for taking a step back from a strong holism to a weaker version of it, and arguably, these criteria can be provided by somehow directly solving the WI problem; otherwise, he or she has to bite the bullet by adopting a strategy that is explicitly holistic.

F&L claimed that this answer can hardly be provided without a principled analytic/synthetic (A/S) distinction (between sentences true only in virtue of their meaning and sentences true only in virtue of how the world is); in this case, analytic inferences would count as constitutive and would be the natural option (for example, the inference from “X is a bachelor” to “X is an unmarried man” would be constitutive of the concept *bachelor*). However, Quine (1953) has convincingly shown that such a sharp distinction cannot be maintained.<sup>2</sup> At the very least, it has become a highly suspicious distinction, and avoiding it would probably be the best option (as Brandom and F&L do). F&L not only believed that IRS is in need of such criteria but also that these cannot

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<sup>1</sup> They also asked IRS theorists: *How do you explain the compositionality of meaning?* See F&L (2002: 139). I will neither address this issue here nor discuss it in relation to semantic holism.

<sup>2</sup> First, to know *P* only in virtue of its meaning ipso facto means to know *P a priori*. Second, if analytic sentences are true only in virtue of their meanings, then they cannot be revised by means of experience. Analyticity entails both *apriority* and *unrevisability*, epistemic consequences that are semantically troublesome, since, as Quine claimed, the inferences that one accepts do not depend only “on what one intend[s] [his/her] [...] words to mean but also on how [he/she] [...] take[s] the (non-linguistic) world to be. And there is no principled way to separate the respective contributions of these factors.” See F&L (1992: 57). Third, Quine showed that in defining analyticity, when we begin with semantic notions like “meaning” and “synonymy,” we cannot avoid circularities. For different readings, see for example Boghossian (1994, 1994a), Katz (1979), and Rey (1993).

be achieved and, therefore, that IRS cannot avoid strong semantic holism (SSH). Here comes the problem: F&L argued, on the basis of this entailment, that IRS *must* be in trouble. An argument that runs between the lines, against IRS, can be synthesized in this way:

- 1) SSH is unacceptable.
- 2) We need a principled A/S distinction to claim that analytic inferences are content-constitutive (and thus to adopt IRS while avoiding SSH).
- 3) We do not have any A/S distinction.
- 4) Thus, IRS entails SSH.
- 5) Given (1) and (4), it follows that IRS is unacceptable.

If we cannot answer the WI problem, then we face a very strong form of holism, one entailing that the content of every concept is constituted by the totality of good material inferences it is involved in. An inferential role should involve, at this point, the whole language or, at least, a very large part of it. Indeed, IRS seems to entail the kind of holism that F&L claimed is unacceptable. This would mean paying too high a price for every kind of IRS. Why is SSH unacceptable? Is it true that IRS entails SSH?

## 2a) Problems with SSH

There are many reasons to think that SSH entails problems about grasping, sharing, and learning contents. The difficulties, highlighted especially by F&L (1992, 1993), Jackman (1999, 2014), and Whiting (2008), are the following:

*Grasp:* First of all, grasping a concept seems to entail the mastery and understanding of all the relevant inferences. A *prima facie*, troublesome entailment of this holistic conception is that if you need to master too many inferences to grasp a concept *C*, then it appears as if you need to master an entire language/conceptual system to grasp any single concept. The requirement for the grasp of a concept, then, would be to master and understand all the other concepts. This is a problem, since the conditions for grasping concepts would become very hard to meet. Here we need an explanation of the way in which such a grasp could be accommodated holistically.

*Concept learning:* SSH also faces problems in explaining concept learning. Imagine a child learning her first concept, *C*. The very idea of concept learning seems to suggest that there must be a starting point in the process. This case is relevant, since holism is the claim that concepts come in groups, while a

starting point in concept acquisition would be arguably a concept *C* alone. How can it be possible to learn *C* if its content is determined by certain inferences that the child is unable to draw? Our basic ideas about learning as a cumulative process would be impossible to accommodate. If we want to preserve these ideas about concept learning, then we should avoid SSH or provide a different account suitable to accommodate both holism and concept learning.

*Constitutive instability:* A very troublesome aspect of SSH is the connected thesis of the permanent instability of meaning and of the content of belief; every form of SSH systematically generates this instability. Conceptual contents, as such, are usually meant to be stable; “copper is not an electric insulator” should mean the same thing in my mouth and in your ear, and as well, it should mean the same thing for me today and tomorrow (and whenever). The strong holism we are dealing with seems to pose a radical challenge to this view; since the way in which we understand our concepts depends on the inferences that we draw and on our beliefs—that are not shared and can also change—it follows that our conceptual contents cannot be stable. What is unacceptable in holism is that it seems obvious that we have *different beliefs* and, at the same time, that we share *the same meanings*. SSH, in fact, entails that semantic contents be different from mind to mind and that they vary depending on the beliefs of the speakers. In principle, it is possible to have temporal instability for a single speaker; every change of belief can transform the entire range of beliefs again and again. This means that holistic contents cannot be stable and, rather, that they *must* be something that shifts depending on people’s beliefs. Therefore, we have reasons to suppose that this instability is a feature strictly related to SSH.

*Communication:* If we endorse SSH, since individual perspectives may diverge, the inferences and beliefs that different speakers associate with the concept *C* may be different, and this entails that *C* not only can be *slightly* different for you and me but, in principle, that it can also be *radically* different (despite the fact that, independently of individual perspectives, certain inferences actually determine *C*). In fact, if we associate different inferences with the same sentences, we cannot conceive communication as a successful exchange, or transmission, of information between speakers (because the inferences that we draw may differ). This entailment of SSH no longer seems enough to warrant successful communication between speakers. Here again, to explain communication, we would need to avoid SSH or provide a theory of how it can be possible to explain communication holistically.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom developed a holistic account of communication and claimed that communicating would be better understood in terms of “cooperating in joint activity” and that it should rather

*Psychological generalization:* Psychological generalization is supposed to work only if we can attribute to other people the same contents we ourselves undertake. Thus, there is also a problem for the psychological attribution of thoughts, beliefs, and desires to other people. (Can I attribute to Jimmy the belief of being thirsty, if by *thirsty* we mean actually different things— e.g., if we draw different inferences from it?) How can SSH be suitable for the successful attribution of psychological contentful states in these cases? Psychological generalizations seem to require a more stable notion of content than the one provided by SSH.

These difficulties indicate that we need to know how the stability of content can be explained and defended. SSH here presents a challenge to the very idea of mutual understanding, since the instability of contents entails the possibility of permanent equivocation (both in communicating and in attributing psychological states).

### 3. Remarks on grasp: an anti-individualist proposal<sup>1</sup>

Before addressing the questions raised in the previous section, I think it is useful to develop a further premise. In fact, the peculiar holism entailed by IRS seems to depend on the conception of grasp that one endorses. This becomes evident if one thinks about the grasp of concepts as an *all-or-nothing* matter; since to grasp a concept, I have to master its *complete* inferential role, grasp will entail the kind of holism that is semantically disastrous (everything being constitutive). Thus, this conception of grasp (together with IRS) seems to lead to the holism we should avoid in semantics. This line of reasoning can be undermined by proposing a conception of grasp that does not commit us to these holistic entailments. I believe, and it seems to me that I am supported by good evidence on this, that grasp is not an all-or-nothing matter; rather, it is a matter of degree. It seems actually sound and coherent to distinguish at least between these two basic (anti-individualist)<sup>2</sup> levels of grasp:

1. “Minimum grasp” regarding a neophyte’s possession and use of concepts, does not require the mastering of inferential roles but just of a few inferences.

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involve “coordinating social perspectives by keeping deontic score [the argumentative score between discussants] according to common practices.” See Brandom (1994: 479).

<sup>1</sup> For an extended version of this point, see Salis (2015).

<sup>2</sup> See Burge (1979) for the basic idea of anti-individualism, and Putnam (1975) for the groundbreaking idea of a “division of linguistic labour.” Very roughly, the idea is that common speakers do not entirely master the concepts they use and that in case of doubt and controversy, they “defer to experts” (who actually master the relevant concepts).

2. “Full grasp” is equivalent to expertise; here the expert has a qualified mastery of the inferential transitions involving a concept.

We should also consider a medium level of grasp exemplified by those who are working to become experts (like graduate students). Furthermore, while it is strongly plausible that linguistic children are people we can talk with, we do not consider them as experts (we presuppose in practice that grasp is a matter of degree). If we think as well about the inferential roles of many concepts we commonly use, we easily realize that we do not master all the constitutive inferences but just a few, and to know more about those, we have to ask experts (think about legal, physical, and biological concepts and so forth).<sup>1</sup> Thus, common sense grasp and expertise are different things, since we can grasp concepts without being experts. Grasp then concerns the first basic judgments and inferences we learn to perform with certain words (and not the whole framework of implications).<sup>2</sup>

Another feature of this suggestion is that our common sense mastery of inferential roles has to be understood as minimum grasp. We should not (and actually do not) require expertise about anything to attribute linguistic/conceptual competence to speakers, and so minimum grasp is enough for language users. This competence is also the degree zero, the a priori condition, for becoming experts about certain conceptual systems/items. Think about the concept, *copper*. We can have a common sense competence about it, but then we can, on a second occasion, become expert about the peculiar physical properties of copper (and so we can become competent about all the relevant inferences involving *copper*). This is a coherent story about which inferences constitute common sense grasp; it is not a story about particular inferences but rather a matter of statistics about the things we know. (There is merely something that most of us know as common speakers.) Far from being a brute fact about knowledge, common sense grasp is something related to our (common, actual) practices, the relevant epistemic and cultural context, the effective way in which we learn language.

If this is our conception of grasp, then the only version relevant to common speakers will be, from a semantic perspective, the minimal one. This

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<sup>1</sup> In the same way, someone who is not a doctor can even come to think that “arthritis” can concern one’s thigh. See Burge (1979).

<sup>2</sup> Brandom seems to explicitly endorse this view, even if a little bit quickly, in (2000: 64), where he talks about grasping concepts: “the metallurgist understands the concept *tellurium* better than I do, for training has made her master of the inferential intricacies of its employment in a way that I can only crudely approximate.”

conception of grasp does not, per se, entail SSH, and so I think it is useful to take it on board before addressing the WI problem again. Even if this view is *not* meant to be a direct response to the worries about semantic holism, it helps us to restrict the scope of the problem just before addressing the main proposal of this study. It directly answers the problem about grasp, but it will also become helpful in clarifying and explaining learning, communication and psychological generalizations, as well as, partly, content-stability (see below).

#### 4. On counterfactually robust inferences: alternative views of content-constitutiveness

In the logical space opened by the problems with semantic holism, there is a certain response that I consider, for different reasons, worthy of attention. The main idea is not very new, since it was presented for the first time by Sellars (1948). It is based on certain modal features of our patterns of inference.

According to Brandom's reading, Sellars proposed another way to demarcate the "realm of the conceptual:" he claimed, that counterfactually robust inferences, the inferences that support counterfactual conditionals, are content-constitutive. IRS would become, from this point of view, the claim that content *C* is determined by the good material inferences that are counterfactually robust. Brandom (2007: 661), defines this proposal as a "modal theory of meaning," because these inferences are heavily influenced by nomological-law-like-necessities. This is a possible way to address the WI problem, which Quine implicitly showed could not be solved by means of the A/S distinction. This move is seconded as a live option in Brandom's (2007, 2008) most recent works. He describes this enterprise in these terms:

Sellars, for instance, does not take all the materially good inferences involving a concept to be essential to it. He picks out the privileged concept-constitutive inferential connections as those that support *counterfactual* reasoning, and so count as having *nomological* force. This is a real practical difference; this way of drawing the line does not fall afoul of Quine's strictures, for it by no means follows that these conceptual matters are a priori—we need to investigate the world to find out what the laws are, as for any other facts. Since the laws involved are not a priori, unrevisable or immune to factual evidence, this is not a version of analyticity (Brandom, 1994: 634).

This is a conception of content-constitutiveness that is not supposed to be just a new version of analyticity, since constitutive inferences are not a priori or unrevisable. Quine criticized a conception of analyticity (and hence of content-

constitutiveness) understood to be both a priori and unrevisable. This proposal is meant to play the same role that IRS would want from the A/S distinction (but without the problems highlighted by Quine for this): distinguishing between constitutive and nonconstitutive inferences. Counterfactually robust inferences are understood to be content-constitutive, while *non*counterfactually supporting inferences should *not* be content-constitutive. If this proposal works, then it could be what we are looking for; we could get a response to the WI problem without committing ourselves to any version of analyticity (and could stop worrying about holism at the very beginning).

At this point, we can raise a number of questions. What exactly does this “counterfactual” proposal mean? When exactly is an inference counterfactually robust? What examples can we find to give content to these ideas? Are we able to show that this “modal” view is true? Do we have the direct argument we need to defend it?

Let us try to better understand the meaning of this account. We can start with a very clear quotation from Brandom:

The inference from something’s being copper to its melting at 1083.4°C is partly constitutive of the concept copper because *if* the coin in my pocket *were* copper, it *would* melt at that temperature. The inference from the coin’s being in my pocket to its being copper is not partly constitutive of the concept copper because if this nickel were in my pocket, it would not follow that it was copper. This is a directly responsive answer to Quine’s challenge, because we do in our ordinary linguistic practice distinguish between inferences based on their modal status as counterfactual-supporting or not —between those that would explicitly be licensed by law-like regularities such as connect atomic structure and melting point, and those that would be licensed only by accidental regularities, such as those connecting atomic structure and location in space (Brandom, 2007: 661).

The first types of counterfactual conditionals are generally ruled, as the example shows, by the necessities exemplified in natural laws; the second types of counterfactual conditionals deal with regularities that are only accidental.

Inferences that are counterfactually robust are in general those that are supported by the laws of nature that actually obtain.<sup>1</sup> Here, counterfactual robustness is understood as a consequence of the fact that laws obtain in hypothetical situations where contingent facts may be very different from their

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<sup>1</sup> Other types of necessity, as for example logical or mathematical necessity, can be as well preserved by our use of counterfactuals. See Lange (2009: chap. 2).

actual course; it is the stability of laws under counterfactual circumstances. On this basis, we can say more clearly what it means, according to Brandom, to say that a material inference is counterfactually robust. Having, for some good material inferences, a certain range of counterfactual robustness means their “remaining good under various merely hypothetical circumstances” (Brandom, 2008: 105).

It is both a presupposition and a result of our scientific practices that laws are necessary and stable, and these features are strictly related to our ability to evaluate specific counterfactual conditionals (our ability to identify which necessities would still hold in different hypothetical contingent situations). For example, it is a law that gold has atomic number 79. We can imagine counterfactual situations that hold the law fixed, while changing some contingent facts: “If this coin had not been gold, it would have had a different atomic number.” It is a law that emeralds are green: “Had this emerald been inside my pocket, something green would have been there.” So, generally, counterfactuals can help us in distinguishing facts that are somehow necessary (laws) from the mere facts that are contingent (accidents).<sup>1</sup> A consequence of this view is that counterfactual conditionals involve laws that, Sellars suggested, can be understood as entailments between *universals* <sup>2</sup>; to say that it is a law that emeralds are green is to say that the universal “emerald” is a subset of the universal “green.” These features, being lawful, can be made explicit by counterfactual conditionals: “Had these gems been rubies, they would not have been green.” For this Brandomian reading of Sellars, concepts are constituted by actual laws of nature that are independent of our knowledge of them (if we had had no idea of them, they would have still obtained). This feature is very interesting for concepts, because the stability of laws over space and time would render conceptual contents stable per se (independently of our grasp and understanding).

This independence leads us to a further specification: the inferences that are content-constitutive are those that are counterfactually robust and not those that are merely *taken* to be counterfactually robust. It means that our concepts are somehow independent of our conceptions (i.e., we can get the concepts

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<sup>1</sup> See Lange (2009: 17). Even though, in certain cases, accidental happenings may show some misleading degree of regularity.

<sup>2</sup> See Sellars (1948: 296): “Universals and laws are correlative, same universals, same laws, different universals, different laws.” Here, “universal” should be understood, broadly, as something that can be exemplified, just as “red things” exemplify the universal, “Red”. Vice versa, “particulars” serve to exemplify some universal, for example “this red patch” exemplifies (the universal) “Red”. In this sense, universals are general properties that can be exemplified by particulars. See Sellars (1948: 300).

wrong). That emeralds are green is true even in the world where nobody knows it or in the world where everyone wrongly believes that they are blue (and, in the same way, the counterfactuals regarding emeralds will hold again in that world, notwithstanding their being neglected).

However, here we must be careful to avoid certain easy confusions. There are claims that are counterfactually robust, and hence content-constitutive, but that nonetheless are good independently of natural laws. There is *prima facie* a difficulty, in fact, with such lexical concepts as *bachelor*. The inference from “A is a bachelor” to “A is unmarried” is constitutive of *bachelor*, but it does not depend on natural laws. However, this inference shows as well a certain undeniable degree of counterfactual robustness; the inference from “A being a bachelor” to “A being unmarried” is content-constitutive of *bachelor*, since, if Barack Obama were a bachelor, he would be unmarried. This inference is constitutive and counterfactually robust, but not yet law-like. (Perhaps it is a “conceptual necessity,” but not yet a natural law, that bachelors are unmarried.)

Here, we have *two* possible readings of the example about *bachelor*. The first could represent it as a direct counterexample against this view, since there are constitutive inferences that are not nomological. But I tend to be quite skeptical about this route, since this quick conclusion risks hiding the central feature of the account attributed to Sellars. There is, in fact, a second option that I prefer and that seems to find some help in passages from Brandom. The idea is that the constitutive inferences are those that are counterfactually robust, though not necessarily those governed by nomological laws. An interesting passage, for example, explicitly offers ground for this second reading, when Brandom says that “it may [...] be tempting to think that the inferences that are counterfactually robust are all and only those underwritten by *laws*” (Brandom, 2008: 105). But, he goes on, we should grant that “every claim, whether contingent or not, supports some counterfactual inferences, and if one grasped none of them one would not qualify as understanding those claims” (Brandom, 2008: 105). This option must thus generalize also to inferences that are not law-like but that show, as well, degrees of counterfactual robustness. The reason proposed by Brandom, which is basically the necessity to grasp certain counterfactual inferences involved in the very use of a concept *C* as a condition to understand *C* (independently of these inferences being law-like or not), seems to pose an interesting requirement. These counterfactual conditionals can be used as rules to license certain inferences as good (or to rule out others as bad). This means that these conditionals may be relevant in matters of concept use. If I take as good an inference that violates some counterfactual constraints for the use of a certain concept involved in it, I am therefore

misusing the concept, and I also show that I fail to understand and master it. Think again about the concept, *copper*. Conditionals such as “if this coin were copper, it would melt at 1084°C” cannot license inferences that clearly violate these constraints (and thus violate our concept use for *copper*). On this basis, an inference like “it’s really hot today, I fear this copper coin is going to melt” is clearly bad (it violates norms for the correct use of *copper*). So far so good, but this example is law-like, so it was already granted to work that way. (In this case, violating counterfactual constraints ipso facto means violating laws.) Think about the concept, *bachelor* (which is not law-like), again: “If Josh were a bachelor, he would be an unmarried man” is a conditional that may license certain inferences as good and rule out others as bad (e.g., as violating norms of concept use). For example, the inference from “Josh is a bachelor” to “Josh is a faithful and careful husband” is not only bad, but also an inference that violates counterfactual constraints that are not law-like. Indeed, the necessity violated in these cases cannot be just natural necessity. The counterfactual constraints that determine the norms of use for our concepts indeed extend beyond law-like inferences. So, more generally, the realm of the relevant necessities extends beyond natural laws. This aspect, according, for example, to Lange (2009), is fine with our understanding laws, and all these necessities can, in fact, be preserved by our use of counterfactuals. Thus, the law-likeness of these inferences is not the precise condition for them to be content-constitutive. (It is a sufficient condition but not a necessary one.) The necessary condition, then, is just their being counterfactually robust.

Would this proposal be suitable to explain grasp of concepts? This depends on the requirements one asks for; if one asks for all the constitutive inferences of the concept *C* to explain the grasp of *C*, then there are problems. Only experts, in fact, could grasp *C*. Since content-constitutiveness would in many cases be determined by natural laws, only scientists defending true theories would have a grasp of those specific concepts.<sup>1</sup> If one thinks that minimum grasp requires less than content-constitutiveness, the problems disappear; some constitutive inference could suffice. Another reason why grasp should not coincide with content-constitutiveness is the following. Since, according to Brandom’s reading, Sellars claimed that the constitutive inferences are not generally good a priori, he is *not* committed to claim that grasp needs all the constitutive inferences.<sup>2</sup> We need empirical investigations to learn about concepts (and thus, grasp is necessarily understood as a gradual process). We

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<sup>1</sup> We should also distinguish true theories from merely successful ones in a certain period. Imagine someone talking about *combustion* when *phlogiston* was the official theory. Now, nobody would concede his grasp of that concept.

<sup>2</sup> See Brandom (1994: 634).

simply cannot start having the constitutive inferences at the beginning of the learning process.

Brandom says that this approach to the problem has radical consequences for our traditional understanding of concepts. For instance:

Investigating the world is an attempt at once to rectify our claims and our concepts. Conceptual change is part and parcel of scientific change, because every new law we discover and every old one we are forced to give up brings with it a change in our concepts.<sup>1</sup> Semantics is not a discipline that can be pursued independently of our empirical inquiries into the rest of the world (Brandom, 2007: 661–662).

The understanding of all our concepts must be considered as almost entirely revisable in virtue of experience, since every new empirical discovery is potentially suitable to change our grasp and mastery of these concepts' inferential role. New empirical evidence can demonstrate the existence of good inferences about something we believe we know that we never imagined before, or it can even demonstrate that some inferences that we used to draw in the past were actually bad. (Think about inferences drawn from a geocentric model.) Revisability a posteriori entails that our grip on concepts may evolve. Thus, the way we use and grasp concepts can change over time depending on our empirical findings. This view, after all, is consistent with what Quine claimed about the A/S distinction; if there is no such distinction available, then there is no sharp distinction between concepts that are empirically revisable and those that are not. We finally just get a distinction between the connections that are counterfactually robust and those that are not.

What is the moral to be drawn from this? The option appears to be promising, and it also seems capable of deeply intertwining IRS and modality

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<sup>1</sup> Here Brandom says something that appears to contradict the idea that the constitutive inferences are those determined by the actual laws. Laws do not change, and this holds for concepts too. Changes come only at the level of grasp and understanding, which deal with our conceptions (and *not directly* with concepts). For example, Brandom (1994: 636), claims that: “[the account] distinguishes the proprieties governing *correct* use in which the concepts grasped by individuals consist, on the one hand, from the dispositions to apply concepts, make inferences, and perform speech acts, in which an individual's grasping of a concept consists, on the other—and so distinguishes concepts from conceptions of them. Talk of grasp of concepts as consisting in mastery of inferential roles does not mean that in order to count as grasping a particular concept an individual must be disposed to make or otherwise endorse in practice all the right inferences involving it.” The latter characterization, “all the right inferences involving it,” should count as ideally relative to concepts as independent of our grasp (and so of our conceptions).

with our concept use.<sup>1</sup> Being that promising is, nonetheless, not enough to endorse it. The only indirect reason that we have found so far in support of the account is that the inferences that we already know to be constitutive, like the inference from “Josh is a bachelor” to “Josh is unmarried” (which is constitutive of *bachelor*), are also counterfactually robust (though no law-like). We do not know whether *all* the counterfactually robust inferences are content-constitutive; we just know that some content-constitutive inferences are counterfactually robust. Therefore, there are clues, though insufficient, that suggest keeping the option alive. This indirect reason alone, so far, is not enough to defend the view. Even if this view seems to fit with our examples, has a certain valuable explanatory power, and directly solves the problem of stability of content—and these are all good *prima facie* reasons in support of the account—we still need a direct argument for it. However, a further entailment of this view can still be helpful in dealing with semantic holism, and it depends on another feature of this modal account.

## 5. On modally ruled out inferences: a modest version of Sellars’ view and the “which inferences” problem

This modal proposal yields a complement as well: inferences that are not counterfactual-supporting. When is an inference *not* counterfactually robust? Brandom (2007: 661) provides helpful examples: “The inference from the coin’s being in my pocket to its being copper is *not* partly constitutive of the concept *copper* because *if* this nickel *were* in my pocket, it would *not* follow that it was copper.” These non-counterfactual-supporting inferences are described by Brandom as not content-constitutive, and this is a feature very interesting for another view that can be introduced into the discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> See Brandom (2008: 95–102). Here, Brandom supports the view, as embedded implicitly in what he calls “the modal Kant-Sellars thesis,” stating that “the ability to use ordinary empirical descriptive terms such as ‘green’, ‘rigid’, and ‘mass’ already presupposes grasp of the kinds of properties and relations made explicit by modal vocabulary” (2008: 96-7). Brandom (2008: xiii) claims that this book has a certain independence from the inferentialist project pursued in Brandom (1994); nonetheless, this point seems to be relevant to inferentialism as well. However, in other places, Brandom explicitly said he does not want to endorse Sellars’ view (though admitting that these ideas deserve more attention): “The difference between inferential connections among concepts that are counterfactually robust and those that are not is an important one, and this fact accounts for the felt difference between the two sorts of inferences mentioned above. Nonetheless, nothing is made of it here” (1994: 634); “Sellars’s approach seems to be wholly viable, though it has not, as far as I know, yet been pursued by other theorists” (2007: 662).

I want to use counterfactually non-robust inferences to try to rescue IRS from F&L's claim by which it necessarily entails the strong form of holism that seems to make it an unreasonable view. I do not want to directly face the WI problem but instead, the strong holistic consequences it is supposed to entail. My proposal is the following: inferences that are non-counterfactually robust (or better, *modally ruled out*, or MRO)<sup>1</sup> are not content-constitutive (and therefore, not all the good material inferences are content-constitutive). This is sufficient, I claim, to stop the holistic regress and to save IRS. But how exactly does this account permit us to eliminate the unacceptable consequences of SSH?

First of all, if we cannot say which inferences are content-constitutive, then we are obliged to conclude that all materially good inferences must be content-constitutive. This is the main reason to infer SSH from IRS. Consider now the following opportunity: inferences that are not counterfactual-supporting are not content-constitutive. This means that we have a smaller set of inferences (MRO) that can be subtracted from the greater (holistic) set of content-constitutive inferences that the inferential role theorist—who cannot say which inferences are content-constitutive—is ipso facto compelled to accept (with the entailment of SSH). In contrast, if we are able to eliminate MRO inferences from the inferentialist account of content, then we can weaken the threat of SSH on IRS. This means that we have no direct answer to the WI problem, but nonetheless, we have one for the converse question about which inferences are *not* constitutive (and that, by the way, for our purposes means that we can say which inferences are not analytic).

Now, to master, grasp, and have content would mean to master, grasp, and have *many* constitutive inferences, but this option would also avoid the requirement of mastering, grasping, and having *all* the inferences as constitutive. The inference from IRS to holism is still sound, but that from IRS to SSH is blocked. The worst entailments of semantic holism, especially problems with stability of content, would be avoided, and IRS would be safe from the SSH objection (see below).

### 5a) Why are MRO inferences not constitutive?

To claim that counterfactually non-robust inferences are not content-constitutive can be considered as something independent of the evaluation of

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<sup>1</sup> I mean those inferences whose goodness is ruled out by counterfactual patterns of inference (see below for examples).

the account about counterfactually robust inferences. Someone demonstrating that it is false that counterfactually robust inferences are content-constitutive will not prove by this that MRO inferences are content-constitutive. We have, by assumption, two separate sets: what is content-constitutive and what is not. This proposal focuses only on what is *not* content-constitutive to show that *not all* is content-constitutive (even independently of which particular account of content-constitutiveness one endorses in general).

The main basic argument is that I cannot find any MRO inference that is content-constitutive of anything, and thus, it is a challenge to the opponent of IRS to provide examples of counterfactually ruled out inferences that are instead content-constitutive.<sup>1</sup> The general form of this proposal is the following:

- If an inference involving *C* is not counterfactually robust, then it is not constitutive of *C*.

Let us look at some examples:

- The inference from a T-shirt being in my wardrobe to its being red is not constitutive of *red*, because if this black T-shirt were in my wardrobe, it would not be true that it is red.

Indeed “being in my wardrobe” is not content-constitutive of *red*. Circumstances do exist in which the inference from the T-shirt being in my wardrobe to its being red is a good one. However, circumstances do *not* exist where it is content-constitutive of *red*. This is a crucial difference. Counterfactuals like this form a semantic device that is useful in excluding inferential connections as constitutive of conceptual content. But let us look at some other examples.

- The inference from this table being inside my office to its being round is not constitutive of *round*, since if the table had been inside another office, it would not follow that it is rectangular.

Therefore, we have now an inferential constraint for the application of the concept *round*. (“Being in my office” is not content-constitutive.) It is a negative way of determining concepts. Step by step, it is possible to indicate which inferences are *not* content-constitutive of a given concept. Let us try, then, to

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<sup>1</sup> This challenge directly depends on the following examples (see below).

focus on more ordinary counterfactual conditionals to check whether these are more challenging for this view.

- The inference from a tree being in my garden to its being an elm is not content-constitutive of *elm*, because if an oak were in my garden, it would not follow that it is an elm.

Again, “being in my garden” is not a relevant connection for the inferential role of *elm*. Another example:

- The inference from dinosaurs being extinct to their being reptile is not content-constitutive of the concept *reptile*, because if cats were extinct, it would not be true that they are reptile.

“Extinct” is not content-constitutive of *reptile*, and so forth.

I do not know how long we can go on providing such examples without finding more or less crucial counterexamples. It seems to be a quite regular conceptual phenomenon, and in case we find some counterexamples or cases of ambiguity, we should also evaluate its real burden for the general pattern of MRO inferences (as not being content-constitutive). I believe that, in the light of the examples provided here, as I said before, this is a viable option to stop the inference from adopting IRS to the endorsement of SSH, which would entail problems.<sup>1</sup> However, I think that this is not enough to fully establish the point.

### 5b) The argument from analyticity, and back to the holism challenge

Finally, a decisive argument in support of this view is that I cannot provide conditionals of this kind by using inferences that contain analyticities<sup>2</sup> (which

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<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, this idea can be used in a negative way to determine the content of our concepts, thanks to these counterfactuals, by eliminating the inferences that are not content-constitutive.

<sup>2</sup> Imagine codifying such conditionals using conceptual connections between “bachelor” and “unmarried” or between “square” and “having four sides.” These conditionals would be weird, and seen as something standing in between meaninglessness and falsity. For example: “The inference from being a square to having four sides is not content-constitutive of *square*, because if this square were (whatever but four-sided [e.g., three-sided]), it would not be a square (!).” (But then, “having four sides” *is* constitutive of *square*.) “The inference from his being a bachelor to his being unmarried is not content-constitutive of *bachelor*, because if this bachelor were (whatever but unmarried [e.g., a widower]), he would not be a bachelor (!).” (But then, “unmarried” *is* constitutive of *bachelor*.) The fact that we cannot use these examples, in order to say that content-constitutive traits are non-constitutive, means that MRO inferences—the inferences ruled out

are ipso facto content-constitutive) or inferences already known to be content-constitutive,<sup>1</sup> and this is further evidence that they yield entailments that are not content-constitutive. The following can be considered as a stronger argument against the content-constitutiveness of MRO inferences:

- If MRO inferences were content-constitutive, then they could be expressed by means of analytic inferences (or inferences known to be content-constitutive). Since this is not possible, MRO inferences cannot be content-constitutive.

Indeed there is, embedded in this proposal, a further challenge for theorists who claim that IRS is forced to entail SSH: they should find an MRO inference built from conceptual connections that are manifestly analytic or content-constitutive.

Let us go back to the problem of stability. Here, we may distinguish at least three different ways to approach the issue.

The first is based on a minimum level of grasp. Since we have to minimally grasp *C* to achieve the linguistic/conceptual competence of a simple speaker about *C*, and since we all are generally trained to endorse the same basic judgments and inferences involving *C* (by belonging to the same culture, speaking the same language, and obeying the same norms), we have a globally stable and shared basic standard of linguistic performance. The individual differences may arise when some of us begin attaching to *C* inferences and judgments that are specialist, or more idiosyncratic, that do not belong to the basic set we are trained to endorse. But these are differences in knowledge and understanding of *C*, that are independent of the stability of conceptual content.<sup>2</sup> It is one thing to say that “copper is a metal,” which may belong to the standard set of basic resources; it is quite another to say that “copper is the metal used, for the most part, to produce bronze alloy.” The first judgment does not entail individual differences for linguistic competence, while the

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thanks to these conditionals—are not content-constitutive. Otherwise, these attempts would have been successful.

<sup>1</sup> This is meant to work independently of having a tenable notion of analyticity (the target is just content-constitutiveness).

<sup>2</sup> Actually, problems about stability deal only with the inferences that *we take to be* good, and not with those that *are* good. However, even if the expert level of grasp may be wrong or misleading from a fallibilist point of view, it nonetheless is a (stable) reference point for the linguistic community. In cases of doubt and controversy, we may always ask an expert, and then defer to her statements. Worries about stability at the basic level, in principle, are solvable at the expert one. See Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979) for the idea of “deference to experts.”

second is suitable to give rise to those differences, that ultimately depend on the division of linguistic labor, and that can be solved by asking an expert or consulting an encyclopedia. That would be a problem only if we were unable to spell out and revise our individual inferential dispositions.

A second strategy is directly based on MRO inferences. This proposal allows contents to be stable, even without directly solving the WI problem. MRO inferences, in fact, are stable in their being modally ruled out and not content-constitutive. The inference from “this tree is an elm” to “this tree is in my garden” will not become constitutive of *elm* with the passing of time; it will remain non-constitutive (unless, for some reason, people will redefine our vocabulary in order to make it constitutive, and will begin keeping only elms in their gardens—it can happen, but just by virtue of *stipulation*).<sup>1</sup> But this, in a negative way, is proof that there is stability of content. (How can the non-constitutive traits be stable without the constitutive traits being stable as well?) This also means that constitutive traits have to be stable (whatever they are). This is the negative route to stability.

A third strategy comes from pragmatics. The “game of giving and asking for reasons”, with its general scheme of claims and challenges, tends to conform the inferences that we draw to the inferences that are actually good. By critically assessing our mutual ways of inferring, we thereby also assess the inferences that are constitutive of our concepts, indeed revising, when it is the case, our conceptual competence.<sup>2</sup> These dynamics are further constraints that tend to

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<sup>1</sup> I have to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out. Stipulation entails *changing the rules*, and thus we will have in such cases new traits to be considered as constitutive (and others to be considered as non-constitutive). Stipulation is also the simplest case: actually, meanings/concepts change over time within a community, depending on many complex factors. However, in principle, every new usage entails a new *stable* constitutive set of conceptual traits and a new stable non-constitutive set. Moreover, since the rate of these changes is not anything that can be noticed in a lifetime, this is not a worry for speakers.

<sup>2</sup> Here, further help from pragmatics is possible, for example, thanks to the *de re/de dicto* distinction about ascribing propositional attitudes, which may be helpful with these challenges, since this distinction lets the facts of the matter count objectively in a substantially perspectival doxastic context. For example, using *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes, which are referentially transparent, permits us to bind discourse to factual aspects, and to use “the way things are” in order to assess the commitments that people undertake (regarding the same facts). Furthermore, these ascriptions are crucial in highlighting the specific aboutness of our commitments, and in using this feature to distinguish, in a subtle way, who is committed to what. For example, a *de re* ascription could be the following: “George III believed *of* Ben Franklin that he was dangerous.” I can use it in order to distinguish the commitments that I undertake about Ben Franklin from those of George III. See Brandom (1994: 513–585). For a criticism of this supplementary strategy (taken in isolation) against holism, see Whiting (2008).

limit the proliferation of individual inferences and commitments, and indeed permit a certain degree of admissible stability for our inferential habits.

The three strategies are not mutually incompatible, and we can use them as an ensemble of resources that can make our contents stable in holistic contexts (which, thanks to MRO inferences, are not of the SSH kind). And so we can sum them together in a three-layer explanation of stability of content. Contents are stable because we grasp them generally in a regular way, because we can infer their stability from the stability of non-constitutive inferences, and finally, because our discursive practices tend to limit, by means of rational norms, the proliferation of individual and idiosyncratic inferential patterns.<sup>1</sup>

Grasp can easily be explained, since, as we know, it is granted by the small set of inferences statistically relevant for our common sense inferential skills. Since grasp is a gradual process, and full grasp is expertise, here there are no relevant problems.

Learning can be explained as well, on the basis of our anti-individualist conception of grasp, as a role of concepts in basic judgments; we do not need to learn inferential roles as whole sets to enter the process of learning. Learning can be safely holistic, once it is stated that it is gradual. To learn that “water is a fluid,” one does not have to learn soon that “water boils at 100°C.” “Water is wet” and “you can drink water when you are thirsty” are surely better candidates to belong to the basic set.

Once you give up SSH, communication is not a problem. The level of common sense linguistic competence entails that even if people may diverge in some inferential dispositions, these do not amount to the serious differences given by radical holism. Once we have the ability to use and understand a concept in specific basic judgments (and inferences), together with a common sense mastery of the inferences which constitute the basic level of competence of normal speakers, communication is not only possible, but it also easily becomes the vehicle of mutual doxastic updating. We can learn new inferences that our interlocutor draws from the concept *C*, and he, as well, can learn new judgments and inferences about *C* from our own repertoire.<sup>2</sup> Of course this

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<sup>1</sup> If the view that Brandom attributes to Sellars were right about counterfactually robust inferences, then we could also explain *why* MRO inferences are stable: they are stable thanks to different kinds of necessity.

<sup>2</sup> Let *C* be the concept, *arthritis*. A patient who wrongly believes that the pain in his thigh is due to arthritis (like Burge’s Bert) could learn from the doctor that his belief is actually wrong. See Burge (1979). Here, the example is about experts revising wrong conceptions, but we should also say

poses a challenge, but our discursive practices are suitable, once all our resources (viz., pragmatics) are deployed, to revise our mistaken conceptions and to clarify potential equivocations.

Let us look, finally, at psychological generalization. Since we share some of the uses of singular terms in judgments and inferences, I can attribute to *S* thoughts about water, even if she does not share any of the features I know to be true of water.<sup>1</sup>

The problem about which inferences are content-constitutive stays open (after eliminating MRO inferences as not content-constitutive). For this problem, the latter view would suggest testing the content-constitutiveness of inferences in a complementary manner with respect to inferences that are not content-constitutive. But it would be a test of content-constitutiveness for every single inference and not a general principle. However, if it is true that MRO inferences are not content-constitutive, we can ask, in virtue of what? The first answer, *prima facie*, is this: in virtue of the fact that counterfactual supporting inferences presumably *are* content-constitutive, and this would count as a preliminary reason, or at least as a clue, in support of the Sellarsian account. Since MRO inferences are not counterfactually robust (and we know that for this very reason they are not constitutive), we should expect that counterfactually robust inferences, which explicitly lack the requirement for not being constitutive, could count, at least putatively, as content-constitutive. Moreover, *some* content-constitutive inferences actually *are* counterfactually robust (as the examples about *bachelor* show). But this hypothesis, as it stands, requires further work.

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that when normal speakers face inferential disagreements they are motivated to understand what is going on.

<sup>1</sup> See Brandom (1994: 360–404), for an account of the role of singular terms within judgments and inferences in terms of “substitution”. To cut a long story short, singular terms are substitutable for their synonyms according to good substitutional inferences, like the one from “Ben Franklin invented bifocals” to “the first Postmaster of the United States invented bifocals.” Here “Ben Franklin” can substitute “the first Postmaster of the United States” and vice versa, without altering the goodness of the inference. These inferences are ruled by “simple material substitution-inferential commitments” (SMSICs), the commitments that we use in practice to distinguish good and bad substitutional inferences. Predicates, such as “invented bifocals,” compose the frame where substitutions of singular terms may occur. While the SMSICs governing the substitution of singular terms are symmetric, those that govern predicates are often asymmetric: the inference from “Ben walked” to “Ben moved” is a good one, but not vice versa. When we disagree about the features that we attribute to water, we are focusing on which substitutional inferences involving water are good and/or bad. Therefore, we may attribute thoughts about water to other speakers, right or wrong as they may be.

