Brandom and Hegel on Objectivity, Subjectivity and Sociality
A Tune Beyond Us, Yet Ourselves

door

Michael James DeMoor

geboren te Edmonton
promotor: prof. dr. L. Zuidervaart
copromotor: prof. dr. P. Koslowski

This dissertation is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a conjoint Ph.D. degree program offered by the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto and the VU University Amsterdam.
### Contents

Abstract v  
Acknowledgments vi  
Abbreviations ix  

**PART ONE: BRANDON ON CONCEPTS, OBJECTIVITY, SUBJECTIVITY AND SOCIALITY**

**Chapter One: Conceptuality and Normativity**  
Introduction 1  
1.1. Kant on Intentionality and Normativity 4  
1.2. Sellars 11  
1.3. Brandom on Conceptuality and Normativity 14  
1.3.1. The Primacy of a Normative Pragmatics 15  
1.3.2. Brandom’s Semantics 23  

**Chapter Two: Objectivity**  
Introduction 40  
2.1. Kant on Objectivity and the Universal Validity of the Categories 42  
2.2. Fichte’s “Intersubjective” Turn Toward Objectivity 48  
2.3. Brandom on Objectivity 60  

**Chapter Three: Sociality, Subjectivity and Truth**  
Introduction 95  
3.1. Sociality: I-Thou and I-We 95  
3.2. Subjectivity, Self-Consciousness and “I” – Fichte, then Brandom 111  
3.3. Truth 138  

**Chapter Four: Conclusion of Part 1 and Brandom’s Hegel**  
4.1. Conclusion 150  
4.2. Brandom’s Hegel 151  

**PART TWO: HEGEL ON OBJECTIVITY, SUBJECTIVITY AND SOCIALITY**

**Chapter Five: Hegel**  
Introduction 166  
5.1. Objectivity and Apperception 168  
5.2. The Constitution of the Thing in Property 186  
5.3. Being-for-Me and Being-Mine 195  
5.4. Truth and Self-Criticism in Absolute Knowing 206
PART THREE: A HEGELIAN CRITIQUE OF BRANDON

Chapter Six: Introduction to Part Three and the First-Person  223
  Introduction  223
  6.1. The First-Person  227
  6.2. Having a Perspective  232
  6.3. Attributing a Perspective  240
  6.4. Self-Recognition  248

Chapter Seven: The Second-Person  257
  Introduction  257
  7.1. First and Second-Persons  257
  7.2. Second and Third-Persons  263
  7.3. Brandom’s Reply to Habermas  271

Chapter Eight: I, Thou and We  286
  Introduction  286
  8.1. Review of Brandom on I-We Social Practices  287
  8.2. Validity and Lifeworld  290
  8.3. Tradition and Authority  297
  8.4. Constitutive and Genetic Priority: Hegel and Teleology  311
  8.5. Back to Brandom  321
  8.6. Sociality Beyond Discourse  330

Chapter Nine: I, We and It  338
  Introduction  338
  9.1. Deflationism, Phenomenalism, Propositionalism  339
  9.2. Objective Idealism and Nominalism: Habermas  342
  9.3. Nominalism and The Space of Reasons: Rödl and McDowell  349
  9.4. Between Nominalism and Objective Idealism: Summary and Set-up  365
  9.5. The Unboundedness of the Normative without the Unboundedness of the Conceptual: Heidegger.
    9.5.1. Heidegger on Truth  369
    9.5.2. Heidegger Contra Brandom  377
    9.5.3. Nominalism and Space of Reasons Again  383

Chapter Ten: Hegel and Conclusion  396
  Introduction  396
  10.1. Appearance, Truth and the Unboundedness of the Conceptual in Hegel  397
  10.2. Conclusion: Brandom, German Idealism and Hegel  414

Samenvatting  420

Bibliography  424
Abstract

This dissertation is an exposition and critique of Robert Brandom’s theory of discursive objectivity. It discusses this theory both within the context of Brandom’s own systematic philosophical project and, in turn, within the ideas and questions characteristic of the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition in German philosophy. It is argued that Brandom’s attempt to articulate a theory of the objectivity of discursive norms (and hence also of the content of discursive attitudes) resembles J.G. Fichte’s development of themes central to Kant’s philosophy. This “Fichtean” approach to the problem of objectivity is then compared and contrasted to that of G.W.F. Hegel. Though Brandom, Fichte and Hegel share the desire to derive an account of the conditions of objectivity from the social character is discursive practices, Hegel offers a version of this project that differs with respect to the nature of self-consciousness, sociality and truth. It is then argued that Brandom’s theory suffers significant internal inconsistencies that could be avoided by adopting a more “Hegelian” approach to these three themes. More specifically, Brandom’s own project requires that he recognize the necessity and irreducibility of first-person and second-person discursive attitudes, as well as that he recognize the role of “I-We” social practices for discursive objectivity. Furthermore, he must include in his explanations some form of natural teleology and hence he must abandon his deflationary approach to semantic explanation. However, Brandom’s methodological and metaphysical commitments prevent him from doing so.
Acknowledgments

Whatever its bulk, I know this dissertation to be a small thing, though I have faith nevertheless that Christ has the power to take it up into the cosmic scope of his redemptive work. If it is, there are many who deserve thanks.

First chronologically – but by no means in that manner alone – my family has been a source of nurture, support and inspiration from before I can remember. In particular I thank my father for sowing the seeds of a love of philosophy in my young mind and for showing support and good humour when I made him the audience for my early attempts to show off my nascent discursive chops. Now, despite my having many years to refine those chops, he still has enough genuine wisdom to out-philosophize me just about any day. I have also a family that I have had a part in making, and I want to thank Steph for her unceasing – I won’t say untiring – support, love and patience, and also to thank Liesbet and Johan for the joy they bring and their refusal to allow this dissertation to become an excuse for not living a life. To the child that I have yet to fully meet, I apologize for having to miss a week of your early life defending this thing, but count yourself lucky that you didn’t have to be around for the writing of it. And to my new Mom and Dad (and to Ben and Neeno too) I give thanks for the warmth, encouragement and all of the help making time to write this thing without therefore becoming a terrible father.

The academic community at the Institute for Christian Studies also deserves a great deal of thanks. I shudder to think what kind of a philosopher I might have been (or failed to have been) but for the guidance and inspiration of its Senior and Junior
members. In particular I acknowledge a great debt to Bob Sweetman who supervised my masters-level work and firmly anchored me in the great traditions of philosophy and of Christian thought especially. Lambert Zuidervaart, of course, deserves my undying thanks for supervising my doctoral work, providing unobtrusive but consistent guidance and insight; even the content of this dissertation would be very different (and, I daresay, a good deal more feeble) but for his influence on my thinking. I hasten also to mention Henk Hart, Jim Olthuis, Ron Kuipers, Adrienne and Jonathan Chaplin and indeed all of the Senior Members during my tenure at ICS (one of the great virtues of ICS is that you don't need to be working directly with a Senior member to learn a great deal from them, if only over tea at 3 pm).

Amongst the Junior members at ICS a few deserve my especial gratitude for their friendship and encouragement. Eric Kamphof helped to open me up to the analytic tradition in philosophy that I had hastily written off. Robert Brink's catholic interests and acute (not to mention amusing) cultural insight was both an inspiration and a welcome relief from the ponderousness of much of the philosophy I was immersed in; our conversations – often kicking a soccer ball back and forth in the library – on any number of things reminded me (and still do) of the delightful enterprise that scholarship can be. Matt Klaassen's influence on this dissertation is without a doubt manifest on nearly every page (at least where my arguments go well; he bears no blame for its faults...OK, a little blame). Conversations with Matt have been not only inspiring, but constantly instructive; he is a teacher as well as a friend. Tom Atfield and I have little in common in respect of intellectual style, but his (and Claire's) friendship and kindness has been a welcome support.
My colleagues (and, in some cases, former teachers) at The King's University College deserve thanks for their encouragement with this project when my interest in it waned and the daily demands of teaching, grading and the like obstructed into the time that I ought to have been finishing it. John Hiemstra's mentorship and friendship is especially appreciated, helping me to find my place as a teacher and scholar at King's. Thanks also to my colleagues for their polite nods and expressions of interest as I struggled to articulate what in the world my dissertation is about; here now is ample opportunity to find out in more detail than you could possibly wish.

There are, finally, some estimable philosophers who in one way or another deserve my gratitude for their words or deeds of encouragement that helped me to believe that I might actually be a philosopher like them (at least in part): Paul Franks (who, as the text hopefully makes clear, has been the source of many of the suggestions fleshed out in this project), Nick Wolterstorff, Jeff Edwards, Bill Rowe, and others.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Publisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>Pippin, Robert</td>
<td><em>Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness.</em></td>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTMA</td>
<td>de Vries, Willem</td>
<td><em>Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity.</em></td>
<td>Cornell University Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPV</td>
<td>Kant, Immanuel</td>
<td><em>Critique of Practical Reason.</em></td>
<td>Translated and edited by Mary Gregor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KRV</td>
<td>Kant, Immanuel</td>
<td><em>Critique of Pure Reason.</em></td>
<td>Translated by Norman Kemp Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>“An Attempt at a New Presentation of the <em>Wissenschaftslehre,</em> Chapter One.”</td>
<td><em>Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800)</em></td>
<td>Translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDE</td>
<td>Davidson, Donald</td>
<td>“A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs.”</td>
<td><em>The Essential Davidson</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Author(s) and Title</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TJ  Habermas, Jürgen. *Truth and Justification*. Edited and translated by

TMD  Brandom, Robert. *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the
Chapter 1. Conceptuality and Normativity

Introduction

Robert Brandom’s systematic opus, *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment*, opens with a general characterization of his project that situates it in the mainstream of western philosophical thinking. Brandom opens with the question of what we mean when we say “we;” how do we go about “telling who or what we are, distinguishing ourselves from the other sorts of objects or organisms we find in our world[?]”\(^1\) In other words, his project is, in a broad way, a project of demarcation; setting out the comportments, capacities, properties, etc., that distinguish the sort of creature that we include as one of “us” from that which is not. This is a familiar enough question and the broad outline of Brandom’s answer is also familiar enough.

“We” are, amongst other things, the beings that say “we;” i.e., we are the beings that can take ourselves to be members of a community of beings that engage in the project of discerning who “we” are, who participate in a project of self-demarcation.\(^2\)

What it means to be human is to be self-consciously engaged with a community of other humans in the project of articulating what it means to be human. This is a commitment

---

\(^1\) Robert B. Brandom, *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 3. [Henceforth: MIE] I should note that, since the initial drafting of this essay, Brandom has published two new books: *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009) and *Between Saying and Doing: Toward an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Though each includes much that is of interest, I will not engage with either at any length, focussing my analysis and critique of Brandom primarily on MIE and other supporting publications. My justification for doing this is, in part, a function of the fact that I have not had time to engage in sufficiently detailed study of either new work. However, neither publication is meant to revise or extend Brandom’s systematic arguments in MIE. *Reason in Philosophy* has both historical and systematic chapters, but generally the book has metaphilosophical intent that does not fundamentally change any key dimensions of the project of MIE. *Between Saying and Doing* is more directly systematic, but it pursues a project that Brandom describes thus: “this book is not a further working-out of the theory presented in that earlier one [MIE]. The two are largely orthogonal enterprises. I think they are broadly compatible, but I have not worried overmuch about reconciling, or even relating, them in a compare-and-contrast sort of way (and devote none of the present volume to doing any of that)” (*Between Saying and Doing*, xiii).

\(^2\) MIE, 4.
that Brandom shares with, inter alia, German Idealists, existentialists, Aristotelians and many others. Furthermore, along with the mainstream of western philosophy, Brandom argues that underlying this ability to “say ‘we’” – and hence foundational to our being the sorts of creatures that we are – are “capacities that are broadly cognitive. Our transactions with other things, and with each other, in a special and characteristic sense mean something to us, they have a conceptual content for us, we understand them in one way rather than another.”

We are concept-mongers, we do not merely respond differentially to stimuli or behave in predictable ways based on conditioning from without; we are sapient rather than merely sentient beings. Sapient beings respond to their world and to one another as providing reasons to behave in certain ways or to have certain attitudes:

Saying ‘we’ in this sense is placing ourselves and each other in the space of reasons, by giving and asking for reasons for our attitudes and performances. Adopting this sort of practical stance is taking or treating ourselves as subjects of cognition and action; for attitudes we adopt in response to environmental stimuli count as beliefs just insofar as they can serve as and stand in need of reasons, and the acts we perform count as actions just insofar as it is proper to offer and inquire after reasons for them.

What characterizes ‘us’ is that our behaviours and attitudes are, on the one hand, intentional – insofar as they are conceptually contentful or “meaningful” and thus yield understanding – and, on the other hand, normative – they are subject to criticism and revision in light of circumstances that provide reasons for acting this way and not that, or having this attitude and not another. Crucially, these two facets of our behaviours and attitudes are inseparably (indeed, inferentially) linked: intentional states just are those states that take something to stand within the (normative) space of reasons and something

---

3 MIE, 4.
4 MIE, 5.
5 MIE, 5.
can be a reason for action or belief only insofar as it can be the object of intentional states. The unity of intentionality and normativity in human behaviour can be seen in Kant’s famous dictum (which, in one form or another can be traced back to Aristotle) that: “Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the power to act in accordance with his idea of laws.”\(^6\) Human (that is, rational) action is simultaneously rule-bound and irreducibly intentional, insofar as it is guided not by the force of natural necessity but by a conception or idea of the rules. Brandom’s project is to articulate just what it means for human comportment to be intentional in the sense of having conceptual content, and he does so in accordance with the conviction that conceptual content is irreducibly normative in character. In so doing, he is working within the scope of both Aristotle and Kant, but I will focus on how Brandom’s project works within the set of problematics and commitments characteristic of Kant and his more immediate (“German Idealist”) successors (particularly Fichte and Hegel). The commitment that sets this group (including Brandom) apart from Aristotle and his successors is not the claim that our intentional states are inherently normative, but rather the claim that the norms that hold for our intentional states are themselves dependent in some sense on the states for which they hold; i.e., that the space of reasons in which our behaviours are (intentional) actions and our attitudes are (intentional) beliefs is not sui generis, but conditioned by the kinds of subjects that find themselves within it. This understanding of the relationship between the norms for intentional states and the subjects of those norms generates what is in many ways the central problematic for Kant and the German Idealists, the question of objectivity: how is it possible for our attitudes

to be objectively true or false and for our actions to be objectively right or wrong if the
norms to which they are subject are not independent of and constitutively prior to our
believing and acting? Brandom shares with Kant and the German Idealists both the
commitment to the correlation of normativity and intentionality and a self-conscious
struggle with the problem of objectivity. I will treat the commitment and the struggle in
turn, beginning with a brief account of Kant’s understanding of the conceptual
contentfulness of our attitudes and behaviours.

1.1. Kant on Intentionality and Normativity

Empirical thought, for Kant, means synthesizing the manifold of intuitions
according to a rule, i.e., a concept. In the faculty of sensibility (receptivity), we receive
empirical intuitions, which are given form within sensibility by means of the pure (i.e.,
non-empirical) intuitions of space and time. Thus the mind is furnished with a manifold
of spatio-temporal intuitions. This is not yet thought, since as yet no object is known or
determined in intuition;7 the manifold must itself be given form.8 Knowledge or thought
must take the form of judgments, “functions of unity among our representations; instead
of an immediate representation [intuition], a higher representation, which comprises the
immediate representation and various others, is used in knowing the object and thereby
much possible knowledge is collected into one.”9 In other words, knowing an object
requires bringing a plurality of intuitions (immediate representations) into a unity by

7 Although in intuition we are in “immediate” contact with objective things, we cannot be said to know
them; i.e., we cannot by this means only make true judgments about them.
8 The intuitions that constitute the manifold already have the forms of space and time in pure sensibility,
but there must be a further formation of the manifold that they constitute.
B 93-94. [Henceforth KRV – in order to distinguish it from the Critique of Practical Reason, which yields
the same acronym in English].
means of a higher level representation, viz. a concept. This higher level representation can only be a contribution from a different faculty than that of receptivity and one that must act upon a given manifold; Kant calls this faculty of spontaneity “understanding.” Understanding works essentially by means of judgments, which are the basic acts of spontaneity and thus understanding can also be called “the faculty of judgment.”

Judgments, as mentioned, have the function of bringing a unity to a manifold and thus determining an object through the mediation of a variety of intuitions. The kind of unity that judgments bring is not that of identity, resemblance, contiguity or causality understood as constant conjunction (although judgments can be made to the effect that these relations obtain between intuitions), but rather a “unity of rule determines the manifold.” The unity of a synthetic judgment arises from a rule for how understanding ought to synthesize intuitions in that act; i.e., the understanding brings intuitions into a unity according to a rule that determines the act by which synthesis is undertaken. This rule is what is meant by a concept: “All knowledge demands a concept, though that concept may, indeed, be quite indifferent or obscure. But a concept is always, as regards its form, something universal which serves as a rule.” Concepts are the ground of the unity of judgments in the synthesis of intuition, and thus are a priori conditions of knowledge of objects. However, though intuitions need concepts to become instances of knowledge, concepts correspondingly need intuitions for their applicability: “Thoughts

---

10 KRV, A 69/ B 94.
11 These latter three are, of course, Hume’s favourite means of “relating” impressions. They will not do for Kant since they are themselves part of the sensible manifold and require a higher order representation to enter into a unity. Given the resources provided in intuition, we could never notice that two intuitions are related in these ways; that could only be determined by means of an act of judgment and hence of the faculty of spontaneity. Of course a judgment can determine that these relations obtain in the sensible manifold, but this presupposes the act of unifying intuitions in a judgment, it does not explain it.
12 KRV, A 105.
13 KRV, A 106.
without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”\textsuperscript{14} Empirical knowledge (i.e., cognition of things as they appear to us – phenomena) is possible only through the unity of concept and intuition in judgment.

Concepts, like intuitions, come in two flavours: empirical and pure. All concepts emerge from spontaneity – they are not “given” in receptivity as are intuitions – but some (empirical concepts – e.g. “horse” “war”) arise only in the interaction of understanding and sensibility, while others (pure concepts) are pure \textit{a priori} in that they are entirely undetermined by sensibility. These pure concepts – the \textit{categories} – of the understanding are the \textit{formal} conditions for all synthesis according to empirical concepts, and thus have a role corresponding to those of the pure forms of intuition in sensibility. As formal conditions, they make experience possible. However, as “pure” (i.e., non-empirical) concepts, it is not immediately clear by what right the categories can be applied to empirical knowledge. Kant’s answer to this \textit{quaestio quid juris} is – to make a long story very short – that this application must be justified, since it is a condition for (B-Deduction\textsuperscript{15}) and a necessary function of (A-Deduction) of the condition of experience \textit{par excellence}, viz. the transcendental unity of apperception. In the unity of apperception, the various representations (intuitions and concepts) and thus their unity in the act of judgment can be ascribed by their subject to herself; she can say of each of them “I think them.” Outside of the standing possibility of doing so (and thus of a form of self-consciousness), knowledge of objects in experience is impossible: “It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to

\textsuperscript{14} KRV, A 51, B 75. This should not be taken to imply that concepts and intuitions never occur separately: there are blind intuitions and empty concepts, only these are not knowledge of the world.

\textsuperscript{15} To be discussed at greater length below.
saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me.”¹⁶ Concept-mongering creatures, as a condition for the applicability of these concepts to the world as it appears to them, must be self-conscious.

Kant’s conception of empirical knowledge can be said, then, to be a “classificatory” model in this sense: self-conscious subjects know empirical objects only by means of bringing particular¹⁷ intuitions “under” universal concepts by means of the application of these concepts as rules for an act by which the intuitions are brought into a unity. This is, at least, how Brandom describes it: “Kant follows the rationalists in treating the classificatory account of cognition as a classificatory account of consciousness generally. All awareness is understood as exhibiting the classificatory structure of universal or repeatable concepts subsuming particulars… Kant denies apprehension without comprehension, insisting that there must be conceptual classification wherever there is any sort of awareness.”¹⁸ As far as empirical knowledge is concerned, this characterization is not inaccurate: we have seen that there is no cognition of appearances where concepts and intuitions are not united (blind intuitions and empty concepts do not apprehend the empirical world). Thus, for Kant, insofar as (a) the judgment is the fundamental unit of sapient experience of the world (i.e., empirical knowledge), and (b) judging is an act done in accordance with a concept that functions as

¹⁶ KRV, B 131.
¹⁷ I say “particular” rather than “singular” because intuitions as given in sensibility are not pure or bare individuals, since they already have the forms of spatiality and temporality, which are “universal” in the sense of “formal.” It is a mistake, then, to simply say that, for Kant, sensibility is to understanding as matter is to form. Nevertheless, the universality of intuitions in terms of space and time is not the relevant kind for the act of thinking through judgments; this can only be provided by concepts, whose universality is not that of space and time, but of the categories. I amend this last comment, however, by the acknowledgement that space and (especially – if Heidegger is to be believed) time are conditions for thinking in that they make possible the schematism by means of which the categories can be applied to objects.
¹⁸ MIE, 86.
a rule for it, we can say that human experience is both irreducibly conceptual and irreducibly normative. It should be noted that something similar holds for Kant’s view of action. For genuinely human (i.e., moral) action to be possible at all, the will – the faculty of practical rationality – must be determinable entirely on the basis of laws that hold unconditionally and thus without reference to empirical conditions. In this determination, the will makes something true through a concept(ion) of its duty, rather than takes it to be true through the application of a concept to intuition. Thus the activity of the will reverses the direction of empirical judgment, but its validity remains objective since it involves the application of a concept to the objective phenomena. Kant puts it thus: “In [the practical use of reason], reason is concerned with the determining grounds of the will, which is a faculty either of producing objects corresponding to representations or of determining itself to effect such objects… that is, of determining its causality.” As mentioned, for this action to be free, the determining grounds of the will must be unconditional moral law, rather than contingent empirical conditions, and hence free action is responsive to norms rather than natural causality. Human action just is action that is determined by rules, but rules that are conceptually articulated and self-consciously applied to empirical circumstances; rational beings act according to a

---

19 In the Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics, Kant distinguishes judgments of experience – which constitute claims to universal validity (and hence genuine knowledge) – from judgments of perception that claim a merely subjective validity. Only the former count as actual experience of a world (of things as they appear), and are enabled to be so precisely because they invoke concepts and hence make a validity-claim (i.e., they are normative in nature). Cf, Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 45.


21 Free (i.e., autonomous) action is a function of the super-sensible nature of rational beings; i.e., of the human subjects insofar as it transcends “their existence under empirically conditioned laws.” KPV, 5:43.
conception of rule. Thus in action as well as experience, human activity is both necessarily conceptual and irreducibly normative.

It is important to note that the norms that make human experience and action possible (the categories in the former case and the unconditional moral law in the latter) are, for Kant, not “read off” of or imposed by the structure of an “external” reality, but are in an important sense, subjective. As I’ll discuss below, the categories – the pure concepts of understanding – are objective conditions for experience because they make experience of unified objects possible (and are hence objectively valid), but they have their origin in the faculty of spontaneity, which is “the mind’s power of producing representations from itself.” As pure concepts, the categories cannot arise from empirical experience and thus cannot be determined by objects (instead they determine objects). Thus, just as the “pure intuitions” that are the very “forms of intuition,” viz. space and time, are not external forms impressing themselves from outside of the subject, but “conditions of all outer and inner experience [which are] merely subjective conditions of all our intuition,” so the “pure concepts of the understanding” or “categories” likewise are not to be thought of as perceptions of external forms, but the subjective formal conditions for human experience. In other words: the categories shape the phenomenal world, not the other way around; they are “subjective conditions of thought” that “have objective validity.”

Similarly, the unconditional moral law that determines the free will is objectively valid insofar as the will is a genuine (noumenal) causality and thus determines objective/sensible reality (e.g., it is by a determination of the will that the human body

---

22 KRV, A 52/B 75.
23 KRV, A 49/B 66.
24 KRV, A 89/B 122.
does such and such, with such and such sensible results). However, that law itself must on no accounts be empirically derived; were the determining principle of the will empirical, the will would not be autonomous and hence would be unfree and non-moral. In the determination of action, the “ground of every enactment of practical law lies \textit{objectively in the rule} and in the form of universality which makes the rule capable of being a law... \textit{subjectively}, however, it lies in the \textit{end}.”²⁵ Here we have two poles that determine action: an objective pole that is a law, and a subjective pole that is an end. Moral action itself, only happens when these two poles coincide:

\[\text{T}he \text{ subject of all ends is to be found in every rational being as an end in himself. From this there now follows... the Idea of the will of every rational being as a will which makes universal law. By this principle all maxims are excluded which cannot accord with the will’s own enactment of universal law. The will is therefore not merely subject to the law, but is so subject that it must be considered also as making the law for itself and precisely on this account as first of all subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author).}\]²⁶

Here the rational will is the subjective ground of action (since only it is an end in itself) and the universal law is the objective. Moral action occurs only when they coincide, when the subject of the law is also the law-giver. What makes genuinely \textit{moral} (and therefore \textit{free}) action possible is the coming together of the subjective and objective grounds of action in the will’s giving the rule to itself; i.e., its autonomy. Thus, in both experience and action, Kant holds human comportment to be made possible by norms that are conceptually articulated and yet not independent of the subjects that conceive and apply them. I’ll argue that the same considerations apply to Brandom (albeit differently) and that they open up the problem of the objectivity of our intentional (i.e., conceptual) experience and action and of the norms that make them possible.

²⁵ \textit{Groundwork}, 98.
²⁶ \textit{Groundwork} 98-99.
1.2. Sellars

Before I turn to Brandom, however, it is worth briefly examining Wilfred Sellars’ “holistic” transformation of this Kantian theme. “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” is a long expose of the “Myth of the Given,” the notion that the data of perception (“sense data”) provide a simple, conceptually and propositionally undifferentiated domain of experience, that there is a domain of non-conceptual phenomenal facts. Moreover it is an attack on the notion that anything like “experience” or “sense-data” performs the role of epistemic intermediary between, say, an assertion and the world. Sellars begins by showing that most sense-datum theorists hold three incompatible propositions to be true: (A): “X senses red sense content s entails x non-inferentially knows that s is red”; (B): The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired; (C): The ability to know facts of the form x is y (i.e., classificatory or conceptual knowledge). This confusion is itself based on a prior one between: (1) That there are certain inner episodes that we have which are independent of “any prior process of learning or concept formation” and which are necessary for the ability to, say, see that something is the case; and (2) “the idea that there are certain ‘inner episodes’ which are the non-inferential knowings that, for example, a certain item is red and triangular.” Sellars does not attack (as did, say, Ryle) the notion

---

28 EPM, 140.
29 EPM, 140.
that there are such things as “inner episodes,” but rather the mistaken notion that they are non-inferential/non-conceptual and un-acquired and could yet be called “knowledge.”

I shall not follow his argument in any detail, but only note his conclusions. Essentially, he argues, by means of an analysis of “looks talk” that to know that “X is green” implies the ability to use the concept “green,” and that having this concept can be neither unacquired nor non-inferential: “one can have the concept of green only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element. It implies that, while the whole process of acquiring the concept of green may – indeed does – involve a long history of acquiring piecemeal habits of response to various objects in various circumstances, there is an important sense in which one has no concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all – and, indeed, as we shall see, a great deal more besides.”

Sellars in fact makes the tie between language and perception by describing the position that he wants to defend as “psychological nominalism,” “according to which all awareness of sorts, resemblances, facts, etc. in short, all awareness of abstract entities – indeed all awareness even of particulars – is a linguistic affair. According to it, not even awareness of such sorts, resemblances and facts as pertain to immediate experience is presupposed by the process of acquiring the use of a language.” He thus turns empiricism on its head. Whereas empiricists would argue that language has meaning in

---

30 In fact, the last 20 pages of the paper are dedicated to giving an account of how we might properly come to believe in the notion of inner episodes that we could call “thoughts” or “experiences”.
31 For example the sentence: “X looks green to me” as compared to “I can see that X is green.”
32 EPM, 148.
33 EPM, 160.
virtue of its relation to immediate experience, Sellars argues that inner episodes constitute awareness only insofar as they are related by a language (a network of concepts as discussed in the previous paragraph); there is no pre-linguistic awareness.

If to know even observable facts requires the use of concepts that are inferentially related to a whole language of other concepts, then “in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.”34 Within the logical space of reasons, then, immediate experience has no privileged justificatory position outside of its being related inferentially to all sorts of facts that are not a matter of immediate experience. Thus there is no sense in thinking of immediate experience as forming a special class of epistemic intermediaries between knowledge of any fact and the world.

The upshot of this, for my purposes, is first that for Sellars, as for Kant, sapient experience is by definition conceptually articulated, and second, that this conceptually articulated experience is to be viewed within a “space of reasons” that defines a practice of justifying one’s statements and hence a space of normative consideration (justification being a normative status). However, despite these broadly Kantian commitments, Sellars introduces two major innovations (which Brandom will pick up on). First, the conceptual articulation of our experience is understood holistically and inferentially: the significance of any part of our experience is constituted by its inferential relationship to (all of the) other parts thereof—conceptual content is not meted out concept by concept, but only distributed between each part of the whole. The content of an item in the space of reasons is not determined by the non-conceptual material (the “Given”) that it

34 EPM, 169.
comprehends (since there is no non-conceptual or pre-linguistic experience), but by
where it stands in that space in relation to other items. For Kant, by contrast, the
comprehension of a non-conceptual (i.e., intuitive) content is part of what constitutes a
complete act of judgment (after all, thoughts without content are empty). Second, the
notion of “conceptuality” and “conceptual content” is given a “linguistic turn.” Having
concepts is now part and parcel of having a language, and being “in the space of reasons”
for a subject means having a command of a language. Though there are many important
issues that this raises, the most central for a consideration of Brandom is that this points
toward the identification of the space of reasons with a social practice. Natural languages
are not the possession of individuals (indeed, not even of each individual in a group), nor
are they static, unchanging or “noumenal” in a Kantian sense. Natural languages live and
move and have their being in concrete, irreducibly social practices, and hence the
conceptual norms that make our experience possible – since they are inferentially and
holistically determined within a natural language – are concrete and irreducibly social.

1.3. Brandom on Conceptuality and Normativity

In many respects, Brandom’s philosophical project is an attempt to systematically
develop a philosophical semantics that elaborates and grounds Sellars’ epistemological
points. In particular, Brandom is committed to explicating a connection between
inference, conceptuality, reasons and language that can give an account of even the

35 It is worth saying, though, that such thoughts do not for that reason not exist. Just as there can be “blind”
intuitions (i.e., unconceptualized intuitions) there can be “empty” concepts. What is important, though, is
that neither of these is an act of sapient awareness or consciousness and hence has no objective validity.
Kant does acknowledge a kind of subjective validity to non-conceptual knowing and even acknowledges
that it can have universal validity (e.g., aesthetic judgments), but these matters lie beyond the current scope
of my discussion.
representational (world-“referring”) dimensions of language that slides into neither a physicalistic naturalism nor into the Myth of the Given. This means cashing out, in a comprehensive semantic theory, the notion that there is no non-linguistic, non-conceptual awareness. I will attempt to outline structural features of this comprehensive theory in this section.36

1.3.1. The Primacy of a Normative Pragmatics

Brandom’s project in Making it Explicit is twofold: first to develop a “normative pragmatics” according to which social practices (at least, discursive practices) must be explained in terms not of their properties, but in terms of the proprieties of moves within them. In other words, practices are to be explained in terms of the normative statuses of participants. Second, he wants to develop an “inferentialist semantics” that “answers” to this normative pragmatics. Thus the semantic content of a speech act is explained in terms of the proprieties (i.e., normative statuses) of making certain material inferences from its appropriate application to the consequences that such an application commits one to (which may include either making or endorsing other speech acts). In this project, then, it is pragmatic terms indicating normative statuses that have explanatory priority over semantic terms indicating language-world relations. The latter class of terms includes “traditional semantic vocabulary” such as “truth” and “reference;” these are to unpacked in terms of the pragmatic significance of their use, rather than in terms of, say “primitive denotation” as a causal relation between expressions and the world. In other

36 This can only be a partial and incomplete explication. Each major feature of Brandom’s account (a “normative pragmatics” and “inferentialist semantics” that includes a substitution-inferential account of singular terms and an anaphoric account of deixis) is developed at great length in MIE. My goal in this section is to say enough to motivate and to set the stage for my primary concern, which is his approach to the objectivity problem.
words, the \textit{representational} dimension of language (word-world relations, if you will) are to be unpacked in terms of the \textit{normative} dimensions of its use. This bears some unpacking.

What distinguishes “us” from other beings, as discussed, is the fact that our attitudes and actions are \textit{intentional} “in the sense of the propositional contentfulness of attitudes.”\footnote{MIE, 7. Thus it is not identical with Brentano’s definition of “intentionality” as “the directedness of sense” (ibid.) (although, on Brandom’s view, his account of conceptual contentfulness will explain the directedness of sense in perception).} In other words, our attitudes are ways of “taking something to be true” of our world or ourselves; by taking them we \textit{say something}, we make \textit{judgments}, we have \textit{beliefs}. As already discussed with respect to Kant (and discussed below with respect to Brandom) this propositional contentfulness “is a matter of conceptual articulation,” and it is the nature of this conceptual articulation of propositional content that a philosophical semantics seeks to explain. The terms of this explanation must begin with the question of what is required to see someone’s actions or attitudes as intentional; in virtue of what can we see the overt behaviours of someone to be cases of believing, judging, saying or acting on something? Brandom follows Davidson\footnote{Cf. Donald Davidson: “Radical Interpretation,” in \textit{Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 125-139.} and Dennett\footnote{Cf. Daniel Dennett: “Intentional Systems,” \textit{Journal of Philosophy} 68, no. 4 (1971), pp. 87-106.} in arguing that taking this “intentional stance” requires attributing at least a certain degree of rationality to one’s object. Thus, if I am to attribute intentionality to you by, say, attributing to you the belief that it is raining, I can do so only by seeing that belief as something that it would be \textit{appropriate} (or inappropriate) for you to have under present circumstances. Similarly, I attribute your behaviour when you cover your head and run for cover as an intentional action only when I can see it as an appropriate action to undertake given your belief that...
it is raining and your desire not to get wet. In other words, that act of attributing intentional states necessarily involves evaluation of someone’s commitments and their entitlements to those commitments, that is, their reasons for having the attributed states. Brandom sums this up in the slogan “Attributing an intentional state is attributing a normative status.” To say that someone “believes” or “judges” or “does” X is to say that she takes up a position in the logical space of reasons; it is to attribute to them a commitment and to make some evaluation of their entitlement to that commitment. Propositional/conceptual content – i.e., an account of what she believes – must be explained in terms of where and how she takes that stance in the (normative) space of reasons.

Brandom’s “normative pragmatics” has a further wrinkle. Rather than treating normative statuses such as “commitment” and “entitlement” as primitive, he aims to give an account of these statuses in terms of the normative attitudes of participants in a practice; an explanatory strategy he calls “phenomenalism.” For example, the normative status of “being safe” in baseball is explained in terms of the normative attitude of “being (appropriately) taken to be safe” by the other participants (or by an umpire). These attitudes can take the form of the explicit application of a rule – “He was safe because he touched first base before the baseman caught the ball” – but ultimately these explicit rule-applications must answer to normative attitudes implicit in practices. In fact, it is this requirement and what follows from it that motivates Brandom’s phenomenalism about norms.

---

40 MIE 16. Brandom also gets to this conclusion by: (a) showing that intentional explanation in terms of the “functional role” of intentional states in “mediating perception and action” (16) essentially invokes normative concepts about proper function; and (b) showing that intentional explanation in terms of assessments of truth-conditions also necessarily invokes normative considerations since “the business of truth talk is to evaluate the extent to which a state or act has fulfilled a certain kind of responsibility.” (17)
If it is the case that intentionality/propositional contentfulness cannot be understood outside of the practice of making normative evaluations (i.e., of attributing commitments and entitlements), this means that understanding one another must mean applying a norm or rule to the other’s actions. But “the rule determines proprieties of performance only when correctly applied,”\(^{41}\) and this suggests that there must be a rule for rule-application. Since the conscious application of a rule can be done rightly or wrongly, the application of the rule presupposes a grasp on the rule that determines the propriety of the application of the first rule. But this opens up the risk of an infinite regress, since the rule-application rule can be applied rightly and wrongly as well, which suggests that, in order to grasp that rule, one must grasp a rule for applying rule-application rules; and so on \textit{ad infinitum}, which is absurd. This is a potentially serious problem for any approach to understanding intentionality in terms of the norms that govern discursive practices.

Brandom’s solution to this regress problem is to argue that the regress can be stopped if, at least somewhere down the line, we don’t formulate taking a normative stance in terms of applying a rule that we have an explicit grasp upon (i.e., grasping the rule and then applying it) but as taking up a normative attitude in accordance with a norm that is “implicit in practice.”\(^{42}\) The regress becomes vicious only if every articulate application of an explicit rule presupposes an articulate grasp of an explicit rule (a “principle”). If, however, there is “some more primitive sort of practical propriety”\(^{43}\) – a norm implicit in practice – then there is no need to appeal to another explicit rule to explain its application. Instead of requiring a knowledge \textit{that} such and such is the rule for

\(^{41}\) MIE, 20.  
\(^{42}\) MIE, 23.  
\(^{43}\) MIE, 20.
doing thus-and-so, all that would be required is an implicit, practical *know-how* with respect to norm-application. As long as we can avoid the intellectualist temptation to “underwrite every bit of know-how with a bit of knowledge-that”[^44] we have in the practical and implicit taking up of a normative attitude a solution to the infinite regress problem. It is in virtue of this primacy of practical attitudes and abilities that Brandom calls his approach a normative *pragmatics* – explicit grasp (knowledge-that) must ultimately be understood in terms of practical competence or mastery of a practice (know-how). With respect to norms, this means explaining the ability to explicitly apply principles in terms of the practical ability to apply norms implicit in practice.

But this in turn raises the question of “how to understand proprieties of practice, without appealing to rules, interpretations, justifications, or other explicit claims that something is appropriate.”[^45] In other words, how can we explain what is to invoke or apply an implicit norm in practice, in a way that doesn’t beg the question against intellectualism (that prioritizes knowledge-that over know-how) and hence return us to the regress problem? To make a long story short, Brandom answers this by appeal to sanctions: “to treat a performance as correct or incorrect in practice, is explained in terms of positive and negative sanctions, rewards and punishments.”[^46] That is, to treat a performance (attitude, action) as correct or incorrect (which, as discussed, is necessary for treating it as intentional/contentful) is to either reward or punish its subject for the way it is carried out. These sanctions need not be understood in non-normative terms, however, since some sanctions can involve attributing to someone a special obligation or

[^44]: MIE, 23.
[^45]: MIE, 25.
[^46]: MIE, 36.
authority, etc., each of which is attributing a new normative status.47 This explains what it is to take a normative attitude in practice, but what of the normative statuses attributed by those attitudes?

Brandom takes this question to regard the situation of normative statuses [“being committed to X;” “being entitled to that commitment;” “being safe (in baseball)’’] in a world that “we can describe, and largely cope with… while restricting ourselves to a resolutely nonnormative vocabulary.”48 He takes the “disenchantment” of the world in modernity for granted – assuming that the success of nonnormative description and coping with the natural world is complete and that it indicates that it is true of that world49 – and distinguishes two ways in which moderns can “domesticate” normative statuses in such a way that “the normative significances we assign to things might be thought to be unnaturalized second-class citizens in an intrinsically insignificant natural world.”50 In the first case, we could take normative statuses or facts to merely supervene on the nonnormative facts such that “settling all the facts specifiable in nonnormative vocabulary settles all the facts specifiable in normative vocabulary.”51 This would essentially constitute a reduction of normative status to naturalistic fact, at least in respect to the degree to which the former is something “real;” hence it is unacceptable to Brandom given his commitment to the irreducible normativity of the intentional. The

47 Cf. MIE, 42-46.
48 MIE 46-47.
49 This will be an issue that I take up again in Chapter 9. Brandom is unclear about the extent to which he endorses a disenchanted view of nature. I will argue that he is unclear and that it is a problem for his theory of objectivity.
50 MIE, 47. It’s worth noting that, in his “argument” “From the Assessment to the Social Institution of Norms” Brandom does not speak in his own voice so much as he ventrioliquizes thinkers such as Pufendorf and Kant. This is not a complete departure from his previous “use” of Wittgenstein, Sellars, etc., but here he seems to be substituting historical reconstruction for concrete argument in a way that he did not previously. My summary of this view is my best construction of an argument for his conclusion.
51 MIE, 47.
second approach is to argue that “all the facts concerning normative attitudes settles all the facts concerning normative statuses.”

Normative attitudes – practical evaluation of performances (as just discussed) – are quite at home in a disenchanted world (unless, perhaps, the eliminativists are right), and hence a “reduction” of normative status to normative attitudes can demonstrate that they too are not aliens in such a world, granted that the reduction can go through. This, he takes it, is the route taken by Kant, amongst others: “[O]ur own acknowledgment or endorsement of a rule is the source of its authority over us – in short that our normative statuses such as obligation are instituted by our normative attitudes.”

Transformed into appropriately pragmatist language, it can be said that practical normative attitudes, whether explicit or implicit, “institute” normative statuses. In terms of discursive practices (i.e., practices of giving and asking for reasons, which Brandom takes to be those relevant for understanding linguistic meaning), this means that the crucial normative statuses – being committed to a claim, being entitled to a claim – are to be understood in terms of the practical attitudes of ascribing, undertaking and acknowledging commitments and entitlements. In simple terms: what we are (i.e., what normative statuses we have – e.g.: John is safe) is to be understood in terms of what either we or others do in treating us as being thus. As long as we do not take a reductionist attitude toward normative attitudes – i.e., as long as we don’t try to cash these out entirely in non-normative terms, which Brandom has already established as a possibility in his discussion of normative sanctions – we can show that normative statuses

---

52 MIE, 47.
53 MIE, 51.
are safely at home in a disenchanted “natural” world in a way that “does not entail relinquishing the distinction between normative proprieties and natural properties.”

