

AN HEGELIAN SOLUTION TO A TANGLE OF PROBLEMS FACING BRANDOM'S ANALYTIC
PRAGMATISM

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The innovative and ambitious program of analytic pragmatism introduced by Robert Brandom in his 1994 *Making It Explicit* and developed in subsequent writings (Brandom 1994, 2000, 2002, 2009, 2010, 2011) constitutes one of the most thoroughgoing recent reinterpretations of the nature of analytic philosophy and its place in the history of philosophy. Brandom's philosophy has its basis in a semantic theory, "inferentialism", that treats the meaning of a judgment as dependent upon those inferential relations to other possible judgments within which it stands. Moreover, on his account, not only are these inferential relations necessary for a judgment's meaningfulness, they are also *sufficient*.¹ This "strong" inferentialism *reverses* the traditional "representationalist" account of these issues that he sees as dominating philosophy since the seventeenth century. On the representationalist account, the capacity for representation is seen as intrinsic to mental states, with expressions deriving their conceptual contents from those states. In contrast, for Brandom the conceptual contents of the mental states are best regarded as determined by the contents of the linguistic *acts* giving expression to them—acts directed to and interpretable by others. This focus on the primacy of action constitutes a type of *pragmatism*, but in a move highly unusual in analytic philosophy, Brandom links this inferentialist, analytic version of pragmatism to the rationalist–idealist tradition by treating his strong inferentialism as continuous with Hegel's transformation of Kant's transcendental idealism.

¹ "The weak inferentialist thesis is that inferential articulation is *necessary* for specifically *conceptual* contents. The strong inferentialist thesis is that broadly inferential articulation is *sufficient* for specifically conceptual contentfulness—that is, that there is nothing more to conceptual content than its broadly inferential articulation" (Brandom 1994, 131).

With his appeal to Hegel as the forerunner to strong inferentialism, Brandom challenges the standard assumptions about the relation between analytic philosophy and the earlier history of modern philosophy. Here we might think of Russell as having articulated the conventional view: it was the new approach to logic that had emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a revolution to which he was a key contributor—that showed what was systematically wrong with the type of idealist metaphysics that had seduced many earlier in that century. The idealists had simply been misled by faulty assumptions deriving from the term-logical conception of judgments that had ruled since the time of Aristotle but that had come to be replaced by a different approach to logical form deriving from Frege. This new logic, able to utilize polyadic predicates and thereby schematize relations, now enabled philosophy to reach back over the heads of the idealists and re-establish a continuity with the earlier, more atomistic, empiricist tradition. With its logically sophisticated version of empiricism, analytic philosophy might thereby be seen as severing its links with idealism in virtue of its having brought to completion the modern break with *Aristotelianism*. As it was this break that had marked the emergence of modern physics in the seventeenth century, analytic philosophy, on the Russellian account, can be seen as the philosophical inheritor of the rise of modern scientific culture.

This self-image of analytic philosophy was not to go unchallenged, however, with some seeing Wilfrid Sellars's classic critique of the early analytic marriage of logic and empiricism—the well-known critique of the “Myth of the Given” (Sellars 1997)—as marking a new “Kantian” phase within analytic philosophy.² Brandom's further repositioning of analytic philosophy away from empiricism and towards the rationalist–idealist tradition clearly builds on the Sellarsian critique.³ Here, two features of Brandom's approach are crucial. First, he takes up the early Frege's treatment of the logical structure of a judgment as reflecting its inferential relations to other judgments. Next, following Sellars, he broadens the range of inferential

² According to Richard Rorty, Sellars himself described his philosophical project as “an attempt to usher analytic philosophy out of its Humean and into its Kantian stage” (Rorty 1997, 3).

³ Rorty adds that “Brandom's work can be usefully seen as an attempt to usher analytic philosophy from its Kantian to its Hegelian stage” (1997, 8–9).

relations between judgments to non-formal or “material” inferences. With this latter move, Brandom seeks to free Frege’s inferentialist account of logical form from the reliance of any input of some extra-logical “Given”. The switching from empiricism to the rationalist–idealist tradition as the antecedent of analytic philosophy is thereby complete.

Brandom’s bold reinterpretation of the relations between idealism and analytic philosophy has, not surprisingly, been resisted by many from *both* camps. For some Hegelians (e.g., Houlgate 2007), Brandom has replaced the real Hegel with a post-Fregean “analytic” simulacrum, while for many analysts, he has been far too radical in his severing of the links between analytic philosophy and the earlier empiricist “representationalist” stance. Here, I will not be concerned with the question of Brandom’s faithfulness to the historical Hegel *per se* beyond that of his construal of Hegel as a strong inferentialist. Hegel, as I will argue in the latter parts of this essay, cannot be aligned with the uniformly anti-Aristotelian dimension of the classical narrative of analytic philosophy, a dimension that is to a large degree preserved in Brandom’s reinterpretation. But the significance of this fact is not merely historiographical, as the retention of *Aristotelian* features within Hegel’s philosophy, I suggest, allow him to offer solutions to problems about Brandom’s strong inferentialism that worry contemporary *analysts*.

I will thus proceed as follows: in the first section of the paper I direct attention to a group of connected problems that might be seen as expressions of a more general problem specified by Michael Kremer (2010) as Brandom’s inability to provide a plausible account of what he (Brandom) terms the “representational purport” of judgment—an explanation of “what it is to express or exhibit a content that purports to *represent* something” (Brandom 1994, 76–7). As Brandom explains, “treating something as a representation involves acknowledging the possibility that it *misrepresents*—that the representational taking is a *mistaking* (the object represented does not exist, the state of affairs represented does not obtain)” (Ibid, 78). But Kremer argues that Brandom is able to produce no more than a “*formal* conception of representation, and of the objects represented” (Kremer 2010, 234). That is, being “unable to give an adequate account of representational *success*”, he is thereby also

unable to give an account of “representational purport”. In short, Brandom has thrown out the baby of any notion of “representation” with the bathwater of *representationalism*, and so has been unable to capture the common-sensical idea that a judgment can be true or false only because it is fundamentally *about* something, the nature of which has a say in this issue of that judgment’s truth or falsity.