Things become easier, in addressing the WI problem, if we consider further resources. In particular, I refer to those coming from pragmatics, resources that enable us to specify the context in which certain inferences are more compelling in spelling out the content of a given concept, or even in terms of social practice, where the doxastic and epistemic perspectives of various speakers can provide further help.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom, for example, greatly trusts such perspectives. See, for example, note 25.

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## **Brandom et Popper : Autour de la question des pratiques discursives**

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### **Abstract.**

This article, written soon after the publication of the attempt of reflection on the analytic pragmatism of Robert Boyce Brandom (July 2015) and three years after an essay on the epistemology of Karl Raimund Popper (2012), seeks to circumscribe necessary reports of nuanced rapprochement between two dialogical regulators principles of linguistic practices and discursive commitments (the principle “give and ask reasons” and the principle “give and take reasons”), bringing together two contemporary philosophers (Robert Boyce Brandom and Karl Raimund Popper) on the issue of discursive practices that are a particular model of language use. This is to say mainly two things: (i) how the issue of truth (and/or falsity, its corollary) is possible as necessary and practical impact in the implementation of such dialogical principles within the epistemology of rational discussion (Popper) as in the epistemology of deductive inference (Brandom), and (ii) how doxastic or assertional commitments, which are a basic type of discursive engagement (Brandom) and asserted or defended arguments, which are an appropriate type of discursive practices (Popper), can give solution to the question of discourse incompatibilities to legitimize the validity of inferences (Brandom) or rather the persuasion and/or the conviction by the interlocutor (Popper). This should thus promote the justification of the presupposed nuance in the rapprochement between the two philosophers of discursive language.

### **Keywords.**

Arguments, conviction, deductive inference, dialogical principles, discursive commitments, discursive incompatibilities, discursive practices, language use, persuasion, rational discussion, reason, truth, validity.

## ملخص.

تمت كتابة هذا المقال بعد قليل من نشر محاولة لتأمل البرجماتية التحليلية عند روبرت بويس براندوم (يوليو 2015)، وبعد ثلاث سنوات من مقال عن إبستمولوجيا كارل رايوند بوبر (2012). ويهدف المقال إلى الإحاطة بالتقارير الضرورية عن التقارب الدقيق بين مبدئين ضابطين للحوار في الممارسات اللغوية والالتزامات الخطابية (مبدأ « طرح وطلب الأسباب»، ومبدأ « طرح وأخذ الأسباب»)، وقد جمع بينهما فيلسوفان معاصران (روبرت بويس براندوم و كارل رايوند بوبر) في معالجتهم لمسألة الممارسات الخطابية التي تمثل نموذجًا جزئيًا للاستخدام اللغوي. ويعني هذا في الأساس شيئين؛ أولهما كيف يمكن لمسألة الصدق (و/أو الكذب وما يلزم عنها) أن تكون ممكنة كأثر ضروري وعملي في تطبيق هذه المبادئ الحوارية ضمن إبستمولوجيا المناقشة العقلانية (بوبر)، وكذلك في إبستمولوجيا الاستدلال الاستنباطي (براندوم)؛ وثانيهما كيف يمكن للالتزامات الاعتقادية والتوكيدية التي هي نمط أساسي للاشتباك الخطابي (براندوم)، والحُجج المؤكدة والمدافع عنها التي هي نمط ملائم للممارسات الخطابية، أن تقدم حلاً لمسألة عدم التوافق الخطابي لإضفاء الشرعية على صحة الاستدلالات (براندوم)، أو بالأحرى الاقتناع و/أو الاقتناع Persuasion and/or Conviction من جانب المحاور (بوبر). وبالتالي يجب أن يكون هذا دعمًا لتبرير الفارق البسيط المفترض مسبقًا في التقارب بين فيلسوفين من فلاسفة لغة الخطاب.

## كلمات مفتاحية.

حُجج، اقتناع، استدلال استنباطي، مبادئ حوارية، التزامات خطابية، عدم التوافق الخطابي، ممارسات خطابية، استخدام اللغة، اقتناع، مناقشة عقلانية، سبب، صدق، صحة.

## Résumé.

Cet article, écrit aussitôt après la parution de l'essai de réflexion sur le pragmatisme analytique de Robert Boyce Brandom (juillet 2015) et trois ans après un essai de réflexion sur l'épistémologie de Karl Raimund Popper (2012), vise à circonscrire les rapports nécessaires de rapprochement esquissés entre deux principes dialogiques régulateurs des pratiques linguistiques et engagements discursifs (le principe « give and ask reasons » et le principe « give

and take reasons »), mettant ainsi en présence deux philosophes contemporains (Robert Boyce Brandom et Karl Raimund Popper) sur la question des pratiques discursives qui sont un modèle particulier de l'usage du langage. Il s'agit en cela de dire principalement deux choses: (i) comment la question de la vérité (et/ou de la fausseté, son corollaire) est envisageable comme incidence nécessaire et pratique dans l'implémentation de tels principes dialogiques au sein de l'épistémologie de la discussion rationnelle (Popper) comme au sein de l'épistémologie de l'inférence déductive (Brandom), puis (ii) comment les engagements doxastiques ou assertionnels, qui sont un type élémentaire d'engagement discursif (Brandom), et les arguments assertés ou défendus, qui sont un type approprié de pratiques discursives (Popper), peuvent fournir une solution à la question des incompatibilités discursives pour légitimer la validité des inférences (Brandom) ou plutôt la persuasion et/ou la conviction par l'interlocuteur (Popper). Cet état de chose devrait ainsi favoriser la justification de la nuance entrevue dans le rapprochement entre les deux philosophes du langage discursif.

### Mots-clés.

Arguments, conviction, discussion rationnelle, engagements discursifs, incompatibilités discursives, inférence déductive, persuasion, pratiques discursives, principes dialogiques, raison, usage du langage, validité, vérité.

## Introduction

L'épistémologie proposée par Popper dans *La logique de la découverte scientifique* peut-elle se dispenser d'avoir recours aux notions sémantiques de vérité et de fausseté et ne faire appel qu'aux aspects syntaxiques de ces notions dans la problématique de la déductibilité, c'est-à-dire de la transmission de la vérité, et de la retransmission en sens inverse de la fausseté ? <sup>1\*</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-François MALHERBE, *La philosophie de Karl Popper et le positivisme logique*, Montréal, 2011, p. 144.

\*D'aucuns pourraient douter de l'opportunité de ce renvoi à Jean-François Malherbe qui donnerait le prétexte que l'auteur se trompe sur l'essentialité de la relation de déductibilité. Je le leur concède. Car, si la relation de déductibilité est « syntaxique », cela ne laisse pas entendre la question de la « transmission et retransmission de la vérité ». Puisque, d'un point de vue syntaxique, il n'est question que de « dérivabilité » et non de vérité ou de fausseté et donc pas de transmission et retransmission de vérité et/ou de fausseté. En ce sens, seule la notion sémantique de déductibilité, notamment l'« inférence », requiert la transmission/retransmission de la vérité. Toutefois, je me sers de ce renvoi comme tremplin argumentatif pour justifier la démarche de la

Ce questionnement qui ouvre le chapitre 4 de l'ouvrage de Jean-François Malherbe sur la philosophie de Karl Popper, et que nous pourrions tout autant appliquer à l'épistémologie que propose Robert Brandom aussi bien dans *Making It Explicit* que dans *Articulating Reasons*, est significatif de la problématique que nous voulons construire autour de la philosophie de ces deux penseurs au moyen des notions de « vérité » (et/ou de « fausseté ») et de « validité » en contexte de l'épistémologie de la discussion rationnelle et de celle de l'inférence déductive, par l'entremise des principes de « *give and ask reasons* » (principe d'offre et de demande des raisons) et de « *give and take reasons* » (principe d'offre et d'acquisition des raisons).

Ainsi, de même que Jean-François Malherbe se demande si l'épistémologie poppérienne peut faire l'économie de la notion sémantique de vérité (et de la notion de fausseté, son corollaire) dans le processus sémantique de déductibilité, avant d'y répondre par la négative, aussi voudrions-nous nous poser la même question sur l'épistémologie brandomienne, qui est un inférentialisme pragmatique déductif et y répondre tout autant par la négative. Il est entendu que le jeu d'offre et de demande des raisons est une instance des pratiques discursives – qui consiste en la justification des vérités<sup>1</sup> – de même que l'est le jeu d'offre et d'acquisition des raisons – qui consiste en la découverte des vérités. La pratique discursive étant parmi ces savoir-faire de l'expressivité linguistique au moyen duquel le locuteur ou l'interlocuteur, selon les cas, juge utile de porter son choix sur cette instance langagière précise. Puisqu'il ne s'agit ni plus ni moins que de l'usage du langage, c'est-à-dire de savoir faire respectivement usage de concepts (pour Brandom) et d'arguments (pour Popper) ; de savoir respectivement conduire sa raison, d'une part en

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discussion que j'entends entre Brandom et Popper autour des principes de « *give and ask reasons* » et « *give and take reasons* ».

<sup>1</sup> L'expression « justification des vérités » peut porter à confusion en ce que, d'un point de vue inférentialiste, « vérité » est essentiellement « justification ». Cela s'entendrait donc ici comme un paralogsme. Et, j'aime bien l'illustration suivante que Shahid Rahman utilise souvent pour distinguer sémantiquement entre la « proposition » et le « jugement » ; ce qui est naturellement le point de vue de Brandom et, en général, celui des antiréalistes et de la longue tradition criticiste incluant Kant lui-même. En effet, dire « *Maman Gisèle est du Congo* », par exemple, c'est énoncer une « proposition », puis dire « *Il est vrai que Maman Gisèle est du Congo* », c'est émettre un « jugement ». Ce jugement présuppose qu'il y a une justification pour la proposition « *Maman Gisèle est du Congo* » : la justification peut avoir été produite au moyen de certains éléments de preuve tel que le passeport. Mais, cela n'est aucunement la justification du jugement, puisque l'on ne peut justifier que la proposition et non le jugement. Ce qui laisse comprendre que la « vérité » est en soi « justification ». Ainsi, l'expression « justification des vérités » est simplement utilisée pour justifier l'opération d'offre/demande et d'offre/acquisition des raisons produites dans le processus de « découverte » de cela qui est en soi « justification ».

offrant et demandant des raisons dans le processus de validité du jugement par le procédé de l'inférence déductive (Brandom), et d'autre part en offrant et acquérant des raisons dans le processus de production et reproduction de la vérité de la proposition logique par le procédé de la falsifiabilité (Popper).

En fait, il va de soi que pour une procédure inférentialiste l'enjeu se ramène essentiellement à ce que l'on appelle la « validité » de l'argument ou de l'inférence, et que, en conséquence on penserait moins à la question de la vérité. C'est pourquoi, par exemple, là où Popper pose les conditions de vérité dans la scientificité de la proposition ou la falsifiabilité, Brandom les fonde sur le jugement. Soit ! Mais, à y réfléchir profondément, la question de la vérité resurgit, ne serait-ce que comme « incidence immédiate », et s'impose dans la recherche même de la validité ou non de l'inférence déductive. Puisque « inférer », c'est sémantiquement déduire la conclusion nécessairement de la « vérité » des prémisses ; c'est sémantiquement transférer la vérité des prémisses à la conclusion.

Paraphrasant Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>, Robert Damien estime en 2001 que, c'est l'ensemble des pratiques discursives ou non discursives qui fait entrer dans le jeu du vrai et du faux et qui le constitue comme objet pour la pensée (que ce soit sous la forme de la réflexion morale, de la connaissance scientifique, de l'analyse politique, etc.) Nous en convenons. Mais, cela ne tient linguistiquement ou discursivement que si l'on fait un usage rationnel surtout des notions d'inférence et d'incompatibilité matérielles que Brandom déploie plutôt à l'encontre de l'approche phénoménologique héritée du pragmatisme de John Dewey (1859-1952), tant est qu'il ne distingue pas facilement le phénomène et le monde matériel qui l'enveloppe – de même que René Descartes « confondait » la matière et l'espace qui l'entoure<sup>2</sup> – là où Popper distingue assez clairement et discursivement le monde matériel contenant le phénomène et celui-ci contenu dans celui-là, favorisant ainsi la persuasion (ou la conviction ?) par l'agent discursif. Brandom assimile donc le vocabulaire modal au vocabulaire normatif, rendant alors difficile la décision de « lire l'affirmation selon laquelle *p est incompatible avec q* en termes modaux ou normatifs », c'est-à-dire selon que l'affirmation se fonde sur la conception subjective de l'agent cognitif ou plutôt sur la nature onto-logique et donc matérielle du phénomène observé. Bernhard Weiss pense, à cet effet, que :

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Michel FOUCAULT, « Le souci de la vérité », in *Dits et écrits*, tome IV.

<sup>2</sup> René DESCARTES, *Discours de la méthode*, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1966, p. 62. Voir aussi *Principia philosophiae*, II, traduction française, paragraphes 10, 11, 13, 21, volume 3, pp. 68-74.

There is a dangerous assimilation of modal to normative vocabulary in Brandom's account (...) Brandom has only given us reason for seeing the incompatibility in a normative light, namely, that a subject ought not to be committed to both  $p$  and  $q$ . Brandom responds by claiming that the same incompatibility can be seen both in a normative and in a modal light. If we treat the incompatibility as subject-centred – a subject repels incompatible commitments – we get the normative claim; if we treat the incompatibility as object-centred – an object repels incompatible properties – we get the modal claim.<sup>1</sup>

Réfléchir sur de tels aspects de la problématique autour de la question des pratiques discursives, dans le déploiement du principe de « *give and ask reasons* » (Brandom) et du principe de « *give and take reasons* » (Popper), en contexte d'inférence déductive chez Brandom et de discussion rationnelle chez Popper, exige que nous clarifions d'abord les rapports de Popper aux pratiques discursives, ensuite les rapports de Brandom aux pratiques discursives, de manière à ce qu'il soit enfin évident de voir si la question de la vérité est envisageable comme incidence nécessaire et pratique dans l'implémentation des principes dialogiques régulateurs de l'épistémologie de la discussion rationnelle et de l'épistémologie de l'inférence déductive, et de mesurer le degré de corroboration, de la conception que chacun des penseurs a de la notion d'incompatibilité, aux mondes possibles et aux relations d'accessibilité possible à de tels mondes. Nous savons, par ailleurs que, l'unité minimale de la connaissance pour Brandom s'entend au travers de la notion de « jugement » là où Popper l'entend au travers de la notion de « proposition ».

## 1. Popper et les pratiques discursives

### 1. a- La notion de pratiques discursives chez Popper

Parler des « pratiques discursives » chez Popper, c'est se situer dans le cadre de la théorie de la discussion rationnelle, dans une approche logico-déductive en matière d'usage du langage, d'usage de concepts pour exprimer les phénomènes de la nature. C'est se situer en contexte de la théorie de l'inférence déductive considérée non comme une base sémantique ou logique, mais comme un cadre théorique où l'on peut distinguer entre les constantes logiques et les constantes non logiques, c'est-à-dire le cadre dans lequel les pratiques discursives s'exercent autour et au moyen de l'appropriation des phénomènes du réel par des expressions linguistiques que légitiment les constantes logiques. Dans la théorie poppérienne de l'inférence déductive, la signification des signes

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<sup>1</sup> Bernhard WEISS, Review of Bernd PRIEN and David P. SCHWEIKARD (eds.), *Robert Brandom: Analytic Pragmatist*, Ontos, 2008.

logiques ou des signes discursifs est déterminée par certaines règles issues de définitions d'inférence de ces signes. Ces règles, qui sont des règles d'inférence au sujet des opérateurs logiques, induisent un critère de logique qui est basé sur la conjonction, l'implication et la quantification universelle en tant qu'opérations logiques fondamentales. De telles pratiques discursives rappellent, on ne peut mieux, la nature de la logique déductive au travers de la question de la distinction entre ce que Popper appelle les signes de formation et les signes descriptifs, en fait : les constantes logiques et les constantes non logiques<sup>1</sup>. C'est un ensemble de travaux sur la logique avec deux objectifs possibles dont un objectif principal qui consiste à définir le caractère logique des signes – et donc des expressions discursives – et un objectif secondaire qui consiste à produire une base pour la logique et la déduction logique.

A l'objectif principal sont respectivement liées (i) la définition poppérienne de la constante logique qui ne se réfère pas à la notion de déductibilité, puis (ii) la référence à la notion de déductibilité, mais pas d'une manière telle que la solution au problème de la définition de la déductibilité est logiquement présupposée ou équivalente à la définition du caractère logique. La première intention discursive ne mène nulle part, car il en résulterait une théorie complètement différente de celle de Popper. C'est la deuxième intention qui est une véritable pratique discursive, expression d'acte du langage, puisqu'elle permet, entre autres jeux de langage : une définition de caractère logique, au sens de Popper, dans le cadre de la déductibilité, de peur justement de produire une nouvelle théorie qui soit tout à fait différente de celle de Popper.

Ce qui consolide ainsi l'acte du langage, c'est le fait qu'il ne s'agit nullement d'utiliser cette définition pour « justifier » certaines règles d'inférence au sujet des opérateurs logiques, et donc une certaine conception de la déductibilité, mais plutôt de considérer ce concept comme pouvant être utilisé ailleurs, ou mieux autrement. Ce qui légitime alors l'engagement discursif poppérien d'accepter l'idée normative selon laquelle un opérateur caractérisé par certaines règles est logique si et seulement si ces règles sont liées d'une certaine façon à une définition d'inférence de cet opérateur. En revanche, il n'est pas possible que ceci « justifie » en même temps les règles de caractérisation comme règles définissant sémantiquement l'opérateur en question. Cela est d'autant vrai que la justification sémantique des règles de caractérisation requiert d'autres arguments. Ce qui, comme nous le verrons chez Brandom, traduirait explicitement le fait d'être habilité, ou d'avoir l'autorisation de, ou encore de s'engager à construire des concepts pour exprimer la réalité phénoménale par

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. les travaux de Popper sur la logique déductive publiés entre 1947 et 1949, commentés par Peter Schroeder-Heister.

un type d'engagement doxastique ou assertionnel<sup>1</sup>. C'est le « *entitlement* » ou même le « *commitment* » qui oblige à produire des assertions plutôt que le « *claim* » qui n'en donne que la prétention. En matière d'usage du langage, les pratiques sociales des expressions linguistiques discursives sont régies, chez Popper, par le principe du « *give and take reasons* » que Popper place – comme nous allons le voir – au fondement de la théorie de la discussion rationnelle, pour produire les conditions de possibilité de la vérité objective, dans un état intentionnel où les relations d'incompatibilités matérielles entre les propositions logiques liées par une inférence matérielle sont bien comprises et observées.

Parler des « pratiques discursives », c'est donc *poppériennement*, c'est-à-dire d'un point de vue conforme à l'essence même de la pensée de Popper, se situer dans le cadre de la théorie de la discussion rationnelle où la liberté de pensée, le conflit d'idées, l'indépendance de décision, l'autocritique, la critique, l'intersubjectivité argumentative, et notions semblables, sont des engagements discursifs déterminants dans le jeu d'interactions sociales entre les interlocuteurs. C'est un jeu social qui impulse le « dialogue » en tant que pratique discursive qui se structure en un jeu de conflit d'idées entre un proposant (qui doit défendre l'argument asserté) et un opposant (qui l'oblige à se défendre). Cela se passe exactement comme en logique dialogique (encore appelée logique du dialogue ou sémantique des jeux) dont l'enjeu constitue une approche des sémantiques de la logique fondée sur le concept de « validité » (pour la logique dialogique) ou de « vérité » (pour la sémantique des jeux). Dans une telle entreprise d'usage du langage, l'accomplissement des actes illocutoires par un agent cognitif et interlocuteur par exemple dépend de la compréhension de ces actes par l'agent. C'est pourquoi, choisir l'acte du langage pertinent requiert que l'agent cognitif et interlocuteur comprenne pertinemment les autres actes du langage exprimés par les autres agents de la communauté. Ce qui rappelle la notion wittgensteinienne de « l'accord » entre les membres de la communauté discursive.

Parler des « pratiques discursives », c'est, en ce sens, poser des actes illocutoires qui sont des actions intentionnelles. Ce qui implique que toute tentative de les accomplir réussisse ou échoue. Et, puisque ce n'est pas la « vérité » que recherche l'agent locutoire mais le « succès » de son acte, à la notion de conditions de vérité, la logique des actes illocutoires substitue la notion de conditions de succès d'un acte du langage. J. Searle et D. Vanderveken, en 1985<sup>2</sup>, y ont mené une étude appliquée, se fondant sur la

<sup>1</sup> Robert B. BRANDOM, *Making It Explicit*, 2010, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> J. SEARLE & D. VANDERVEKEN, *Foundations of illocutionary logic*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 199.

logique intensionnelle de Montague<sup>1</sup>. En Logique dialogique, par exemple, la notion de « validité » est fondée sur l'existence d'une stratégie gagnante pour le proposant. Cette approche se reconnaît *argumentativement* par des concepts des jeux théorétiques à l'instar de l'existence d'une stratégie de victoire pour les joueurs<sup>2</sup>. Des joueurs sont en confrontation d'opinions, en contexte des pratiques discursives bien comprises. Chacun conçoit et développe constamment un ensemble de stratégies de victoire, puisqu'il faut tenter de gagner. La logique se conçoit ainsi de façon dynamique et exige de nouvelles relations avec l'argumentation et les sciences du langage. De ce point de vue, la dialogique ou logique du dialogue aborde la logique comme une notion en soi pragmatique, en se présentant elle-même comme une argumentation conversationnelle. C'est un dialogue que manifeste ainsi une argumentation se déroulant entre deux parties : un proposant, qui défend une thèse, et un opposant, qui attaque cette thèse. La thèse est dite « valide » si et seulement si le proposant arrive à la défendre contre toutes les attaques possibles par l'opposant. Dans le cas contraire, l'« invalidité » de la thèse est avérée. Au demeurant, la validité ou l'invalidité de la thèse est rendue possible au travers de l'observance des « règles » de signification des connecteurs logiques (ou particules). Ces règles autour desquelles sont organisés les dialogues sont de deux types : (i) les règles qui déterminent leur signification locale (appelées règles de particules), et (ii) les règles déterminant leur signification globale (appelées règles structurelles).

### 1. b- Le contexte de la discussion rationnelle

C'est le cadre théorique de la discussion menée entre des interlocuteurs en vue de la recherche de la vérité au travers des arguments rendus valides par la stratégie de la victoire du locuteur ou de son interlocuteur. C'est un cadre de débats et d'engagements discursifs régi par le principe de la réfutabilité argumentative qui le présuppose lorsque celui-ci fonctionne conformément à la nature absolument faillible de l'esprit humain. La théorie de la discussion rationnelle offre ainsi les conditions de limitation possible du pouvoir de la raison humaine qui se sait naturellement faillible dans le processus de demande et d'acquisition des raisons. C'est pourquoi je m'instruirai toujours de mon

<sup>1</sup> R. MONTAGUE, « Universal grammar », in *Theoria* 36, pp. 373-398. See also "The proper treatment of quantification in ordinary English", in K. J. J. Hintikka et al. (eds.), *Approaches to natural language*, Dordrecht, pp. 344-354.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. la pratique discursive du jeu dialogique à l'Ecole du Pragmatisme Dialogique de Shahid Rahman (Lille 3) dont l'une des illustrations est donnée par Juan REDMOND, *Logique Dynamique de la Fiction. Pour une approche dialogique*, in *Cahiers de Logique et d'Épistémologie*, volume 9, King's College Publications, 2010, Chapitre V : pp. 225 et plus.

interlocuteur. Mes conclusions évolueront au rythme des siennes, selon qu'elles peuvent me faire changer d'idées (parce qu'elles sont valides et convaincantes) ou non (parce qu'elles se révèlent invalides à ma critique). Je changerai d'avis, d'opinion, d'attitude et même de croyance et de motivations, et donc d'engagements, pour « mettre à jour » mes informations au regard des inférences convaincantes de l'interlocuteur. C'est ici tout l'enjeu de la disposition du « *give and take reasons* »<sup>1</sup> (donner et prendre des raisons) que Popper place au fondement même de la discussion rationnelle. Le conflit d'idées rend ainsi notre discussion intelligente, lucide de ses propres limites, consciente de ses normes, m'apprenant que je suis redevable de ma raison à celle de l'interlocuteur. Un sens d'autocritique qui me convainc du sens d'humilité qui m'est intrinsèque<sup>2</sup>. Voilà pourquoi je n'aurai pas la prétention de « persuader », c'est-à-dire de rallier à tout prix l'interlocuteur à ma cause, quoi que je puisse vouloir « convaincre », c'est-à-dire faire comprendre au moyen de la validité de mes inférences. Je sais et je reste conscient de ce que je peux me tromper. L'*Aufklärer poppérien* est assez sage pour provoquer « socratiquement » la contradiction, la critique et l'autocritique en l'esprit de l'interlocuteur qu'il ne veut justement pas emballer mais en qui il veut librement forger une « opinion ». La notion de « liberté d'esprit » est inhérente au fonctionnement de la discussion rationnelle dans l'épistémologie poppérienne. Popper estime que l'interlocuteur ne doit pas chercher à convaincre pour les raisons suivantes : (i) il n'y a rien que l'on puisse prouver car, en dehors des mathématiques notre argumentation n'est jamais sans faille ; (ii) nous devons toujours soupeser les raisons avancées, de manière à ce que nous décidions toujours sur celles qui l'emportent : celles qui militent en faveur d'un point de vue ou celles qui militent contre ce point de vue ; et (iii) rechercher la vérité et forger une opinion propre en passant donc toujours par le moment de la libre décision, et c'est la libre décision qui fait toute la valeur humaine d'une opinion<sup>3</sup>.

Le contexte de la discussion rationnelle laisse clairement entendre la question de l'usage et de la compréhension du langage, exactement telle que nous la retrouvons dans la problématique des pratiques discursives. En effet, pour Popper, s'il est une somme d'éléments indispensables au développement scientifique, c'est aussi et surtout la combinaison nécessaire du langage, la formulation des problèmes, l'émergence de nouvelles situations problématiques, les théories concurrentes et la critique réciproque grâce à des

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Raimund POPPER, *A la recherche d'un monde meilleur. Essais et conférences*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2011, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Raimund POPPER, *ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Raimund POPPER, *ibid.*, p. 277.

arguments<sup>1</sup> « intelligents » que régissent des engagements discursifs. C'est, en fait, à l'intérieur d'une telle somme de langage *argumentativement* critique qu'est possible la connaissance de la vérité objective. Ce qui est évident. Puisque, *poppiériennement*, ce n'est pas tant avoir raison dans le débat qui importe, mais que la validité des arguments de ta (tes) proposition(s) serve au langage argumentatif de conduire à la connaissance de la vérité objective, au contraire de Brandom pour qui ne compte que la validité du jugement – et donc la logicité de la vérité atteinte – formulé dans le processus d'inférence déductive.

## 2. Brandom et les pratiques discursives

### 2. a- La notion de pratiques discursives chez Brandom

Lorsque Brandom présente l'objet de son *Articulating Reasons* et, pour parler de « pratiques discursives » en termes de choix stratégique en matière d'explicitation de la nature même du conceptuel, et donc en matière d'usage du langage, il dit :

Le thème général est celui de la nature du conceptuel comme tel. Ce choix implique d'emblée que l'on mette plus particulièrement l'accent sur des choses bien précises (...); en pragmatisme, sur le choix plus particulier de la pratique discursive (c'est-à-dire l'usage de concepts) entre autres savoir-faire. Il s'agit de se concentrer sur le conceptuel de manière à élaborer une notion relativement claire du genre de conscience que l'on prend lorsque l'on applique un concept à quelque chose – tout particulièrement, lorsqu'on en dit ou pense quelque chose.<sup>2</sup>

Lorsque, dans *Making It Explicit* (Première Partie), Brandom présente le Chapitre III portant sur « Pratique linguistique et engagement discursif »<sup>3</sup>, il introduit un modèle particulier de l'usage du langage, ce qu'il appelle le « modèle de la pratique discursive comme marquage au score déontique ». Ce modèle décrit et use d'un ensemble de pratiques sociales ou linguistiques implicitement normatives possédant une articulation inférentielle de nature à conférer un *contenu spécifiquement propositionnel* aux expressions et performances jouant le rôle qui convient dans de telles pratiques. Brandom signale que le fait d'être doté de contenu propositionnel doit être compris en référence aux pratiques consistant

<sup>1</sup> Karl Raimund POPPER, *La Connaissance objective*, Paris, Aubier Flammarion, 1991, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> R. B. BRANDOM, *Articulating Reasons*. Traduction française par Claudine Tiercelin et Jean-Pierre Cometti : *L'articulation des raisons. Introduction à l'inférentialisme*, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2009, pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> R. B. BRANDOM, *Making It Explicit*. Traduction française sous la direction d'Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel : *Rendre explicite*, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2010, pp. 285-383 (Chapitre traduit par Sabine Plaud).

à donner et demander des raisons. Pour Brandom, ceci constitue le coup principal des attaques dans le jeu dialogique du modèle de la pratique discursive. Il le dit ainsi qu'il suit :

Le type fondamental de coup dans le jeu consistant à donner et demander des raisons consiste à formuler une affirmation – à produire une performance dotée de contenu propositionnel au sens où elle peut consister en une présentation de raisons, d'une part, et où l'on peut en demander des raisons, d'autre part (...) Le premier défi explicatif que doit relever ce modèle est celui de la spécification de la structure que doit présenter un ensemble de pratiques sociales pour que l'on soit fondé à admettre qu'il inclut des attitudes pratiques consistant à considérer ou à traiter certaines performances comme ayant la valeur d'affirmations ou d'assertions (...) Traiter une performance comme une assertion, c'est la traiter comme la contraction (ou la reconnaissance) d'un certain type d'engagement – que l'on désignera comme un engagement « doxastique », ou « assertionnel ». Être doxastiquement engagé, c'est avoir un certain statut social. Les engagements doxastiques sont des statuts normatifs, et plus spécifiquement déontiques.<sup>1</sup>

Il vient donc de ces deux renvois à l'œuvre de Robert Brandom le fait que, parler des « pratiques discursives » chez Brandom, c'est d'abord, parler d'une chose bien précise en se situant dans le cadre de l'inférence déductive, par une approche analytico-pragmatique. C'est parler de « l'usage de concepts », de l'application que l'on fait du concept au phénomène de la réalité, non seulement intentionnellement, mais aussi et surtout pragmatiquement, c'est-à-dire de façon pratiquement objective. C'est s'engager à prendre conscience de son engagement à dire quelque chose ou penser quelque chose de quelque chose.

Parler des « pratiques discursives », c'est, ensuite, parler du fait d'« exprimer » quelque chose. Ce que Brandom considère comme le fait de « rendre explicite » ce dont on parle ou ce que l'on pense, et donc de le mettre sous une forme où cela peut à la fois servir pour « donner des raisons » et/ou se trouver dans le besoin de « demander des raisons » dans le jeu « d'offre et de demande des raisons ». En ce sens, c'est parler de savoir faire usage de concepts dans une procédure inférentiellement analytique où les raisons que l'on donne et celles que l'on demande concourent à la combinaison nécessaire des propositions-prémisses avec la (les) proposition(s)-conclusion.

Parler des « pratiques discursives », c'est encore faire le choix stratégique ultime dans la procédure de conceptualisation de manière qu'en exprimant quelque chose l'on prenne un engagement inférentiellement articulé qui

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<sup>1</sup> R. B. BRANDOM, *ibid.*, p. 286.

consiste à s'autoriser l'usage inférentiel du concept en s'autorisant soi-même l'autorisation d'un tel engagement, exactement comme la procédure fonctionne dans une inférence où la conclusion procède d'un certain nombre d'engagements auxquels on est autorisé ou susceptible de l'être. En ce sens, « nous », les agents cognitifs et interlocuteurs, dans nos états intentionnels tels que les croyances, sommes des « marqueurs au score déontique » dont les actes de langage que nous posons, et notamment les assertions, « *modifient le score déontique ; (...) induisent un changement quant aux engagements et aux habilitations qu'il convient d'attribuer, non seulement à l'auteur de cet acte de langage, mais encore à ceux à qui il est adressé* »<sup>1</sup>.

Cela est tout à fait normatif. Autrement, ce serait anarchique. Car, je dois être reconnu par mon interlocuteur d'avoir l'engagement d'être autorisé à m'engager au moyen de mes assertions. Ce qui, pour Popper, est une reconnaissance par autrui du fait que j'y suis autorisé par le moyen de mes arguments. Cela est encore normatif du fait que, il n'y a de pensée et de sens que dans le cadre de la reconnaissance de divers engagements et autorisations normatifs au sein d'une communauté d'agents qui en « gardent la marque », c'est-à-dire avec qui j'ai en partage de tels engagements et autorisations ; des agents ayant pris conscience de ce qu'il y'a des engagements dont on doit s'autoriser ou avoir l'autorisation de l'explicitation ; des agents engagés et s'autorisant socialement et moralement – et donc pragmatiquement – à élaborer et mettre en œuvre des concepts devant rendre explicites les défis essentiels du vécu de l'homme, selon « les normes de la pensée » (ce que Boole appelle les lois de la pensée<sup>2</sup>) qui, au bout du compte, s'imposent à tout être rationnel ; des agents cognitifs et interlocuteurs qui se sont donnés la capacité ou l'habileté de considérer l'interlocuteur comme « en droit de » et/ou « engagé à » dire ou agir, et qui ont acquis l'habileté à lui répondre contextuellement et pratiquement.

Mon état intentionnel relatif à la « croyance » induit, à cet effet, un type d'engagement doxastique ou assertionnel qui est un type élémentaire d'engagement discursif dont « *la stratégie consisterait à décrire un système simplifié de pratiques sociales dans lesquelles on peut considérer ou traiter quelque chose comme (ayant la portée pragmatique d') une assertion – comme la reconnaissance d'un engagement à l'égard d'un contenu assertable. Le « contenu assertable » est la forme que prend le « contenu jugeable » de Frege du point de vue d'un engagement explicatif à comprendre les jugements en premier chef comme ce qui est exprimé par des assertions* »<sup>3</sup>. L'expression de cet

<sup>1</sup> R. B. BRANDOM, *ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> George BOOLE, *The Laws of Thought*. Traduction française par Souleymane Bachir Diagne : *Les Lois de la pensée*, Paris, Vrin, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> R. B. BRANDOM, *ibid.*, p. 314.

engagement doxastique ou assertionnel régit l'interaction réciproque entre « croyance » (mon état intentionnel) et « connaissance » (mon état d'appropriation de la vérité) et produit un jugement au contenu propositionnel, dans un processus de « *délibération (...) l'intériorisation de la pratique interpersonnelle et communicationnelle consistant à donner et demander des raisons aux autres, de même que le jugement est l'intériorisation d'un processus public d'assertion (...)* Il faut considérer que la pratique consistant à donner et demander des raisons inclut l'assertion car, bien qu'il existe, outre les assertions, d'autres types de performances qui puissent exiger des raisons (...) il reste que présenter une raison, c'est toujours formuler une assertion »<sup>1</sup>.

Parler des « pratiques discursives », c'est enfin, reconnaître *brandomiennement* (c'est-à-dire d'un point de vue digne de la philosophie de Brandom) que l'unité minimale de la connaissance est le « jugement ». L'appropriation brandomienne de l'approche doxastique/assertionnelle qui relève de Wilfrid Stalker Sellars (1912-1989) est ici bien évidente. Ce qui rappelle tout autant Richard McKay Rorty (1931-2007). Car, et de ce point de vue, croire qu'il y'a un arbre dans le jardin n'est pas du tout avoir une représentation d'un arbre, mais c'est être susceptible d'exprimer cette pensée linguistiquement, d'en inférer d'autres à partir d'elle et de se la voir attribuer par un tiers. Ce qui signifie, *sellarsienement*, et donc d'un point de vue conforme à la pensée de Wilfrid Stalker Sellars<sup>2</sup> que, je ne puis dire que je crois qu'il y'a un arbre que si je peux manifester, par un jugement, mon engagement vis-à-vis d'une phrase signifiant qu'il y'a un arbre.

Il s'établit ici entre de tels agents cognitifs et (inter)locuteurs non pas un accord de convention où l'observance de la définition des termes par exemple n'est que de pure formalité, mais plutôt un accord effectif dans l'usage de la définition des termes. Cela devient progressivement un mode de vie, ce que Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) appelle un ensemble de « formes de vie »<sup>3</sup>. La relation méta-linguistique que Wittgenstein établit entre « l'accord des agents (inter)locuteurs » et la « forme de vie » que celui-ci conditionne sous la forme de « règle(s) » tient des régularités des pratiques linguistiques, des coutumes linguistiques, des usages et des institutions linguistiques, j'allais même dire des pratiques discursives desquelles viennent des concepts. Ainsi, concepts et règles de la pensée interagissent les uns sur les autres de sorte que : « *Si, d'une façon générale, les hommes ne s'accordaient pas sur la couleur des choses, et que ces désaccords ne fussent pas exceptionnels, notre concept de couleur ne pourrait pas exister. Non, ce concept*

<sup>1</sup> R. B. BRANDOM, *ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kevin SHARP and Robert BRANDOM (eds.), 2007, *In Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, *Recherches philosophiques*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004, § 241, p. 135.

*n'existerait pas* »<sup>1</sup> ; et même « *C'est seulement lorsque les hommes ont longuement parlé une langue que sa grammaire est écrite et vient à l'existence, et il en va de même pour les jeux primitifs : on y joue sans que leurs règles aient été établies, et sans que jamais une seule règle ait été formulée à cette intention* »<sup>2</sup>, et donc qu'aucune norme de langage correspondante n'ait été conçue.

Exprimer, conceptualiser, inférer comportent ainsi sémantiquement une même charge ontologique et pragmatique qui les ramène au fait de « dire quelque chose de quelque chose pour quelque chose ». Ce qui, d'un point de vue brandomien, n'a justement rien à avoir avec des attitudes comportementales ni psychiques, les pratiques et usages sociaux déterminant les règles à observer. Cela Brandom l'hérite du second Wittgenstein pour qui les concepts et les lois (ou normes de la pensée) doivent être rendus publics et reposer sur des usages et pratiques sociales<sup>3</sup>. Comprenant ainsi la philosophie analytico-pragmatique de Brandom, nous convenons avec Pascal Engel que les concepts n'existent que par les inférences auxquelles ils donnent lieu et qui sont de nature matérielle, objective, phénoménale<sup>4</sup>, dans une relation onto-logique,

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, *Remarques sur la philosophie de la psychologie II*, Mauvezin, T.E.R., 1994, § 393, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, *Grammaire philosophique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1980, § 26, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. l'illustration que nous en donnons dans notre essai de réflexion autour du pragmatisme analytique de Robert Boyce Brandom (pp. 138-141), lorsque nous présentons les conditions de production des règles pratiques de déploiement du vocabulaire indexical sur fond d'implémentation de la relation de reliance que nous établissons entre les « faits » et les « valeurs » chez Brandom. Ces règles sont au nombre de quatre :

- (i) la règle du temps et de l'espace ;
- (ii) la règle de production d'un nouvel appareil conceptuel de l'analyse sémantique et pragmatique des relations entre vocabulaires ;
- (iii) la règle d'application du nouvel appareil conceptuel d'analyse philosophique des relations entre vocabulaires pragmatiques et vocabulaires analytiques ;
- (iv) la règle d'investigation de nouvelles relations sémantiques pragmatiquement médiatisées.