However, this phenomenalist view of the relation between normative status and attitude raises the question of objectivity. If normative attitudes institute normative statuses, how could there be a gap between status and attitude such that we can say that it is one thing to be correct and another thing to be taken to be correct? Without this distinction there is no objectivity in our assessment of normative status, and it would seem at least that being correct in or being entitled to a commitment is nothing more than the expression of subjective preference (a normative attitude). Furthermore, if it is in virtue of having certain normative statuses that our attitudes can be taken to have conceptual content (i.e., to be commitments or beliefs), how it is that these attitudes can be correct or incorrect in virtue of how things stand with respect to what they are about rather than merely in virtue of what we or other people think about them? Brandom’s answer to these questions is my fundamental concern and will be discussed at length below. For now it will suffice to say that he finds a way to reconcile normative phenomenalism (and an inferentialist semantics that answers to it) with robust objectivity by means of interpreting the practice of taking up normative attitudes and assuming normative statuses as a social practice. More specifically, the objectivity of both our normative statuses and the conceptual contents that depend on them is vouchsafed by the social distinction between the practical normative attitudes of undertaking a commitment oneself and attributing a commitment to someone else. In order to understand the argument for this, though, I need to address the fundamental features of Brandom’s

---

54 MIE, 52.
“inferentialist semantics” and hence his understanding of the nature and ground of conceptual/propositional content.

1.3.2. Brandom’s Semantics

Brandom’s Sellarsian commitment to the unintelligibility of non-conceptual awareness can be seen as a pragmatist re-working of the Kantian theme that there is no cognition of appearances without concepts (i.e., that intuitions without concepts are blind). Early on in *Making it Explicit*, Brandom marks some of his own systematic commitments by approving reference to Kant’s theses of the demarcation of intentional (Brandom says “conceptual”) from the non-intentional in terms of discursive normativity,55 of rational action as acting according to *conceptions* of rules,56 of the derivation of the authority of norms from their acknowledgment,57 of the primacy of judgment with respect to other intentional mental acts,58 and of a classificatory conception of judgment. Brandom accepts all of these theses, though with a pragmatic turn.

On Brandom’s telling, Kant conceives of the realm of the cognitive (consciousness, awareness) as being essentially bound to normativity. That is, genuine cognition must be understood in terms of the norms that hold for it, in terms of how we *ought* to think of things. For Kant, this meant that cognition depends on the use of concepts, conceived of as *rules* for the synthetic act of judgment; concepts stake out *how* judging *ought* to be done. Brandom accepts the demarcation of the intentional from the non-intentional in terms of the normativity of the former, but – as just discussed – rejects

55 MIE 7-9.
56 MIE, 30-32
57 MIE, 50-52.
58 MIE, 79-80.
Kant’s idea that discursive normativity must consist in rules understood as “propositionally explicit prescriptions, prohibitions and permissions.”\textsuperscript{59} This is because the application of such rules is itself something that can be done rightly or wrongly, i.e., according to rules. These rules for rule-application in turn would have to be subject to rules for their correct application \textit{ad infinitum}. Brandom’s solution to this regress is to give Kant’s theory a pragmatic turn. Norms (“concepts”) should not be conceived of first and foremost as rules, but as proprieties \textit{implicit} in practice that are acknowledged not by an explicit knowing-\textit{that} they apply, but in a practical \textit{know-how} with respect their correct application.\textsuperscript{60}

Given his acceptance of the priority of judgment, this pragmatic turn with respect to the normativity of discursive awareness requires “a pragmatic version of this classificatory model [that] results if it is de-intellectualized, stripped of residual commitments to understanding concepts as explicit to the mind.”\textsuperscript{61} The subsuming of phenomena under a concept in judgment, then, is not primarily an explicit saying-that something is thus-and-so, but is an implicit way of behaving towards it that \textit{treats it as} thus-and-so: “From such a perspective, the roots of conceptual classification are to be found in treating something in practice as being of a certain kind – taking something (particular) as something (universal), by behaving towards it in a way that assimilates it to others.”\textsuperscript{62} This version of the classificatory model – and Brandom’s particular way of making sense of it – is far from innocent with respect to the commitments involved in

\textsuperscript{59} MIE, 19.  
\textsuperscript{60} Cf. MIE, 23.  
\textsuperscript{61} MIE, 86.  
\textsuperscript{62} MIE, 86. This way of cashing out the “as” in terms of predication (universal and particular) distinguishes it from Heidegger’s \textit{pre-predicative “as,”} which carries with it no necessity of a universal-particular structure. This will have significance for my discussion of a Heideggerian critique of Brandom in Chapter 9.
Kant’s version; Brandom’s pragmatist Kantianism requires a thorough rethinking of Kant’s Kantianism. Charting the differences that Brandom draws between his and Kant’s versions of classificationism can allow us to unpack Brandom’s understanding of the conceptual and the non-conceptual.

Seen from the perspective of his pragmatism about norms, Brandom says, Kant’s classificationism can be seen to involve the running together of three dualisms, each of which Kant mistakenly takes to mark out the boundary between the conceptual and the non-conceptual: form/matter, general/particular, and spontaneity/receptivity. Brandom’s manner of rejecting each of these dualisms as ways of marking off the conceptual from the non-conceptual reveals the fundamental structure of his inferentialist semantics and its conception of the conceptual.

First, Brandom’s view of concepts does not oppose them to some sort of non-conceptual material conditions, be they intuitions or what have you. For Kant the (classificatory/synthetic) act of judgment brings conceptual form to a conceptually undifferentiated manifold of intuition. The categories, being pure concepts and hence independent of intuition, are formal conditions for the comprehension of intuitions. In a rough way we can say that concepts are to intuitions as forms are to matter. For Brandom, on the other hand, concepts are understood as inferential roles. The conceptual content of a stance or status in a discursive practice is determined by the role that it plays in licensing or sanctioning inferences to other statuses as a consequence of the assumption of the status in question. In other words, it “must be able to serve as a premise for inferences to the applicability of further concepts. The particular content of a given concept is, accordingly, thought of as the content of an inferential commitment:
roughly the commitment to the propriety of the inference from any of the appropriate circumstances of application of that concept to any of the appropriate consequences of application of the concept.”

Conceptual content, then, is conferred on assertions, attitudes, commitments etc. in virtue their being moves in a game of giving and asking for reasons, articulated according to a holistically interconnected web of inferential connections.

Correspondingly, to grasp the conceptual content of a statement (construed as a move in a discursive practice) is to grasp the discursive-pragmatic consequences of its assertion; i.e., to grasp what someone who utters that statement is committed and entitled to both as a condition for its appropriate utterance and as a consequence of that utterance. This is what it means to understand a speech-act. Brandom unpacks this point by imagining two different reporters offering reliable responses to a stimulus (namely, irradiation by red light). Both a trained parrot and a human being may give identical and equally reliable responses; that is, both may say “That’s red” every time they are exposed to the stimulus and differently when exposed to a different stimulus. Both are sentient in that they can respond differentially to the sensory stimulus, but only the human can be said to sapient. This is because the human understands what “That’s red” means. Because the human can subsume the stimulus under the concept “red” she can be said to understand it. For Brandom, this classification takes the form of having a practical mastery over the various inferences in which the concept is involved. For example, grasping the concept “red” means being able to (implicitly) infer that “this is not green” and “this is a colour.” More precisely, grasping the conceptual content of

---

63 MIE, 618.
64 MIE, 88.
“that’s red” means taking the one who uttered it to be ipso facto committed to its inferential consequences – it is a practical mastery of the discursive-pragmatic consequences of a performance in discursive practice. It is in virtue of our mastery of these inferential connections, then, that our discursive practices become contentful. Propositional content, according to Brandom, “is understood in terms of proprieties of inference,” that is, in terms of what inferences are and are not justified in virtue of commitment to a particular claim; this is the upshot of his pragmatic-Kantian commitment to understanding conceptual/propositional content in terms of norms implicit in practice.

Since it is inferential role (i.e., the role played in the practice of giving and asking for reasons) that determines conceptual content and, since it is only in virtue of being conceptually contentful that an utterance (or mental event) is genuinely cognitive, Brandom is committed to the “priority of the propositional” with respect to other moods of speech acts (or other meaningful acts). It is the assertoric mood (expressed in a proposition) that makes an utterance a potential premise or conclusion in reasoning. Since it is such an inferential role that determines the speech act as conceptually contentful, all other illocutionary forms are dependent on the assertoric for their sense and thus other illocutionary acts are derivative of constative ones. Conceptual, intentional content is essentially propositional content. According to Brandom, this is the moral of Kant’s view on the priority of judgment, a view that he shares in spite of

---

65 Which are thus specifiable in terms of the normative statuses appropriate to a discursive practice (commitment and entitlement primarily).
66 MIE, 134.
67 This has the further consequence of implying a holism about conceptual content. To have one concept, one must have many. MIE, 89; cf. my discussion of Sellars above.
68 MIE, 81.
69 “What can serve as a premise in reasoning must have propositional content.” MIE, 83.
their difference regarding the applicability of the form-matter (or form-content) distinction for demarcating the conceptual

Understood thus, the conceptual could still be construed formally (in terms of the formal proprieties of inference canonized in logic texts). However, for Brandom, the primordial kind of inferential correctness – and the kind implicated in the crucial inference from circumstances to consequences of application – is material correctness; i.e., correctness in virtue of the content rather than the form of the inference. As a paradigm case, he offers the inference from “A is to the East of B” to “B is to the West of A.” Nothing about the form of this inference determines whether it is correct, it is only so in virtue of the contents of the concepts “East” and “West,” contents that are expressed in the correctness of inference. That material correctness is explanatorily prior to formal correctness is a crucial part of Brandom’s general semantic theory. As we’ve already seen, he sees it as a condition of adequacy for a normative approach to meaning that it can avoid an infinite regress of rules by understanding “believing and saying in terms of more primitive capacities (knowing-that in terms of knowing how).” If these capacities are inferentially articulated, then only the practical mastery of material inferential connections between discursive performances can satisfy this requirement, since assessments of formal validity require the articulate application of an explicit logical principle to a situation in a way that only raises the spectre of an infinite regress. In other words, a formalism about inferential validity (which takes formal validity to

70 The elliptical quality of this explanation shows the correlativity of material inferential correctness and conceptual content.
71 MIE, 101.
underlie material correctness\textsuperscript{72}) is of a piece with “intellectualism” about normative practices (which takes the application of an explicit principle, rather than the implicit ascription of a normative status in practice, to be the primary form of norm-attribution); both, for Brandom, lead to irresolvable problems for a normative approach to intentionality. It must be the case, then, that explicitly logical principles of formal validity can be derived from implicit practices of treating inferences as correct or incorrect in virtue of their contents\textsuperscript{73}.

Specifically logical vocabulary and principles (i.e., formal logical principles) instead have an “expressive” role to play in discursive practices. The distinction of matter and form as pertaining to conceptual content arises only in the adoption of logical vocabulary that attempts to “make explicit to ourselves the contents of our nonlogical concepts;”\textsuperscript{74} and thus – as a mode of the expression of conceptual contents – cannot mark the boundary between the conceptual and the non-conceptual. Logical vocabulary allows us to say what it is that we are doing when we participate in discursive practices and hence when we ascribe, undertake, acknowledge (etc.) discursive commitments in accordance with a practical mastery of the material-inferential consequences of undertaking this or that commitment. Formal rules of validity and explicitly logical vocabulary (like conditionals) have an expressive role in that they raise our established

\textsuperscript{72} Such a view is propounded when material inferences are taken to be enthymemes – deductive inferences with a suppressed premise – that can only be truly assessed with respect to their validity when the suppressed premise is made explicit (and hence when it takes the proper – syllogistic – form). Brandom is adamant that material inferences are not enthymemes. Cf. MIE, 98.

\textsuperscript{73} Brandom makes such an argument, asserting that “the notion of formally valid inferences is definable in a natural way from that of materially correct ones, while there is no converse route. For given a subset of vocabulary that is privileged or distinguished somehow, an inference can be treated as good in virtue of its form, with respect to that vocabulary, just in case it is a materially good inference and cannot be turned into a materially bad one by substituting nonprivileged vocabulary, in its premises and conclusions.” (MIE, 104) The precise details of this argument do not concern me here; what does matter is his conclusion that material inferences implicit in practice are foundational to discursive practices and hence to what it means to mean and to understand a performance in that practice.

\textsuperscript{74} MIE, 619.
practical mastery of discursive practices (our know-how) to the level of explicit
knowledge (knowledge-that) of just what we are doing when we do what we do. Hence,
for Brandom, “logic is the organ of semantic self-consciousness.”75

This is a crucial point (and one to which I will return). It implies that it is quite
possible for a person or community to engage in discursive practice – and hence to
ascribe, undertake, acknowledge commitments in virtue of which our performances are
intentional – without the use of specifically logical vocabulary and hence without being
able to “say” or “express” what they are able to “do.” This is an imaginable situation
since, for Brandom, practical mastery (know-how) of conceptual-inferential practices
makes possible explicit grasp of its norms as principles (knowledge-that) and not the
other way around. Discursive practice is by definition a practice of giving and asking for
reasons (and the normative attitudes that constitute the practice – undertaking, attributing,
etc. – are evaluations of performances/utterances in terms of what is a reason for them
and what they can stand as reasons for), and so the participants in them must be rational,
but they may yet not be logical in the sense of having the expressive resources to say
what they are doing. I will discuss this point at length later, arguing that this commitment
(along with others) makes it difficult to see how participation in a discursive practice can
be self-conscious, which (I will argue) it must be even on Brandom’s own terms. For
now, though, it suffices to say that what this view amounts to for Brandom is an
affirmation of the Kantian point that conceptualization is a form of classification (taking
something “as” something) but without the further assertion that this classification
involves distinguishing what is classified from the concept under which it is classified in
accordance with the matter/form distinction. The matter/form distinction is instead

75 MIE, xix.
understood as the distinction between conceptual proprieties implicit in practice and those proprieties as made explicit as formal principles in reflection.

Secondly, Brandom rejects drawing a line between the conceptual and the non-conceptual in terms of the general/particular distinction. On his reading of Kant (and on some of Kant’s own ways of speaking), concepts are related to intuitions (i.e., the non-conceptual content of cognition) as the universal is to the particular; concepts allow the mind to draw general conclusions (via judgment) from essentially singular mental events (i.e., intuitions). Thus, in order to find the non-conceptual element in thought, one must simply find the singular or particular element, the element referred to in a judgment by the use of singular terms. Brandom rejects this picture by attempting to show that, although sentences (as possible premises or conclusions in arguments) are conceptual in the primary sense of having a direct inferential role, singular terms (and other subsentential expressions) and their contents also have an inferential role to play and are thus part of the conceptual order. On his telling, singular terms are not contentful simply in virtue of a kind of direct reference to worldly particulars, but in virtue of the roles they play in “substitution inferences,” practical proprieties that license or sanction the substitution of one subsentential expression for another in a way that preserves the commitment expressed by the sentence of which they are parts. Thus “Benjamin Franklin” and “The inventor of bifocals” are substitution-inferentially connected in the sentence: “Benjamin Franklin spoke French well” since to substitute the one for the other would preserve the commitment expressed, and another scorekeeper would be entitled to infer from my commitment to the one to a commitment to the other. Thus the singular term “Benjamin Franklin” is conceptually articulated in virtue of the substitution-
inferences it is involved in: “There is no restriction of the conceptual to the general, as expressed by predicates in contrast to the particularity invoked in singular terms. Singular terms have an inferential role, represented by the set of terms intersubstitutable for them, just as predicates do.”\textsuperscript{76} Substitution inferences – which include both the general and particular components of judgments – are then an essential (if derivative) feature of the conceptual articulation of discursive practice.

Thirdly, Brandom’s version of classificationism rejects the Kantian dualism between spontaneity and receptivity, or the contrast between “the conceptual as the product of cognitive activity, [and] the nonconceptual impingement on cognitive receptivity in virtue of which that cognitive activity is constrained.”\textsuperscript{77} This contrast amounts to that between a naturalistically conceived causal order and a normatively conceived conceptual order, which must be overcome within the act of judgment. Thus the boundary between the conceptual and the non-conceptual is construed in terms of an internal (mental) or social (discursive) realm of norm-governed, conceptually articulated commitments and a merely causally articulated objective world standing outside of (over-and-against) that realm. On such a picture, the imagined point of contact between the conceptual and the causal “takes place in \textit{deixis}, where something is indicated without being characterized.”\textsuperscript{78} In other words, the mind or our social practices, on this view, are in touch with the objective world via non-repeatable tokenings of indexical or demonstrative utterances or gestures that themselves have no conceptual content since they merely indicate a state of affairs in the objective world, rather than offering a characterization of it as something. However, Brandom rejects this picture too on the
grounds that deictic tokenings are in fact conceptually articulated. This is because their use is governed by anaphoronic chains that connect their use to singular terms governed by substitution-inferences by establishing a relation of dependence of the former on the latter. Thus my use of “this” in “this is red” is linked by an anaphoric chain to the (possible) use of a singular-term designation (say, “Bryan’s car is red”), which – as we have just seen – is itself conceptually articulated. Because of this anaphoric linking-up of unrepeatables with token repeatables (singular terms), “unrepeatable tokenings such as the uses of demonstratives become available for service as premises in inferences. In this way they acquire an inferential significance and so can be understood as expressing a conceptual content.”79

This is an important point, to which I will return. What it amounts to is the claim that deixis (the ability to indicate singulares via demonstratives or indexicals) is possible only on the basis of anaphora (i.e., the ability to “pick up” singular references within language and “pass them along” a chain – as in the use of pronouns) and not vice-versa. Without the possibility of being “picked up” by means of anaphoric chains, a deictic tokening would have no “semantic significance:” “Anaphora is the fundamental phenomenon by means of which a connection is forged between unrepeatable events and repeatable contents. No semantically significant occurrence of a subsentential expression can be discerned unless it is governed by substitution inferences, which requires token recurrence: no (semantically significant) occurrence without (the possibility of) recurrence.”80 Anaphora, on the other hand, does not presuppose deixis, since what is picked up in anaphoric chains need not be an unrepeatable singular (as indicated by

79 MIE, 621.
80 MIE, 465.
demonstratives and indexicals), but may be a token repeatable. Thus, just as it is possible to conceive of a discursive practice that is rational but not logical, so it is possible to describe a language that uses pronouns but does not use demonstratives, but not the other way around. Indexicals and demonstratives are not constitutive for the practical capacities that ground linguistic meaning. There is, then, no non-inferentially articulated point of contact between the causal and the conceptual. As we will see in a moment, there is, on Brandom’s view, no need for one.

It should be made clear, first, that just as deixis does not provide a non-conceptual point of contact between “the space of reasons” and the causal order, neither do perception and action. Concepts get empirical content by acting as inferences with non-inferential circumstances of application (e.g.: perception), and practical content “in virtue of their connection with noninferential consequences of application in action.” As mentioned, conceptual content is conferred upon a performance in virtue of a material inference from the appropriate circumstances of its application to the consequences of that application. Perception – insofar as it yields knowledge-that such and such is the case – involves a judgment that the appropriate circumstance for the application of a judgment to the effect that, say, “that thing is red” (whether expressed in an utterance or not) is the non-inferential circumstance of being in the presence of something red. Corresponding to this judgment is the inference to the consequence of that appropriate

---

81 This, as I will elaborate below, is part of the reasoning for Brandom’s assertion that objectivity is possible without the employment of epistemically strong de re attitude ascriptions and correspondingly that it is thinkable to have a discursive practice that does not have the expressive resources made possible by the use of the essential indexical (“I”), which in turn implies that it is possible to have a discursive practice that is conscious but not self-conscious (i.e., which lacks even the resources for self-consciousness). I shall argue that this claim sits uncomfortably with other commitments of Brandom’s.
82 MIE, 618.
83 In Kantian terms: insofar as it constitutes a judgment of experience that has objective or universal validity.
application, viz. that the perceiver is *ipso facto* committed to the claim that “that thing is coloured” and so forth. In other words, to perceive something can be considered a form of non-inferential knowledge – insofar as the appropriate circumstances for it are non-inferential – but it must yet be inferentially articulated insofar as it makes possible an inference to other commitments and entitlements on the part of the perceiver and her discursive community. In order to have the normative status of knowledge, the content of perception must be conceptually – i.e., inferentially – articulated. This is in accordance with Sellars’ critique of the myth of the given.

The case of action is just the flip-side. Actions have inferential circumstances of application (i.e., an action is appropriate if the actor is committed to this or that propositionally contentful claim), but non-inferential discursive consequences. Thus human behaviour is properly taken to be an action when one does something other than making a new inference or taking up a new commitment as an inferential consequence of a commitment. So if I run away (which is non-inferential) as a consequence of my belief that I am about to be shot (which is inferential), my running is rightly conceived of as an action. If there are no inferential or (and this is the same thing) conceptually articulated antecedents to my running away, it can’t be considered an intentional action. Action, like perception, is conceptually articulated just insofar as it is what it is (viz., intentional).

---

84 Knowledge, on Brandom’s telling, is a “hybrid deontic status.” He reconstructs the traditional “Justified True Belief” (JTB) definition of knowledge in terms of his normative pragmatics. To have a belief is to have a discursive commitment (which, in turn, is unpacked in terms of the appropriateness of having that commitment ascribed to one). The “justification” condition is unpacked in terms of attributions of entitlement, and the “truth” condition is unpacked in terms of the willingness of the one ascribing knowledge to endorse or acknowledge the ascribed commitment himself (hence it is a matter of the discursive attitude of taking-true rather than a primordial semantic relationship). Cf. MIE, 202.

85 Brandom unpacks action as necessarily involving “practical” rather than “doxastic” commitments. All commitments are understood in terms of the inferential relationship between their appropriate circumstances and their consequences. With practical commitments, the consequences are actions, not other commitments or entitlements (although they may be entitlements to act certain ways). In spite of such asymmetries, the inferential structure that makes them discursive commitments remains intact. Cf. MIE, 233-243.
Thus neither of these provide a non-conceptual point of contact between a causal and a normative order.

We have seen, then, in Brandom’s rejection of the three “Kantian” dualisms the main outlines of his account of concepts and the conceptual. In its primary significance, the notion of “concept” denotes an inferential role played in establishing an utterance or commitment as a possible premise or conclusion of reasoning and thus as a possible move in a practice of giving and asking for reasons. Secondly, the conceptual also extends to singular terms via their substitution-inferential roles. Finally, it also includes the use of unrepeatably deictic tokenings by means of the linking up of anaphoric chains with repeatable expressions (paradigmatically singular terms, but also definite descriptions). Each of these “levels” of an account of the conceptual depends upon the others: “Just as the idea of inference needed to be supplemented by that of substitution in order to be brought to bear on subsentential expressions, so the idea of substitution-inferential significance needs to be supplemented by that of anaphora in order to be brought to bear on unrepeatably tokenings of subsentential expressions, rather than just on their repeatable types.”86 In the other direction, anaphora can only be significant with respect to substitution-inferential significances and these in turn only in terms of the inferential significance of (assertoric) speech acts that can be premises or conclusions in the practice of giving and asking for reasons.

Thus Brandom rejects all of the Kantian ways of drawing the line between the conceptual and the non-conceptual. This is not an attempt to set up his own demarcational criteria; rather Brandom wants to do away with the demarcational project altogether: no boundary separates a conceptual domain from a non-conceptual one. This

86 MIE, 621.
applies not only in thought – i.e., that there are no “non-conceptual” contents of thought – but even to the relation between thought and the world. Knowing the world is not the establishment of a relation between conceptually articulated discursive practices and a non-conceptually (say, causally) articulated world: “The conception of concepts as inferentially articulated permits a picture of thought and of the world that thought is about as equally, and in the favored cases, identically conceptually structured.” The world itself is conceptually structured insofar as it does not consist simply in a collection of things, but of facts (as in Wittgenstein’s famous pronouncement at the outset of the *Tractatus*); the world is an articulated constellation of states of affairs, which – as facts – are themselves just the contents of true claims. Conversely, when a claim is true, its contents are nothing other than the facts of the matter; in Wittgenstein’s words: “When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case, we – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact; because we mean: *this-is-so*.” Perception and action are not the points at which discursive practice bumps up against a non-conceptual world, but are “merely [two] of the necessary conditions for a conceptually articulated grasp of a conceptually articulated world.” Like John McDowell, then, Brandom advocates the “unboundedness of the conceptual,” a stance that Jürgen Habermas calls “Objective Idealism.”

---

87 MIE, 622.
88 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953): §95. Brandom’s way of expressing this idea is to say that “Facts are just true claims” (MIE, 622). This is meant to suggest that there is no ontological gap between our knowledge of the world and the world itself; when we know something the content of our knowledge just is the (worldly) fact (not, say, some representation of it). This sits uneasily with Brandom’s acceptance of a disenchanted view of the world in his argument (such as it is) for normative phenomenalism (see above); I will return to this tension at length in Chapter 9.
89 MIE, 622.
There are important differences between Brandom and McDowell, however, that
deserve some mention. First, McDowell’s project, within which the thesis of the
unboundedness of the conceptual is a part, is an attempt at a kind of Wittgensteinian
philosophical therapy in which he tries to articulate a Weltbild, not so much to advocate
for its truth, but to show how we can think about the relation of mind and world that
doesn’t tempt us into either the Myth of the Given or a Davidsonian coherentism. This is,
by definition, an anti-systematic project: McDowell is not trying to say that his Weltbild
is the right one, only that it is thinkable and, if adopted, can relieve us of the
philosophical burdens that beset those held captive by the traditional picture. The point,
then, is to avoid having to do philosophy, not to set us up to do it. Brandom’s project, on
the other hand, is unapologetically systematic; the idea of the unboundedness of the
conceptual is meant to do philosophical work for him (for example: justifying the notion
that facts are true claims).

Furthermore, McDowell’s project – as articulated in “Knowledge and the Internal
Revisited” – is to show that there is no need to see the “space of reasons” as restricted to
thought; rather knowledge – understood as “having a standing in the space of reasons” a
la Sellars – is world-involving in all its aspects, not only in the favor that the world is
taken to do for otherwise justified beliefs by making them true. In favored cases, there
will be no gap between justification and truth, as a gap between a standing in the space of
reasons and a favor the world does that standing, since the space of reasons includes the
world. Brandom claims to share this conception, but argues that it requires a social
articulation that he provides in ch. 8 of MIE. McDowell rejoins that precisely because this social articulation requires holding justification (attributions of entitlement) and truth (undertaking of commitment on the part of the ascriber) *apart*, Brandom’s social articulation of the space of reasons is exactly what McDowell is arguing against. I shall return to these matters at some length in Chapter 9. I need now to turn to the objectivity problem as it arises for and is dealt with first by Kant and Fichte and then Brandom himself (discussion of Hegel will wait until the next chapter).
Chapter 2: Objectivity

Introduction

I have argued that for both Kant and Brandom, human attitudes and behaviours are distinguished by their conceptual articulation and that, furthermore, this conceptual articulation is inherently and irreducibly normative; that is, concept-mongering cannot be understood without reference to questions regarding the appropriateness of certain conceptual moves (by reference to norms for them) and the responsibility of concept-mongering creatures for the ways in which they comport themselves. Crucially, though, for both Kant and Brandom the norms at play in human attitudes and behaviours are not independent of those attitudes and behaviours. In Kant’s case, the pure concepts of the understanding (which are formal functions of unity in a judgment and hence rules for the act of judging) are taken to originate in the (“subjective”) faculty of spontaneity rather than being a deliverance by intuition either from the sensible world (sensory intuition) or via some kind of intellectual intuition.¹ Furthermore, with respect to action, the unconditional moral law that determines the will is likewise neither a fact of the empirical world nor a deliverance from God, but rather a fact of reason: the ultimate formal principle of human action insofar as the latter is responsive to conceptualized norms rather than merely mechanistic laws of causality. In Brandom’s case, the normative

¹ Kant uses the concept of intellectual intuition in a number of ways. In KRV: B 145 he describes it as “a divine understanding which should not represent to itself given objects, but through whose representation the objects should themselves be given or produced.” Later, he refers to a kind of “non-empirical intuition” that makes possible the “mathematical knowledge gained by reason from the construction of concepts.” (A713/B 741). In B 308, he sees intellectual intuition as a way by which the categories could be applied to noumena (presumably because, by constructing its objects, the intellectual intuition automatically makes them subject to the categories). However, Kant restricts the power of intellectual intuition to only its use in mathematics; beyond that he denies the power to human beings (or rather, he denies that human beings possess it). As we will see below, however, Fichte at least thinks that we do have a kind of intellectual intuition that is constitutive of its object beyond the domain of mathematics, viz. that whereby we intuit ourselves as acting, which is constitutive of rational agency itself. The story of the role of the idea of intellectual intuition in German idealism is well told by Paul Franks in “Kant’s Dirty Laundry: Maimon’s Challenge and Construction in Intellectual Intuition in German Idealism” (unpublished paper, Feb. 2005).
statuses that confer conceptual content on moves within a discursive practice (i.e., being committed to something and entitled to a commitment) are taken to be instituted by the normative attitudes of participants in that practice; i.e., the status of being-committed-or-entitled-to-X is to be understood in terms of being-taken-to-be-or-treated-as-committed-or-entitled-to-X. For Brandom, all the facts about normative attitudes in a discursive practice settle all the facts about the normative statuses of participants in such a practice; the latter merely supervene on the former.

In both cases the ultimate explainers with respect to an account of our conceptual capacities seem to be “merely” subjective and potentially arbitrary. If conceptual content is dependent upon the norms we employ, and if those norms are not themselves “read off” of the structure of ultimate reality, how can we be confident that our intentionality is not a “mere” construction or a “mere” expression of subjective feeling, attitude or preference? In other words, what grounds do we have for using the norms that we do, or taking the normative attitudes that we do? Are the norms that make possible intentional attitudes and actions ultimately merely arbitrary? Furthermore, if our attitudes and actions are propositionally contentful in virtue of being subject to these norms, and if these norms do not originate in the objects of our attitudes, then how is it that these attitudes can be appraised in terms of their correctness with respect to how things stand with their objects? How is it that conceptually articulated judgments “about” the world can be right or wrong in virtue of how the world is, if they are articulated in terms of resolutely non-empirical concepts? I will begin by examining Kant’s answer to these objectivity problems and then examine Fichte’s transformation of Kant’s problem as a way of setting the stage for a lengthy discussion of Brandom’s complex approach to these

---

2 Whether this “ultimate reality” is empirical (the physical world in its causal articulation) or transcendent.
issues. Fichte’s views are important in the context since, on the one hand, they demonstrate the link between Brandom’s views and Kant’s, and, on the other hand, they demonstrate the substantial transformation of Kantian problematics when Kant’s dualisms are rejected (as discussed in Brandom’s case above).

2.1. Kant on Objectivity and the Universal Validity of the Categories

For Kant, the objectivity problem is tied up with the question of whether the application of the categories to intuition is arbitrary; i.e., with the question of whether the act of synthetic judgment is universally or merely subjectively valid. His proof of the contention that it is indeed universally valid has two parts: first he demonstrates that the employment of concepts (and ultimately the pure concepts of the understanding) is necessary for unified experience of objects; and, second, he demonstrates that this employment (and hence the kind of experience of objects that it constitutes) is necessary for having any experience at all. In other words, without the categories there is no experience of objects and without this kind of experience there is no experience at all.

Without the categories we could have no experience of unified objects. This is because, first of all, sensory intuition presents us only with a manifold articulated in space and time. The forms of intuition do not confer on intuitions the unity of an object isolatable in space and continuing through time, they only present us with this intuition now and that intuition then and another intuition later. For this manifold to constitute experience of a unified object, it must be subject to an act of combination or “synthesis,” by which some kind of necessity is attributed to the way in which the manifold is given in virtue of there being a unity to (parts of) it. In other words, the perception of objects
requires positing in the manifold of intuition a necessary unity. This synthesis, though, cannot be an act of intuition itself, but must rather be “a best of spontaneity of the faculty of representations… all combination… is an act of the understanding.” As such the necessity of the synthesis of the manifold into an object cannot be the necessity of empirical cause and effect, but rather the (normative) necessity of a concept; what moves a person to bring unity to the manifold this way or that way is the fact that, in virtue of its formal conditions (i.e., the pure concepts), her activity can only be done certain ways. The universal validity – i.e., the necessity – of the act of determining an object in this or that way in the manifold (the act of judgment) is derived from the validity of the concepts applied in that act. The conceptual content (i.e., the object) of our experience can be universally valid only if the concepts/rules in virtue of which the act of determining that content is performed are more than merely subjectively valid. The question of objectivity/universal validity then devolves onto the question of the necessity/universal validity of the application of the categories to experience.

This is what Kant calls the *quaestio quid juris*. That the understanding brings unity to the manifold by means of the application of the categories has been established (this is the answer to the *quaestio quid facti*), but it remains an open question whether this

---

3 The necessity here is important, since this will confer universal validity on the perception of the object. One might say that, in seeing an object in the manifold, one is saying “what is given in intuition must be thus-and-so because I am having a continuous experience of one thing in a particular place.” Positing the unity of an object in the manifold of intuitions explains why the manifold is the way it is (“I keep having red experiences because I’m looking at a fire-truck”).

4 In the A-deduction, Kant goes into some detail about how this must happen. There are three successive syntheses that must take place: a “synthesis of apprehension in the intuition,” a “synthesis of reproduction” in the imagination and a “synthesis of recognition” in a concept. Without all three of these one cannot determine a unified object in the manifold of intuition. Cf. KRV, A 98-110.

5 An object just is: “that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united.” (KRV, B 137)

6 So for Kant (as I will argue is also the case for Brandom) the objectivity of the conceptual content of our experience depends on the objectivity of the norms that determine the activity in virtue of which our experience has content at all.
is done by necessity (i.e., in a way that is universally valid, with reason) or whether this is ultimately arbitrary. To show “how subjective conditions of thought [the categories] can have objective validity”\(^8\) is the task of the transcendental deduction of the categories. It is far beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the myriad intricacies, vagaries and complexities of the deduction, and I will not attempt to do so. It suffices for me to discuss Kant’s basic argument and the significance thereof. Kant’s basic argument goes something like this: the transcendental unity of apperception is a condition sine qua non for all experience simpliciter, insofar as even my intuitions to be my experience must be mine and they are mine only insofar as I take myself to be having them: “It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me.”\(^9\)

This “transcendental unity of self-consciousness”\(^10\) is universally valid insofar as it is a necessary condition for any and all experience. Kant then moves on to argue that the application of the categories to experience (and hence the determination of objects in the manifold) is a necessary condition of bringing the transcendental unity of apperception to experience. To make a complex story simple, this is because this unity of apperception necessarily involves judgment, and it is the categories that are the formal conditions for judgment. Thus, for the necessary condition of all experience (the unity of apperception) to obtain, the categories must be applied to experience through the act of judgment and hence this application is necessary for all experience. Kant summarizes his argument thus:

---

\(^8\) *KRV*, A 89/ B 122.

\(^9\) *KRV*, B 131.

\(^10\) *KRV*, B 132.
The manifold given in a sensible intuition is necessarily subject to the original synthetic unity of apperception, because in no other way is the unity of intuition possible. But that act of understanding by which the manifold of given representations (be they intuitions or concepts) is brought under one apperception, is the logical function of judgment. All the manifold, therefore, so far as it is given in a single empirical intuition, is determined in respect of one of the logical functions of judgment, and is thereby brought into one consciousness. Now the categories are just these functions of judgment, in so far as they are employed in the determination of the manifold of a given intuition. Consequently, the manifold in a given intuition is necessarily subject to the categories.11

The necessity of transcendental apperception makes it necessary to employ the categories which in turn necessitates the determination of objects in the manifold. Determining objects in the manifold the way we do (i.e., judging in accordance with the categories) is not arbitrary, but is in fact a normative necessity, in virtue of the fact that transcendental self-consciousness must underwrite every aspect of our experience.

This is highly significant. For Kant, there is genuine empirical objectivity in the sense that the way we experience objects (appearances, phenomena) is not an arbitrary imposition of “merely” subjective preference12 because the norms/rules by which we act in giving form to that experience are non-arbitrary conditions for experience. This empirical objectivity (or “empirical realism”) is, however, underwritten by a transcendental subjectivity, viz. the transcendental unity of apperception. Thus, for Kant, “the synthetic unity of consciousness is... an objective condition of all knowledge. It is not merely a condition that I myself require in knowing an object, but it is a condition

---

11 KRV, B 143. Paul Guyer sums up the intent of this argument: “The entire project [is to show] that the categories apply to all the objects of the transcendental unity of apperception precisely because apperception itself presupposes the use of the categories...” Paul Guyer, “The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories” in The Cambridge Companion to Kant, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 150.
12 Which would be a form of empirical subjectivity.
under which every intuition must stand *in order to become an object for me.*”13 There are, in other words, subjective conditions for objectivity.

There is more to the question of objectivity in Kant’s philosophy. In addition to there being (transcendentally) subjective conditions for (empirical) objectivity, there are also, in some sense, objective conditions for subjectivity; or rather, (empirical) subjectivity for Kant is not self-sufficient but is also made possible by the existence of the external world; this is the force of his “Refutation of Idealism.” Kant asks how it is possible to have experience of himself as persisting through time. To say that it is a result of some inner permanence would beg the question, and thus “perception of this permanent is possible only through a *thing* outside me and not through the mere *representation* of a thing outside me; and consequently the determination of my existence in time is possible only through the existence of actual things which I perceive outside me.”14 Empirical self-consciousness is possible only on the basis of object-consciousness; the two are correlates.

This interplay between subjectivity and objectivity – which is a primary concern of this essay – points in some sense in the direction of a correlation between them in Kant’s thought. However, the correlation between subjectivity and objectivity is not complete, as a result of Kant’s strong distinction between the transcendental and empirical, or between the thing-in-itself and the object as an appearance. In the first instance, the object made possible by subjective conditions is not a thing-in-itself, but a “mere” appearance; it is thus not transcendentally, but only empirically, real. Secondly,

---

13 KRV, B 138.
14 KRV, B 275.
the kind of self-consciousness made possible by consciousness of an objective world[^15] is not the transcendental self-consciousness that makes empirical objectivity possible, but the empirical ego that is the object of inner sense. In other words, it is *transcendental* subjectivity that makes *empirical* objectivity possible and (in a sense) *transcendental* objectivity that makes *empirical* subjectivity possible. Since Kant maintains a rigorous distinction between the transcendental and the empirical, this cannot be a fully realized case of the correlation of subjectivity and objectivity. However, it points in that direction and, more importantly, becomes a fully realized case in Fichte’s hands, since the latter does away with the rigorous phenomena/noumena distinction that grounds Kant’s version of the transcendental/empirical distinction.

Before I move on to discuss Fichte and his “intersubjective” turn on the problem of objectivity, I’ll summarize the most important points about Kant’s address to the problem. We can distinguish two senses in which our experience can be objective. First, in virtue of its *content*, our experience is objective if the ways in which we determine objects in the manifold of intuition are non-arbitrary and can in some sense “answer to” the phenomena perceived. Our experience has objective content, (a) because it depends on and comprehends a non-conceptual “given” (intuition); and (b) because the determination of objects in the manifold given (empirical judgment) is done in accordance with norms that are universally valid. (B) indicates the second way in which our experience can be said to be objective: if our acts of experiencing are performed in accordance with norms that – though ultimately grounded in transcendental subjectivity –

[^15]: It is worth noting that this objective world consists of *things in themselves*, which are the objective grounds of the perceived phenomena, while the pure intuitions and concepts are their subjective grounds. The point of the “Refutation” is, then, that we *must* pre-suppose that the perceived phenomena correspond in some sense to independently existing things in themselves, otherwise there would be no grounds to posit the continuity of the perceiving subject through time.
are non-arbitrary and binding beyond merely (empirically) subjective preference; i.e., that are universally valid. Kant demonstrates the possibility of this by showing that these norms are necessary for the application of the transcendental unity of apperception to the manifold which is a condition for experience überhaupt. There are, then, two dimensions to the objectivity of our conceptual practices, corresponding to two different constraints that determine whether a concept has been correctly or erroneously applied: 1) a “formal” norm of consistency with other concepts (and particularly the pure concepts); and 2) a “material” norm of adequacy to the non-conceptual intuitions being synthesized.\textsuperscript{16} Kant’s defence and articulation of the objectivity our experience, then, still relies on the dualisms that Brandom seeks to “get beyond:” concept/intuition; formal/material; conceptual/non-conceptual, etc. To set the stage for Brandom’s alternative defence, I’ll discuss how Fichte – in his Jena period at least – also seeks to effect a “Kantian” reconciliation of subjectivity and objectivity in a way that avoids the Kantian dualisms.

\section*{2.2. Fichte’s “Intersubjective” Turn Toward Objectivity}
Whereas Kant seeks the conditions for sapient experience in the various syntheses and their rules, Fichte deduces the correlation of subjectivity and objectivity from the conditions for rational agency. That is, Fichte begins with the self, not as synthesizing an otherwise chaotic manifold of representations, but acting in the world. It is in an investigation of the conditions that make human action possible that he discovers the correlation of objectivity and subjectivity.

Rational action – that is, \textit{intentional} action, directed at an end – is possible first of all only by an agent capable of forming an intention; that is, a self-active agent, an agent

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. KPV, A 294/ B 350.
that can act upon itself in order to determine itself with respect to an end. This “self-reverting activity” is constitutive of rational agency as such: we are rational beings by virtue of the ability to take this intentional stance. In a way, Fichte here is starting out with an affirmation of Kant’s description of rational action; viz. that it is action in accordance with a conception of a rule. What this means for Fichte is that a rational agent “must ascribe to itself an activity whose ultimate ground lies purely and simply within itself;” in other words, that what moves a rational being to action is something “internal” to it, a conception of a rule as opposed to some external necessity. Failing this condition, there is no self-consciousness and thus no rational agency. It is because of this necessity – i.e., that of positing a self-reverting activity to it – that Fichte insists that “the practical I is the I of original self-consciousness.” He does not begin with a split between practical and theoretical reason, the former aimed at the production of objects according to a concept and the latter at the determination of objects in an intuitive given. The primacy of the practical – i.e., the primordiality of practical self-consciousness for rational being as such – for Fichte means that the very givenness of intuition is posited within the sphere of self-conscious practical reason. This bears some unpacking.