This core problem, I suggest, is reflected in more specific criticisms that have been, or could be, made by different analytic critics. Thus in the first sections of the paper I look at ways in which the problem is expressed in Brandom’s approach to *object* perception, to *de re* attitudes, to perceptual *experience*, and to the *modal* distinction between possibility and actuality—all able to be understood, I suggest, as expressions of what Kremer diagnoses as Brandom’s inability to offer anything more than a “formal” account of representation. Taken together, I suggest, they signal substantive difficulties for Brandom’s program. In the final sections of the paper I then briefly turn to Hegel, who, I argue, has an account of judgment that suggests a solution to these problems. Here my presentation of Hegel will be a version of the “inferentialist” reading offered by Brandom, albeit a “weakly” inferentialist one. While weak inferentialism is in the spirit of those offered to Brandom by Kremer and others, they standardly appeal to *Kant* as the paradigmatic weak inferentialist, hoping to retain something of the residual empiricism of Kant’s position. In contrast, I suggest that Brandom is *correct* in identifying Hegel as having provided a fruitful path beyond the residual and problematic empiricist/representationalist tendencies in both Kant and much contemporary analytic philosophy. In fact, from the inferentialist perspective, Kant’s account of intuition as a form of representation can be seen to suffer from a version of the problem of “formalism” that Kremer diagnoses in Brandom himself. Where Brandom goes wrong on my account is in thinking of this path beyond Kant as leading to the strong inferentialism he himself espouses. This is a result of his unilateral championing of the victory of Fregean over Aristotelian logic. In contrast, I suggest that from an *idealist* perspective, it makes no sense to pose a general question as to which is the “right” logic, and that this allows Hegel to hold onto aspects of Aristotelian logic for specific purposes.

Before surveying this tangle of problems besetting Brandom's project, I will briefly review its broad outlines.

Inferentialism contra representationalism

According to Brandom, representationalists typically think of awareness in terms of the possession of mental contents that somehow intrinsically represent or picture worldly things or states of affairs. Descartes provides the paradigm, picturing humans as “producers and consumers of representings”. It is this capacity for representation that for the representationalist distinguishes the mind “from a world of merely represented and representable things” (Brandom 1994, 6). In turn representationalists typically conceive of linguistic expression as borrowing representational content from such primordially representational inner states: the mind's capacity for representing the world is treated as the “unexplained explainer” (Ibid., 93). But this, according to Brandom, leads to an impoverished theory of judgment. Singular terms are regarded as naming or standing for particular objects and, by a type of extension, general terms are similarly thought of as naming something—shareable properties or essential natures of things, for example. Extended to judgments, this “designational” model results in two characteristic mistakes: “assimilating sentences to complex names, and assimilating judging to predicating” (Ibid., 84). This view, he thinks, was finally put to rest in the late nineteenth century by Frege's approach to the semantics of predicate terms, treating them as corresponding to *functions* rather than names of any sort. Frege's revolution was not unprecedented, however, and Brandom finds the prehistory of Frege's modern approach to semantics in the rationalist–idealist tradition.

With his account of judgment, Kant had broken with the designational model: for him the judgment was the “fundamental unit of awareness or cognition, the minimum graspable”⁴—this doctrine anticipating Frege's later idea of the “priority of

⁴ “The pre-Kantian tradition took it for granted that the proper order of semantic explanation begins with a doctrine of concepts or terms, divided into singular and

the propositional”—that is, the so-called “context principle” stating that the semantics of sub-sentential terms derives from the role they play in complete sentences which are the primary bearers of meaning (Frege 1997, 90). A remnant of the older designational model remained in both Kant and Frege, however. In Kant, it is the idea of non-conceptual *sensory intuitions* allowing a type of singular reference to the world that is at variance with the doctrine of the priority of the judgments and propositional contents. Thus “it remained for Hegel ... to complete the *inversion* of the traditional order of semantic explanation by beginning with a concept of experience as inferential activity and discussing the making of judgments and the development of concepts entirely in terms of the roles they play in that inferential activity” (Brandom 1994, 92; see also 2002, chs 6 & 7). In Frege’s case, a similar retention of elements of the older representationalist paradigm is found in the atomistic set-theoretic formal semantics that returns in the later Frege and is found in most of those coming after him (Brandom 1994, 96–7; 2000, 49–52). Thus Brandom appeals to Frege’s *early* work with its conception that a judgment’s logical form is to be considered a reflex of its inferential relations to other judgments (Brandom 1994, 94–7), as the source of his strong-inferentialist approach.

Brandom links this anti-representationalist idealist heritage with a pragmatist one running back through the likes of Wilfrid Sellars and W. V. O. Quine to logical pragmatists like Charles Sanders Peirce. Indeed, we might see Brandom’s approach to judgment as continuous with Peirce’s approach to *belief* as that “upon which a man is prepared to act” (Peirce 1960, vol. 5, 12). This idea of a preparedness to act might then be understood as translated by Brandom in terms of the notion of an agent being normatively *committed* to act, and in the context of analytic pragmatism’s post-linguistic-turn, the primary form of acting that is relevant becomes that of *asserting*. “What is it that we are *doing* when we assert, claim or declare something? The general answer is that we are undertaking a certain kind of *commitment*” (Brandom 1994, 167). This is a commitment to further acts of reason giving to an interlocutor, should they ask for them, as to why they should accept and be prepared to act on the original claim. Thus following Sellars, asserting becomes a move in a “game of

general, whose meaningfulness can be grasped independently of and prior to the meaningfulness of judgments. ... Kant rejects this.” Brandom 2000, 159.

giving and asking for reasons”.⁵ Assertion thus becomes an act of placing a claim in the “logical space of reasons” (Sellars 1997, §36), a space defined by the claim’s relations to others—relations of antecedence, consequence, or exclusion—that one utilizes in reason giving. And this is all one needs in order to develop an explanation of the *semantic content* of claims. Once more, Brandom appeals to Hegel as the forerunner to his own “incompatibility semantics” (2010, ch. 5).

Problems for strong inferentialism I: perception

Kremer, as we have noted, has argued that Brandom has resources sufficient only for a “formal” account of the idea of “representational purport”—of “what it is to express or exhibit a content that purports to *represent* something” (Brandom 1994, 76–7), and that this is so because Brandom is unable to give an account of what would *count as* representational success. Paradigmatically, we might think of perception as playing a crucial role here in determining the success or otherwise of our purported representations. Let’s say there is a debate about the contemporary existence of the thylacine, a carnivorous marsupial once found in Tasmania but for many years thought to be extinct. One way to find out whether our talk of present-day thylacines has or has not content is to try to *locate* one. There may be other evidence—finding what look like thylacine droppings, and so forth—but someone’s *seeing* a thylacine by *being in its presence* is usually taken as evidence of a quite different order.