<sup>4</sup> Ainsi que le montre la proposition suivante : « *S'il pleut, les rues sont mouillées* » dans laquelle le concept de « *pluie* » ne s'infère logiquement que de celui de « *rues mouillées* », dans une relation onto-logique où ce que l'on déclare correspond « matériellement » avec ce dont on parle : le concept traduit l'essentialité du phénomène exprimé. Pascal Engel parle en cela de l'équivalent brandomien de la médiation hégélienne (Cf. son Compte-rendu du *Making It Explicit* de Robert Brandom, Volume 1). Nous pouvons tout autant parler de l'équivalent brandomien de la « vérité-correspondance » telle qu'elle procède de l'inférentialisme aristotélicien, de la monadologie leibnizienne, de l'onto-logique tarskienne ou même de la déductibilité poppérienne, du fait que les concepts sont implémentés dans des procédures inférentielles en vertu non seulement de leur forme mais aussi et surtout de leur contenu. L'inférence est ici une opération de l'esprit dont l'objet est un jeu de signes sur des signes par des signes qui précèdent par une dérivabilité des signes par des signes dont on considère à la fois la forme et le contenu.

relation de correspondance à la fois logique et ontologique entre les faits et le langage par le moyen duquel ceux-ci sont exprimés.

C'est avec de telles connotations que l'on reconnaîtra des notions anglaises telles que *committed* (être engagé ou autorisé à) et *entitled* (être en droit de, s'autoriser de, être habilité à), accolées à un type de vocabulaire précis qui est soit un vocabulaire modal soit un vocabulaire normatif et, dans ce dernier cas, un méta-vocabulaire du vocabulaire de base portant sur des pratiques discursives qui elles-mêmes portent sur le jeu d'offre et de demande des raisons. *Between Saying and Doing* ressort clairement, en ses chapitres 4 et 5, que le vocabulaire modal est un méta-vocabulaire élaboré sur la base des pratiques discursives d'une robustesse contrefactuelle qu'elles explicitent<sup>1</sup>, et que le vocabulaire normatif explicite les pratiques discursives qui elles, méta-linguistiquement, interprètent le jeu d'offre et de demande des raisons<sup>2</sup>. En élaborant les méta-vocabulaires modaux et normatifs qui les explicitent, ces pratiques discursives assertoriques et inférentielles se veulent autonomes<sup>3</sup>.

C'est donc dans ce cadre théorique des pratiques discursives qui favorisent le jeu d'offre et de demande des raisons que nous articulerons nos raisons pour dire la conception de la *vérité* induite par la pratique du *give and ask reasons* dans une théorie de la connaissance que Brandom conçoit au milieu de sa conception inférentialiste du conceptuel, de sa théorie du normativisme rationaliste, de son rationalisme pratique et de sa théorie sociale de la représentation. C'est, en fait, une conception de la vérité inhérente à la réconciliation entre le pragmatisme et la philosophie analytique qui, elle-même, est sémantiquement impulsée par l'interaction entre le sens et l'usage des expressions linguistiques discursives. Une entreprise qui, au bout du compte et en considération de son attachement strict à la pensée de Kant et à celle de Hegel, retient Brandom captif de la théorie classique de la vérité logique ou formelle. L'essentialité d'une telle théorie étant – on ne peut mieux – de définir « l'objectivité » comme le produit d'un « accord » des agents cognitifs et (inter)locuteurs engagés dans une pratique commune d'assertions ou de jugements. Au contraire de Popper qui la conçoit dans une relation ontologique à des faits indépendants. En ce sens, la notion de vérité que Popper conçoit et thématise comme « objective », la décelant en tant qu'idée régulatrice dans la correspondance entre le langage (qui exprime) et l'objet (qui est exprimé

<sup>1</sup> Robert Boyce BRANDOM, *Between Saying and Doing*, 4. 3: Counterfactual robustness and the updating argument, pp. 102-109.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. 5 : Meaning-use analysis, et 5. 6 : Semantic holism : recursive projectibility without compositionality, pp. 130-136.

<sup>3</sup> Pascal ENGEL, « Compte-rendu de *Rendre explicite, I* ».

conceptuellement), Brandom la détermine et la fixe comme une simple logique d'assertabilité, de justifiabilité, et donc de conceptualité, refusant aux faits d'être indépendants de l'agent cognitif et (inter)locuteur qui ne fait, du reste, que les interpréter. De ce point de vue brandomien, l'on peut dire que : ce qu'il n'y a pas ce sont les faits, et ce qu'il y a ce sont des interprétations, au sens de la doctrine du constructivisme social ou du relativisme.

Toute cette construction est menée selon une approche pragmatique analytique. Une approche qui fonctionne, *brandomiennement*, de manière à élargir le projet d'analyse philosophique classique des expressions linguistiques discursives, d'abord comme une technique d'analyse en signification/sens et utilisation/usage des relations d'interactions entre vocabulaires s'appuyant sur sept (7) diagrammes<sup>1</sup>, ensuite comme une technique d'analyse en signification/sens et utilisation/usage des relations d'interactions entre des vocabulaires de la philosophie du langage : le vocabulaire modal, le vocabulaire normatif, le vocabulaire intentionnel et le vocabulaire logico-classique<sup>2</sup>.

En effet, l'ancienne technique d'analyse philosophique des relations entre vocabulaires est essentiellement sémantique : ce sont des relations de contenu d'un vocabulaire à un autre vocabulaire de base. C'est à cette ancienne méthode que Brandom substitue la nouvelle technique d'analyse des relations analytico-pragmatiques des expressions linguistiques discursives. La dynamique de cette nouvelle procédure tient surtout de la conscience que l'agent cognitif et (inter)locuteur a de son engagement pratique dans la société pour résoudre des problèmes sociaux précis.

A cet engagement ressortit une intentionnalité pratique de laquelle procède le vocabulaire intentionnel qui, lui-même, la présuppose dans l'implémentation des pratiques ou habiletés discursives autonomes, lorsque le méta-vocabulaire universel a permis de dresser le véritable cadre théorique du déploiement des pratiques normatives subjectives (lieu du vocabulaire normatif) et des pratiques

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Robert B. BRANDOM, *Between Saying and Doing. Towards an analytic pragmatism*, 2008: See "Extending the Project of Analysis", pp. 10-23:

- (i) pragmatic metavocabulary
- (ii) pragmatically mediated semantic presupposition-1
- (iii) pragmatically mediated semantic presupposition-2
- (iv) composition
- (v) composition and retraction
- (vi) specifying the automaton that deploys the laughing Santa vocabulary
- (vii) syntactic pragmatic expressive bootstrapping

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* See « Intentionality as a Pragmatically Mediated Semantic Relation », pp. 176-200; more: "Afterword: Philosophical Analysis and Analytic Philosophy", pp. 201-235.

modales objectives (lieu du vocabulaire modal) sans – et c'est dommage ! – donner le gage quelconque de la conception de ce que serait une « vérité objective ».

## 2. b- Quelques incidences méta-théoriques

Nous relèverons encore deux choses d'importance, des incidences méta-théoriques, toutes ayant un lien étroit avec la conception brandomienne de la vérité logique ou formelle, surtout lorsque nous lisons Bernd Prien et David P. Schweikard dans leur *Robert Brandom: Analytic pragmatist* (2008)<sup>1</sup> et le commentaire qu'en fait Bernard Weiss de l'Université de Cape Town. En fait, l'incidence principale est méta-théoriquement la conception de la « vérité logique » ou « vérité formelle », à quoi est liée la question des incompatibilités.

Premièrement, Brandom établit une distinction ontologique entre les entités observables (*observable entities*) et les entités théoriques (*theoretical entities*) là où, logiquement, il en aurait conçu une différenciation de type méthodologique. Et, ce qui lui aurait réussi, car comment contesterait-on par exemple les observations onto-logiques d'un penseur, pour dire qu'elles ne sont pas vraies, si ce n'est en procédant méthodologiquement ? L'entité observée étant ce qu'elle est dans sa nature intrinsèque, ne changent que les interprétations que l'on peut en avoir théoriquement et contextuellement d'un locuteur à un autre.

Deuxièmement, à propos de la question de l'objectivité des normes discursives fondamentales à quoi est liée la question des incompatibilités. En effet, Brandom assimile la norme « normative » de l'énonciation d'une incompatibilité relevant de l'agent cognitif (inter)locuteur à la norme « modale » de l'énonciation d'une incompatibilité relative à une situation de fait dans un monde possible pour lequel l'agent discursif a l'engagement d'accessibilité. Brandom prend argument de l'état transcendant des normes d'inférence pratique<sup>2</sup> qu'il présente par rapport aux interlocuteurs qui, conscients de ce que celles-ci sont a priori, ne sauraient les réviser, pour prétendre légitimer l'objectivité des normes discursives fondamentales au nombre desquelles on peut avoir la norme de justification des assertions et la norme

<sup>1</sup> Bernd PRIEN and David P. SCHWEIKARD, *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Ce que Brandom nomme « inférence matérielle », pour rendre explicite la convenance des « inférences matériellement bonnes » qui engage essentiellement le contenu conceptuel non logique des prémisses et des conclusions, par opposition aux « inférences valides » dont la convenance formellement logique engage exclusivement le contenu conceptuel d'expressions purement logiques (*Making It Explicit*, I, pp. 224-227). Ceci contribue énormément à l'explicitation de sa conception de la notion de « vérité logique ».

d'intolérance des incompatibilités qui, elles, sont indépendantes du sujet pensant.

Or, les normes d'inférence matérielle tiennent leur objectivité de ce qu'elles ne sont aucunement tributaires de l'attitude (comportementale, psychique, morale, assertionnelle, etc.) des interlocuteurs et qu'ainsi elles peuvent conduire à des engagements non-monotones, parce qu'incompatibles les uns avec les autres. Elles reposent donc sur des usages et des pratiques sociales. Elles sont un « jeu social » qui a lieu dans l'espace logique des raisons (pour paraphraser W. S. Sellars pour qui penser, c'est se situer dans l'espace logique des raisons<sup>1</sup>). Les interlocuteurs peuvent, dans ce cas, s'engager et s'autoriser mutuellement l'engagement à réviser leurs croyances et les informations auxquelles ils ont foi, sans porter atteinte au caractère objectif des normes d'inférence pratique. Nous en avons l'illustration historique dans l'inférentialisme aristotélien où la rigueur, la pertinence et la dynamique monotone des règles du syllogisme catégorique<sup>2</sup> rendent non seulement l'aristotélisme persistant, mais aussi et surtout actuelle l'argumentation logique initiée par Aristote dans la production du savoir scientifique. Anthony Kenny en déduit que l'œuvre d'Aristote n'a pas encore été surpassée<sup>3</sup>.

A la vérité, je n'ai aucun intérêt à tolérer des incompatibilités discursives dans un processus justificatif d'une situation de fait que je crois avérée dans tel ou tel monde possible, en défendant l'assertion par laquelle je l'exprime conformément à mon engagement. A partir d'un tableau de matrices de l'incompatibilité ou barre de Scheffer et, si l'on part de la définition que

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<sup>1</sup> Cette formulation de Wilfrid Sellars requiert de mettre l'accent sur le caractère normatif et réflexif des raisons, renvoyant à la conceptualisation wittgensteinienne lorsqu'il existe un type d'explication des pratiques humaines guidée par notre compréhension de normes ou de canons de pensée et de sentiment, et lorsqu'en réfléchissant sur ces normes, en revenant sur elles, l'on peut expliquer ces pratiques sociales. Ce sont des explications réflexives. qui, à la différence des explications causales naturelles, rendent un comportement intelligible en expliquant les choses telles qu'elles devraient être rationnellement, c'est-à-dire en les interprétant, en en révélant le sens et donc en comprenant en quoi elles répondent à des normes précises. C'est donc ce cadre logique de l'autonomie de ces normes et de leur reconnaissance par rapport aux régularités naturelles qui fonde le caractère spécial de ces explications que présente Pascal Engel (dans « L'espace des raisons est-il sans limites ? », in *Un siècle de philosophie*, Paris, Gallimard, Collection « Folio », 2001) que la conceptualisation sellarsienne traduit par l'expression « espace logique des raisons ».

<sup>2</sup> Régis Jolivet ramène les huit (8) règles d'Aristote à trois (3) principales :

R<sub>1</sub> : le syllogisme ne doit avoir que trois termes :

R<sub>2</sub> : de deux prémisses négatives on ne peut rien conclure ;

R<sub>3</sub> : de deux prémisses particulières on ne peut rien conclure.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony KENNY, « Le raisonnement pratique », in *Philosophie de l'action. Action, raison et délibération*, Paris, Vrin, 2007, p. 193.

Brandom donne de ce qu'il appelle la « négation logique »<sup>1</sup>, à savoir qu'un énoncé est la négation d'un autre si et seulement si l'engagement vis-à-vis de l'un interdit l'engagement vis-à-vis de l'autre, voici les cas possibles des moments d'incompatibilités :

p	q	p   q
1	1	0
1	0	1
0	1	1
0	0	1

Ce qui s'entend ainsi :

- 1<sup>er</sup> cas : si  $p$  et  $q$  sont vrais en même temps, l'incompatibilité de  $p$  avec  $q$  est fausse ;
- 2<sup>è</sup> cas : si  $p$  est vrai et  $q$  est faux, l'incompatibilité de  $p$  avec  $q$  est vraie ;
- 3<sup>è</sup> cas : si  $p$  est faux et  $q$  est vrai, l'incompatibilité de  $p$  avec  $q$  est vraie ;
- 4<sup>è</sup> cas : si  $p$  et  $q$  sont faux ensemble, l'incompatibilité de  $p$  avec  $q$  est vraie.

Le point de vue de Brandom selon lequel, « pour asserter que  $p$  est incompatible avec  $q$ , on asserite le conditionnel dont l'antécédent est  $p$  et dont le conséquent est la négation de  $q$  », se justifie réductivement dans le deuxième cas, lorsque  $p$  est vrai (1) et  $q$  est faux (0), c'est-à-dire non- $q$  ( $\neg q$ ) vrai ; donc lorsqu'on a :

- (i) une situation du genre (1 – 0 – 1), i.e.  $p$ -vrai,  $q$ -faux et  $p/q$ -vraie.

p	q	p   q
1	0	1

Ou

- (ii) une situation du genre (1 – 1 – 1), i.e.  $p$ -vrai,  $\neg q$ -vrai et  $p/q$ -vraie.

<sup>1</sup> En effet, dans le jeu social discursif des systèmes logiques qui résultent d'une sémantique qui combine des relations d'incompatibilité pragmatiquement conférées avec des relations d'implication pragmatiquement conférées, Brandom conçoit la négation logique (ou formelle) d'une affirmation « comme son incompatible minimal, comme l'affirmation impliquée par chacune des affirmations incompatibles avec l'affirmation dont elle est la négation. Ainsi, dans le contexte d'un conditionnel qui rend explicites les relations d'implication, l'introduction d'une locution qui joue le rôle inférentiel de la négation permet de rendre explicite la relation d'incompatibilité matérielle entre les affirmations. Pour asserter que  $p$  est incompatible avec  $q$ , on asserite le conditionnel dont l'antécédent est  $p$  et dont le conséquent est la négation de  $q$  » (*Making It Explicit*, I, p. 246).

p	$\neg q$	$p   q$
1	1	1

Brandom trouve certainement non pertinents – ou plutôt refuse de faire attention, parce qu'il ne se préoccupe que de l'incompatibilité matérielle ! – les deux derniers cas de la barre de Scheffer que rend explicite notre tableau de matrices, c'est-à-dire :

(iii) la situation du genre  $(0 - 1 - 1)$ , i.e.  $p$ -faux,  $q$ -vrai et  $p / q$ -vraie.

Et

(iv) la situation du genre  $(0 - 0 - 1)$ , i.e.  $p$ -faux,  $q$ -faux et  $p / q$ -vraie.

Une étude du « carré logique » menée par Charles Zacharie Bowao<sup>1</sup>, contrastant d'avec l'approche épistémologique de Jean Piaget, révèle au niveau de la sémantique logique que, toutes les formules en relation d'incompatibilité ne sauraient être des tautologies. Ce qui va de soi, si nous tenons compte respectivement des situations suivantes :

- (i) la relation entre la proposition universelle affirmative (type A), par la formule conditionnelle  $(p \rightarrow q)$ , c'est-à-dire « si  $p$  alors  $q$  », et la proposition universelle négative (type E), par la formule conditionnelle  $(p \rightarrow \neg q)$ , c'est-à-dire « si  $p$  alors non- $q$  », A et E étant des propositions contraires ;
- (ii) la relation entre la proposition de type E et la proposition particulière affirmative (type I), par la formule conjonctive affirmative  $(p \wedge q)$ , c'est-à-dire «  $p$  et  $q$  », E et I étant des propositions contradictoires ;
- (iii) la relation entre la proposition de type A et la proposition particulière négative (type O), par la formule conjonctive négative  $(p \wedge \neg q)$ , c'est-à-dire «  $p$  et non- $q$  », A et O étant des propositions contradictoires.

A l'analyse, et d'un point de vue pragmatique argumentatif, les conclusions suivantes qui rimeraient avec l'approche poppérienne de la discussion rationnelle, semblent bien avérées :

- (iv) à propos de l'incompatibilité: cette relation suppose que les propositions composées ne soient pas vraies en même temps, mais elles peuvent être fausses simultanément. Or, les deux dernières assignations n'obéissent pas à cette exigence qui correspond à la signification logique de la barre de Scheffer dont les quatre

<sup>1</sup> Charles Zacharie BOWAO, *L'argumentation logique : Dédales et pistes*, Thèse de doctorat d'Etat de Philosophie, UCAD, Dakar, 1995-1996.

assignations possibles sont représentées dans le tableau plus haut : (1-1-0), (1-0-1), (0-1-1), (0-0-1) ;

- (v) à propos de la contradiction et de la contrariété : les contradictoires ne sont ni vraies, ni fausses simultanément. L'incompatibilité ici est forte par rapport à la contrariété où elle est faible du fait de l'acceptation de la possibilité de la fausseté simultanée des propositions, puisque les contraires peuvent être fausses ensemble quoique ne pouvant être vraies simultanément.

Si donc l'on considère de telles exigences argumentatives, l'exigence d'assimilation que formule Brandom entre les normes « normatives » de l'énonciation d'une incompatibilité relevant de l'agent cognitif (inter)locuteur et les normes « modales » de l'énonciation d'une incompatibilité relative à une situation de fait dans un monde possible pour lequel l'agent discursif a l'engagement d'accessibilité, tombe à l'eau et, dès lors, perd tout son sens pratique.

Toutefois, Brandom peut en être dégagé –et cela pour deux raisons principales – si tant est que sa préoccupation ne le ramenait qu'à l'essentialité de la notion classique de « vérité logique », là où Popper est préoccupé de « vérité objective », et que Brandom parle d'incompatibilité entre deux propositions liées par une inférence matérielle, c'est-à-dire après qu'une inférence a été effectuée :

- (i) on peut s'en rendre compte, au-delà de ses propres écrits, aussi bien dans *Robert Brandom's Analytical Pragmatism* de Igor D. Dzhokhadze<sup>1</sup> que dans *The Pittsburgh School of Philosophy : Sellars, McDowell, Brandom* de Chauncey Maher (2012, 156 p.)<sup>2</sup>, par exemple ;
- (ii) si l'on part du fait que l'incompatibilité ici doit être pensée comme le résultat de l'inférence matérielle, et que l'opérateur

<sup>1</sup> Académie Russe des Sciences. Institut de Philosophie, Moscou, avril 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Nous nous fondons ici principalement sur le commentaire qu'en ont fait Jeremy Wanderer et Steven Levine (University of Massachusetts, Boston, 23/01/2013), tout en pensant respectivement aux Chapitres 2, 4 et 6 de l'ouvrage de Chauncey Maher. Notre attention est portée notamment sur la conception brandomienne de la « normativité » qui, à notre avis, justifie explicitement le dévolu que Brandom fait reposer sur la notion de « vérité logique ». En effet, pour cet « anti-naturaliste » qu'est Brandom, les « normes » qui vacillent aussi bien de bas en haut que de haut en bas dans les procédures de pratiques discursives (« *normativity goes all the way down* », asserte-t-il) ne sauraient se réduire à des « faits » : elles résultent de notre état de normativité inhérente à notre langage. Nous sommes par essence liés aux normes au point que celles-ci nous caractérisent même et ne peuvent être que parce que nous les faisons être : elles ne nous sont pas extrinsèques, mais plutôt intrinsèques, au point qu'il n'y a que des normes, même dans la normativité elle-même.

logique de la barre de Scheffer n'est que la transcription de la négation de la conjonction d'une proposition A avec une proposition B, c'est-à-dire  $\neg(A \wedge B)$ , alors, il serait de bon aloi d'utiliser les règles inférentielles purement déductives suivantes. Soit « $\vdash$ » le symbole d'inférence ou de déductibilité et « $A \mid B$ » la formule de l'incompatibilité de A avec B.

Introduction à gauche :

$$\frac{S \vdash A ; S \vdash B}{S \vdash A \mid B}$$

$$A \mid B \vdash D$$

Introduction à droite :

$$\frac{A, B \vdash S}{A \mid B \vdash S}$$

Ou plutôt avec un tableau dialogique des stratégies de victoire :

$$(O) A \mid B$$

$$(P) A \mid B$$

$$(O) A$$

$$(O) B$$

## Conclusion

La question de départ était de circonscrire les rapports nécessaires de rapprochement que nous savons désormais nuancé entre deux principes dialogiques régulateurs des pratiques linguistiques et engagements discursifs : le principe de « *give and ask reasons* » de Brandom et celui de « *give and take reasons* » de Popper. Y sommes-nous parvenu ? De quelle manière : normativement ? modalement ? doxastiquement ? déontiquement ? logiquement ? objectivement ? conceptuellement ?

Au bout du compte, nous avons décrit des relations d'un rapprochement non homogène, et même non monotone, tant est que dans leur fonctionnement par des mécanismes certainement différents, ces deux principes dialogiques ne conduisent pas nécessairement au même aboutissement. Car, pendant que le

« *give and ask reasons* » de Brandom favorise l'éclosion de la vérité de type logique ou formelle fondée conceptuellement sur la validité formelle de l'inférence déductive d'un agent cognitif et interlocuteur engagé à s'exprimer par une forme de jugement dont la communauté des membres discursifs lui reconnaît l'habileté, le « *give and take reasons* » de Popper ouvre, quant à lui, à un type de vérité objective fondée argumentativement sur la validité des arguments des interlocuteurs, surtout lorsque le proposant, qui affirme une proposition, réussit à la défendre de toutes formes d'attaques de l'opposant, de manière à le persuader par une stratégie de victoire convaincante. Les agents cognitifs et interlocuteurs brandomien et poppérien prennent l'engagement et s'autorisent doxastiquement et/ou assertionnellement à produire des jugements ou des propositions dont ils se donnent l'habileté respective d'explicitier en société ou de défendre devant l'interlocuteur. Les incompatibilités discursives peuvent ainsi avoir trouvé une solution « formelle » (pour Brandom) ou « matérielle » (pour Popper).

Ainsi, le pragmatisme argumentatif de Popper diffère – par nature – du pragmatisme expressiviste de Brandom, la conception de la vérité et les conditions d'y accéder contrastant selon les cas. La « vérisimilarité » poppérienne traduit le fait d'une idée régulatrice dans la proposition logique par laquelle l'agent discursif exprime la réalité phénoménale là où le « contenu conceptuel » brandomien traduit le fait d'explicitier et de légitimer la validité de la déductibilité inférentielle dans un jugement sur ce qui est ou ce qu'il y'a. C'est pourquoi la croyance de l'être (ou de l'existence) d'un « objet » ne tiendra *brandomiennement* que de mon engagement à exprimer phrastiquement ma pensée de l'objet et mon habileté à en inférer d'autres jugements possibles, puis du droit que les membres de la communauté discursive m'en reconnaîtront. Ce qui, *poppériennement*, ne se limite guère à l'expression linguistique de la pensée, mais va à exiger onto-logiquement la correspondance entre le contenu conceptuel de la proposition exprimant l'objet et cet objet selon qu'il est exprimé dans un langage précis. Au demeurant, la question des pratiques discursives nous a permis de dresser un tableau d'oppositions entre la philosophie de Brandom et celle de Popper : la conception de la vérité logique est opposée à la conception de la vérité objective ; l'implémentation du contenu conceptuel diffère du jeu de la vérisimilarité ; les incompatibilités formelles fonctionnent autrement que les incompatibilités matérielles ; le jugement favorise l'émergence de la validité de l'inférence là où la falsifiabilité permet de décider de la scientificité de la proposition devant rendre compte de la réalité, etc.

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## A Paradox of Inferentialism

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### Résumé.

John McDowell a formulé une critique radicale de l'inférentialisme normatif contre la conception expressiviste de Brandom des contenus conceptuels. L'une de ses principales préoccupations consiste à revendiquer une conception de l'intentionnalité qui ne pourrait pas être réduite aux relations déontiques établies par les praticiens du discours. En particulier, une part importante de cette discussion se concentre sur la connaissance empirique et sur les jugements d'observation. McDowell affirme qu'il n'y a pas de rôle pour l'inférence dans l'application des concepts d'observation, sauf le rôle paradoxal qui consiste justifier le contenu d'un jugement d'observation dans ses propres termes. Cet article examine les conséquences sémantiques de l'analyse du contenu des jugements empiriques dans les termes de leur rôle inférentiel. Je suggère que ces derniers sont distincts des paradoxes épistémologiques dont McDowell accuse l'approche inférentialiste.

### Mots-clés.

Inférentialisme, disjonctivisme, raisonnement défaisable, habilitation par défaut, perspectives inférentielles.

### ملخص.

قدّم «جون ماكديويل» نقدًا جذريًا للترعة الاستدلالية المعيارية تجاه تفسير «روبرت براندوم» التعبيري للمحتويات التصورية. وقد تمثلت أحد اهتماماته الرئيسية في تبرئة مفهوم القصدية الذي لا يمكن رده إلى علاقات الواجب (أو الالتزام) Deontic التي يدشنها ممارسو الخطاب. وقد تركّز جزء كبير من هذا النقاش بشكل ملحوظ على المعرفة التجريبية والأحكام القائمة على الملاحظة. ويذهب «ماكديويل» إلى أنه ليس ثمة دور للاستدلال في تطبيق التصورات القائمة على الملاحظة، فيما عدا تلك الحالة التي تنطوي على مفارقة، والتي تتمثل في تبرير محتوى حكم قائم على الملاحظة من خلاله هو ذاته. وتفحص

هذه الورقة النتائج السيمانطيقية لتحليل محتوى الأحكام التجريبية من خلال دورها الاستدلالي. ومن المفترض أن تكون هذه مختلفة عن المفارقات الإستمولوجية التي أداها «ماكديول» بالمقاربة الاستدلالية.

## كلمات مفتاحية.

نزعة استدلالية، تجربة، انفصالية، استنتاج قابل للبطلان، استحقاق افتراضي، منظورات استدلالية.

### Abstract.

John McDowell articulated a radical criticism of normative inferentialism against Robert Brandom's expressivist account of conceptual contents. One of his main concerns consists in vindicating a notion of intentionality that could not be reduced to the deontic relations that are established by discursive practitioners. Noticeably, large part of this discussion is focused on empirical knowledge and observational judgments. McDowell argues that there is no role for inference in the application of observational concepts, except the paradoxical one of justifying the content of an observational judgment in terms of itself. This paper examines the semantical consequences of the analysis of the content of empirical judgments in terms of their inferential role. These, it is suggested, are distinct from the epistemological paradoxes that McDowell charges the inferentialist approach with.

### Keywords.

Inferentialism, experience, disjunctivism, defeasible reasoning, default entitlement, inferential perspectives.

## 1 Introduction

Inferentialism is a theory about how to understand conceptual content: according to the inferentialist, conceptual content has to be understood *primarily* in terms of inferential relations between concepts. This is the inferentialist idea at its bare bones. There are several ways to put some flesh on it. The proof-theoretical tradition, for instance, maintains that the content of an expression  $\varphi$  is to be determined in terms of the proofs we have for it. The idea is that, when inferential rules are *properly*<sup>1</sup> defined, proofs provide the epistemic guarantee

<sup>1</sup> Of course, the whole Gentzen-Prawitz enterprise consists in the attempt to formally cash out this adverb.

that  $\varphi$  has been introduced on its justificatory grounds which, in this sense, account for  $\varphi$ 's *epistemic* content. Robert Brandom's *normative* approach, instead, gathers inferentialism in a triptych together with a pragmatist thesis and an expressivist thesis. The pragmatist thesis is the idea that the inferential role of an expression  $\varphi$  must be defined in terms of the normative relations that the use of  $\varphi$  binds speakers to in discursive practices. The expressivist thesis amounts to the claim that the deontic statuses that speakers acquire by engaging in discursive practices can be made explicit by deploying particular linguistic resources. Thus, in the framework of this normative inferentialism, linguistic expressions acquire the content they have because speakers use them to engage in normative discursive practices, and these contents are expressed by various semantically explicating vocabularies that allow to *say* what people *do* while engaging in discursive practices. Logical vocabularies are just a case in point. So, for instance, in Brandom's view to assert the conditional "if  $\varphi$  then  $\psi$ " is to say that whoever is committed to  $\varphi$  ought to be committed also to  $\psi$ , i.e. that the inference from  $\varphi$  to  $\psi$  is to be treated as a valid one.

Inferentialism, as a semantic theory, is alternative to traditional representationalism, according to which the content of conceptual episodes has to be understood *primarily* in terms of what they designate in the world. There are many wrong ways to draw a comparison between representationalism and inferentialism. One of these is to look at the formal apparatus for a distinction to make. Thus, one might erroneously believe that the inferentialist is not entitled to deploy certain semantic tools, like set-theoretical models, or that the representationalist is compelled to accept certain logical properties, like multi-consequence inference or classical contraposition. Another problematic way to understand the comparison between inferentialism and representationalism that is likely to lead to serious puzzlements is to look at it from an epistemological point of view. Representationalism holds it that to grasp a concept is to know what it represents, for its content is a *representing thing* isomorphic to a *represented thing*. This idea inherits the Cartesian distinction between a mental *res*, which is immediately known, and a physical *res*, which is known through the mediation of the representational relation. Inferentialism holds it that to grasp a concept is to master its inferential use, for its content is the role it has in reasoning. This idea characterizes the delimitation of the Sellarsian space of reasons, as opposed to a space of nature where episodes are causally determined. The epistemological concern might be raised at this point that both representationalism and inferentialism run the risk of excavating an epistemic gulf between conceptual episodes, like perceptions and thoughts, and non-conceptual entities, like cabbages and kings. The dreadful consequences of this picture are familiar. On the one side, one might attempt to build illicit

foundational bridges between the two spaces. For instance, one might accept that certain causally determined episodes in the space of nature could directly provide epistemic foundation for non-inferential knowledge. Such an idea, typical of traditional empiricism, Sellars himself stigmatized as the *myth of the given*. On the other side, one might yield to the idea that thoughts are epistemically detached from how things are in the world, in the Davidsonian sense that beliefs only answer to other beliefs, and accept that coherence is the only reasonable requirement for knowledge. This prefigures the Hegelian picture of knowledge as a wheel spinning in the void. If the ship of semantics is compelled to navigate in such an epistemic strait, representationalism seems to drive it to a foundationalist Scylla, inferentialism to a coherentist Charybdis.

In the last 20 years Robert Brandom has been pursuing the ambitious enterprise of developing a normative form of inferentialism, according to which conceptual content can be represented in terms of inferential relations that are grounded in the normative relations established by speakers who engage in discursive practices. This project has been discussed at length. In this paper I will consider in particular the criticism raised by John McDowell. I will not try, however, to adjudicate the debate between the two authors. My more modest purpose is to consider just a small comment made by McDowell as part of his replies to Brandom's remarks on *Mind and World*. Although the comment is somehow secondary to the overall discussion, nonetheless it presents an interesting paradox in the inferentialist analysis of empirical content. The comment is the following one:

In the conceptual activity I am mainly concerned with, that of making observational judgments, what matters is the rationality exemplified in judging whether things are thus and so in the light of whether things are (observably) thus and so. The content of the item in the light of which a judgment of this kind has its rational standing is the same as the content of the judgment itself. The only inferences corresponding to the rational connection in question would be of the "stuttering" form, "P; so P." (McDowell, 1998b, p. 405)

In order to evaluate this paradox I will proceed as follows. First I will present both Brandom's and McDowell's theories of observation. These are two refined attempts to lead the analysis of meaning out of the perils of epistemology, respectively from an inferentialist and a representationalist point of view. Then I will consider the details of McDowell's criticism against normative inferentialism. This will allow to distinguish between two sorts of problems of experience for the inferentialist: an epistemological problem and a semantic problem. I will concede, for the sake of the argument, that

McDowell's answer to the epistemological problem is fundamentally correct. And eventually I will proceed to consider McDowell's paradox in the context of the semantic problem of experience.

## 2 A “two-ply” reading of Sellars’s account of observation

As a part of the ambitious recollection of inferentialist themes in the history of philosophy that Brandom put together in his *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, he also proposed an interpretation of Sellars's account of observational knowledge (Brandom, 2002b). If such a contribution is read against the epistemological background just described in Section 1, arguably it is questionable both as an interpretation of Sellars's views and as a theory in itself.

Brandom's reading begins with a demarcational interpretation of the space of reasons. According to his view, rational beings are essentially characterized (and therefore distinguishable from non-rational beings) by their ability to play the game of giving and asking for reasons. The idea is that concept users are not merely endowed with capacities to discriminate aspects of reality and to classify them, but also with the ability to comply with the normative consequences of doing so. Thus, Brandom notices, a chunk of iron classifies environments with respect to their degree of humidity by exhibiting a differential response: it rusts in some and not in others. And although it only provides a rough classification, it is reliable in doing so. Differential reliable responses do matter for concept use. In fact, as for humidity reports, we rely on hygrometers which exhibit fine grained dispositions to differentially respond to the degree of water vapor in the air. What an hygrometer can't do, however, is using a report to make a move in a language game. As Brandom puts it, for Sellars concept use is a linguistic affair: to understand the conceptual content of a response is to understand its role in the web of inferential relations that are established by the dynamics of the deontic statuses of those who take part in a discursive practice. So, for instance, what makes of an observer's report of “it's humid here” an application of the concept of humidity is the observer treating it as entailing something like “there's water vapor in the air” and as entailed by something like “I am a reliable reporter of humidity in standard conditions and I reported ‘it's humid’”. Part of what such a treating amounts to is providing premises, when asked, as reasons to justify one's commitment to the report “it's humid here”. Traditional empiricism has always been fascinated by the possibility to connect concept use with the reliable differential responsive dispositions that rational beings share with inanimate, non-personal ones. But of course the temptation to think of an epistemic bridge between the realm of

nature and the realm of reasons that might directly provide with observational knowledge is part of the mythology of the *given*. That is what the inferentialist is supposed to avoid by endorsing the view that conceptual knowledge is inferentially articulated.

But now, observational reports begin to look problematic for the inferentialist. Consider the following trivial example. I go for a walk on a misty evening in Pisa, I feel humid and I spontaneously claim “it’s humid”: do I know that it’s humid? Of course the inferentialist wants to say that I do, but she can’t concede that my perceptual report *per se* expresses knowledge, for it is elicited with no inferential justification. This is the explanatory difficulty that, according to Brandom, Sellars solves by distinguishing two moments in observational reports: the non-inferential dispositional response and its justification *ex post facto*. The idea would be that while certain responses may actually be elicited as the manifestation of certain dispositions (i.e. not as a consequence of an inferential process), these are truly to be treated as knowledge only when they come to be justified by a reliability inference. Thus, in our example, it is only when the inference is in effect drawn from “I am a reliable reporter of humid environments” and “I reported ‘it’s humid’” to “it’s humid” that knowledge that it’s humid can be ascribed to me. In other words, it is only when the inferential articulation of the concept of humidity is mastered that it can be applied to make observational reports. The point is that the inferential justification might be provided even after the dispositional response is elicited.

This account is completed by two collateral theses of Sellars’s. The first one is a story about how observational concepts are learnt. Along the same lines as Wittgenstein, Sellars adopts a methodologically behaviorist stance on this point. In this view, a child is first trained by concept users to conform its differential responsive dispositions to the inferential rules that govern concept applications: thus, for instance, she is trained to report “it’s humid” when she feels it. How much does this process differ from the calibration of an hygrometer? At a very early stage not much: both the child’s and the hygrometer’s performances are causally adjusted to the concept use of the trainers/calibrators. But it changes dramatically when the child learns to respond to the rules themselves as they are expressed in the rule-language of the trainers. At that point in fact the child will be able to master the inferential articulation of the linguistic moves that she has learned to unconsciously perform in certain ways, and thus, ultimately, to properly apply concepts.

The second thesis is the acknowledgment that concepts with observational role can be learned, just like theoretical ones, by learning the rules for their application. With respect to theoretical concepts, whose application is governed

only by rules for intra-linguistic moves, rules for observational concepts allow what Sellars called language-entry transitions. A language-entry transition entitles one to move to a linguistic position from a non-linguistic one. Thus, for instance, one may apply the concept “red” to enter the linguistic practice with the observational report “that’s red”. Of course, for that move to be *really* the application of a concept, one ought to be able to inferentially justify the move by providing reasons for it, as e.g. “I am a reliable report of red stuff and I reported ‘that’s red’”. In this sense the reporting role of observational concepts are not mysterious from an inferentialist point of view. As a matter of fact, Sellars noticed, certain concepts that are initially introduced as theoretical may well later acquire reporting role and become observational concepts. That is possible if their application comes to be governed by rules for language-entry transition. Thus, for instance, physicists have recently begun to report the observation of Higgs bosons after their existence had been postulated in the 1960s to explain in the Standard Model how is it possible for other particles have mass.

Brandom ascribes this “two-ply” account of observation to Sellars, but is that accurate? There is one main reason to doubt it, and it hinges on the understanding of the reporter’s mastering of the inferential articulation of empirical concepts. As we have seen, in Sellars’s view, for the tokening of an observational report like “it’s humid” to have epistemic authority it must be placed in the space of reasons, which, on the inferentialist reading, means for instance that it is correct to infer from it that it’s humid. Of course the epistemic authority of the report comes with the responsibility to give reasons for it. The problem with Brandom’s interpretation then deals with the role of the reliability inference that justifies the tokening of an observational report in the space of reasons. In *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* Sellars very explicitly requires that the reporter himself must be able to draw such inference (Sellars, 1956, §35). Brandom, on the other side, insists on the possibility that the reliability inference might be at someone else’s disposal.

To a first approximation, Brandom’s misalignment with Sellars’s point of view could be put as a difference between an externalist reliabilism and an internalist reliabilism (if there is any such thing). Maybe that could help catching a glimpse of the problem from an epistemological point of view. But it must be kept firmly in mind that Brandom’s analysis is mostly motivated by semantic reasons.<sup>1</sup> He ultimately aims to explain the content of the concepts applied in

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<sup>1</sup> As McDowell puts it: «Brandom thinks Sellars imposes his internalist requirement with a view to securing that the reporter *understands* her reports [...] But its point is rather to secure that they have a specific kind of authority» (McDowell, 2002).

observational judgments, and of course he aims to do that in terms of his normative inferentialism. On his approach, the inferential relations that articulate conceptual contents are expressively grounded on the normative relations that are established by the activities of discursive practitioners who keep the score of each other's deontic score. Practitioners are held responsible for their moves in discursive practices, in the sense that they are treated as endorsing commitments to justify their entitlement to their assertions. Such a responsibility is complied with by performing other assertions. The set of commitments and entitlements endorsed by a discursive practitioner constitutes her deontic score and the pragmatic significance of an assertion consists in its potential to alter deontic scores. Thus an assertion, like an observational report, is construed as having content *qua* having pragmatic significance. Since, however, deontic scores are kept by practitioners for each other, they most likely will differ from one perspective to another. The idea that the determination of the articulation of conceptual content is a perspectival, social and historical process is part and parcel of Brandom's normative inferentialism.

Arguably, however, this is not Sellars's view. He certainly maintains the thesis that linguistic utterances have conceptual content not because they are reliably elicited by speakers nor because they express their internal thoughts, but because they play certain roles in certain practices. This however does not imply that such contents are determined by the interaction of different deontic perspectives on linguistic performances. To the contrary, Sellars also holds that observational reports possess first personal epistemic authority: the myth of genius Jones in the last part of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* is just intended to explain how that is not incompatible with conceptual contents being acquired by engaging in linguistic practices. Sellars distinguishes in fact the primacy *in the order of being* of episodes of experience from the primacy *in the order of understanding* of the inferential articulation of their contents, that can only be mastered as a consequence of a proper training in linguistic practices. The latter semantic dependence of the content of an episode of experience from the social practices in which concepts are learnt is not quite the same thing as the second externalist step envisaged by Brandom in the process of application of observational concepts where dispositionally elicited reports are inferentially justified *ex post facto*.<sup>1</sup> In effect, if Brandom's analysis of experience is read at face value from an epistemological point of view, the concern may be legitimately raised that it rules out epistemic first personal authority in principle.