The rational being determined by the self-reverting activity is a finite being and hence this activity must posit itself as finite, that is, as limited. For genuine self-

---

17 Fichte elsewhere characterizes this activity as “an acting that is itself directed at acting (Fichte 1994, 42).”
18 FNR, 18.
19 FNR, 21.
20 This phrase is, of course, Kant’s. In KPV, he argues that practical reason has primacy over theoretical reason insofar as it “has of itself original a priori principles with which certain theoretical positions are inseparably connected, while these are withdrawn from any possible insight of speculative reason…” (KPV, 5: 120). Amongst these principles Kant includes the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. Because Fichte does not distinguish practical and theoretical reason in the same way Kant does, applying the phrase to him will involve a certain equivocation, however the fundamental idea that practical, moral considerations are foundational for theoretical insight remains common to both.
reflection to be possible for a finite being – for it to take itself to be finite – that self-reflection must simultaneously posit the existence of something outside of the self, a “Not-I” that limits and constrains it. The I must, in other words, take itself to be acting in a world; self-reverting activity must also have an object other than itself. The positing of the Not-I is just as necessary as the positing of the I in self-reverting activity, in fact, the former is a necessary condition of the latter (and vice versa): “What emerges in the I’s necessary acting [i.e., in its self-reverting activity by which it is an “I”] itself appears as necessary, i.e., the I feels constrained in its presentation of what emerges. The one says that the object has reality. The criterion of all reality is the feeling of having to present something just as it is presented.”

Subjectivity – “I-ness” – is possible only on the condition of a posited objectivity; the beholdenness of the I to something outside of itself that constrains its free activity. The I must take itself to be responsible for determining its actions in this way as opposed to that way in virtue of requirements imposed on it by something that is not it. There must be something else that has normative significance for the I.

This means that a genuinely rational agent (one capable of practical self-consciousness) must also be one that has a “world-intuiting activity” according to which it is (normatively) beholden to a Not-I as well as a “free” activity by which it determines its own actions in accordance with a purely “internal” ground. In other words, intentional action must have both a concept (the free self-determination of activity) and an object (a responsibility to determine itself in certain ways in virtue of an external constraint). So far, this does not appear to be too different from Kant’s distinction between concept and intuition and his assertion that the two must be united in an act of judgment for there to

\[21\] FNR, 5.
be genuine knowledge. However, whereas Kant separated intuition and conception as acts of two different faculties (of receptivity and spontaneity respectively) and construed the former as the non-conceptual (and hence, per se non-normative) material which is given form in a separate act of judgment in the understanding, for Fichte these two activities are the same acts. The free self-reverting activity (activity that says “I”) is only possible if it posits itself as bound to a not-I and the beholdenness to the not-I is reciprocally a condition for the self-positing of the I qua finite. In other words: “the world-intuiting activity is itself that free activity in the state of being bound… free activity… is an efficacy directed at objects, and intuition is an efficacy that has been nullified, one that has been freely surrendered by the rational being itself.”22

The “objectivity” of the world as intuited – the way in which our free activity is constrained from without (at least materially) – is grounded in the self-limitation of self-conscious activity. The way in which the “external” world impinges on our activity such that it provides a reason for acting in this way and not that (i.e., insofar as it provides rational constraint) is grounded in the requirements for rational agency as such: “Every object has become determinate for the I in just the manner that it is for the I, because the I acted determinately in just the manner that it acted; but that the I acted in such a manner was necessary, for such an action belonged among the conditions of self-consciousness.”23 In other words, objects exist for the I just in virtue of the fact that the I determines its activities in this way rather than that in response to a posited constraint. But this is not arbitrary, since the way it determines its activities are a condition for its being able to determine its activities at all, in other words, they are a condition for self-

22 FNR, 20. Fichte later calls this “the identity of acting and being acted upon” (FNR, 23).
23 FNR, 5.
consciousness. This argument is structurally similar to Kant’s transcendental deduction (the B-deduction), but without the language of “the application of the categories to the given manifold of intuition” and hence without the “Kantian dualisms.” If we can call the sphere of a rational agent’s free (i.e., norm-responsive\(^24\)) activity the “space of reasons” (since within this space free activity is constrained by the force of the better reason rather than by non-conceptual causal pressures), then for Fichte, objectivity is not a matter of what is outside of the space of reasons (i.e., the non-conceptual causal realm) impinging *per extra* on that logical space, but is a matter of the rational agent taking up a certain posture or comportment *within* the space of reasons as a condition for being in that space at all.\(^25\)

So, Fichte accounts for objectivity in terms of the conditions necessary for the subjectivity constitutive of rational agency and thereby draws out a kind of correlation between subjectivity and objectivity. But Fichte suggests a further condition for the possibility of self-conscious rational agency: a “summons” from another rational agent. In its “finding itself” to both posit (as a being for it) the not-I and to be constrained by the not-I, the rational agent finds itself to be both self-determining and yet determined. This would seem to be a paradox. Self-consciousness is only possible if the I *simultaneously*

\(^{24}\) Norm-responsive, since rational agency is always action according to a conception of a rule – implying simultaneously rule-boundedness (beholdenness) and freedom: hence *responsibility*.

\(^{25}\) In fact to *be* an object (even a “thing”) just is to be a fixture in the space of reasons; i.e., to be a possible reason for acting on the part of a rational agent. The external world is thought of as being for the subject. This does not mean that it is *created* by the I (nor does it imply the metaphysical thesis that *esse* *is percipi*), but rather that there are conditions under which a thing can *count as* an object *for* a rational agent, which is to say that it can be a something about which a rational agent can deliberate and, moreover, that act as an *acknowledged* check on the agent’s free action. In so far as an external object impinges on my free rational activity it functions for me as a sort of norm: something that constrains norm-responsive action (i.e., normative action). One could say that – alongside moral laws, legal principles, rules of inference, etc. – objects *for us* are necessary features in the topography of the space of reasons. Cf. FNR, 4-5.
ascribes free efficacy to itself and “in one and the same undivided moment” posits something in opposition to that free activity by which that free activity is determined in a certain respect. The question is: how is it possible that these two “moments” can be simultaneous – i.e., one moment? After all, if one wants to explain the self-ascription of free efficacy by itself, one can only do so (as established) by reference to some object of that efficacy, i.e., by positing a not-I for that “I”. But then to explain the co-incidence of those, one needs to repeat the simultaneous positing and so on *ad infinitum*: “The reason the possibility of self-consciousness cannot be explained without always presupposing it as already actual lies in the fact that, in order to be able to posit its own efficacy, the subject of self-consciousness must have already posited an object, simply as an object. This is why we were always driven beyond the moment within which we wanted to attach the thread of self-consciousness to a prior moment, where the thread already had to be attached.”

The only possible resolution to this infinite regress – whereby self-consciousness always presupposes a self-consciousness that explains the necessary object-directedness of self-consciousness – is to identify a point at which self-consciousness and its object (concept and object, if you will) are not two distinguishable moments within an act, but are in fact “one and the same moment” in such a way “that the subject’s efficacy is itself the object that is perceived and comprehended, and that the object is nothing other than the subject’s efficacy (and thus that the two are the same).” In other words, the subject must be perceived to be self-perceiving and, moreover, this perception must be *determinative* for the perceived, since it grounds the possibility of any self-perception on

---

26 FNR, 30.
27 FNR, 31.
28 FNR, 31.
its part; that is, it must be a perception of the agents’ self-perception that, on the one hand, cannot come from itself (without begging the question) and, on the other hand, must make or enable the agent to be self-conscious (self-consciousness always presupposes self-consciousness).

And this is just Fichte’s solution: “we [can] think of the subject’s being-determined as its being-determined to be self-determining, i.e., as a summons to the subject, calling upon it to resolve to exercise its efficacy.” The self-reverting activity that constitutes the normative space of reasons for us, happens as a response to a summons to engage in exactly that kind of self-determining activity. What enables us to be self-conscious creatures is that we are treated as such by other self-conscious creatures. This summons is not, it must be made clear, a causal pressure – it does not necessitate the activity the way that motion necessitates other motion – but is itself a normative call: “Thus as surely as the subject comprehends the object, so too does it possess the concept of its own freedom and self-activity, and indeed as a conception given to it from the outside. It acquires the concept of its own free efficacy, not as something that exists in the present moment (for that would be a genuine contradiction), but rather as something that ought to exist in the future.” In this way, the subject’s autonomy (i.e., its character as self-determining) is not contradicted by the presence of a brute norm or rule that it must follow, but is in fact made possible by the normative call or summons; it is determined to be self-determining.

There is no paradox inherent in the implication of Fichte’s account of self-consciousness that it always pre-supposes self-consciousness, as long as we open up our

29 FNR, 31.
30 FNR, 32.
explanatory horizon to include other self-consciousnesses. Now, obviously, the self-consciousness of the summoner must be explained in terms of a response to a summons, and so on, but this merely implies that self-consciousness is only possible within a temporally extended community: “The human being (like all finite beings in general) becomes a human being only among other human beings; and since the human being can be nothing other than a human being and would not exist at all if it were not this – it follows that, if there are to be human beings at all, there must be more than one.”31 It is essential to note, however, that this conclusion is not merely one that a philosopher must draw in explaining the possibility of rational agency, but one that the agent herself must come to as a condition for genuine self-consciousness. In other words, it is a condition for being self-conscious that an agent distinguishes not only between herself (qua rational efficacy) and the object of her efficacy (the not-I), but also between herself and other rational (i.e., self-conscious) beings that are, on the one hand, “outside” of her, but, on the other hand necessary for her having an “inside” at all.32 As the agent goes about her rational activities, she must – as a condition for her activities being rational at all – keep constant track of the extent to which the “ground of the given something [an object] lies within [her], and how much that ground lies outside [her].”33 The first-person perspective of a rational agent (i.e., the consciousness made possible by self-consciousness) must

31 FNR, 37. In a sense, Fichte could be said to be offering a holism of self-consciousness – one cannot be a self-conscious agent outside of a community of self-conscious agents – to correspond to and underly the semantic or conceptual holism of Sellars and Brandom. I will argue that for Hegel, this kind of holism must be articulated in such a way as to recognize an irreducible “community perspective” above and beyond the aggregated perspectives of the participants in such a community. Neither Fichte (at this point in his philosophical development) nor Brandom recognize this adequately.

32 “The subject must distinguish itself, through opposition, from the rational being that (as a consequence of the preceding proof) it has assumed to exist outside itself. The subject has now posited itself as containing within itself the ultimate ground of something that exists within it (this was the condition of I-hood, of rationality in general); but it has likewise posited a being outside itself as the ultimate ground of this something that exists within it.” FNR, 39.

33 FNR, 39.
include within it constant reference to others (a second- or third-person attitude\(^\text{34}\)) both in identification with them and the maintenance of distinction from them. Having a perspective on the world thus necessarily involves identifying with and distinguishing one’s own perspective from those of others within the horizon of a shared world of objects. This holds for everyone, since no-one’s self-consciousness is self-determining without being determined, and hence it is a condition for anyone having a perspective on the world that everyone exist in relationships of mutual recognition; i.e., where we recognize one another as rational beings.

Put in practical terms, this means that it is a condition of being a rational agent that one can maintain a distinction between a “sphere of possible activity” within which I act freely (i.e., in accordance with grounds that are entirely self-determined) and a corresponding sphere of activity that belongs to the other; i.e., that I recognize both myself and her as rational agents and have a willingness to respect the boundaries between us by simultaneously protecting my autonomy within my sphere of activity and respecting her autonomy within her sphere of activity.\(^\text{35}\) From both of our perspectives, this limitation must be seen to be self-imposed, just as one’s beholdenness to objects must be self-imposed, and this too as a condition of our self-consciousness and hence also of

\(^{34}\) The question of the precise nature of the recognitive attitude taken toward other rational agents will become an important focus of my critique of Brandom. I will argue that Brandom’s model of mutual-recognition has much in common with Fichte’s and that it fails, amongst other reasons, because it does not treat the second-person attitude (“you”) as irreducibly distinct from a third-person attitude (“him” or “her”) attitude toward others. Furthermore, I will argue that taking a second-person attitude requires also being able to take a “first-person plural” attitude – the ability to say “we.”

\(^{35}\) “The subject determines itself as an individual, and as a free individual, by means of the sphere within which it has chosen one from among all the possible actions given within that sphere; and it posits, in opposition to itself, another individual outside of itself that is determined by means of another sphere within which it has chosen. Thus the subject posits both spheres at the same time, and only through such positing is the required opposition possible.” (FNR, 41)
our consciousness of objects. In undertaking an rational activity, then, I am binding myself to an obligation to respect the other person’s autonomy (because my own capacity for free efficacy depends on her recognition of me as a rational agent) and binding the other person to an obligation to respect my free efficacy within my own sphere of possible activity.

From these obligations – grounded in the mutual recognition constitutive for rational agency – Fichte deduces the concept of right, but what primarily interests me here is what this means for the grounds of objectivity. As we have seen, Fichte argues that a certain form of objectivity (i.e., of the subject’s beholdenness to a “not-I” in its free activity) is both a condition for and a result of a subject’s self-reverting activity in virtue of which that subject is a rational agent; in other words, subjectivity (being a self-conscious rational agent) stands in a relation of reciprocal grounding with objectivity – they are correlates. I have now further shown that, for Fichte, this correlation is itself made possible only within the further correlation of subjectivity (individual self-consciousness) and inter-subjectivity (consciousness of other rational agents) in a relationship of mutual recognition. Thus objectivity, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are irreducibly inter-related concepts. The project of answering the problem of objectivity requires a kind of “triangulation.”

---

36 Cf., FNR, 41.
37 “The conclusion to all of this has already emerged. – I must in all cases recognize the free being outside me as a free being, i.e., I must limit my freedom through the concept of the possibility of his freedom. The relation between free beings that we have deduced… is called the relation of right; and the formula that has now been established is the principle of right.” FNR, 49. Fichte moves on, in the rest of FNR, to formulate a system of social ethics from this principle (and particularly political and civil legislation), in a similar manner that Kant does in his Metaphysics of Morals. However, it should be noted that Fichte rigorously distinguishes the principles of right (and of civil legislation that follow from them) from the moral law and the corresponding conception of duty. Cf. FNR, 50-52.
38 This term is employed by Donald Davidson to argue – amongst other things – that the possibility of objective content is underwritten by the social relationship between authoritative first-person perspectives.
can have these only by holding conscious reference to objects simultaneously together with conscious reference to other such subjects and to itself qua subject of those attitudes. Without constantly triangulating our knowledge of ourselves, of others, and of objects, no rational experience of objects (normative objectivity) is possible.

Before I move on to see how Brandom picks up this theme of “triangulation” in his own approach to the problem of objectivity, I want to briefly probe just a little bit deeper into the nature of the “intersubjective” pole of Fichte’s triangle. Having a concept of (my own) individuality is, as we have seen, necessary for having a concept of an object. Fichte’s intersubjective turn has demonstrated moreover that “the concept of individuality is a reciprocal concept…this concept can exist in a rational being only if it is posited as completed by another rational being. Thus the concept is never mine; rather it is – in accordance with my own admission and the admission of the other – mine and his, his and mine; it is a shared concept within which two consciousnesses are unified into one.”

Who is the subject of this concept, then? Fichte has shown (if his arguments stand) that if we did not both have the concept of individuality, then neither of us would,
but, I want to argue, this does not imply in his view that the subject(s) of the concept is anything other than the individuals involved. Though he says that “the concept of individuality determines a community,”40 I do not believe that Fichte can assert that it is the community – i.e., that it is we – who hold the concept genuinely in common; the concept is mine and his, his and mine, but it is not ours. This is because, on Fichte’s account of mutual recognition, the distinction between my individuality and his individuality must always be maintained from my perspective. I must rigorously maintain – as a condition for my being a rational agent (as discussed above) – the distinction between my perspective and those of others, even though I must constantly keep track of the perspectives of others. The other rational agent is still defined as being outside of me41 and hence as a Not-I. If, then, the concept of individuality that is “shared” between us is one in which “two consciousnesses are united into one,” this unity must not transcend my distinguishing of our two perspectives. The I and the Not-I are opposites that are united, and hence mutual recognition is “a unifying of opposites into one” but “the point of union lies in me, in my consciousness; and the unity is conditioned by my capacity for consciousness.”42 From my perspective, I am the subject of the conceptual unity of “I” and “Not-I” while, from the other’s perspective, he is the subject of the conceptual unity of “I” and “Not-I.” Even the necessary “sharing” of the concept of individuality does not transcend the individuality of the members of the community so determined; there is no “We” that transcends the mutual co-incidence of “I” and “Him,” no perspective or sphere of possible efficacy that is not exhaustively parcelled out between the individuals in play, no “ours” that transcends the co-incidence of “mine” and

40 FNR, 45.
41 Cf. FNR, 39.
42 FNR, 44.
“his.” This is why I defined Fichte’s turn as “intersubjective” rather than “social;” the community of mutually-recognitive agents can be exhaustively analyzed into the sum of their various individual epistemic and practical perspectives. I will argue that this same analysis of “sociality” plays out in Brandom, whereas (as I will argue in Part 2), Hegel defends a more robust sense of community in conception of Spirit as “an I that is We and a We that is I.” I will further argue (in Part 3) that Hegel’s version of sociality is superior to Fichte’s and Brandom’s in that it can diagnose and correct the problems in Brandom’s defence of objectivity that render him unable to genuinely reconcile his normative phenomenalism with the robust objectivity of conceptual norms.

2.3. Brandom on Objectivity

As outlined above, Brandom takes propositional conceptual content to be conferred on our utterances “in virtue of their proper use being governed by inferential commitments,” and these commitments in turn must be understood as statuses within a discursive practice. Any utterance I make has a meaning (i.e., an assertible content) in virtue of the fact that, by making it, I undertake or acknowledge a certain commitment, a commitment to which I may or may not be entitled in virtue of other commitments I have. This commitment is a normative commitment to say or do various things as a consequence of my undertaking it, and I am held responsible for it both by myself and by others; having an inferential commitment is a normative status. Furthermore, the normative discursive statuses of being committed and being entitled to a commitment

---

43 MIE, 495.
44 There are, of course, many other kinds of normative status (e.g., moral statuses), but these are not essential to Brandom’s characterization of discursive practice (i.e., the practice of giving and asking for reasons) and hence not essential to understanding the conceptual contentfulness of our attitudes and
are to be unpacked in terms of the normative attitudes of discursive practitioners; being committed to a claim just is being taken to be so committed either by oneself and by others;\textsuperscript{45} in other words, being committed or entitled to a commitment is to be understood in terms of the practical attitudes of taking or treating as being committed or entitled in the practice of undertaking, acknowledging, ascribing, etc. commitments in a social practice. By taking these practical normative attitudes, participants in a discursive practice “keep score” of their own and others’ commitments, constantly keeping track of and (normatively) assessing the commitments and entitlements of others while doing the same with respect to their own. Brandom calls this the “deontic scorekeeping” model of discursive practice. Every claim or assertion (indeed, every speech act) made is a move in a complex game in which there is no umpire, but rather – like a “pick up” game – the players keep score for themselves and one another, understanding the “pragmatic significance” of every move (speech act) in terms of the commitments and entitlements of the person who makes the move. It is in virtue of having “pragmatic significance” in this

\textsuperscript{45} Parceling out the role of oneself and others in instituting one’s own normative statuses will be an essential task of the following section and, I will further suggest, a matter that leaves Brandom at a critical impasse (albeit an unacknowledged one) with respect to the relation of subjectivity (self-ascription of discursive status), sociality (the ascription of discursive status to others and by others) and objectivity (the ways in which our discursive statuses are dependent on the way things stand with the world).
game (i.e., in virtue of being a commitment or entitlement that “interacts with the
discursive score”\textsuperscript{46}) that speech acts have inferential and hence conceptual content.

This deontic scorekeeping model of discursive practice is of a piece with
Brandom’s “phenomenalism” about norms (i.e., the idea that normative attitudes institute
normative statuses). Simply touching a base on a baseball diamond does not make one
“safe;” being safe is not a function of the strictly physical or naturalistic facts about a
situation. After all, one can only be “safe” (which is a normative status) if one is actually
playing a game of baseball, and if, furthermore, a number of antecedent facts have
preceded it, not all of which are physical facts.\textsuperscript{47} Now, one is only playing a game of
baseball if others are also playing and are thus actively concerned with the constitutive
rules and standards of the game and keeping active track of whether they apply; hence
one can only be safe if everyone around you is engaged in taking up certain \textit{attitudes} –
there is no normative status outside of a (social) practice of taking up normative attitudes.
This, of course, raises the problem of objectivity. How is it, if being safe (or, by analogy,
being committed or entitled to a claim) is intelligible only within a practice of people
taking up attitudes about whether I’m safe (or entitled or committed), that anyone and
even everyone can be \textit{wrong} about whether I’m safe? Furthermore, if the fact that I
touched a base before someone else did cannot (being a merely physical or naturalistic
fact) by itself endow me with the status of being safe (i.e., outside of the practice of
taking up normative attitudes about it), how is it that my \textit{being safe} can depend upon
whether or not this fact obtained and not upon whether or not everyone around me (or

\textsuperscript{46} MIE, 183.

\textsuperscript{47} For example, it is not sufficient that you hit the ball, it must have also be “fair” rather than “foul” (a
normative status) and the pitch that preceded it must have be thrown at the appropriate time and in the
appropriate manner.
even I myself) think that I did? Put in terms of discursive scorekeeping: “it is of the utmost importance to the present project to offer an account of what one is doing in taking a scorekeeper to have gotten things wrong, to have attributed commitments different from what the one to whom they are attributed is really committed to.”48 How can we make sense of the idea that there can be objective constraint on our normative attitudes such that the attribution of normative status in those attitudes can be taken to be wrong? Again: how is it that I can be safe even if I and everyone else thinks that I wasn’t, given that the status of being safe is instituted by the attitudes of the players?

It is important to note that there are two dimensions of objectivity at stake here, though they are inextricably interconnected: objectivity of deontic status and objectivity of conceptual content. These two dimensions can be understood in terms of the two “levels” of explanation that I discussed above. In the first case, Brandom’s normative pragmatics (his attempt to give an account of the propriety of attitudes and behaviours in terms of norms and attitudes implicit in practices) requires an account of the objectivity of normative status: how can it be that I can have a certain deontic status whether or not it is attributed to me, and, correspondingly, how can the normative statuses I have constrain the activity of attributing normative statuses to me if that activity (cashed out in terms of normative attitudes implicit in practice) in fact institutes those statuses? In the second case, his inferentialist semantics (by which he attempts to unpack the conferral of propositional content in terms of material inferential proprieties) requires an account of how the correctness of the asserted content of a claim is constituted (at least in part) by the way things stand with what the claim is asserted about. In other words, Brandom must provide an account of the representational purport of our commitments (and their

48 MIE, 184.
expression in explicit speech acts): how is it that our activities, attitudes and assertions are about things in the world? Perhaps enough has been said about the question of the objectivity of status to motivate an analysis of Brandom’s answer to it, but more needs to be said about the question of representation.

Brandom distinguishes between two basic explanatory strategies in a philosophical semantics (i.e., in an attempt to account for the conceptual contentfulness of our attitudes), one by which proprieties of inference are explained in terms of representational purport and one that pursues the opposite explanatory course. The former strategy – employed by inter alia Descartes and virtually all empiricists – treats our capacity to represent the world in our attitudes or (latterly) by our assertions as fundamental to our discursive capacities. Whether by an immediate cognitive contact with (non-conceptual) things or through a mediating representation of them, individual acts of consciousness or speech “take up” some part or aspect of the world.49 Only when this “word-world” relation is established (when our thoughts/assertions have representational content or purport) can we then move on to establishing connections between our various ideas by means of some sort of construction using some sort of purely formal rules.50 As such, this “representationalist” strategy also tends toward a semantic atomism, insofar as each individual idea or assertion is taken to be intelligible and contentful simply in virtue of its relation to items or events in the world (or a mental surrogate for the world) quite apart from whatever inferential significance it may have.

---

49 Various ways have been offered to unpack how this primordial “uptake” of the world into the mental sphere takes place and from there to give an account of how these representations can be interrelated. One more recent such attempt is through a “causal” theory of reference or a theory of “primitive denotation” whereby the impact of the world on discourse can (at least theoretically) be unpacked in the causal language of physics. See, for example, Hartry Field’s attempt to unfold Tarki’s semantic theory of truth in these terms in “Tarksi’s Theory of Truth”. Journal of Philosophy 59 (1972): 347-375.

50 Even these formal rules (e.g., the laws of logic) can be interpreted as constructions from immediate experience (Hume’s psychologism is an example).
with respect to other ideas/assertions. Speaking more broadly, a semantics is representationalist if it treats word-world relations ("truth" "reference") as fundamental in the order of explanation. Such a view would seem to provide a fairly simple account of the objectivity of conceptual content: an idea is objectively correct if and only if it successfully represents the world in whatever way the particular theory wants to explain it. As I'll discuss, though, it has certain very significant draw-backs on Brandom's view.

To this view, Brandom opposes his "inferentialism." One of the fundamental problems he sees with any representationalism is that it tends to run together two distinct issues or, when it doesn’t run them together, it misconstrues their inter-relation. On the one hand, the "representational purport" of an assertion is the way it takes things to be thus-and-so; *an assertion* purports to represent, say, the fire truck as red. On the other hand the "representational uptake" is precisely the way in which *an asserter* can *take the assertion to be a representation*, or (in other words) it is the way in which you can take the assertion to have representational purport. It is characteristic of representationalists, he thinks, to fail to give an account of representational uptake, that is, to fail to show an interest in what we do when we take a thing to be thus-and-so. Even when they do attempt to give such an account, however, they fail to grasp that "the notion of

51 It need not necessarily be so. One reading of truth-conditional semantics would treat it as representationalist (in virtue of treating conceptual contentfulness in terms of a semantic theory of truth) but also holist, insofar as that theory of truth must simultaneously fix the extensions of all the expressions in a language.

52 Thus a "causal" theory of representation would explain objective correctness is terms of whether the causal chain between the represented and its representation is uninterrupted or undistorted.

53 Of course, as I’ll discuss further below, he does not take himself to be the first inferentialist. He cites, amongst others, Spinoza, Leibniz and (his particular hero) Hegel (indeed, in some sense he re-defines the so-called "rationalist" tradition in modern philosophy as being "inferentialist").

54 Representational purport, in turn, needs to be distinguished from representational success; not every purported representation actually manages to successfully represent an object (i.e., there can be a failure to refer).

55 Cf. MIE, 72.
representational purport implicitly involves a notion of representational uptake on the part of the some consumer or target of the purporting. It is only insofar as something can be taken to be a representation that it can purport to be one.”56 To put it slightly inelegantly: an assertion’s capacity to be about something depends upon the capacity of an asserter to take that assertion to be about something; nothing can be a representation that isn’t taken to be one.57 The status of being a representation (or purporting to be one) needs to unpacked in terms of the activity or attitude of treating something as such a thing.

Inferentialism is an approach to the question of representational uptake. To take a claim to be a representation is to treat is as both standing in need of reasons and as potentially offering a reason for other claims. Reasoning is by definition inferential and hence it is inferential proprieties that explain representational uptake. This in turn, as we have just seen, explains representational purport, and hence inferentialism reverses the “direction” of representationalist explanation: instead of explaining inferential contentfulness (the ability to be a reason and to stand in need of reasons) in terms of representational contentfulness (purport), inferentialism asserts that the latter needs to be unpacked in terms of the former. Though inference is prior to representation in the order of explanation, it is necessary that representational purport actually be explained, however. Without some account of how it is that our assertions have representational content, there can be no account of how they are correct or incorrect in virtue of how

56 MIE, 72-73.
57 An interesting question here is whether this sentence should conclude “… by the one representing” (which would seem to the moral of Kant’s insistence that the “I think” must be able to accompany all of our representations). I will argue, in fact, that Brandom is of two minds about this. On the one hand, he needs to say it in order to ground his perspectivalism, but on the other, his assertion that attributing a commitment is primary to undertaking one (and not vice versa) makes him unable to do so. I shall return to this point in Chapter 3.
things stand with what they “represent” and hence no meaningful sense can be made of the “objectivity” of conceptual content.

So, as I’ve described it, Brandom needs to address two “sides” of the objectivity problem. First, he needs to address the risks of his phenomenalism about norms that threaten to collapse normative status into normative attitudes in such a way as to make it unintelligible how the latter can be mistaken and stand in need of correction in virtue of the former. Second, he needs to show how it is that inferentially articulated conceptual contents can be mistaken and stand in need of correction in virtue of how things stand with the world. It is crucial to note, however, that, though they are distinct, these two objectivity problems are not separate and are to be addressed together. There are two inter-related reasons for this.

In the first place, the answer to one of the objectivity problems requires an answer to the other. The deontic statuses that Brandom needs to show to be objective are the discursive statuses of being committed and entitled to a claim. One aspect of showing that having the status, say, of being entitled to claim X is objective, is to show that it is “not up to you or me” whether I have that status (in the sense that either of us could arbitrarily decide that I did not have it) but rather that I have that status in virtue of the content of X or of some other claim Y that entails it. Thus, if I am entitled to the claim that “this coffee is cold,” it is not up to me whether I am also entitled to the claim that “this coffee is less that 100°C”; I am entitled to the latter claim simply in virtue of the inferential significance of the former. Similarly, one may have a normative status at least partly in virtue of how things are with the world. I gave the example earlier of being safe

---

58 I have shown above how Kant’s problematics make him address two similar issues in a similar way: the objectivity of content of judgment and the objectivity of conceptual norms.
in baseball because I touched first base before the baseman caught the ball. My entitlement to the claim “I am safe” is then at least partly derived from some fact about the physical world that is “represented” in that claim. In both of these cases, settling the question of the objectivity of deontic status cannot be completely abstracted from the question of the objectivity (representational purport) of the conceptual/propositional contents of the attitudes of those involved.

Secondly, Brandom’s rejection of representationalism does not allow him to merely let the objectivity of content explain the objectivity of deontic status, since the former needs to unpacked in terms of a discursive attitude, viz. that of taking or treating a performance as a representation of something. Both the questions of deontic status and conceptual content need to sorted out fundamentally in terms of the deontic discursive attitudes that govern the game of giving and asking for reasons (attributing, ascribing, undertaking and acknowledging commitments and entitlements). This follows from the structure of Brandom’s general explanatory strategy. In his inferentialist semantics, conceptual/propositional contentfulness is seen to be conferred by the inferential connections between the various commitments and entitlements of participants in a discursive practice. In his normative pragmatics, these commitments and entitlements are in turn to be explained in terms of the practical normative attitudes of discursive scorekeepers in that practice; these attitudes form the horizon within which both discursive statuses and conceptual contents are to understood and hence it is in the language (or according to the model) of discursive scorekeeping that their respective ‘objectivities’ are described. Anticipating some of the details of Brandom’s argument, Daniel Laurier articulates the unity of the two objectivity questions thus: “…both the
objectivity of conceptual contents and the objectivity of deontic statuses are ultimately understood in terms of the contrast between the immediate deontic attitudes of acknowledging and attributing commitments (including inferential commitments) and the mediate deontic attitude of consequentially undertaking commitments.\textsuperscript{59}

Brandom’s arguments in answer to the objectivity problem are complex and depend upon just about every aspect of his thought as laid out in \textit{Making it Explicit}. Speaking as generally as possible, however, we can say that his aim is to argue that the distinctions necessary for a conception of objectivity (the distinction between having a deontic status and taking a deontic attitude and the distinction between what someone is talking about and what they are saying about it\textsuperscript{60}) are underwritten by (and specifiable in terms of) the \textit{social} distinctions between the perspectives of scorekeepers in discursive practices. More specifically, both the representational dimension of language-use and the distinction between deontic statuses and attitudes can be discerned through an examination of the use of “propositional-attitude-ascribing locutions,”\textsuperscript{61} which make explicit (and thus \textit{sayable}) what discursive score-keepers \textit{do implicitly in practice}, viz. attribute deontic statuses to one-another (e.g., being committed to such-and-such). This form of logical vocabulary,\textsuperscript{62} however, does more than merely allow us to \textit{say} something

\textsuperscript{59} Daniel Laurier, “Between Phenomenalism and Objectivism: An Examination of R. Brandom’s Account of the Objectivity of Discursive Deontic Statuses,” \textit{Journal of Philosophical Research} 30 (2005): 198. Laurier’s article is one of relatively few that point out the complexity of the objectivity problem in Brandom as it involves the two aspects that I have been discussing. Laurier argues, in fact, that – though Brandom seeks to provide an account that will serve to answer both parts of the question – the argument that he provides in fact means that Brandom can establish the objectivity of content only at the expense of establishing the objectivity of status.

\textsuperscript{60} This is another way of articulating the distinction between the \textit{representational} dimension of speech acts (“what people are talking about”) and the \textit{inferential} articulation of conceptual contents (“what people are saying about it”). Cf. Robert Brandom: \textit{Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.158.

\textsuperscript{61} MIE, 499. E.g., “John believes that…” or “Sally takes me to be committed to…”

\textsuperscript{62} These locutions are logical in Brandom’s broad sense according to which all explicatory locutions (ones that make explicit what is done implicitly in practice) are “logical” (see above). Cf. MIE, 499.
we could previously only do; it also “makes it possible to do things one could not do before, by saying those things.”

Through the use of ascriptional locutions, “it becomes possible… to attribute not just statuses but attitudes” to others; that is, we can not only implicitly take someone to be committed or entitled to X, but we can attribute to them the attitude of taking himself or someone else to be committed or entitled to X. We can already begin to see, then, that the distinction between normative status and normative attitude is made possible by the expressive resources provided by ascriptional locutions and hence that the ability of the former to swing (relatively) freely of the latter will need to be discovered in an examination of the use of the locutions. However, the same holds for the representational dimension of language use. For Brandom, representational idioms like “is true of” and “refers to” are also bits of logical vocabulary that make explicit (sayable) implicit practical attitudes and hence we must turn to the use of such locutions to grasp the basis of this dimension of objectivity as well. I shall begin, as Brandom does, with these representational locutions. In doing so, we will develop an understanding also of Brandom’s approach to the status-attitude dimension. But first something needs to be made explicit.

On Brandom’s view propositional content and normative correctness are essentially perspectival. As I have discussed above, conceptual content is intrinsically inferential; a move in a language-game has conceptual/propositional content (in other words, it “says something”) in virtue of its inferential significance, that is, in virtue of the propriety of inferring from the appropriate circumstances of its performance to the consequences that follow from it. Put in terms of his normative pragmatics, this means

---

63 MIE, 499.
64 MIE, 449.
that the content of a commitment (what one is committed to) is determined by what else undertaking that commitment commits or entitles one to. Furthermore, the conceptual content of subsentential expressions (singular terms, etc.) and non-repeatable terms (deictic tokenings) are necessarily determined by their substitution-inferential role and this in turn is understood in terms of the notion of commitment-preservation, which commitment is contentful in virtue of its inferential role as just summarized; all content is inferential through and through. Brandom’s semantics, then, is resolutely holistic: the significance of any part of or move within a practice is determined by its role in the whole and hence by its inter-relations with every other part. Content – whether conceptual or empirical (for Brandom these are interconnected) – is not parcelled out sentence by sentence, much less term by term, but rather first and foremost to the whole (whatever that may be).

If conceptual content is determined holistically, though, who gets to decide how the whole properly fits together? In other words, who decides on what the inferential significance of assertion X is? Brandom is a pragmatist and hence believes that meaning (in this case, inferential significance) is determined by use in practice and thus it cannot be based in any one specific codification (dictionaries don’t determine the meanings of words); what follows from what has to be determined within the practice, not imposed on it. Put in terms of his scorekeeping model, inferential proprieties that determine meanings cannot simply be a set of rules established prior to play and then imposed on the activities of the players.65 Furthermore, there is no umpire in a language game, no

65 Such a view would be what Brandom identifies as the two-stage Kantian model of conceptual normativity. Such a view would see the generation and the application of norms as separate activities. Brandom takes it to be a pragmatic insight of Hegel’s that such a separation is both unnecessary and problematic. Cf. Robert B. Brandom, “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism,” in Tales of the
privileged perspective that determines these proprieties, but rather “not only are scores kept for each interlocutor, scores are also kept by each interlocutor.” Each player keeps score by keeping “two sets of books,” one on his own score (in terms of what he is committed and entitled to), and one for those of other players (in terms of what they are committed and entitled to). Inferential proprieties in a language game are therefore determined (a) holistically – i.e., in virtue of the proprieties of other moves in the game; (b) practically – i.e., in the course of the action, not prior to it; and (c) perspectivally – i.e., by each player from that player’s own perspective. What this amounts to is that the decision about what follows from commitment X is determined by the practical scorekeeping attitudes of each participant in a discursive practice in accordance with what else they take to either follow from X or that they take X to follow from. How they keep score (i.e., what inferences they are prepared to endorse) and therefore what they take any move in the game to mean is thus dependent (given the holistic determination of inferential propriety) on what collateral commitments they hold: “[Commitments] differ not only in who endorses the propriety of the inference involved but also in what inference is taken to be involved. For what one takes to follow from what… depends on what collateral premises one is committed or entitled to.”

The conceptual content of an expression, then, is by its nature relative and perspectival; it depends on who utters (or interprets) it and what else they are committed to. What I may mean by uttering any given expression may not be the same as what you (would) mean by uttering it as long as we both do not take it to have precisely the same

---


66 Including the perspective of the community as a whole, as we shall discuss later.

67 MIE, 185.

68 MIE, 587.
inferential consequences and antecedents. This is more, of course, than a mere possibility. As a matter of fact it is extremely unlikely that any two people will have exactly the same set of collateral commitments and hence it is equally unlikely that they mean precisely the same thing when they express any one of their commitments. This raises the possibility (even the likelihood) of a massive failure of communication and hence of a failure to actually engage in a discursive practice together (by analogy: it raises the risk that all the players are not in fact playing the same game, but each is merely playing his own). If you may well not mean what I mean by expression X, I may very well not be justified in interpreting your utterance of X by mapping it onto what I would mean by uttering X; there would seem to be an unbridgeable doxastic gap between us. This being the case what Brandom needs to do is to identify some mechanism within language that is, on the one hand, consistent with his holistic perspectivalism and, on the other hand, able to explain “the capacity [on the part of discursive scorekeepers] to accommodate differences in discursive perspective, to navigate across them.” It is in the process of articulating what these mechanisms are that Brandom formulates his grounds for objectivity.

The ability to negotiate a shared practice across a doxastic gap is fundamentally made possible by the distinction between two different forms of propositional attitude ascription, i.e., between \textit{de dicto} and \textit{de re} ascriptions of propositional attitude.

---

69 Davidson holds something like this view – that all communication is ideolectical – but does not think it fatal to the possibility of communication. Cf. Donald Davidson, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs” in \textit{Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). I shall discuss this article at greater length in Chapter 8.

70 Unbridgeable because there is no privileged position outside of our respective perspectives by which to adjudicate just who is right about the inferential significance of X.

71 Some would take this situation to vitiate any perspectivalist holism – if such a doctrine leads to the conclusion that we cannot communicate, it is clearly wrong. Brandom holds out hope.

72 MIE, 588.
Interpreting an interlocutor, for Brandom, necessarily requires – amongst other things – being able to ascribe intentions and attitudes to them and to do so in a way that “makes sense” of these intentions and attitudes in virtue of that person’s collateral commitments; by doing so I can get a sense of what her utterances “mean to her.” It also, requires, however, that I make assessments about those commitments and I must do this from my perspective, from what I take to be true and false in virtue of my own collateral commitments. Hence, in interpreting someone’s utterance, I must have two ways to express the content of what was said, one “from her perspective” (i.e., in light of what she is committed to given her own collateral commitments) and one “from my perspective” (i.e., in light of what that content would commit me to given my collateral commitments). Similarly, ascribing a propositional attitude to someone is a “hybrid deontic attitude” insofar as, in so ascribing I am doing more than one thing. First of all, I am attributing a commitment to my interlocutor (“she believes that X” attributes to her the commitment to X), but I am simultaneously undertaking a commitment myself, viz. a commitment to the effect that she is committed to X. What is attributed (to my interlocutor) is not the same commitment as what is undertaken (by me); these vary not only in perspective but also in terms of whether I (as the ascriber) would be willing to endorse each respectively. For example, I can attribute to another a commitment that I take to be false, but the commitment that I undertake (“She falsely believes that X”) is one that I take to be true. It is thus imperative that I can actively maintain the distinction between these two commitments; otherwise a tremendous amount of confusion might result since, there is a “division of responsibility in the ascription:” my interlocutor is responsible for

---

73 MIE, 551.
74 MIE, 505.
justifying her entitlement to “X” whereas I am responsible for justifying my entitlement to “she believes that X.” If I could not keep these responsibilities separate, I might end up having to justify a commitment that I take to be false. So here too, some kind of expressive device is needed to make explicit the distinction between discursive perspectives – here between a commitment attributed to another and one undertaken oneself.

The ability to keep running track of the distinctions between discursive perspectives and the ability to specify the same content from the different perspectives is grounded in the expressive resources made available by the distinction between two “styles” of attitude-ascription. De dicto ascriptions specify the content of a commitment in terms of what is said by expressing that commitment, taking the form “S believes that \( \Phi(t) \).” De re ascriptions, on the other hand, specify the content in terms of what is being talked about, taking the form “S believes of t that \( \Phi(it) \).” Thus, for example an ascribed commitment may be specified de dicto as “Mary believes that Fido is a mean dog” and specified de re as “Mary believes of Fido that he is a mean dog.” Both the content of the commitment ascribed to Mary (i.e., that Fido is a mean dog) and the content of the commitment expressed in the ascription as a whole (i.e., that Mary believes that Fido is a mean dog) are the same across these different specifications; de re and de dicto

75 Brandom’s inferentialism implies that any contentful expression must be supportable by reasons, and it is a condition for conceptual correctness that the proprieties of inference that provide these reasons are followed. This suggests (although Brandom does not explicitly say so) that making an assertion necessarily involves a (tacit) promise to “back up” the commitment expressed by articulating the reasons for it if challenged. Cf. MIE 176-178 on the “default and challenge structure of entitlement.” If he does indeed hold to such a view, this puts him on a side with Jürgen Habermas, cf. The Theory of Communicative Action, v. 1 (Boston, Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 295-305. One crucial difference between them, though, emerges in respect to Habermas’ view that the constitutive necessity of this promise of discursive redemption of validity claims requires an account of the role of performative attitudes oriented toward reaching a shared understanding as being essential for understanding discursive practice. Brandom demures from this claim. I will discuss this issue at length in Chapter 7.