Representationalists are, of course, on home ground with such an idea. Taking mental states as intrinsically representational, they have no trouble in thinking of how perceptual experience can be representational—for them perception is the paradigm of a representational mental state. Brandom, of course, opposes invoking the idea of representation as an “unexplained explainer”, but clearly needs some account of perception and its role in the formation of knowledge. He thus offers an account of perception that builds on, but also tries to correct, the earlier attempt to give an inferentialist account found in Wilfrid Sellars (Brandom 2002, ch. 12; 1994, ch. 2, V, 2 and ch. 4, III).

⁵ Brandom (1997, 159) attributes this idea to Sellars, while Sellars talks of “the ‘game’ of *reasoning*” in (2007, 31).

Following the early Frege, one might think of the semantics of *logical* concepts in terms of their roles linking judgments inferentially, but *empirical* concepts seem less easily assimilated to the inferential model. Here Brandom proposes a “two-ply” solution based on the work of Sellars. Empirical content, he tells us, “derives (at least in part) from the *reliable differential responsive dispositions* that those who have mastered the concepts exhibit with respect to their application” (Brandom 1994, 119). These dispositions may be what are *exhibited* when concepts are applied in judgments, but what is *asserted* in judgment is a different matter. The reliable differential responsive dispositions (RDRDs) forming the first-ply and underlying empirical judgments are not the preserve of cognitive beings—an appropriately trained parrot might reliably distinguish red from blue things by appropriate squawks, and even inorganic objects can “discriminate” in this way, as when an iron bolt “discriminates” between wet and dry environments by rusting or not rusting. What *is* the preserve of we *sapient* beings is the response that unfolds on the upper of the two levels or “plies”. Rather than simply make noises reliably associated with features of the environment, we typically produce *assertions* and put them into the “space of reasons”. That is, when I *assert* that *there is a thylacine next to the large gumtree*, my concept “thylacine”, the empirical content of which is rooted in my disposition to differentiate animals, is a component of a proposition that can be inserted into inferential relations. Asserting that there is a thylacine next to the gumtree, for example, commits me to the inferentially related claim that there is a *mammal* next to the gumtree and disallows the claim that the thylacine species is extinct. When I make an assertion I undertake a commitment to be prepared to accept certain assertions and refuse others on the basis of their inferential links to the content of the former, and it is such links that determine the semantic content of the former. But Brandom’s position here forces him to affirm what, for many, is a very counter-intuitive approach to talk of perception of *objects*. I will restrict myself to “seeing”.

Brandom appeals to the familiar example of the particle physicist who detects the presence of subatomic particles with the use of suitable apparatus. Being able to reliably differentiate the existence of mu-mesons, say, from their non-existence by observing and reporting on the events happening within the cloud chamber, the

physicist can be said to see or “observe” the mu-mesons. “The claim is”, Brandom sums up, that the physicist “is *directly* observing mu-mesons ... rather than indirectly, inferentially coming to a conclusion about mu-mesons on the basis of an *inference* ... from the presence of a vapour trail with a certain shape” (Brandom 1994, 223–4). But many have found this idea strongly counter-intuitive (for example, Apel et. al 2008). For them, it makes more sense to say that the physicist *really* sees the vapour trail, not the mu-meson, and makes an inference to the presence of the latter as what explains the observed vapour trail. An analogy might be seeing what seem to be thylacine droppings, rather than an actual thylacine.

Like many debates in philosophy, this one tends to peter out in appeals to different intuitions. Some, might say, following Susanna Siegel (2006), for example, that to *see* something requires that the seen object be phenomenologically differentiated from its immediate background. This would lead one to describe a cloud chamber not as an aid to *seeing* small things (like a microscope, say), but an instrument for *detecting* them. Here Brandom has the recourse of questioning the relevance of intuitions in philosophy. As Richard Rorty (1982) had argued, might it not be the case that our intuitions simply follow our speech habits, and why should we be so wedded to them? We might, however, pursue these issues along a different path, as arguments over the issue of *object perception* seem effectively continuous with ones that are expressed in terms of the distinction between “*de re*” and “*de dicto*” attitudes. To bring out the specificity of Brandom’s analysis here, it may be helpful to contrast his approach to that of Tyler Burge (2007, ch. 3; 2009).

Problems for Strong Inferentialism 2: De Re Attitudes

De re attitudes are thought of as intentional states directed to *particular* things—*particular* “*re*”s. To hold a *de re* belief, for example, is to believe something *of* some particular thing, believe that *it* has some particular attribute. In contrast, what is believed in a “*de dicto*” belief is the whole “*dictum*”—the whole of *what is said*—a whole proposition that can be true or false. Brandom’s thesis of the “priority of the propositional” (Brandom 1994, 79) would suggest that the basic form of intentionality is “*de dicto*”, with a complete propositional content, and indeed this is how he explicitly treats the relation of *de re* to *de dicto* forms.

In the analytic tradition, talk of the “*de re/de dicto*” distinction had been reanimated by W. V. O. Quine who, in the 1950s, raised the issue in relation to problems concerning quantifying into “referentially opaque” contexts such as beliefs (Quine 1956). This is indeed the spirit in which Brandom approaches the distinction, as his concern focuses on the substitutability of singular terms in both *de re* and *de dicto* contexts (Brandom 1994, 502). Because one can, seemingly, substitute terms in *de re* ascriptions, Brandom treats these as the epistemically weaker form that “may be thought of as formed from *de dicto* ones by *exporting* a singular term from within the ‘that’ clause prefacing it with ‘of’, and putting a pronoun (or other anaphoric dependent) in the original position” (Ibid.). In the late 1970s, however, Tyler Burge argued against the approach initiated by Quine, stating that it “tended to suggest that *de re* belief needs to be explained in terms of what came to seem the clearer and more basic notion—*de dicto* belief” (Burge 2007, 44). In contrast, Burge was to argue that, more in accordance with our everyday intuitions, “*de re* belief is in important ways more fundamental than the *de dicto* variety; and this can be seen if one attends to its role in basic cognitive activities” (Ibid.). For Burge, the basic cognitive activity in question was the formation of perceptual beliefs, and these beliefs were taken as the paradigms of *de re* intentional states.