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<sup>1</sup> On Brandom's misunderstanding of Sellars on the report of episodes of experience see (McDowell, 2009c).

### 3 Experience and second nature

All those who take on the notion of the space of reasons in order to characterize knowledge seem to be doomed to struggle against the dilemma between foundationalism and coherentism. All but John McDowell. His analysis of the epistemological perplexities resulting from the dichotomy between the two logical spaces of nature and reasons is essentially the analysis of an anxiety about the possibility of empirical knowledge that is in fact fostered by a blind-spot. In the obfuscated picture, as McDowell describes it in the introduction of *Mind and World* (1994), there are essentially two epistemological stances. The first one is a bald naturalism, that is committed to the rejection of the dichotomy between logical spaces and to the eliminativist program of reducing rational episodes to natural ones. The second one is a compelled idealism, that accepts to discard the empiricist requests as the unavoidable consequence of rigorous epistemology and commits to a coherentist picture according to which beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs. The attempt to accept the dichotomy and yet to bridge it, by postulating hybrid episodes or justificatory relations, is the epistemological blunder engendered by the mythology of the *given*. According to McDowell's reading, the Sellarsian alternative is to «delineate a concept of impression that is insulated from epistemology» (*ibi.*, p. xvii), i.e. to separate the dispositional occurrence of non-conceptual episodes in experience from their justificatory authority in the space of reasons. These episodes thus play the transcendental role of constraining the activity of concept application from the outside of the space of reasons. But McDowell considers the transcendental approach as an ultimately unsatisfactory answer, for it tries to look at the relations between conceptual activity and its subject matter from *sideways-on*, where in fact, he argues wittgensteinianly, no such a standpoint is available. In McDowell's view the transcendental perspective is the price that Sellars accepts to pay in order to explain experience without commitment to neither idealism nor the *given*. But it is not a price he is willing to pay himself, especially because he sees he doesn't have to. What he would see, and Sellars would not, is that conceptual capacities that are spontaneously deployed in judgments are also passively activated in sensibility. This is a lesson McDowell learns from Kant's "Clue" for the transcendental deduction of pure concepts: «[T]he same function which gives unity to the various representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations in an intuition» (A79/B104–5). Hence, he extracts the idea that «if an ostensible seeing that... is a seeing that..., the very actualization of conceptual capacities that accounts for its "containing" its claim also constitutes—at least if the content of the claim deals

with an ostensible object—its being an intuition in which an object is immediately present to the subject» (McDowell, 2009a, p. 48).

Speaking of an “ostensible seeing” as “containing its claim”, McDowell is using the Sellarsian jargon of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Ostensible seeings are episodes, as it were, of *putative* visual experience: they are a superset of real seeings, which are episodes of *veridical* visual experience. Thus while a seeing of a pink ice cube is an experience in which there is a pink ice cube in front of one, an ostensible seeing of a pink ice cube is an experience in which it merely looks to one that there is a pink ice cube in front of one. According to Sellars, however, any seeing contains a claim in the sense that it “conveys” (Sellarsian jargon again) a content that could be expressed by an observational judgment. Of course the idea can be generalized to any sensorial episode.

McDowell, then, construes Kant as saying that *if* sensibility consists in the actualization of the same conceptual capacities that are otherwise paradigmatically actualized in judgment, *then* intuitions immediately provide with conceptually determined objects. Suppose, for instance, that one is perceptually confronted with a pink ice cube. Then one has the intuition of a pink ice cube. The content of such an intuition is the same as the content that could be expressed by the observational judgment “Here is a pink ice cube”. This reasoning is often popularized as the idea that the world is directly taken in in conceptual shape. In McDowell’s view this idea is not only compatible with, but it is in fact the proper way to vindicate the minimal empiricist requirement that empirical knowledge must answer to the tribunal of experience for its adequacy to how things are in the world.

The problem with wrapping one’s mind around this approach is to understand in what sense conceptual capacities might be actualized in sensibility, while granting the minimal empiricist requirement and avoiding the myth of the *given*. The first point to get clear of is what it means for an object to be conceptually determined. McDowell puts forward an example that is framed in a Russellian understanding of conceptual articulation: the intuition whose content is “Here is a *pink ice cube*” exhibits a different conceptual articulation with respect to the intuition whose content is “Here are a *pink* plastic pyramid, a white *ice* sphere and a gray iron *cube*” (cp. McDowell, 2009a, pp. 10–11). So the idea is that the conceptual capacities (*Funktionen*) that synthesize such a togetherness in an intuition are the same capacities that synthesize the same togetherness in a judgment (*ibi*, p. 33).

The risk at this point, having acknowledged that an intuition is a conceptual representation of an individual, a *this*, is to draw the distinction between judgment and sensibility on something like the complexity of the categorial structure of the representation that they synthesize. In other words, one might think that while a judgment that there is a pink ice cube in front of one is the representation of a *this as a pink ice cube*, the intuition of a pink ice cube provides one with a simple, a *this-pink-ice-cube*. This move is just what Sellars accuses Kant of doing in his *Science and Metaphysics* (cp. Sellars, 1968, §§ 11–17). Of course the proto-conceptual notion of a *this-such* is a blind alley: either one accepts it as epistemically authoritative, thus committing to the myth of the *given*, or one renounces to use it to ground the justification of empirical judgments, thus giving up on empiricism. McDowell, in effect, doesn't share this criticism against Kant and insists on taking "the Clue" at face value: conceptual capacities are already fully at play in sensibility. On his reading, the difference between sensibility and understanding lies just in the fact that while in the latter conceptual capacities are spontaneously exercised, in the former they are only passively active. When one judges, one is free to make up one's mind about an object as one wishes. When one intuits, one is necessitated by a perceived object. According to McDowell, the idea that these processes pertain to capacities that must be explained on different logical spaces is the consequence of a certain approach to scientific explanation according to which the realm of nature coincides with what is made intelligible in terms of natural sciences. It should be acknowledged instead that « we need not identify the dichotomy of logical spaces with a dichotomy between the *natural* and the *normative*» (McDowell, 1994, p. xix). To use another slogan, human beings also possess a *second nature*. This is the nature they acquire by partaking in linguistic practices where they learn how to apply concepts: among the conceptual abilities that they acquire there are those which are triggered in sensibility by the interaction with the world.

If one is willing to follow McDowell this far, one might be well convinced that his analysis of empirical knowledge is sound and avoids the myth of the *given*. The hardest hurdle for him still to clear, however, is to harmonize the idea that conceptual capacities are passively actualized in intuition with the idea that empirical knowledge answers for correctness to how things are in the world. In order to do that, to begin with, an account must be provided of perceptual mistakes. According to McDowell, the content of an intuition is *object-dependent*, because intuitions are «immediate sensible representation of objects» (McDowell, 2009a, p. 32). In an oft-quoted passage he makes his point crystal clear:

In experience one takes in, for instance sees, *that things are thus and so*. (McDowell, 1994, p. 9)

As far as the problem of vindicating minimal empiricism is concerned, however, what follows is more relevant:

Of course one can be misled into supposing that one takes in that things are thus and so when things are not thus and so. But when one is not misled, one takes in how things are. It does not matter much that one can be misled. (*ibi*)

This last sentence has always given me a hard time, for it seems that the possibility to be misled is just the whole point about perceptual mistake. As a first preliminary step, the temptation must be resisted to picture McDowell's proposal along the following lines: one's episodes of experience are the result of the non-conceptual world causally activating one's conceptual capacities. This view, that McDowell attributes to Davidson and diagnoses as the root of the coherentist approach, sees the constraint that reality exerts on experience as external to the conceptual realm and thus ultimately inaccessible to it. McDowell holds instead that the world is *really* in conceptual shape and that the constraint it exerts on thought is internal to the conceptual realm. By rehearsing Wittgenstein's dictum that « [w]hen we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this-is-so* » (Wittgenstein, 1953, §95), he claims that when one is not misled, what one takes in in experience—that things are thus and so—is just as such a fact, part of the world. As a second preliminary step, the fear of idealism must be kept at bay. That is the anxiety that if reality is in conceptual shape and it does not exert an external constraint on thought, then the former would turn out to be dependent on the latter. According to McDowell this accusation hinges on a confusion. Here, as Sellars taught us, it's decisive to acknowledge the *ing/ed* ambiguity of intentional terms: in a sense, a thought is an act of thinking, in another different sense, a thought is the content of such an act. Now, to say that reality does not exert external constraint on thinking is compatible with saying that reality constrains thinking from within the realm of the contents of thought. In other words, to claim that the world is in conceptual shape does not imply that it can't properly constrain conceptual activity.

Once these two points are put in place, the problem of perceptual mistake in McDowell's account can be properly considered. Once again, his idea is that, when all goes well, if one has an intuition, for instance, that there is a pink ice cube in front of one, then there is a pink ice cube in front of one. Things go well when one is not misled, i.e. when one's ostensible seeing is in effect a seeing. But what if something goes wrong? Since there is nothing to mediate

between conceptual contents and objects, the only reasonable conclusion to draw is that to be under the illusion of being perceptually confronted by a pink ice cube, as McDowell puts it, is to be under an illusion «about the contents of one's conceptually shaped consciousness» (McDowell, 2009a, p. 49). But now, what does such an illusion amount to? It is important (and yet hard) here to avoid any misunderstanding. In effect, philosophers have been traditionally puzzled by another question about mistaken perceptions: what does one perceive when one has an illusion or hallucinates? Of course, this is one of the sources that nourished the mythology of the *given*: sense data theories, for instance, were designed just as a solution to this puzzlement. A tentatively better answer might be: "nothing". In the sense that in the case of mistaken perceptions one has no real intuition at all, since one's conceptual capacities have failed to be actualized. This is not what McDowell has in mind however. An illusion about the contents of one conceptually shaped consciousness is for him, in Kantian terms, an appearance of the sensible manifold being synthesized into a representation. Let us suppose one is hallucinating a pink ice cube. In such a case, one's concepts of "pink", "ice" and "cube" are activated. These concepts are the same as those that are activated both in the judgment "here is a pink ice cube" and in the intuition of a pink ice cube. However, while in these cases the concepts are activated with a certain «"logical" togetherness» (*ibi*), in the case of hallucination the togetherness of the representation is merely apparent because there is no object with such a togetherness. In this sense McDowell accepts that seeings and ostensible seeings may share the activation of certain conceptual capacities, but denies that they are the same sort of internal episode of experience. Still, this view is often characterized as a form of epistemological disjunctivism. As an account of perceptual mistake, it must be acknowledged that it implies the mind-independency of the objects of experience and that it is essentially compatible with the demands of minimal empiricism.

#### 4 McDowell's criticism against inferentialism

Is McDowell's theory of empirical knowledge sound, or is it just an overeager attempt to have the cake and eat it? I do not intend to put forward any answer to questions of this sort, nor my purpose in this paper is to evaluate McDowell's theory. I would be content with having presented it correctly and clearly enough in such a short space. Indeed, for the sake of the argument I will assume that it is correct and take up the challenge that it poses to the inferentialist. It's worth being clear, however, that McDowell intends to raise no challenge at all: instead, he argues explicitly against normative inferentialism. In order to properly present the paradox of inferentialism, McDowell's criticism

must be rehearsed. The main points of his dissatisfaction with Brandom's approach are presented in a diptych of essays directly addressed to Brandom and conveniently collected in the volume *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays* (2009b).

One of these, *Motivating Inferentialism* (2005), is purported to show that, whatever the merits of inferentialism may be, Brandom fails to provide really convincing reasons to adopt it. McDowell's argument consists in what looks like a lethal combination of hits: (i) Brandom advertises inferentialism as the reversal of the representationalist tradition according to which designational relations have explanatory priority over inferential ones, but such a tradition is in effect a chorus of straw men; (ii) although inference might have explanatory priority over designation, it has no priority over representation; (iii) scorekeeping practices, as Brandom describes them in deontic terms, are not sufficient to ground inferential relations; (iv) the authors, like Sellars and Frege, to whom Brandom ascribes inferentialist theses in the attempt to retrace an alternative inferentialist tradition in the history of philosophy, do not really maintain them; (v) although logical vocabularies make explicit the inferential properties of linguistic expressions as contents in the space of reasons, these properties depend on expressions having semantic content beforehand; (vi) Brandom fails to cash out the alleged virtues of inferentialism into a substantial semantic account of a whole language in inferentialist terms.

The climactic series (i)–(iii) is particularly illuminating with respect to McDowell's view on inferentialism. He begins by highlighting a problematic argumentative strategy on Brandom's part. Brandom presents the contrast between representationalism and inferentialism as consisting in the choice of their primitive semantic notion: representationalists take designation as a primitive and try to explain inference in terms of it, inferentialists to the contrary take inference as a primitive and try to explain designation in terms of it. Yet, he argues, the inferentialist approach is more promising. On the one hand, as Ryle, Wittgenstein and Sellars have noticed (among many others), a semantics based on the name-bearer relation makes it mysterious that linguistic expressions may have meanings. On the other hand, a pragmatic story could be told about how the notion of inference is grounded in a deontic analysis of social discursive practices. Therefore, Brandom contends, inferentialism is worth at least giving a chance. McDowell proceeds to demolish this reasoning. He (i) insists that the idea that the name-bearer relation is to be taken as a primitive in semantics is in no sense representative of representationalism. This may sound weird: after all designation, as it is realized in the function of interpretation, *is* a primitive in model theory, and model-theoretic semantics *is* a

representationalist theory, and of course it *is* the standard approach in semantic theory. Still, what is required for Brandom's argument to hit the target is that the relation of designation characterizes the theoretical core of representationalism rather than the technical core of model-theory. In other words, the question is whether any representationalist would agree that what it is for any linguistic expression to have meaning is to be the name of something. And this, of course, is different from saying that the meaning of any linguistic expression can be theoretically represented by something for which it stands for in a model. Representationalists, McDowell claims, just purport to explain how expressions are meaningful in terms of a notion of representation. That in effect is what model-theoretic semantics tries to capture in terms of the formalization of a correspondentistic notion of *truth*. So even if designational relations could be defined in terms of inferential ones, that would be no reason to favor inferentialism over representationalism.

But maybe the notion of representation itself could be defined in term of inference. McDowell (ii) denies that. What McDowell has in mind as a paradigm of a use of expressions with representational purport is judging: «representing that things are thus and so in the way one does when one asserts that things are thus and so» (*ibi.*, p. 114). He concedes for the argument's sake that Brandom might be right in maintaining that representational locutions, like 'that'-clauses, could be introduced as explicating devices in a discursive practices in which speakers already master inferential relations. Yet he points out that those representational locutions are not the same things as judgments, if only because they can't be used by themselves to make a judgment, an assertion, a language move. Besides, according to Brandom himself, asserting and inferring are not intelligible the one apart from the other.

This simply cuts the whole point about the choice of semantic primitives loose. In a sense, however, it enhances the role of Brandom's normative pragmatics, which is purported to explain how inferential relations are grounded in discursive practices: if Brandom were successful with that, he would in effect secure, both from an inferentialist and from a representationalist point of view, the connection between semantic significance and pragmatic significance that is encapsulated in his slogan "semantics must answer pragmatics". McDowell himself recognizes that:

Perhaps the more we should extract from Brandom's acknowledgment that inferring is not prior to asserting is that "inferentialism" is, after all, not a good label for the position he means to recommend. What he really wants us to see as a primitive is the idea of a deontic structure of commitments and

entitlements with rationality consequential relations between them (*ibi.*, p. 115). In effect, his criticism of Brandom's approach in this paper mainly hinges on this point (iii)—subsequent points (iv)–(vi) being essentially corollaries and collateral remarks. It is also worth remarking that, in this sense, the criticism doesn't really address inferentialism as a semantic theory *per se*, but the possibility to satisfactorily account for conceptual content in the socio-deontic terms on which Brandom bases his normative approach to inferentialism. So, the question is whether the “deontic structure of commitments and entitlements with rationality consequential relations between them” that Brandom describes essentially involves conceptual contents. McDowell denies that. He contends that a practice whose characterization is exhausted by such a deontic structure may well be just a game, in which moves are normatively determined and still devoid of content. Brandom's own response against this proposition consists in rehearsing his expressivist project in *Making it Explicit* and compiling the list of the expression whose role he managed to reconstruct in the second part of the book as making explicit features of the discursive practices that he analyzes in the first part: logical connectives, normative vocabulary, semantic vocabulary, singular terms and predicates, etc. Brandom's view is that since no one doubts that these expressions have conceptual content and they are shown in *Making it Explicit* to express features of normative discursive practices (which McDowell acknowledges), then the idea that these practices do not involve conceptual contents must be wrong (Cp. Brandom, 2008b). This however doesn't sound like a satisfactory answer to McDowell's concern. In fact it might be insisted that the reason why the linguistic expression that are shown to express features of the discursive practices have conceptual contents is because discursive practices do involve conceptual contents, except Brandom's socio-deontic characterization is not sufficient to provide them with it.

My impression is that in his answer Brandom is intentionally refusing to acknowledge the difference between his and McDowell's notion of conceptual content. In fact, while they both endorse Sellars's normative characterization of conceptual content as what is trafficked in the space of reasons, they differ in the interpretation of his functionalism. To the contrary of Brandom, McDowell believes that a purely functional definition of conceptual content falls short of providing a characterization of its being about how things are in the world. This is why he says that in Brandom's socio-deontic practices it may be not the case «that the behavior has meaning, except in the sense in which, say, chess moves have meaning» (McDowell, 2005, p. 115). In fact, in McDowell's view chess moves have no meaning because they are not related to the extra-chess world.

It's worth recalling here Sellars's non-relational analysis of meaning statements like "... means ..." or "... stands for ...". In the standard Tarskian account these are metalinguistic statements of relations between an expression in the object language on the left-hand side and the object referred to by the metalinguistic expression on the right-hand side. Sellars construes instead what stands on the right as the peculiar use of a linguistic expression as an illustrative sample exhibiting the role that the sampled sort of expressions play in the metalanguage. He typographically singles out such a use by employing dot-quotes: thus, for instance "• cat•" is interpreted as a distributive singular term referring to the expressions that in any given language play the role that "cat" plays in English. The role an expression plays in a language can be functionally determined with respect to the relations it stands to other expressions. These relations in Brandom's normative inferentialism are established by the normative attitudes that discursive practitioners adopt towards each other's linguistic performances and can be represented in terms of inferential relations. In this sense, "«gatto» stands for cat" is to be analyzed as saying that "gatto", in Italian, plays the same role "cat" plays in English. In this sense, again, semantic statements are not relational statements at all: they do not relate expressions to things in the world. To the contrary, they are specialized copular statements, signaling practical properties of use of expressions: thus, for instance, that "gatto" is a • cat•. Of course in this sense, chess moves *do* have meaning: the very same sort of meaning that language moves have.

In the third of his *Woodbridge Lectures, Intentionality as a Relation*, McDowell directly tackles this Sellarsian non-relational reading of semantic analysis:

How can a statement that relates an expression only to another expression serve to determine an intentional character associated with the first expression, a role it plays in enabling linguistic acts it occurs in to be determinately directed towards elements in the extra-linguistic reality? (McDowell, 1998a, p. 478)

McDowell can't accept a non-relational analysis of intentionality: to him, it would be like spoiling good epistemology with bad semantics. In fact the authority of the outer world, to which conceptual contents must answer for their objectivity, is seriously at risk to get lost if contents are treated to be related only with each other. From this point of view, Sellars's transcendental and Brandom's socio-historical perspectives are just frantic strategies to put objectivity back in the picture.

If my recollection is correct, this first part of McDowell's criticism to Brandom's semantic approach is essentially directed against his strategy to

ground conceptual contents on normative discursive practices and to treat intentionality as an expressive side-product of their socio-deontic dynamics. In this sense, however, it does not amount to a rejection much of inferentialism *qua* semantic theory as of Brandom's socio-deontic analysis of conceptual content. Of course the two are deeply intertwined in Brandom's normative inferentialism, but still it is important to mark off precisely the point that McDowell addresses. Semantic analysis is concerned only to the extent that it might support (or at least suggest) wrong approaches to epistemological questions. In this sense, the problem is particularly acute in the case of observational content: here semantic analysis must be consistent with a solution to the epistemological problem of experience, which consists in explaining how we take in how things are.

## 5 Externalism and default entitlement

No doubt representationalism fits McDowell's account of conceptual content and his concern with the epistemological problem of experience better than inferentialism. It is important to acknowledge, however, that McDowell does not burden the representationalist semantic analysis with any explanatory task in epistemology. He does not intend the interpretation function to ground an expression's content into what it stands for in the world. That would be a rather twisted exploitation of representational semantics on his part. In model-theoretic semantics, representational relations only make explicit the content of linguistic expressions. The same applies to inferentialist semantics: inferential relations do not ground an expression's content into anything linguistic or non-linguistic, they only make explicit the content of linguistic expressions.

The reason why this point is worth remarking is that it helps to avoid a certain misunderstanding of the paradox of inferentialism we will deal with. Recall that the paradox presented by McDowell consists in the claim that the conceptual content of an observational judgement is not inferentially related to anything but itself. It would be a mistake to read this as the one horn of a dilemma that the inferentialist would be forced to face: either to recognize that inference does not play any substantial role in the semantic analysis of empirical content or to concede that empirical content may receive inferential justification from the empirical realm. Of course the latter option is just off the table for anyone who is enough aware of the pitfalls of the myth of the *given*, while the former amounts to a debacle of the inferentialist project. But the two horns of such dilemma pertain in effect to different problems about empirical content: on the one side there's the semantic problem of defining the content of observational judgements, on the other hand there is the epistemological

problem of grounding an observational judgment's content on what in the world exerts the authority on which its justification must be adjudicated. In fact, the inferentialist is in no sense committed to inference being an epistemological bridge. Just like the representationalist is not committed to representation being any such bridge.

This preamble on the distinction between semantic and epistemological problems of experience is useful as an introduction to the analysis of a second substantial part of McDowell's criticism of inferentialism, in which the risk to confuse the two planes is quite high. The theses that I want to consider are contained in McDowell's *Knowledge and the Internal Revisited* (McDowell, 2002), which is basically just a rejoinder to Brandom's comments on his original paper (Brandom, 1995; McDowell, 1995). There, he deals with the proper place of Sellars's normative characterization of knowledge along the axis of the debate between internalism and externalism. According to Sellars episodes of knowing belong to the space of reasons, in the sense that the notion of knowledge is a normative notion, the deployment of which introduces a framework in which episodes are properly treated as requiring justifications rather than empirical descriptions. But what does a justification amount to? In this regard, it is expedient to keep in mind the traditional platonic definition of knowledge as *justified true belief* (JTB). On the internalism-externalism axis just like on the coherentism-foundationalism one, the notion of the space of reasons seems to introduce a dilemma. On the one horn there's a purely internalist account of empirical knowledge in which justifications spin in the empirical void. Such sort of internalism fails to vindicate the *factivity* of knowledge: if the content *p* is *known*, then it must be *true*.<sup>1</sup> On the other horn, a stark externalist stance according to which, for instance, the justification for one knowing that there is a pink ice cube in front of one is the empirical fact that there is a pink ice cube in front of one. Such sort of externalism seems to opt out of the very idea of the space of reason. According to McDowell, however, the dilemma is the result of an unquestioned dualistic proclivity to internalize the space of reasons and to believe that it is in some sense autonomous and detached from the *outer* world. This approach obfuscates the commonsensical truth that «[t]he entitlement consists in the visual availability to her of the fact she would affirm in making that claim» (McDowell, 2002, p. 98). And thus it makes it mysterious how one can be entitled to justify one's perceptual knowledge that there is a pink ice cube in front of one by claiming "I see that there is a pink ice cube in front of me".

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<sup>1</sup> The contrapositive is, to a certain extent, clearer a statement of the principle to grasp: nothing false can be known.

When confronted with this picture, on his part, Brandom tries to supply an externalist alternative to the internalization of the space of reasons by mobilizing his social account of discursive practices:

[C]ognitive locutions such as “knows”, which include both factive and warrantive dimensions, can all be understood as standings in a socially articulated space of reasons: standings that incorporate what are with respect to *individual* knowers internal and external epistemic considerations in the form of the distinct *social* perspectives of attributing and undertaking commitments. (Brandom, 1995, p. 907)

His way to cash out JTB requirements is in terms of his analysis of the speakers' normative statuses in linguistic practices. So, in his view, for *S* to believe that *p* is for *S* to be committed to the content that *p*, and for *S* to be justified in believing that *p* is for *S* to be entitled to the content that *p*. Of course the crux of the analysis concerns the truth requirement. According to Brandom, for *S* to believe truly that *p* is for *S*'s *interpreter* to be committed to *p* herself. Here is where, with the introduction of a second perspective, the social dimension comes directly to the fore. But it is important to acknowledge that the whole analysis is essentially social: the score of commitments and entitlements that constitute deontic statuses is reciprocally kept by discursive practitioners. So to sum up, according to Brandom, the content of a knowledge attribution like “*S* knows that *p*” on the part of an interpreter of *S* is fully unpacked into three parts: (i) the interpreter *attributes* to *S* the commitment to *p*, (ii) the interpreter *attributes* to *S* the entitlement to *p* and (iii) the interpreter *acknowledges* herself the commitment to *p*.

McDowell (2002) protests against this deployment of social perspectives in order to characterize epistemic entitlement. First, in his view, Brandom's attempt to fulfill the JTB requirements through the interplay between a knower and an interpreter shares just the internalizing proclivity that he criticized in the first place, to the extent that Brandom doesn't conceive the knower's entitlement (ii) to be sufficient to guarantee truth (iii) and advocates for the necessity of a mediating element, provided by the interpreter's commitment, that is not at the knower's disposal. Second, on Brandom's analysis entitlement (ii) is also externalized on the social framework, in the sense that it is attributed to the knower by a scorekeeper. This, as Brandom puts it, allows for the possibility of being justified while not being able to justify. As we have seen in Section 2, Brandom explicitly admits that an episode may be one of knowledge even if the knower herself is not able to draw the inferences that would justify her knowledge, provided that such inferences can be drawn by the interpreter who keeps her score.

Patently, the whole discussion gravitates around the interpretation of the notion of entitlement. While both Brandom and McDowell recognize that a knower's entitlement does not depend only on herself, they disagree about the status a knower acquires by being entitled to her beliefs. On Brandom's view entitlement is essentially perspectival (even when it is ascribed to oneself), therefore it does not guarantee *per se* the objectivity of the correctness of concept application. McDowell considers such a defeasible entitlement as no entitlement at all, just because it does not provide objective justification. The distinction between a semantic and an epistemological problem of experience, however, allows to contemplate the possibility that they might be both right. Brandom's notion of entitlement is essentially semantic: according to his pragmatic analysis of discursive practices, entitlements and commitments constitute the attitude-dependent normative statuses that are established by discursive practitioners and that define the pragmatic content of the linguistic expressions they deploy. McDowell's notion of entitlement is thoroughly epistemic: it characterizes the status of being justified in entertaining empirical knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Let me try to shed some light on the point by means of an example.

Let us consider a certain John (maybe a necktie seller) who is at the shooting range shooting clay pigeons. For the sake of the example let's consider "to shoot" as a resultative verb, just like "to see": in a episode of shooting something is shot down. Now, suppose also that John is quite good at shooting clay pigeons, and yet sometimes he fails. When he misses the clay pigeon, his shooting capacities fail, they are not actualized: the clay pigeon is not shot down. In Sellars's deceptive jargon, in that case the shooting would be just an *ostensible* shooting. In fact, there is no shooting at all. Similarly, McDowell's disjunctivism suggests that a case of mere ostensible seeing is no seeing at all, in the sense that the conceptual capacities that would be actualized in an episode of seeing to return empirical knowledge of what is seen are not in fact actualized *in the same way* in a case of perceptual mistake.

Let us suppose now that John is back at the shooting range on a windy day. Unbeknownst to him the range operator substitutes clay pigeons with real ones, which however happen to fly just on the same trajectory of the clays. Then,

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<sup>1</sup> Of course there is no misunderstanding on this point on these authors' part: they know what they are doing just too well. Brandom is pushing the idea that epistemological problems have a "soft underbelly" to be accounted for (cp. Brandom, 2002a, p. 23). In fact, his story about the objectivity of conceptual content has to be found not in his two-ply account of observational reports, but in his analysis of German idealism. McDowell instead, in his debate with Brandom, is trying precisely not to be enrolled in his Hegelian ranks (cp. McDowell, 2002, 98).

when John performs his shooting, he shoots down the poor animals. How can he do that? Is his ability to shoot clay pigeons the same as his ability to shoot real ones, just like his ability to shoot green clay pigeons is the same as his ability to shoot orange ones? Let now the cruel man be caught and get what he deserves. Clay pigeons are put back in their places and John goes for his shootings again. He now misses almost every time. Let us suppose that in fact clay pigeons, as opposed to real ones, fly with a certain spin which interacts in certain ways with the wind, thus producing certain modifications in their trajectories. John doesn't know how to deal with that and he misses clay pigeons in windy conditions. In a sense, it would be correct to say that John doesn't really have the capacity to shoot clay pigeons. *Which* capacity does he have then?<sup>1</sup>

Again, this is not a ballistic (or, *mutatis mudandis*, an epistemological) problem, but a semantic one. It is not a problem that McDowell doesn't see, but it is one that he is not really concerned with. As he makes clear in plenty of occasions, he is committed to the idea that the possession of conceptual capacities is acquired by being taught to take part in the social practices in which those capacities are exerted and concepts applied (cp. McDowell, 2002, pp. 104–105). He just doesn't see how this could provide any answer to the epistemological problem of experience he is concerned with.<sup>2</sup> Still, the problem of the determination of conceptual contents is an interesting one. As far as concept-use is concerned, representationalism tends to harmonize with the Carnapian two-step analysis famously criticized by Quine: first concepts are

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<sup>1</sup> Of course it's easy to adapt the example to the case of empirical knowledge. In fact, Sellars's original example of the tie shop in section III of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* would do the job just as well. The reason why I didn't pick an epistemic example in the first place is because it might have suggested that this point should count somehow against McDowell's theory of experience. It does not. In the case of shooting clay pigeons there are some capacities that are actualized and many others that are not. An episode of shooting clay pigeons in which a clay pigeon is not shot down is not, in fact, an episode of shooting clay pigeons, just like an episode of seeing a pink ice cube in which a pink ice cube is not taken in in perceptual experience is not an episode of seeing. Hence, there is no question that John can justify the fact that he shot down a clay pidgeon by claiming that "I shot a clay pigeon". The point of the example is rather to raise a different sort of question, a question about the determination of the episode's content.

<sup>2</sup> The failure to distinguish between these two sorts of problems may engender the misunderstanding that the debate between Brandom and McDowell on experience is to be construed as hinging on the distinction between a social and an individualistic approach. In effect, Brandom explicitly charges McDowell of individualism (Brandom, 1995, pp. 904–908). But again his concern is mostly semantic, along the lines of Wittgenstein's objection to the idea of a private language: he accuses McDowell of individualizing the space of reasons and transforming it into something private, impervious to the normative analysis of conceptual content that he endorses. McDowell, on his part, is concerned instead with the epistemological entitlement of a concept user to empirical knowledge.

grasped and then they are applied. In such a picture the problem of how conceptual contents are determined is clearly distinguished from the problem of whether they are applied correctly. To the contrary, inferentialism, at least in Brandom's normative version, runs together the processes of determination and application of conceptual contents. The latter are established by the normative attitudes that discursive practitioners take towards each other with respect to their moves. Of course, semantic analysis is to be understood as representing the conditions for the correct application of conceptual contents. This must be true for both representationalism and inferentialism. Yet, in normative inferentialism, since conceptual contents are attitude-dependent, one's entitlement to the application of a conceptual content is intrinsically defeasible. Moreover, since conceptual contents are represented in functional terms as roles in the web of inferential relations that express the normative relations established by discursive practitioners, there is a clear way to account for such a defeasibility directly on the semantic plan in terms of defeasible inferences.

## 6 A few logical remarks on defeasibility

As we have seen, in McDowell's view the justificatory role of an observational report can only be played by the fact it reports. But the justification a fact provides is not of the inferential sort. The content of an observational report is inferentially related to nothing: the only sense in which inferential relations could come into play in this picture is by connecting the content with itself. Let's now assume for the sake of the argument that McDowell's account of empirical content is correct. That implies that Brandom's two-ply account has to be rejected as a rival epistemological explanation. However, this is actually a relatively cheap move from an inferentialist perspective, since McDowell's theory is not really much committing on the semantic side. Let us now look back at the paradox of inferentialism pinpointed by McDowell from the point of view of the semantic problem of experience. Recall that the paradox amounts to the remark that the only content in virtue of which an observational judgment has its standing in the space of reason is the content of the judgment itself, so that the only inference involved in its determination would be:

$p$ , therefore  $p$

To begin with, I would say that rather than a "stuttering" form of inference, this is a quite respectable instance of the *identity axiom*. No matter how trivial it might sound, in many calculi this is necessary to define the deducibility relation

that is intended to be formalized. Let us ask however how trivial it actually is from the inferentialist perspective.

In effect, logicians know that in the neighborhood of the identity axiom lies another sort of paradoxes. These affect the classical formalization of the conditionals in terms of *material implication*. A formula whose principal connective is a material implication,  $\varphi \rightarrow \psi$ , is true for any combination of the truth values of the component formulas,  $\varphi$  and  $\psi$ , except in the case in which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false. Of course, this semantic definition of the implication connective validates the identity axiom, but it also validates more controversial formulas, as for example  $\varphi \rightarrow \psi \rightarrow \varphi$  or  $\psi \rightarrow \varphi \rightarrow \varphi$ . The reason why some logicians view these as problematic is that they don't seem to express any interesting relation of entailment between the premisses and the conclusions.<sup>1</sup> To accept them is to accept the following arguments, for instance, as valid:

If there is a pink ice cube in front of one, then if McDowell is the author of *Making it Explicit* then there is a pink ice cube in front of one.

If Brandom lives in Pisa, then if there is a pink ice cube in front of one then there is a pink ice cube in front of one.

These formulas are known as “paradoxes of material implication”, and the problem they raise is quite distinct from the paradox of inferentialism that we are considering. Nonetheless there are some interesting relations between them that can be highlighted by looking at how the paradoxes of material implication are generated from a proof-theoretical point of view.

It is common for a proof system to have a deduction theorem that relates its deduction relation with a connective of implication. Thus, let a proof system  $\mathbf{P}$  be a couple  $(Fm, \vdash)$ , where  $Fm$  is a set of well formed formulas of a given language  $L$  (containing a connective “ $\rightarrow$ ”) and  $\vdash \subseteq Fm \times Fm$  a relation on  $Fm$ . Let also  $\Gamma, \Delta$  be sets of formulas in  $Fm$ , and  $\varphi, \psi, \chi$  be formulas in  $Fm$ . Then the deduction theorem for  $\mathbf{P}$  can be expressed as follows:

**Deduction Theorem.**  $\Gamma, \varphi \vdash \psi$  iff  $\Gamma \vdash \varphi \rightarrow \psi$

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<sup>1</sup> As it is well known, this approach to the analysis of implication and entailment was pioneered by C.I. Lewis and led to the modern systems of modal logics. Later, the same vein has been exploited to develop relevant logics. For a *locus classicus* of the discussion on the paradoxes of implication see (Anderson and Belnap, 1975), in particular §1.1 and §5.1.

The deduction theorem essentially states that relations of deduction among formulas in  $Fm$  can be made explicit as implicative formulas. And *viceversa*.

Classical proof systems also have another interesting property that characterizes monotonic reasoning:

**Monotonicity.** If  $\Gamma \vdash \varphi$  and  $\Gamma \subseteq \Delta$ , then  $\Delta \vdash \varphi$

Monotonicity states that if a relation of deduction is valid, the addition of extra premisses does not invalidate it.

Clearly, these properties together with the identity axiom generate the paradoxes of implication:

- |     |   |             |
|-----|---|-------------|
| (1) | $\vdash \varphi \rightarrow \varphi$                  | Ax.         |
| (2) | $\varphi \vdash \varphi$                              | 1, Ded. Th. |
| (3) | $\psi, \varphi \vdash \varphi$                        | 2, Mon.     |
| (4) | $\varphi \vdash \psi \rightarrow \varphi$             | 3, Ded. Th. |
| (5) | $\vdash \varphi \rightarrow \psi \rightarrow \varphi$ | 4, Ded. Th. |

Similarly, for  $\psi \rightarrow \varphi \rightarrow \varphi$  by applying commutativity in the premisses of the deduction relation.

Among the ingredients blent together here, the most obvious suspect for spoiling the recipe is monotonicity. In effect, with the exception of certain highly specialized fields like mathematics, monotonic reasoning is anything but evidently sound. Our everyday reasoning is essentially non-monotonic: adding premisses does make a huge difference as for the validity of an inference. Just to stick to our examples, consider:

If John shoots a clay pigeon, then a clay pigeon is shot down.

If John shoots a clay pigeon on a windy day, then a clay pigeon is shot down.

Nothing seems to guarantee that if the first inference is valid, then the second one must be valid too. To the contrary, our previous example just shows a case in which the former is valid and the latter fails. In order to cope with these intuitions, proof systems have been developed that lack the property of monotonicity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Non-monotonic logics are a wide and varied family, for failure of monotonicity can be obtained in a number of ways. Relevant logics for instance are *in a sense* non-monotonic since they reject the rule of weakening (or thinning): if  $\Gamma \vdash \Delta$  then  $\varphi, \Gamma \vdash \Delta$ . This is known as a structural rule of

There is however another less noticeable responsible for the derivation of the paradoxes of implication from the axiom of identity. In effect, it is somehow hidden in the deduction theorem and it takes some algebraic elaboration to bring it into plain view. Let  $\mathfrak{A} = \langle \mathcal{A}, \leq \rangle$  be the *Lindenbaum Algebra* determined by the set of theorems of the system **P**. In algebraic semantics it is usual to interpret entailment in terms of the ordering relation “ $\leq$ ”. Thus, if the deduction theorem is valid for **P**, it is easy to show that  $\mathcal{A}$  has the following property of residuation:<sup>1</sup>

**Right Residuation.**  $\varphi \wedge \psi \leq \chi$  iff  $\psi \leq \varphi \rightarrow \chi$

Residuation shows that there is an interesting relation in  $\mathcal{A}$  between the algebraic operators that interpret conjunction and implication. In algebra, “ $\varphi \rightarrow \chi$ ” is called the *right residual* of  $\chi$  by  $\varphi$ : it can be thought as what remains of  $\chi$  after “ $\rightarrow$ -ing” it by  $\varphi$ .<sup>2</sup> In algebraic semantics it is common to think of implication as a right residual because this guarantees certain basic properties. In fact, it follows from *Right Residuation* that

$$\varphi \wedge \varphi \rightarrow \chi \leq \chi$$

The conjunction of two formulas  $\varphi$  and  $\psi$  instead is usually represented as the *greatest lower bound* of their interpretants, i.e. the greatest  $x \in \mathcal{A}$  such that  $x \leq \varphi$  and  $x \leq \psi$ . That also makes some standard properties of conjunction valid, such as:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{if } \Gamma \vdash \varphi \text{ and } \Gamma \vdash \psi, \text{ then } \Gamma \vdash \varphi \wedge \psi \\ \text{if } \Gamma \vdash \varphi \wedge \psi, \text{ then } \Gamma \vdash \varphi \text{ and } \Gamma \vdash \psi \end{array}$$

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Gentzen’s sequent calculus for classical logic **LK** and intuitionistic logic **LJ**. Systems that reject any of the structural rules are known as *substructural* logics. In this sense relevant logics can be construed as substructural logics. There are other substructural logics that reject weakening, like linear logic or Lambek calculus. These are non-monotonic in the same sense as relevance logic. For a presentation of substructural logics see (Restall, 2000). All these logics are contained in classical logic in the sense that any substructural consequence of a set of formulas is also a classical consequence, but not *viceversa*. However, non-monotonicity has been thoroughly explored also in another direction, by weakening the Tarskian properties of the classical consequence relation and obtaining relations that extend the set of consequences that can be drawn from a set of formulas beyond classically valid ones. In this sense, these non-monotonic logics are said *supraclassical*. For a comprehensive review of non-monotonic supra-classical logics see (Makinson, 2005).