76 MIE, 502.

77 MIE, 502.
ascriptions are not in themselves content-conferring, but are rather expressive (i.e., logical) in function – they are means by which to make explicit some implicit feature of discursive practice.

De re ascriptions allow us to be clear about the (social-perspectival) distinction between a commitment attributed and a commitment undertaken in a way that purely de dicto ascriptions cannot do. Brandom imagines a court-room exchange in which the “sly prosecutor” offers a de dicto characterization of the defence attorney’s claims: “The defence attorney believes [that] a pathological liar is a trustworthy witness.”78 Naturally, the defence attorney rebuffs with another de dicto specification of his positions: “Not so; what I believe is that the man who just testified is a trustworthy witness,” to which the prosecutor replies “Exactly, and I have presented evidence that ought to convince anyone that the man who just testified is a pathological liar.”79 The de dicto ascriptions of belief here fail to make it clear just who is responsible for what claim, i.e., who is undertaking the claim that the man who testified is a reliable witness and who is undertaking the claim that the man who just testified is a pathological liar. This makes a mess out of what is the genuine topic of dispute: “the disagreement is about whether this man is a liar, not about whether liars make trustworthy witnesses.”80 The situation would be greatly clarified if the prosecutor would specify his original attribution in de re terms: “The defence attorney claims of a pathological liar that he is a trustworthy witness.”81 Brandom argues that “this way of putting things makes explicit the division of responsibility involved in the ascription. That someone is a trustworthy witness is part of the commitment that is

78 MIE, 505.
79 MIE, 505.
80 MIE, 505.
81 MIE, 505.
attributed by the ascriber; that the individual is in fact a pathological liar is part of the commitment that is undertaken by the ascriber. 82

The reason that the de re specification of the content is able to distinguish these two different commitments is that it includes not merely a specification of how things are represented to be from the perspective of the defence attorney (i.e., that the witness in question is trustworthy), but also a specification in terms of how things are represented to be from the perspective of the prosecutor (i.e., that the witness is a pathological liar). The way things look to the defence attorney is specified in the “that…” phrase (“that he is a pathological liar”), and the way things look to the prosecutor is specified in the “of…” phrase (“…claim of a pathological liar…”). The difference between commitments undertaken and attributed in the ascription as a whole is marked by an expression of the difference between a way of representing the situation from the perspective of the defence attorney and the way of representing the situation from the perspective of the prosecutor. In and of themselves, de dicto ascriptions only “specify the contents of attributed commitments in terms that, according to the ascriber, the one to whom they are ascribed would acknowledge as specifications of the contents of commitments undertaken,”83 i.e., these ascriptions limit themselves to specifying the content of a commitment from the point of view of the one to whom it is attributed, what she would be prepared to acknowledge in virtue of her collateral commitments. Thus a fair and accurate de dicto specification of the defence attorney’s belief would be “he believes that the witness is trustworthy.” De re ascriptions, on the other hand, specify the content of commitments from the perspective of the ascriber by indexing this content to a

82 MIE, 505.
83 MIE, 523.
description of the situation consistent with the ascriber’s collateral commitments (i.e., a
description that the ascriber and perhaps not the attributee would be prepared to endorse
given her other beliefs) by the use of the word “of.” Implicit in this is the endorsement
by the ascriber of a substitution inference to the effect that what is indicated in the “of”
phrase is inter-substitutable salve veritate84 with the subject of the “that” clause in the de
dicto specification.85 In sum: de re specifications of propositional content ascribed to an
interlocutor provide all the expressive resources necessary for the ascriber to maintain the
distinction between her own and her interlocutor’s discursive perspectives. This makes it
possible for her to maintain the distinction between what commitments are attributed and
what commitments are undertaken in her ascription as well as making it possible for her
to specify her interlocutor’s commitments in terms of her own (collateral) commitments
and hence to interpret them.

The magic of de re ascriptions does not end there, however. They are, for
Brandom, the most fundamental form of discourse that we “use to express the intentional
directedness of thought and talk – the fact that we think and talk about things and states
of affairs.”86 De re specifications of conceptual content essentially use locutions – such
as “of” and “about” – that express the world-directedness of our concepts. Thus when the
prosecutor says that the defence attorney believes of a pathological liar that he is a
trustworthy witness, he is not only specifying the defender’s propositional attitude from
his own perspective, he is doing so with explicit reference to something in the world, viz.
a pathological liar. As mentioned, such ascriptions involve the endorsement of a

84 Or rather: in a manner that preserves commitment.
85 “Indeed, (weak) de re ascriptions are formed by substituting, for locutions the target of the ascription
might use in expressing the content of the commitment, locutions that the ascriber is committed to being
intersubstitutable with them.” MIE, 513.
86 MIE, 500.
substitution inference, and these inferences are what allow the picking out of singulars in a holistically conceptually-articulated language game. It is in virtue of the embedding of substitution inferences in *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes that we are able to deploy such representational terms as “of” and “about.” This is because substitution-inferences are not *sui generis*, they can only function *within* complete speech acts that have a *propositional* content, that state *of* something *that* it is thus and so (this is in keeping with Brandom’s endorsement of the “priority of the propositional,” his version of Kant’s prioritizing of judgment as the fundamental cognitive act). Put in different terms, Brandom expresses this argument thus: “…in order to identify vocabulary in alien languages that means what ‘of’ and ‘about’ do when used to ascribe intentionality and describe its content – or to introduce such vocabulary into expressively impoverished languages – one must be able to recognize expressions of *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes.” The proposition being the fundamental unit of conceptual contentfulness, the world-directedness of that content needs to be discerned in complete propositions first (and only then in terms of the de-compositions by substitution inferences and anaphora) and thus in the role they play in *de re* ascriptions of contentful attitudes; there is no more fundamental unit of object-directed discourse; all the others are derived from this. Therefore, understanding the grounds of the “aboutness” or “of-ness” of our thought and talk, requires that we see what it is that *de re* ascriptions express. This is what we have just done: these ascriptions express the social-perspectival distinction between commitments undertaken and commitments attributed in propositional-attitude ascriptions by simultaneously expressing the content of these commitments from the

---

87 MIE, 500.
perspective of the ascriber (in virtue of his collateral commitments) and of the attributee (in virtue of her commitments).

Furthermore, *de re* ascriptions underwrite our ability to formulate *truth-conditions* for someone’s utterances and hence to interpret them. Essential to being able to understand what someone is saying (expressed in a *de dicto* specification) is the ability to discern under what conditions their expression would be true. Thus, to use Donald Davidson’s example, if a German speaker says “es regnet” I can interpret what he is saying if I can formulate a theory of truth for that statement of the form: “es regnet” is true if and only if it is raining.88 In some sense, what I am doing is taking his utterance to be answerable to some situation in our shared world and thus being able to correlate it with one of mine that is similarly answerable to the same conditions. The formulation of truth-conditions is not only necessary for interpretation across a gap between natural languages (i.e., translation) but also for the interpretation of the speech of others who speak the “same” language, given the fact that – according to Brandom – our differing collateral commitments imply different “meanings” of our utterances from our differing perspectives.89 What is absolutely crucial to see here is that, for Brandom at least, specifying truth-conditions (i.e., taking someone’s utterance to be answerable to how things stand in the world) is itself inherently *perspectival*; truth-conditions just are formulations of a speaker’s intended meaning in such a way that they can either be endorsed or rejected by the interpreter given her collateral commitments: “The point is that scorekeepers must use the auxiliary hypotheses provided by their own commitments in assessing the truth of the beliefs they attribute or entertain, for taking-true a claim is

88 Cf. Davidson, “Radical Interpretation”.
89 Cf. Donald Davidson, “Truth and Meaning” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 
just endorsing it." 90 This formulation requires the use of de re ascriptions of propositional attitudes that can coordinate a content specified from the speaker’s perspective with that same content specified from the interpreter’s perspective through the use of “representational” terms of “of” and “about.” In other words: “De re content specifications not only indicate what a claim represents or is about, they are the form in which the truth conditions of claims are expressed... and so are the specifications that present propositional contents in a form apt for assessments of truth.” 91 Objectivity – construed here as susceptibility to truth-assessments – is thus underwritten by the social-perspectival character of discursive practice expressed in de re ascriptions of propositional attitudes.

The objectivity of content, then, is not for Brandom the taking up of reference to non-conceptual bare particulars; nor is it the causal impact of items of the world on our mental states or linguistic utterances; 92 nor yet is it the recognition of non-perspectival facts from a particular perspective. 93 Instead, the representational dimension of our...
discursive practices and their resultant susceptibility to assessments of truth consists in
the expression and overcoming of the differences of content between the deontic attitudes
of different discursive practitioners. In Brandom’s own words:

Extracting information from the remarks of others requires being able to do the
sort of substitutitional interpreting that is expressed explicitly in offering \textit{de re}
characterizations of the contents of their beliefs – that is, to be able to tell what
their beliefs would be true of if they were true. It is to grasp the \textit{representational}
content of their claims. The most important lesson of the deontic scorekeeping
account of the use of \textit{de re} ascriptions is that doing this is just mastering the \textit{social}
dimension of their inferential articulation – the way in which commitments
undertaken against one doxastic background of further commitments available for
use as auxiliary hypotheses can be taken up and made available as premises
against a different doxastic background.\footnote{MIE, 517.}

If this works, then Brandom has made good on one of the basic commitments of his
inferentialist strategy for explaining conceptual content, namely, that he can account for
the representational dimension of discursive practice without invoking any irreducibly
representational locutions and hence without presupposing word-world relations as
\textit{givens}. He has tried to accomplish this by cashing out “representational” talk (“of”
“about” “true of”) in terms of the social articulation of the discursive scorekeeping
attitudes of undertaking and attributing commitments.

analogy to the (explanatory) deflationist theory of truth that Brandom explicitly
endorses.\footnote{See my discussion of his theory of truth in Chapter 3.} On Knell’s reading, Brandom’s theory of the “aboutness” of discursive
performances avoids explaining intentionality as a kind of property of mental states by
avoiding treating the “of” clause in \textit{de re} ascriptions as if it “contribute[s] to the
articulation of a \textit{descriptive feature} of the ascribed belief that is not articulated by a

\footnote{MIE, 517.}


\footnote{See my discussion of his theory of truth in Chapter 3.}
corresponding *de re* ascription."^{97} What *de re* ascriptions add to *de dicto* expressions is only a *performative*, not a descriptive, element. What this amounts to is that Brandom avoids offering a substantive *explanation of* what "*intentionality*" is (as if it were a property of sentences) and opts instead for offering a reconstruction of the *expressive role* that "*intentionality talk*" plays in our language games; this is what makes the theory deflationist. Brandom, in his reply to Knell, endorses this characterization of his theory saying "this strikes me as an extremely promising line of research."^{98} This deflationist strategy will be successful only if it can avoiding taking up substantive ontological and other theoretical commitments in characterizing intentionality, but rather limit itself to cashing out the use of "*aboutness talk*." Whether he has succeeded in doing so will be a matter for discussion in Part 3.

There is yet more magic, though, in the perspectival articulation of the social dimension of discursive practices made explicit in *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes. Besides accounting for the objectivity of *conceptual content* (by underwriting the representational dimension of language-use), *de re* ascriptions also account for the objectivity of *deontic status* by expressing the social-perspectival distinction of deontic status and deontic attitude. Recall that, on Brandom’s telling, what is needed to underwrite a conception of the objectivity of conceptual norms (the discursive deontic statuses of commitments and entitlements) is a demonstration of how there is always an effective distinction between the status that one is *taken* to have and the status that one *really* has. If this distinction is always in effect, then there are always grounds to assert that a deontic attitude – the way in which a status is *taken* to be – is correct or incorrect in

---

^{97} Knell, “A Deflationist Theory of Intentionality?”, 80.
virtue of the real deontic status of the object of that attitude. Part of Brandom’s account of how this is the case has already been given. Part of the normative status at stake in discursive practice is the correctness or incorrectness of the application of conceptual contents and hence part of what makes this status swing free of the attitudes of those evaluating it is the fact that the application of conceptual contents answers also to the way things stand with what those contents are about. The “aboutness” that makes conceptual contents answerable to objects (by the specification of truth-conditions for them) is, as I have just discussed, made possible by the expressive resources made available by de re ascriptions which are a linguistic mechanism for sorting out the social-perspectival distinction between discursive commitments undertaken and attributed by participants in a discursive practice. But this is not the whole story.

The independence of deontic status from this or that deontic attitude – i.e., the structural distinction between the status that someone has and the status that she is taken to have – is further grounded in the distinction between two different ways of undertaking a commitment, a distinction which is also underwritten by the distinction of scorekeeping perspectives in discursive practice (and hence expressed in de re ascriptions). To undertake a commitment (i.e., to become committed to X) is to make it appropriate for others to attribute that commitment to me; i.e., it is to do something that issues an inferential license for others to attribute a commitment to me.\(^9\) The most obvious way in which this can be done is by acknowledging a commitment, which is just “attributing it to oneself,”\(^1\) and which thus involves a degree of self-consciousness. By definition, one does not have any acknowledged commitments that one does not know about. However,

\(^9\) Cf. MIE, 507, 196. As I shall discuss below, this primacy of attribution to undertaking is Brandom’s way of articulating the necessity of recognition by other (self)-conscious beings for (self)-consciousness.

\(^1\) MIE, 596.
one may also undertake a commitment *consequentially*. Given the fact that all commitments are contentful in virtue of their inferential connections to other commitments, undertaking commitment X will have certain consequences including becoming committed (willy nilly) to everything that follows from X. Thus, for example, if I undertake (by acknowledging) the commitment “it’s raining outside” I am *ipso facto* committed to the claim that, if I were to go outside without an umbrella, I would get wet; the latter claim is undertaken as a consequence of the former. In many cases, a consequentially undertaking commitment is one that I would be quite prepared (and able) to acknowledge given my collateral commitments, but this is not always the case. If my collateral commitments did not include the claim that rain makes things wet, then I would not be in a position to acknowledge the consequential commitment in my example. However, this does not by itself mean that I am not actually so committed. From the perspective of another discursive scorekeeper – one who does have the collateral commitment to the effect that rain makes things wet – I have in fact committed myself to the consequential claim in virtue of my acknowledged commitment to its antecedent. Now, since undertaking a claim in general *just is* making it appropriate for others to attribute it to me, I must still be taken (at least from the standpoint of my interlocutor) to *have in fact* undertaken the consequential commitment in spite of the fact that I am in no position to acknowledge it from my own point of view: “From the point of view of each scorekeeper, there is for every other interlocutor a distinction between what commitments that individual *acknowledges* and what that individual is really committed to.”101

Undertaking a commitment is a deontic attitude and is just a form of the fundamental deontic attitude, viz. attributing a commitment. Brandom has shown,

---

101 MIE, 597.
however, that there is more than one kind of deontic attitude corresponding to the two ways of undertaking a commitment. In first place, there are immediate attitudes, paradigmatically attributing a commitment (and including the self-attribution of commitments in their acknowledgment). In the second place, though, we have just discerned what Brandom calls “consequentially expanded deontic attitudes;”\textsuperscript{102} attitudes that I can be said to have (i.e., undertakings of commitments on my part) only as mediated through someone else’s collateral commitments (i.e., from someone else’s perspective). These mediate (consequential) deontic attitudes are what has been identified thus far as deontic statuses, or conversely: “deontic statuses are just such consequentially expanded deontic attitudes.”\textsuperscript{103} By maintaining the distinction between my immediate deontic attitudes (i.e., my acknowledged commitments) and my consequential deontic attitudes (the commitments that I have undertaken but cannot acknowledge from my own point of view), my interlocutor can – from her point of view – maintain a distinction between my deontic attitudes and my deontic status; i.e., between what I take myself to be committed to and what I really am committed to. I can, of course, do the same with respect to her: each discursive practitioner has constantly available to her the distinction between deontic attitude and deontic status as long as she can articulate the difference between her point of view (given her collateral commitments) and the point of view of her interlocutor (given their collateral commitments).

Given this situation, Brandom believes that he has articulated a genuine conception of the objectivity of conceptual norms (i.e., of the distinction between

\textsuperscript{102} MIE, 596.
\textsuperscript{103} MIE, 596.
conceptual commitments that someone really has and the conceptual commitments she is
taken to have) without falling afoul of his stated commitment to a phenomenalist
approach to explaining conceptual norms. As mentioned, phenomenalism entails that all
deontic statuses are instituted by deontic attitudes and thus all the facts about the former
can be accounted for by all the facts about the latter; it was this view that seemed to raise
the objectivity problem in the first place. Now, by showing how we can maintain a
distinction between normative attitude and status by distinguishing (according to
differing discursive perspectives) immediate and consequential deontic attitudes,
Brandom has given a version of normative objectivity that doesn’t at any point treat
deontic statuses as being ontologically independent of deontic attitudes. This is so, since
deontic statuses just are mediate or consequential attitudes (consequential undertakings),
and these mediate attitudes are determined by the immediate deontic attitudes
(attributings) of one’s interlocutors (since all undertakings just are actions that license
attributings by others). Thus phenomenalism is compatible with objectivity if
“objectivity is a structural aspect of the social-perspectival form of conceptual
contents.”104

This task is not complete, though, until he can show how it is possible for this
structural feature of the form of conceptual content (i.e., the distinction between being
correct and taking to be correct) can be applied to oneself. Thus far he has only shown
that we can keep this distinction open with respect to the points of view of others – i.e.,
that we can see that there is a difference between what some other is committed to and
what she takes herself to be committed to. This can by itself be taken to suggest that the

104 MIE, 597. Cf. also 595: “Rather, the distinction between claims or applications of concepts that are
objectively correct and those that are merely taken to be correct is a structural feature of each scorekeeping
perspective.”
first-person perspective of someone ascribing propositional attitudes to others (and hence applying the distinction to others) is the infallible arbiter of the way things are; after all, we have seen that determining “what my interlocutor is really committed to” or “what my interlocutor is right or wrong about” is a matter of specifying (the content of) her commitment from my perspective via a de re attribution of propositional attitude. But a viewpoint that takes the attitudes of the ascriber to be the final word how things really are is not one that genuinely shows a difference between being correct and being taken to be correct, since there is at least one point where this distinction does not apply. Thus a robust conception of objectivity requires that we can keep this distinction open even when assessing our own point of view, in other words, that someone can be entitled to distinguish between claims that he acknowledges (i.e., that he holds true) and those claims that he is in fact committed to in spite of the fact that he does not acknowledge them. On the face of it, this would seem to be paradoxical: how can someone recognize that he is committed to claim X without therefore acknowledging this claim and hence collapsing the distinction between what one is really committed to and what one merely takes oneself to be committed to? What Brandom needs to show is that it is possible for someone to recognize from their own perspective that there is a possible difference between what in fact is the case and what they take to be the case. This means showing that two conditionals do not hold. In the first place, he must show that it is possible to distinguish two commitments – “p” and “I claim that p” – such that it is not the case that:

(p) [p \rightarrow (I claim that p)]. He calls this unacceptable conditional the “No First-Person Ignorance Condition”\(^{105}\) since it asserts that, if something is the case (“p”), then (necessarily) I take it to be correct; there is nothing that is true that I do not believe to be

\(^{105}\) MIE, 605.
true. Obviously, if this conditional holds, then the distinction between being correct and being taken to be correct breaks down in the first-person perspective of an ascriber. Similarly, and for Brandom “more threateningly” the “No First-Person Error Condition”\textsuperscript{106} asserts that: (p) [(I claim that p) \(\rightarrow\) p]. This condition moves the other direction in closing off the distinction at stake by claiming that, if I claim that such-and-such is the case (i.e., if I take such-and-such to be true), then it is the case that such-and-such.\textsuperscript{107} In his “objectivity proofs,” he attempts to show that each of us can recognize from our own perspective that neither condition holds.

In surveying this attempt, we must note that what Brandom is calling for here involves a complex interplay between the first- and third-person (scorekeeping) perspectives in discursive practices. His argument thus far has established (if it is successful) that the distinction between taking-true and being-true (or between acknowledging and really being committed) is a structural feature of the third-person point of view taken by discursive practitioners insofar as they are keeping score on the normative statuses of others by attributing mediate and immediate discursive attitudes to them. The structural objectivity of discursive scorekeeping practices – expressed in terms of the distinction at hand – is grounded in the assumption of a third-person perspective by which one can assess another’s point of view by reference to the way things look from one’s own and hence can “evaluate it from the outside by contrasting what it merely takes to be true with what actually is true.”\textsuperscript{108} Objectivity is thus inseparable from the third person point of view, since only the latter allows the detachment from the attitudes at

\textsuperscript{106} MIE, 605.

\textsuperscript{107} In both conditionals, “p” can be understood in terms of both levels of correctness (objectivity) mentioned in footnote 198; i.e., as indicating either such-and-such being the case in the world or such-and-such being the case with respect to my (or someone else’s) normative statuses.

\textsuperscript{108} MIE, 600.
stake that makes them available for evaluation “from the outside” (and this is made possible by the expressive resources made available by \textit{de re} ascriptions); the attributee’s first-person attitudes (paradigmatically, acknowledging a commitment) can be objective – in the sense of being correct or incorrect in virtue of what they are \textit{about}\footnote{Whether they are about their own commitments (i.e., what they take themselves to be committed to) or about states of affairs in the world (i.e., how they take things to be from their perspective).} – only because they can be taken up from the third-person perspective, usually of another scorekeeper. Self-criticism – the ability to apply the distinction between being correct and being taken to be correct to oneself, which is required to complete this scorekeeping account of objectivity – thus requires being able to take this third-person attitude with respect to oneself, to look at one’s own commitments as it were from the “outside.”

The first step in being able to do this is the recognition that there is a social “symmetry” of deontic scorekeeping perspectives and hence of the attitudes and statuses attributed to and from these various perspectives. When I employ a \textit{de re} ascription of propositional attitude in specifying the commitments of someone else, I am making explicit the distinction between the \textit{objective} (or representational) content of his commitment (expressed using the \textit{de re} “of” or “about”) and the \textit{subjective} attitude that he himself takes with respect to the content of his commitment (expressed in the \textit{de dicto} “that” clause). However, from the point of view of my interlocutor assessing my discursive attitudes, things are exactly reversed. What I expressed as the \textit{objective} component of his commitments (from my point of view) will be precisely what he attributes to me in terms of my \textit{subjective} attitudes specifiable with the \textit{de dicto} “that.” Correspondingly, what I attributed (from my perspective) to him as \textit{subjective} attitude, will be taken from his perspective as the \textit{objective} content of my attitudes specifiable
with the de re “of” or “about.”110 Put differently, my consequential deontic attitude (what I am really committed to, even though I do not, in the first-person attitude, acknowledge it) is just his immediate deontic attitude (his third-person attitude of attributing a commitment to me), since I have that consequential attitude/objective deontic status just because I have done something that licenses him to attribute it to me. Objective content and subjective attitude are mirror-images of one another reflected across different scorekeeping perspectives. In simpler terms, every first person perspective is a third-person perspective somewhere else and hence equally subject (from another point of view) to evaluation in terms of objective correctness. When ascribing propositional attitudes to another I do not actively apply the distinction between \( p \) and my belief that \( p \) to my own perspective – I take my own perspective to be the one that specifies how things really are – but I can be aware that my own perspective is equally subject to that distinction from my interlocutor’s perspective. This awareness is the first ingredient in allowing me to take up a third-person attitude with respect to my own present commitments.

But more is needed. To realize that there is a difference between “\( p \)” and “I claim that \( p \)” such that, on the one hand, my commitment to the latter does not (even from my

110 Cf. MIE, 600-601. So, for example: I may say: “He believes of a bowl of porridge that it is the King of Siam” in keeping track of his commitments. However, he – keeping score on my commitments – would have to think: “He believes of the King of Siam that it is a bowl of porridge.” The fact that one of us here is insane will matter later on (in Chapter 8). I will ask how Brandom can decide which one of us is the madman. I will argue that taking up a performative attitude necessary for discursive practice depends upon being able to make such judgments, and that this in turn is only possible by reference to a perspective that is accessible to us that transcends our individual perspective; i.e., that of a “We”. This will not imply – as Brandom thinks it does – that this “we” is indefeasible, only that it has prima facie epistemic authority in that, only from this perspective can the “is correct”/“takes to be correct” distinction be applied to a difference between symmetrical perspectives in a way that has no symmetrical correlate that can just “turn the tables on it.” The defeasibility of this (“We”) first-person perspective, then, cannot be explained in terms of taking up of a symmetrical but converse (“They”) third-person perspective; there must be a way in which self-criticism is possible within a first-person (plural) perspective. And this is what Hegel offers in the “self-opposition” of consciousness in the concept-object distinction.
own perspective) imply the former (as the No First-Person Error Condition holds) and, on the other hand, the fact that former obtains does not imply that the latter does (as the No First-Person Ignorance Condition holds), requires the ability to be aware that these two claims have different contents. Though it is true that these two claims are pragmatically equivalent – insofar as uttering one “does the same thing” in terms of my discursive score as uttering the other – they are not semantically equivalent in that they do not have identical inferential significance. The difference is to be grasped in terms of a difference in the incompatibility entailments of each; they are not synonymous because what is incompatible with one is not incompatible with the other, and hence being committed to one has different inferential consequences (in terms of what else one is not entitled to) from being committed to the other. If it is possible for me to grasp this semantic difference, then it is possible for me resist both conditionals and hence to apply the distinction between what I take or claim to be true and what is in fact true to my own perspective.

111 In other words: in order to show that I can acknowledge that I am not correct just because I think I am.
112 In other words: in order to show that, just because something is true, doesn’t mean that I believe it.
113 Yet another way to put the issue at hand is to say that Brandom is trying to show that neither conditional is an analytic truth even from the first-person perspective. The danger of the kind of perspectivalism that he defends – where there is no non-perspectival reference to non-perspectival facts – is that from each interlocutor’s perspective, there is no semantic distinction (i.e., distinction in meaning) between “I believe that X is the case” and “X is the case.” This would make their equivalence (and hence the validity of the necessary implication of one from the other in accordance with the two conditionals) an analytic truth; i.e., true in virtue of meaning (as much as “he is unmarried’ is semantically identical to “he is a bachelor” and hence these two claims reciprocally imply each other). Thus he must show that, even from the perspective (i.e., specified in terms of what she would endorse given her collateral commitments) of one undertaking and attributing claims to others and evaluating their claims in terms of how she takes things to be, “X” and “I believe that X” do not mean the same thing.
114 So the utterance “I believe that what is before me is the King of Siam” and “What is before me is the King of Siam” both express a commitment to the latter claim and hence license others to attribute it to me (i.e., they both undertake the same commitment via acknowledgment of the claim).
115 Incompatibility entailments are inferential relationships between discursive statuses such that commitment to \( A \) precludes (i.e., is incompatible with) entitlement to \( B \) (and other similar cases). It is part of the inferential significance (and hence the propositional content) of commitments that they are incompatible with a range of other discursive statuses. Cf. MIE, 190ff.
Brandom argues that this difference can be grasped, but only by taking up the perspective of a (hypothetical) interlocutor. In terms of the No First-Person Ignorance Conditional – \([p \rightarrow (I \text{ claim that } p)]\) – it is clear what would be incompatible with the consequent, *viz.* “I do not claim that \(p\)” or any other claim that entails that. But, from my own perspective, can I grasp that “I do not claim that \(p\)” is not incompatible with the antecedent \((p)\)? Yes, because I can grasp that, if \(p\) and (I do not claim that \(p\)) were incompatible for me, then, they would be so for everyone and yet there is no incompatibility in saying “\(S\) claims that I do not claim that \(p\), and \(S\) claims that \(p\).”\(^{116}\) In other words, if I take up the perspective of someone keeping score on my discursive attitudes while simultaneously maintaining their own, then I can see that there is no incompatibility between being committed both to (I\(^{117}\) do not claim that \(p\)) and to \(p\), since that other scorekeeper is not contradicting herself in holding to both. Hence “the social dimension of their inferential articulation is essential to the semantic non-equivalence of \((p)\) and \((I \text{ claim (hold) that } p)\).”\(^{118}\) If it is true, then, that I can grasp the semantic non-equivalence of the antecedent and the consequent of the No First Person Ignorance condition, then I am in no position to endorse the condition; I have grounds to construct counter-examples to it and hence to undermine it.

Having grasped this semantic distinction, one can also apply it to undermining the No First-Person Error Condition, namely, that \([(I \text{ claim that } p) \rightarrow p]\). Though it is true that *commitment* to the antecedent entails *commitment* to the consequent\(^ {119}\) the same does not go for my *entitlement* to both claims, and this is a result of their different

\(^{116}\) MIE, 605.

\(^{117}\) “I” here still refers to me, not back to my hypothetical interlocutor.

\(^{118}\) MIE, 605.

\(^{119}\) If it am committed to the claim “I believe that rain is wet” I am ipso facto committed to the claim “rain is wet.”
incompatibility entailments. If I am committed to two incompatible claims (for example “snow is white” and “nothing in Canada is white”), then I am entitled to neither, but this does not preclude me being committed to both. This being the case, any claim q that is incompatible with p is incompatible with the consequent of the No First Person Error Condition but not with the antecedent (since there is no incompatibility between q and (I claim that p); I can be entitled to the antecedent, but I am not therefore entitled to the consequent.\textsuperscript{120} Therefore, at least with respect to my entitlement to my claims, the conditional does not hold and I can be aware of that fact at least as a standing possibility.

To sum up: the ability to grasp the semantic distinction between the claim that p and the claim that I claim that p, when combined with the ability to see that my claims are subject to assessment by others in terms of what they take to be the case, makes it possible for me to take up “hypothetically a sort of third-person scorekeeping attitude toward my own present commitments and entitlements.”\textsuperscript{121} Doing so means applying the distinction between what is merely taken to be correct and what is in fact correct – which is paradigmatically deployed in my third-person (de re) ascriptions of propositional attitudes to others – to my own first person attitudes, thus admitting that there is a difference between those attitudes (“I claim that p”) and the way things really are (p) such that it is possible for the former to be wrong about the latter. Objectivity is still, even in the case of self-criticism, understood by Brandom in terms of a structural feature of discursive score-keeping attitudes in a social practice, i.e., as the running possibility of distinguishing between an attitude and a status.

\textsuperscript{120} Cf. MIE, 606.
\textsuperscript{121} MIE, 605.
Chapter 3: Sociality, Subjectivity and Truth

Introduction

Having described in some detail Brandom’s solution to the objectivity problem, I want to draw out three important themes of his account. In the first place, I will describe the nature of the “social articulation” of discursive practices on which he relies so heavily in his attempt to formulate a sense of objectivity compatible with his normative phenomenalism and non-representationalist semantics. I will then turn to a careful examination of what I take to be the ambiguous role of the first person singular and the expressive resources that its use makes available in Brandom’s arguments. Finally, I will clarify his conception of truth, which has been alluded to but insufficiently unpacked above. These three themes will each be a crucial site of the internal critique of Brandom’s thought that I will develop in Part 3.

3.1. Sociality: I-Thou and I-We.

As we have seen, Brandom repeatedly insists that it is the social-perspectival character of our discursive practices that underwrites the objectivity of conceptual content and deontic status. It is the social difference of scorekeeping perspective between different discursive practitioners that is made explicit by the fundamental form of representational (object-directed) locution, namely, de re ascriptions of propositional attitude. These ascriptions also articulate the difference between being taken to be committed to a claim (deontic attitude) and actually being committed to such a claim (deontic status) by tracking the differences between the perspectively determined scorekeeping attitudes of different interlocutors. Thus, for Brandom, even though the fundamental currency of intentional
explanation is the discursive attitudes of participants – and therefore all talk about conceptual content and deontic status must be “cashed out” in those terms – a genuine sense of objectivity can be wrung from such a characterization of discursive practice so long as it is a social practice. I will attempt to draw out the crucial dimensions of Brandom’s account of this sociality; and I will begin by contrasting it with a way of offering a social account of objectivity that Brandom rejects.

A fundamental question that needs to be addressed when considering how discursive deontic proprieties can be objective is that of discursive authority. As discussed, Brandom’s inferentialist semantics implies that the conceptual content of a move in a language game is determined by the proprieties of making inferences from the appropriate application of a concept (by producing a speech act) to the discursive consequences of doing so. Conceptual content is determined by just what circumstances make it appropriate to apply a concept and just what other commitments (should) follow from applying it. Similarly, his normative pragmatics states that it is the propriety of taking up certain practical attitudes that determines the deontic status of participants in a social practice. In both cases (and, of course, they are mutually imbricated) a crucial question is: who gets to decide just what the proprieties of these moves are? Whose point of view determines just what the inferential circumstances and consequences of a linguistic performance are? Whose deontic attitudes fix the proprieties that govern the attitudes of all the “players” in the game of giving and asking for reasons? Who, in short, has the discursive authority to make the rules of the game?

These questions are not separate from the question of objectivity. Whoever (or whatever) has discursive authority in some sense gets to decide just what really follows
from what and what status someone really has. The distinction that, for Brandom, articulates the objectivity of social practices – namely, that between being correct and taking to be correct, or between status and attitude – can then be cast in terms of whether an individual or group’s judgments (attitudes) accords with that of the discursive authority. To be correct is to attribute, undertake, acknowledge, etc. discursive attitudes in accordance with the proprieties of doing so as established by the discursive umpire, whereas to merely take something to be correct is to try but fail to do so. We have seen this connection already in Brandom’s own approach to objectivity: discursive authority rests in each individual in discursive practice, determining the propriety of various moves in accordance with her own collateral commitments (which together constitute her scorekeeping perspective). What prevents this from collapsing the distinction between attitude and status (and hence undermining the possibility of objectivity) is that the individual is necessarily involved in a give-and-take with other discursive practitioners with their own authority and their own peculiar scorekeeping perspective. Objectivity spills out of the conceptual fine-structure that is deployed to deal with this complex interchange. As I will discuss more below, Brandom characterizes this give-and-take (of reasons) between individuals as an “I-Thou” social structure, and he believes that it alone can genuinely underwrite discursive objectivity.

There is, however, another way to characterize the site of discursive authority as a way to give a social articulation of objectivity. On this picture, the propriety of any individual’s taking up of various discursive attitudes is determined by what the community as a whole is prepared to endorse. Brandom attributes this view to Crispin Wright, who he says “combines an understanding of conceptual norms as instituted by
practical normative attitudes... with a way of maintaining a distinction between conceptual commitments and individual assessments of those commitments... by identifying the normative status of being a correct application of a concept with being taken to be such a correct application, not by an individual, but by the whole community.”¹ On this picture, the interplay that opens up the distinction between attitude (assessment) and status is not (as for Brandom himself) between individual discursive practitioners (an I-Thou social practice²), but between the scorekeeping perspective of the individual and that of the community as a whole; hence he calls it an “I-We” form of sociality.³ For Wright and allied thinkers, propriety of inference and attitude is determined by a kind of convention mutually agreed to by all discursive practitioners and expressed in the first-person plural: what we believe/acknowledge/are prepared to endorse. Membership in a discursive community and hence participation in a discursive practices governed by this “we” point-of-view is dependent upon the willingness of the individual to coordinate her own normative attitudes with those of the community, at least implicitly granting the “we” discursive authority to set inferential and practical proprieties for her own comportments. This is a social account of objectivity, but one that differs greatly from Brandom’s.

Brandom rejects an I-We construal of the social practices that ground conceptual objectivity, on three inter-related grounds. In pragmatic terms, he sees this “communal assessment” approach to articulating practical propriety as a way of reducing the

---

¹ MIE, 53.
² As I will discuss below (and in Chapter 7), this characterization is inaccurate. Given Brandom’s description of the kinds of attitudes deployed in this form of sociality, it would be better called an I-Him/Her/It social practice. There is no clear role for characteristically second-person attitudes in Brandom’s discursive scorekeeping model.
³ This terminology is used at various places in MIE, but is first introduced on page 39.
normativity/propriety of social practice to the factual regularity of communal behaviour. Advocates of this viewpoint rightly, in Brandom’s view, reject regulism – the view that all norms must take the form of explicit rules or principles – but instead fall into a kind of regularism that ultimately explains away the genuine normativity of social practices by reducing the propriety of moves in that practice to some function of the way things tend to go, i.e., to the statistical regularity of behaviour or disposition on the part of participants. On such a view, a move is correct if it is in accordance with the way things are regularly or conventionally done in this or that community, or (to put the same point differently) if it accords with the assessments and attitudes that members of the community are disposed to take with respect to certain behaviours. It is important to note that specifying a regularity of practice or disposition is done in non-normative terms; it is couched in terms of statistical preponderance or degree of probability. For Brandom, there are two fundamental problems with regularity theories: “attempts to define normative statuses in terms of the nonnormative regularities can be criticized from two directions, as either failing to reconstruct some essential features of genuine normative statuses, or as covertly appealing to normative notions.”⁴ I will not get into the details of these two arguments; it suffices to say that he believes that the deployment of an I-We construal of social practices to ground a structural distinction between deontic status and attitude (i.e., of objectivity) is ultimately – and problematically – reductionist in that it “attempts to bake a normative cake with nonnormative ingredients.”⁵

Secondly, the positing of a point of view of the community as a whole falsely reifies the community, treating it as if it was itself a subject of attitudes, commitments,
etc., i.e., as if it were itself a participant in discursive practice rather than a name for what holds together the various independent discursive practitioners. Brandom puts this point thus: “This tendency to talk of the community as somehow having attitudes and producing performances of the sort more properly associated with individuals is neither accidental nor harmless. This *façon de parler* is of the essence of the communal assessment approach. It is a manifestation of the orienting mistake… of treating I-We relations rather than I-Thou relations as the fundamental social structure.”

Talk of a “we,” if it is taken to refer to a plural subject makes the elementary mistake of assuming that every noun designates a substance. As I will discuss further below, a community for Brandom just is an aggregate of various inter-related perspectives formed by the interactions of discursive scorekeepers: “Assessing, endorsing and so on are all things we individuals do and attribute to each other, thereby constituting a community, a ‘we.’” On his view, I-Thou social relations are constitutively prior to I-We relations, and the latter can never stand by themselves absent the ongoing inter-change between individual perspectives.

Finally, and most importantly, I-We social relations cannot provide the required account of the objectivity of conceptual content and discursive norms. Attempts to

---

6 MIE, 38-39. I will try to show how good sense can be made of this *façon de parler* in Chapter 8.
7 Of course, the notion that there may be “collective” or “group” beliefs does not necessarily fall prey to such a simple fallacy. For a defense of the concept of irreducibly social beliefs see the essays in Frederick F. Schmitt, ed., *Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), particularly the essays by Margaret Gilbert and Frederick Schmitt. I should say, however, that a defense of the notion of “collective belief” may not be necessary for making sense of I-We social practices. The commitments specified from a “We” perspective may still be thought of as being held by individuals, but held by them in such a way that these individuals take it that the content of those commitments are specifiable in the same terms from the perspective of others in their discursive community as they are from their own; i.e., they are held in such a way that we presume no doxastic gap between our epistemic perspectives with respect to these commitments. In language I shall employ in Chapter 8, “We” beliefs are for-oneself what they are for-others. I will argue that Hegel and Habermas see a place for such beliefs, but – because of his consistent and thorough-going perspectivalism – Brandom cannot.
8 MIE, 39.
unpack the attitude/status distinction in terms of a distinction between individual perspectives and the perspective of the community not only falsely reify the community, but posit its “perspective” as immune to error, since the distinction between attitude and status does not apply to it – the attitudes of the community just are the way things really are (statuses). On such a view “the community is incorrigible about what is a proper application of a concept and what is not.”9 The community is granted a perspective that is privileged in that there is no question whether its attitudes are correct or incorrect, since these attitudes define correctness and incorrectness for all its individual members. What this means is that it is impossible for the community as a whole to take up a (hypothetical) third-person attitude towards its own commitments and thus it cannot engage in self-criticism; its immunity to error makes it unable to get better. Since objectivity, for Brandom, just is a structural feature of the third person perspective of discursive scorekeepers, it is therefore impossible to say that there is a meaningful sense in which the judgments of the community are or can be objective; they cannot answer to anything outside of them, they offer no opportunity to be “evaluated from the outside.” Genuine objectivity implies the answerability of a scorekeeper’s attitudes to the way things actually are with objects and, in the case of individual scorekeepers, this answerability – cashed out in terms of truth-conditions – is founded on their susceptibility to \textit{de re} specifications of their commitments by other scorekeepers (or by themselves insofar as they can take up a third-person attitude toward themselves). On an I-We construal, \textit{de re} attributions cannot be made to the community (except in tautologies such as “the community believes of a rock that it is a rock”) since the community’s perspective just defines how things are; it is thus not susceptible to specification of truth-conditions in

9 MIE, 59.
terms of how things stand with objects.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, on Brandom’s reading, I-We social structures cannot provide a foundation for genuine objectivity, since they cannot account for how all of us can be correct or incorrect in virtue of how things actually stand with what our attitudes are about.\textsuperscript{11}

By contrast, Brandom argues that an I-Thou form of social relations (and only such a form) can underwrite a genuine conception of objectivity for discursive practices. As discussed at length above, objectivity is for Brandom a structural (formal) feature of the deontic scorekeeping attitudes of discursive practitioners insofar as these attitudes are both ascribed and undertaken across a doxastic gap between the way things are taken to be from the perspective of one attributing contentful commitments (“I”) and the way things are taken to be from the perspective of the one to whom those commitments are attributed (“Thou”). The \textit{de re} ascriptions of propositional attitude that make this distinction explicit are simultaneously the fundamental form of representational locution in a discursive practice, the form that the specification of truth-conditions must take (and hence make possible a sense of “answerability to objects”), and the form of attribution that can express the difference between deontic attitude and deontic status (construed in

\textsuperscript{10}Cf. MIE, 600. Truth-conditions on an I-We construal have to be some specification of how things stand with the “we” itself. It can thus include such things as coherence, warranted assertibility (even idealized, a la Pierce), but not any specification of how things stand with objects “outside” of it. I will argue in Part 2 that Hegel “splits the difference” between Brandom and Wright/Pierce, etc. insofar as he develops an account of a privileged “we” perspective that has no “outside” (thus it cannot take up a third-person attitude on itself) but can nevertheless answer to objects because it is the result of a thorough mediation of consciousness in the objective world such that objects do not stand outside of it. This being the case, self-criticism (in terms of how things stand with objects) is possible without taking up a third-person perspective “outside” of the perspective of the “we.” Thus, with respect to truth conditions, there is no dilemma between specifying such conditions in terms of how things stand with objects (“correspondence” broadly conceived) and in terms of how things stand with the subject and its perspective (“coherence” broadly conceived) – these different specifications reciprocally imply each other; they are one.