In Burge’s account, *de re* beliefs are context specific beliefs whose contents contain the analogue of an indexical expression, such as a demonstrative, used deictically to “pick out a *re*” in the environment (Burge 2007, 51 & 68).⁶ Such demonstrative discrimination still stands in the need of a concept, and so a typical *re*

⁶ Not that this picking out should be thought of as concept-free. Rather than bare demonstratives, Burge sees this demonstrative element as bound up with conceptual forms of designation. He argues that “*mental representation is always representation-as*” and “rules out any view that maintains that one perceives, conceives, or things about objects, properties, or relations without doing so in any particular way that constitutes some perspective on them” (Burge 2009, 249). The subject of a *de re* belief should thus *not* be thought of as represented by some analogue of a naked demonstrative, “this”, but by the analogue of a demonstrative concept, a “this such”.

of a *de re* attitude would thereby be something designated by a term like “this man”, the use of which could be accompanied by pointing or otherwise indicating something in the perceivable environment. In contrast, *de dicto* attitudes “are ascribed by indicating representational contents that contain no demonstratives or indexicals” (Burge 2007, 71). There are some singular terms that can be “exported” from a *de dicto* context in the style of Quine (or Brandom), but these cannot include terms with some demonstrative element, as properly *de dicto* contents exclude demonstrative or indexical elements. Thus we might think of a referring expression like “the shortest spy”, with no implicit indexical element, as able to be “exported” to get what formally looks like a *de re* ascription, as when we infer from “Ralph believes that the shortest spy is such and such” to “Ralph believes *of* the shortest spy that he is such and such”. But this is not to ascribe to Ralph a *properly de re* attitude as when one ascribes a perceptual belief, say, to Ralph. Ralph’s actually having a proper *de re* attitude directed towards *some particular person* would necessitate his being able to use demonstratives such as “this man”, in saying something like “*This man* is a spy”.

Brandom’s analysis of *de re* attitudes fits with his insistence that the particle physicist “sees” the mu-mesons, as, following Quine, the term “mu-mesons” would be thought of as “exported” from a prior *de dicto* attribution such as the attribution “the physicist sees *that* a mu-meson is present”. Of course, a critic of Brandom who objected to the idea of the physicist’s *seeing* mu-mesons could readily agree that the physicist might be said to see *that* a mu-meson is present. Where such a critic draws the line is in denying that this implies that the physicist thereby can be said to see *the mu-meson* itself. From a Burgean perspective, the type of attribution that results from the Quine–Brandom analysis involving the “exporting” of a singular term from the *de dicto* content is not a genuine *de re* attribution, but a *pseudo-de re* one. In a *post-exportational* form such as (the somewhat mangled) “the physicist sees *of* the mu-meson that it is present”, the physicist’s cognitive connection to the mu-meson is no more perceptual than the relation found in, say, “Ralph *believes of* the shortest spy that, such and such”. In short, seeing something *of* a mu-meson (whatever that might mean) does not imply that the mu-meson is *seen*.

In bringing out these differences between Brandom and Burge, we should not be misled into thinking that Burge’s position is that of the “representationalism” targeted

by the inferentialist critique. Quite the contrary: Burge has been a major figure in the development of an “externalist” account of semantic content, and he shares many of Brandom’s objections to traditional representationalism. Like Kremer, Burge is more properly seen as a “weak inferentialist”, claiming that some sort of representational content (perceptual contents he thinks humans share with non-human animals), are necessary for human mindedness, just as the capacity to place utterances in inferential relations is necessary. Again, much comes down in these arguments to which formulations one grasps as intuitive or counter-intuitive, but we may once more find analogues for these argumentative positions in different areas of inquiry, allowing the objections to Brandom to accumulate.

Problems for Strong Inferentialism 3: Experience

John McDowell (2005, 2010) has argued that Brandom’s account of perception is incomplete without a coherent account of perceptual *experience*, and that an account of perceptual experience is *impossible* within the framework of strong inferentialism. We have seen evidence for this so far: perception, on Siegel’s analysis, requires “phenomenological discrimination”—something that cannot be simply reduced to the form of behavioural “discrimination” that Brandom deals with in terms of the possession of “reliable discriminatory responsive dispositions”. Moreover, while McDowell shares Brandom’s critique of traditional representationalism, he points out that *strong* inferentialism is not itself required for the critique of the assumptions of the representationalist paradigm. For *that* purpose, no more than the weak version, which claims the necessity of inferential articulation for conceptual contentfulness, is needed (McDowell 2005, 129). McDowell’s criticism of Brandom, like Kremer’s and Burge’s criticism of Quine, thus opens up a place for some necessary contributions of *experience* within a broadly inferentialist account, and here McDowell appeals to Kant and the retention of some form of Kant’s notion of empirical “intuition”. Similar appeals to Kant and to the role of the notion of intuition are made by Kremer (2010) and Burge (2007, 53n.11 and 67).

One dimension of Brandom’s response here is effectively a version of that favoured by his mentor Richard Rorty. What is needed here is more “circumvention”

than argumentation—more a change of vocabulary than arguing against an opponent within *their* vocabulary. As for experience, as Brandom puts it, “Experience is not one of my words” (2010, 205n.7). As for *intuition*, Brandom argues that we can do without it, attempting, in *Making It Explicit*, to free Kant’s thought from the necessity of the notion of intuition by disentangling what he takes to be the three *functional tasks* performed by the concept–intuition distinction, and arguing that each function can be performed by concepts when they are rightly understood. In Kant, “concepts contrast with intuitions first as *form* to *matter*, which they structure or organize. Second, they contrast with intuitions as *general* to *particular*. Finally, they contrast with intuitions as products of *spontaneity* or intellectual activity, as opposed to products of *receptivity*” (Brandom 1994, 616). While each of these functions, he points out, is important and needs to be accounted for, none can be properly understood “as distinguishing the conceptual from some non-conceptual element in judgment” (Ibid.). The three distinctions can be given a functional explication within the resources of modern Fregean logic *without* the need for anything *non-conceptual*. *Qua* conceptual, such elements will from there be able to be accounted for inferentially.