<sup>1</sup> In the following, members of  $\mathcal{A}$  and the operators defined on them will be indicated with the same notation as the formulas of *Fm* and the operators in the system **P** that they interpret.

<sup>2</sup> In the algebra of arithmetics, for instance, where conjunction is multiplication, the residual is what remains of  $\chi$  after *dividing* it by  $\varphi$ : in fact,  $\varphi \times \psi = \chi$  iff  $\psi = \varphi \setminus \chi$ .

Let us ask now what would happen if the operator right-residuated by implication does not represent conjunction. Let us suppose in other words that there is another binary logical operator that binds premises together and that is related to implication in the way residuation laws prescribes, but doesn't behave like conjunction.<sup>1</sup> Let us call it *fusion* and let us denote it by “ $\circ$ ”. So, conjunction and fusion are two ways to take contents together and are differently related with implication and inferential relations:<sup>2</sup> from an inferentialist point of view this means that they make explicit two different ways to define inferential roles and thus ultimately conceptual contents. The interaction of these two inferential perspectives may well produce defeasible inferences. A good way to see how that happens is to consider a four-valued algebraic semantics for a logic that contains such two inferential perspectives. Thus, consider the following Hasse diagram:



Figure 1

The algebraic structure pictured in Figure 1 is a bilattice  $\mathcal{B}$ .<sup>3</sup> A bilattice can be seen as a doubly partially ordered set, thus  $\mathcal{B} = (B, \leq_1, \leq_2)$ . In this sense,  $\mathcal{B}$  can be read as follows: nodes are ordered from bottom to top according to  $\leq_1$  and from left to right according to  $\leq_2$ . Intuitively, a bilattice-based algebraic semantics is just suitable to represent a logic in which two inferential perspectives interact. Let us consider  $\mathcal{B}$  as representing the algebra of a four valued semantics for such a logic. Let  $\leq_1$  represent the inferential perspective determined by conjunction, and  $\leq_2$  the inferential perspective determined by fusion: in more formal terms, given that  $\mathcal{B}$  is a bilattice, for any  $x, y \in B$  let

$$\begin{aligned}
 x \leq_1 y &\text{ iff } x \wedge y = x \\
 x \leq_2 y &\text{ iff } x \circ y = x
 \end{aligned}$$

<sup>1</sup> A similar strategy has been applied for relevant logics: see (Dunn, 1973; Mints, 1976).  
<sup>2</sup> A right residual for conjunction might be added as well to complete the picture, but that does not really add anything relevant to the point being made here.  
<sup>3</sup> The study of bilattices in algebraic semantics was originally introduced by Ginsberg (1988) and later developed and systematized in (Fitting, 1990; Avron, 1996).

Let the algebraic equivalent of conjunction and fusion be both greatest lower bounds with respect to their order. Thus, for example,  $0 \wedge 1 = F$  and  $T \circ F = 0$ . That is easy to read off from Figure 1.

This algebraic semantics allows to see what happens when reasoning is performed while two inferential perspectives interact. Let us define again, standardly, entailment in terms of the ordering relation  $\leq_1$ , and let us consider, for instance, just the paradoxes of material material implication. Recall that the problematic steps are (i) the move from  $\varphi \vdash \varphi$  to  $\psi, \varphi \vdash \varphi$  and then (ii) the move to  $\varphi \vdash \psi \rightarrow \varphi$ . First consider move (ii). For it to be valid in the present semantics the coma that takes premises together on the left of the turnstile can't be interpreted in terms of conjunction. In fact we have stipulated that implication is the right residual of fusion. But then move (i) turns out to be problematic. In fact, while  $\varphi \wedge \psi \leq_1 \varphi$  is always valid,  $\varphi \circ \psi \leq_1 \varphi$  could fail. For a counterexample just consider the case in which  $\varphi$  is F and  $\psi$  is T: then  $\varphi \circ \psi$  is 0, and 0 is greater than F.

At this point it is worth pausing to sum up the line of thought pursued in this section. These brief remarks are intended to suggest that if the notion of defeasible entitlement is considered from a logical point of view, it unveils a number of deep and interesting questions about the structure of the inferential relations that are involved in defeasible reasoning. A paradigmatic example of this sort of reasoning is just empirical reasoning. In this sense, the paradoxical ring resonating around McDowell's analysis of the inferentialist account of the content of observational judgments is illusory. In fact, even an apparently trivial principle like the identity axiom may have profound consequences in the inferential behavior of the different systems to which it may belong. These consequences are of the utmost importance to the inferentialist, because they dramatically affect the inferential relations that are construed as defining conceptual contents. In particular, the role of non-monotonicity has to be reconsidered when a semantic approach is adopted.

## 7 Defeasibility and the articulation of conceptual content

Non-monotonic inferences are clearly defeasible, but there are several ways to construe their defeasibility. In an epistemological sense, defeasibility is usually explained in terms of partial information. Thus, non-monotonic inferences are construed as representing reasoning from a somehow epistemically defective knowledge base, so that the addition of new information may not only allow for new inferences to be drawn, but also invalidate inferences drawn before. The inferentialist, however, may also read defeasibility in a semantic sense. If

contents are defined as inferential roles then defeasible inferences determine contents that vary dynamically by interacting with other contents in different contexts. It is important to acknowledge that in this reading what varies is not the definition of conceptual contents, but the contents themselves. From a technical point of view, the main difference between the epistemological and the semantic interpretation concerns the account of the defeasible inference. Notice that, for an inference to be defeasible, it must have been valid in some context. So, for instance, the inference “If John shoots a clay pigeon, a clay pigeon is shot down” is valid in the context in which it is originally drawn. Such a context does not include the content that results from the combination of the content “John shoots a clay pigeon” and the content “it’s a windy day”. In fact a context that contains such a combination invalidates the inference. Of course there are a lot of ways in which these intuitive notions of context and combination of contents can be formalized, but in general an inference can be said to be defeasible in this sense if it is valid in some but not in every context. An inference being defeasible in a given context does not tell against the validity of the inference in other contexts.

Things change if contexts are organized into some preferential order. Then, if an inference is defeasible in a *better* context we tend to look at it as somehow defective. That is exactly what happens in the epistemological interpretation of defeasibility, in which contexts are ordered according to the amount of information that is available in each of them. In such framework, it is reasonable to point out, along with McDowell, that if an inference can be defeasible in a better epistemic context then it is not *really* valid after all. Let us consider a classical epistemic example. Thus, let us suppose that John sees a lit candle in front of himself in a dark room and reports “there is a lit candle in front of me”. Suppose however that, unbeknownst to him, he is facing a mirror reflecting the light of a candle that is positioned behind his back where he can’t see it. Suppose also that Mary knows of the mirror. Is John entitled, in his perspective, to the claim that there is a lit candle in front of him? And is he entitled to it, in Mary’s perspective? Clearly, one is willing to say that John only *believes* to be entitled while he actually is not. This is because Mary’s perspective is *epistemically* privileged. Among other things, that also means that if John were in Mary’s perspective he would not endorse his report himself. There is nothing wrong with this analysis. The point, however, is that it is not obvious at all how contexts should be ordered on a semantic interpretation of defeasible inferences.

Indeed there are two senses in which inferential relations can be construed as defeasible from an inferentialist point of view. They correspond to the two

ways in which the generation of the paradoxes of implication can be blocked that have been pointed out in Section 6. First, it could be argued that the inferential relations that define certain conceptual contents are intrinsically defeasible. This is all but a preposterous idea. Empirical concepts, as they have been molded by the rise of modern science, just provide a paradigmatic example. These concepts are embedded in a network of nomological relations whose validity essentially involves a number of potential defeasors. Thus Galileo, for instance, came to define the law that describes the behavior of fallen objects in gravity fields just by abstracting from potential defeasors like friction. In general, which potential defeasors are *relevant* to the validity of nomological inferences depends on the context in which the concept that they define is applied. Brandom's analysis of observational reports can be read as hinging just on this idea. In fact, part of the inferential content of the empirical concepts that are applied in an observational judgment deals with the reliability inferences that allow to infer the truth of the report from the reporter's dispositions to differentially respond to certain stimuli with certain pieces of linguistic behavior. So John, in the example here above, reacts to a certain stimulation of his retina by uttering "there is a lit candle in front of me", and, from the fact that he is a reliable observer of lit candles, draws the conclusion that there is in effect a lit candle in front of him. Such reliability inferences are defeasible: the reporter could be in anomalous perceptual conditions, she could be deceived, disabled, drugged, etc. Yet, such defeasible inferences define the content of the empirical concept applied in the reporter's judgment. In this sense, as far as the determination of which concept is applied in the report, it doesn't matter whom the reliability inference is performed by, whether by John or by Mary (cp. Brandom, 2008a, pp. 102ff).<sup>1</sup>

A second sense in which the inferential relations that define conceptual contents can be construed as defeasible in the framework of Brandom's normative inferentialism deals with the interaction between the different perspectives of the discursive practitioners who keep each other's deontic score of commitments and entitlements. Brandom's normative analysis of discursive practices is perspectival through and through: each practitioner keeps the score of her peers in the context of her additional commitments. And of course there is no privileged perspective, so that the inferential relations that the scorekeepers' deontic attitudes establish are defeasible to the extent at which

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<sup>1</sup> Of course this analysis belongs to a semantic account of the content of the empirical concepts that are applied in observational judgments. Brandom's theory of experience also contains the additional claim that the epistemological problems of observational judgments are essentially semantic ones. By accepting McDowell's analysis for the sake of the argument, the latter claim has been bracketed to focus on the inferentialist approach proper.

they can be considered from another deontic perspective. This means that the determination of conceptual contents is defeasible as well. In fact, Brandom sees the determination of conceptual contents, in Hegelian terms, as a process unfolding along the history of linguistic communities constructed by speakers who reciprocally recognize the responsibility towards each other's authority as concept users (Cp. Brandom, 2011). In this second sense, defeasibility does not intrinsically characterize the inferential relations that define the content of certain concepts. There are no *ceteris paribus* conditions implicit in the validity of the inferences essentially involving these concepts. It does not even directly deal with the correctness of concept application, as in the epistemological interpretation. There are no privileged contexts in which certain concept applications are discovered to be mistaken. Rather, here defeasibility results from the attempt of drawing inferences as from different perspectives. In order to understand what this means, consider again the example of John and Mary and think about what happens if John is not willing to recognize Mary's authority over his application of the concept "lit candle". Suppose, in other words, that he would not discard his report if he were in Mary's perspective. What is put into question, in this case, is neither whether potential defeasors of the inferences that define the contents of the concepts that John applies are relevant in the given context, nor whether John applies empirical concepts correctly, but whether he and Mary do apply the same concepts: in fact they are evidently defined by different inferential relations and their inferential role is different. This is why the inferences that characterize the content of John's concepts turn out to be defeasible once they are drawn in Mary's perspective. In this framework, to recognize the responsibility to each other's authority over concept application is part and parcel with the determination of conceptual content itself.

## 8 Conclusion

It is important to have a clear head on the scope of inferentialism while approaching the analysis of empirical contents from an inferentialist point of view. My purpose in this paper was to identify some of the landmarks and draw some of the distinctions that may help characterizing such a scope. In particular, I tried to show why McDowell's inferentialist rephrasing of his own theory of empirical knowledge may seem paradoxical when epistemological questions and semantic questions are run together. On the other hand, I also tried to show that the representation of different sorts of inferential relations and of the interaction of conceptual contents with different inferential perspectives is within the proper scope of inferentialism. And that is not an easy task to accomplish.

If there's a lesson to be drawn from the Brandom-McDowell debate on observation, I think it is the following: while the epistemological problem of experience might well be better exorcised away, the semantical problem of experience is as much as intriguing and it is still there to be solved.

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## Transposition as Naturalistic Metaphysics: Carnap, Sellars, and Brandom on Modality and Normativity

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### Résumé.

Cet article explore le tournant linguistique que prend Robert Brandom sur des questions traditionnellement considérées comme métaphysiques par nature. Dans ce but, le traitement brandomien du langage normative et modal dans *Between Saying and Doing* est examiné dans le contexte de la *Syntaxe logique du langage* de Carnap et du texte de Sellard, "Inference and Meaning". J'affirme que le traitement brandomien représente une synthèse des élans réductionnistes carnapiens et des élans pluralistes de Sellars, synthèse qui offre au naturaliste une façon satisfaisante de réduire les questions métaphysiques à des questions linguistiques.

### Mots-clés.

Brandom, Carnap, Sellars, métaphysique, modalité, normativité.

### ملخص.

تستكشف هذه الورقة المنعطف اللغوي الذي وظفه «روبرت براندوم» في معالجة القضايا التي يُنظر إليها تقليدياً على أنها تمثل وجوداً ميتافيزيقياً في الطبيعة. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، نأخذ بعين الاعتبار معالجة «براندوم» للغة المعيارية والجهوية في كتابه: «بين القول والفعل»، وذلك في سياق كتاب «رودلف كارناب»: «السينتاكس المنطقي للغة»، وكتاب «ويلفريد سيلرز»: «الاستدلال والمعنى». وأزعم أن معالجة براندوم تمثل توليفة من بواعث «كارناب» الرديّة وبواعث «سيلرز» التعددية، وهي توليفة توفر لصاحب المذهب الطبيعي وسيلةً مُشبعة لتقليص القضايا الميتافيزيقية إلى قضايا لغوية.

### كلمات مفتاحية.

براندوم، كارناب، سيلرز، ميتافيزيقا، جهة، معيارية.

**Abstract.**

This paper explores the linguistic turn that Robert Brandom takes on issues that are traditionally seen as being metaphysical in nature. Towards this end, Brandom's treatment of normative and modal language in his *Between Saying and Doing* is considered in the context of Rudolf Carnap's *Logical Syntax of Language* and Wilfrid Sellars's "Inference and Meaning." I argue that Brandom's treatment represents a synthesis of Carnap's reductionist impulses and Sellars's pluralist impulses, one that offers the naturalist a satisfying way of deflating metaphysical issues to linguistic ones.

**Keywords.**

Brandom, Carnap, Sellars, Metaphysics, Modality, Normativity.

**§1. Introduction**

The critique of metaphysics has been an abiding concern within the history of philosophy. From the skeptics of antiquity, to the modern empiricists and the mature Kant, philosophers have attempted to balance our systematic aspirations with an awareness of our essential human finitude. One of analytic philosophy's distinctive movements over the past hundred years has been the linguistic turn it has taken on this issue. The guiding thought of the linguistic turn is that many perennial problems of philosophy are not substantive in that their solution does not demand any deep metaphysical explanation of the constitution of the world. Instead, these metaphysically-suspect problems can be transposed into easily answered questions concerning what we say in and do with the languages we speak.

Robert Brandom's project of meaning-use analysis, developed in his 2008 work *Between Saying and Doing*, carries on this tradition.<sup>1</sup> As Brandom understands it, this project is both distinct from yet related to the project from his 1994 masterwork, *Making It Explicit*.<sup>2</sup> This newer project is focused on developing a set of analytical tools for understanding the semantic relations between various vocabularies and practices, and it is Brandom's intention for these tools to have no implications for first-order semantic theory—thus not prejudicing the issue in favor of his own version of inferential semantics. This being said, as *BSD* progresses Brandom applies his analytical tools to a number

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<sup>1</sup> *Between Saying and Doing* is abbreviated to 'BSD' throughout.

<sup>2</sup> See *BSD*, xiii and 234-235.

of issues raised by his project in *Making It Explicit*, in hopes of illustrating the power of his tools.

For our purposes, the most important of these issues concerns the relation between modal and normative language. Ultimately, Brandom argues that “the language of modality is ... a ‘transposed’ language of norms,” thus accepting the linguistic turn.<sup>1</sup> By generalizing Brandom’s account of the relation between modal and normative language, we can construct a Brandomian account of transposition. To do this, however, we must first trace Brandom’s thinking back to its historical progenitors, Rudolf Carnap and Wilfrid Sellars. After considering Carnap’s account of the material mode of speech from his *Logical Syntax of Language* and Sellars’s account of derivability from his “Inference and Meaning,” I argue that Brandom’s account of transposition is a synthesis of Carnap’s reductionism and Sellars’s pluralism. In doing this, I hope to implicitly show my reader how Brandom’s account represents the culmination of one strain of the linguistic-turn tradition.

## §2. Reductionism, or Carnap on the Material Mode of Speech

To begin to understand Brandom on modality and normativity, we must first turn to Carnap’s *The Logical Syntax of Language*. There, Carnap distinguishes between the material mode of speech and the formal mode of speech, and diagnoses a number of philosophical problems caused by the unreflective use of the material mode. It is this diagnosis that leads Carnap to develop his reductionist metaphysical project, against which both Sellars and Brandom are reacting.

Although Carnap provides a formally robust account of the material mode of speech,<sup>2</sup> for our purposes his ordinary language account will serve just as well:

The material mode of speech is a transposed mode of speech. In using it, in order to say something about a word (or a sentence) we say instead something parallel about the object designated by the word (or the fact described by the sentence, respectively).<sup>3</sup>

The key thought here is that, when using the material mode, we *reify* aspects of how we intersubjectively use language into aspects concerning the constitution of the objective world. To avoid this reification, we must use the

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<sup>1</sup> Sellars, “Inference,” 233. See also *BSD*, 29 and 100-101.

<sup>2</sup> See Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 238-239.

<sup>3</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 309.

formal mode of speech, which is simply the mode of speech where, in order to say something about a word or sentence, we say that thing about that word or sentence.

To gain a better understanding of these two modes of speech, let us consider the problems that Carnap diagnoses concerning the material mode. First, Carnap claims that “the habit of formulating [sentences] in the material mode of speech causes us ... to deceive ourselves about the objects of our own investigations.”<sup>1</sup> To see why, consider:

S1. ‘Daystar’ designates the sun’.

According to S1’s surface grammar, it would seem as though we must inquire into the relation between a word, ‘daystar’, and an object, the sun, if we hope to determine whether S1 is true. However, Carnap claims that this would be a mistake, because the sentence is really the material mode counterpart to

S2. ‘Daystar’ is synonymous with ‘sun’.’<sup>2</sup>

Assuming that Carnap’s claim is correct, S2 makes explicit the logical grammar of S1, implying that S1’s surface grammar is deceptive. Instead of inquiring into the relation between a word and an object, we should actually inquire into the relation between two words, ‘daystar’ and ‘sun’.

Carnap’s second problem is that material mode sentences so easily deceive us because they are inherently *incomplete*. The reason for this is that using the material mode involves “employing absolute concepts in place of the syntactical concepts which are relative to language.”<sup>3</sup> To see what Carnap means, consider the German translations of S1 and S2:

S1’. ‘Daystar’ bedeutet die Sonne’.

S2’. ‘Daystar’ ist synonymisch mit ‘sun’.’

These sentences make the same claims as S1 and S2, respectively; but notice that we translate the used word ‘sun’ in S1 to get S1’, but we do not translate the mentioned word ‘sun’ in S2 to get S2’. This highlights the different logical grammars of the designation and synonymy relations.<sup>4</sup> Both are two-place relations that, in our examples, take the English language word ‘daystar’

<sup>1</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 298.

<sup>2</sup> Sellars’s dot-quote convention hinges on a similar sort of claim. See Sellars, “Meaning.”

<sup>3</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 299.

<sup>4</sup> Again, see Sellars’s discussion of his dot-quote convention in Sellars, “Meaning.”

as their first arguments. In this sense, both are partially relative to language. However, only the synonymy relation is doubly relative to language, in the sense that both of its arguments must be relativized to their respective languages before we can make sense of the overall relation. On the other hand, the designation relation obtains regardless of what language its second argument is expressed in. We can mark this difference explicitly with the following convention:

S1". 'Daystar' (in English) designates the sun'.

S2". 'Daystar' (in English) is synonymous with 'sun' (in English)'.

In transposing S2" into S1", we lose the information conveyed by the second '(in English)' from S2". Carnap's claim is that similar losses occur whenever we make use of the material mode of speech.

Finally, Carnap's third problem concerning the material mode of speech is that using this mode easily leads us to *contradiction*. Because material mode sentences are deceptive and incomplete in the manner sketched above, we often use "the methods of inference which are correct for other sentences ... thoughtlessly ... in connection with [the material mode]."<sup>1</sup> Carnap provides a technical example to illustrate this,<sup>2</sup> but consider the debate about whether existence is a real property. Both sides have strong arguments, and yet they are led to contradictory conclusions because existence cannot be both a real property and not a real property. However, if we translate 'Existence is a real property' out of the material mode, we get ' 'Is existent' (in language *L*) is a predicate-expression'. At this point, we can appreciate that there need be no contradiction involved in the situation where 'is existent' is a predicate-expression in one language, *L1*, but not in another, *L2*.

Given Carnap's diagnosis of these three problems, he concludes that "the true situation is revealed by the translation of the sentences of the material mode of speech ... into the correlated syntactical sentences" of the formal mode.<sup>3</sup> This is his reductionist thesis, which he elaborates on by saying:

If a sentence of the material mode of speech is given, ... then the translation into the formal mode of speech need not always be undertaken, but it must always be possible. *Translatability into the formal mode of speech constitutes the*

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<sup>1</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 291.

<sup>2</sup> See Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 291.

<sup>3</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 288.

*touchstone for all philosophical sentences, or, more generally, for all sentences which do not belong to the language of any one of the empirical sciences.*<sup>1</sup>

What is distinctive of Carnap's reductionism is the thought that material mode sentences indirectly convey the information that formal mode sentences assert directly. Considered independently of the formal mode, such material mode sentences are cognitively vacuous because there is no 'true situation' for them to be about. It is only insofar as material mode sentences are translatable into the formal mode that they gain intentionality and are thereby truth-apt. It is in this manner that Carnap identifies reduction with translation.

That being said, it is important to note something that Carnap is *not* claiming. Namely, this reductionist thesis does *not* entail that we ought to stop using the material mode in favor of the formal mode. Although Carnap concedes that there will be cases where there is no formal mode translation available for a given material mode sentence, this entails only that those specific material mode sentences ought to be eliminated from a scientific language, not that all material mode sentences ought to be eliminated. Such a blanket prohibition would not only go against Carnap's principle of tolerance,<sup>2</sup> but it would also deprive us of the benefits Carnap readily admits that the material mode has over the formal mode—in particular, it is “more readily understood,” is “often shorter and more obvious,” and “*is frequently expedient.*”<sup>3</sup> For this reason, Carnap's position is properly understood to be reductionist but not eliminativist.

### §3. Pluralism, or Sellars's Pragmatics Turn

Because our topic is the relation between modality and normativity, it might seem counterintuitive for me not to address Carnap's thoughts on either in the previous section. The reason for this is because it is not until Sellars's “Inference and Meaning” that these two topics are understood as being intimately connected. Although Carnap provides an analysis of modal sentences in *The Logical Syntax of Language*, it is Sellars's great achievement to identify that this analysis overlooks the normative dimension of syntactical rules, and that correcting this oversight requires us to acknowledge the pragmatic dimension of language as undergirding Carnap's overall syntactalist project. Once we take these Sellarsian developments into account, we are driven away from Carnap's reductionism to a form of pluralism that promises

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<sup>1</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 313.

<sup>2</sup> See Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 51-52.

<sup>3</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 312.

“an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse, are not *inferior*, just *different*.”<sup>1</sup>

The key thought in Carnap’s account of modality is that modal sentences are in the material mode. Therefore, if we are to understand sentences such as ‘*p* is necessary’ or ‘*q* is possible’, we must first translate them as ‘‘*p*’ is analytic’ or ‘‘*q*’ is not contradictory’ (respectively), which Carnap takes to be their formal mode counterparts.<sup>2</sup> From here, we need only follow Carnap’s analysis of the syntactical predicates ‘is analytic’ and ‘is contradictory’ to see that his account of modality is grounded in his account of direct consequence.<sup>3</sup>

It is this latter, grounding account that Sellars critiques in “Inference and Meaning.” As a syntacticalist, Carnap defines a language as being “any sort of calculus, that is to say, a system of formation and transformation rules.”<sup>4</sup> For each language, this system of rules is in turn understood as being nothing more than the definition of ‘direct consequence’ for that language:

we will assume the *definition of ‘direct consequence’* to be stated in the following form: “*A*<sub>1</sub> [sc. a linguistic expression] is called a direct consequence of *K*<sub>1</sub> [sc. a class of linguistic expressions] in *S* if: (1) *A*<sub>1</sub> and every expression of *K*<sub>1</sub> has one of the following forms: ...; and (2) *A*<sub>1</sub> and *K*<sub>1</sub> fulfil one of the following conditions: ....” The definition thus contains under (1) the formation rules and under (2) the transformation rules of *S*.<sup>5</sup>

In this manner, direct consequence is the foundational notion in Carnap’s philosophy of language, as his project attempts to “show how *the most important syntactical concepts can be defined by means of the term ‘direct consequence’*.”<sup>6</sup>

Sellars’s critique of this account is not so much that it is wrong, but that it is incomplete. To see why, Sellars draws two analogies. First, Sellars considers the attempt to define ‘is morally right’ in naturalistic terms, such as with the

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<sup>1</sup> Sellars, “Counterfactuals,” 282.

<sup>2</sup> For more on Carnap’s analysis of modality, see Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 250-257.

<sup>3</sup> For Carnap’s analysis of ‘is analytic’ and ‘is synthetic’ in terms of ‘is valid’ and ‘is contravalid’, see Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 182. For Carnap’s analysis of ‘is valid’ and ‘is contravalid’ in terms of ‘is a consequence’, see Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 173-174. For Carnap’s analysis of ‘is a consequence’ in terms of ‘is a direct consequence’, see Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 172. For Carnap’s account of direct consequence, see Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 168-172.

<sup>4</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 167.

<sup>5</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 169. See also Carnap’s identification of rules with the definition of ‘direct consequence’ at Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 168.

<sup>6</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax*, 168.

statement 'x is morally right =<sub>DF</sub> x maximizes human happiness'. In an allusion to G. E. Moore, Sellars claims:

Here we should all know what to say. We would point out that the definiendum is no mere synonym for the definiens, and that even if it has the same components of descriptive meaning as the latter, it has a surplus meaning over and above these which can be indicated by the word "ought".<sup>1</sup>

Sellars's point is that, just as it is a naturalistic fallacy to ignore the normative dimension of moral rules, so too is it a fallacy to ignore the normative dimension of syntactical rules. By defining 'direct consequence' in purely descriptive terms relating to the "structural relationship between ... two kinds of expression," Carnap unwittingly commits this fallacy, and it is Sellars's project to supplement Carnap's account with the missing normative dimension.<sup>2</sup>

Sellars uses his second analogy to provide this normative supplement. Sellars begins by noting that "a rule is always a rule for *doing* something."<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, Sellars draws an analogy between Carnap's definition of 'direct consequence' and the following definition of 'arrestable': 'X is arrestable =<sub>DF</sub> X has broken a law'. The point of this analogy is to note two things. First:

It is obvious that such a definition would be a mistake *not only because* the definiendum "arrestable" has, as we saw [in the first analogy], a normative force not shared by the definiens, *but also because* it designates an act, the act of arresting, which is not designated by the definiens.<sup>4</sup>

Sellars applies this latter point to the definition of 'direct consequence', and claims that the phrase 'direct consequence' (as Carnap uses it) must obliquely designate an act as well, one that is not designated in Carnap's definiens concerning the structural relations between expressions.

The second thing to note is that "a person who offered such a 'definition' [of 'arrestable'] [is] really attempting, in a confused way, to ... *specify the circumstances* in which a person is arrestable."<sup>5</sup> By Sellars's lights, to be arrestable is to have a certain normative status (namely the status of *deserving* to be arrested). Therefore, when Sellars applies this second point to Carnap's

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<sup>1</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 230. See also Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 62 and 65.

<sup>2</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 230.

<sup>3</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 230.

<sup>4</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 231; italics mine.

<sup>5</sup> Sellars, "inference," 231; italics mine.

definition, the lesson is that although it fails as a definition, it does specify a set of circumstances in which a person could have some normative status relating to some act.

Discovering what this act and status are is the key to Sellars's normative supplement to Carnap's account of direct consequence; but to do this, we must leave the realm of syntax and turn to the pragmatics of language use. Once we do this, we realize that "Carnap is ... specifying the circumstances in which it is *permissible* to *derive* one expression from another."<sup>1</sup> Following Sellars's convention of using the suffix '-able' to connote permissibility (instead of possibility), we see that Sellars's supplement explains B's being a *direct consequence* of A in terms of B's being *derivable* from A (for some subject in some set of practices).

Sellars recognizes that this supplement has consequences for Carnap's account of modality, although Sellars takes only the first tentative step towards elucidating these consequences. Sellars considers it to be Carnap's great achievement to recognize modal sentences as being in the material mode, but he reminds us that Carnap's analysis of modal sentences in terms of direct consequence is incomplete insofar as it overlooks "the rulsiness of syntactical rules."<sup>2</sup> By analyzing direct consequence in terms of derivability, Sellars has shown that we do not reduce modal sentences to sentences of a descriptive syntactical language; instead, we must correlate modal sentences with sentences of the normative language of pragmatics. In this sense, "the language of modalities is interpreted as a 'transposed' language of norms."<sup>3</sup>

Once we do this, we must ask whether Carnap's reductionist thesis remains plausible when we substitute these normative sentences for Carnap's descriptive sentences. Sellars frames his answer in terms of a distinction between what a sentence asserts and what it conveys. Because modal sentences are in the material mode, they do not directly assert anything, but merely convey something indirectly. According to Sellars, what the sentence ' $\varphi$ a necessitates  $\psi$ a' conveys is "that the speaker conforms to the rule ' $\psi$ a' is ... derivable from ' $\varphi$ a' and says what he says in some sense because of the rule."<sup>4</sup> At this point, we notice that the correlated normative sentence, ' $\psi$ a' is derivable from ' $\varphi$ a' does not assert anything about a speaker, and so it does

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<sup>1</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 231; italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 232. See also the surrounding paragraphs.

<sup>3</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 233.

<sup>4</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 234. Sellars's distinction between L-derivability and P-derivability will not concern us here.

not assert what the modal sentence conveys (as would be the case were Carnap's reductionism correct). Instead, both sentences convey the same information. The position this leads to is a pluralism in which the languages of modality and normativity "are mutually irreducible,"<sup>1</sup> with neither being "*inferior*, just *different*."<sup>2</sup>

#### §4. Synthesis through Brandom's Analytical Tools

At this point, we have seen how Carnap and Sellars each identify one important insight into our use of modal language specifically, and seemingly-non-naturalistic languages more generally. Carnap's insight, encapsulated in his notion of the material mode of speech, is that when we use these languages, we are really talking about aspects of our own linguistic usage. Sellars's insight, encapsulated in his notion of derivability, is that in order for us to understand our linguistic usage, we must acknowledge its normative and pragmatic component.

Although Sellars attempts to acknowledge both of these insights, our survey of his account of modality should leave us with two related questions. First, what exactly does Sellars have in mind with his distinction between asserting and conveying? And second, how is Sellars's account of the language of modalities as a transposed language of norms supposed to explain anything about modality? Despite its flaws, Carnap's reductionism at least has the formal feature of using one language to *say something new* about another language, whereas Sellars's pluralism would seem to offer no explanatory gain insofar as he uses two languages to *convey the same information*.

Brandom's goal throughout *BSD* is to develop the analytical tools necessary to develop an account of transposition that acknowledges both insights, without raising the sorts of problems highlighted by our questions for Sellars's pluralism.

##### §4.1. Meaning-Use Analysis

To understand Brandom's answers to these questions, we must first get acquainted with his project of meaning-use analysis. Brandom begins *BSD* with a discussion of analytic philosophy's history, focusing on what he takes to be its original, semantic-logicist project and the ensuing pragmatist critique. From its earliest days, analytic philosophers' aim has been "to exhibit the meanings

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<sup>1</sup> Sellars, "Inference," 234.

<sup>2</sup> Sellars, "Counterfactuals," 282.

expressed by various target vocabularies as intelligible by means of the logical elaboration of the meanings expressed by base vocabularies thought to be privileged in some important respects—epistemological, ontological, or semantic—relative to those others.”<sup>1</sup> We have already seen Carnap, in his account of the material mode, pursue this aim of using formal logic as the metalanguage for understanding semantic relations within and between various object languages, but he is not alone—Frege,<sup>2</sup> Russell,<sup>3</sup> the early Wittgenstein,<sup>4</sup> and Tarski<sup>5</sup> can all be seen as adopting this general approach to semantics.

The core pragmatist critique of this project, according to Brandom, attempts to enact “a displacement from the center of philosophical attention of the notion of meaning in favor of that of use.”<sup>6</sup> Sellars’s critique of Carnap, with its emphasis on speech acts and their proprieties, is just one example of this move towards use-theories of language. For Brandom, Quine<sup>7</sup> and the later Wittgenstein<sup>8</sup> represent the other two notable proponents of this position.

Brandom develops his project of meaning-use analysis as a synthesis of these two movements within the history of analytic philosophy. As he characterizes this project:

My basic suggestion for extending the classical project of *analysis* so as to incorporate as essential positive elements the insights that animate the *pragmatist* critique of that project is that, alongside the classical semantic relations between vocabularies that project has traditionally appealed to, we consider also *pragmatically mediated* ones.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of limiting ourselves by considering objects of only one ontological category in our semantic analyses—that of vocabularies—Brandom’s idea is for us to introduce objects of a second category—that of practices. Pragmatically mediated semantic relations are then understood as being semantic relations that take as their relata one or more practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> See Frege, “*Begriffsschrift*,” 5-8.

<sup>3</sup> See Russell, “On Denoting.”

<sup>4</sup> See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, especially those propositions discussing saying and showing.

<sup>5</sup> See Tarski, “Concept of Truth,” 167.

<sup>6</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> See Quine, “Two Dogmas.”

<sup>8</sup> See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, especially §§40-43.

<sup>9</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 11.

To better understand Brandom's project of meaning-use analysis, we must consider four basic pragmatically mediated semantic relations, out of which Brandom composes the more complex relations with which he understands modal and normative language. First, there is the relation of practice-vocabulary sufficiency (PV-sufficiency), which "obtains when engaging in a specified set of practices or exercising a specified set of abilities is sufficient for someone to count as *deploying* a specified vocabulary."<sup>1</sup> Second, there is the relation of practice-vocabulary necessity (PV-necessity), which is "the converse of PV-sufficiency. It obtains when one cannot deploy a certain vocabulary without engaging in the specified practice, or exercising the specified ability."<sup>2</sup> Third, there is the relation of vocabulary-practice sufficiency (VP-sufficiency), which "holds between a vocabulary and a set of practices-or-abilities when that vocabulary is sufficient to *specify* those practices-or-abilities."<sup>3</sup> Finally, there is practice-practice sufficiency (PP-sufficiency), which "holds when having acquired one set of abilities means one can already do everything one needs to do, *in principle*, to be able to do something else."<sup>4</sup> We will gain a better understanding of each of these relations as we apply them throughout §§4.2 and 4.3 below.

#### §4.2. Pragmatic Metavocabularies and Brandom's Reductionism

Using this framework of meaning-use analysis, Brandom argues that the language of normativity is what he calls a *pragmatic metavocabulary* for the language of modality. In doing this, Brandom develops the first, reductionist point in his account of transposition.

Brandom defines the relation of being a pragmatic metavocabulary in terms of the above-mentioned basic pragmatically mediated semantic relations. Specifically, this relation is "the relation that holds between vocabulary V' and vocabulary V when V' is VP-sufficient to specify practices-or-abilities P that are PV-sufficient to deploy vocabulary V."<sup>5</sup> To help visualize this complex relation, I have reproduced Brandom's meaning-use diagram of the relation below.<sup>6</sup> The reason pragmatic metavocabularies are philosophically interesting

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 101:

is because they allow us to “say what it is one must do to count as engaging in those practices” that allow us to say things in some base vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> This point becomes important in §4.4 below.

But before we get there, we must first understand Brandom’s argument for the claim that the language of normativity is a pragmatic metavocabulary for the language of modality. Like Sellars, Brandom begins with the observation that when I say ‘ $\varphi$ a necessitates  $\psi$ a’, “what I am *doing* ... is endorsing a certain kind of inference,” namely that inference which is justified by a rule permitting the derivation of ‘ $\psi$ a’ from ‘ $\varphi$ a’.<sup>2</sup> It is here where Brandom breaks from Sellars, despite his protests to the contrary.<sup>3</sup> This is because Brandom, unlike Sellars, does not take the first-order normative statement, ‘ $\psi$ a’ is derivable from ‘ $\varphi$ a’’, to be the relevant normative counterpart to the original modal sentence. Instead, Brandom notes that to endorse something is to hold it in a positive normative attitude. Therefore, the statement, ‘Speaker S endorses the

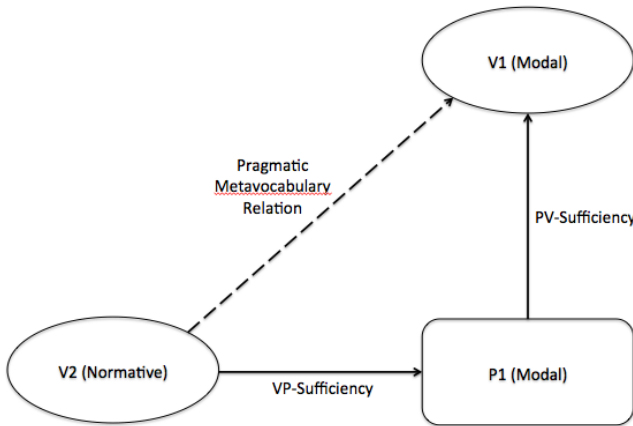


Diagram 1: The Pragmatic Metavocabulary Relation, and Its Component Relations

The following are the conventions for Brandom’s meaning-use diagrams: (1) ovals represent vocabularies; (2) boxes represent practices; (3) solid-lined arrows represent basic pragmatically mediated semantic relations; and (4) dashed-lined arrows represent complex pragmatically mediated semantic relations. See Brandom, *BSD*, 10.

<sup>1</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 10. Brandom’s use of ‘say’ throughout *BSD* is largely synonymous with Sellars’s use of ‘assert’.

<sup>2</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 101.

<sup>3</sup> See Brandom, *BSD*, 100-101. Although Brandom takes his current point about the pragmatic metavocabulary relation to be a development of Sellars’s claim that “the language of modalities is ... a ‘transposed’ language of norms” (Sellars, “Inference,” 233), it is actually Brandom’s point about the elaborated-explicating relation that leads to the sort of pluralist position that Sellars defends. For more, see §4.3 below.

inferential rule ‘ $\psi$ a’ is derivable from ‘ $\varphi$ a’ ’, is itself a normative statement, although a second-order one about what S is *doing with* Sellars’s first-order statement. Because we use normative vocabulary to specify the act that Brandom’s second-order statement is about, and because this act is the sort of act that allows one to count as using modal vocabulary, the language of normativity is thus a pragmatic metavocabulary for the language of modality.

Taken by itself, this last conclusion results in a form of reductionism, although one that is noticeably different from Carnap’s. By grounding his account of the material mode in syntax as opposed to pragmatics, Carnap’s strategy is to reduce what we *say* in the material mode to what we *say* in the formal mode. What we *do* with each is largely irrelevant for Carnap.

This isn’t the case for Brandom. By saying that the language of normativity is a pragmatic metavocabulary for the language of modality, Brandom is making a claim about what we *do with* the language of modality, and not what we *say in* it. In particular, Brandom’s strategy is to analyze the practices associated with the language of modality into their constitutive acts, and reduce those acts (whatever they may be) to normatively-characterizable acts. This focus on the practices associated with the base vocabulary—and not the base vocabulary itself—makes Brandom’s a distinctively pragmatic form of reductionism.