\textsuperscript{11}Cf. MIE, 594. In other words, I-We social practices posit a perspective (that of the “We”) that cannot satisfy the “no communal error” and “no communal ignorance” conditions set forth in Brandom’s “objectivity proofs.” These conditions parallel the “no first-person error/ignorance” conditions discussed in Chapter 2. Cf. MIE, 602-603.
terms of immediate and consequential deontic attitudes). The form of sociality being expressed with these *de re* ascriptions just is an I-Thou relation; in other words, the use of *de re* ascriptions and all that follows from it just is an appeal to an I-Thou social structure.

As mentioned, an I-Thou social structure is fundamentally a kind of give and take between individuals, more specifically, a give and take of *reasons* between participants in a discursive practice. Brandom models this give and take in terms of keeping score in a game. However, unlike a game of, say, baseball there is no umpire; that is to say, there is no one privileged site of discursive authority such that such a perspective determines for every player exactly what the proprieties of inference are in any of their moves within the game and hence what the significance of their moves are for the score (both their own\(^{12}\) and of the game as a whole). This implies a two-fold perspectivism in discursive scorekeeping practices. In the first place, scores are kept for each interlocutor, not in the first place for the game as a whole. In baseball, someone keeps score for each player (determining her batting average, etc), but this individual score is only intelligible in terms of the over-all score that determines which team is winning the game; individual scores are derivative in significance\(^{13}\) and importance\(^{14}\) from the collective score – playing baseball is an I-We social practice. In the game of giving and asking for reasons, however, individual scores are both constitutively and genetically prior\(^{15}\) to collective

\(^{12}\) By analogy their own stats (batting average, errors, RBIs etc); in a discursive practice one’s score is one’s discursive deontic statuses (what one is committed and entitled to, whether one is correct in this or that commitment, etc.).

\(^{13}\) For example, Cal Ripken’s score with respect to RBIs is only intelligible in terms of the number of runs he made possible *for the team* by batting them in. Individual accomplishments are only accomplishments in baseball because they affect the collective score.

\(^{14}\) Thus, Cal Ripken’s RBI stats don’t amount to a hill of beans if his *team* doesn’t win.

\(^{15}\) I will return to the distinction between constitutive and genetic priority in Chapter 8. For now it will suffice to paraphrase this distinction as that between being prior in the order of time or generation (genetic priority) and being prior in significance or the order of intelligibility (constitutive priority). In baseball, individual scores may be construed as genetically prior to collective scores (my team doesn’t score a run
scores. Individual scores “can be aggregated into one grand score for each stage of the conversation of a linguistic community, so long as it is kept clear… which deontic statuses are being attributed to which interlocutors.” The idea of a score for a community as a whole (i.e., some attribution of deontic status to a “we”) is only intelligible as an aggregate of the scores of individuals and must not be granted priority or privilege with respect to those individual scores – to do so would be commit the error of reifying the community as if it were as sui generis subject of deontic attitudes (as discussed above). In other words, in discursive scorekeeping practices I-Thou social relations are prior to and the condition for I-We social relations.

In the second case, discursive scorekeeping is not only perspectival in that scores are kept for each player, but “scores are also kept by each interlocutor.” There being no umpire or “collective” perspective to appeal to, the interpretation and application of the rules of the game are the job of each and every player. Discursive authority – the authority to determine the proprieties of moves in discursive practice – is thus the privilege of each player, each of whom determines the score by applying the “rules” (discursive proprieties) as interpreted from their own perspective as shaped by their own network of (acknowledged) commitments. As discussed, for Brandom, what keeps this distribution of authority from running into a rampant subjectivism and hence from

---

16 MIE, 185.
17 Cf. MIE, 601.
18 MIE, 185.
19 I will argue that Hegel puts this notion into question – there is a collective perspective to appeal to, but it is initially at least posited as an end (or an ideal), not as a fully present reality, at any stage in the game. Thus the perspectives of individual scorekeepers are genetically prior to the existence of a common score, but (I will argue) on Hegel’s view this collective score is nevertheless constitutively prior to the score as seen by each player (since the end gives form to the means).
making the game unplayable is the fact that the privilege of each perspective is perfectly symmetrical with those of others; what seems to me to be the way things objectively are (given my standpoint) may be to you just how things subjectively seem to me. In other words, the distinction between merely taking something to be the case and something’s actually being the case cuts across every doxastic perspective, given that each is equally susceptible to this distinction from the (third person) perspective of others: “[A]ccording to the I-Thou construal of intersubjectivity, each perspective is at most locally privileged in that it incorporates a structural distinction between objectively correct applications of concepts and applications that are merely subjectively taken to be correct. But none of these perspectives is privileged in advance of any other.”20 Unlike the I-We social practices discussed above (of which baseball playing is one), there is no perspective that is privileged such that it is not susceptible to critique in terms of whether what it takes to be thus-and-so actually is so.

I want to argue now that Brandom’s I-Thou construal of sociality – insofar as it underlies his account of objectivity – is structurally parallel to Fichte’s as described above. My purpose in doing so is to take a step in the direction of showing that Hegel’s rejection of a Fichtean version21 of the triangulation between objectivity, subjectivity and sociality (which I will describe in Part 2) counts also against Brandom’s version (an argument that I will make in Part 3). To recall Fichte’s position: the self-reverting activity (practical self-consciousness) that both makes possible and necessarily requires the emergence of an objective not-I for consciousness is itself possible only as a response

20 MIE, 600.
to a “summons” from another self-conscious agent, a normative call to engage self-
determination. In other words, in order for me to be a self-determining agent, another self-determining agent must recognize me as such, since only through that recognition can I gain a conception of my own individuality such that I can engage in the self-
determining activity that constitutes me as a rational agent. This recognition, though, is not a one-way street: my recognition of my interlocutor is equally a summons to him to engage (with me) in intentional activity; both of us have a sphere of our own possible efficacy as rational agents in virtue of our joint participation in a community of mutual recognition. For each of us, our ability to distinguish ourselves from what is not us but is merely for us (i.e., from objects), such that we can act rationally with respect to those things, depends upon our grasp of the distinction and inter-relation between ourselves and other rational individuals, that is, our ongoing recognition of others and our recognition that they recognize us.\(^{22}\) Furthermore, this recognition is not merely a theoretical positing, but the assuming of practical attitudes toward others: “The condition was that I recognize the other as a rational being… i.e., that I should treat him as a rational being – for only in action does there exist such a recognition valid for both.”\(^{23}\) Both self-determining activity and mutual recognition (which, as stated, are correlates) are fundamentally ways of acting; my concept of my own individuality is that of a limited being with a genuine sphere of possible practical efficacy, and my concept of the other is likewise. Thus, a community of mutually-recognitive rational agents is, if you will, a

---

\(^{22}\) “But the individual C cannot have acted upon me in the described manner without, at least problematically, having recognized me; and I cannot posit him as acting upon me in this way without positing that he recognizes me, at least problematically.” FNR, 44.

\(^{23}\) FNR, 44.
kind of social practice; a group of people doing things and doing things to one another that count as recognition of their agency.

Brandom also invokes the concept of recognition to explain the possibility of intentionality. As we have seen, what constitutes “us” – the community of those with intentionality – and distinguishes us is the fact that we are concept-mongering creatures. The deployment of concepts, though, is to be understood in terms of the taking up of certain normative attitudes with respect to certain behaviours respecting the propriety of that performance – given the circumstances – and of inferring from that performance to certain consequences of it. In other words, concept-mongering creatures are those that undertake inferentially articulated commitments in virtue of the things that they do. Crucially, though, this undertaking of commitments is only intelligible in a social practice in which concept-mongering creatures attribute commitments and entitlements to others. This is because (as remarked above and developed below) attribution of deontic status is foundational to undertaking commitments, since undertaking a commitment just is (on Brandom’s view) making it appropriate for others to attribute it to you. In other words, only given the standing possibility of others attributing a commitment to me can I be said to undertake that commitment; without reference to the discursive attitudes of others, I cannot be said to have discursive attitudes of my own. Furthermore, my commitments can be objective – in the dual sense of being about objects and of being correct or incorrect in virtue of something other than my merely taking things to be thus and so – only insofar as others can attribute to me not only deontic statuses (being committed to thus and so), but also deontic attitudes, that is, only insofar as they recognize me as the
sort of creature that deploys concepts in practice. Recognition, for Brandom, means: “Taking or treating someone as one of us… According to the construal of recognition being developed here, taking or treating as one of us is adopting a certain kind of intentional stance. It requires first of all interpreting the one it is directed at as the subject of intentional states [i.e., as having conceptually contentful commitments and entitlements]. But taking someone as one of us also requires… interpreting that individual as an intentional interpreter – as able to attribute intentional states, and so as able to adopt toward others the same sort of attitudes out of which that very stance is constructed.”

To put the same point in different terms: I am a discursive agent (a “concept-monger”) only insofar as I am a member of a community (a “we”) that is engaged in discursive practices; i.e., that is busy giving and asking for reasons to and from one another. My membership in this community is a normative status, which – like all normative statuses – is explicable in terms of a set of normative attitudes; my being a member of a discursive community is a function of being taken to be a member. It is not my own attitudes alone, however, that determine this status, but also (and more fundamentally) those of other members who take or treat me as a member by attributing discursive attitudes and statuses to me and by, furthermore, interpreting me to be doing

24 In case it is unclear, this is because objectivity depends upon the deployment of *de re* ascriptions (in the third person), which necessarily chart the social difference between the attributer’s perspective and the attributee’s perspective. Only insofar, then, as someone takes me to have a perspective by deploying *de re* attributions can there be, e.g., a distinction between my deontic attitudes and my deontic status (consequential attitudes) such that the latter outrun the former. Though I can be my own attributer (I can take up a third-person attitude to myself), this ability is derivative of my ability to recognize others as having taken up that third-person stance with respect to me in the first place. I have argued all of this above.

25 MIE, 67.

26 MIE, 39: “Being a member of a community is rather being one who ought to conform to the norms implicit in the practices of the community. Community membership has a normative significance; it is a normative status.”
the same to them. In yet other terms, being a rational agent, for Brandom, means having a perspective on the world, but having a perspective depends upon others having a perspective on me and on my recognition of that fact.

Thus, like Fichte, Brandom believes that mutual recognition between rational agents is constitutive for their individual rational agency. Fichte puts this primarily in terms of the conditions for self-consciousness, while Brandom puts it in terms of the conditions for undertaking discursive commitments (because this pre-supposes attribution of commitment to me by others). There are important differences between these two arguments, but what is important to me now is that they both invoke the same understanding of social practices. In both cases recognition involves the attribution of intentionality across gaps between the different perspectives of different agents. In Fichte’s case these attributions primarily take the form of attributions of rational actions within a sphere of possible efficacy, whereas in Brandom’s case these are attributions of deontic status and attitude within a doxastic perspective determined by a holistic network of inferential commitments; but the basic structure is the same for both. Furthermore, as I have argued in both cases, neither views this mutual recognition as requiring or implying the positing of a “higher” fully communal perspective – wherein the community of mutually recognizable individuals is taken to be a fully fledged subject of attitudes and actions – except as an abstraction from the aggregate of individual yet interacting

---

27 Brandom’s argument may not include the necessity of genuine self-consciousness, since not all undertakings are self-conscious acknowledgments; whereas Fichte’s position is moot without self-consciousness, since that is what is to be explained. I will return to this in the next section.

28 Thus that two factors are necessary for positing another as a rational being, since these are conditions for attributing actions to him: “Only in the union of both properties [being a rational and a sensible being] is he posited by me at all... Thus I can attribute an action to him only insofar as it is connected, in part with the sensible properties of his previous actions, and, in part, with his recognition of me; I can attribute an action to him only insofar as the action is determined by both.” FNR, 46. What is crucial for my purposes here is that positing an other (recognizing him) requires (indeed, consists in) attributing actions to him.
perspectives. At no point does the individual “transcend” her perspective (or self-ascribed sphere of possible efficacy, in Fichte’s terms); even the positing of the community of rational agents (saying “we,” if you will) is something done from the perspective of a rational agent. For Fichte, the “unifying of opposites into one” is the positing of a community of the I and the self-conscious not-I, but “the point of union lies in me, in my consciousness; and the unity is conditioned by my capacity for consciousness.” For Brandom, the act of recognition does involve taking the other to be one of us (we concept-mongering creatures) and this is done through the use of propositional-attitude ascriptions, but both de dicto and de re ascriptions index the content of these ascriptions to a particular perspective; in the former case it is specifying the content in terms of what the attributee would endorse (i.e., his perspective), and in the latter case in terms of what the attributer would endorse, given her collateral commitments. Thus both employ an I-Thou construal of social practices in which mutual recognition underwrites the rational agency of each actor. I will argue in Part 2 that Hegel departs from this view by asserting that mutual recognition must itself be understood in terms of the concrete identification of oneself with a community such that the community is taken to have a prima facie normative authority (but not for that reason indefeasible), an identification that must be understood in I-We terms (though not exactly as Brandom understands this form of sociality). I will now, though, make good on my remark about a crucial difference between Fichte and Brandom; namely, on the question of the role of self-consciousness in an account of the mutual imbrication of objectivity and sociality.

29 FNR, 44.
3.2. Subjectivity, Self-Consciousness and “I” – Fichte, then Brandom

As mentioned, for Fichte, the necessity of the summons to free, self-determining activity – in other words, the necessity of recognition – is posited because it makes possible the condition for rational agency par excellence, namely, the self-reverting activity of rational being, which I have been calling practical self-consciousness since it is defined as an “acting directed at acting.” Strictly speaking, it is not quite correct to call this a form of consciousness since Fichte, like Kant, considers all consciousness to be the comprehension of an intuition under a concept, and such an act – even when directed at itself – cannot be primordial as a condition for consciousness as such. Fichte’s conception of the transcendental unity of apperception thus grounds practical self-consciousness in a form of intuition. This brings us back in turn to that act directed at acting that brings the I into being for itself. As mentioned, self-consciousness is the conceptual comprehension of an intuition, namely the act of returning to oneself, of acting that is itself directed at acting. We have access to this intuition via another one, which Fichte calls “intellectual intuition”: “‘Intellectual intuition’ is the name I give to the act required of the philosopher: an act of intuiting himself while simultaneously performing the act by means of which the I originates for him. Intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness that I act and of what I do when I act.”

Because of intellectual intuition, I can be aware of the I that acts. In other words, “it is only through intellectual intuition that I know that I do this.” This makes possible the self-ascription

30 J.G. Fichte, “Second Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre For Readers Who Already Have a Philosophical System of Their Own,” in Breazeale, ed. and trans, Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800) (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1994), 46. [Hereafter cited as: SI]

31 SI, 46.
that Kant credited to pure apperception. There are, according to Fichte, three elements of any complete act of consciousness: 1) sensory intuition “whereby the representation obtains a relation to an object and thus becomes a representation of something”;32 2) an intellectual intuition that relates the representation to the subject; and 3) a concept “whereby the first two elements are united and thus become a representation.”33 The concept, as we have already seen, can arise only by the positing of a Not-I opposed to the I that arises from the original act of the subject and in that sense is made possible by that act. The sensory intuition, too, depends on reference to that act via intellectual intuition: “sensory intuition is possible only in conjunction with intellectual intuition, since everything that is supposed to be my representation must be referred to me, but consciousness of the I comes only from intellectual intuition.”34 Thus every complete act of consciousness is conditioned by our ability – made possible by intellectual intuition – to refer the act back to oneself, that is, by practical self-consciousness.

Paul Franks clarifies Fichte’s emphasis on the reflexive referring of representations to the subject by comparing his account to that of John Perry and David Lewis. Perry imagines a situation where a man is lost in a library but has all the information about his own up to date biography and the lay-out of the library. In spite of having all the pertinent information at hand, the fact that he cannot locate himself with respect to these facts – “since he does not know that he himself is the person described”35 – the information is useless. Until the subject is able to form the “locating beliefs” that situate him properly, he is lost. What is missing in the man’s knowledge of the

32 SI, 58.
33 SI, 58.
34 SI, 47.
biographical information, says Perry, is a certain conceptual ingredient that would allow him to put the content of the belief in first-personal terms. Franks puts this into a Fichtean idiom by saying that what is missing is not a conceptual ingredient. Rather: “any attempt to specify a locating belief in non-first-personal terms has a missing intuitive ingredient.” David Lewis, in response to the apparent problem that these locating beliefs set out for the definition of belief, argues that in fact all beliefs are self-locating beliefs; that “every belief or desire involves immediate self-ascription.” Franks argues that Perry and Lewis’ self-locating beliefs – by which the content of the belief is immediately ascribed in an irreducibly first-personal manner – play a similar role to that of intellectual intuition in every full act of consciousness according to Fichte. In both cases, it is in virtue of the fact that the content of consciousness (be it information, concepts or sensory intuitions) is referred immediately to myself as an acting subject that it becomes available to me as something to be acted upon (i.e., that it becomes something for me).

Two common elements of Lewis’ and Fichte’s understanding of self-ascription need to be highlighted briefly: first, that it is immediate; and, second, that it occurs in every act of consciousness. As mentioned, for Fichte, intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness of my act and thus allows me to know that I act. It is the immediate access to the act by which the I posits itself (as positing), which is, for the subject, “entirely unconditioned and thus absolute.” For Fichte, it is necessary that the

---

36 SWS, 20.
37 That is, these locating beliefs are not attitudes toward propositions, but immediately referred to the subject.
38 SWS, 20.
39 SI, 46. The full sentence reads: “Since, moreover, nothing exists for him which is not contained in his consciousness, and since everything else within his consciousness is conditioned by this very act and thus
reference of any representation to the subject must be immediate – in the sense that it is unmediated by any further representations – in order to avoid an infinite regress. If it were not, then the representation that mediates the reference of the first representation to the I must itself be referred to the I by another representation and so on. Intellectual intuition is, as we have seen, not a complete representation but rather an immediate consciousness of myself, thus it does not itself need to be referred to me by anything else. Franks puts it thus: “To avoid the regress, the ‘reference to a subject’ must be unmediated by any representation whatsoever. Hence Fichte’s characterization of the transcendentally necessary reference of every representation to its subject as an intellectual intuition; an immediacy that is a priori and wholly independent of sensibility, but which, like every concept or intuition, is never encountered on its own in any ordinary act of consciousness.”

Second, just as Lewis argues that all beliefs are self-locating, Fichte asserts that intellectual intuition – and thus self-consciousness – is at work in every act of consciousness. This seems to put him at odds with Kant, who only asserted that the “I Think” must be capable of accompanying any of my representations. In other words, for Fichte (as opposed to Kant) an actually occurring self-consciousness is a condition for the possibility of any act of consciousness. I offer two reasons for this. First, as Franks cannot in turn – at least not in one and the same respect – be a condition for the possibility of this act, he must therefore think of this act as an act that is for him entirely unconditioned and thus absolute.”

40 SWS, 10. In “An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre, Chapter One” Fichte summarizes all of this thus: “Your inner activity, which is directed at something outside of you (namely, at the object you are thinking about), is, at the same time, directed within and at itself. According to what was said above, however, self-reverting activity is what generates the I. Accordingly, you were conscious of yourself in your own act of thinking, and this self-consciousness was precisely the same as your immediate consciousness of your own thinking; and this is true whether you were thinking of some object or were thinking of yourself. – Self-consciousness is therefore immediate; what is subjective and what is objective are inseparably united within self-consciousness and are absolutely one and the same.” In Breazeale, ed. Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre, p. 113. Hereafter: NP
argues, this commitment follows from a more basic ontological commitment of Fichte’s that “capacities and, more generally, possibilities cannot be metaphysically basic, but must be grounded in actualities.” On this view, it is no good to simply make a possibility the condition of the possibility of something else; there must ultimately be some actual condition holding things up. Since the capacity in question is the ability of immediately self-ascribe, “then the actual ground for that capacity must already involve immediacy.” This immediacy is the unconditioned act of self-positing as positing, “an existential commitment with respect to oneself as the agent engaged in making existential commitments, predications, or inferences.”

The second reason is connected to the first: beyond the self-directed acting by which the I comes into being for itself, there is no I to which one could be capable of self-ascription. This act does not bring the I into being as a substance with then continues existing – substance-like – in the absence of an act of consciousness, but which must continually recur in every act: “This act of self-positing is not supposed to produce an I that, so to speak, exists as a thing in itself and continues to exist independently of all consciousness.” The intellectual intuition by which my acts are referred to myself as subject is the immediate accomplice of the original act of the subject and thus recurs with it at every moment. Thus an unrealized capacity for self-ascription could no more exist than could consciousness that lacked a subject (an unknown knowing, if you will); the self-ascription (implicit or explicit) must occur everywhere and every time the I does.

41 SWS, 17.
42 SWS, 18.
43 Or, as I put it above: acting directed toward oneself as acting.
44 SWS, 18.
45 NP, 114.
Before I turn to Brandom, I will summarize Fichte’s account of consciousness and self-consciousness. All consciousness of objects – which involves comprehending a sensible intuition under a concept – is made possible by the actual self-consciousness underwritten by intellectual intuition. This self-consciousness is to be understood as the immediate and actual reference of any act of consciousness to its subject, which is itself constituted by an act of self-positing (self-reverting action). The object-consciousness that thus arises is the manner in which objects come to be for the I; that is, by being objects of consciousness, things that seemed subjective (representations) come to have objective validity (being) insofar as they then pose a (normative) constraint upon the free action of a rational agent.\(^4\) Thus, Fichte’s project shows how immediate self-consciousness is a condition for the existence of norms binding on autonomous agents. His arguments about the necessity of recognition in *Foundations of Natural Right* are meant to explain the necessary conditions for just this immediate self-consciousness; the necessity of recognition is no way obviates for Fichte the necessity of the immediate self-ascription of a rational agent’s activities.

I will now argue that, for Brandom, this necessity is less than totally clear. On the one hand, I will attempt to show that some of the terms and presuppositions of his structural, inter-subjective account of objectivity require that he does not take occurrent self-consciousness (as expressed in the use of the first person pronoun) to be necessary for participation – even “objective” participation – in discursive practices, a position that

\(^4\) In fact, since it is constituted in an act of self positing that makes itself into an object, the I is itself something objective in a sense. Cf. SI, 43: “This action [acting that is directed at acting] is, by its very nature, objective. I am for myself, this is a fact. But I can only have occurred for myself by means of acting, for I am free.” Also, SI, 78: “As a consequence of this act of thinking, the acting that is thought of within this act of thinking becomes, for the philosopher himself, something *objective*, that is to say, something that – insofar as he thinks of it – hovers before him as something that limits the freedom (i.e., the indeterminacy) of his thinking. This is the true and original meaning of the term ‘objectivity.'”
he explicitly endorses. On the other hand, I will also argue that a number of other factors in his perspectivalist account of discursive social practices do require a form of immediate and occurrent self-reference and hence a form of (intuitive) self-consciousness, a la Fichte. I will begin by discussing Brandom’s distinction between strong and weak de re attitudes, a distinction which underwrites the first of my arguments, namely, that Brandom’s terms lead him to reject the necessity of self-consciousness for sapient discursive practice.

_De re_ ascriptions as discussed thus far have been “epistemically weak;” the type of “access” that they give us to objects rests simply on the use of locutions that denote objects (whether through the use of a singular noun or a definite description). By contrast, epistemically strong _de re_ belief “has more epistemic oomph to it than the thin notion reconstructed here... [it] involves being en rapport with a particular object in a stronger sense than merely having some way or another of denoting it.”\(^{47}\) The extra “oomph” that strong _de re_ attitudes have consists in their providing a mode of epistemic access to the object referred to that goes beyond merely being able to refer to it. More particularly, strong _de re_ attitudes consist “not just in being able to use an expression that in fact refers to [an object] but in knowing what object one is talking about.”\(^{48}\) To employ an example of Brandom’s, the phrase “the shortest spy” is sufficient to pick out a particular object, but does not yet tell us who that is, thus this phrase is epistemically weak. By contrast, offering her name (Rosa Kleb) in the right context not only refers to the person, but tells us who she is. Strong _de re_ attitudes allow us to know not only _that_ X (such and such) is Y (thus and so), but also to _pick out_ X by allowing us to “endorse

\(^{47}\) MIE, 548.  
\(^{48}\) MIE, 549.
some nontrivial identifying belief about it;“49 in other words, they allow us also to know who X is, or know which object is X.

Perhaps the paradigmatic way that these attitudes offer us this special access to objects is through the use of demonstrative or, more broadly, indexical expressions. These are taken to be “directly referential expressions” that express an immediate rapport or contact with objects, a kind of “knowledge by acquaintance” that allows us not only to successfully refer to an object, but to know and express just which object is being referred to. Thus “this X is Y” is epistemically strong in that the demonstrative “this” picks out a particular object with which the speaker (and presumably the hearer) is directly acquainted. Moreover, indexical or demonstrative reference is often understood to be purely intuitional, in that the contact that it establishes with an object does not rely on any kind of conceptual mediation: “directly referential expressions, paradigmatically indexical ones, [are taken to] make possible a fundamental sort of cognitive contact with the objects of thought, a kind of relational belief that is not conceptually mediated – in which objects are directly present to the mind, rather than being presented by the use of concepts.”50 In versions of representationalist (as opposed to inferentialist) semantics, this primordial contact between mind (or words) and world established by indexical reference is taken to be the stuff out of which the whole edifice of mind and language are constructed – a view that Brandom rejects in the strongest terms – but the account of strong de re attitudes articulated in terms of the access to objects made possible by

49 MIE, 550.
50 MIE, 551.
demonstratives does not necessarily lead to such a semantic theory.\footnote{In other words, granting that there are irreducibly epistemically strong \textit{de re} attitudes made possible by the use of indexicals does not commit one (even consequentially) to a generally representationalist semantic strategy. This much even Brandom grants. I would want to go further and say that, even if one rejects Brandom’s attempts to derive strong \textit{de re} attitudes from weak ones and hence grants that at least some forms of the former are autonomously intelligible and a necessary substratum of beliefs (e.g., the immediate contact with oneself made possible by the indexical “\textit{I}”), even that does not commit one to a kind of atomistic, constructivist representationalism of the naïve empiricist variety (e.g., Hume). It does, however, mitigate the absolute and general priority of inference over representation in semantic explanation. It requires, in other words, a semantics that is neither fully representationalist nor inferentialist. I’ll expand on this more in Chapter 6, following John McDowell’s criticisms of Brandom’s inferentialism.} Nor does it necessarily require resting a global account of objectivity on this account of \textit{deixis}.

Those inclined towards agreement with Sellars’ critique of the Myth of the Given, will naturally be a little bit chary about accepting such an account of epistemically strong \textit{de re} attitudes, leading some to reject them altogether.\footnote{Brandom cites Davidson and Dennett as examples. Cf. MIE, 551.} Brandom, Sellarsian that he is, likewise rejects any attempt to rely on deictic, epistemically strong \textit{de re} attitudes to do much philosophical (and especially semantic) heavy lifting, but he does nevertheless want to grant that there is such a thing as a strong \textit{de re} attitude and even to grant that such attitudes are significant in their own right; he wants to steer between the boosters and knockers of such attitudes. It is his knocking that matters most to me here. Though he grants the boosters a number of aspects of their account of strong \textit{de re} attitudes, he differs with them in his “assessment of their theoretical significance.”\footnote{MIE, 551.} Brandom relativises their theoretical significance (their ability to do the semantic heavy lifting that the boosters grant them) by rejecting three inter-related claims about them. First, he argues that “these beliefs do not form an autonomously intelligible sort or stratum of beliefs;”\footnote{MIE, 551.} that is, epistemically strong \textit{de re} beliefs cannot be thought to exist independently of (or, \textit{a fortiori}, prior to) some more primordial attitudes and semantic facts. Second, “although essentially indexical beliefs have a special sort of object-
involving content that other beliefs do not, that object-involvingness should not be thought of as a nonconceptual element in their content.\footnote{MIE, 551.} These two points are both – as I shall discuss in a moment – underwritten by Brandom’s insistence that anaphora is prior to deixis such that the former can exist without the latter, but not vice-versa. Finally – and most crucially for my purposes – he rejects any attempt to make deictic strong de re attitudes foundational to the objectivity (world-involvingness) of our conceptual contents: “what is of primary significance for understanding the representational dimension of thought and talk – its intentionality or aboutness in general – is the combination of doxastic perspectives expressed by (weak) de re specifications of the conceptual contents of beliefs of any sort, not the special sort of content expressed by strong de re beliefs, nor the special rapport with objects they embody.”\footnote{MIE, 552.} Thus, as deixis is asymmetrically related to anaphora, so strong de re beliefs are asymmetrically related to weak de re beliefs; you can have the latter without the former, but not the other way around. I will briefly discuss both of these points.

As mentioned, the first two of Brandom’s assertions about the relatively low degree of theoretical significance possessed by strong de re beliefs are to be understood in terms of his repeated insistence that anaphora is asymmetrically related to deixis. Anaphora is (as discussed above) the capacity of linguistic expressions to “pick up” reference to non-repeatable singulars such that they can be made “available to figure in substitutional commitments”\footnote{MIE, 462.} which in turn determine the sense of repeatable singulars. This “picking up” is made possible by the creation of anaphoric chains – paradigmatically chains of pronouns; thus (in Brandom’s example): “That pig [non-repeatable singular

\[55\text{MIE, 551.}\]  
\[56\text{MIE, 552.}\]  
\[57\text{MIE, 462.}\]
reference using a demonstrative] is grunting so it [anaphoric pronoun] must be happy. I’m glad, because it is our champion boar, Wilbur [repeatable singular available for substitution inferences].” Without the possibility of forging an anaphoric chain between the demonstrative “this” and the repeatable singular term “Wilbur,” the demonstrative could have no sense, since it would not be made available for substitution inferences which confer a sense it by allowing it to play a role in propositional speech acts. Because of this, Brandom asserts that “deixis presupposes anaphora;” without anaphora, deictic tokenings have no sense; they can only have an inferential significance insofar as they are used as “a special kind of anaphoric initiator.” Indexicals (such as “I”) are a bit more of a complex case, but these too “are essentially unrepeatable according to types” and hence require anaphora in order to be made available inferentially since “it is only as repeatable… that they can be substituted for,” and anaphora is the linguistic mechanism that makes them repeatable. The reverse is not the case. Not all anaphoric initiators are demonstratives or indexicals. In our example, the proper name (which is repeatable) “Wilbur” could also have functioned as an anaphoric initiator if the sentence were re-written thus: “Wilbur is grunting so he must be happy. I’m glad because he is our champion boar.” Likewise, a definite description (e.g., “the big pink pig with the spider hanging above it”) could be used in a similar role. As Brandom puts it: “Anaphoric mechanisms are more fundamental than, and are presupposed by, deictic mechanisms – one cannot have a language with indexicals such

58 MIE, 462. My gloss in brackets.
59 MIE, 462. Structurally, this point about demonstratives being anaphoric initiators parallels Brandom’s conception of perception as a “discursive entrance;” in both cases, the phenomenon at hand (demonstratives and perceptions respectively) have a sense (a meaning if you will) only insofar as they have inferential significance, which is only possible if they are “picked up” by essentially inferential phenomena.
60 MIE, 465.
as demonstratives but without expressions functioning anaphorically, though the converse is possible.\textsuperscript{61}

If it is sound, this argument instantly establishes Brandom’s first rejoinder to those who posit a strong theoretical significance for deictic, strong \textit{de re} attitudes, namely, that these do not constitute an autonomously intelligible sort or stratum of belief. It also implies his second rejoinder, that the object-involvingness of essentially indexical beliefs is not non-conceptual. This is because anaphora, upon which the sense of indexical (and other demonstrative) beliefs depend, are essentially conceptually – i.e., inferentially – articulated. Anaphoric chains \textit{just are} means by which non-repeatable tokenings are made available for inclusion in substitution \textit{inferences}; anaphora is conceptually articulated in that it depends upon substitution inferences, which in turn depend upon the inferential significance of complete propositions (thus we witness Brandom’s holism again).

Anaphora also plays a role in Brandom’s defence of his third – and for my purposes, most crucial – rejoinder: that the representational dimension of our discursive practice (i.e., the objectivity of conceptual content) is not essentially dependent on the kind of rapport with objects (i.e., “direct acquaintance”) expressed in strong \textit{de re} beliefs, but rather upon the grasp of the social distinction between epistemic perspectives expressed in the use of \textit{weak de re} specifications of deontic attitudes (which includes belief). In brief, his argument for this claim is that the representational dimension is essential for communication (since, as we have seen, it allows the specification of content across doxastic gaps of perspective), but strong \textit{de re} attitudes are not; this being the case, it follows that a discursive practice can be objective (it \textit{must} be) without including the use

\textsuperscript{61} MIE, 306.
of strong *de re* attitudes. Brandom establishes that strong *de re* attitudes are not essential for communication by showing how they can be specified – to a degree of accuracy sufficient for communication – in weak *de re* terms. His precise argument for this is complex; for now it will suffice to give a simplified version. A strong *de re* attitude, such as one making essential use of the indexical “I” (e.g., “I believe that I am the King of Siam”) must, if communication is to be possible, be attributable by someone to the speaker and hence specifiable from the attributer’s perspective. The problem is that “I” is not a type-repeatable, since it has a difference sense and reference in the mouths of different utterers. The sense and reference of “I” in the mouth of the utterer (who says “I believe that I am the King of Siam”) can be preserved in the specification of the content of his commitment by the attributer through the *anaphoric* use of quasi-indexicals such as “he himself” thus: “He believes that he himself is the King of Siam.”

The essential content of the utterer’s commitment is preserved in the attribution, but the “epistemic oomph” that it has in his utterance (“I am…” – expressing privileged access to the object of his belief) – which renders it epistemically strong – is lost, since the ascriber does not have the same epistemic access to the object that the utterer does. Thus the utterance and the attribution cannot be cases of perfect “same-saying” but there is a preservation of *reference* or denotation across the interlocutors’ doxastic perspectives, and this co-reference (which is merely *weakly de re*) is sufficient for communication: “In the least demanding extensional or representational sense, communication requires securing only coreference… In this sense it is sufficient for an interpreter to understand another’s remark, and so for communication to count as successful, if that scorekeeper adopts a deontic attitude of attributing a commitment that would be undertaken explicitly by

---

62 Cf. MIE, 563.
asserting a (weak) *de re* ascription." In other words, through the use of quasi-indexicals (which are “quasi” precisely because they are essentially anaphoric mechanisms, not purely deictic ones), strong *de re* attitudes can be made available to an ascriber (i.e., to someone without the special epistemic access to the object expressed in the strong *de re* attitude) in such a way that the ascriber’s specifications of them “are not restricted to the use of singular terms that themselves express strong *de re* rapport with the object of the belief.” Though these weak *de re* specifications are not exhaustive of the content of the strong *de re* attitudes that they specify, the co-reference that they establish are sufficient for communication and hence their specification in strong *de re* terms is not necessary. Thus Brandom concludes that: “the second, stronger sense of ‘of’ is built on, and must be understood in terms of, the first and more fundamental sense. The representational dimension of discourse… is accordingly to be explained in the first instance as what is expressed by (weak) *de re* specifications of the contents of ascribed commitments.”

Strong *de re* attitudes, then, are neither necessary nor sufficient for the success of communication or (correspondingly) for the objectivity of discursive practices. Expressions that make us of the first-person pronoun “I” are strongly *de re* because they are “essentially indexical” – they always express a belief based on the special kind of epistemic access to the object made available to the believer just because she is the object of her belief. First-person singular beliefs always, and by their very nature, allow more than simple reference to the object of the belief, they allow the believer to know which “I” is being discuss; after all, there is only one option: it’s me. By contrast, there are forms of belief about oneself that aren’t essentially indexical. If one uses a way of

---

63 MIE, 567.
64 MIE, 585.
65 MIE, 586.
identifying the object of such a belief that is not an indexical (e.g., one’s own name, a
description of oneself), one does not necessarily have the special epistemic access to that
object that guarantees the ability to identify it. Thus “I am the King of Siam” expresses a
strong *de re* attitude, but “Michael DeMoor is the King of Siam” doesn’t (even if spoken
by me), since the subject of the latter sentence does not necessarily index the content to
the speaker (i.e., me), since it can equally refer to another person of that name. I can
grasp the content of the latter proposition *without* knowing that the subject of the
sentence refers to *me* (i.e., that I am the King of Siam); it is thus merely *weakly de re*. The proposition “I am…” allows me to reliably identify whom it is about by indexing the
proposition to the speaker – me (“I” when uttered by me cannot refer to anything else) –
and there is no use of “I” that does not do so; it is essentially indexical and *strongly de re*. Given the considerations outlined above, this implies that beliefs expressed in the first-
person singular (those made possible by the expressive resources made available by the
use of “I”) – as with all epistemically strong *de re* and essentially indexical beliefs – are
not fundamental to what it is to be a sapient participant in a discursive practice; one can
imagine a discursive practice (even an objective one) in which these play no role, just as
there can be practices that are rational, but not logical and that employ anaphora but not
deictic tokenings. In fact, like conditionals and (as we will see below) truth-talk
(“traditional semantic vocabulary”), “I” is a piece of logical vocabulary in Brandom’s
terms: its role is to make explicit something implicit in discursive practice, but it doesn’t
make discursive practice possible in the first place. As he himself puts it:

> There is no necessity that every idiom include an expression playing that role [of
> the first person pronoun ‘I’]; there need be nothing incoherent in descriptions of
> communities of judging and perceiving agents, attributing and undertaking
> propositionally contentful commitments, giving and asking for reasons, who do
not yet have available the expressive resources ‘I’ provides. Yet when this bit of vocabulary is available, it makes explicit something important about such a set of discursive practices. ‘I’ is a logical locution. While those who lack it can be conscious in the sense of sapient – can be explicitly aware of things by making judgments about them – they are in an important sense not yet self-conscious.66

Logic, in his idiom, is the organ of semantic self-consciousness – it allows us to say explicitly what we can do implicitly in practice. In the form of the essential indexical ‘I’ it would seem to be the organ of self-consciousness as such.67 For Brandom, qua expressive, self-consciousness is asymmetrically related to its substratum (sapience). As we have seen, sapient activity is possible only in discursive practices having an I-Thou social structure, which is just what underwrites the possibility of discursive objectivity. It would seem, then, given all that has been said, that Brandom holds that a discursive practice can be conscious but not self-conscious, social and objective but not “subjective” in a way that implies self-consciousness. For Brandom, there is “nothing incoherent” in this idea. I will now argue that, given his own views on what ‘I’ allows us to do, there is.

In other words, I want to turn now to establishing that Brandom does in fact (and, on his own terms, he must) depend upon an account of discursive activity that implies a degree of self-consciousness – construed as strongly de re first person thought – on the part of rational agents.

As mentioned in my discussion of Fichte at the beginning of this section, John Perry argues that the essential indexical “I” has a special and necessary role to play in practical reasoning. More specifically, without the availability to an agent of locating beliefs expressed in first-personal terms, they would be unable to translate information

66 MIE, 559.
67 As I will discuss below (Chapter 6), in his reconstruction of an argument of Hegel’s, Brandom in fact constructs an account of self-consciousness that is not first-personal in these terms since it is the recognition of oneself as the third-person object of another’s recognition. I will argue further that this is not an adequate conception of self-consciousness even on his own terms.
into action. Perry uses the example of following a trail of spilled sugar around a grocery store, looking in vain for the shopper spilling it, believing – rightly – that the person spilling sugar is making a mess, an epistemically weak de re attitude. As it turns out, it is Perry’s own bag of sugar that is making the mess. His weak de re attitude is true, but it can’t translate into effective action to fix the problem until he discovers that he himself is the source of the mess; not until he can have the (epistemically strong de re) locating belief “I am spilling the sugar” can all of the (true) information he has translate into action.68 No other designation of the spiller (even a definite description or proper name) can move Perry to action unless that information can in turn be indexed to himself via the use of “I”. Thus, for example, even the weak de re belief that “John Perry is spilling sugar” cannot translate into action unless it is accompanied by the locating belief “I am John Perry.” Such beliefs are, then, indispensable for practical reasoning.