I will not attempt to follow the details of Brandom’s analysis here, but rather raise the question as to whether he has captured *all* the functional distinctions that need to be captured. Let us briefly consider the *first* distinction. The inferentialist reinterpretation, says Brandom, will simply bypass any “form-content” distinction because, for the inferentialist, semantic *content* simply *is* a reflex of inferential form: “The inferential role, which is the conceptual role, *is* the content” (Brandom 1994, 618). But one aspect of Kant’s idea of intuitive content that appears to elude this reinterpretation is that of the phenomenal content of experience. In Kant’s account, the generality of concepts means that concepts can never capture the *particular* way in which something that instantiates that concept in experience does so. Let’s say I am wearing a blue tie. According to Kant, experience will show the blue tie to be some particular *shade* of blue.⁷ Of course, I may be able to make the predicate more

⁷ I am generalizing here from Kant’s “anticipations of perception” in the *Critique of Pure Reason* in which he claims that we know *a priori* of a perception that

specific and say that it is *sky blue* or *navy blue*, or some other shade, but with the idea of the *singularity* of sensory intuition Kant seems to insist that there will always be a further range of such sky blues or navy blues, an idea summed up in his claim that there are no “*infima-species*”, no ultimate units of analysis that are both “*singular*” such that no further division is possible, and yet *conceptual* (Kant 1998, A655–6/B683–4). Perceptual experience, it might be said, is more fine-grained than what is actually captured by *any* general concept. But *this* feature of perceptual experience does not seem to be captured in the *de dicto* expression: the semantics of a *de dicto* expression depends simply on whether the proposition is true or false. The *way* in which my tie makes the proposition true or false drops from consideration altogether.

This experiential dimension of experience can be seen as linked to the issue of object-perception *qua de re* intentional attitude. One might argue that our pragmatic rules of language use are such that a person’s claim that they have *seen* or *observed* something makes appropriate a particular response from an interlocutor—that of asking *what that thing looked like?* If you tell me that you saw a thylacine in your backyard, surely I can ask questions of that type: How big was it? What colour were its stripes? And so on. But it seems meaningless to ask this question of the particle physicist who is described as observing the mu-meson. One could, of course, ask the question: What did the *vapour trail* look like? How long was it? Was it curved or straight? But there seems nothing here at all similar with respect to the mu-meson itself. There is nothing that it is like to “look” like a mu-meson in any analogous sense.

Problems for Strong Inferentialism 4: Modality

The role of experience in object perception in turn links to another function of Kant’s intuition–concept distinction that eludes Brandom’s reconstruction, and this brings in a topic that Brandom does *not* want to circumvent—that of modality. Indeed, Brandom explicitly wants not only to give a theory of modality—he wants to give a

it will be of some particular *intensity*. Nevertheless, the point, I think, is well within the scope of Kant’s general position.

“Kantian” one, at that (Brandom 2010, ch. 5; 2011, ch. 3). But Kant’s account of modality is tightly tied to his concept-intuition distinction. When we conceive of merely *possible* situations we cannot, of course, appeal to intuitive content to distinguish among *them*. There is only *one* possible situation whose determinacy includes the participation of intuition, and that is an actual one:

The postulate for cognizing the **actuality** of things requires **perception**, thus sensation of which one is conscious ... In the **mere concept** of a thing no characteristic of its existence can be encountered at all ... that the concept precedes the perception signifies its mere possibility; but perception, which yields the material for the concept, is the sole characteristic of actuality. (Kant 1998, A225/B272–3)

For Kant, the specification of possibilities is thereby exhausted by conceptual determination in contrast to the ways in which actualities are not. For example, while there is no necessity in my tie’s being blue—I might have purchased a yellow one—there seem to be important distinctions to be made between my actual blue tie and its differently coloured possible alternatives. While it makes sense to ask the further question concerning my actual tie as to its *particular* shade of blue, it does not make sense to ask an analogous question about my *possible* yellow one. Of course I could always make further stipulations here at will—it’s possible, I might think, that I had brought one that was closer to the colour of lemons than daffodils, and so on. But this does not seem analogous to the way such questions can be posed about my actual tie. In the latter case there is difference between *answering* the question and just giving a further *stipulation* of the situation.⁸

⁸ In Redding (2014a) I draw on the approach of Robert Stalnaker to argue that although Brandom aims to capture a “Kantian” position on modality he fails to do so, and that his account has certain features more in common with David Lewis’s Leibnizian possible-worlds account of modality than a Kantian one.

The Identity and Difference of De Re and De Dicto Judgment Forms in Hegel's Weak Inferentialism

Brandom stands on good grounds, I believe, in treating Hegel as an inferentialist critic of the early modern representationalist paradigm and in his claim that he frees Kant from a type of “representationalist” lapse attendant on his use of the concept–intuition distinction. The problem with Kant’s notion of intuition is that it looks susceptible to Sellars’s famous critique of the “Myth of the Given”, which states that nothing *non-conceptual* can stand in the appropriate justificatory relations to the contents of judgments. But while Hegel develops Kant’s *implicitly* inferentialist critique of representationalism, Hegel’s texts show this to be a *weak* inferentialist, and as such free of the thicket of problems facing Brandom. Here I can do no more than sketch such a reading of Hegel and suggest some directions in which it is heading, and so, relying on analyses done elsewhere, I will briefly touch on Hegel’s treatment of the logic of perceptual and non-perceptual judgments in Book III, Chapter 2 of his *Science of Logic*. Hegel, I will suggest, on all the topics surveyed above—those of *object perception, the de re / de dicto distinction, the role of experience and the issue of modality*—can be seen as consistently aligned with Brandom’s weak inferentialist critics. But he does so without relying on the problematic notion of a non-conceptual form of representation, the intuition. A key consideration here is Hegel’s treatment of judgment.

Hegel treats *judging* as an act in which the “concept”—which we are to think of as the concept *qua* judging subject, the I, and not simply something said or thought *by* a subject *of an object*—is “realized” by “stepping into existence as determinate being [*das Treten ins Dasein als bestimmtes Sein*]” (Hegel 2010, 550 (translation altered)). We might, following Brandom, think of both theoretical and practical judgments as acts in which the I “steps into” determinate existence in the sense of assuming particular theoretical and practical, publically assessable *commitments*—that is, commitments concerning ways the world *is* or *should be*. Brandom captures the rationality implicit in such acts as residing in the norm that any agent’s *entitlement* to such a commitment can always be brought into question by others, and asked for justification. It is this pragmatic feature of language use that ties the *meaning* of a judgment to its inferential articulation. Nevertheless, aspects of Hegel’s approach

militate against Brandom's interpretation of him as a *strong* inferentialist. Here I will restrict attention to that part of Hegel's writings that can most directly be brought into relation with the general logical and semantic framework of the analytic authors referred to above—his treatment of the tradition of formal logic from in Book III of the *Science of Logic*.