#### §4.3. The Elaborated-Explicating Relation and Brandom’s Pluralism

The irony of Brandom’s discussion of pragmatic metavocabularies is that, in trying to develop Sellars’s position from §3, Brandom comes to a reductionist conclusion. But this is not the end of the story. As we will see currently, Brandom’s discussion of the elaborated-explicating relation (LX-relation) has the sort of pluralist implications one would expect from a Sellarsian position.

For Brandom, the LX-relation is a complex pragmatically mediated semantic relation composed of not only the PV- and VP-sufficiency relations, but also the PV-necessity and PP-sufficiency relations. The LX-relation takes two vocabularies as its relata, with the first being any vocabulary and the second being a vocabulary that is distinguished by three characteristics:

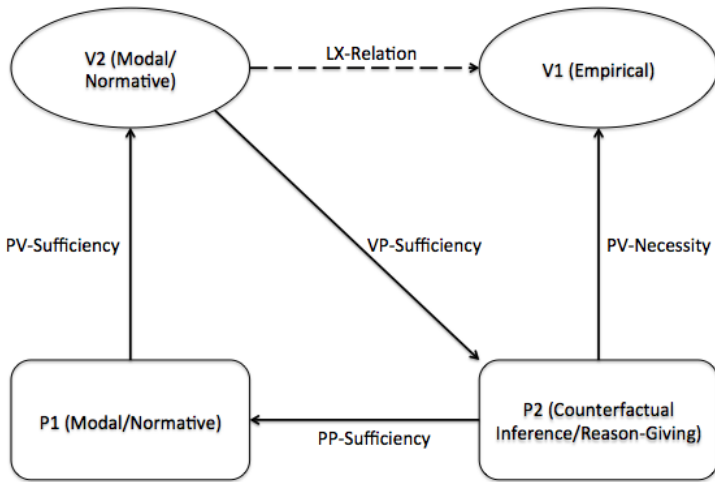
1. being deployed by practices-or-abilities that are algorithmically elaborated from
2. practices-or-abilities that are PV-necessary for *every* autonomous vocabulary (and hence every vocabulary whatsoever) and that
3. suffice to specify explicitly those PV-necessary practices-or-abilities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 47.

These three characteristics of the second vocabulary introduce the basic pragmatically mediated semantic relations out of which the LX-relation is composed. These basic relations take as their relata the two vocabularies within the LX-relation, as well as two practices associated with those vocabularies (again, Brandom’s meaning-use diagram is reproduced below).<sup>1</sup> The first characteristic states that the first of these practices must be PV-sufficient for using the second vocabulary in the LX-relation. The first and second characteristics together introduce the second practice, which is a relatum in two basic relations. First, this practice is PV-necessary for using any vocabulary, in particular the first vocabulary in the LX-relation. And second, this practice is PP-sufficient for engaging in the first practice. This second relation ensures that an algorithm can be developed that specifies how acts from the second practice are to be performed in succession if we are to perform acts from the first practice.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the third characteristic states that the second vocabulary must be VP-sufficient for saying what we do in the second practice.

<sup>1</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 102 and 111:



**Diagram 2: The LX-Relation, and Its Component Relations**

For the conventions of this diagram, see Note 47 above. In Brandom’s original presentation, P2 is a practice that is a part of a broader practice. For our purposes, nothing depends on this detail and so I have ignored it for simplicity considerations. Curious readers should see Brandom, *BSD*, 44-48.

<sup>2</sup> For more on algorithmic elaboration, see Brandom, *BSD*, 26-27 and 31-39.

When we put these three characteristics together, we are left with a relation that is similar to the pragmatic metavocabulary relation in one important respect, but different in two other respects. Concerning the similarity, when either relation holds between two vocabularies, we are able to use one vocabulary to make explicit what we are doing when we use the other. Let us call the first vocabulary the explicating vocabulary, and the second the explicated vocabulary.

As for the first difference between these relations, it concerns the explicating vocabulary. Whereas the pragmatic metavocabulary relation leaves it undecided which practices are associated with the explicating vocabulary, the LX-relation does not. When the LX-relation holds, we are able to say things in the explicating vocabulary by doing precisely those things about which we use the explicating vocabulary to talk. This allows the LX-relation to be self-contained in the sense that it provides an account of what we are doing in using not only the explicated vocabulary, but also the explicating vocabulary. Although noteworthy in its own right, this difference will not be our focus going forward.

Instead, we will focus on the second difference, which concerns the explicated vocabulary. As we have just said, the explicating vocabulary in each relation allows us to say things about the practices related to the explicated vocabulary. But whereas the practice involved in the pragmatic metavocabulary relation is PV-sufficient for using the explicated vocabulary, the one involved in the LX-relation is PV-necessary for using the explicated vocabulary. It is this second difference that leads to the pluralist aspect of Brandom's account of transposition.

To see why, let us return to the topic of modal and normative language. One of Brandom's chief concerns in *BSD* is to prove that both languages hold the LX-relation to empirical descriptive language, with the former two being the explicating vocabularies and the latter one being the explicated vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> The reason Brandom needs to establish that both languages hold this relation is that each allows us to talk about a different practice that is PV-necessary for empirical language (drawing counterfactually robust inferences in the case of modal language, and giving and asking for reasons in the case of normative language). Although they are both necessary, neither of these practices alone is sufficient for using empirical language, and so there can be no pragmatic reduction of empirical language to modal or normative language. Instead,

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<sup>1</sup> For Brandom's arguments in support of this, see Brandom, *BSD*, 102-114.

Brandom's point is that the LX-relation allows us to distinguish between "what is expressed by the use of modal and what (something different) is expressed by normative vocabulary."<sup>1</sup> The '(something different)' is telling because it highlights the fact that what we say in modal language is different from what we say in normative language. It is this difference that allows us to use each language to explicate empirical language in terms of their associated PV-necessary practices, while this in turn establishes the pluralist point that both languages "are not *inferior*, just *different*."<sup>2</sup>

#### §4.4. Brandom's Combined Account of Transposition

The task at this point is to reconcile the reductionist implications of Brandom's treatment of the pragmatic metavocabulary relation with the pluralist implications of his treatment of the LX-relation. To do so, we need only look to the title of Brandom's book. Whereas what we *do* with the language of modalities can be reduced to what we say in the language of normativity, it is not the case that what we *say* in the language of modalities can be reduced to what we say in or do with the language of normativity. This distinction between saying and doing dissolves any seeming contradictions within Brandom's account, and to mark this point, let us call Brandom's form of reductionism *pragmatic* reductionism and his form of pluralism *semantic* pluralism.

To develop a Brandomian account of transposition, we need only combine his pragmatic reductionism with his semantic pluralism and generalize away from his focus on specifically modal language. The account we are left with is one where the semantics of metaphysically-suspect vocabularies can justifiably be acknowledged as being distinct from other, more naturalistic vocabularies so long as what we do when deploying those suspect vocabularies can be reduced to the sorts of actions that can be specified using the language of normativity. Once we do this, we can appreciate how Brandom is able to acknowledge the two insights with which we began this section without falling into the issues raised by our two questions concerning Sellars's account.

Brandom's acknowledgement of Sellars's insight that we must take the normative and pragmatic component of language use into account should be obvious. As we have just seen, the language of normativity serves as the explicating vocabulary in the reductionist portion of his account, while this

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom, *BSD*, 115.

<sup>2</sup> Sellars, "Counterfactuals," 282.

portion is concerned with accounting for the pragmatics of the explicated, metaphysically-suspect vocabulary.

Additionally, Brandom acknowledges this insight without resting his case on a tenuously drawn distinction, such as Sellars's between asserting and conveying. Instead, Brandom takes pains to adequately develop his core distinction between saying and doing, with his entire apparatus of meaning-use analysis—developed across the early chapters of *BSD*—aimed at meeting this demand.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Brandom's relation to Carnap's insight—that certain metaphysically-suspect languages (such as modal language) are about our use of language and not about the world—is more complex. This is because Brandom's reductionism acknowledges the sense in which this insight is genuine, while his pluralism highlights the sense in which it may be deceptive. Specifically, it is genuine in the sense that the pragmatics of what we do with these metaphysically-suspect languages can be understood in terms of the proprieties of our own language use and not in terms of objects or relations in the external world. However, Brandom's semantic pluralism leaves it undecided whether what we say in these languages is about our language use or the world, because even if what we say in the explicating language of the LX-relation is about language use, this by itself does not entail anything concerning the intentionality of the explicated language.

By acknowledging Carnap's insight along the pragmatic dimension, but not necessarily along the semantic dimension, Brandom gives himself the tools necessary to respond to the charge that pluralism offers no explanatory gain. The strategy would be Hegelian in spirit, pointing out the one-sidedness of both pluralism and reductionism in isolation. Brandom's pragmatic reductionism highlights the sameness between the explicating and explicated languages, while his semantic pluralism highlights their difference from one another. Only by combining both of these points do we reach a determinate conception of either language, and thereby achieve a full explanation of both.

In this manner, Brandom's account of transposition can be seen as the most recent development in a tradition comprised of Carnap, Sellars, and himself. In their separate ways, all three philosophers accept the linguistic turn and attempt to transpose metaphysical questions about the constitution of the world into naturalistic questions concerning our own use of language. In the

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<sup>1</sup> See Brandom, *BSD*, Chapters 1 and 2.

historical story I have told, Carnap plays the role of progenitor, Sellars that of critic, and Brandom that of reconciler. Although interesting in its own right, this story is important for us because it highlights Brandom's motives for developing his account of transposition, and it sets the standards by which his account is to be judged. By creating a synthesis between Carnap and Sellars—one that captures their insights without repeating their mistakes—Brandom meets these criteria and develops an account of transposition that is adequate to this tradition.

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## Truth and Brandomian Metaphilosophy

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### Résumé.

Robert Brandom a affirmé que la vérité n'est pas pertinente pour la philosophie. Un bref examen du programme de Brandom concernant la signification et l'engagement montre comment émerge cette conception métaphilosophique. Cependant, cette approche est sujette à des défis concernant la normativité de l'engagement.

### Mots-clés.

Brandom, vérité, signification, engagement, normativité, métaphilosophie.

### ملخص.

ذهب روبرت براندوم إلى أن الصدق ليس ذي صلة بالفلسفة. وتُظهر الملحة العابرة لبرنامج «براندوم» الخاص بالمعنى والالتزام كيف تنشأ هذه الرؤية ما وراء الفلسفية. ومع ذلك، فإن هذه الرؤية عُرضة للطعن من جهة معيارية الالتزام.

### كلمات مفتاحية.

براندوم، صدق، مغزى، اشتباك، معيارية، ما وراء الفلسفة (الفلسفة الشارحة للفلسفة).

### Abstract.

Robert Brandom has argued that truth is not relevant to philosophy. A brief overview of Brandom's program regarding meaning and commitment shows how this metaphilosophical view arises. However, this view is open to challenges on the normativity of commitment.

### Keywords.

Brandom, truth, signification, engagement, normativity, metaphilosophy.

## 1. A contrastive picture

A longstanding program for thinking about the cognitive realm has been to take it that meaning, what's true, and how we know what's true were all separate matters, each designated with distinct programs of study: semantics, metaphysics, and epistemology. These three *topoi*, though clearly mutually relevant, were regularly taken to be mostly free-standing. And so, knowledge, being factive, entails truth, but not the other way around. And though understanding some meanings may yield some conditional knowledge (e.g., that if a figure is a triangle, it is a polygon), most meanings carry little more than that. Truth, however, was a central part of this traditional program, and so semantics is a matter of *truth*-conditions, and epistemology is a matter of identifying rational pathways *to truth*. This, for better or worse, was and still arguably is the dominant paradigm for philosophy in the cognitive vein.

It is best to understand Robert Brandom's philosophical program in contrast with this longstanding structural view. Brandom's intellectual shift is to collapse the hard lines between truth, meaning and knowledge. The lines of questioning comprising semantics, metaphysics and epistemology are, ultimately, different faces of the same phenomenon: the exercise of reason. One way to conceive of this move on Brandom's part is to identify the content of our claims, what is *meant*, with inferences and actions the claims license. An accepted statement or agreed upon sentence is meaningful not only in terms of what facts it is about (as the traditional program would run), but in terms of what actions are reasonable in light of them, what inferences one can make with them, and what other commitments would lead one to accept them.<sup>1</sup> Our beliefs, their contents, what they are about, and how we properly form them are all instances of living within the space of reasons. And so, terms such as *inferentialism*, *rationalism*, and *pragmatism* are appropriately applied to Brandom's view. Let us pause to expand on these terms and how they bear on the Brandomian program.

The Brandomian program is *inferentialist* because meaning is a matter of what inferences that lead to and follow from commitments. Inferentialism is a use theory of meaning, with particular emphasis on the inferences that license making a claim and what inferences accepting the claim license. It is *rationalist* in that all the moves, inferential or practical, are ones licensed as rational by inputs, and so are instances of reasons.<sup>2</sup> Rationalism, in this sense, is that we

<sup>1</sup> Peregrin's contrastive story puts similar emphasis on inference and representation as the contrast (2014: 110).

<sup>2</sup> See Brandom 2000:11 and 2011:83 for explicit endorsements of 'pragmatic rationalism'.

interpret, explain, and expect our thoughts and statements to be instances of the exercise of our rationality. Our defaults are on focusing on the reasons we have and the acceptability. And, finally, the program is *pragmatist* in the sense that how this reasoning connects with our actions and practical lives plays a determining role in identifying the relevant inferences and licensing reasons (2011: 72). Again, because Brandom's program in semantics is a use-theory, the connection to pragmatism is easy to make, as use itself is the practical face of meaning.

Further, in this intersection between rationalism and pragmatism, our actions are conceived as instances of rationality. But actions, statements, acceptances (and rejections) are also instances of when we *express* our desires and emotions (1994: xviii and 2000: 56). Our rational agency expresses our desires. Our actions are places where we enact how we feel. And so the inferential relations sentences have with one another are to be explained in terms of what about us we express when we utter them, accept them, or act on them.

And so four central notions emerge for the Brandomian program: Inferentialism, Pragmatism, Rationalism, and Expressivism. This, I take it, is the ground floor of Brandom's philosophical vision.<sup>1</sup> It, when applied to how we talk to each other about going to the store, what political party is preferable, and how the weather will be tomorrow, is a philosophical program about language-use and the world it makes possible for us. However, when one moves to the second level, when one turns to how Brandom's program bears on philosophy, philosophers, and philosophy's history, this first-floor program takes philosophical practice as its target. The second level to this view is Brandomian *social rationalism*. This, again, can be best captured contrastively.

Consider early modern rationalism. This program of conceiving human reason had as its core the view that being rational meant that one was a normatively constrained being, that one could be evaluated according to what one ought to do, how one ought to think, how one ought to assess and respond to relations between reasons. The early modern rationalists thought that the norms and the kinds of beings we had to be to live up to those norms were all supernatural, and consequently they had a very hard time explaining how we got to be good at reasoning at all and how those reasons had any influence on our actions. That's why they were so often nativists and dualists.

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<sup>1</sup> See Brandom's 2011 and 2000 for accounts of the connection between these intersecting programs. Rockmore's critical gloss in 2002 is useful.

Brandomian rationalism maintains the core rationalist commitment to the irreducible normativity of reasons, but it is also a particular form of naturalism. Normativity – the norms, the actions guided by them, and those agents constrained by those norms – arises as a result of the social actions of recognition. We, as it were, *confer* this status on one another, we acknowledge and attribute being responsive to reasons in the third person, and thus, the sphere of reasons is at bottom a social sphere. Brandom calls it the “reciprocal recognitional model” (2009: 89). Sociality is based on and bases our assessments of rationality. Thus arises the practice of *giving and asking for reasons*, a social game, of sorts, of keeping track of what things are licensed and what people are allowed to say or do in light of those endorsements (1994: 474).

Philosophy, given Brandom’s view, is the exercise of that sociality of reason in a particular form – self-consciousness. At bottom, self-consciousness begins with knowing what it is one is thinking, having thoughts clarified for oneself – and not only the thoughts one thinks but also how one got to them and what their implications are. Thus, we have an explanation for the Brandomian motto, “Logic is the organ of semantic self-consciousness” (2009: 11; 1994: xix). Logic is a metalanguage, one that describes and assesses our reasoning – one that captures not only *when* we reason well or not, but also *why*. And thus, it is an instance of social rationality assessing itself.

And so with the advent of logic, there comes the capacity to philosophize. Philosophy itself is at its core an application of reason and this new metalanguage to questions about what contested terms mean, how we judge things positively or negatively, and what practices we have in place to flourish. The terms of logic, then, are both the means by which we approach these questions and are also the very things about which we puzzle. And thus, we begin to philosophize clearly and make our way to self-consciousness.

## 2. Philosophy, history and sociality

Given that philosophy is something that arises from the activities of self-conscious clarification of expressive practices, philosophy is best conceived as a special set of communicative social practices of explication and assessment. Since these practices have histories, develop over time, and expand as we come to know more, philosophical practices are best conceived, Brandom takes it, as primarily *historicist*. The historicist line is that if the normative status for any of the meanings is something conferred socially, then it seems that our concepts are contingent on particular social developments. With philosophy, we are trying to understand our concepts and how we use them, and so Brandom takes

it that we can make it clear how we can understand and endorse our concepts only through a kind of historical reconstruction:

We fulfill that obligation by rationally reconstructing the tradition, finding a coherent, cumulative trajectory through it that reveals it as expressively progressive – as the gradual unfolding into greater explicitness of commitments that can be seen retrospectively as always already having been implicit in it (2009: 112)

The philosopher’s job, then, is not only to ask about our concepts, but to trace the history of thought on those concepts, their use and abuse, and show a pattern of clarification over time.<sup>1</sup> It is the philosopher’s job to provide “Whiggish rewritings” of the development of traditions so that our thoughts are incipient, waiting to be grasped in full, in their history (2009: 112). This is the philosophical work of self-consciousness – we endorse where we are by endorsing the way we got there, and *vice versa*.

To wax Wittgensteinian, we might say that to grasp a concept is to know how to *go on* – one places a term or an expression in a field of relations, some cognitive, others practical. Understanding, and especially philosophical understanding, is a kind of inferential know-how.<sup>2</sup> This view is a hallmark of *cognitive pragmatism*, that knowledge-that is a species of knowledge-how, and Brandom’s philosophical program of rational reconstruction of traditions is that one takes what is an *implicit* mastery of a concept or task and makes it *explicit* and graspable as a set of rules and procedures. In so doing, those rules and procedures will appear to have been there all along in the use of the concept and completion of the task, but this is, again, the product of successful philosophizing – the world seems progressively more intelligible, more rational.

The topic of philosophy is normativity in all its guises, and inference in all its forms (2009: 126). Philosophical work is the evaluation of evaluative vocabulary; and one further, when one does philosophy, one discovers that philosophy also uncovers histories and traditions of evaluative background for descriptive vocabularies. As such, the inferences that are licensed by a description are also normative, and so criticizable in terms of their appropriateness. As Brandom emphasizes, “the aim is *evaluative*” (2009: 131). The philosophical enterprise is to ask what we owe to ourselves and each other,

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<sup>1</sup> See Brandom’s *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (2002) for an extension of this program to figures in modern philosophy. This program is challenged by Tom Rockmore (2002: 431).

<sup>2</sup> See Brandom’s *Articulating Reasons* (2000: 94) for a program of first-order and meta-philosophical pragmatism.

whether we now or ever live up to it, and how we can improve our prospects of doing so.

This project of conceptual improvement is not only the province of philosophy, but philosophers have a unique place in the game. Artists, poets, filmmakers and religious figures all play similar roles, but the philosopher has vocabularies about those vocabularies. The philosopher's drive for explicitness always drives the vocabulary of self-consciousness up a level – the painter may be reacting to another painter or to a religious idea, but it takes philosophical vocabulary to explain how they fit together, whether the reaction is appropriate, and evaluate the exchange. Philosophers “produce new vocabularies in which we can understand ourselves and each other ... Specifically philosophical vocabularies are the principal organs of self-consciousness for expressive beings” (2009: 150). And this is the point of the project of philosophy, by Brandom's lights: to enact a kind of “expressive freedom” (1979: 194), wherein one may express new thoughts, thoughts about old thoughts, and achieve new forms of self-consciousness. This freedom allows not only critique and endorsement, but possibilities for transformation, homage, and reconsideration.

### 3. Truth as dispensable

Notice that nowhere in the above articulation of Brandom's view of philosophy's objectives has *truth* been mentioned. This is because Brandom holds that “truth is not important in philosophy” (2009: 156). Again, this view is best understood contrastively. Consider a common way the philosophical enterprise is described: *to find the profound truths, to ask whether we have the true conception of justice, beauty or reality*. Brandom's program has no use for this notion *truth*, or better put, truth plays no central role.

I think it is a fundamental mistake to think that what is important is the possession of beliefs of a certain metaphysically weighty property: being true (2009:157)

This seems, on its face, strange. With all the talk of *reason, inference* and *acceptance*, surely *truth* is the point of the story. We exchange reasons, and in doing so, shouldn't those reasons be truth-directed, inferences truth-preservative? Let us call this the *truth challenge* to Brandom's program.

Brandom's reply to the truth challenge is that once we are clear about the expressive role of truth-talk in our exchanges of reasons, we can see it really does no explanatory work. Acceptance and inference do all the work truth was

supposed to do. Semantic vocabulary's expressive role, as when we speak of *reference, truth, facts* and so on, actually plays an elliptical function – that of being stand-ins for endorsement.<sup>1</sup> Brandom explains his view with the example of knowledge-attribution. For one to take another to know something, one must do three things. One must attribute a commitment and entitlement for that commitment (i.e., a *belief* and *justification*) to another. Brandom agrees with these first two components. Traditionally, it was taken that one must, third, take that commitment to be also *true*, but Brandom demurs. Instead, he takes it that this third component is simply *endorsement*:

Third, I must *myself* endorse the belief... That is, besides *attributing* to you both a *commitment* ... and an *entitlement* ..., I must myself *undertake* the corresponding commitment. That is what corresponds to the *truth* condition on knowledge. But *all* that condition is doing is marking the coincidence of belief across social perspectives: I count only as knowledge beliefs I *share* (2009: 157-8).

‘Truth’ is a word that we use only in the place of endorsement, as a term for “beliefs (we) take deserve to spread” (Brandom 2009: 158; see also 1993 and 1994: 515).

Recall the first level of the contrastive story for Brandom's program. On the longstanding traditional model, truth stands at the center of the picture of our cognitive aspirations, and epistemology (the quest for knowledge of truth) and semantics (the articulation of how one's statements' meanings are in terms of their truth conditions), are in its service. Brandom rejects the entire project and picture:

This familiar philosophical scene, with truth at center stage and in the leading role, is no doubt uplifting and inspiring. But I think it is deeply confused and almost totally wrong (2009: 160)

In its place is: coincidence of belief across social perspectives, endorsement of the inferences to and from the commitment, and the commendation of that commitment to others. And this, Brandom's inferentialist-expressivist-pragmatist program on the first order, yields social rationalism on the second. Philosophy is yet one more instance of that first-order expression of desires and inclinations: but in this instance, it is taken into a metalanguage. And so, just as truth is eliminable in the first instance, it is eliminable all the way up into the languages about those on the first-order.

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<sup>1</sup> For further explanation of the endorsement view see: Brandom 1994: 322 and Wanderer 2008: 97 and 187. Moreover, for earlier developments, see Rorty 1988 and 1997.

#### 4. Truth and normativity

I believe Brandom's metaphilosophy is coherent, so long as one does not ask from what the normativity of endorsement or acceptance derives. I think that when we see the Brandomian program of taking truth-talk as elliptical endorsement-talk, we may ask the following question, perhaps echoing Socrates' famous dilemma for Euthyphro:

Do we endorse contents because we take them as true, or  
Do we take contents as true because we endorse them?

It is clear that because Brandom does not take truth or truth-talk to play any significant explanatory role, in that he takes it as elliptical for endorsement, he would take the second horn of the dilemma. With this decision, there comes a price. All truth-talk becomes mere 'truth'-talk, what *passes for truth*, what is *taken as* or *endorsed as true*, but not truth *per se*.<sup>1</sup> The normativity of endorsement does capture the first-person view of taking someone to have gotten things right – just as we see with the knowledge-attribution case earlier. However, if endorsement is *just endorsement*, then it is not clear what it is of or why. Of course the Brandomian answer is that one endorses on the basis of other endorsed commitments or inferences, but this simply kicks the can down the road. Given the dilemma, the challenge is to distinguish truth from mere rationalization, and the social theory of inference and expression seems not only not to distinguish the two but to run headlong into the latter.

There are two ways into this critical thought. The first is to note that the inferentialist-expressivist program may describe how we *use* the term 'truth,' but that is not obviously what we *mean* by it. Consider, on analogy, the inferentialist-expressivist line with some other normative term, perhaps 'Justice.' Likely, the line, just as with 'truth,' the account will be: *Justice' just means whatever social arrangement the speaker endorses*. So to call a decision 'just' is only to take it on oneself and commend that others take it on, too. Or, perhaps 'validity' too can be conceived as the kind of inference we endorse, come what may. But in each of these cases, we have something in mind, something that bases our endorsements of justice and validity, not simply what we *call* 'justice' or 'validity' in the cases.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this challenge has been posed by Gibbard (1996: 715), Rosenberg (1997); and Rosenkranz (2001: 235).

One way to highlight this first critical point is that it seems that it's clear that endorsement and truth-ascription (and other evaluative-term application) are not identical. Consider the standard form of Moore's Paradox:

I believe that p, but p is false.

What this form manifests, as Moore rightly notes, is a *contradiction in thought*, but statements of this form *nevertheless can be true* (in that one may simply be in error that p). Notice that since it can be true, yet a contradiction *in thought*, the contradiction must arise from how the thoughts conflict. It seems clear that the endorsement of p (with belief) is in contradiction with a derivable rejection of p from the following series of inferences: I say that p is false  $\rightarrow$  I accept that not-p  $\rightarrow$  I reject p. And so the *contradiction in thought* arises as one that has the speaker say she both accepts and rejects p, derived from the falsity-assessment of p. Alternately, one can see a similar contradiction in thought with overt rejection and implicit acceptance in:

I do not believe that p, but p is true.

Again, the contradiction in thought is derivable as: p is true  $\rightarrow$  I accept p; and I do not believe that p  $\rightarrow$  I do not accept p. The point, again, is the old Platonic point behind Euthyphro's dilemma – it is the assessment of a commitment's content *as true* that yields acceptance, not the other way around. Any theory that reverses the arrows here makes a hash out of how Moore-style cases yield *contradictions in thought*. But if one were really just a version of the other, the explanations would be reversible. They aren't reversible, so they can't be identical.

The second critical line of thought with Brandom's program of assessing truth-talk as acceptance is that this seems similar to all-too-familiar programs of idealism. The Brandomian challenge may run that there can be no counter-examples to the thesis that the 'truth' term is mere endorsement – one cannot ever find a truth and hold it as such without endorsement. Were one to produce such a case, the very production of the case would be self-refuting in the way the Moore cases above were *contradictions in thought*. Such a counter-example would need to be in the form: *P is true, but I do not believe that P*. But, of course, this drives us back to Moore's Paradox, and thus yields self-defeat. Berkeley's Master Argument, too, ran in such fashion, that *to be is to be perceived*, and any case wherein one presents an example of something that is but is not perceived is procedurally self-defeating. But this seems a confusion of *assent* with what is *assented to*, *perception* with *what is perceived*. For a table to be perceived,

it seems it must be *in perception* in a sense, but it's better to say it *occasions a perception of it*. The same, I would want to say, with truth and assent – for a truth to be manifest to us, we must assent to it, and so it is *in assent* we have that truth, but it seems better to say that it (and the evidence that indicates that truth) *occasions that assent*.

Finally, the metaphilosophical consequences of taking truth out of the philosophical program are significant. Take, for one, the fact that it must, nevertheless, be true that philosophy is merely a metalanguage. Surely *that* has been a fact to be discovered and then made explicit by a Hegel and then a Brandom. Is it *true* that truth, consequently, is dispensable?

Brandom and the Brandomians have a reply to these lines of questioning, and it is to stick to their expressivist guns. Yes, *it is true that truth is dispensable*, because the expressivist is just endorsing the elimination of truth-talk with that first 'true'. Yes *it is true* that philosophy is merely a metalanguage, because the expressivist is agreeing that philosophy's role is one of mere reflexive self-consciousness, not anything else. On the Brandomian model, these sorts of statements only *sound* like self-refutation. Properly understood, they are perfectly consistent and probably true.

Further, the Brandomian reply to the Socratic dilemma posed for such endorsements is that, yes, *it is true because it is endorsed*. The Brandomian program may weather this challenge only because the alternative, as too many in the history of philosophy found out, is untenable and leads either to dogmatism or skepticism. Any survey of the program of epistemic realisms reveals how skepticism looms for all parties. Better, one might say, to stick with a program that keeps everything in place and does minimal damage to our practices.

The appeal and costs, I believe, are clear with Brandom's program. A good deal of the categorical normativity of terms like 'truth' and 'reference' are sacrificed for a systematic theory of *inference, endorsement, and practice*. Every philosophical program has tradeoffs, and Brandom's is no different. The question, however, as with any tradeoff, is whether it is worth the costs.

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# Varieties of Inferability and Incompatibility: A Counterproposal to Brandom's Distinction of Three Kinds of Inferability Relations

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## Résumé

En élaborant les détails de sa sémantique inférentialiste, Brandom en vient à distinguer la “préservation de l’habilitation”, la “préservation de l’engagement” et les relations d’inféribilité “induites par l’incompatibilité”. Dans le présent article, je soutiens que cette distinction échoue à capturer les authentiques différences entre différents types de relations d’inféribilité, et que sa distinction asymétrique entre trois types d’inféribilité et un certain type de relations d’incompatibilité doit être remplacée par une distinction symétrique entre quatre types d’inféribilité et quatre types correspondants de relations d’incompatibilité. De façon importante, ma contre-proposition permet de comprendre toutes les relations d’inféribilité comme induites par l’incompatibilité, et donc de rendre compte de toutes les relations d’inféribilité dans le cadre d’une sémantique de l’incompatibilité, du type de celle que Brandom lui-même a cherché à développer et qui, comme il l’affirme dans *Between Saying and Doing*, comprend le contenu sémantique comme l’ensemble de tous les (ensembles de) contenus sémantiques incompatibles avec ce contenu sémantique.

## Mots-clés.

Brandom, inférentialisme, inference, inférentiabilité, incompatibilité, engagement, habilitation.

## ملخص.

ميّز براندوم في معالجته لتفصيلات سيمانطيقاه الاستدلالية بين العلاقات القابلة للاستدلال بشأن «حفظ الاستحقاق»، و«حفظ الالتزام»، و«منتج

عدم التوافق». وأزعم في هذا المقال أن تمييزه يفشل في تحديد الفوارق الحقيقية بين الأنواع المختلفة من العلاقات القابلة للاستدلال، وأن تمييزه اللاتماثلي للأنواع الثلاثة لقابلية الاستدلال، ولنوع واحد فقط من علاقات عدم التوافق، يجب أن يحل محله تمييز تماثلي لأربعة أنواع من القابلية للاستدلال، وأربعة أنواع مناظرة من علاقات عدم التوافق. والأهم من ذلك، يتيح لنا طرحي المضاد فهم كل العلاقات القابلة للاستدلال كمنتج لعدم التوافق، ومن ثم تفسير كل العلاقات القابلة للاستدلال في نطاق سيمانطيقا عدم التوافق، من النوع الذي عمل «براندوم» نفسه على تطويره في كتابه «بين القول والفعال»، وفهم من خلاله المحتوى السيمانطيقى كمجموعة لكل مجموعات المحتويات السيمانطيقية التي هي غير متوافقة مع ذلك المحتوى السيمانطيقى.

### كلمات مفتاحية.

براندوم، نزعة استدلالية، استدلال، قابلية للاستدلال، عدم توافق، التزام، استحقاق.

### Abstract.

In working out the details of his inferentialist semantics, Brandom has come to distinguish 'entitlement-preserving', 'commitment-preserving', and 'incompatibility-induced' inferability relations. In the present article, I argue that his distinction fails to capture genuine differences between different kinds of inferability relations and that his asymmetric distinction of three kinds of inferability and one kind of incompatibility relations ought to be replaced by a symmetric distinction of four kinds of inferability and four corresponding kinds of incompatibility relations. Importantly, my counterproposal allows us to understand all inferability relations as incompatibility-induced, hence to account for all inferability relations within an incompatibility semantics, of the kind that Brandom himself has been working at developing, that, as he puts it in *Between Saying and Doing*, understands a semantic content as the set of all the (sets of) semantic contents that are incompatible with that semantic content.

### Keywords.

Brandom, inferentialism, inference, inferability, incompatibility, commitment, entitlement.

Brandom famously endorses a holistic inferentialist semantics according to which propositional semantic contents are constituted by the inferential relations and incompatibility relations in which they stand to other such semantic contents. In working out the fine mechanics of his semantic apparatus, he has come to oppose three kinds of inferential relations, 'entitlement-preserving', 'commitment-preserving', and 'incompatibility-induced' ones, to one kind of incompatibility relations. In what follows, I will take issue not with Brandom's overall inferentialist approach to semantic contents, with which I tend to agree, but only with the one part of its implementation that consists in his asymmetric distinction of three kinds of inferential relations and one kind of incompatibility relations, which I will propose to replace by a quite different symmetric distinction of four kinds of inferential or, as I prefer to say, inferability relations and four corresponding kinds of incompatibility relations. Before I can begin to dismantle Brandom's problematic distinction, I will have to expose the reader to a whole battery of Brandomian terms and their systematic interconnections, which I will strive, however, to introduce as clearly and digestibly as possible.

## 1 Preliminaries

### 1.1 Inferability-Incompatibility Relations Between Semantic Contents

As I propose to use the terminology, a semantic content can be said to stand to another one in an *inferability* relation if it is inferable from the latter, in the normative sense that it is *correct* for one to *infer it from* the other semantic content, in an *incompatibility* relation if it is incompatible with the latter, in the normative sense that it is *incorrect* for one to *compete it with*, that is, to *admit it together with* the other semantic content. According to this use, the proposition that figure A is a rectangle, for instance, can be said to stand in an inferability relation to the proposition that figure A is a square, in an incompatibility relation to the proposition that it is a circle.

I prefer the notion of *inferability* relations to Brandom's notion of *inferential* ones not only because it makes more clearly visible the precise nature of the connection that obtains between the *relations*, of inferability and incompatibility, and the corresponding *doings*, of inferring and competing, but also because it yields a formulation that, with its satisfying symmetry, hints at a symmetry

between these relations themselves.<sup>1</sup> Part of my criticism of Brandom's asymmetric distinction of three kinds of inferability relations and one kind of incompatibility relation sets off from the idea of a symmetry between inferability and incompatibility relations, which I take to be just as plausible as the idea of a symmetry between relations of being-a-reason-for and of being-a-reason-against, to which inferability and incompatibility relations after all correspond: That the proposition that figure A is a rectangle is *inferable from* the proposition that it is a square and *incompatible with* the proposition that it is a circle means that by asserting that figure A is a square one is giving a *reason for* and by asserting that it is a circle one is giving a *reason against* the assertion that figure A is a rectangle (2009: 4).<sup>2</sup>

Before I begin to deconstruct Brandom's distinction, I want to shed some light on his motivation for drawing it the way he does, which requires us to have a look at the way in which, within his rationalist account of linguistic activity, Brandom embeds his inferentialist semantics into a normative pragmatics.

## 1.2 Inclusion-Exclusion Relations Between Normative Statuses

Brandom insists that taking an assertion to have a semantic content has a point if and only if that semantic content can be taken to determine what he calls the 'normative pragmatic significance' of the assertion (1994: 143). He takes assertions to have pragmatic significances of avowing and thereby undertaking 'assertional commitments' (1994: 167), which he understands as responsibilities to do something, namely to rationally integrate those very commitments into the set of one's prior commitments (2009: 35).<sup>3</sup> According to Brandom, such integrative responsibilities are composed of more specific responsibilities of three kinds: They first and foremost contain *critical* responsibilities to dissolve incompatibilities between one's commitments by disavowing some of one's incompatible commitments, which, since two commitments are incompatible if each of them is a reason against the other

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<sup>1</sup> Talk of inferability relations is more precise than talk of inferential ones notably in that, when we say that  $p$  stands in an inferential relation to  $q$ , we leave open whether we mean to say that  $p$  is inferable from  $q$  or that the inference from  $p$  to  $q$  is a correct one, hence that  $q$  is inferable from  $p$ .

<sup>2</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all references are to Brandom's publications.

<sup>3</sup> Brandom proposes the concept of an assertional commitment as a theoretically regimented substitute for the pretheoretical notion of a belief, which he takes to be 'ambiguous' and 'insufficiently precise' (1994: 198). It might seem odd that assertional commitments, as Brandom understands them, are both responsibilities to integrate and what is to be integrated. I have shown elsewhere that, contrary to first appearances and the concerns of some commentators (MacFarlane 2010: 88-94), such an understanding is neither incoherent nor circular.

one, can be understood as responsibilities to *take back* commitments that one has *reasons against*. They also contain *justificatory* responsibilities to *bring forth reasons for* and *ampliative* responsibilities to *draw out the consequences of* one's commitments (2009: 36).

To these three kinds of responsibilities, Brandom takes to correspond three kinds of inclusion-exclusion relations (or, as he prefers to say, consequential relations) between two kinds of normative statuses: assertional commitments and entitlements to such commitments (1994: 142; 2008: 120-1; 2010: 21-2).<sup>1</sup> To *ampliative* responsibilities correspond *inclusion* relations *between commitments*, a commitment having another one as a *consequence* if the former includes the latter. To *justificatory* responsibilities correspond *inclusion* relations *between entitlements*, a commitment being a *reason for* another one if an entitlement to the former includes an entitlement to the latter. To *critical* responsibilities correspond *exclusion* relations *from commitments to entitlements*, a commitment being a *reason against* another one if the former excludes an entitlement to the latter. Brandom takes these three kinds of inclusion-exclusion relations to determine the three kinds of responsibilities to which they correspond, hence the integrative responsibilities which these three kinds of responsibilities constitute, hence the assertional commitments which these integrative responsibilities are, and hence the pragmatic significances of the assertions by making which these assertional commitments are avowed and undertaken (2009: 39). It thus seems that semantic contents can be taken to determine the pragmatic significances of assertions if and only if the inferability-incompatibility relations between semantic contents that constitute the former can be taken to determine the inclusion-exclusion relations between normative statuses that determine the latter. What is needed, it seems, is thus an understanding of inferability-incompatibility relations between semantic contents as determining inclusion-exclusion relations between normative statuses, which – and this is the crucial point – Brandom can be seen to aim at making available by distinguishing different kinds of inferability-incompatibility relations *each of which is to correspond to one of the three different kinds of inclusion-exclusion relations*. Which, as we shall see, is where things start to go wrong.

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom speaks of *consequential* relations between commitments, between entitlements, and from commitments to non-entitlements – though, in a way that anticipates my own terminology, he refers to the latter also as *preclusion* relations in which commitments stand to entitlements (2008: 120; 2010: 22). Not much hangs on whether one follows Brandom's talk of consequential relations or my own talk, which I take to be preferable for reasons of systematicity, of inclusion-exclusion relations. Both are ways of capturing one and the same fact that two normative statuses can stand in a relation such that if one has the first one, one does or does not have the second one.

## 2 Final, Unfinal, and Nonfinal Inferability Relations

### 2.1 Final and Unfinal Inferability Relations

Brandom begins by distinguishing two kinds of inferability relations, *commitment-preserving* and *entitlement-preserving* ones, that correspond to inclusion relations between commitments and between entitlements respectively (1994: 168-9; 2000: 194; 2008: 120-1; 2010: 21-2). It is clearly possible to distinguish such inferability relations, in that it is clearly possible to distinguish whatever inferability relations correspond to the respective inclusion relations. The question is whether there is a *point* to distinguishing two kinds of inferability relations in this way, whether there is a *genuine difference* between two kinds of inferability relations that is well understood as corresponding to a difference between these two kinds of inclusion relations. As far as I can see, there are two main candidates for such a difference, which I propose to call the difference between *final* and *unfinal* and the difference between *final* and *nonfinal* inferability relations. In what follows, I will argue both that Brandom tends to confuse these two differences and that none of them is well understood as one between commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations. I will start with what I call the difference between final and unfinal inferability relations.