Brandom accedes to this reasoning: “For any other terms t I might use to pick myself out, there would always be some possible circumstances in which I could believe that t had a property… without thereby believing that I have that property…[A] belief I would express using ‘I’ can be relevant to my practical reasoning and action in a way that no belief that can be otherwise expressed can match.”69 The essential difference between a specification of the subject (me) by using “I” and the a specification using any other locution is that the former has the role of “expressing the acknowledgment of a commitment.”70 By using the first-person pronoun, I am making it explicit (to myself) that I have a certain commitment, one that has practical consequences; by saying “I am spilling the sugar” I am acknowledging an obligation to act in a certain way in virtue of

---

69 MIE, 552.
70 MIE, 552.
the content of the avowed commitment. On the contrary, the statement “Somebody is spilling sugar” – even if this is assumed to imply that the spiller should take steps to remedy the mess – cannot move me to action because it does not constitute an acknowledgment of a practical commitment on my part. Left as it is, it does indeed ascribe a practical commitment to someone (someone is obliged to clean up the mess), but – because that attitude is only epistemically weak – it does not say enough for me (the believer) to recognize that the practical commitment is mine. Saying “I am spilling sugar” amounts to acknowledging (recognizing) that the practical commitment to cleaning the mess is my own commitment. By doing so, I am essentially forming the intention to clean it up, since ‘forming an intention’ on Brandom’s discursive scorekeeping model, just is acknowledging a practical commitment.71

Here we can see a connection to Fichte’s conception of how the I arises for itself: in acting directed toward acting. Both Brandom and Fichte see I-hood as bearing an intrinsic relation to self-directed activity; in Brandom’s case, to the undertaking of a commitment, that is, to reflexively ascribing the commitment in such a way as to motivate further action. Just as Fichte does, he recognizes that this is essential for rational agency. Any rational agent, he says, must have “reliable dispositions to respond noninferentially to acknowledgments of some range of practical commitments by producing suitable performances.”72 To employ Brandom’s example, I must be able to move from the commitment that I am in danger of being eaten by a bear to the formation of an intention to run away. A condition for doing so is my ability to identify myself as the one in danger of being eaten and myself as the one who needs to run away. No third

---

71 Acknowledgment of a practical commitment is the deontic attitude that corresponds to forming an intention – what is expressed by a sentence of the form “I shall…” MIE, 552.
72 MIE, 553.
person description can substitute for the first-person pronoun in this inference while preserving the commitment involved. For example, the practical commitment “I shall run away” does not follow from (i.e., cannot be motivated by) “The bearded man is in danger of being eaten by a bear” unless one can say “I am the bearded man.” Thus the ability to ascribe commitments to oneself (i.e., to acknowledge or undertake them) by means of the first-person pronoun is essential for rational agency and cannot be replaced by any third-personal ascription (in this sense, Brandom too believes that self-attribution is “essentially indexical”); or, more precisely, the possibility of rational action presupposes certain epistemically strong de re attitudes (expressed by the use of “I”) that pick out oneself as the subject of one’s commitment.

The irreducibility of first-person attitudes is grounded in the fact that what they express cannot be exhaustively expressed in other terms. To replace “I” with any other designator loses the special motivating role that first-person beliefs can have. A commitment may be attributed to me in third-person terms (even by myself – I can say of myself that “Michael should run away”), but, as we’ve seen, this is not sufficient to move me to action. What the use of “I” expresses, however, is more than an attribution, it is the undertaking by acknowledging of a commitments, which “is something than no one but I can do.”73 The irreducibility of the “I” (the first-person perspective) has its ground in the difference between attributing and undertaking a commitment, but not (in this case) necessarily across a doxastic gap between scorekeeping perspectives. According to Brandom “acknowledging commitments [which is the home of the “I”] is the basic way of undertaking them, and undertaking commitments cannot be reduced to attributing

73 MIE, 553.
them, even to oneself.”

The attributing of commitments is what is expressed in third-personal terms; but undertaking is not reducible to attributing and hence must be specified in terms other than the third-person. We have seen, furthermore, that there are two ways of undertaking commitments – by acknowledgment (self-ascription) and consequentially (by undertaking a commitment that entails the one at hand, even without the subject’s awareness of this). Consequential undertaking cannot be expressed in first-person terms, since by definition it transcends the subject’s awareness. Thus, what “I” expresses is the deontic attitude of undertaking a commitment by acknowledging it, which Brandom says is the “basic” form of undertaking.

He does not spell out in any detail exactly how this attitude is “basic,” but (amongst other things) it seems obvious that it just means that undertaking some commitment by acknowledging it is a necessary condition for having another consequential commitment and not vice versa; one may have acknowledged commitments without having consequential ones, but one cannot have any consequential commitments without having at least one acknowledged one. Brandom’s own account of how consequential commitments arise implies this. Consequential commitments are ascribed to us by an interlocutor in virtue of what she takes to be the consequences of another commitment that I have, one that she takes me to acknowledge. Even de re attributions must have some de dicto part (Y believes of X that it is Z), which specifies

74 MIE, 554; This claim is a bit surprising, given that earlier in MIE, Brandom asserts that the concept of undertaking a commitment must be understood fundamentally in terms of the scorekeeping attitudes of others (i.e., undertaking a commitment just is making it appropriate for others to attribute it to you (MIE 196)). This makes the link between undertaking, attributing etc. vague. I take this to be an expression of his two-mindedness about the first-person. If undertaking is reducible to attributing (or specifiable purely in terms of it, or asymmetrically grounded in it), then there is no special role for the first person that cannot be unpacked in terms of third-personal attitudes. If it is not, then there is an irreducible role for the first-person. But would this latter role be in some sense grounding, such that there is a symmetry between attributing and undertaking? By failing to properly acknowledge the irreducibility and essentiality of the first-person perspective, Brandom makes such questions difficult to answer.
what the attributee would *acknowledge from his perspective*. Thus one cannot ascribe a consequential commitment to someone (using a *de re* ascription) without simultaneously attributing to them at least one acknowledged commitment (specified in the *de dicto* that-clause of the ascription). In this sense, the primacy of *de dicto* to *de re* specifications of conceptual content\(^{75}\) points to the primacy of acknowledged undertakings over consequential undertakings.

What this means is that strong *de re* attitudes (acknowledging commitments) are foundational for all undertakings (which may be expressed only in weak *de re* attitudes); one cannot undertake any commitments unless one is capable of acknowledging commitments. Acknowledging, I take it, is an epistemically strong attitude because it includes within it – by its very nature – an index to the subject, since – as Brandom himself says – only I can acknowledge my own commitments. By acknowledging a commitment I am doing something that involves (implicitly or explicitly) a kind of privileged access to the subject of that commitment; I am not just attributing it to someone, I am *specifying* the one to whom it is attributed. Whenever I acknowledge a claim I am – implicitly or explicitly – making reference to myself, a reference that I *grasp* (at least intuitively, *a la* Fichte\(^{76}\)). I need not make this explicit – I can acknowledge a claim simply by asserting it, I don’t need to say “I believe that X” – but I cannot undertake any claims without employing a strong *de re* attitude, namely, acknowledging a claim; and this attitude is the one that is expressed (and only expressible) through the use

\(^{75}\) Cf. MIE, 525; *de dicto* are prior just insofar as they are a necessary ingredient of *de re* specifications, but not *vice versa*; it is thus possible to imagine a language game with *de dicto* but not *de re* attributions (though it would not be “objective”).

\(^{76}\) “Implicit in practice” (and hence not expressed in a formulated principle) in Brandom’s idiom is functionally co-extensive with “intuitive” in Fichte’s; both express a kind of awareness that has not yet been formulated using explicit concepts, but which underlie all conceptualization.
of “I”. Again, insofar as acknowledging a claim cannot be exhaustively expressed in third-personal terms (i.e., insofar as acknowledging, like all undertakings, is irreducible to attributing) and thus can only be fully specified by using “I”,77 we can see that it is strongly de re as are all such specifications (“I” being essentially indexical and hence epistemically strong). Therefore, without a rapport with myself that goes beyond merely being able to denote myself (i.e., to attribute commitments to myself in third person, weak ascriptions) – i.e., without epistemically strong attitudes – I would not only be unable to draw conclusions from commitments to action (as established in the discussion of Perry’s cases), I would be unable to undertake any commitments at all; without a kind of practical self-consciousness, I could have no consciousness at all.

We can see this also in Brandom’s perspectivist account of objectivity, and can draw the conclusion that objectivity would not be possible without this practical self-consciousness. This is because objectivity of both content and status depends upon the discursive scorekeeper’s ability to simultaneously distinguish and relate two sets of books, his own and that of his interlocutors; in other words, he must be able to distinguish between the commitments he attributes to others and those he undertakes himself. Each act of attribution must simultaneously include the undertaking of a commitment and the attributor must at least be able to acknowledge the undertaken commitment (i.e., to recognize it as his own and not his interlocutor’s), otherwise he would be unable to make the distinction between the two commitments.78 Thus the very condition for objectivity – the ability to keep two scorekeeping books – implies a degree of practical self-ascription.

77 Brandom acknowledges this in the argument I discussed above to the effect that one can communicate the content of strong de re attitudes, but only through securing co-reference by the use of anaphoric chains, since actual same-saying of such attitudes is impossible, given the fact that they are essentially indexical. Essentially indexical attitudes are content-irreducible to any attribution of them by anyone else.

78 Assuming that one cannot distinguish something that one is unaware of.
of commitments and, moreover, an at least implicit grasp of that act (in Fichte’s terms, both a self-reverting activity and the intellectual intuition necessarily and immediately accompanying that act). One must be self-conscious (i.e., have the capacity to acknowledge commitments, which is an epistemically strong de re attitude) if one is to be a scorekeeper in a language-game that has “objective” elements.

Brandom further highlights the importance of a conception of “self.” For him, “one of the normative social statuses instituted by any scorekeeping practices that qualify as discursive is that of being an individual self: a subject of perception and action, one who both can be committed and take others to be committed, a deontic scorekeeper on whom score is kept.”79 Given that propositional contents are inferentially articulated (which implies that a person must be able to hold more than one commitment at a time in order to understand anything), it is necessary that we have a conception of “one performer who is responsible for two different claims”80 which the concept of a self provides. Without such a concept, discursive practices – particularly those with an I-Thou social structure – couldn’t get off the ground, since such practices require the parcelling out of discursive authority and responsibility for various claims between individual scorekeepers: “That two commitments are to be assigned to the same individual is accordingly a fundamental social status instituted by those scorekeeping practices.”81 What is essential here, for my current purposes, is that being a self is a normative status within a discursive practice, which on Brandom’s terms means that – like all normative statuses – must be seen to be instituted by normative attitudes; to be a self is to be the object of a number of normative attitudes, in particular, attitudes that

79 MIE, 559.
80 MIE, 559.
81 MIE, 560.
ascribe, attribute or undertake certain discursive responsibilities or obligations in virtue of assumed deontic discursive proprieties.

But which attitudes are fundamental in instituting selves? We have seen that Brandom’s version of Fichte’s recognition thesis holds that the normative statuses of individual actors are dependent on the normative attitudes of others and that, moreover, this condition holds for all actors such that this recognition must be reciprocal. This suggests that it is the normative attitudes of others – expressed in third-person attributions of discursive commitment – that institute self-hood. But, though this is part of the answer, it cannot be the whole of it. This is because being a self is a matter of having certain discursive responsibilities or obligations – i.e., being subject to certain binding norms. Now Brandom, in his articulation of his normative pragmatics, endorses (as part of his phenomenalism about norms) the “Kantian”\textsuperscript{82} thesis that “the authority of norms derives from their acknowledgment;”\textsuperscript{83} discursive norms derive their binding power from our acknowledgment of them as binding. Now, articulated socially this thesis does not rule out my being bound by discursive norms that I do not explicitly acknowledge (i.e., my having consequential commitments or my deontic statuses outrunning my own deontic attitudes), but, first, all binding norms must be rooted in someone’s act of acknowledging their bindingness; and, second, I cannot (as we have just seen) have consequential commitments (i.e., I cannot be bound by norms that I do not explicitly acknowledge) if I did not have acknowledged commitments. Therefore, if being a self is a matter of having a number of inter-related discursive obligations – if “selves correspond

\textsuperscript{82} As usual, Brandom attributes a thesis to this historical predecessor in his own terms, not Kant’s – whether Kant would endorse this articulation of his point about the role of spontaneity and autonomy in rational knowledge and agency is debatable.

\textsuperscript{83} MIE, 50.
to coreponsibility classes or bundles of deontic states and attitudes—then the act of acknowledgment, essentially including my own acknowledgment of the norms binding on me, is a fundamental part of what institutes my status of being a self. This being the case, it follows—given what I have just argued about what acknowledgment entails—that being a self depends upon an act that necessarily involves a kind of practical self-consciousness that, being an epistemically strong de re attitude, can only be expressed using the first person singular. Thus I take it that, given Brandom’s views about selfhood, the grounds of the binding effects of norms and the irreducibility of undertaking to attributing claims, he offers a version of Fichte’s claim that the “I” comes into being through self-directed activity; I am a self—in the sense of being a rational agent subject to rational norms—insofar as I take myself to be so.

It is possible that Brandom might defend the notion that the “I” is optional by arguing that there might be a discursive practice in which there is acknowledgment, but the acknowledgment is only implicit in the practice of assertion, and hence in which the acknowledgment cannot be made explicit using the “I.” In other words, there would be a kind of very low-level practical self-reference, but not of the type that the person acknowledging the commitment would be in a place to make explicit, even to herself. Steven Levine rightly argues that this too is impossible on Brandom’s own terms, at least if we take Brandom at his word that all discursive practices (logical or not) depend upon a default-and-challenge structure with respect to the normative status of entitlement. Brandom suggests, says Levine, that “the default and challenge structure of entitlement is a constitutive part of deontic scorekeeping insofar as it is built into the performance of the

84 MIE, 559.
85 I.e., this is a necessary condition for self-hood/rational agency. As we have seen, for both Fichte and Brandom there is a further condition, namely, that someone else takes me to be such a being as well.
assertion."86 In other words, the practice of both asserting and ascribing assertions itself involves attributing a kind of defeasible discursive authority to the assertions of others; but this authority (qua defeasible) is challengeable by an interlocutor and hence requires the asserter to give reasons to justify their entitlement to the claim asserted. Levine argues that certain sorts of challenges – cases in which “the assertion being challenged concerns the agent’s own action or perception”87 – can only be answered by employing the expressive resources that the “I” makes available: “Insofar as the challenge is addressed to us, the reasons which are invoked in answering it are invoked with the specific intent of taking responsibility for the action and its practical commitments… In taking responsibility for the action and its practical commitments, one is explicitly ascribing them to oneself.”88 Since such challenges are part of the very structure of discursive practice, one cannot be a competent discursive practitioner if one is unequipped to answer them, and this requires the ability to deploy the resources made available by the “I”. Hence, since no discursive practice is possible where there are no competent discursive practitioners, it is not possible for there to be a discursive practice in which no practitioner is able to say “I.”

86 Steven Levine, “Expressivism and I-Beliefs in Brandom’s Making it Explicit,” International Journal of Philosophical Studies 17 (2009): 110. This article is unique in taking up Brandom’s view of I-beliefs for sustained attention. He does not make the same argument I do, but he does (a) give reasons for why Brandom does not acknowledge the need for I-beliefs in all discursive practice and (b) give reasons (discussed in the text above) why he must make that acknowledgement. With respect to (a), Levine argues that what underlies Brandom’s refusal to grant rational (as opposed to logical) significance to essential indexicals is his commitment to an explanatory strategy of “external expressivism,” the notion that a reconstruction of a discursive practice from “outside” of it is an adequate form of explanation, which can – so to speak – build a semantic house with non-semantic normative bricks. I will offer my own reasons to take issue with this methodological commitment in Part 3, particularly since it blinds Brandom to: (1) differences in voice between first-, second-, and third-person perspectives; and (2) the necessarily teleological dimension of discursive practice.
87 Levine, 111.
88 Levine, 111.
If these arguments are successful – that is, if it is true that, on Brandom’s own terms rational agency requires the expressive resources made available by the “I”, that all undertaking of discursive commitments presupposes the ability to acknowledge commitment and that this ability in turn necessarily involves a kind of self-reference that can only be expressed using “I”; if, moreover, it is true that the social articulation of discursive scorekeeping attitudes that underwrites the objectivity of those attitudes necessarily involves this kind of practical self-consciousness and if the normative status of being a self does likewise – then I have established that, given these (consequential) commitments of his, Brandom is not entitled to his claim that it is possible to posit the existence of a discursive social practice that is “conscious in the sense of sapient… [but] not yet self-conscious.”89 In other words, the epistemically strong de re attitudes that can only be expressed using the “I” as well as the expressive resources that these make available are not optional, but are in fact constitutive for the possibility of a discursive practice; first-personal attitudes are just as basic and fundamental as are third-personal attitudes; you cannot have attributions (including self-attribution) expressed in third-personal weak de re terms without acknowledgments expressed in first-personal strong de re terms. As I will discuss further in Part 3, these conclusions would require Brandom to re-think all of the considerations that lead him to reject them in the first place; e.g., the priority of the rational to the logical, of anaphora to deixis, of inference to representation, etc. For now, these conclusions are to be taken not as criticism of Brandom’s projects, but as a re-construction of the commitments he in fact undertakes in virtue of other expressed commitments.

89 MIE, 559.
3.3. Truth

In keeping with the two parts of Brandom’s overall project, his account of truth is likewise developed in two stages: first, an account in terms of the practical (normative) attitude of “taking-true”; and, second, in a semantic key in terms of the use of “…is true” as an anaphoric pro-sentence forming operator. I will discuss each in turn and then show how the semantic explanation fits into the pragmatic.

With respect to the pragmatic “level,” the fundamental pragmatic question to ask about truth – given Brandom’s phenomenalist commitment to unpacking normative statuses (e.g., being true) in terms of normative attitudes (taking true) – is: what is it to take someone to be telling the truth? Or what is one doing when one “takes-true?” We have already seen that Brandom is committed to answering this question without invoking a conception of truth as a language-world relation, and this means unpacking it pragmatically in terms of practical attitudes. Only once this is established, and only on this basis, will he then move on to explain the semantic or representational dimensions of truth (and thus also to give an account of “truth-conditions”): “Taking a claim to be true must be understood in the first instance as adopting a normative attitude… This normative attitude is presupposed by the possibility of ascribing an objective property and is not to be explained in terms of it.”90  Brandom’s pragmatic analysis of taking-true is (deceptively) simple: “Taking a claim to be true… is endorsing the claim and so acknowledging a commitment.”91  If I take “snow is white” to be true, then what I am doing is self-consciously undertaking a commitment to the effect that snow is white. This commitment in turn is contentful because it is inferentially connected to other

---

90 MIE, 324.
91 MIE, 324.
commitments to which I simultaneously undertake (whether I know it or not\textsuperscript{92}) as a consequence of that first commitment; for example, to the effect that snow has no colour but only a shade.\textsuperscript{93} In taking-true, then, I am establishing a relationship to an assertible, propositionally contentful claim, the contents of which are determined by the other commitments that I am taking up in establishing that relation.

Just what it means to be “establishing a relationship to an assertible claim” will be an important issue when considering a Heideggerian critique of Brandom, which I will undertake in Chapter 9. From Brandom’s viewpoint there are a couple of aspects to this. First, acknowledging a commitment (taking a claim to be true) means making it appropriate for others to attribute that claim to me, and thus to treat me as being obliged to do certain things (namely, to acknowledge the consequences of the commitment in question). This is true generally of all undertakings, of which acknowledgment is a species (but, as we have just seen, the most basic in the genus). Secondly, I am ascribing that commitment to myself. This means recognizing my obligation to whatever the consequences of the commitment may be (whether I know them or not), and this includes not only obligations to acknowledge other discursive commitments, but also obligations to act in certain ways (in case any of the consequences are “practical commitments”).\textsuperscript{94} It seems at least that Brandom is content to stop at the level of discursive normative

\textsuperscript{92} It is because there are two ways of undertaking a commitment (directly – by taking it to be true – and consequentially – by undertaking a commitment that is inferentially connected to the one at stake), that Brandom clarifies that taking-true is an undertaking of the first sort, namely, acknowledging a commitment, ascribing it to oneself.

\textsuperscript{93} These inferential connections, of course, are not themselves sui generis, but are understood in terms of the normative proprieties of making material inferences from one commitment to another. Thus the connection between the sentences “It is raining” and “I should wear a raincoat” consists in the propriety of inferring from someone’s commitment to the former to their commitment to the latter as an inference from a commitment to its consequence.

\textsuperscript{94} For example, if I take it to be true that someone is being murdered in front of me, I acknowledge my commitment to that effect but also to its material inferential consequences, one of which is a commitment to the effect that I have to stop it from happening, and indeed the action of stopping it from happening is part of the consequences of the original acknowledgement.
attitudes (ascriptions of obligation grounded in the conceptual contents of commitments) in describing what it is to be related to a claim. As we shall see, Heidegger insists that we need to go deeper.

We have seen, then, that the primary horizon within which truth must be understood is the practical attitude of acknowledging a commitment. However, this does not by itself entirely explain our use of the locution “…is true.” Some uses do seem to be connected directly to that attitude: “It is true that the sky is blue.” This sentence just makes explicit my acknowledgment of a commitment. However, other uses do not admit of this kind of explanation: “If it is true that the sky is blue, then it is the same colour as the background on the cover of Making it Explicit.” In cases of this kind (so-called “embedded uses”), “…is true” is not being used simply to express a practical attitude, but rather as a piece of “logical” vocabulary, the purpose of which is to make explicit proprieties of inference implicit in practices. More specifically, the use of the locution makes explicit the inheritance of substitution-inferential commitments by means of the creation of “pro-sentences.” This bears a little bit of unpacking.

Brandom, following Grover, Camp and Belnap, analyzes the use of “…is true” on the model of the use of pronouns, which work anaphorically; i.e., by establishing connections between tokenings of singular terms (or, indeed sentences that have been “nominalized”). Pronouns do two kinds of things. In simple (or “lazy”) cases, they simply stand in for an antecedent term and can be replaced thereby without affecting the sense. Thus “Mary thinks that she will read a book now” can as easily be rendered “Mary thinks that Mary will read a book now” granted that the pronoun in the first

---

95 It is thus semantically redundant. The use of “…is true” merely functions as a force-indicating operator, making it explicit that I am uttering “The sky is blue” with the force of an assertion.
sentence is taken to depend on “Mary” as its antecedent. In more complicated cases, however, pronouns work quantificationally. Thus “Any book that Mary reads will be such that Mary has read it” cannot simply be rendered: “Any book that Mary reads will be such that Mary has read any book that Mary reads” since “Any…” designates a class and “it” designates a particular. There is still an anaphoric dependence-relation established between “Any book that Mary reads” and “it,” but it cannot be unpacked simply in terms of the replaceability of the latter by the former. Instead: “The semantic role of the pronoun is determined by a set of admissible substituends, which is in turn fixed by the grammatical antecedent. Asserting the original sentence commits one to each of the results of replacing the pronoun ‘it’ in some occurrence by some admissible substituend…”96 Here, then, the dependence of tokenings of the pronoun are established as dependent on the antecedent, but in a way that carries with it substitutional commitments, rather than simply the commitment to the replaceability of the pronoun with the antecedent.

The proposal, then, is to treat “…is true” as a constitutive fragment of sentences that play these pronominal roles, which then receive the name “prosentences.” In “lazy” cases – such as “Snow is white is true” – the prosentence is semantically redundant (the sense is the same as the assertoric use of “Snow is white”), but has an added pragmatic significance in that “it differs from its antecedent in explicitly acknowledging its dependence upon an antecedent.”97 That is to say, a tokening of “Snow is white is true” explicitly depends upon a tokening of “Snow is white” for its sense (i.e., the appropriateness of its application). In quantificational cases, the prosentence “Everything

96 MIE, 301-302.
97 MIE, 302.
the policeman said is true” does some more heavy-duty semantic work. The prosentence firstly establishes its dependence not on a tokening of “Everything the policeman said” but rather on everything the policeman said, that is, not on a particular tokening (as in lazy cases) but a whole set of sentence tokens as admissible substituends. Thus, just as pronouns establish connections between tokenings of singular terms, prosentences – which are formed by the use of “…is true” – establish connections between tokenings of sentences. Put in other terms, using “…is true” makes explicit and thus manageable the intricacies of the inter-substitutability of sentences. Truth-talk is, then, a piece of logical vocabulary – allowing us to make explicit what is implicit in practice, i.e., to say what we are doing – rather than fact-stating vocabulary (which, say, attributes a property “truth” to an object).

This can be most clearly seen in an inter-subjective context, and here too we can see the connection between the two aspects of truth (as taking-true, and as using the expression “…is true”). Taking a sentence to be true in a social context means crossing over a doxastic gap. As discussed, no two person’s sets of discursive commitments will be identical and, since the significance of any one commitment consists in its inferential connections to others, the tokening of a particular sentence by one person will mean something (slightly) different from the same sentence uttered by others.98 This means that between participants in a discursive practice, there is a doxastic gap that results in differences in the pragmatic significance of taking up a deontic attitude toward any particular tokening of a sentence (and thus in the semantic content of the claim made in doing so). This raises the problem of communication: how is it that contents can be

98 “The underlying point is that what a given endorsement of claim commits one to, is entitled by, and is incompatible with [the three primary deontic statuses] depends on what else one is committed to, on what collateral information is available as auxiliary hypotheses for the inferences in question.” MIE, 477.
shared across a doxastic gap? In discursive-pragmatic terms this question comes to: how is it that I can endorse (or acknowledge) a claim from my perspective (determined as it is by my auxiliary commitments) that I ascribe to another in the horizon of her perspective? This is just the problem of what it is to take what someone else is saying to be true, an attitude that is essential for interpretation and thus communication. What is required, then, to cash out the pragmatic notion of truth in terms of taking-true, is an account of the possibility of sharing contents across a doxastic gap.

Brandom describes a “three level approach” to overcoming this gap. The first level is simply his position that claims have significance in terms of their inferential roles. This doesn’t get us far, since it is just this fact that raises the problem of communication in the first place. The next step requires the creation of “equivalence classes” that allow one to correlate two sets of commitments (one’s own and one’s interlocutor’s) by referring both to what they are about; that is, to fix their extensions. Finally, one “moves up” from the extensional level at which the two sets of commitments are correlated back to the “intensional” level of propositional or conceptual contents upon which one can then take a stand (i.e., acknowledging, undertaking etc.).

There is a lot going on here, but for my current purposes what is most important is that the use of anaphoric proforms (including prosentences formed by the use of “…is true”) are essential for completing the second step. In order to correlate extensional

---

99 MIE, 484-487. Although not Brandom’s example, and admittedly heuristic, translation can perhaps help to illustrate. I first decide that “la neige est blanche” is contentful in terms of a different set of commitments specifiable in French. Then I determine equivalence classes by saying something like “the sentence is about snow and its colour” (or, more appropriately, the sentence would be true of snow, or the singular terms therein refer to snow). Having correlated the extensions of the French terms with the extensions of my terms “snow,” “white” etc., I can move back up to an interpretation of the propositional content of the French sentence – “la neige est blanche” means “snow is white” – and take a position on that claim. A careful semantic analysis would reveal that “true” and “refers” here are used as pro-form operators regarding sentences and singular terms respectively.
equivalence classes, I need to make an extensional stipulation from my perspective link up with one from that of another’s. This is achieved by means of the use of proforms, establishing a dependence of my tokening of a sentence upon an antecedent tokening on the part of my interlocutor. This allows the inter-substitution of the tokens such that – as a result of its dependence on the antecedent – my tokening is about the same thing as hers. By the use of proforms, my use of sentences can “take an extensional ride” on my interlocutor’s, which allows for their correlation. In Brandom’s terms: “it is anaphoric chains that tie different perspectives together and make it possible for scorekeepers to correlate them, structuring different pragmatic significances according to unified, though perspectival, semantic contents.”

Using the locution “…is true” as a prosentence operator, then, allows me to negotiate the doxastic gap between myself and my interlocutor in order that I can acknowledge (and thereby undertake) the commitments (from my perspective) that I attribute to her; using “…is true” and taking-true are two sides of the same coin.

Something should be said about truth and objectivity in Brandom’s account. In neither part of his theory is truth taken to involve a direct linking up of sentences with the world. In taking-true, the link is between a claim and the deontic attitude I take towards it, whereas in the anaphoric use of “…is true” the link is between my tokening of a particular sentence and another’s tokening thereof. These tokenings, in turn, are to be understood in terms of the assuming or expressing of deontic attitudes. Thus the relation between truth and the (objective) world is always mediated by normative attitudes adopted in discursive practice. This is not, however, to say that there is no such relation at all – discursive practices are not totally out of touch with the world – only that the

100 MIE, 592.
The concept of truth has no special explanatory role to play in accounting for this capacity of discursive practices. The need for such a capacity can be seen primarily in the fact that communication (on the three-stage model discussed above) needs to have a representational dimension; it needs to be about things in the world in order for the correlation of perspectives to be possible. As discussed at length above, Brandom accounts for this representational dimension in terms of the social difference between “the two…distinct flavors” of practical attitudes, namely, “undertaking or acknowledging a commitment (oneself) and attributing a commitment (to another).” For a participant in a discursive practice (a “deontic scorekeeper”) to keep track of the difference between the commitments that he attributes to another and the ones that he himself undertakes or acknowledges, he must make use of de re specifications of propositional attitudes by which the other’s commitments are specified according to what they are about as seen from the ascriber’s perspective (i.e., as specified according to his commitments). These de re ascriptions are, according to Brandom, the paradigmatic form of representational use of language, which in turn allows the specification of truth-conditions, amongst other things. The important thing here is that Brandom offers (or believes he does) an account of how discursive practice is in touch with the world that does not rely on any essentially semantic terms, but rather only upon the deontic attitudes of discursive practitioners. What will become important in my confrontation of Brandom’s views with Heidegger’s (in Part 3), however, is that the contents of these attitudes must be inferentially, that is, propositionally articulated. There is a propositional structure to “being in touch with the world,” on Brandom’s view, that does not answer to any more primitive kind of comportment. This “being in touch with the world,” moreover is not primarily a question.

101 MIE, 139-140.
of truth nor is truth defined primarily as the capacities of sentences or states to be in touch with the world.

It is important to see here that Brandom is offering an explanation of truth that is – at least in one respect – deflationist. Deflationist theories of truth reject any substantive definition of truth that would seek to explain the “nature” of truth by defining it as a property that sentences (beliefs, etc.) have in virtue of their correspondence to the world, their internal or external coherence or their pragmatic usefulness; in all of these accounts, according to the deflationist, the concept of truth is mistakenly reified as if it were a property of things with a nature susceptible to a definition. Armour-Garb and Beall attempt to characterize the distinction between substantive and deflationary theories102 of truth by distinguishing two questions that can be asked about truth: “What is (the nature of) truth?” and “What is the conceptual role of truth (or, relatedly, the linguistic role of ‘true’)?”103 Both substantive and deflationary theories take the second question seriously, but deflationary theorists reject the idea that the first question can yield interesting, important or significant answers that can’t be cashed out entirely in terms of the conceptual or linguistic role of truth. Truth, for a deflationist, cannot be defined in the traditional ways, nor can it be reduced to “more basic” or primitive semantic properties or terms;104 explaining what we do and how we do it when we use the concept or word ‘true’ is all that can (or should) be meaningfully said about truth.

102 They mean for their definition to be broad enough to include all varieties of deflationism – amongst which they number disquotationalism (a la Field), minimalism (a la Horwich) and prosententialism (a la Brandom).
104 For an example of such an attempt, see Hartry Field’s interpretation of Tarski as offering the grounds for a physicalist reduction of truth to “primitive denotation” in “Tarski on Truth.”
On such a characterization, Brandom’s theory of truth is clearly deflationist: the concept of truth is understood to be exhaustively specifiable in terms of the complexities of the practical attitude of taking-true, and the use of the locution “is true” is unpacked as an anaphoric prosentence-forming operator, ultimately serving to make it possible to take-true a sentence across a doxastic gap between subjects with differing collateral commitments. This is in keeping, of course, with Brandom’s general strategy of unpacking semantic matters by reference to normative pragmatic attitudes, that is, he explains what it is to have a certain semantic status within a language-game in terms of what it is to (correctly or incorrectly) take something to have that status; this is just the upshot of his phenomenalism and his prioritizing of pragmatic explanation to semantic. Thus, for example, we have seen that he unpacks what it is for a sentence to be “about” something in the world by discussing the practical attitude of taking a sentence to be about the world through the use of de re ascriptions of propositional content.\(^{105}\) However, he insists that he is only an explanatory deflationist about truth, rejecting any kind of expressive deflationism.

What this means is that, though truth-talk can offer no global explanation of the contentfulness or representational aboutness of thought and talk – i.e., appeal to truth conditions as fundamental explainers in semantic theories is misguided – there is nevertheless an irreducible role for truth-talk to play in discursive practice such that “it would be a travesty to say that on this view truth locutions were redundant and

\(^{105}\) This points to an intimate relationship between Brandom’s deflationism about truth and his deflationism about intentionality discussed in Chapter 2 (in relation to Sebastian Knell’s characterization of Brandom’s theory of intentionality). When I take up Brandom’s deflationism about truth for critique in Chapter 9, I will of necessity, then, also be taking up his deflationist theory of intentionality; the one is unintelligible apart from the other.
unnecessary.”¹⁰⁶ Truth-talk – understood in terms of the employment of anaphoric prosentence-forming operators – has an ineliminable expressive role in that it makes explicit aspects of discursive practice in such a way that we discursive practitioners are enabled to do things we would otherwise not be able to do. As Brandom puts it: “it is evident that the availability of such idioms contributes substantial expressive power to a language. In general, this contribution is just the extension to the level of whole sentences of the expressive power provided by anaphoric mechanisms already at the level of singular terms.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, as we have seen, this enrichment of the expressive power of anaphoric mechanisms allows us to “communicate” the contents of whole sentences across a doxastic gap by initiating an anaphoric chain between someone else’s tokening of a sentence and my own through the formation of prosentences. In other words, truth-talk allows us to formulate truth-conditions in our own terms for the sentences expressed by someone else from their own perspective. As such “the anaphoric story about the expressive role of truth commits one to seeing it as capable of playing an important role in local explanations of meaning [i.e., in my being able to say in my terms what my interlocutor means]” even though it is “precluded from playing an important role in global explanations of meaningfulness in general.”¹⁰⁸ As with all essentially logical locutions – those locutions whose conceptual role it is to make explicit what is implicit in practice – truth-talk makes us able to do more by allowing us to say what it is we could otherwise only do; expression is not only fact-stating about our practical abilities, it also enriches them. However, even here, it should be noted that all logical locutions (all

“saying what we’re doing”) must be seen to be derivative from more primordial, but still propositionally/conceptually articulated and hence rational, discursive attitudes such that it is imaginable that there is a rational discursive practice in which these locutions and the expressive resources they provide are not available. Thus the possibility of a discursive practice that is “rational but not (yet) logical” (semantically conscious but not yet semantically self-conscious) implies the possibility of a language-game without truth-talk.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ This follows from and, in turn, implies (depending on the explanatory direction you take) the possibility of a global explanatory deflationism about truth: truth-talk, being logical in character cannot be a necessary condition for language-use and hence cannot explain its possibility. The concept of truth has no role in explaining the possibility of discursive practice (including the contentfulness of performances in that practice), but only in enriching the possibilities already inherent in that practice. In line with my doubts about Brandom’s similarly deflationary attitudes about strong de re attitudes, I will (in Chapter 9) raise doubts about the sufficiency (even on its own terms) of this explanatory strategy, which likewise points in the direction of questioning the possibility of a language-game that is rational but not logical or conscious but not self-conscious and, correlative, the global explanatory priority of pragmatic attitudes to semantic status.
Chapter 4: Conclusion of Part 1 and Brandom’s Hegel

4.1: Conclusion

This part has attempted to outline the fundamental themes of Brandom’s systematic philosophy by showing how he wrestles with some of the fundamental commitments, strategies, and (most importantly perhaps) questions of Kant and Fichte. Amongst other things, I have tried to show in particular that Brandom’s “social” attempt to articulate the grounds for the objectivity of conceptual comportments bear a marked resemblance to Fichte’s. Like Fichte, Brandom attempts to explain the (normative) answerability to the world – and hence to resist a slide into a subjectivism according to which our normative answerability is exhausted by our subjective preferences and attitudes – by recourse to a social account of rational agency that situates the practical capacities of such agents within the give-and-take of mutual recognition between individuals. It is not the primary purpose of study to argue that Brandom is a Fichtean (though, as I will discuss below, it is worth remarking that his thought has more in common with Fichte’s than with Hegel’s given his deliberate identification with the latter), but rather to employ the parallel between them and their projects to get to the heart of some of the deepest and most internally problematic aspects of Brandom’s own project. Thus I have already suggested that Brandom’s prioritizing of I-Thou to I-We social practices is subject to some of the

---

1 I am, of course, not the first to read contemporary developments in analytic philosophy in the light of German Idealism. As I will discuss below, Brandom himself invites such a reading (though I think he misreads himself as more Hegelian than Fichtean) as do such figures as John McDowell, Sebastian Rödl, Stanley Cavell, P.F. Strawson, etc. Accounts of how to read the relationship between analytic philosophy and German Idealism differ. Particularly influential for me has been the work of Paul W. Franks, who sees a convergence of concern between analytic philosophers and German Idealists on a set of issues including the systematicity of philosophy and the problem of naturalism. Cf. Paul Franks, “From Quine to Hegel: Naturalism, Anti-Realism and Maimon’s Question *Quid Facti*,” in Espen Hammer, ed., *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 50-69; and the introduction and conclusion to Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). For another important account of these convergences, see Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
same problems as Fichte’s, and that a comparison with Fichte’s articulation of the nature and role of practical self-consciousness exposes a crucial ambivalence in Brandom’s own conception thereof.

In the following two chapters I will argue (in Part 2) that though Hegel shares a broadly similar set of problems and approaches to the questions of objectivity, sociality and truth, he comes up with a set of answers that differs markedly from Brandom’s and Fichte’s. In Part 3, I will then go on to discuss a number of ways in which this consideration of Hegel’s alternative approach exposes a number of internal problems and inconsistencies in Brandom’s own and, furthermore, how it can diagnose the fundamental basis of these problems (which, I will argue lies in Brandom’s failure to anchor his “free-floating” conception of discursive practice in a more robust articulation of human sociality and subjectivity). My fundamental goal, then, in situating Brandom within the horizon of German Idealism is to examine what the developments in that tradition can say to Brandom; how these can bring his proposals and problems into relief and place them against the horizon within which they can be seen in their proper light. However, I would be remiss if I did not say something about what Brandom has to say about this tradition and about Hegel in particular.

4.2. Brandom’s Hegel

Much could be (and has been\(^2\)) said about Brandom’s interpretation of Hegel, and it is not my intention to add much to these; it will suffice for my purposes to discuss the

---

\(^2\) Most of this has been critical, sometimes strongly so. I will not go into any depth criticizing Brandom’s Hegel-interpretation, since the aim of this essay is to understand and critique Brandom’s own thought. For critiques see, inter alia, Robert Pippin, “Brandom’s Hegel,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2005): 381-408; John McDowell, “Comment on Robert Brandom’s ‘Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism,’” *European Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1999): 190-193; Tom Rockmore, *Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
main elements of his appropriation of Hegel. On this interpretation, Hegel’s thought comes out looking rather a lot like Brandom’s own; his thought turns out to be, amongst other things, expressivist, inferentialist, pragmatist, holist, and concerned primarily with the delimitation of the conceptual, all fundamental characteristics of Brandom’s own systematic proposals. I will discuss how Brandom imputes these various “isms” to Hegel, but first I should note that the fact that Hegel comes out looking a lot like Brandom does not necessarily vitiate Brandom’s Hegel-interpretation as recklessly eisegetical. This is because, first, Brandom claims that his own systematic work is in many respects inspired by Hegel, and the resemblance between their ideas may have as much to do with the influence of Hegel (mediated perhaps by Sellars and Rorty\(^3\)) on Brandom as the other way around. Secondly, and more importantly, the exegetical approach that Brandom frequently takes to historical philosophical texts self-consciously stipulates the commitments attributed to the text (or its author) in terms of what he, the interpreter, takes to be the case. “De re” interpretation – like all de re specifications of conceptual content, as discussed at length above – does not attempt to specify the content of one’s interlocutor’s ideas in “their own terms” (i.e., in terms that they themselves would endorse given their acknowledged commitments, preferred vocabulary etc.), but rather in terms of the commitments and point of view of the interpreter. The discursive commitments so specified “will be specifications of the very same conceptual contents

\(^3\) It is beyond the scope of the current study to reconstruct the way in which the influence of Brandom’s teachers and heroes impacted the development of his thought, though to do so seems to me to be necessary if one is to make strong judgments about the degree to which his Hegel-interpretation is highly eisegetical. If direct engagement with Hegel’s thought is a development of Brandom’s philosophical work that occurred only after he formulated his holism, expressivism, etc. (perhaps under the influence of Sellars, Quine and Rorty primarily), then the charge would be stronger than if not.
that are specified by *de dicto* ascriptions\(^4\) but “in the *de re* case, those contents are specified from a different point of view: from the context provided by premises that are, from the point of view of the ascriber, *true.*”\(^5\) This means that, in *de re* historical interpretation, the claims of the historical text/author are not just put alongside other claims that it/he makes or those made by other historical authors; rather “the *de re* style of intellectual historiography requires laying *facts* alongside the claims of the text, in extracting consequences, assessing evidence, and so delineating their conceptual content.”\(^6\) Obviously – given Brandom’s perspectivalism – this approach means that the *facts* that are used to confront the claims of an interpreted text are specified in terms of the interpreter’s collateral commitments, and hence “responsibility for justifying these auxiliary hypotheses rests with the ascriber, rather than with the one to whom the commitment whose contents are being specified are ascribed.”\(^7\) This style of intellectual historiography is, according to Brandom, equally legitimate as (and a necessary complement to) *de dicto* historiography; it allows an interpreter to engage with a historical text not only by asking what, say, Hegel would say if asked what he meant when he said “the True is the whole” but also by asking what it is he was talking *about* “from the interpreter’s point of view” and hence also whether he was right about this. Thus, for example, the *de re* style can ask whether Hegel is referring to the “whole” as

---

\(^4\) This is a debatable claim, of course. Part of my concern about the irreducibility of the semantic significance of the use of essentially indexical locutions is that, if we take the role of “I” sufficiently seriously (as Brandom is consequentially committed to doing), then there may be a loss or gap between the significance of an utterance specified in *de dicto* and *de re* terms, such that *de re* specification of epistemically strong (including essentially indexical) *de re* beliefs by someone who is not the subject of those beliefs is only an approximation of their full significance as specified by the subject of those beliefs. Brandom’s “official position” – which treats epistemically strong *de re* attitudes as derivative from weak attitudes and as inessential to discursive practice – is that such a gap, though real, is not theoretically significant in that it does not bear on the more essential aspects of discursive practice.

\(^5\) TMD, 102.

\(^6\) TMD, 102.