In the section “Judgment” Hegel explores a variety of logical forms that the content of an expressed judgment may take, effectively, the three determinations of “the concept”—singularity, particularity and universality—being distributed between the subject and predicate places of the expressed judgment. This forms a series that leads ultimately to a judgment form, the “judgment of necessity”, that can equally be treated as a complex judgment *or* as an inferential relation between two judgments, and with this, Hegel's presentation transitions into his treatment of inferences, “syllogisms” (Hegel 2010, vol. 2, sect. 1, ch. 3). I interpret the transitions displayed from one form of judgment to another as meant to show how the ability to employ the earlier judgment form is ultimately dependent on the capacity to employ the later. Brandom's treatment of the capacity of an agent to use a judgment as dependent on their capacity to make inferences is in turn reflected in Hegel's transitioning from the treatment of judgment to that of inference or “syllogism”. Furthermore, Brandom treats as a precondition of the capacity to *infer* that the judge belongs to public reasoning, and so inference-making, language games. In Hegel, this is reflected within the “Syllogism” section by the transition from the abstract syllogism to the *concrete* syllogism, which I have interpreted elsewhere as appealing to concrete social practices of *syllogising* (Redding 1996, 156–163). Here, however, I want to focus simply on an early distinction made between judgment forms that Hegel makes on the basis of the difference between ways of interpreting the relation of subject to predicate in those forms, and pose the question of the relation of the respective capacities to make such judgments.

In his introductory paragraphs to the treatment of judgment, Hegel points to the need to examine “how the *connection* of subject and predicate in judgment is determined, and how the two are themselves determined”. The judgment has in general “totalities for its [subject and predicate] sides ... that are at first essentially self-subsistent”, and so “the unity of the concept is at first, therefore, only a

connection of self-subsistent terms” (Hegel 2010, 552). Hegel makes it clear this follows from the nature of the linguistic form in which a judgment is expressed. Thus, “*grammatically* speaking this kind of subjective relation that proceeds from the indifferent externality of subject and predicate is perfectly valid, for it is *words* that are here externally combined” (Ibid.). This analysis of the judgment clearly reflects the approach of Aristotelian term logic. However, judgment *qua act* is to be properly regarded as “the self-diremption of the concept”—the splitting of an original unity, “the concept”, into its determinations of *singularity*, *particularity*, and *universality*. Understanding the judgment in this way as resulting from an *original splitting* into determinations that are expressed in separate subject and predicate terms thus renders the initial analysis of a judgment as a *combination* of self-subsistent terms “superficial”. Rather than subject and predicate terms being self-subsistent, it must be “in the judgment” itself that subject and predicate “first receive their determination” (Hegel 2010, 553). From this angle, the judgment itself appears to be the basic unit, such that the components gain their significance from the role they play within the judgment. In contrast to the first analysis, this seems to reflect a *propositional* rather than term logic, the approach to logic first muted by the *Stoics*.⁹ This distinction between two ways of understanding the determination and connection of subject and predicate terms then becomes expressed in different conceptions of judgment form—conceptions that give rise to distinct ways of conceiving of the relation of predication holding between subject and predicate terms.

Hegel thus goes on to explain that a predicate may be understood as *inhering in* a subject, as found in “judgments of existence [*Dasein*]” (Hegel 2010, 557–568), or alternatively, a *subject* may be conceived as *subsumed under* a predicate, as found in “judgments of reflection” (Ibid, 568–575). In turn, this distinction is reflected in the different types of *inferences* (syllogisms) that judgments exist within (Redding 2014b). In earlier writings Hegel had signalled what seems to be the same distinction in a different way: in one form of judgment, an intuition may be said to subsume a concept; in another a concept may be said to subsume an intuition (Hegel 1979, 99–100). This earlier invocation of Kant’s concept–intuition distinction suggests that

⁹ I have elsewhere (Redding 2013) charted Hegel’s sensitivity to the opposition between Aristotelian and Stoic approaches to logic.

Hegel is concerned with the “content-acquiring” function that Kant had afforded intuitions and the form-conferring function of that he had given to concepts, and a comment in the *Science of Logic* supports this. While the logical form involving inherence is said to express the judgement according to its content [*Inhalt*] that involving subsumption is said to express that judgement according to its *form* [*Form*] (Hegel 2010, 560–561).¹⁰ It is this distinction between judgment forms, I suggest, that plays the role in Hegel’s logic played by the distinction between intuition and concept in *Kant’s* transcendental logic. It is acquisition of *content* via the former type of judgment that eventually leads to the consideration of the syllogism itself as *concrete* and *objective*, and not merely an “empty” formal structure of subjective thinking.

With the idea of a judgment of existence Hegel clearly has in mind the type of judgments in which something is said *of* perceivable concrete objects that could be singled out within particular contexts by the use of phrases consisting of the definite article and a sortal term such as “the rose”. Here we might think of such a definite description as used in Donnellan’s referential rather than attributive sense (Donnellan 1966; Stalnaker 1970). This makes “the rose” function in a similar way to “this rose”, as the judge will have some *particular* rose in mind that could be indicated by an indexical.¹¹ Such judgments, I suggest, express “*de re*” intentional attitudes as understood by Burge—attitudes directed to specific perceivable things or “*re*”s in the judge’s immediate environment. Moreover, *what* is said about the object *via* the

¹⁰ Effectively, we find the same distinction, I suggest, in the opening chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, between the intentional attitudes of *perception* [*die Wahrnehmen*] and *the understanding* [*der Verstand*] (Hegel 1977, chs 2 & 3).