Assume that an inferability relation holds that is expressed by asserting that, for any  $x$ , if  $x$  is a true philosopher, then  $x$  is melancholic. What matters for our purposes is that this inferability relation, if it holds, holds as a final or as an unfinal one. It holds as a *final* one if all true philosophers are melancholic, *without any exceptions*, as an *unfinal* one if all true philosophers are melancholic, but *with some exceptions*. I thus propose to understand the difference between final and unfinal inferability relations, at least paradigmatically, as a difference between inferability relations that *hold without* and those that *hold with exceptions*.

As we have seen, inferability relations between semantic contents correspond to relations of being-a-reason-for between assertional commitments. The difference between final and unfinal inferability relations can thus be understood as a difference between *final reasons for*, which *cannot*, and *unfinal reasons for*, which *can* be overridden by stronger reasons against. Assume that one has strong reasons against the commitment that S is melancholic, which demand that one disavow that commitment. If the commitment that S is a true philosopher is a *final* reason for the commitment that S is melancholic, then the strong reasons against the latter demand that one disavow the former as well. If, by contrast, it is an *unfinal* reason for the latter, then the commitment that S is a true philosopher can be avowed, as an *unfinal* reason *for* the latter that is *overridden* by stronger reasons *against* the latter. In this case, S is taken to be an exception to the rule that all true philosophers are melancholic. That rule is still endorsed, but only as one that holds with certain exceptions.

We have also seen that relations of being-a-reason-for between assertional commitments correspond to inclusion relations between entitlements to assertional commitments. Since inferability relations correspond to the former, they also correspond to the latter. The difference between final and unfinal inferability relations can thus also be understood as a difference between *final entitlements*, which *cannot*, and *unfinal* (or, as Brandom prefers to say, *prima facie*) *entitlements*, which *can* be overridden, where, importantly, entitlements are final or unfinal not in themselves, but relative to the entitlements in which they are included (1994: 169; 2008: 120n2; 2010: 21).<sup>1</sup> That the entitlement to the commitment that S is melancholic is *unfinally* included in the entitlement to the commitment that S is a true philosopher simply means that one can lose the former without losing the latter. One can keep the latter without having the former in the precise sense that, since the entitlement to the commitment that S is melancholic can be overridden, one can have an entitlement to the commitment that S is a true philosopher together with an *overridden*, and thus *canceled*, entitlement to the commitment that S is melancholic.

At this point, we can already note that being an entitlement-preserving inferability relation is compatible both with being a final and with being an unfinal inferability relation. Brandom takes being a *commitment-preserving* inferability relation to be compatible *only* with being a *final* inferability relation, which leads him to understand the difference between final and unfinal inferability relations, which indeed seems to be the genuine difference that he aims at capturing when he says that ‘entitlement-preserving inferences are always defeasible; the entitlement one acquires thereby is only *prima facie*’ (2002: 120n2), as a difference between commitment- and entitlement-preserving ones (1994: 168-9; 2002: 7-8; 2008: 120-1; 2010: 21-2). This is problematic, for two reasons.

The first point, which we might call the ‘no difference’ problem, is very straightforward. Being an *entitlement-preserving* inferability relation is compatible *also* with being a *final* inferability relation, as we have just seen and as Brandom is indeed forced to admit (1994: 174n27).<sup>2</sup> It is indeed undeniable that the

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<sup>1</sup> That entitlements are unfinal not in themselves, but relative to other entitlements structurally distinguishes *unfinal* entitlements from *default* ones, which are entitlements that subjects have as long as they have not been challenged. Brandom misleadingly assimilates the two, by referring to both as *prima facie* entitlements (1994: 177-8; 2008: 120n2; 2010: 21) – a trap that talk of *unfinal* rather than *prima facie* entitlements can help us avoid.

<sup>2</sup> Brandom wants to say on the one hand that all entitlement-preserving inferability relations are unfinal, that ‘entitlement-preserving inferences are always defeasible; the entitlement one acquires thereby is only *prima facie*’ (2002: 120n2), on the other hand that ‘commitment-preserving

difference between final and unfinal inferability relations is a difference not between inferability relations that *are not* and those that *are* entitlement-preserving, but between *final* and *unfinal* entitlement-preserving inferability relations. All inferability relations are entitlement-preserving, for the very simple reason that all inferability relations between semantic contents correspond to relations of being-a-reason-for between assertional commitments, which correspond to inclusion relations between entitlements to assertional commitments. There is thus no difference between inferability relations in general and entitlement-preserving ones in particular.<sup>1</sup>

The second point, which we might call the ‘coincidental difference’ problem, is somewhat trickier. It requires us to see that Brandom’s claim that being a *commitment-preserving* inferability relation is compatible *only* with being a *final* inferability relation is true only under the condition that, in our account of linguistic activity, we do not make room for *unfinal commitments*. We can indeed put forward a perfectly coherent account of a linguistic practice in which, in the absence of any *final* reasons for or against a commitment, one is always left free to withdraw to a neutral, non-committal position, regardless of the *unfinal* reasons that one may have for or against that commitment. We can just as easily come up with a more realistic account, however, according to which, in the absence of *final* reasons, one is forced, at least occasionally, to act on one’s best *unfinal* reasons. If, in such a case, one has better unfinal reasons for than against a commitment, one can be said to find oneself with an *unfinal commitment* – which we can thus understand as a commitment that one has if one has no final reasons either way, has better unfinal reasons for than against, and has to take sides. In contexts in which the withdrawal to a non-committal stance is not an option, a commitment can be said to unfinally include another one whenever an entitlement to the former unfinally includes an entitlement to the latter, where commitments and entitlements to commitments are unfinal in exactly

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inferences are also entitlement-preserving’ (1994: 174n27), hence that all commitment-preserving inferability relations, which according to Brandom are *not* unfinal, are entitlement-preserving. The two claims are clearly incompatible. In Brandom’s account, commitment-preserving inferability relations are both opposed to and subsumed under entitlement-preserving ones. Once I will have introduced the concept of *nonfinal* inferability relations, we will be in a position to conjecture that the quoted passages show that Brandom wavers between understanding entitlement-preserving inferability relations as *unfinal* inferability relations, to which commitment-preserving ones might be *opposed*, and understanding them as *nonfinal* inferability relations, under which commitment-preserving ones might be *subsumed*.

<sup>1</sup> The point that the difference that Brandom aims at capturing is that between final and unfinal (or, as they prefer to say, between undefeasible and defeasible) inferability relations and that this difference must be understood as a difference not between commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations, but between two kinds of entitlement-preserving ones, is also made, if only inchoately, by Andrade-Lotero and Dutilh Novaes (2012: 49-50).

the same sense, namely insofar as they can be overridden by stronger reasons against those commitments.

My point is not at all that, contrary to what Brandom seems to think, being a commitment-preserving inferability relation must be taken to be *also* compatible with being an *unfinal* one. As I have said, I do not wish to deny that we can give a coherent account of a linguistic practice without unfinal commitments. My point is rather the more subtle one that, since we can also give an account that allows for unfinal commitments, *if*, by the lights of the account that we end up giving, being a commitment-preserving inferability relation turns out to be compatible *only* with being a *final* one, this fact is *conditional* on us not allowing for unfinal commitments and, to that extent, *coincidental*. In other words, my point is that the difference between final and unfinal inferability relations between semantic contents corresponds to a difference between *final and unfinal inclusion relations* between normative statuses. Whether such a difference holds only for entitlements or also for commitments depends on whether we make room for unfinal commitments, which, as we have seen, are perfectly intelligible. Regardless of whether we do, it should be clear that the difference between final and unfinal inferability relations essentially corresponds to a difference between two ways in which a normative status can be included in another one rather than to a difference between two kinds of normative statuses. By understanding final and unfinal inferability relations as commitment- and entitlement-preserving ones, we leap at a coincidental and superficial difference and overlook the underlying essential one.

## 2.2 Order of Strength: Nonfinal Inferability Relations

Brandom not only *distinguishes* commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations – he also takes them to stand in an *order of strength*. He claims that the former are stronger than the latter, that commitment-preserving inferability relations must be entitlement-preserving whereas entitlement-preserving ones need not be commitment-preserving (1994: 174n27, 189n39, 191n43; 2000: 195; 2010: 28-9). This, however, is clearly incompatible with an understanding of this difference as one between final and unfinal inferability relations, since, clearly, inferability relations must be either final ones, which cannot be unfinal, or unfinal ones, which cannot be final. These two possibilities are both exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

As we have seen, there are passages in which Brandom leaves little doubt that the difference that he wants to capture is that between final and unfinal

inferability relations. As this understanding is incompatible with his equally explicit claim that commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations stand in an order of strength, his distinction is clearly ambiguous. What then is the other difference that Brandom has in mind? The most obvious candidate is that between inferability relations *in general* and *final* inferability relations *in particular*, which stand to one another in a very obvious order of strength.

Thus understood, Brandom's distinction turns out to be problematic on two counts. It is problematic, first, because it is ambiguous. Brandom can be seen to waver between two differences, contrasting final inferability relations now with unfinal ones, to which they can be opposed, now with inferability relations in general, under which they can be subsumed. It is problematic, second, in that neither difference is well understood as one between commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations. As we have seen, the difference between final and unfinal inferability relations cannot be so understood because of what I have called the 'no difference' and 'coincidental difference' problems. While the 'no difference' problem does not keep us from understanding entitlement-preserving inferability relations as inferability relations in general, the 'coincidental difference' problem still prevents us from understanding commitment-preserving inferability relations as final ones in particular.

This interpretation however leaves us with some questions: If the ambiguity to which Brandom falls victim is as obvious as the difference between inferability relations *in general* and *unfinal* inferability relations *in particular*, why doesn't Brandom notice it? If he can avoid the ambiguity simply by distinguishing entitlement-preserving inferability relations in general, some of which are *also* commitment-preserving, from *merely* entitlement-preserving ones, why doesn't he do so? Above all, this interpretation makes it sound as if Brandom were fully aware of the difference and merely somewhat negligent in his choice of words, that is, as if he were unambiguously referring in some passages to unfinal inferability relations in particular, in others to inferability relations in general and guilty merely of failing, in the former passages, to explicitly refer to unfinal inferability relations as *merely* entitlement-preserving ones.

That is not what Brandom does, however. Even where he most strongly emphasizes that he takes commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations to stand in an order of strength, he very explicitly presents entitlement-preserving inferability relations as unfinal ones. In 'Conceptual Content and Discursive Practice', he can thus be seen to proceed in two steps:

In a first step, he *opposes* entitlement-preserving inferability relations as unfinal or defeasible ones to commitment-preserving inferability relations as final or indefeasible ones, associating them with inductive and deductive inferences respectively (2010: 21). He then goes on to show in a second step that, *in spite of this opposition*, commitment-preserving inferability relations can *also be subsumed* under entitlement-preserving ones (2010: 29). This presents us with a serious exegetical challenge: Why does Brandom believe, rather oddly, that he can show that commitment-preserving inferability relations can be both opposed to and subsumed under entitlement-preserving ones?

My conjecture is that there is a further difference between two kinds of inferability relations – one that is congruent with the difference between inferability relations in general and final inferability relations in particular, and hence compatible with the claim that the inferability relations of the one kind can be *subsumed* under those of the other kind, but that, at the same time, also implies a sense in which the inferability relations of the two kinds are *opposed* to one another. I submit that it is this difference, rather than that between final inferability relations in particular and inferability relations in general, that Brandom runs together with that between final and unfinal ones. I call it the difference between *final* and *nonfinal* inferability relations. To grasp it, we have to look at the various ways in which inferability relations can be *expressed*.

We have seen that inferability relations must be either final or unfinal. Importantly, this does not mean that they must be *expressed* either as final or as unfinal ones. There is indeed room for a third possibility, in that inferability relations can be said to hold as inferability relations without undertaking any additional expressive commitment as to whether they hold more specifically as final or unfinal ones, which I propose to understand as expressing inferability relations as *nonfinal* ones.<sup>1</sup> Final, unfinal, and nonfinal inferability relations can then be understood as inferability relations that are *correctly expressed* as final, unfinal, and nonfinal ones respectively. According to this understanding, all inferability relations are nonfinal, for the simple reason that expressing inferability relations as nonfinal ones is expressing them without undertaking an additional expressive commitment that could be incorrectly undertaken. Note that the claim that there are three ways of expressing inferability relations, and hence three corresponding kinds of correctly expressed inferability relations, is

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<sup>1</sup> An inferability relation is expressed, very straightforwardly, as a final, unfinal, or nonfinal one by asserting that it holds without exceptions, with exceptions, or without asserting whether it holds with or without exceptions respectively.

perfectly compatible with the earlier claim that inferability relations must be either final or unfinal.<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen, the difference between *final* and *unfinal* inferability relations can be understood as one between inferability relations that hold *without exceptions* and those that hold *with exceptions*. We can at present understand the difference between *final* and *nonfinal* inferability relations as one between inferability relations that hold *where exceptions are not allowed for* and those that hold *where exceptions are allowed for*. Final inferability relations hold without exceptions, which means that they hold where exceptions are not allowed for. Nonfinal inferability relations hold where exceptions are allowed for, which, importantly, does not mean that they hold with exceptions. While there is no order of strength between final and unfinal inferability relations, there is one between final and nonfinal ones, in that final inferability relations must be nonfinal, whereas nonfinal ones need not be final. Final inferability relations can thus be *subsumed* under nonfinal ones. At the same time, there is a sense in which they are *opposed* to one another, insofar as they correspond to two mutually exclusive ways of expressing inferability relations. While, clearly, there is a genuine difference between unfinal inferability relations, which hold with exceptions, and nonfinal ones, which hold where exceptions are allowed for, that difference, unlike the congruent one between unfinal inferability relations in particular and inferability relations in general, is inconspicuous enough to be overlooked by as fastidious a philosopher as Brandom.

Like the other two candidates that we have examined, the difference between final and nonfinal inferability relations cannot be understood as a difference between commitment- and entitlement-preserving ones, not only because the ‘coincidental difference’ problem still applies, but also because the ‘no difference’ problem reemerges under a new guise. While all inferability relations are nonfinal ones, understanding nonfinal inferability relations as entitlement-preserving ones is still misleading if it leads us to equate *expressing*

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<sup>1</sup> Brandom scholars might be interested to know that, in this passage, I can be seen to deploy two Brandomian moves. First, I apply the concept of an expressive commitment, introduced by Brandom in his account of representational vocabulary, where he understands expressive commitments as commitments ‘to a particular form of words being a way of expressing’ assertional commitments (1994: 545). The idea behind my appropriation of the concept is that, just as assertional commitments can be expressed using different forms of words, inferability relations can be expressed in different ways, as final or as unfinal ones, so that choosing one expression over another contains a substantial commitment. Second, I take over Brandom’s understanding of incorrigibility, according to which subjects are incorrigible if they do not undertake commitments that could be incorrectly undertaken, which is at the center of his account of ‘looks’ talk (2002: 356-7).

inferability relations *as nonfinal* with *expressing* inferability relations *as entitlement-preserving*. The latter is just expressing inferability relations as inferability relations, which, unlike expressing inferability relations as nonfinal, is something one also does when one expresses inferability relations as final or as unfinal.<sup>1</sup> Although all inferability relations are nonfinal, understanding them as entitlement-preserving ones is trivial in a sense in which understanding them as nonfinal ones is not, namely in the precise sense that *expressing* inferability relations *as entitlement-preserving* is trivial whereas *expressing* inferability relations *as nonfinal*, which is only one of three distinct ways in which inferability relations can be expressed, is not.

I take it that, so far, the discussion has revealed among others two things. It has shown, first, that Brandom's distinction between commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations is problematically ambiguous. Neither understanding it as aiming at capturing the difference between *final and unfinal* inferability relations nor understanding it as aiming at capturing that between *final and nonfinal* ones can be made fully compatible with Brandom's own presentation of the distinction, which wavers between these two differences. The discussion has revealed, second, that neither of these two differences is well understood as corresponding to a difference between inclusion relations between commitments and inclusion relations between entitlements. The solution that I want to propose is thus to *replace* Brandom's one distinction between commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations by the two distinct distinctions between final and unfinal inferability relations and between final and nonfinal ones, without taking either distinction to mark a difference that would correspond to a difference between these two kinds of inclusion relations.

### 3 Modal, Unmodal, and Nonmodal Inferability Relations

#### 3.1 Modal and Unmodal Inferability Relations

Brandom distinguishes not only commitment- and entitlement-preserving inferability relations, but also *incompatibility relations*, which he takes to correspond to exclusion relations from commitments to entitlements (1994: 160, 169; 2000: 194; 2008: 120-1; 2010: 22), and *incompatibility-induced inferability*

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we might say that one cannot express an inferability relation just as an inferability relation, without indicating whether or not one undertakes an additional expressive commitment. If one does not indicate that one undertakes such a commitment, one simply does not undertake one. Expressing inferability relations just as inferability relations can only be understood by abstraction, as what expressing inferability relations as final, unfinal, and nonfinal have in common.

*relations* (which he also refers to as incompatibility-entailment relations), where a semantic content stands in an incompatibility-induced inferability relation to another one if and only if any semantic content that stands in an incompatibility relation to the former stands in an incompatibility relation to the latter (1994: 160; 2000: 194; 2008: 121, 124). The proposition that figure A is a rectangle thus stands in an incompatibility-induced inferability relation to the proposition that figure A is a square in that any proposition that stands in an incompatibility relation to the former, such as the proposition that figure A is a circle, stands in an incompatibility relation to the latter. Note that the converse is not true: The proposition that figure A is a non-equilateral rectangle stands in an incompatibility relation to the proposition that figure A is a square, but not to the proposition that it is a rectangle. Incompatibility-induced inferability relations can thus be said to correspond to exclusion relations from commitments to entitlements *indirectly*, as determined by incompatibility relations, which correspond to such relations *directly*.

Importantly, Brandom understands incompatibility relations, and hence incompatibility-induced inferability relations, as *modally robust relations* (2000: 194; 2008: 121-2, 125; 2010: 22). Exploiting the fact that incompatibility-induced inferability relations are determined by incompatibility relations, he develops an incompatibility semantics that understands semantic contents as incompatibility sets by understanding a semantic content as the set of all the (sets of) semantic contents that are incompatible with that semantic content (1994: 160; 2000: 194; 2008: 123). In developing this semantics, Brandom brackets all inferability relations that are not incompatibility-induced (2008: 123n5), which, in the context of his understanding of incompatibility-induced inferability relations as modal ones, are inferability relations that are in some sense opposed to modal ones, which, as we shall see, might be understood as *unmodal* or as *nonmodal* ones.

Entitlement-preserving inferability relations set aside, Brandom can be seen to distinguish two kinds of inferability relations, *incompatibility-induced and commitment-preserving* ones, that correspond to exclusion relations from commitments to entitlements and to inclusion relations between commitments respectively (2002: 7-8; 2010: 28-9). Again, it is clearly possible to distinguish such inferability relations, in that it is clearly possible to distinguish whatever inferability relations correspond to the respective inclusion-exclusion relations. The question is once more whether there is a *point* to distinguishing two kinds of inferability relations in this way, whether there is a *genuine difference* between two kinds of inferability relations that is well understood as corresponding to a difference between these two kinds of inclusion-exclusion relations. Again, I

take there to be two main candidates for such a difference, which I propose to call the difference between *modal and unmodal* and the difference between *modal and nonmodal* inferability relations.

Assume that an inferability relation holds that is expressed as a *modal* one by asserting that, for any  $x$ , if  $x$  is a true philosopher,  $x$  *must be* melancholic, as an *unmodal* one by asserting that, for any  $x$ , if  $x$  is a true philosopher, then  $x$  *happens to be* melancholic.<sup>1</sup> The inferability relation holds as a *modal* one if  $S$ , which is not melancholic, would be melancholic if  $S$  were a true philosopher. It holds as an *unmodal* one if it would not be true that all true philosophers happen to be melancholic if  $S$ , which is not melancholic, were a true philosopher. As an unmodal one, the inferability relation holds relatively to the contingent fact that all true philosophers happen to be melancholic, which is itself asserted by endorsing the inferability relation. The difference between modal and unmodal inferability relations can thus be understood as a difference between inferability relations that hold *not relatively to contingent facts* and those that hold *relatively to contingent facts*, which are asserted by endorsing these inferability relations.

### 3.2 Order of Strength: Nonmodal Inferability Relations

Again, Brandom not only *distinguishes* incompatibility-induced and commitment-preserving inferability relations, but also takes them to stand in an *order of strength*. He claims that the former are stronger than the latter, that incompatibility-induced inferability relations must be commitment-preserving whereas commitment-preserving ones need not be incompatibility-induced (2000: 195; 2002: 7-8; 2010: 28-9). This is clearly incompatible with an understanding of this difference as one between modal and unmodal inferability relations. Clearly, inferability relations must be either modal ones, which cannot be unmodal, or unmodal ones, which cannot be modal.

The strategy that has allowed us to arrive at the distinction between final and nonfinal inferability relations can be applied once more to introduce a similar distinction between modal and nonmodal ones, which we can then understand as one between inferability relations that hold *where relative to contingent facts is not allowed for* and those that hold *where relative to contingent facts is allowed for*. While there is no order of strength between modal and unmodal inferability relations, there is one between modal and nonmodal ones, in that

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<sup>1</sup> That the modality pertains not to the consequent itself, but to its relation to the antecedent can be emphasized by prepending the modal operator – in this instance by asserting that, necessarily or contingently, or that it must be or happens to be true that, for any  $x$ , if  $x$  is a true philosopher, then  $x$  is melancholic.

modal inferability relations must be nonmodal, whereas nonmodal ones need not be modal. This gives us reason to understand the difference between modal and nonmodal inferability relations as the genuine difference that Brandom wants to capture as one between incompatibility-induced and commitment-preserving inferability relations.

#### 4 Four Kinds of Inferability-Incompatibility Relations

Brandom thus distinguishes *three kinds of inferability relations*, corresponding to *three kinds of inclusion-exclusion relations* and standing in an *order of strength*, from entitlement-preserving ones as the weakest over commitment-preserving ones to incompatibility-induced ones as the strongest inferability relations. While in *Making It Explicit* he still tends to identify incompatibility-induced and commitment-preserving inferability relations and hence to distinguish only two kinds of inferability relations, commitment-preserving ones, which he also takes to be incompatibility-induced, and entitlement-preserving ones (1994: 174n27, 188-9, 189n39, 191n43, 200), Brandom in his later work clearly allows for commitment-preserving inferability relations that are not incompatibility-induced (2000: 194-5; 2002: 7-8; 2010: 28-9).

I propose that, according to the most charitable overall interpretation, Brandom's distinction of incompatibility-induced, commitment-preserving, and entitlement-preserving inferability relations is to be understood as aiming at capturing what I have presented as the difference between modal, final nonmodal, and nonfinal nonmodal inferability relations. I have argued that the difference between *final and nonfinal* inferability relations is not well understood as one between inferability relations that *are* and those that *are not commitment-preserving*, and I will argue that the difference between *modal and nonmodal* inferability relations is not well understood as one between inferability relations that *are* and those that *are not incompatibility-induced* either. The solution that I want to propose is to *replace* Brandom's distinction of incompatibility-induced, commitment-preserving, and entitlement-preserving inferability relations by that of modal, final nonmodal, and nonfinal nonmodal ones.

There are indeed two more problems with Brandom's distinction of modal, final nonmodal, and nonfinal nonmodal inferability relations as inferability relations of three kinds and modal incompatibility relations as incompatibility relations of one kind. It is problematic, first, because it *ignores nonfinal modal inferability relations* as inferability relations of a fourth kind. The distinctions between modal and nonmodal and between final and nonfinal inferability relations ought to be understood as *orthogonal* distinctions that yield four kinds of inferability relations, where nonfinal modal inferability relations are those

that hold where exceptions are allowed for and where relativity to contingent facts is not allowed for. Brandom implicitly admits that there are such inferability relations insofar as his examples of nonfinal inferability relations tend to be examples of modal ones, such as the inferability relation in which the proposition that stormy weather is ahead might be taken to stand to the proposition that the barometric reading is falling (2002: 7-8; 2008: 120). The four kinds of inferability relations can then be taken to stand in a *bifurcated* order of strength, composed of two orders of strength from nonfinal nonmodal inferability relations as the weakest to final modal ones as the strongest inferability relations, over final nonmodal and nonfinal nonmodal inferability relations respectively, where the latter themselves do not stand to one another in any order of strength.

Brandom's distinction is problematic, second, because it yields an *asymmetry between inferability and incompatibility relations*. As we have seen, these relations correspond to relations of being-a-reason-for and of being-a-reason-against between assertional commitments, which suggests that they ought to be understood as symmetric and that distinctions of different kinds of such relations stand in need of justification to the extent that they present them as asymmetric. It seems difficult to justify distinguishing final and unfinal reasons-*for* without distinguishing final and unfinal reasons-*against*. If the commitment that S is a true philosopher were a non-compelling, overridable reason *for* the commitment that S is melancholic, wouldn't it also be a non-compelling, overridable reason *against* the commitment that S is sanguine? Indeed, insofar as reasons *for* commitments to semantic contents are reasons *against* commitments to *negations* of semantic contents, it is evident that final and unfinal reasons-*for* *always already are* final and unfinal reasons-*against*. In general, it seems difficult to justify, and Brandom indeed does not justify, distinguishing final modal, nonfinal modal, final nonmodal, and nonfinal nonmodal inferability relations without distinguishing four corresponding kinds of incompatibility relations, similarly standing in a bifurcated order of strength. That there is only one kind of incompatibility relations is a presupposition that Brandom never questions and for which he never provides the least justification. Two emendations are thus called for, which together result in the understanding of inferability-incompatibility relations that is summarized in the figure below. It is true without doubt that there are inferability relations that are incompatibility-induced, where, as we have seen, a semantic content stands in an incompatibility-induced inferability relation to another one if and only if any semantic content that stands in an incompatibility relation to the former stands in an incompatibility relation to the latter. But Brandom goes wrong in understanding incompatibility relations, and hence incompatibility-induced

inferability relations, as final modal ones. Once four kinds of incompatibility relations have been distinguished, it is possible to distinguish four kinds of incompatibility-induced inferability relations, hence to understand *all* inferability relations as incompatibility-induced, where a semantic content stands in a final modal, nonfinal modal, final nonmodal, nonfinal nonmodal inferability relation to another one if and only if any semantic content that stands in a final modal incompatibility relation to the former stands to the latter in a final modal, nonfinal modal, final nonmodal, nonfinal nonmodal incompatibility relation respectively.<sup>1</sup>

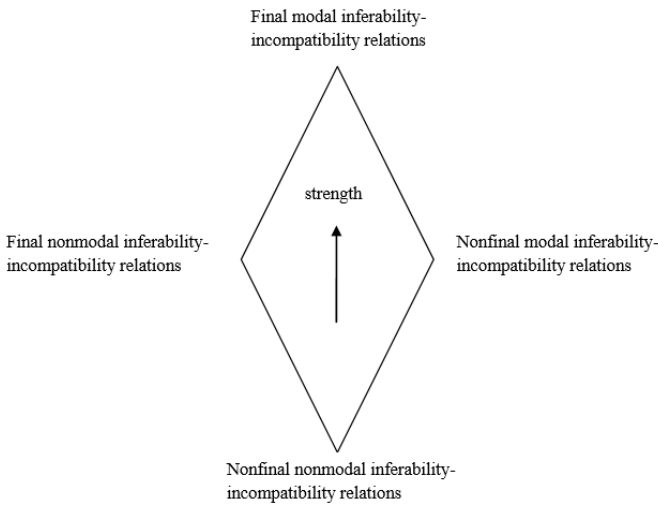


Figure: Four kinds of inferability-incompatibility relations standing in a bifurcated order of strength

<sup>1</sup> The point that commitment-preserving inferability relations are also incompatibility-induced, which entails that the difference between modal and nonmodal inferability relations cannot be understood as one between inferability relations that are and those that aren't incompatibility-induced, is also made by Andrade-Lotero and Dutilh Novaes (2012: 48). They seem to recommend understanding commitment-preserving and incompatibility-induced inferability relations, now understood as inferability relations of one and the same kind, as modally robust ones, by assimilating 'deductive inferences' to 'robust inferences' (2012: 52). By contrast, I distinguish different kinds of incompatibility relations, which allows me to take the distinction of modal and nonmodal relations, as well as the orthogonal distinction of final and nonfinal ones, to apply both to inferability and to incompatibility relations and to take different kinds of incompatibility relations to determine different kinds of incompatibility-induced inferability relations. I can thus claim that understanding all inferability relations as incompatibility-induced is perfectly compatible with distinguishing different kinds of inferability relations. Whereas

Understanding all inferability relations as incompatibility-induced has far-reaching consequences, whose technical implementation goes beyond the scope of this article, for Brandom's project of developing an incompatibility semantics. While it remains possible and perfectly legitimate to develop a basic and simplified incompatibility semantics that brackets all inferability relations that are not both final and modal, understanding all inferability relations as incompatibility-induced both makes it illegitimate to understand what one is doing in bracketing these relations as bracketing all inferability relations that are not incompatibility-induced and, most importantly, makes it possible to develop an incompatibility semantics that is not forced to bracket any inferability relations at all – a prospect that Brandom should welcome with wide open arms.

I do not want to withhold that there is a respect in which the distinction of different kinds of inferability-incompatibility relations proposed here does yield an *asymmetry* between inferability and incompatibility relations, insofar as I follow Brandom in taking inferability relations to be determined by incompatibility relations without taking the latter to be determined by the former.<sup>1</sup> But taking inferability and incompatibility relations to be asymmetric in this respect can be *justified*, by being shown to grow out of an understanding of these relations as symmetric.

Inferability and incompatibility relations can be seen to be interrelated in the following way: A semantic content is *inferable* from another one if and only if any semantic content that is *inferable* from the former is *inferable* also from the latter and if and only if any semantic content that is *incompatible* with the former is *incompatible* also with the latter. On the other hand, a semantic content is *incompatible* with another one if and only if any semantic content from which the former is *inferable* is *incompatible* with the latter and, since incompatibility relations are symmetric (1994: 160, 169; 2008: 120, 123), if and only if any semantic content from which the latter is *inferable* is *incompatible* with the former. The *asymmetry* between inferability and incompatibility relations that consists in that inferability relations are determined by incompatibility relations, whereas the latter are not determined by the former, can thus be shown to grow out of the *symmetry* between these relations that consists in that *both* inferability and

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Andrade-Lotero and Dutilh Novaes tend to collapse all kinds of inferability relations into one, I preserve their variety.

<sup>1</sup> Except, of course, in the trivial sense that, in a language that contains negations, one can say that  $p$  is incompatible with  $q$  by saying that  $\text{non-}p$  is inferable from  $q$ , which however is not at all the kind of determination that is at issue here.

incompatibility relations determine *inferability* relations and in that *neither* inferability nor incompatibility relations determine *incompatibility* relations on their own. The only genuine asymmetry at work, which is indeed undeniable and cannot be explained away, is the perfectly familiar and innocuous one that consists in that inferability relations, as corresponding to relations of being-a-reason-for, are both reflexive and transitive, but not symmetric, whereas incompatibility relations, as corresponding to relations of being-a-reason-against, are symmetric, but neither reflexive nor transitive.<sup>1</sup>

## 5 Diagnosis

Since once the need for and the possibility of an account of inferability-incompatibility relations that understands these relations as symmetric have been pointed out, it is difficult to see how they could possibly be overlooked in the first place, there is a need for diagnosis. According to the diagnosis that, in conclusion, I want to submit, Brandom's original mistake is to assume that genuine differences between the different kinds of inferability-incompatibility relations between semantic contents must correspond to differences between the three kinds of inclusion-exclusion relations between normative statuses, which leads him to distinguish two kinds of inferability relations and one kind of incompatibility relations, hence to understand inferability and incompatibility relations as asymmetric. The correct idea that inferability relations are determined by incompatibility relations can then find articulation only in the incorrect claim, made in *Making It Explicit*, that incompatibility-induced inferability relations are inferability relations of the one kind as opposed to inferability relations of the other kind or in the equally incorrect claim, made in his later work, that they constitute inferability relations of a third kind.

Brandom's original mistake can be avoided if it is understood and firmly kept in mind that inferability and incompatibility relations correspond to relations of being-a-reason-for and of being-a-reason-against between assertional commitments, and hence to inclusion and exclusion relations to entitlements to assertional commitments. Inferability relations correspond to

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<sup>1</sup> In a substantial footnote to his commentary on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Stekeler rejects Brandom's claim that incompatibility relations are more fundamental than inferability relations (2014: 495n58). My own understanding of these relations allows us to reconcile Brandom's and Stekeler's positions: It allows us to say, with Brandom, that there is a sense in which inferability relations are determined by incompatibility relations, and not vice versa, which is due to the familiar fact that the former are reflexive and transitive, whereas the latter are symmetric, but also, with Stekeler, that this need not be taken to mean that incompatibility relations are more fundamental than inferability relations, notably in that there is a corresponding sense in which inferability relations are determined by other inferability relations.

inclusion relations between commitments only at one remove, namely to the precise extent that inclusion relations between entitlements come together with inclusion relations between commitments. What must be understood above all, however, is that making available an understanding of semantic contents as determining the pragmatic significances of assertions, and hence of the inferability-incompatibility relations between semantic contents that constitute the former as determining the inclusion-exclusion relations between normative statuses that determine the latter, while it indeed requires us to take inferability-incompatibility relations to correspond to inclusion-exclusion relations between normative statuses, does not at all require us in addition to take the genuine *differences* between different kinds of inferability-incompatibility relations to correspond to *differences* between the three kinds of inclusion-exclusion relations.

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## Robert Brandom's Wittgensteinian Commitments

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### Résumé.

Le *Making it Explicit* de Brandom est probablement le travail le plus important de la philosophie systématique qui soit apparu au cours des vingt dernières années. Il est si puissant dans sa conception et riche en descriptions et explications détaillées, qu'il est difficile d'obtenir une vue globale du projet dans son ensemble. Cela en dépit du fait que Brandom essaie d'être et à de nombreux égards, plus explicite quant aux contextes de sa motivation et aux idées qui animent son projet. Dans cet essai, je tente de donner un aperçu sur les différents contextes que nomme Brandom ou que son principal travail rend visibles, afin d'identifier le contexte proche et décisif qui, comme il sera revendiqué, est donné dans un ensemble tripartite d'options, dont deux seulement sont mis en évidence dans les auto-descriptions de la théorie de Brandom.

### Mots-clés.

Brandom, philosophie systématique, conception, description, explication, contexte.

### ملخص.

ربما كان كتاب براندوم: *لنقلها صراحةً* هو أهم عمل ظهر في الفلسفة النسقية خلال العشرين سنة الأخيرة تقريبًا؛ فهو عمل يتسم بالقوة في تصويره، والثراء في تفصيلاته الوصفية والتفسيرية، بحيث يمكن القول أنه من الصعب الحصول على وجهة نظر مهيمنة إزاء المشروع ككل. هذا على الرغم من حقيقة أن براندوم كان يحاول أن يكون في معظم الجوانب أكثر وضوحًا فيما يتعلق بالسياقات المحفزة والأفكار المهمة لمشروعه. وأسعى في هذا المقال إلى استعراض السياقات المختلفة التي أوردها براندوم، أو التي تظهر في عمله الرئيس هذا، بُغية تعيين السياق المباشر والحاسم الذي

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منها اثنان فقط في الأوصاف الذاتية لنظرية براندوم.

### كلمات مفتاحية.

براندوم، فلسفة نسقية، تصور، وصف، تفسير، سياق.

### Abstract.

Brandom's *Making it Explicit*<sup>1</sup> is probably the most important work in systematic philosophy to have appeared during the last 20 years or so. It is so forceful in its conception and rich in descriptive and explanatory detail that it is difficult to get a commanding view of the project as a whole. This in spite of the fact, that Brandom tries to be and in most respects is most explicit about the motivating contexts and the animating ideas of his project. In this essay I try to give an overview over the different contexts that Brandom names or that his main work can be seen in, in order to identify the proximate and decisive context which, as will be claimed, is given in a tripartite set of options, of which only two are given prominence in the self-descriptions of Brandom's theory.

### Keywords.

Brandom, systematic philosophy, conception, description, explanation, context.

### I.

The most general contexts of Brandom's project are (in descending order of generality) Literature, Philosophy and Theory of Meaning (for a natural language). Mentioning the first is not trivial. Brandom is explicit in characterizing his book as belonging to „creative nonfiction writing“, in which philosophical works are a „peculiar genre“. (*MIE*, XI) But that it is not trivial elucidates only from the differentia specifica 'philosophical', which constitutes the next-general context.

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1 Harvard UP 1994, cited as *MIE* with page-numbers in parentheses . Other abbreviations: *Between Saying and Doing* – *BSD*; *Tales of the Mighty Dead* – *TMD*; *From Empiricism to Expressivism* – Brandom reads Sellars – *FETE*; *Articulating Reason* – *AR*; *Wiedererinnerter Idealismus* – *WI*. (This last book is available only in German. It contains the first three chapters of Brandom: *Reason in Philosophy*, and in Chapters VII-IX essays on Hegel, which have appeared in English already, the last two in *TMD*. The middle part of the book elaborates lectures that Brandom gave at Munich University in 2011.)

Since Plato's critique of writtiness it is not self-evident that philosophy is given in writing. Even Brandom himself does not philosophize exclusively in written form. Being a Professor and a teacher (indeed, I have been told that he was given the friendly nick-name 'the preacher') much of his philosophizing is presented orally. It is worth to dwell a moment on the alternative of orality and writtiness. Since Plato the core of philosophizing has been *reflective conceptual clarification* – trying to understand explicitly what we all know implicitly as speakers of languages and actors. And the most modest aim of conceptual clarification is clarifying *someone's* understanding dialogically. (That's why Plato, being critical of writtiness, when he wanted to use this form, wrote *dialogues*.) Augustine has given the paradigmatic example for the need of such dialogical clarification in an 'I-you'-context when he formulated his question concerning the concept of Time: *quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerentem explicare velim, nescio*. We all know, what time is insofar, as we can use temporal determinations and expressions, but asked to explicate this implicit understanding we are at a loss and must try hard. Both Kant and Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>, who besides Frege are named as the most important influences on the normative pragmatics of Brandom's project (*MIE*, XIII), have referred to Augustine's formulation as paradigmatic for the core task of philosophy.

Brandom's work is not only *reflective conceptual clarification*. It gives a theory of meaning for a natural language (English) with *explanatory* aspirations. The project of a theory of meaning can be seen as one of the central research projects of Analytical Philosophy arising from the foundational work of Frege and the early Wittgenstein, pursued in bits and pieces by Logical Empiricism and Carnap, coming to theoretical self-consciousness in the work of Quine, Davidson and Dummett.

Brandom sees this tradition moving „decidedly on a slant“ (*MIE*, XII), because it takes the concepts of representation and reference as foundational and moves to explicate the inferential aspects of meaning in terms of them. He semantically does it the other way round, taking the concept of inference and 'inferential articulation' as basic and moving to explicate representation and reference in terms of them. An interesting question is, why this project is not seen as moving on the converse slant of the dominant representationalist one. It can be seen so from the vantage point of the third option for the clarification of meaning, which has been the core of philosophy since Plato: *reflective*

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1 Kant: 'Über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze ...' (1764), A 79. Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations* para. 89 c. (Wittgenstein gives the locus of Augustine's formulation quoted before in Latin: *Confessions* XI.14).