\(^7\) TMD, 102-103.
“the totality of facts” or as “the complete system of materially correct inferences” or as “the whole of the discursive practice of a linguistic community.” No de dicto specification of Hegel’s commitments in terms of Hegel’s own acknowledged commitments and preferred vocabulary would allow an interpreter (like Brandom), who takes these to be some of the fundamental terms in which to understand the “whole” insofar as it is rational, not only to specify but also to evaluate Hegel’s view that the true is the whole. Of course, this de re style of interpretation will have the effect of making a Hegel “speak” in terms that he would not have used himself (indeed that he may even explicitly refuse), but, granted that it is the same content that is specified de dicto and de re, this does not imply that the contents of the commitments attributed him are thereby distorted or falsified. Almost all of Brandom’s Hegel-interpretation is done in the de re style and hence has the effect of making Hegel speak Brandomian; but if this is understood correctly, it is a legitimate (though historiographically risky) undertaking.

I will approach the (slightly) finer points of Brandom’s interpretation of Hegel by discussing how he takes Hegel to be semantic inferentialist and holist, a conceptual pragmatist, an objective idealist and a logical expressivist. With the exception of objective idealism, these are all positions that Brandom not only recognizes from his own point of view but, one way or another, endorses.8 I’ll begin with his account of Hegel’s pragmatism and his idealism.

In “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism” Brandom asserts that Hegel’s approach to the question of “the nature and origins of the determinate contents of

8 And objective idealism has been attributed to Brandom by Jürgen Habermas (as I will discuss at length in Part 3). I think it’s telling, though, that Brandom does not self-identify as an idealist, since on his own account it is Hegel’s idealism that most clearly involves an account of subjectivity as self-consciousness and that as being essential for discursive practice, a position that I have argued Brandom is structurally ambivalent about.
empirical conceptual norms”9 – i.e., to the question of how the conceptual norms in virtue of which our experience is propositionally contentful come about and are applied – needs to be seen as, at once, being in fundamental continuity with Kant’s view that conceptual content is an inherently normative matter, bearing on the undertaken responsibilities of concept-mongering creatures, and yet also as being a material rejection of Kant’s own version of the origin and nature of these norms. Kant’s version, on Brandom’s reading, is a “two-phase story” according to which “one sort of activity institutes conceptual norms, and then another sort of activity applies those concepts.”10 Thus concepts as rules for synthesis of the manifold of intuition are generated by an activity that is thoroughly spontaneous and not in any respect empirically determined, and only after their generation or selection can they be practically applied to the manifold to yield determinate empirical judgments. By contrast, Hegel rejects any two-phase story, asserting instead that both the generation and application of conceptual norms are moments in a holistic process of conceptual vision and revision such that “empirical judgment and action is not (as for Kant and Carnap) just the selection of concepts to apply, or the replacement of one fully formed concept by another. It is equally the alteration and development of the content of those concepts. Conceptual content arises out of the process of applying concepts – the determinate content of concepts is unintelligible apart from the determination of that content, the process of determining it.”11 The meaning (conceptual content) of any judgment or action can only be determined by a process of defining and redefining in practice, that is, in the use and application of those contents. This thesis – that determinate conceptual content is

9 TMD, 211.
10 TMD, 213.
11 TMD, 215.
determined only in the practical use of concepts – is the heart of conceptual pragmatism, and hence Hegel’s break with Kant should be seen as a movement in the direction of a kind of pragmatism, in many ways prefiguring Quine’s pragmatist/holist break with the neo-Kantian (two-phase) account of meaning developed by Carnap.\(^{12}\) Hegel’s own way of articulating his break with Kant is laid out in terms of his critique of “the Understanding” – which treats concepts as “static, inert, dead” – in the name of “Reason” – which is his own “good, dynamic, active, living conception”\(^{13}\) of the genuine nature of concept-generation and use.

To this pragmatist thesis, Brandom’s Hegel adds an “idealist thesis” according to which “the structure and unity of the concept is the same as the structure and unity of the self.”\(^{14}\) This idealist thesis, Brandom argues, “is Hegel’s way of making the pragmatist thesis workable, in the context of several other commitments and insights.”\(^{15}\) Being a self, according to the idealist thesis, is a normative status that is instituted by the practical attitudes of a community of people engaging in the give and take of reciprocal recognition, which is “the practical attitude of taking someone as able to undertake commitments.”\(^{16}\) This reciprocal recognition necessarily involves both the undertaking of a kind of authority – that of being a recognizer of others – and the granting of authority to someone else, since it is not in my power to determine whether or not you recognize

\(^{12}\) Cf. TMD, 214. On this break, see the interesting defense of a modified Carnapianism by Michael Friedman in *Dynamics of Reason* (Stanford, CSLI Publications, 2001). I have argued in a couple of unpublished papers that the perspective of Hegel can show that Friedman’s defense of a relativized *a priori* can be compatible with a roughly Quinean holism about the structure of scientific theories.

\(^{13}\) TMD, 215.

\(^{14}\) TMD, 210.

\(^{15}\) TMD, 210.

\(^{16}\) TMD, 216.
me as I recognize you. Thus “the structure and unity of the ‘I’ or of self-conscious selves… [is] the structure and unity produced by this process of reciprocal recognition, by which normative communities and community members are simultaneously instituted.”

Working with this conception of the nature and origin of self-conscious self-hood, the idealist thesis claims that the structure and unity of conceptual contents must be understood on the model of being a self; for both selves and conceptual contents, “transcendental constitution is social institution.” Meaning, like self-hood, is a normative status, and it is the character of all normative statuses, according to Brandom’s Hegel, that “wherever a norm can properly be discerned, there must be distinct centres of reciprocal authority and a process of negotiation between them.” In other words, the structure of self-hood is a model for conceptual content because both are instances of a more general phenomenon – the normative itself – and thus must display its essential

---

17 This notion only puts forward Hegel’s conclusion with respect to the nature of authority in cases of mutual recognition, failing to follow the process by which Hegel develops that conclusion (an exegetical strategy which seems to fall afoul of the pragmatist thesis). After all, Hegel begins the story of recognition with a situation in which the slave – in order to save his life – grants all recognitive authority to the master and the master in turn undertakes to compel the slave to recognize him (qua master). This of course leads to the famous dialectic of mastery and bondage, the upshot of which is the conclusion that only the recognition of another who is free and equal can count as genuine recognition – but it seems to me that the upshot of the pragmatist thesis is that the meaning of this conclusion is unintelligible apart from the dialectic process of its formulation. Brandom’s Hegel – at least here – (or at least his Hegel-interpretation) does not seem very dialectical and hence not very pragmatist.

18 TMD, 218. Brandom’s account of this (as the previous note suggests) – though it seems to me to make primary reference to Hegel’s account of recognition in the “Lordship and Bondage” dialectic – happens at considerable distance from the text (as may befit a de re interpretation). It seems to me, as a matter of fact, that it bears much greater resemblance to Fichte’s account of recognition in Foundations of Natural Right (and hence also to Brandom’s account in MIE) than to Hegel’s Phenomenology. Establishing that Hegel would view this account of reciprocal recognition and the institution of self-conscious self-hood (unpacked here in an I-Thou form of sociality) as abstract and free-floating from more concrete and universal forms of sociality and selfhood is a large part of the burden of Part 2 of this study.

19 TMD, 216. As I will discuss briefly in Chapter 9, this phrase originates in John Haugeland’s interpretation of Heidegger, which he has since disavowed both as an accurate description of Heidegger’s views and as an adequate theory of the constitution of objects in experience. Brandom, however, persists in asserting this view.

20 TMD, 222.
structure, which in this case is that of a process of interchange between distinct but interdependent authoritative normative attitudes. In the case of conceptual content, the distinction between these centres of authority marks the distinction between the force and content of an utterance: “the authority of a self-binder governs the force that attaches to a certain rule: it is endorsement by the individual that makes the rule a rule for or binding on the individual. But that authority must not be taken to extend also to the content of the rule… Hegel’s idea is that the determinacy of the content of what you have committed yourself to… is secured by the attitudes of others, to whom one has at least implicitly granted that authority.”21 We will further see how this social-process account of normativity (and hence also of conceptual contentfulness) is simultaneously an inferentialist semantic theory.

Thus, on Brandom’s reading, the master-idea of Hegel’s thought is his conception of normativity as being bound up with a process of interplay between distinct but interrelated authorities, with the effect that normative statuses (such as “being a self” and “meaning thus and so”) are the achievement of this process and are hence determined in use (the pragmatist thesis) in a social practice. Hegel’s most important ideas are interpreted through the lens of this master-idea. Besides the recognitive interplay between different centers of authority in the present, Brandom also imputes to Hegel (in a way that he does not do so clearly in his own work in MIE) an awareness of the historical unfolding of this interplay in which “the present acknowledges the authority of the past, and exercises an authority over it in turn, with the negotiation of their conflicts

21 TMD, 219-220. It should not escape notice that this is in many ways exactly what Brandom seeks to articulate in MIE by arguing that the social-perspectival account of deontic scorekeeping attitudes can show how it is possible that the contents of our utterances and beliefs can be objective insofar as they can outrun our own attitudes; we can be (consequentially) committed to a claim even if we are not in a position to endorse or acknowledge it.
administered by the future. The unity of Spirit (on Brandom’s reading) is just the unity of this process of mutual recognition between past, present, and future within a living tradition. Furthermore “making that structure explicit is achieving the form of self-consciousness Hegel calls ‘Absolute Knowledge;’” the fulfillment of the phenomenologist’s investigations – and the horizon of truth – is grasping the pragmatic and idealist theses in their unity as manifestation of the emergence of normative statuses out of the reciprocal recognition between the normative attitudes of participants in a social practice.

The semantic side to Hegel’s idealist pragmatism – that shows him to be both a holist and an inferentialist – is discussed at length in Brandom’s essay “Holism and Idealism in Hegel’s Phenomenology.” As in “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism,” Brandom takes Hegel’s over-riding concern to be the question of determinateness, now put in terms not of the determinateness of conceptual norms but of conceptual content in our cognition of the objective world, i.e., in our taking things in the world to be thus-and-so. In other words, Hegel is here addressing the issue of what kind of content our knowledge of the world must have if it is to be objective. For things to be grasped objectively, they must be determinate: “there must be a distinction between things being that way and their being some other way” so that there can be some sense made of one attempt to grasp them being right and another wrong. But more than that, Hegel discovers – in the argument leading from “Sense Certainty” to the conclusion of “Perception – that it is not enough for there to be differences between different properties of things, but in order that we can determine what or how a thing really is we must be

22 TMD, 234.
23 TMD, 234.
24 TMD, 178.
able to say it is “this and not that;” that is, at least some of its differences must stand in relations of *material incompatibility*. Some differences – for instance, between being red and being square – are compatible, but others are not, e.g., between being square and being triangular; if we are to employ concepts of things with determinate content and thus grasp things as determinate, we must employ the latter: “Hegel argues that the idea of a world exhibiting definiteness or determinateness as *mere... difference, without exclusive difference, is incoherent.*”²⁵ Hegel’s demonstration of this constitutes his formation of the semantic principle that lies at “the very center of his thought,”²⁶ namely, the concept of determinate negation, which Brandom summarizes thus: “The essence of determinateness is modally robust exclusion.”²⁷ We cannot grasp things as determinate without taking them to exhibit properties that stand in relations of material incompatibility (negation) with other (possible) properties – it is square *and not* triangular, red *and not* green, etc.

We have met the idea of material incompatibility before as a part of Brandom’s own semantic vocabulary, expressing one kind of *inferential* relation between conceptually articulated commitments.²⁸ And so it is also for Hegel, on Brandom’s reading; in fact Hegel goes further to argue that material incompatibility is the most basic kind of inferential articulation. Relations of material incompatibility are the basis of “consequence relations, that are modally robust in the sense of supporting counterfactual...

---

²⁵ TMD, 179.
²⁶ TMD, 179.
²⁷ TMD, 179.
²⁸ To refresh memory: Brandom argues that even from the first-person perspective I am able to distinguish between “I claim that *p*” and “*p*” – such that I can see that these do not reciprocally imply one another and hence that I can see that my claim that *p* is exempt from the possibility neither of error nor of ignorance – because I can see that the two propositions, though they may be pragmatically equivalent (uttering them has the same force – that of asserting that *p*), there is a semantic difference because each has different incompatibility entailments; what is incompatible with “I claim that *p*” is not incompatible with “*p*”.

inferences. As such, it is in terms of their incompatibility relations that we can say that $p$ entails $q$: “the proposition or property $p$ entails $q$ just in case everything incompatible with (ruled out or excluded by) $q$ is incompatible with (ruled out or excluded by) $p$.”

Since all determinateness in the properties of objects depends upon their standing in relations of material incompatibility, it follows then that they also must stand in modally robust consequence (inference) relations. This is Brandom’s take on Hegel’s notion that all determinacy is mediated – mediation just is being inferentially articulated in terms of incompatibility and consequence relations. This is in fact to say also that a thing must be conceptually articulated since “to be conceptually articulated is just to stand in material relations of incompatibility and (so) consequence (inference).” This inferentialist commitment about how objects must be in order to be determinate (i.e., they must conceptually, i.e., inferentially articulated) is part of Hegel’s objective idealism, but there is more that is necessary to understand that obscure doctrine.

Hegel’s idealism does not start out with a characterization of objects and subjects and then seek to find terms to express their relation. Rather, the terms in which this relation is to be expressed are discovered before the nature of objects and subjects is characterized and, indeed, when this characterization occurs, it is in accordance with these terms. Thus the concept of determinate negation/material incompatibility as a condition for determinacy as such is, according to Brandom, formulated before Hegel makes an attempt to parcel out the nature of the objects and subjects of knowledge.

---

29 TMD, 180.
30 TMD, 180.
31 TMD, 181.
32 Without offering any real textual argument, Brandom locates the discovery of determinate negation in “Sense Certainty” and talk of subjects and objects in “Perception.” I hope it will be clear in my discussion of these passages in Part 2 that I do not agree – the dialectic of “Sense Certainty” traverses both an account
Rather, “the concepts subject and object can be defined in terms of determinate negation or material incompatibility;”\textsuperscript{33} this implies that both are to be understood in terms of the inferential and conceptual articulation that grounds Hegel’s account of determinacy. On the one hand, to be an object means to “repel objectively incompatible properties (such as square and triangular), in such a way that one and the same object cannot at the same time exhibit both.”\textsuperscript{34} On the other hand, “subjects repel subjectively incompatible commitments… in that one and the same subject ought not at the same time endorse both.”\textsuperscript{35} The difference between being a subject and an object is cashed out in terms of how a thing repels or resists materially incompatible predicates: for subjects there is a normative dimension to this repulsion – one can hold materially incompatible commitments, but one ought not to do so; a subject is responsible for resisting materially incompatible commitments, an object is not. This dovetails, then, with the view that being a self is a normative status, that of being responsible for maintaining a consistent set of material inferential commitments.\textsuperscript{36} According to Brandom, Hegel’s idealism can be understood as a commitment to the effect that objects and subjects so defined are two sides of a coin “each intelligible in relation to the other.”\textsuperscript{37}

The argument for this commitment is long and complicated, and it will suffice for me merely to address the main points. Hegel’s idealism is offered by Brandom as a way in which to satisfy the holistic requirements of his (inferentialist) approach to

\textsuperscript{33} TMD, 182.

\textsuperscript{34} TMD, 182.

\textsuperscript{35} TMD, 182.

\textsuperscript{36} He motivates his attribution of this account of selfhood to Hegel at even greater length in “The Structure of Desire and Recognition: Self-Consciousness and Self-Constitution,” \textit{Philosophy and Social Criticism} 33 (2007): 127-150, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{37} TMD, 182.
individuation and determinacy without falling into the contradictions that attend “strong
individuational holism” according to which “articulation by relations of material
incompatibility is sufficient – all there is available to define it – for determinate
contentfulness;”38 one of which is the famous charge that in such a holism “the relata are
in a sense dissolved into the relations between them.”39 In other words, Hegel’s problem
is the difficulty of articulating how both subjects and objects must be inferentially
articulated in a holistic manner and yet maintain a genuine determinacy and individuality
that is not merely dissolved into the “whole” of the set of material inferential relations.
Hegel’s solution, according to Brandom, is to show that, though subjects and object are
indeed unintelligible apart from one another – understanding objective relations of
material incompatibility “is acknowledging in practice a subjective obligation to engage
in the process of resolving incompatible commitments”40 and, conversely, objective
inferential relations are necessary “constraints on inferential processes of rationally
altering one’s beliefs”41 – they are only reciprocally sense-dependent, not reference-
dependent. What this means is that one cannot grasp or understand one concept

38 TMD, 183. It is a perennial problem for holist semantic theories that – since the meaning of an expressed
commitment is determined its relation to a host of other beliefs – changes in a person’s beliefs can effect a
change in the meaning of terms. Similarly the same term used by two agents with different beliefs would
mean different things, which would seem to vitiate the possibility of communication. These are problems
that Brandom himself attempts to resolve in the theory of objectivity and truth discussed above.
39 TMD, 187. Russell and Moore famously charged the British Idealists (who claimed inspiration from
Hegel) that their metaphysics ended up positing a world of relations without relata, which is clearly absurd.
Cf. Peter Hylton, Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University
40 TMD, 194.
41 TMD, 194. The emphasis here on subjectivity as engaging in a process of rationally resolving
incompatible relations in accordance with the responsibility to avoid incompatible commitments (which is
constitutive of subjectivity) points to the continuity of this interpretation of Hegel’s inferentialism with the
(normative) pragmatism attributed to him in “Some Pragmatist Themes…” According to Brandom, the
view that objective inferential relations and subjective inferential processes are correlates “is a more
specific version of conceptual pragmatism” according to which “grasp of a concept… is a practical
capacity, mastery of practice, or the capacity to undergo or engage in a process; it is a capacity to do
something.” (TMD 194).
(objective inferential relations) without grasping another (subjective inferential processes) – this is what he calls “sense-dependence” – but it does not follow from this that the two concepts are “reference-dependent” in that “concept P [objective inferential relations] cannot apply to something unless Q [subjective processes] apply to something.”\textsuperscript{42} If the latter were the case – if subjects and objects were reciprocally reference dependent – then there would be no objective relations of material incompatibility (and hence no objective determinacy) if there were no subjects engaging in the process of reconciling incompatible commitments, and vice-versa; in such a scenario the objections to strong individuational holism (that you end up with relations without relata) would indeed be fatal. However, this is not the case for Brandom’s Hegel, who is content merely to assert that they are sense-dependent and to defend the thesis that “sense-dependence does not entail reference dependence.”\textsuperscript{43} As such, Hegel can have his holist and idealist cake without the indigestion that results from swallowing a doctrine that is fatally flawed.

Thus in semantics as in pragmatics, Brandom takes Hegel to have offered a kind of idealism meant to underwrite a set of commitments – to inferentialism, holism, conceptual pragmatism – that they share. In fact, in “Holism and Idealism” Brandom steps out of his Hegel-scholar shoes and recommends the basic thesis of Hegel’s objective idealism – namely, that objective inferential relations and subjective inferential processes are reciprocally sense-dependent – as one to be “defended on their own merits to conceptual pragmatists”\textsuperscript{44} of which he is one. This is in fact what he takes himself to have done in MIE, in which he argues that “the concepts of singular term and object are

\textsuperscript{42} TMD, 195. My gloss in brackets. My italics.
\textsuperscript{43} TMD, 195.
\textsuperscript{44} TMD, 196.
reciprocally sense-dependent” such that “only people who know how to use singular
terms can pick out objects and distinguish them from properties, situations or states of
affairs” and also that “the concepts of asserting and fact are reciprocally sense-
dependent” such that “one does not know what a fact is unless one understands that they
can be stated.”

In effect Brandom is acknowledging a commitment to objective
idealism thus understood. Put in my own terms, he is identifying his own approach to the
triangulation of objectivity, subjectivity and sociality in MIE with what he takes to be
Hegel’s own version of the same strategy, according to which objectivity (objective
inferential relations) and subjectivity (processes of reconciling materially incompatible
commitments) are bound in a relation of mutual sense-dependence within the context of a
normative practice (the upshot of conceptual pragmatism) that has a social articulation (of
mutual recognition as per “Some Pragmatist Themes”). As will become clear in Parts 2
and 3, I believe that Brandom is right that Hegel offers a version of the triangulation
thesis, but wrong when he takes Hegel’s version to overlap with his own, since Hegel’s
account of what objectivity, subjectivity and sociality actually involve is incompatible
with Brandom’s. In fact, part of the burden of Part 3 is to argue that Hegel’s version is
superior to Brandom’s in that it can point out and avoid the weaknesses that cause
Brandom’s triangulation thesis fail on its own terms.

---

45 TMD, 196-197.
46 And more-over that this social practice (which institutes normative statuses) has the I-Thou structure of
the interplay of mutual recognition between individual discursive practitioners.
Chapter 5: Hegel.

Introduction

This is a chapter about Hegel. However, apart from coming to a better understanding of Hegel’s conception of the objectivity of our experience, this chapter is also intended as preparation for a critique of Robert Brandom. As discussed in Part 1, Brandom tries to account for the objectivity of our experience\(^1\) in terms of our social practices, particularly those practices within which we mutually recognize each other as giving and asking for reasons. More precisely, Brandom thinks that we can account for the fact that the norms by which we adjudicate our and each other’s reason-giving (and which determine the contents of our concepts and thus of our ability to have sapient rather than merely sentient experience) are binding beyond our merely subjective preference. We can do this by attending to the difference between two distinct “flavors” of our norm-instituting practical attitudes: undertaking or acknowledging a commitment and attributing a commitment to another. The form of sociality invoked here, he argues, is an “I-Thou” as opposed to an “I-We” construal of social practices; that is, it construes the social relationship in terms of the mutual recognition of individuals rather than in terms of individuals insofar as they take their places as parts of a larger social whole.\(^2\) On Brandom’s view, I-Thou forms of sociality alone can account for objectivity and, furthermore, they underlie and make possible I-We forms: it is a fundamental mistake to treat “I-We relations rather than I-Thou relations as the fundamental social structure.

\(^1\) I use this term broadly, intending neither to capture Hegel’s precise use of the term nor to conflict with Brandom’s distaste for it. I shall use it to denote all of those acts by which we have sapient awareness of the world (thus it includes, but is not limited to, sense experience, our experience of events, and theoretical understanding or insight).

\(^2\) There is also the aspect of discursive authority at play here: in I-We construals of social practices, some whole (e.g. the “community”) is taken to have prima facie authority (its norms are the authoritative ones), whereas in I-Thou construals each participant’s perspective is given authority and the content of norms is established in the interaction between individuals.
Assessing, endorsing and so on are all things that we individuals do and attribute to each other, thereby constituting a community, a ‘we’.”³

My argument in this chapter is that, on Hegel’s view at least, any account of the objectivity of our experience must be grounded in an account of social relations that take the forms characteristic of social institutions, which are I-We forms of sociality. Like Brandom, Hegel argues that the objectivity of our experience requires an account of the mutual recognition of individuals, but (unlike Brandom) this must itself be grounded in an account of individuals as they self-consciously (a condition about which Brandom is ambivalent⁴) take themselves to be parts of whole communities in the form of social institutions. Thus, if Hegel is right, Brandom’s account of objectivity as grounded in I-Thou sociality is incomplete and his understanding that I-We style social practices are founded upon I-Thou relations is mistaken.⁵

My argument will proceed thus: I will begin by showing that there is a parallel between Hegel’s account of the transcendental unity of apperception (that in virtue of which an experience is “mine”) in the Phenomenology of Spirit and his account of property in Elements of the Philosophy of Right, such that taking possession is to practical reason as apperception is to theoretical reason; that is, in their respective spheres they are constitutive of their objects, such that things in the world can be things for-(self)conscious reason. An important part of this unity is that in both cases, the constitutive principle itself is made possible by forms of sociality which in turn take their

³ MIE, 39.
⁴ Cf. Chapter 3. This ambivalence will be the starting point for an internal critique of Brandom in Part 3.
⁵ Ultimately, I think that Brandom’s view of this latter point has mistaken the genetic priority of I-Thou relations for an a priori constitutive priority. I take it to be Hegel’s point that I-We forms of sociality, though genetically subsequent to I-Thou relations of mutual recognition between individuals, are constitutive for the full expression (Being in- and for itself for another) of the latter. This is so because necessary elements of I-Thou social practices in relation to the physical world (such as labour and property) take their meaning from their places in the life of social institutions.
full meaning in the context of social institutions. I will then attempt to demonstrate that property is important for understanding apperception by showing that the constitution of objects in the sphere of practical reason is also determinative for theoretical reason. For Hegel there is no fundamental split between these two spheres of reason. I will make this concrete by reference to some examples of the inter-penetration of experience and possession. Thus I will conclude that a satisfying account of the objectivity of our experience must include an account of the role that objects take in forms of practical life that have an I-We social structure. I will then go on to discuss how, on Hegel’s view, an I-We social practice can nevertheless be fallibilistic and self-critical in such a way that it preserves rather than (as Brandom asserts) undermines the possibility of objectivity.

5.1. Objectivity and Apperception

Kant famously asserted that “It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me.”\(^6\) That is, in order for the manifold of representations to have any normative significance\(^7\) (to be something “for me”), I must be able to say of them that they all belong to me: “For the manifold representations, which are given in an intuition, would not be one and all my representations, if they did not all belong to one self-consciousness.”\(^8\) Kant calls this ability “pure apperception,” and it is a kind of self-consciousness that is the condition for any consciousness of objects. In any

\(^6\) KRV, B 131.

\(^7\) By “normative significance” I mean that they can be taken as potential objects of rational deliberation and grounding; the sort of thing that a rational agent is able to make use of and is normatively bound to be responsible to.

\(^8\) KRV, B 133.
experience, the manifold of representations must undergo a threefold synthesis: a synthesis of apprehension in the intuition, a synthesis of reproduction in the imagination, and a synthesis of recognition in a concept.\(^9\) These allow the manifold of representation to form a coherent whole such that the subject can have a unified experience. But there must also be a deeper unity underlying these syntheses, namely, the unity of the consciousness that synthesizes thus. In order for a subject, then, to take her experience as coherent and potentially true, she must be able to take herself to be the one experiencing: “It is not the case that the self-relation of apperception involves a representation of the self… but it is the case for Kant that my implicitly ‘taking myself’ to be perceiving, imagining, remembering, and so on is an inescapable component of what it is to perceive, imagine, remember, and so on.”\(^10\)

Beyond just this however, the transcendental unity of apperception is an objective condition for knowledge; that is, it is constitutive of what can count as an object of knowledge: “The synthetic unity of consciousness is… an objective condition of all knowledge. It is not merely a condition that I myself require in knowing an object, but it is a condition under which every intuition must stand in order to become an object for me.”\(^11\) No thing can be given to me in intuition unless it is subject to the categories, but for the categories to have any application, they must be applied to the manifold, which is only possible on the basis of the unity of apperception. Thus objects only appear under

---

\(^9\) These three syntheses are described in KRV, A 98-110. In Chapter 2, I discussed these issues in light of Kant’s “B-Deduction.” Here I put it in terms of his A-Deduction. I judge little to hang in the balance for my purposes in taking them up alternately.


\(^11\) KRV, B 138.
the categories and come to be so only through the syntheses effected through the unity of 
averception.

This Kantian thesis is a common commitment of the German idealist tradition 
generally, and Hegel shares it in his own way. However, starting at least with Fichte, 
Kant’s claims served to undermine some of Kant’s most basic commitments. In the 
argument just summarized, an object cannot be given in the intuition unless it is 
synthesized according to the categories and recognized according to a concept. Here, the 
distinction between concept and intuition, or more generally between spontaneity and 
receptivity is blurred, if not out-right undermined. Thus Fichte, and Hegel following 
him, rejected the notion of “pure” concepts or (especially) “pure intuitions;” they rejected 
the notion of anything that determines thought that is not itself subject to the conditions 
for thought, which include the unity of apperception.

This, of course, brings up the problem of objectivity in a more profound way than 
did even Kant’s idealism. To give up on pure intuitions as “extraconceptual 
representations”¹² means that the post-Kantian idealist must first, give some account of 
how thought is determined and, second, show how it can be that the determinations of 
consciousness can be right or wrong, appropriate and inappropriate; that is, it must give 
an account of “taking-true” that doesn’t reduce “being-true” to “taking-true.” Without 
pure receptivity, this means that the determination of consciousness must happen from 
“inside” the sphere of conceptuality (spontaneity), and yet these determinations must be 
objective in some sense; it must be shown “from the inside” how they could be both 
incorrect and correctable. In other words, not only must it be possible for the self-

¹² HI, 37.
determinations of consciousness to be correct or incorrect, but it must be possible for this
consciousness to see that this is so. Pippin calls this a form of “self-opposition”:

[This is] the Fichtean legacy in Hegel’s project, that the problem of objectivity, when and if it arises as a problem, does not involve the pure synthesis of a “merely material manifold” but can only be understood as the subject’s experience of ‘self-opposition,” some way for a subject’s projection of a possible experience to be “internally deficient” and “internally correctable”… in this sense, a subject… could be said to be “opposed to” or “dissatisfied with” itself.13

Objectivity, then, necessarily involves some sort of negation occurring and arising within the sphere of spontaneity, and this is the form in which the object first emerges. Since Hegel accepts the apperception thesis that the various acts of consciousness are possible only if we take ourselves to be undertaking those acts, he sees that we are only related to objects insofar as we take ourselves to be so, and thus “any relation to objects must be understood as a moment within the self-conscious activity of a subject.”14 Hegel identifies this emergence of objectivity within self-consciousness thus: “Consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something, and at the same time relates itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists for consciousness.”15 Thus, in a more radical version of Kant’s thesis that apperceptive self-consciousness is a condition for the consciousness of objects, the object comes to be something for-consciousness only as a moment within self-consciousness.16

But this does not yet tell us how the object’s being-for-consciousness can have the effect of allowing the kind of self-opposition necessary to do away with the problem of

---

13 HI, 100-101.
14 HI, 114.
16 This is a constitutive condition for the appearance of objects at all, but it is also something that consciousness discovers only after finding the inadequacy of other ways of viewing the object (in the form of the immediacy of the “this”, of the mediated universality of the “thing” and of a system of forces). As we will see, this is the argument of the first three chapters of PS.
objectivity; that is, it cannot by itself explain the difference between truth and taking-to-be-true, which alone allows for self-correction. This requires distinguishing two moments of consciousness: “being-for-another” – which is how we have seen the object to exist for us – and “being-in-itself” – which is the truth. If these can be distinguished, then there is a way of making the distinction between what we take to be true and the criterion by which we evaluate truth. These two moments must both exist within self-consciousness\textsuperscript{17} just as the distinction between the object and subject must. Thus what must be examined is the fit between the “Concept” and the “Object;” to see how consciousness projects a criterion for knowledge (a “Concept”) and then proceeds to decide whether this criterion is satisfied by its actual experience (its “Object”), and thus – since both are moments within self-consciousness – whether and how self-consciousness can be satisfied.\textsuperscript{18} The fact that it is possible for the Concept and Object to fail to coincide shows the difference between truth and taking-true necessary for an account of objectivity, while showing that they do in fact coincide (in absolute knowledge, in the Concept) will show that truth is attainable. The general movement of the Phenomenology charts various attempts to show the coincidence of Concept and Object. It tells a story about natural consciousness, how it sets up criteria for its own experience, and shows how each of these breaks down until it arrives at the Concept in which being-

\textsuperscript{17} Getting rid of pure intuition has also ruled out, for Hegel, recourse to a thing in itself lying entirely beyond the reach of consciousness as for Kant.

\textsuperscript{18} In fact, both the criterion and the knowledge are put to the test here: “Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test: in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing it.” PS 54-55. Miller translates \textit{Begriff} as “Notion,” but I fail to see why. I’ll substitute “Concept” as a more adequate definition with fewer empiricist overtones and which, moreover, is consistent with translations of other of Hegel’s work.
for-another and being-in-itself are identical. Along the way, it is shown just how consciousness determines itself, how it constitutes its object as a determinate thing, and how both of these moments are held together within a self-consciousness that can be opposed to itself as outlined above, which are what concern me most in this essay. The point of this introduction (which follows Hegel’s “Introduction”) has been to both motivate and anticipate some of his findings and to show how they fit into the argument of the work as a whole.

Hegel begins his story with a Concept of knowledge in which the object appears to the ‘I’ in a pure immediacy. Here the Concept and the Object seemingly cannot fail to correspond since there does not seem to be any conceptual content: the object is determined in itself as that which “simply is… I am in it only as a pure ‘This’ and the object similarly only as a pure ‘This.’” However, given that the determination of consciousness must, as we have seen, be some sort of self-determination, the very lack of mediation in sense certainty rules out the possibility of determining consciousness, since any determination involves a negation and thus some sort of mediation. Looked at another way, Hegel shows that, in sense certainty, mediation must be smuggled in – it must be relied upon but never acknowledged – in the form of a kind of universality constituted by a negative determination that secures the content of the ‘This’, ‘Here’ or ‘Now.’ That is, we can only have a ‘This’ when it is ‘Not-That’, and this latter determination stays constant in any determination of a ‘This,’ and thus the apparently

---

19 “Upon this distinction [between the in-itself and for-consciousness], which is present as a fact, the examination rests. If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too…” PS, 54. What is posited as knowledge (the object) is constituted by the criteria we have for it (the Concept) and thus, when we alter the Concept based on a failed adequation to the knowledge we have, we must also change what we take knowledge or the object to be. The only satisfaction comes in a complete correspondence between the two.

20 PS, 58.
immediate simplicity of a pure ‘This’ turns out to be “a mediated simplicity, or a universality.”21

If the simplicity of the object has turned out to be a mediated simplicity, then immediacy may yet be saved by the simplicity of the subject. The immediate certainty that was previously thought to be vouchsafed by the object of sensation is now taken to reside in the subject’s sensing of it, by the indubitable fact that all the sensations are my sensations: “Sense-certainty, then, though indeed expelled from the object, is not yet thereby overcome, but only driven back into the ‘I.’”22 Although there is a sense in which this constitutes progress on Hegel’s account,23 this can hardly be the end of the story, since the same dialectic that played itself out previously, is experienced again in the ‘I.’ The subject as an unmediated simplicity cannot be held constant between various ‘Heres’ and ‘Nows’ but must be a mediated simplicity; i.e., a universal ‘I.’ But like the universal ‘Now’ and ‘Here,’ the universal ‘I’ is “merely universal” and is “indifferent to whatever happens in it.”24 In order to become a genuine experiencing subject, its mediation in the object25 must be more than a simple negation that leaves it unaffected, but rather a means of self-relation through self-opposition. In other words, consciousness is already beginning to discover what is set out anticipatorily in the Introduction, namely, that neither the subject’s relation to itself (the Concept; consciousness’ being-for-itself) nor the object’s givenness vis-à-vis consciousness (the Object; the being-in-itself) can be thought of as unmediated by the other; there is neither pure (unmediated) self-relation nor

21 PS, 61.
22 PS, 61.
24 PS, 62.
25 At this stage it “is a simple seeing, which, though mediated by the negation of this house, etc., is all the same simple and indifferent to whatever happens in it, to the house, tree, etc.” PS, 62.
pure givenness (and hence no pure conceptuality nor pure intuition). The full dimensions of this realization have yet to be uncovered, though.

In rejecting both an unmediated object and an unmediated subject, the Concept of knowledge has changed to what Hegel calls "Perception," and the object thus takes on a different form, given that its principle has been discovered to be a mediated (as opposed to simple) universal. Because it now contains its negation within itself, a differentiation occurs within perception and its object: various properties arise as the immediate expression of the mediated universal, but there yet remains the universality itself, which "is pure relating of self to self, or the medium in which all these determinacies are and in which as a simple unity they therefore interpenetrate, but without coming into contact with one another; for it is precisely through participating in this universality that they exist indifferently on their own account." Thus the object in perception appears as a "thing with many properties," not as a simple immediacy.

But this "thing-hood"—the "universal medium,... a simple togetherness of a plurality"—contains within itself a dilemma. On the one hand, it is the "Also" that determines the various properties as distinct such that they relate to each other as standing side-by-side; in this sense a thing is red and also circular and also made of rubber. Here the thing-hood appears as "the pure universal itself, or the medium." But, on the other hand, the thing is also a "One," "a unity that excludes an other." In this respect, thing-hood denotes that in virtue of which the various properties form part of one thing as

---

26 The German *wahrnehmen* is more fecund here, since it denotes a "taking-to-be-true" – which suggests a propositional attitude which relates two terms (a subject and a predicate) – rather than simply "to perceive," which could be imagined to be a simple act on a par with sensation.
27 PS, 68.
28 PS, 67.
29 PS, 68.
30 PS, 69.
31 PS, 69.
opposed to another thing, even though they are themselves universal in character. The thing, as the “truth of perception,” is thus completed in three moments: the Also, the One and the properties themselves in relation to these moments. However, Hegel shows that the One and the Also are dialectically opposed to each other: acknowledgment of either depends on presupposition of the other, and therefore there is no way into the circle and thus into perception from the outside. Differently put, any attempt to enter the circle – to have a pure apprehension of the object so described – tosses one back out of it. The problem is that this form of consciousness requires in a single experience that we simultaneously see the thing to be One – in the very same moment – Many. But the possibility of grasping how we can have such an experience cannot be accounted for either in terms of the things’ own unity nor its plurality (since they each both presuppose and negate the other); it must be made possible by some fact about the conscious subject. Thus consciousness is, in a sense, “reflected out of the true [i.e., the thinghood of the object] and into itself” and has “experienced in perception that the outcome of the truth of perception is its [perception’s] dissolution.” The apprehension of a thing, then, is always “mingled” with this return of consciousness to itself. Since this is a return to itself, consciousness can then realize the part it plays in apprehension even if, at this stage, it takes that moment to be a moment of untruth or deception that occludes the pure truth that is the object.

---

32 The in-itself moment necessary – along with the “for-another” moment – for an account of objectivity as discussed in the Introduction.

33 In a sense this argument resembles Kant’s B-deduction, where the simultaneous application of the categories (amongst which are the categories of unity – and quantity more generally – and quality – the properties of Hegel’s Also) in a single judgment is possible only on the condition of the transcendental unity of apperception (and vice-versa). Cf. Chapter 2.

34 PS, 71.
It turns out, however, that this being-for-another (i.e., the way the thing causes consciousness to return to itself) is no less of an essential moment of the thing than is its being-for-itself, and thus not necessarily a moment of deception – a discovery which, again, confirms the inter-dependence of Concept (being-for-another) and Object (being-in-itself). When it is posited as being-for-itself in absolute opposition to any other thing (i.e., as the One: this and not-that), a Thing is (qua mediated) seen as a self-related negation, with the result that “the negation that is self-related is the suspension of itself; in other words, the Thing has its essential being in another Thing.”35 That is, the Thing is One – for-itself – only insofar as it is itself an Also – a Thing-for-another-Thing. Even as a thing-in- and for-itself, the object of experience only exists in a relation – it is essentially conditioned – and this fact points to a “medium” in which these relations take their place, which is thus an “unconditioned universal.”36 This medium, furthermore, must not “originate in the sensuous,” since it would therefore be “essentially conditioned by it, and hence not truly a self-identical universality at all;”37 it must have a non-sensible source. With this discovery, we are lead to the realm of the understanding and the supersensible world, in which “the unity of ‘being-for-self’ and ‘being-for-another’ is posited.”38

In spite of the fact that perception must be superseded, it is important to understand that the object as “thing” does not just disappear, but is retained in the later Concepts, just as the sense-element of sense-certainty is still present in perception. When

---

35 PS, 76.
36 PS, 78.
37 PS, 76.
38 PS, 80. That is, we shall see how the two moments both have their origin in the (mediated) unity of self-consciousness.
we move to a consideration of the unconditioned universal as that within which Things can exist, the two moments of Things as unified diversity remain as “content”:

[B]ecause this unconditioned universal is an object for consciousness, there emerges in it the distinction of form and content, and in the shape of content the moments look like they did when they first presented themselves: on the one side, a universal medium of many subsistent ‘matters’, and on the other side, a One reflected into itself, in which their independence is extinguished. The former is the dissolution of the Thing’s independence, i.e., the passivity that is a being-for-another; the latter is being-for-self.39

We are inquiring, then, into the formal conditions for these contents, into what makes it possible for Things to appear to consciousness as Things, i.e., as unified diversities. The apprehension of perception alone cannot account for this – since there the Thing’s Being-for-another appeared only as a form of deception that falsified all knowledge of the truth40 – so Hegel moves into the realm of the understanding – of conceptuality and spontaneity – where the required non-sensible, unconditioned ground can be located (or so it seems).

The understanding deals in concepts, which do not arise from sensory experience, but hold for it. Hegel wants to show that the unconditioned ground that we are looking for can only arise from within consciousness itself. The ground is what will allow us to “explain” how a Thing is determined, how it appears to consciousness as a unity. He shows that this explanation must rely only on consciousness itself by rejecting the two other live options of his day: a realist rationalism that wants to explain the appearance of a thing by recourse to a supersensible world of forces lying “behind” appearances; and a scientific empiricism that tries to explain this appearance by showing its regular (i.e., apparently causal or law-like) relation to other appearances. Neither of these are real

39 PS, 81.
40 Hegel takes it for granted that we do have true experiences, and thus that perception as simple apprehension (rather than also comprehension) cannot account for our experience.
explanations and both lead to the paradox of an inverted world. The only satisfying explanation of the appearance of Things must be one that sees the principles that allow this determination to be found within consciousness; consciousness provides its own criterion (or Concept) by which to determine Things within the sensory manifold. Thus consciousness of objects relies upon a kind of self-determination by which a Concept of objects is freely produced which allows consciousness to find an object to be a unified diversity, a Thing. In other words, we have discovered with Hegel that there is no relation to objects as Things outside of a criterion (the Concept) that determines what will count as an object for us, which implies an at least practical self-consciousness (since we cannot say specify what counts as an Object for-us without an at least tacit conception of who we are). The situation at which we have arrived now is the one laid out in the Introduction: consciousness is a self-determining activity yielding two distinguishable but interrelated moments: the Object and its Concept as moments within self-consciousness. The real trick, however, is determining how this self-relation occurs in such a way that consciousness can find itself opposed to itself in order that we can explain error and the ability of the subject to perceive and correct its own error.