¹¹ Given that there is more than one rose in the universe, the phrase “the rose” when used in this sense will clearly depend on pragmatic context to pick out a single instance of rose. In the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel does occasionally use the demonstrative phrase “this rose” in illustrating judgments of existence, and it is used in the *Zusatz* to the relevant paragraphs ((Hegel 1991, §178 remark and §166, Addition). The use of the demonstrative, I believe, is in keeping with Hegel’s intention, making it explicit that in *judgments of existence* the subject term is to be understood as picking out a particular concrete instance of a kind that is immediately available to perception and thus specifiable by a demonstrative.

predicate of these judgments is conversely thought of as an attribute *as* found instantiated *in the particular way* that it is in *that particular object* represented in the subject. Thus, when saying “the rose is fragrant”, for example, the predicate term “fragrant” is meant to refer to the particular fragrance belonging to *that* particular rose (Hegel 2010, 560).¹² This phenomenal quality is one that Kant would have thought of as the content of a “singular” [*einzel*] intuition. While Brandom is correct that Hegel abandons the concept–intuition distinction, and thinks of such a determination as conceptual, Hegel nevertheless insists here that we have to think of the concept expressed by the predicate as a singularized universal—a concept, or “the concept”, in its moment of “singularity [*Einzelheit*]”.

Within the different “reflective” or “subsumptive” form of judgment expressions, however, terms such as “rose” and “fragrant” will function differently and be taken to express differently structured contents. Reflective judgments have the universal predicate “subsuming” the subject, and here all that is important is that the attributive-universal “fragrant” can subsume, that is, be true of or be satisfied by, all those things in the universe subsumed by the kind-universal “rose”.¹³ Importantly, judgments of reflection exhibit *explicit* quantification into singular, particular and universal forms (Hegel 2010, 530–549). If I say, “all roses are fragrant”, I need have no *particular* instance of a rose or particular fragrance in mind. Indeed, in the use of “all roses” I’m purportedly referring to roses that I’m not and never will be familiar with—*possible* roses that do not as yet exist, or perhaps ones that will never exist, and clearly, I cannot have their particular fragrances in mind. Just as Kant excludes intuitions from

¹² It might be thought that with the subject phrase “the rose” Hegel could be referring to the *kind* rose as in, “the rose as such”, and that the fragrance referred to is that specific to that kind rather than some particular instance of a rose. This, however, would be to confuse a *judgment of existence* with the later *categorical judgment*, as given in the example “the rose is a plant” (Hegel 2010, 576 and 1991, §177, addition).

¹³ It is this feature that led Bertrand Russell famously to treat universally quantified affirmative judgments as conditionals (Russell 1905). Here, the categorical judgment “all roses are fragrant” is understood roughly as “for all things, if that thing is a rose, then it is fragrant”. Such a form of analysis can already be found in Leibniz and Kant. On some of this history, see Redding 2007, “Introduction”.

judgments about possibility, Hegel excludes the singularized universals found in perceptual judgments (judgments of inherence) from judgments, such as universally quantified ones, that “range over” possibilities rather than pick out concrete and perceivable things.

In short, what is important for judgments of reflection is that the content expressed has a determinate “truth value”—is either true or false. These are judgments with a properly *de dicto* content in which the “priority of the propositional” holds. What is semantically primitive is the whole of what is said—believed as a dictum that is true or false *simpliciter*: true or false timelessly. In contrast, in the *de re* judgment “the rose is fragrant” where “the rose” is understood referentially, because the subject term can only be identified relative to some context, the truth or falsity of the judgment itself will be context specific. Tomorrow the particular rose in question may have withered and have lost its fragrance altogether. *De re* beliefs as expressed by judgments of inherence are about individual instances of kinds that change their properties, and so judgments about them cannot be expected to have the timeless character that we look for in those that express *de dicto* beliefs. Furthermore, without this timeless quality, they cannot be candidates for standing in what we normally think of inferential relations that hold because of their *form*—that is, relations of entailment.¹⁴

In the history of logic, Aristotle’s subject–predicate way of thinking of judgments typically expressed such *de re* attitudes, while Stoic and modern, proposition-first, conceptions of judgments better express *de dicto* ones. It was Aristotle’s term logic that had, as Brandom puts it, assimilated “judging to predicating”, by thinking of the subject and predicate terms as independently meaningful—one picking out an object and the other one of its attributes—and subsequently coupled together in the sentence, which is treated like a “complex name”. In the modern analyses of *de re* attitudes, what Aristotle had treated as the name of a perceivable attribute is treated as the type of “open sentence” that is left after a singular term is removed. But as we have seen,

¹⁴ While I can infer from “this rose is red” to “this rose is coloured”, the contextual nature of the referring terms rules out the explanation of this in terms of formal logic.

Burge does not think of the subject of the *de re*-attitude expressing sentence as the type of name that restores to the sentence full propositional status, as in the Quinean-Brandomian “exportation” thesis. With its essentially indexical subject term, functionally, Burge’s *de re* judgment form has the general shape of Aristotle’s term logic.

In Hegel’s presentation of *de re* judgments of inherence and *de dicto* judgments of subsumption in the *Science of Logic* *de re* forms are “aufgehoben” within further, more complex, judgment forms—most immediately, the related *de dicto* forms. The capacity to entertain *de re* attitudes depends on, it would seem, the capacity to entertain *de dicto* ones. But the crucial difference between Brandom and Hegel concerns how we are to understand this *Aufhebung* of *de re* forms into *de dicto* ones. As we have seen, for Brandom, *de dicto* judgments *explain de re* ones, as the ascription of *de re* judgments is logically derived from the ascription of *de dicto* ones. But I think it is clear that this is not how Hegel conceives of the relation of *Aufhebung*. For example, we might think of the *de re* attitude-expressing judgments of inherence as “aufgehoben” in the sense of negated by *de dicto* attitude-expressing judgments of subsumption. But they are also *preserved* within or *integrated* into them. Thus judgments of subsumption (reflection) will themselves become *aufgehoben* into a judgment form—the judgment of necessity—in which characteristics of both *de re* attitude-expressing judgment of inherence and *de dicto* attitude-expressing judgments of subsumption are combined.

Hegel might have relied on the “context principle” in his criticism of the “Myth of the Given”, but he was not, like Brandom, an adherent of the *priority* of the propositional. Hegel seems to demand a place for both *judgments* that are thought of as expressive of *de re* attitudes *and* ones expressive of *de dicto* attitudes. Indeed, he even appears to have an explicit logical precedent for this in the approach of the logical authority at Tübingen when he had been there as a student. Gottfried Ploucquet, the Leibnizian authority on logic there, whose work in formal logic Hegel was clearly familiar with, had claimed that the traditional “particular” judgment was capable of two different types of interpretation, one corresponding with a *de re* structure, the other with a *de dicto* one (Ploucquet 2006, §§12–16; Auer 1909), a pragmatic ambiguity that seems to have much in common with that between

“referential” and “attributive” readings of definite descriptions as treated by the likes of Donnellan and Stalnaker.