*conceptual clarification*. Brandom acknowledges this third option, if only in a footnote:

... the representationalist and the inferentialist – these alternatives are not exhaustive. Other possibilities include treating neither representation nor inference as explanatorily prior to the other. One might then go on to explain both in terms of some third notion. *Or one might eschew reductive explanations in semantics entirely and remain contented with describing the relations among a family of mutually presupposing concepts – a family that includes representation, inference, claiming, referring, and so on.* (MIE, 669 footnote 90)

Seen from the perspective of the quoted possibility italicized by me both, the representationalist and the inferentialist 'order of explanation' are on a conversely corresponding slant by aspiring to „reductive explanations in semantics“. This way for clarifying semantical concepts I believe to be the Wittgensteinian one. It gives *reflective conceptual clarification* by describing language-games. This is no philosophical ('theoretical') option for him precisely because it is *not theoretical* and *explanatory*, but *purely descriptive*. Brandom therefore ascribes to Wittgenstein a „theoretical quietism“ (MIE, XII) which he abhors, but he does not discuss Wittgenstein's reasons for eschewing a theoretical semantics in his own sense, among them not at least his pursuing a different aim in philosophy:

...we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our consideration. All explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And the description gets its light ... from the philosophical problems. ..<sup>1</sup>

Wittgenstein's different aim in philosophy, as underlined in the quotation, is the dissolution of philosophical problems in quite specific senses<sup>2</sup>.

Trying to take issue with Brandom on the interpretation of Wittgenstein would presuppose that one takes account of his explicit, unconventional views on the interpretation of philosophical views and works in *TMD* Chapter 3.

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1 Cp. *Philosophical Investigations* para. 109.

2 As far as I can see I was the first to interpret in detail Wittgenstein's standing formula of 'the philosophical problems' (which, as is well known, appears already in the 'Preface' of *TLP*). Cp. *Wittgenstein's Revolution*, Ch. 1. (accessible on [www.emlange.weebly.com](http://www.emlange.weebly.com))

## II.

Brandom's views on interpretation are unconventional in comparison with several hermeneutical conceptions in that it grows out and is backed by his own explicit theory of meaning. The central distinction on which he builds is between interpretation *de dicto* and interpretation *de re*. The distinction relies on his account of the attribution of propositional attitudes in these two ways, which plays a most important role in the final chapter of *MIE*, where it carries the burden of showing that his theory of meaning in combining a pragmatics in score-keeping terms of undertaking and attributing doxastic commitments and entitlements with an inferentialist semantics can account for the objectivity of concepts.

Put crudely the distinction between interpretations *de dicto* and *de re* comes to this: *De dicto* specifications of views of an interpretee see them in the context of *his* collateral beliefs or doxastic commitments, specifications *de re* take the views of an interpretee in the context of the collateral beliefs or doxastic commitments *of the interpreter himself*, investing into the elaboration of the interpreted views what the interpreter takes to be true.

Interpretation *de re* certainly has a most legitimate place in the context of theory-construction. But in every other context it provokes the question, whether it really is an interpretation of the views of an interpretee. Even the interpretation of historical philosophers and their works, when they are individuated by use of their names, belong to the tasks of *interpersonal* understanding. And when the views, for instance, of Wittgenstein are taken in the context of what Brandom takes to be true: how far can it be said, that it is Wittgenstein who is being interpreted rather than McWittgenstein or some other fictional character? Brandom is bound to accept Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* as an interpretation of Wittgenstein, but as has been shown by Wittgenstein scholars<sup>1</sup> *ad nauseam* it is not. Kripke's Wittgenstein is a fictional character, *Kripkenstein*.<sup>2</sup>

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1Cp. G.P. Baker & P.M.S. Hacker: *Scepticism, Rules & Language*, Oxford 1984; E.M. Lange: 'Übereinstimmung bei Wittgenstein', still accessible on [www.emlange.weebly.com](http://www.emlange.weebly.com).

2Brandom himself once characterizes Kripke's 'interpretation' as giving „Kripke's Wittgenstein“ (*MIE*, 603). But this cannot be taken as a stand-off because according to his conception all interpretation is mere attribution and the ways of interpreting differ only in the sets of collateral commitments of which to take notice is seen to be legitimate. In this conception of interpretation there is nothing like an interpretational proof which shows an attribution to be true.

Since there is no use to quarrel about interpretation-theoretical commitments<sup>1</sup>, in the following I merely describe some of the uses Brandom makes of Wittgenstein's views in constructing his theory, taking issue with a few only, where I believe that Brandom gets it wrong – not Wittgenstein's view, but the topics they are views on.

### III.

Brandom is paying great general tribute to Wittgenstein's extraordinary place in their common philosophical problematic by writing of „the vantage point won for us by the later Wittgenstein“ (*MIE*, 73) and even of „our Wittgensteinian philosophical world“ (*TMD*, 210). All the more remarkable is it that Brandom in his retrospective reconstruction of the genealogy of his inferentialist position (in *TMD*, in contrast to the first two chapters of *MIE*) leaves Wittgenstein out. The only other philosopher of comparable importance to Brandom not treated of there is Kant, but in this case the fact is at least being commented on. (*TMD*, 46).

In particular Brandom endorses two fundamental commitments of Wittgenstein. The first concerns „one dimension of Wittgenstein's pragmatism“ and is consequent upon a slogan attributed to Wittgenstein: 'meaning is use'. His project Brandom takes to give a 'theory of use': „to explain the *meanings* of linguistic expressions in terms of their *use* ...“ (*MIE*, XII). Brandom acknowledges that Wittgenstein is not guilty of the slogan attributed to him, if only by the way. When discussing interpretations *de dicto* und intellectual history, which he acknowledges to be a demanding discipline, he writes the following concerning the interpretation of specific terms:

I have heard specialized uses of the terms defined so that an *expert* is someone who knows a great deal about these things, but only a *scholar* is in a position responsibly to make negative existential claims about them all: 'Wittgenstein nowhere says >Meaning is use< (though he said things like >Don't look to the meaning, look to the use<) ...' (*TMD*, 99)

Brandom probably does not aspire to be a Wittgenstein scholar, but he certainly is an expert. Nevertheless he is correct in the negative existential claim. Even at the place, where Wittgenstein most conspicuously comes near to the slogan attributed to him (*PI* para. 43), the claim 'meaning of a word is its use in language' is restricted to a large class of cases and denied for all. It is a

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<sup>1</sup>I myself subscribe almost completely to the views expounded in Reinhart Brandt: *Die Interpretation philosophischer Werke*, Stuttgart 1984.

question of Wittgenstein scholarship to answer which cases form the rest.<sup>1</sup> (By the way, 'use *in language*' in *PI* para. 43 gives a holistic and therefore 'inferentialist' constraint.)

Of course, Brandom's form of endorsement of Wittgenstein's pragmatism is a point of fundamental divergence from Wittgenstein at the same time, because Wittgenstein eschewed semantic theorizing (cp. *PI* para. 109). Brandom attributes this to Wittgenstein's 'theoretical quietism' in general: „Wittgenstein, the principled theoretical quietist, does not attempt to provide a theory of practices, nor would he endorse the project of doing so.“ (*MIE*, 29) But Wittgenstein offered specific arguments for being 'quietist' with respect to semantic theory (*PI* para 120-1), which Brandom does not bother to address. Wittgenstein argues (as did Brandom's hero Michael Dummett<sup>2</sup>), that the distinction between object- and meta-language cannot but metaphorically be applied to natural language, because for clarifications of meaning one has to use already „language full-blown ... (not some sort of preparatory, provisional one)“. Brandom in spite of this thinks to have a „theoretical meta-language“ available, which is normative in character and takes 'attribution of deontic attitude' to be the fundamental theoretical concept. (*MIE*, 182, 196)

The second most important commitment of Wittgenstein Brandom endorses he takes from the former's regress-of-rules argument. Brandom's reading of it forms the starting point of his extended theoretical project and he calls it „one of the fundamental insights from which the present approach proceeds.“ (*MIE*, 509) From *PI* para. 201 Brandom draws the conclusion, that rule-following cannot happen according to explicitly formulated rules 'all the way down'. At the end there must be rules and norms which are implicit only in participating in a practice. One of the first formulations of the point in Brandom reads thus:

... Wittgenstein argues that proprieties of performance that are governed by explicit rules do not form an autonomous stratum of normative statuses, one that could exist though no other did. Rather, proprieties governed by explicit rules rest on proprieties governed by practice. Norms that are *explicit* in the form of rules presuppose norms *implicit* in practices. (*MIE*, 20)

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<sup>1</sup>I tried to answer this question in an extended excursus on aspect-seeing in my study-commentary on the *PI*, Paderborn 1996; and in a shorter and still accessible version in: 'Ludwig Wittgenstein', in *Die deutsche Philosophie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Darmstadt <sup>2</sup>2015, 311 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Dummett: *Frege-Philosophy of Language*, 1974, 608.

And the uptake of this point taken from Wittgenstein again is from the start connected to a criticism: „The regress argument does not by itself provide such a conception of proprieties of practice; it just shows that without one we cannot understand how rules can codify the correctnesses that they do.“ (MIE, 22) And, of course: „Wittgenstein, the principled theoretical quietist, does not attempt to provide a theory of practices...“ This is therefore Brandom's program in the pragmatics-part of his theory: „to come up with an account of norms implicit in practices that will satisfy the criteria of adequacy Wittgenstein's arguments have established.“ (MIE, 29-30)

Now, the lesson Brandom draws from the regress-of-rules argument is susceptible of two different readings. The presupposition of implicit proprieties by explicit rules can be taken to be valid for particular cases ('locally') or in a generalizing way ('globally'). If one looks at Wittgenstein's own formulation in para. 201 I take it to be evident that Wittgenstein wanted his claim to be understood locally. The decisive proposition reads:

...what we thereby show is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call 'following the rule' and 'going against it'.

The words I have underlined in the quotation are characteristically left out in a context, where Brandom just wants to give the gist of Wittgenstein's argument. Then he can be read thus:

Calling a rule that governs the application of another an 'interpretation', Wittgenstein argues that >there must be some way of following a rule that does not consist in an interpretation, but in following or going against it in practice<. The possibility of making norms explicit in the form of rules, which determine what is correct and incorrect by *saying* what does and does not qualify, depends on an underlying possibility of discriminating norms implicit in the practice of *doing* things correctly and incorrectly and responding to such performances non-linguistically as correct and incorrect. (TMD, 327)

The quotation within the quotation, which I have marked by using the different style '> ... <', is presented as a literal quotation of *PI* para. 201 in footnote 19 (TMD, 403). Comparison with the quotation from Wittgenstein's text given immediately before shows this to be incorrect. And the words I have underlined in Brandom's comment on the putative quotation ('responding to such performances *non-linguistically*') contrast sharply with the words underlined

in second place in the literal quotation of *PI* para. 201: “what we *call* 'following the rule' and 'going against it'.”

Of course, Brandom cites Wittgenstein quite correctly in other places (for instance in *MIE*, 21). But I take the passage from *TMD* to be symptomatic for what Brandom really wants to take out of Wittgenstein's words. If I am correct in this, Brandom understands Wittgenstein's claim in contrast to its intended sense in a global way.

Why is this important? Wittgenstein's picture connects with a perspective on the learning of language and the acquisition of concepts.<sup>1</sup> He suggests that the performance-correcting words 'correct' and 'incorrect' (specializing 'yes' and 'no' as the fundamental possibilities of comment) play an essential role in these processes. And to them a linguistic technique can be connected (a 'joint' to the language-games added) that again is foundational for more elaborate language-learning and concept-aquisition, after a certain basis has been laid by simple behavioristic training ('Abrichtung')<sup>2</sup>: the technique of *explaining* ('teaching') the meanings of words, expressions and the contexts of their use. The way for learning by explanations of meaning is cleared as soon as, after a phase of „ostensive teaching of words“, the trainee has learnt to ask “what the name is“. (*PI* para. 6) There is no mention of explanations of meaning in Brandom's theory. But Wittgenstein's view is, that there is an *internal* connection between the concepts of *meaning* and *explanation of meaning*: 'The meaning of a word is what an explanation of its meaning explains.' (*PI* para 560) Proof of it is, that explanations of meaning in a certain form can be substituted for what they explain (cp. *PG* IV.59 c).

Of course, Brandom's neglect of explanations of meanings is due to his methodological commitment to use a regimented 'meta'-language containing only normative expressions, not intentional and semantic expressions as well, which belong to the explananda of his theory. But this is to say, that the design

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1 Cp. *Zettel* para. 412: 'I connect the concept of *teaching* with the concept of *meaning*!' (own translation). And remember how prominent a role questions of learning and teaching play in the beginning of *PI*. (para.s 1-32). – What Brandom has to say about language-learning and concept-acquisition largely comes from Sellars – cp. *TMD*, 360-2. Although learners are said to have to acquire reliable differential response dispositions not only to environmental stimuli, but to linguistic utterances of others too, no level is specified, at which there can be a question after (the meaning of) a name, for instance.-- *MIE* in contrast allows of no genetic perspective, because it „takes for granted a set of inferentially articulated norms as an already up-and-running enterprise.“ (*TMD* 12)

2 Cp. *Zettel* para. 419: 'The foundation of any explanation is training. (This is what educators should keep in mind.)' (own translation)

of the theory from the start dispenses with a claim to being descriptive of our actual linguistic and conceptual practice. It is content to construct a normative 'model' of a language centering around the language-game of assertion as definitory of what he calls an 'autonomous discursive practice' (ADP). And in it the *internal connection* of *meaning* and *use* is articulated at the cost of its other internal connections with *explanation* and *teaching*.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV.

Having mentioned the concept of ADP gives opportunity to acknowledge explicitly that Brandom's theory-construction does not by far depend on Wittgensteinian commitments only. In his pragmatics Brandom takes up ideas of Frege, Dummett, David Lewis (who is responsible for the idea of 'score-keeping'), Dennett and Davidson (from whom the interpretational 'I-thou'-context of score-keeping is derived). In his inferentialist semantics Brandom builds on Frege and Dummett again, but also, among others, on Sellars. It is from the latter arguments in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* that Brandom's concept of ADP is a generalization. One of Sellars' central arguments shows that the 'look' and 'seeming'-talk of traditional epistemology cannot play the foundational role claimed for it, because the respective claims *withhold* assertational force from what is said to look so-and-so or to seem-to-be and therefore *presuppose* language-uses in which assertional force is endorsed. 'Look'-talk therefore is said not to form 'an autonomous stratum in language' or a 'language-game that could be played though no other is'. The concept of ADP is the generalization of 'autonomous stratum'. And it is worth remarking, that Brandom's use of 'language-game' – a term invented by Wittgenstein as an aspect-illuminating metaphor to remind of the family-resemblances of language-use to the playing of games according to rules – is much more derived from Sellars ('Some Reflections on Language-games') than from Wittgenstein. As a theoretician Brandom is thoroughly inimical to building concepts out of metaphors.

Sellars' conception of our autonomous language-game does not really have a place for the Wittgensteinian plural 'language-games'. In his concepts of 'language-entrance' (perception) and 'language-exit' (action)-rules, he projects on language a philosophical systematic deriving from Aristotle and Kant, which takes the dualism of the cognitive (theory) and the practical (practice) as foundational. And since action is construed as the undertaking of a

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1 In *PG* II.23 Wittgenstein lists all the internal relations that hold the concept of meaning in place, although only implying that 'explaining' is a form of 'teaching'.

commitment by executing it, the cognitive and assertational is given pride of place.

This construction is in stark contrast to Wittgenstein's conception of language as a family of (countless<sup>1</sup>) language-games. Wittgenstein did not take the cognitive and the practical as the basic contrast; in his thought the distinction between 'sense or meaning' and 'truth-vs- falsehood' and, generalizing to non-indicative language-uses, 'satisfaction-vs- non-satisfaction' plays the analogous role. It digs deeper and thereby makes room for a plurality of language-games. Where do belong, in the Sellars-Brandom-construction, expressions of feelings, aesthetic evaluation, moral appraisal and religious pronouncements and so many more language-games?

One problem Brandom's theory wants to solve is the conferral of *determinate* conceptual content on expressions and claims. Problems of indeterminacy and determinacy in his context come from Quine, of course, (and from Hegel). And in one context, where he explains this connection he can be read thus:

Quine rejects Carnap's sharp separation of the process of deciding what concepts (meanings, language) to use from deciding what judgements (belief, theory) to endorse. For him, it is fantasy to see meanings as freely fixed independently and in advance of our applying those meanings in forming fallible beliefs that answer for their correctness to how things are. Changing our beliefs can change our meanings. There is only one practice – the practice of actually making determinate judgments. (TMD, 214)

The part of the last sentence underlined puts the difference to Wittgenstein in a nutshell. With respect to our actual linguistic practice the claim, that there is only the one practice of making *determinate* judgement is a descriptively hopeless regimentation. If it is meaningful at all (because to deny that some of our utterances are explorative only, is senseless; it cannot account for the existence in language of the language-games of putting questions), it is so in the context of narrow philosophical and theoretical commitments only.

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1 Cp. *PI* para. 23. This is a place, where Wittgenstein's German text should be emended. He uses 'unzählig' which literally means 'indefinitely many', where he means 'zahllos' which should be rendered 'not sensibly to be counted'. My English-German Dictionary tells me that 'countless' means 'zahllos', whereas 'unzählig' should be rendered as 'innumerable'; so the English translation actually has emended the text.

## V.

Brandom should have taken notice of the fact that problems of (in)determinacy do not relate to Quine and Davidson only, but to Wittgenstein as well.

As is explicitly stated in *TLP*, its whole ontology of objects and states of affairs and therefore its theory of the proposition as well depends on the postulate of determinacy of sense. (*TLP* 3.23: “The postulate of the possibility of the simple signs is the postulate of the determinateness of the sense.”) One of the most important results of Wittgenstein's self-critique is the insight, that what matters concerning sense is not determinacy but determinability. This is where his concept of explanation of meaning has its systematic place. Use of language in communication or cognition is not made impossible nor so much as endangered by most of our usual expressions being vague, if unclarity and misunderstandings can be met with explanations of meaning, which help a speaker to make himself understood. And that's the way our normal communication goes.

The internal connection of meaning and explanation of meaning in normal discourse is present already in *TLP*:

The meanings of the simple signs (the words) must be explained to us, if we are to understand them.

By means of propositions we explain ourselves (German: verständigen wir uns). (4.026)

Because Wittgenstein subscribed to a version of the language-of-thought-hypothesis in *TLP*, he could not take advantage of this insight in what he there said about the use of language. But when the insight had been won that there is no need for and no sense in the postulate absolute determinacy of sense, he could and did elaborate on what was an early insight already.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The interpretational points on Wittgenstein and his development are substantiated in my books on Wittgenstein. It is one of the general shortcomings of the reception of Wittgenstein in the English-speaking world, that almost nobody (with the exception of, perhaps, David Pears) has a clarified and elaborated account of Wittgenstein's thought as developing from *TLP* to *PI*. The whole of Part I of *PI* can be read as a self-critique of Wittgenstein's 'old way of thinking' (*PI*, Preface) in *TLP*. And the formal object of this self-critique is the constructive model in *TLP* of language use centering around a conception of quantification-theory as giving the deep structure of our propositions and the operative language of thought in all meaning and understanding. Or so I argue in my interpretational books on Wittgenstein.

## VI.

Wittgenstein, though he calls explanation of meaning „a language-game in its own right“ (*PI* para. 27), could well have accepted the point of Quine against Carnap that Brandom endorses. This is because of another Wittgensteinian commitment taken over by Brandom. He calls it the 'default-and-challenge structure' of entitlement in our normal communication and takes it to describe the „picture of the practices of giving and asking for reasons that Wittgenstein suggests“. If one had to justify his utterances and claims 'all the way down' a regress would result comparable to the regress of rules. But: „If many claims are treated as innocent until proven guilty – taken to be entitled commitments until and unless someone is in a position to raise a legitimate question about them – the global threat of regress dissolves.“ (*MIE*, 176-178) This practice according to live-and-let-live precepts is relevant not only to claims, but to the 'meanings' in which they are expressed as well. Explanations of meaning in normal communication are necessary only when misunderstanding has to be removed and therefore never 'all the way down'. But they have to be available as possibilities that are connected horizontally to the substantial language-games (and not relegated to a semantical language-game of higher order, making explicit ex post what is only implicit in normal communication and the deontic score-keeping it is structured by), if communication is to be secured by the possibility of removing misunderstandings from case to case 'on the spot'.

## VII.

Brandom acknowledges that Wittgenstein thematizes inferential aspects of meaning, but thinks that representational ones prevail in his thought. (*MIE* 656 footnote 17). But in *Articulating Reason* Brandom distinguishes between hyper-, strong and weak inferentialism. The first holds that inferences in the formal logical sense are sufficient for the determination of conceptual content, the second that material inferences are necessary and sufficient for it, the last that inferential relations whatsoever are necessary, but not sufficient for the conferral of conceptual content.

In *MIE* Brandom endorses strong inferentialism, but on occasion he also can be content with investing weak inferentialism only (cp. *BSP* 111 footnote 18). Concerning the later phase of Wittgenstein's philosophy it must be said, that holding the propositional context-principle of word-meaning to be senseless (*PR* II.14 a), because a non-postulatory solution to the colour-exclusion problem of *TLP* (6.3751) showed it necessary to take language-games

(at first: propositional systems) as the fundamental units of meaning, not isolated propositions, shows him to be a weak inferentialist. And the inferential aspects of meaning that weak inferentialism acknowledges are by no means relegated to a minor rank compared to the representationalist ones.

### VIII.

It is to Brandom's great credit that he not only acknowledges Wittgenstein's method of internal clarification of sense as a viable alternative to semantic theorizing (as has been shown above in section I), but also admits that philosophical clarification of meanings has to start the Wittgensteinian way. This for him belongs to the hermeneutical platitudes that co-define pragmatism. Relating to them he can be read:

I accept all of these pragmatist claims about the distinctiveness and basicness of ordinary hermeneutic understanding of discursive performances and their products. Should we conclude that the analytic project (sc. of semantic theorizing) is just a mistake? I don't think so. For this pragmatist line of thought does not entail that many aspects of discursive practice might not *also* be susceptible to understanding of the sort I have called 'algebraic'. (BSP 213)

Brandom l.c. then goes on to recommend analytic semantic theorizing, which is admitted to be constructive, not descriptive, because it achieves the highest analytic value of clarity along both the dimensions of definiteness and perspicuity. But if it is only *also* possible to clarify meaning in the algebraic understanding of constructing a formal theory, then the Wittgensteinian internal clarification of sense in hermeneutic understanding is not only a viable alternative, but even self-contained. And this raises the question why to enter into constructive theorizing at all. Because as there is no absolute standard of determinateness, there is none of definiteness and perspicuity as well. It all depends on what one is asking for. Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy in the end is a completely personal one:

Work in philosophy is more the work upon oneself. On the own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one demands of them). (BT 407, own translation)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> German: „Die Arbeit in der Philosophie ... ist eigentlich mehr die Arbeit an Einem selbst. An der eignen Auffassung. Daran, wie man die Dinge sieht. (Und was man von ihnen verlangt.)“

## Pragmatistic Inferentialist and Operationalist accounts: from Peirce to Brandom and back

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### Résumé.

Cet essai discute deux étapes de la tradition pragmatiste en philosophie dans ses versions à la fois générale et stricte. D'un côté, l'étape opérationnaliste explique comment la maxime pragmatiste possède une interprétation particulière du concept de comportement pratique. D'un autre côté, l'étape inférentialiste qui révèle l'importance de nos engagements sur des inférences dérivées de nos pratiques inférentielles. Les deux aspects du pragmatisme sont explorés à travers leurs meilleurs représentants : Charles Peirce qui en est le fondateur et le philosophe contemporain Robert Brandom. L'auteur propose une étude détaillée de la maxime pragmatiste en tant que stratégie dont le but consiste à trouver un équilibre réel entre les deux phases du pragmatisme.

### Mots-Clés.

Pragmatisme, inférentialisme, Brandom, Peirce, Putnam.

### ملخص.

يناقش هذا المقال جانبين من جوانب التقليد البراجماتي في الفلسفة بمعنييه الواسع والضيق، وهما الجانب الإجرائي والجانب الاستدلالي؛ فمن جهة، يوضح الجانب الإجرائي أن المبدأ البراجماتي يتضمن تفسيراً نوعياً لتصور المسلك العملي؛ ومن جهة أخرى، يكشف الجانب الاستدلالي عن أهمية التزاماتنا بالاستدلالات الناجمة عن ممارساتنا الاستدلالية. ويتم استكشاف هذين الجانبين للبراجماتية من خلال أبرز ممثلها، مثل مؤسسها تشارلز بورس، والفيلسوف المعاصر روبرت براندوم. ويقترح الكاتب دراسة مفصلة للمبدأ كاستراتيجية لتحقيق التوازن بين الجانبين المذكورين للبراجماتية.

## كلمات مفتاحية.

براجماتية، نزعة استدلالية، براندوم، بورس، بوتنام.

### **Abstract.**

This essay discusses two edges of the pragmatistic tradition in philosophy in its broad and strict versions. On the one hand the operationalist edge explains that the pragmatic maxim has a particular interpretation of the concept of “practical bearing”. On the other hand the inferentialist edge discloses the importance of our commitments to inferences derived from our inferential practices. Both aspects of pragmatism are explored in key representatives such as the founder Charles Peirce and the contemporary philosopher Robert Brandom. The author proposes a detailed study of the maxim as a strategy to find the right valance between the two aforementioned edges of pragmatism.

### **Keywords.**

Pragmatism, Inferentialism, Brandom, Peirce, Putnam.

### **Introduction**

Philosophical circles of the most varied signs use the term Pragmatism to characterize their views. Historically speaking the divide is simple: there is old and new pragmatism. Pragmatism old and new, however, can be many things: some believe that is a body of views; others take it as a principle, others as a method, and others as a tendency or philosophical temperament. There have been, nonetheless, a number of intents to disambiguate the situation by clarifying and enlisting some characteristics of pragmatism.

In this article I will accept two senses of the term: one is a broad understanding of pragmatism as a tradition in philosophical thought. The other -more importantly for this essay- is an understanding of pragmatism from its origins as a logical principle. The founder of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce, called such principle “the pragmatic maxim”. I will describe broad pragmatism following the accepted features by philosophers traditionally and temporarily known as pragmatists. However, I will present a problem that belies in the too general classification and hence will disclose the epistemological strategies that seem to be at the basis of those characterizations. Two epistemological strategies seem to conform to edges of pragmatism: the inferentialist and the operationalist aspects. I will, thus, try to find both the

inferentialist and operationalist aspects of those descriptions in order to avoid the triviality that some find in too broad characterizations of pragmatism.

The second part of this article will offer a characterization of pragmatism in strict sense. I will analyze pragmatism by attending at its origins in the works of Charles Sanders Peirce in comparison with some contemporary pragmatists, especially Robert Brandom and Hilary Putnam. Finally, an examination of the pragmatic maxim will reveal that the correct balance between the inferentialist and the operationalist edges of the pragmatist tradition can be explored by a better knowledge of the pragmatic maxim. In conclusion, therefore, I aim to provide some clarification of broad pragmatism by the understanding of strict pragmatism.

### 1. Pragmatism: old and new

Historically, Pragmatism has been divided between classical and contemporary. Classical Pragmatism includes the works of the philosophers that accepted the term and offered philosophies that conformed a classical tradition, these are Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George H. Mead, Jane Addams, G. Santayana, Josiah Royce and other prominent scholars. Contemporary Pragmatism groups philosophers linked to analytic philosophy and the later development of the post-positivistic period: Susan Haack, Richard Rorty, Robert Brandom, Hilary Putnam, Richard Bernstein, Isaac Levi, Christopher Hookway, Cheryl Misak, Robert Talisse, etc. Some of the characteristics of the pragmatist tradition that group together all and new pragmatists constitute what I call here “Broad Pragmatism,” tuning with some characteristics that Richard Bernstein identified:

1. Anti-foundationalism: pragmatists are suspect of foundational concepts, intuitions or indubitable propositions.
2. On-going fallibilism: pragmatist philosophers accept that all concepts are open to revision.
3. Emphasis in the social character of the Self and the need to foster a communitarian character of inquiry.
4. The acknowledgment of the ubiquity chance, and, therefore, the acknowledgment of the limited aspect of human experience
5. Pluralism with respect to traditions, perspectives and orientations in philosophy, science and culture broadly conceived. (Bernstein 2010)

The above characterization is, however, still too vague, and it really does not clarify what constitutes a unifying principle of the tradition. Therefore, it is necessary to express what elements are in common in the tradition, but this will

produces a less broad conception of pragmatism. Thus, Putnam expresses these remarks, narrowing the too wide interpretation of Bernstein:

- (1) In ordinary circumstances, there is usually a fact of the matter as to whether the statements people make are warranted or not.
- (2) Whether a statement is warranted or not is independent of whether the majority of one's cultural peers would say it is warranted or unwarranted
- (3) Our norms and standards of warranted assertability are historical products; they evolve in time.
- (4) Our norms and standards always reflect our interests and values. Our picture of intellectual flourishing is part of, and only makes sense as part of, our picture of human flourishing in general.
- (5) Our norms and standards of *anything*—including warranted assertability—are capable of reform. There are better and worse norms and standards. (Putnam 1992, 22-23)

According to Putnam, pragmatism's hallmarks are the rejection of skepticism; the willingness to embrace fallibilism; the rejection of sharp dichotomies such as those between fact and value, thought and experience, mind and body, analytic and synthetic etc; and what he calls 'the primacy of practice' (1994c). The common condition of pragmatists, old and new, therefore, seems to be the ability to confront our concepts, ideas, etc, against the backdrop of meaningful practice. What counts as meaningful practice needs, yet again, further clarification, because we can understand that meaningful practice or practical bearings are concepts surrogate to the aims of our inquiries.

Soon enough, therefore, we have to realize that there are two epistemological strategies that allow us to understand whether our practices are successful in accordance with our goals. The two strategies can have a focus, on the one hand, on the consequences followed by the acceptance of a proposition, belief, etc.; such strategy can be called 'Operationalism'. On the other hand in the inferential commitments that follow from the practices and contexts in which a given concept or idea is relevant and thus, determines whether there is success in the achievement of a goal. Let us analyse each in turn:

### a. Operationalism and Pragmatism

Operationalism is a theory of meaning expressed in terms of “operations”: “we mean by any concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations” (Bridgman 1927, 5). For Bridgman, operations are mainly “sensible effects” and they are verifiable in the sense of positivist philosophy. Operationalism so expressed is, however, a very limited view of pragmatism: Many relevant concepts have a number of relevant operations that we can never enact in practice.

There is a positive aspect of the operationalist principle in pragmatism, though, that is not restricted to a verificationist principle of operations. As Peirce stressed, in order to understand a concept we must understand that will follow of the uses of that concept should we adopted it, and if those consequences could make a difference when we can think in experimental outcomes of those uses. The operationalist principle, so presented, is as ample as it could be the consequence of trying a diagram over another, and thus proof if one models reality better than the other.

### b. Inferentialism and Pragmatism

Inferentialism is an approach to the theory of meaning that identifies the meaning of an expression with its traceable inferential relationship to other expressions, and in which the semantic content of a concept is surrogated to the inferential pragmatic aspects of the use of the concept in a context. For the inferentialist a concept and its inferential possibilities depend on a commitment to accept it with its consequences in a given discourse. Inferentialism is contrasted to representationalism, the view that inferences have some fundamental semantic atoms that are ultimate representations of meaning. The inferentialist approach rejects, against the empiricist or the nominalist, that there are ultimate individual objects, representations or impressions that give a concept its meaning.

## 2. Pragmatism proper: the pragmatic maxim (1878)

Pragmatism, according to Peirce, is a detailed logical principle that gets us reflective clarity about concepts, the articulation of that principle is called the “Pragmatic Maxim.” In its first canonical formulation, Peirce’s pragmatic maxim goes like this:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object (EP1: 132)

William James acknowledged this maxim as “the principle of Peirce” and presented it as the inspiration of his own ideas of expediency that characterized his own version of pragmatism. However, James’ and Peirce’s pragmatism came apart, especially because since the 1900 Peirce started to re-define his maxim in the light of a mathematical proof, something completely alien to what James wanted to achieve, i.e., a dissolution of philosophical disputes that would render agreement based in common sense and the usefulness of a given idea.

We will carry on here in Peirce’s way, not due to a lack of insight in James, but because Peirce’s developing maxim offers us a balance between the aforementioned inferentialist and operationalist characters of pragmatism.

Thus, the pragmatic maxim, as it was developing, came to be associated with “semeiotics” or the theory of signs:

The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the possible different circumstances and desires, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol (Peirce, EP2:346)

This reformulation is a key development in order to understand the inferentialist character of the maxim. Catherine Legg has pointed out that Peirce was not only a strong inferentialist (we will note below that Brandom takes himself to be a strong inferentialist) but a hyper-inferentialist. Legg has noticed that Peirce’s early essays against Cartesianism allow us to see how he was committed to a through-going inferentialism: Peirce rejects the idea that we have foundational intuitions not mediated by inference, rejects introspection, rejects an intuitive idea of the self and affirms that all thought is mediated by signs. Peirce did not develop this early theory of signs till years later, but the point of the latter formulation of the maxim that I mentioned above is that the maxim gives us reflective clarity over the signs and symbols that we use, revealing the inferential commitment they stand for and deriving the consequences of their inferential roles.

Towards the end of his life, Peirce reformulated the Pragmatic Maxim once more, offering a very inferentialist formulation (1903):

Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood. (EP 2: 134-5)

Consider this example: “my rucksack is heavy”, one can ask such questions, following our inferential commitments: what imperatives relative to a context are relevant? In the maxim so defined, we find expressions like “practical consequence”, this means that there are imperatives that can be derive from it...

### 3. Evolution of the Maxim in Peirce’s thought

In “The Pragmatic Maxim” (2012), Christopher Hookway shows how Peirce evolved in his desire to get his maxim to be mathematically proved. In spite of these efforts not being fully satisfactory for Peirce, the different strategies he endeavoured show that he had supreme confidence that the proof had to be found. I explain Peirce’s confidence as the idea that the maxim is an inferentialist principle: if the principle guides inference, then one of its practical bearings has to be its logical structure, and a natural operation that follows from this is a self-explanatory proof. As opposed to a full explanation of this otherwise interesting topic, let us briefly present a list of concepts that Peirce associated with the practical bearings that the maxim is expected to reveal:

1. Beliefs are understood as habits of action (1878): In the earlier formulations we become reflective awareness of a habit of action associated with a concept. The shortcoming of the concept of “habit of action” is that beliefs can be understood affected by psychological elements.
2. Judgments: Judgments are concepts that hold a form translatable in logical forms, but a judgment falls short to express the commitment of those logical forms.
3. Assertions: the assertoric exteriorization of a judgment is yet another way to show what judgments render us liable to.
4. Manifestation of the understanding: the pragmatic maxim ‘makes explicit’ inferential practices that can be represented through Diagrammatic reasoning. In other words, the maxim will reveal what is implied in the mastery of a concept by disclosing A family of logical elements implied in the mastery of a concept by explaining the inferential roles.

5. The imperatives derived from a concept are experimental; they will show operations and actions that will count as successful.
6. A habit of understanding: propositions determine habits of action that tell us what actual or possible context derives imperatives (operations broadly conceived).

#### 4. Peirce on Clarity

The maxim is a logical principle to acquire clarity, to “make our ideas clear,” in the famous expression of Peirce. The achievement of clarity seems to me an illustration of the operationalist character of the maxim: clarity is an ostensible result of putting the maxim to work. Now, clarity is a term that tolerates degrees, and Peirce did offer a hierarchy of degrees of conceptual clarity that help us to see how clear our ideas really are. The following list spells out for us the hierarchy that Peirce identified to be a reflection on how clarity works.

Clarity<sub>1</sub>: An item that is *familiar to us*(EP1: 124-5)

Clarity<sub>2</sub>: *precisely defined* in abstract terms, all of them been clear in the sense 1 (EP1: 127-32)

Clarity<sub>3</sub>: *operationally defined*” enough information for “resolution of practical problems” (CP 3.457)

Clarity<sub>4</sub>: globally reasonable, i.e., incorporated to the stock of our other beliefs by a traceable process of inference.

#### 5. Pragmatism: the growth of concrete reasonableness

After the 1900's Peirce came to identify pragmatism as the growth of concret reasonableness. This formulation of pragmatism happily joints the inferentialist and operationalist characters. Concreteness means what would be achieved by operationally grounding one's grasp of a given subject matter. Reasonableness denotes what would be gauged by the combined coherence of abductive, deductive, and inductive methods of inference addressed to that subject matter (Burke 2013, 55).

#### 6. Brandom's Pragmatism and Inferentialism

Brandom's work shows the influence of Wilfrid Sellars and Wittgenstein, Brandom also offered a distinctive reading of Kant and Hegel. Brandom's philosophy, in connection with a long tradition, affirms that rationality involves possessing the ability to recognize the force of reasons. Brandom, however,

analysed modern epistemology (particularly British Empiricism) noting that the conceptual tends to be reduced to the foundational concept of representation:

[British Empiricism] general course... 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. (2000, 24)

Brandom's conception of pragmatism differs from the broad and less broad formulations offered above. Brandom frames pragmatism in the relationship between Semantics and Pragmatics that underlies language. Indeed, pragmatism is, for Brandom, the priority of pragmatics over semantics: the uses and commitments generated by our successful uses of language determine the senses in which the semantic concepts are to be determined. For Brandom, this determination grounded in inference is a hallmark of pragmatism, because it is concerned with meaningful action, with successful 'doing':

Inferring is a kind of doing... The status of inference as something that can be *done* accordingly holds out the promise of securing an appropriate relation between pragmatics, the study of the practices, and semantics, the study of the corresponding contents. (Brandom 1994, 91)

Thus far the connection with pragmatism, in the broad sense described above, is not entirely specific. Brandom, however, cares to explain that the normative significance of intentional states relies in practices more than in the content of the representations alone. Pragmatism so understood is a priority of the practical over the theories that privilege meaning or sheer reference:

One of the fundamental methodological commitments governing the account presented here is *pragmatism* about the relations between semantics and pragmatics. Pragmatism in this sense is the view that what attributions of semantic contentfulness are *for* is explaining the normative significance of intentional states such as beliefs and of speech acts such as assertions. Thus the criteria of adequacy to which semantic theory's concept of content must answer are to be set by the pragmatic theory, which deals with contentful intentional states and the sentences used to express them in speech acts (Brandom 1994, 143)

In Brandom's happy arrange of words, what philosophy (and, consequently, pragmatist philosophy) does is "making explicit" the commitments we assume in different uses that are allowed in our vocabularies. Inference is a sort of

score-keeping in a game of exchanging and articulating reasons in which we can make explicit what follows from assuming a given commitment. Suppose I believe that “Fluffy is a dog”: a valid inference ought to be, therefore, “Fluffy is a mammal”, given that the public vocabulary states that if “x is a dog, then x is a mammal”. What I prove when I express what follows from the first judgment is that I am a competent player in the use of an inference-ridden language.

Another user of the language will count as a scorekeeper, if she were to correct a mislead use of the language. Reason exchanging is, therefore, the context where carrying inferences and articulating reasons count as successful practices. Commitments and norms are generated in our inferential practices: the semantic content of concepts is ultimately reducible to an inferential commitment in the context of linguistic practice.

Little has been said, however, about the aspects in which the vocabularies of our successful practices are governed by external conditions: if we were exchanging reasons in the context of a scientific theory or a particular illness, for example, operations and their outcomes will count as successful practical bearings. This operationalist aspect is somewhat neglected in Brandom’s discussion, though it does not necessarily means that Brandom omits the importance of non-inferential elements, as his acceptance of concepts like ‘qualia’ reflects.

## 7. Conclusion

We have noticed that both inferentialism and operationalism denote important aspects of pragmatism. The balance seems to be given by the maxim, which prompted Peirce to be an inferentialism of a very strong type, as well as an “extreme” realist of universals given its operationalist (operations presuppose a reality that will resist our experiments). Brandom and Putnam have revived pragmatism in clever and creative ways, but both of them seemed to strive to achieve a balance in which we want to clarify our inferential commitments.

Pragmatism in the narrow sense, followed from the maxim, unifies the insights found in the broad version of pragmatism:

- An inferentialist and operationalist character of the maxim.
- A set of features traditionally associated with pragmatism follows from the inferentialist and operationalist features of the maxim.

- A system of pragmatist philosophy can follow from the use of the maxim.

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