The Consequences of an Idealist Understanding of Logical Form

I have sketched a picture of Hegel’s treatment of logic in which he combines elements of rival Aristotelian term logic and Stoic propositional logic, and the question to be raised is surely that of the intelligibility of such a mix of divergent systems. But how we are to think of *this* must hinge on how we are to think of what is at stake in a “science” of logic understood from an idealist perspective.

Kant can be understood as having given the type of categories investigated by Aristotle an idealist as opposed to a realist interpretation. While Aristotle seems to have assumed that the categories of thought had to be conceived as reflecting categories of “being”, Kant reversed this, deriving his categories from forms of judgment. This could be thus read as advocating a type of formal idealism opposed to Aristotle’s formal realism—Kant’s logical structures deriving from a consideration of the normative conception of rational mindedness. On a realist interpretation, where different logics appeal to different fundamental categories, in the way that, say, Aristotelian and Stoic logics do, there could be no room for pluralism: no more than *one* of them could reflect the basic logical structure of the world itself. An idealist reading of logical structure, however, is not subject to *this* constraint: following Kant the idealist can reject the claim that the structure of thought must reflect the structure of the mind-independent world. However, Kant subjects his account of logical structure to another constraint. Logical structure must reflect the logical relations among diverse judgments that apply to different aspects of a *single world*; it must articulate the contents of a totality of compatible beliefs, as reflected, for example, in his conception of the “transcendental unity of apperception”. Moreover, Kant’s position is complicated by the fact that the logical structure of judgments has to serve another purpose: they must give structure *to experience itself*, as logical structure cannot be simply *found there* courtesy of the logical structure of the world that is experienced.

I suggest that, from Hegel's point of view, Kant had run these two latter requirements together, trying to do these two different jobs with a unified set of categories. But, as we have seen, Hegel thinks of the logical structure of judgments within which the world is presented in experience (the *de re* attitude-expressing judgments of determinate existence) as formally different from and irreducible to those that articulate the judgments so formed into inferential patterns (*de dicto* attitude-expressing judgments of reflection).¹⁵ In this way, by preserving both judgment forms, he is able to avoid the sorts of traps that Brandom falls into in his attempt to derive the logical shape required for the acquisition of content from that required for the achievement of consistency. But does not this come at the cost of rationality by its mixing of incompatible systems?

From Kant's point of view, the demands of integration of all our beliefs into a "transcendental unity of apperception" must rule out *de re* attitude-expressing beliefs, as I have treated them, because as context dependent and without a fully propositional content, their truth or falsity will be localized to time and place or some other context. They thereby won't be candidates for the required integration. But an Hegelian reply might be that thinking of rationality in terms of such a goal of the complete logical integration of all our beliefs is inappropriate. Kant's requirement pictures an epistemic ideal *qua* comprehensive unity that is as conceived of as in the traditional God's-eye view, despite the fact that Kant had abandoned the idea that the world revealed in this unity is the world "as it is in itself". Among the various problems of this picture from Hegel's point of view is the implicit idea of *God* involved. Even *God*, on Hegel's account, cannot completely transcend that element of his existence of an embodiedness and locatedness that binds him to the type of particular existence in time and space that is reflected in the necessity of *de re* attitudes (Redding 2012).

On Hegel's account, rationality demands that each one of us must be able to adopt a stance towards the world mediated by the Aristotelian categories that present things as perceivable instances of kinds with perceptible contrary-excluding properties. However, each must also be able to recognize their own beliefs in the sentences that

¹⁵ Of course the irreducibility also works the other way: *de dicto* judgment form cannot be derived from *de re* form.

others use to ascribe *to* one the various intentional states one is understood as having—that is, to grasp one’s own beliefs from the external point of view of others. But the world, with me in it, as understood from the point of view of another, is available to me only as the content of a *de dicto* expression. For *me*, especially in cases of disagreement, the world as grasped by another must have more the status of a possibility, in contrast to the world of my *de re* attitudes, which purports reveal the world as it actually is. Neither *de re* nor *de dicto* forms can be eliminated from this cognitive economy. To demand, as seemingly Kant does, that all beliefs be integrated into one logically coherent unity is to presuppose a picture of a knowing subject free of *de re* attitudes—a picture which is incompatible with the embodied and located situation in which each of us is ultimately located.

This, of course, will in turn raise an issue that is well beyond the scope of this paper—that of the role of contradiction in Hegel. What might be said, very briefly, is that Hegel clearly understood that mixing these different logical structures must generate the contradictions that Kant diagnosed as resulting from running together the heterogeneous forms of intuition and concept. But for Hegel there can be no sense in which this situation can be circumvented by Kant’s move of restricting our claims to being about something less than reality—“appearances” hiding an unknowable world in itself. But neither does this situation *need* to be circumvented, as the complete elimination of contradiction within a single coherent whole of *de dicto* beliefs is premised upon a faulty concept of an epistemic ideal. The genesis of contradiction is to be viewed as a constant necessity within the process of reason, such that it provides reason itself with something to work upon. This continuing tension between the demands of “representation” and “inference” is the mark of Hegel’s *weak* inferentialism.

Brandom is to be applauded for his demonstration of the relevance of Hegel and the idealist tradition to a contemporary analytic pragmatist form of philosophy. However, the inferentialist *reversal* of representationalism via which he acknowledges the rationalist–idealist paternity of analytic philosophy does not capture the sense in which in Hegel the notion of representation might be said to be *aufgehoben* by that of inference such that an element of the former notion is transformed but preserved within the latter. At a more general level, it might be said

that with his reversal of the conventional self-conception of analytic philosophy as continuous with the earlier representationalist tradition of empiricism, Brandom nevertheless retains the central feature of the Russell's narrative in which analytic philosophy is seen as emerging from the unilateral victory of Fregean over Aristotelian logic, and modern over classical thought. By maintaining a sense in which the classical Aristotelian approach is *aufgehoben* within the modern, Hegel has resources for addressing problems that face Brandom's strong inferentialism.

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