The argument thus far, it must be stated, has been a prolonged transcendental deduction. What was true about sense-certainty turns out to be grounded upon the truth of perception (the Thing) and that in turn upon the self-determining activity of self-consciousness. In that sense what first seemed to be the most concrete and fullest truth (sense-certainty’s immediacy) can only be accounted for as a moment or part of a larger whole, and in this sense is the most abstract, the most de-contextualized matter to be

41 Cf. HI, 134-138.
discussed. For Hegel, immediacy is the most abstract form anything can take. These considerations will be shown to be important for understanding property as well.

Objects must be understood as differentiated unities or mediated universals. This only occurs within the self-determining activity of consciousness that has a Concept of what will count for it as an object. Thus far, the conclusion is not entirely unlike Kant’s assertion that consciousness of objects requires a self-consciousness that takes itself to be relating to objects; that the unity of the object of experience depends on the unity of self-consciousness, in the unity of the ‘I Think’. Where Hegel departs from Kant, is that, for Hegel, this unity of self-consciousness must itself be a mediated universal, a differentiated unity. In order to become self-conscious, consciousness must undergo mediation in an other and find itself in that relation as thus universal; there is no “pure” unity in transcendental apperception. Having undergone this mediation in an other, self-consciousness has the resources to find itself opposed by itself in the other; i.e., to find itself in its other (its being-for-itself in its being-for-another). Put in terms unpacked most extensively in the Encyclopedia Logic, the discovery of the necessity of the determination of Objects within self-consciousness at the conclusion of “Force and the Understanding” still leaves the account of the shape of that (self)-consciousness at the level of Understanding [verstehen], which interprets the relation between itself and its objects only in the mode of “finitude” – where thought approaches “what is but ceases to be where it connects with its other and is hence restricted by it.”42 This must give way to

a self-conception that is infinite – where “the I, or thinking, is… related in thinking to an object that is itself;”\footnote{Ibid.} which is the standpoint of Reason \textit{[Vernunft]}.\footnote{In such a situation, the difference between the ‘I’ and the object is immediately superceded and thus the movement of self-consciousness appears a “the motionless tautology of: ‘I am I.’” PS, 105. Westphal makes this point in \textit{History and Truth}, pp. 124-125. This is likely an implicit critique of Fichte’s early I=I formulation.}

Hegel then tells a story about how this comes about. Actual self-consciousness, he says, is desire, since, in desiring an object and satisfying itself, consciousness relates to itself (satisfaction) through another (the object). We have seen that this happens too in perception – the object is experienced as being-for-consciousness – but in this unity of apperception, the object loses (or rather, is not seen to have ever had) the character of something genuinely other; it is merely experienced as my experience. The self-relation in apperception (as opposed to the object’s mediation which has been established) is not seen, then, to be mediated by a genuine other and thus cannot be actual self-consciousness.\footnote{Ibid.} This self-relation (self-consciousness), then, depends on a prior self-relation in which the other remains other, but not in a way that excludes its intrinsic relation to me as in the Understanding. In desire – the drive for the satisfaction of a lack – the object first appears as other, as independent of the desiring subject. In, for example, eating, the subject relates to itself (satisfies its desires) through an other and thus there is an initial self-consciousness.

But at this stage, self-consciousness is only implicit, it is has not yet become full self-consciousness since the desiring subject doesn’t \textit{take itself to be} desiring, and thus does not understand the other as the object of its desire. Self-consciousness, then, can only come into full actuality in purposive activity: actions directed at a goal that is \textit{taken}
as a goal, i.e., as the object of an intention. But what can bring this about? According to Hegel this occurs only by seeing one’s own desire reflected in that of another self-consciousness. Where there is only one desiring agent, the self-relation in the desired other is nothing but “self sentiment” and the agent is “sunk in life.” However, where there are two desiring agents, there is the potential for their desires to clash, and thus the only way to guarantee their individual satisfaction is by reconciling that desire with that of the other, i.e., by the creation of a kind of like-mindedness. In the forging of this confluence of desire with that of another, one sees one’s own activity and its ends reflected in that of another through the other’s recognition, and this allows one to take a self-conscious attitude toward one’s self-relation in desire. Thus “self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.”

Hegel justifies this claim by showing how the kind of self-relation characteristic of purposive action arises when two opposed self-consciousnesses square off as a result of conflicting desires. This is the famous Master-Slave dialectic. It is sufficiently familiar that I will not rehearse the argument, but only point to the significance of the slave’s labour. Since the slave’s action is no longer a matter of fulfilling his own needs or desires (beyond the simple but abstract desire for life), he emerges from the realm of simple self-certainty. His labour and its products can then appear to him explicitly as other, since it serves not his own satisfaction, but that of the master; it is alienated from

45 Cf. HI, 151. Interestingly (and significantly) Fichte and Brandom also see self-conscious subjectivity to be rooted in a self-relation in purposive activity. I have argued this in Part 1, ch. 3, with the caveat that Brandom does not unambiguously grant that such self-consciousness is a condition for objective consciousness überhaupt. Charles Taylor argues for the connection between Hegel’s philosophy of action and of mind, focusing particularly on the fact of “agent’s knowledge” (the knowledge that we obtain as “doers of action”) in “Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind,” in Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), 77-96.
46 HI, 157.
47 PS, 110.
him. As such, his interactions in the objective world are not determined simply by his
desires and their immediate satisfaction; rather, the slave can recognize that it is he who
determines his labour and thus that the object is in some sense, his: “The Slave begins by
being attached to nothing of significance in life but life; in Hegel’s secular parable, then,
only he can realize that he and he alone is the source or ground for the structure and
worth of his products.”48 He is then able to reflect on his labour, “he struggles to
understand [its] significance… he thinks.”49 Thus an independent self-consciousness that
can reflect upon its own activity, that can undertake it self-consciously, begins to emerge
as a result of his own alienation from the satisfactions of that activity. As Hegel puts it:
“this moment of pure being-for-self is also explicit for the bondsman… in his service he
actually brings this about… [T]he formative activity is at the same time the individuality
or pure being-for-self of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an
element of permanence. It is in this way, therefore, that consciousness qua worker [i.e.,
qua transformer of the physical world to accord with human need] comes to see in the
independent being [of the object] its own independence.”50

But this too is not a fully satisfied self-consciousness, though it has emerged into reflective “thought.” The dialectic of stoicism and skepticism shows that
this individual self-consciousness cannot be satisfied by and in itself, and the internal
dialectic of the unhappy consciousness points toward its resolution in the implicit
posing of a universal will that can nevertheless be regarded as “its own doing.”51 This
universal will is then the individual’s own will mediated through the wills of others in

48 HI, 162.
49 HI, 164.
50 PS, 117, 118. My gloss in brackets.
51 PS, 138.
such a way that they form a common subjectivity. This is a long story, but it is the conclusion that concerns us: that self-determination can only arise in a context of purposive action oriented toward a common understanding with other self-consciousnesses, a community with which one identifies oneself as an independent being.\textsuperscript{52} Genuine mutual recognition, in other words, emerges only in the course of cooperative (or “corporate”) business with (i.e., “being busy with”) the objective world in the transformation of the latter via labour and is grounded in a “universal will” (i.e., shared sets of moral expectations, practices and commitments):

If we take this goal – and this is the [Concept] which for us has already appeared on the scene – in its reality, viz. the self-consciousness that is recognized and acknowledged, and which has its own self-certainty in the other free self-consciousness, and possesses its truth precisely in that ‘other’... then in this [Concept] there is disclosed the realm of ethical life. For this is nothing else than the absolute unity of the essence of individuals in their independent actual existence; it is an intrinsically universal self-consciousness that takes itself to be actual in another consciousness... The single individual consciousness, conversely, is only this existent unity in so far as it is aware of the universal consciousness in its individuality as its own being, since what it does and is, is the universal custom.\textsuperscript{53}

This “ethical substance” or “universal self-consciousness” is not opposed to individual self-consciousness, but rather the condition that under-writes it:

This unity of being-for-another or making oneself a Thing, and of being-for-Self, this universal Substance, speaks its universal language in the customs and laws of its nation. But this existent unchangeable essence is the expression of the very individuality which seems opposed to it; the laws proclaim what each individual is and does; the individual knows them not only as his universal thinghood, but equally knows himself in them, or knows them as particularized in his own individuality, and in each of his fellow citizens.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{52} Pippin puts this compound condition thus: “A self-determination that is indifferent to, independent of, the other is the mere self-sentiment, ‘sunk in life’ described earlier and so, although ‘self-certain’ possesses no ‘truth;’ but a self-determination dependent on recognition by an other is not self-determined, and so not a determination of what ‘we’ think, or must think in our interaction and claims about objects, but a submission to what ‘they’ think, to the contingent desires of others.” HI, 160.

\textsuperscript{53} PS, 212.

\textsuperscript{54} PS, 213.
The essence of individual self-consciousness is thus seen to reside in the individual’s self-conscious *identification* with and participation in social institutions that are shared with others. The fact that what is at stake here is the unity of being-for-another (or “making oneself a Thing”) and being-for-self, shows that the structure of self-consciousness is conceptual. One simultaneously relates oneself to oneself (being-for-self) and distinguishes oneself as the Object of consciousness from the consciousness of oneself (“making oneself a Thing”). This recapitulates the structure of objective consciousness in self-consciousness. The fact that this is grounded in the “customs and laws of its nation” shows that this certainly cannot be an immediate self-relation, but must happen through participation with others in social institutions. In particular, the moment in which the self is made an Object to itself (being-for-another), is possible only through the identification of oneself with these institutions: “the individual knows them [the laws and customs] not only as his universal thinghood, but equally knows himself in them.” In other words, the moment that in consciousness of objects is the distinguishing of the object from consciousness (being-in-itself), is in self-consciousness the distinguishing of oneself as part of the “universal substance” (one’s being-for-others, “We”) from what one is for-one self (“I”). These two moments are distinct, but in any *true* self-consciousness they must be united, just as in any true consciousness being-in-itself and being-for-another must be unified. The Concept by which one constitutes oneself as such an Object is the “Concept of Spirit” “An ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’.”

This brings me to the end of my account of Hegel’s appropriation of Kant’s apperception thesis. Before I move on to a discussion of possession and property,

---

55 *PS*, 110.
however, I ought to summarize my conclusions. The being of objects for me in a way that makes it possible for my judgments about them to be objective can only arise within a self-determining and thus self-opposed self-consciousness; that is self-consciousness as a mediated universal. This kind of self-consciousness arises and has its home, if you will, in purposive activity; that is, in actions oriented not only by desire but by intention and wherein the object of desire is *taken as* a desired object. Purposive activity emerges only in the struggle for recognition between self-consciousnesses and is fully satisfied only in Spirit, a universal will mediated through individuals in mutual recognition (an I that is We, a We that is I). Objects, as discussed, only appear to consciousness as determined by a Concept, a criterion by which they can count as objects for consciousness. Given what we have found, then, it is only within the Concept of Spirit – wherein self-consciousness recognizes itself as recognized by others – that objects appear truly: “It is in self-consciousness, in the Concept of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind it the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present.”56 Only in this Notion is self-consciousness a truly mediated universal: where it can recognize itself as a unity differentiated (and possibly opposed) by its mediation through others and in mutual transformation of the physical world (in, e.g., labour).

5.2. The Constitution of the Thing in Property

Hegel’s discussion of property in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (*PR*), forms the back-bone of what he calls “Abstract Right,” those forms of norm-governed social life that, on the one hand, are most immediate and thus seemingly most basic, and,

56 *PS*, 110-111.
on the other hand, will be shown to be possible only within the more robust forms of social life (particularly Sittlichkeit or “ethical life”) that follow. In that sense, it follows the structure of the opening chapters of the Phenomenology in which, as we have seen, the immediacy of sense-certainty is shown to be grounded in the mediated universality first of the Thing and that in turn of an active agent. Furthermore, both start with an abstract subject that will be progressively actualized in its interaction in the world and with others. In the Phenomenology this subject was “consciousness” or the “I” as a pure sensing “This” – which was shown to have its actuality in self-consciousness as a mediated universal – In PR the subject is the “Person” or the “I” as willing, as a free agent.57 Thus these two accounts of the actualization of selfhood, stand related as an account of theoretical reason to an account of practical reason in Kant’s sense.

The Introduction of PR does much the same thing as that of the Phenomenology: it lays out in very general terms the shape that self-hood will take in its actualization. Just as, for theoretical, apperceptive consciousness, this meant distinguishing two moments: the Notion and the Object, so in PR Hegel shows that the actual will consists in the unity of two moments. In the first, “subjective” moment, the will is a self-relation, an “element of pure indeterminacy… in which every limitation, every content… is dissolved, this is the limitless infinity of pure abstraction or universality, the pure thinking of oneself.”58 In this moment, the will is indeterminate, since any content is nothing but a moment of self-relation. This is countered by the “objective” moment in which the “The ‘I’ here emerges from undifferentiated indeterminacy to become differentiated, to posit something determinate as its content and object. I do not merely

57 And, qua free agent, possessed of rights.
will, I will something." In the objective moment the will comes into “existence”, it is actualized. A genuinely free will consists in the unity of these moments. In the first moment, the will’s freedom is a purely abstract universal, while in the second it is merely objective and particular. In their unity however, the will is “particularity reflected into itself and thereby restored to universality;” one might say: a mediated universal. The story that Hegel tells about the will’s externalizing itself in property on through to its finding its home in a state is the story of the successive mediations required for the will so conceived to become genuinely free, for it to be genuinely itself in its other.

At the beginning, however, we have abstract right: the subject that has this being-in and for-itself for another only implicitly, what Hegel calls a “person” or “personality.” The person is taken as an individual bearing right(s) insofar as it is free in its immediacy. In order to become what it is, if you will, “the person must give himself an external sphere of freedom in order to have being as Idea.” The immediate infinity that is the first moment of the will must undergo a mediation in something external to itself, in something “determined as immediately different and separable from it” in order to achieve “the superseding of mere subjectivity of personality.” In so doing, the second moment of the will – as “objective,” willing a determinate something – is disclosed within abstract right. This sphere of freedom, since it must be external to a free will, is, then, to be found in the thing [Sache], which is “unfree, impersonal, and without rights.”

---

59 PR, §6, Addition.
60 PR, §7.
61 This corresponds, then, to the story told about the two moments of self-consciousness (the Concept and its Object) going through successive mediations until their unity is made complete in Absolute Knowing.
62 PR, §41.
63 PR, §41.
64 PR, §42.
external in general... the thing is the opposite of the substantial: it is that which, by
definition, is purely external."\textsuperscript{65} The thing is taken here in its "immediate quality, not
those determinations [it is] capable of taking on through the mediation of the will, which
is itself in its initial immediacy."\textsuperscript{66} Like the object of desire in self-consciousness, the
thing appears first simply as a negation, an "outside."

When the will creates this sphere of freedom in things, however, the thing is
altered, just as the will has been mediated. The will takes possession of the thing; it
places its will in it. The thing "thereby becomes mine and acquires my will as its
substantial end (since it has no such end within itself), its determination, and its soul."\textsuperscript{67}
The thing becomes something in becoming something-for-me, if you will. Hegel shows
the full significance of this view: "If so-called external things have a semblance of self-
sufficiency for consciousness, for intuition and representational thought, the free will, in
contrast, is the idealism and truth of such actuality... The free will is consequently that
idealism which does not consider things as they are, to be in and for themselves."\textsuperscript{68}
Taking possession of a thing, then, as well as being a mediation of the will in an other, is
what makes immediate externality \textit{count as} an object, as something for-another. The
thing becomes something by becoming a mediation of my will and it thus becomes my
property: "The circumstance that I, as free will, am an object to myself in what I possess
and only become an actual will by this means constitutes the genuine and rightful element
in possession, the determination of \textit{property}."\textsuperscript{69} I want to suggest that taking possession

\textsuperscript{65} PR, §42.
\textsuperscript{66} PR, §43.
\textsuperscript{67} PR, §44.
\textsuperscript{68} PR, §44. I will return to this quote later, but it is worth calling attention to the fact that the self-
sufficiency of the thing for intuition and representational thought is grounded here in the free will as
constitutive for it.
\textsuperscript{69} PR, §45.
of a thing – making it mine – corresponds to that moment in sense-certainty in which the
‘I’ attempts to ground the being of the object in its being-for-consciousness, which is the
initial discovery of the truth of idealism (but which must be unfolded by the successive
mediations of both the object and the ‘I’). In this moment, the thing is nothing but mine
and it is still merely individual. But taking possession of a thing in this manner is only
the first, positive, moment of property, there are two more in which both the will and the
thing undergo further mediation through each other, and which point beyond this
interplay between individual and object toward a mediation of both through another and a
common will.

The second moment of property, the “negative” moment, is that of use. In using
the thing that I possess, I further alter it by bending it to my needs: “Use is the realization
of my need through the alteration, destruction, or consumption of the thing, whose
selfless nature is thereby revealed and which thus fulfills its destiny.\textsuperscript{70} Although this
constitutes a negation of the individual thing taken possession of in the first moment of
property, this negative moment (precisely because it is the \textit{individual} thing that is used)
“embodies an even more universal relation, because the thing is not then recognized in its
particularity, but is negated by me.”\textsuperscript{71} This universality is not merely abstract either. In
being used, the individual thing is determined in its utility, its appropriateness for the
needs of its owner. This utility is then “comparable with things of the same utility.”\textsuperscript{72}
Utility, arising and yet abstracted from the thing’s individuality, is the thing’s value “in
which its true substantiality is \textit{determined} and becomes an object of consciousness.”\textsuperscript{73} In

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{70} PR, §59.
\textsuperscript{71} PR, §59, Addition.
\textsuperscript{72} PR, §63.
\textsuperscript{73} PR, §63; again, I shall return to this remark.
\end{flushright}
being used (i.e., in its negation by and hence mediation through the will’s need) the individual thing is determined as having a universal property, namely, value. This corresponds, I suggest, to the way in which the pure ‘This’ of the object in sense-certainty undergoes a mediation and thus a universalization to emerge in perception as an individual thing with properties, i.e., as an individual with universal determinations (such as redness, shortness, smelliness, etc.).

Thus far we have seen that a person externalizes and thus determines its will by placing it in an external thing, which constitutes that thing in the two ways just discussed. These two moments – possession and use – are not by themselves or together sufficient for having property, however. A condition of having property is that I can give it up, that it is alienable. If I could not give up my property, then my will would not be in it freely; i.e., it would not constitute an external sphere of freedom and thus would not be my property. The alienability of property is its third moment. However, it also creates a problem. When I take possession of something, I externalize myself in it, it becomes me for me, if you will. If, then, all property is what it is only in virtue of being alienable, then it seems that I have myself only insofar as I can get rid of myself. As Jay Lampert puts it: “the category of property as such is an ultimate danger to selfhood (even though the origin of selfhood depended at first on the ability to grasp and shape property).”

This is true, but only where selfhood is understood individualistically; property does make purely individual selfhood (personality) unstable. Property and the externality of a person’s will therein, can only have a stable, determinate being in the context of mutual

---

recognition with other persons. Here again the analysis of property echoes that of apperceptive self-consciousness in the Phenomenology.

Already in §51, Hegel alludes to the inter-subjective horizon in which property takes its place. It is not enough, he says, that the will should fix upon a thing; it must come into existence in the thing by taking possession of it, which implies the ability of others to recognize the thing as mine: “My inner idea [Vorstellung] and will that something should be mine is not enough to constitute property, which is the existence [Dasein] of personality; on the contrary, this requires that I should take possession of it. The existence which my willing thereby attains includes its ability to be recognized by others… My inner act of will which says something is mine must also become recognizable by others.”75 This is not saying enough, however. It is not sufficient that it be a standing possibility that others could recognize my will in my property. Rather, this recognition is a condition for the externalization of my will in the first place:

Existence, as determinate being, is essentially being for another. Property, in view of its existence as an external thing, exists for other external things and within the context of their necessity and contingency. But as the existence of the will, its existence for another can only be for the will of another person. This relation of will to will is the true distinctive ground in which freedom has its existence.76

My will by itself, then, is not sufficient for property and thus not able to externalize itself in things; this can only be done in conjunction with another will: “This mediation whereby I no longer own property merely by means of a thing and my subjective will, but also by means of another will, and hence within the context of a common will, constitutes the sphere of contract.”77

---

75 PR, §51.
76 PR, §71.
77 PR, §71.
This “common will” is very important here. The wills involved (mine and the other’s) are individual wills concerned with their own externalization in property. But conceived merely as individual, there is a contradiction here. In such a situation: “I am and remain the owner of property, having being for myself and excluding the will of another, only insofar as, in identifying my will with that of another, I cease to be an owner of property.”78 What it means for something to be my property is for me to will myself in it and this is necessarily to oppose this claim on it to whatever claims others have on it. But for this property, as we have just seen, to come into existence is to enter into the sphere of contract, wherein the thing is constituted in its being for another. Thus, as long as the wills in question are construed as individual wills asserting exclusive claims on a thing, property is impossible (it involves a contradiction – the thing is mine and mine alone only insofar as it is someone else’s).79

The resolution to this contradiction revolves around what happens to the thing that is my property. The very concept of property compels me to dispose of it; this is the general sense of the above contradiction. In doing so, since the thing qua property is constituted by my willing myself in it, I dispose of myself in it and thus make myself objective (i.e., in my property so disposed of in the relation of contract, I set myself over and against myself, I externalize myself). But since the property as something disposable is also constituted by another will, at the same moment as I am externalizing my will, my will is combined with this other will: these different wills become a unity. Thereby the contradiction (which is predicated on the two wills being different wills) is overcome in

78 PR, §72.
79 I will suggest in Part 3 that this picture of mutually external inter-subjectivity corresponds to Brandom’s understanding of the I-Thou sociality of discursive scorekeeping. The key point, for Hegel, is that this mutual externality (as per the finite Understanding) must be superceded by a recognition of the other as oneself and oneself as the other (i.e., in the infinite relation of Reason).
the exchange, i.e., the contractual relation: “This relationship is therefore the mediation of an identical will within the absolute distinction between owners of property who have being for themselves.”⁸⁰ In contract, my will is mediated through its identity with another’s will, thereby becoming a universal or “common” will, one which I share with the other as a “we.”⁸¹ I do not thereby lose my individuality, but it is in this “we” that I gain it in the first place. The common will is, as we have just seen, required by the fact that existence is being-for-another, and thus it is a condition for my will coming into existence in its willing itself in a thing. This externalization, in turn, is the way in which the two moments of a truly free will (as discussed in the introduction) come to be disclosed in the first place. Thus this disclosure in which I come into being as a free will is possible only on the condition of a common will in the sphere of contract; an individual will is only truly free (and thus truly individual) when it takes itself to be a part of a common will. Again, this recapitulates the findings of the Phenomenology vis-à-vis the possibility of a self-consciousness able to determine itself and stand opposed to itself objectively.

Contract is not self-supporting either, however. As a relationship of exchange, it is itself abstract. The kind of common will predicated on the exchange of property cannot account for “wrong” or violations of that contract; it cannot give an account of

---

⁸⁰ PR, §73.
⁸¹ Charles Taylor’s distinction between common and convergent goods can clarify the significance of this common will. As Taylor describes it: “A convergent matter is one that has the same meaning for many people, but where this is not acknowledged between them or in public space. Something is common when it exists not just for me and for you, but for us, acknowledged as such.” Charles Taylor, “Irreducibly Social Goods” in Philosophical Arguments (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p 139. The kind of will that is necessary to ground contracts is a common, not merely a convergent will. I take it to be Hegel’s overall argument in PR that convergent goods are rooted in common goods, and similarly that individual will is rooted in common will. Brandom’s I-Thou reconstruction of discursive sociality leaves all essential understandings at the level of convergence and does not take it that commonality is constitutive for discourse as a social practice. I will argue in Chapter 8, that this is not so.
that in virtue of which such a violation is wrong. Thus we must have recourse to the moral viewpoint to ground the normative binding force of contracts. Morality itself, however, is an abstraction from ethical life [Sittlichkeit] in its various forms, culminating in the full actualization of the concept of right in the state. Thus Hegel shows that the kind of individuality possible for modern people (being truly free) depends on the development of modern institutions, which articulate the rationality of communities of mutual recognition. My analysis of the constitution of the thing in property is meant to show that, on the one hand, things are only significant for agents in contexts where those agents take themselves to be parts of such communities, and, on the other hand, that those communities are not free-floating, but are themselves predicated around interactions with the objective things that they constitute (as seen in the necessity not only of individual mediation in the thing, but the mediation of the common will in the contractual exchange of the thing). I will now return to the account of self-consciousness and apperception in the Phenomenology in order to show that these conclusions about the realm of practical reason have direct application for that earlier discussion.

5.3. Being-for-Me and Being-Mine

I have shown that Hegel’s account of abstract right in many ways recapitulates his account of the conditions for our experience of things in the Phenomenology; in both cases the object undergoes a mediation whereby it is constituted as a thing for me in the process of (and on the condition that) my undergoing a mediation not only in the thing

\[82\] A helpful guide to the general argument of PR in terms of the actualization of the concept of right (the concept and actualization are the two moments of will – subjective and objective – discussed in the introduction) is found in Robert Pippin, “Hegel’s Political Argument and the Problem of Verwirklichung,” Political Theory 9 (1981): 509-532.
but in other subjects. The movement of both accounts, then, goes from abstract immediacy to concrete universality, which is a particularly Hegelian form of transcendental deduction where whole is shown to be the condition for the individuality of the parts. What the *Phenomenology* does for theoretical understanding, *PR* does for the sphere of practical reason.

I want now to show that, beyond a simple parallelism, these two accounts are in fact part of a single account, in such a way that the phenomena treated in *PR* are directly relevant to gaining a full understanding of what is going on in the *Phenomenology*. I will first show that, for Hegel, there is no hard and fast distinction between the realms of theoretical and practical reason (as there is for Kant); rather the theoretical takes its place within the practical and *vice versa*. I will then argue that both the subjects (the ‘I’) and the communities constitutive for those (the ‘We’) in both accounts are not different entities, but that the ‘I’ and ‘We’ deduced in the *Phenomenology* are abstractions from those discussed in *PR*. Finally, I will show how, with these conclusions in place, the role of the object in practical reason (i.e., as property) is directly relevant to understanding how theoretical experience can be objective.

In the Introduction to *PR*, Hegel discusses the distinction between practical and theoretical reason, or as he puts it, between will and thought. Right out he rejects

---

83 The unity of theoretical and practical reason – between the True and the Good – is a necessary part of Reason’s grasp of the Absolute Idea. Cf. EL §§233, 234. Moreover, understanding this means grasping a teleological element in the natural world (since, properly understood, our true, factual knowledge is also a grasp of the good): “As a result the truth of the good is posited – as the unity between the theoretical and the practical idea: [the truth] that the good has been reached in and for itself – that the objective world is in this way in and for itself the Idea positing itself eternally as purpose and at the same time bringing forth its actuality through its own activity.” EL, §235. The necessity of this unity will be the occasion for a critique of Brandom’s “free-floating” conception of discursive practice, which abstracts from the embeddedness of discourse within social practices that are supra-discursive. This abstraction makes him unable to account for the constitutive necessity of the teleological orientation of discourse toward supra-discursive ends and goods to make sense of essential elements of discourse itself. Cf. Chapter 8. The necessity of positing natural teleology will be discussed in Chapter 9.
Kantian and rationalist faculty psychology, asserting instead that they are distinct attitudes of a free person: “[I]t must not be imagined that a human being thinks on the one hand and wills on the other, and that he has thought in one pocket and volition in another, for this would be an empty representation. The distinction between thought and will is simply that between theoretical and practical attitudes.”84 The difference between these two attitudes lies in the stance that they take vis-à-vis their objects. In thinking an object, I am comprehending it, bringing it within the sphere of the universal, that is into the ‘I’. In that sense, thinking is the overcoming of difference between the object and the subject. Willing, on the other hand, “seems at first to be opposed [to the world] because it immediately sets up a separation. In so far as I am practical or active… I determine myself, and to determine myself means precisely to posit a difference.”85 Thus thought and will move in different directions, if you will: the will posits difference while thought overcomes it.

But thought and will are not opposed to each other, though they are distinct in this way. First of all, the positing of difference by will does not negate the comprehension of the object in thought as “my own.” “But these differences which I posit are nevertheless also mine, the determinations apply to me, and the ends to which I am impelled belong to me… If I posit them in the so-called external world, they remain mine: they are what I have done or made, and they bear the imprint of my mind.”86 In this sense, though will posits a difference, it nevertheless does the work of thought to bring external things within the sphere of my subjectivity and thus “the will is a particular way of thinking –

84 PR, §4. Addition.
85 PR, §4. Addition. That this is so is seen in that first expression of will in property: it consists of the will positing a difference by creating an external sphere of freedom opposed to its own internal sphere.
86 PR, §4.
thinking translating itself into existence.” Second, these two movements are mutually
dependent. One cannot will without thought, since will is a self-determination and this
means an inward representation of my object to myself as that thing that I will. This
inner representation of an object is the domain of thought. On the other hand, one cannot
think without a will, “for in thinking we are necessarily active. The content of what is
thought certainly takes on the form of being; but this being is something mediated,
something posited by our activity.” Thus, the distinction between will and thought as
different attitudes is grounded in their inseparability: “These distinct attitudes are
therefore inseparable: they are one and the same thing, and both moments can be found in
every activity, of thinking and willing alike.”

The inseparability of the theoretical and practical attitudes can also be seen in the
Phenomenology. The apogee of theoretical consciousness – the understanding – was
seen itself to be insufficient to ground the kind of self-determination that was necessary
for the objects of perception to come into being for consciousness. To show how this is
possible, Hegel then turns to self-consciousness in its immediacy, that is, as desire. That
is, the self-consciousness that can determine itself has as its immediate home a practical
attitude. Furthermore, self-consciousness as not only in-itself but for-itself, as we have
seen, has its first expression in purposive action, actions that are undertaken with the
object of desire taken self-consciously as the object of my desire. Thus we have already
seen an instance where theoretical consciousness (the understanding) was grounded in
practical action (self-consciousness) and where the inseparability of the practical and the
theoretical attitudes was implicitly posited.

87 PR, §4.
88 PR, §4.
89 PR, §4.
The expression of self-consciousness in purposive action is possible, as discussed, only due to a mediation by other self-consciousnesses and thus the self-conscious ‘I’ is an “‘I’ that is ‘We’”. We saw a similar fact in the expression of the self-determining will in property: that expression (the will’s coming into existence in property) was grounded in its mediation through a common will in contract. The inseparability of the practical and theoretical attitudes just discussed gives prima facie support to the notion that these two inter-subjective mediations (in the ‘We’ of Spirit – which grounds the account of theoretical reason in the Phenomenology – and the ‘Common will’ of contract – which grounds the account of practical reason in PR) may not be totally distinct. In fact, I want to suggest, the latter is just an instance, a kind of actuality, of the former: that the common will of contract is the dawning of the actuality (reality) of Spirit. Spirit, as we have discovered it in the first parts of the Phenomenology, is a fairly nebulous Concept: it is the ‘I’ recognizing itself as a part of a larger social whole constituted by mutual recognition. But for Hegel, nothing is ever as free-floating as this. Spirit finds its expression in determinate social and cultural institutions, traditions and communities. That this is so is part of the burden of the chapters on “Spirit” in the Phenomenology. The individual self-consciousness that has been the focus throughout the sections on “Reason” is proved to be inadequate on its own; it requires a secure context of recognition from others in the form of “ethical substance:”

If we take this goal – and this is the [Concept] which for us has already appeared on the scene – in its reality, viz. the self-consciousness that is recognized and acknowledged, and which has its own self-certainty in the other free self-consciousness, and possesses its truth precisely in that ‘other’… then in this [Concept] there is disclosed the realm of ethical life. For this is nothing else than the absolute unity of the essence of individuals in their independent actual

90 I say the “dawning” because, of course, contract is far from fully realized objective Spirit; it is itself abstract until it is embedded within more robust forms of sociality, i.e., Sittlichkeit.
existence; it is an intrinsically universal self-consciousness that takes itself to be actual in another consciousness... The single individual consciousness, conversely, is only this existent unity in so far as it is aware of the universal consciousness in its individuality as its own being, since what it does and is, is the universal custom.91

The master-slave dialectic showed how this secure context of recognition is impossible to obtain merely between individuals struggling for recognition of their own projects; this mutual recognition must be mediated by a universal, common element of which individuals recognize themselves as a part. This common element that secures recognition is Spirit in the form of social institutions. As Philip Kain puts it: “What we need... is recognition that is... solid and reliable, much larger in scale, and with much more authority and power [than the recognition of others as mere individuals]. What we need, Hegel suggests in chapter VI [on “Spirit”] is the recognition of institutions – the family, social classes, law, the state, religion.”92 These (excluding religion) are those determinations of ethical life (Sittlichkeit) unpacked in PR. Come at another way, the Phenomenology shows that individual consciousnesses need to find a home in ethical life, and PR shows us what the determinate forms of ethical life are. Thus, not only are practical and theoretical reason in principle inseparable, but the social mediation of individuality that is so essential in both turns out to be the same (or rather, the forms of practical sociality are the existence of the forms of “theoretical” sociality). The forms of social mediation needed to constitute apperceptive self-consciousness are not different in kind from those that constitute, amongst other things, persons with an external sphere of freedom (private property).

91 PS 212.
The same goes for the individual, which though mediated by these forms of sociality, never disappears as an individual. The transcendental subject that is disclosed in the chapter on “Self-Consciousness” in the Phenomenology, is not a different creature than the person of PR. This has already been touched on: thought and will are not separate faculties acting autonomously according to their own principles; thought is not one thing and will another. The subject that takes himself to be experiencing a unified diversity by determining it according to a concept is the same subject that places his will in a thing and thus makes it *his*. Moreover these are not actions undertaken by different faculties according to different principles. The ‘I’ as (self)consciousness and the ‘I’ as practical agent are as inseparable as will and thought: “Consciousness must act merely in order that what it is in itself may become explicit for it; in other words, action is simply the coming-to-be of Spirit as consciousness.”93

Thus far I have shown that there is no gap between the discussion of apperceptive self-consciousness in the Phenomenology and the account of property in PR, by arguing that there is no gap between their general subject-matter – thought and will – nor between the forms of sociality appealed to – Spirit and the Common Will – nor between the “faculties” of the subject – the ‘I’ as knower and the ‘I’ as actor. What remains is for me to show that there is no gap between the constitution of the thing as object of perception and as property.94 Given what has been shown, this would mean that an account of how the perception of objects can be objective would be inseparable from social practices.

---

93 PS, 240.
94 I should make it clear that when I say “there is no gap” I do not mean that they are entirely identical (just as the unity of will and thought did not erase the fact that we can distinguish them). I only mean to show that these activities are so closely related as to be necessary parts in satisfying accounts of the other.
(such as taking property, contracts, morality etc.) that have their existence in institutions with which the individual identifies as a part to a whole (an I-We form of sociality).

To show this, I want to argue that, on Hegel’s view, the first or primary way in which an external thing appears to consciousness as a differentiated unity (as a Thing, as in perception) is the way in which it appears in the use of a possessed thing, i.e., as valuable or useful rather than as a thing with properties. As we have seen, self-consciousness emerges first in purposive action, in contexts in which consciousness takes itself to be related to an object that is the object of its desire. It is essential for this account that self-consciousness can see the thing to be independent, as an other, and yet as in some sense related to itself (to be an other for consciousness). In immediate self-consciousness, the object’s independence is purely negative; as in eating, the object is used up and negated in its satisfaction of desire. But the account of property in PR has shown that this negative moment – when the thing taken-hold of in possession is used – has a positive content. In its being used it shows itself to have universal properties, namely, utility or value, which are not negated in the individual object’s own negation; it thus appears as a differentiated unity or a mediated universal. This experienced independence and universality is what allows self-consciousness to take itself to be relating to something other, that is – qua its possession – nevertheless its own. Just as, in the taking of property (as we have seen), the will is differentiated by gaining an external sphere of freedom, so self-consciousness is differentiated here by coming across another independent universality which it simultaneously takes to be its own. That is, the very same process – taking possession of and using something – is a condition for the disclosure of both the will and apperceptive self-consciousness, in virtue of the fact that
the subject here first experiences a thing as a mediated universality. I think that this is what Hegel has in mind when, in his discussion of use, he says: “This universality whose simple determinacy arises out of the thing’s particularity in such a way that it is at the same time abstracted from this specific quality, is the thing’s value, in which its true substantiality is determined and becomes an object of consciousness.”95 The external thing becomes a thing for consciousness in its being taken and used. Its appearance as a Thing of perception follows upon this first mediation: “The content of what is thought certainly takes on the form of being; but this being is something mediated, something posited by our activity.”96

Once again, my suggestion is that the primary constitution of external things for (theoretical) consciousness happens in the practical activity of taking possession of a thing and using it: “If so-called external things have a semblance of self-sufficiency for consciousness, for intuition and representational thought, the free will, in contrast, is the idealism and truth of such actuality.”97 As discussed, it is the experience of an independent and yet self-related object that allows the kind of self-opposition necessary for objective perception, which is made clear in PR when Hegel thematizes property as having oneself in an other. This self-opposition in property – in the initial constitution of the object – is the same mediation that discloses the self-opposition of theoretical (self)-consciousness.

This conclusion is supported by and, in turn, supports my previous suggestion that the social mediation of self-consciousness signaled in the appeal to Spirit in the Phenomenology just is those institutional practices and forms of life that are examined in

---

95 PR, §63; my italics.
96 PR, §4.
97 PR, §44.
If I am right, then we cannot understand how it is that we can have objective
perception of things in the world without considering the object-directed purposive
activities (e.g., taking property, labour) that happen in the context of social practices
predicated on a common understanding and will. This object-directedness (or “world-
involvingness”) needs to be emphasized. The communities and institutions within which
objective social practices happen cannot be free-floating; they must still undertake a kind
of purposive action with regard to the objective world. One of the reasons that I have
focused on the constitution of the “thing” is that, for Hegel, even though the thing is
socially constituted (both in perception and property), it is nonetheless essential for
accounting for the possibility of those forms of sociality (and for underwriting their
objectivity). We’ve seen this in at least three places: 1) in labour, where the alienation of
the product of the slave’s action in the external world is alienated from him by the
master, with the result that the slave is able to see it as his work and thus as an
externalization of him, rather than just as a satisfaction of his needs; 2) the mediation of
the communal will of contract in the exchange of a thing; 3) the role of the use of the
object in disclosing self-consciousness. Thus there is a kind of “triangulation” in Hegel’s
thought between the ‘I,’ the ‘We,’ and the ‘It’ that never goes away.

Thus I conclude, against Brandom, that, if Hegel is right, an account of the
objectivity of our experience must include (indeed, be founded upon) I-We forms of
sociality, rather than merely I-Thou forms of recognition between individual agents.\(^{98}\)

\(^{98}\) Another important result of my conclusion is that, insofar as the social forms that allow for the
expression the will are a) inseparable from the development of self-consciousness, and b) historical
accomplishments, this means that the kind of self-consciousness capable of objective perception is also a
historical accomplishment. This would mean that, prior to the development of institutional forms of
collective action, human beings would not be able to accomplish the kinds of self-opposition necessary to
distinguish what is merely taken to be true from what is in fact true. This is a result that seems odd at first,
but could be thought out in a compelling way. It might even help explain how the kinds of sophisticated
There are other aspects of Hegel’s account that will feature in my critique of Brandom in Part 3, but which should be noted here. First, the objectivity of these social practices cannot be merely “formal” but are as essentially content-involving as practical use. Whereas, for Brandom, objectivity in discursive practice is underwritten by the formal or structural distinction between different score-keeping perspectives, for Hegel it is underwritten by the necessity for discursive social practices to be grounded in actual transformation and use of the physical world. This is not a formal aspect of discursive practice, but a number of concrete involvements, including labour, ownership and the satisfaction of desire; in none of these can form be separated from content in a meaningful way. This points to a second important difference, namely, that this objectivity and the sociality that constitutes its possibility cannot be merely discursive. Any attempt to derive a theory of the objectivity of consciousness from, if you will, epistemic or semantic attitudes and statuses alone will not suffice for Hegel. Social practices and individual comportments that focus on giving and asking for reasons must be grounded and embedded in practices that also aim at practical engagement with the world on the one hand, and the collective effort to realize the good life, on the other. From a Hegelian perspective, Brandom’s account of the (formal) objectivity of our (merely) discursive practices in their (I-Thou) social articulation has the right relationships in sight (the “triangulation” between sociality, subjectivity and objectivity), but considers them in the finite mode of the “Understanding” – with its attendant division between form and content, internal and external – rather than of “Reason.”

“objectivity determining practices” characteristic of modern science are inseparable from the developments of differentiated modern societies. That’s another story, though.
5.4. Truth and Self-Criticism in Absolute Knowing

Before I move on to the internal critique of Brandom that will redeem these promissory notes (by showing why his failure to account for these aspects of Hegel’s view is internally problematic for his own reconstruction of discursive practice), I need to say a few things about Hegel’s conception of truth and his understanding of the grounds for self-criticism. This will require an account of “Absolute Knowing” and its relation to other parts of Hegel’s systematic thought.

My occasion for doing so is a pair of concerns that Brandom expresses about discursive social practices that have an I-We structure. I have argued that Hegel does indeed suggest that participation in such practices is constitutive for the possibility of actualized objective (self)-consciousness and rational agency, but this then raises Brandom’s concerns about the impossibility that such practices can give sense to a notion of objectivity. If not – i.e., if Brandom’s reasons for rejecting I-We forms of sociality are decisive – then Hegel’s view is self-contradictory; he would essentially ground the possibility of objectivity in a condition that makes nonsense of the idea of objectivity. If we understand Hegel’s account of I-We social practices, however, I believe this is not the case.

In Part 1 I identified two issues with respect to which Brandom’s concerns emerge – truth conditions and the possibility of self-criticism – but both reduce to the same concern, namely, that I-We social practices posit a doxastic perspective (that of the “community,” the “we”) to which attributions of discursive commitment and entitlement cannot be made in such a way that there is a difference between how those commitments are specified de re and how they are specified de dicto. This is fatal, according to
Brandom, for the possibility of objectivity because this possibility consists precisely in the continual maintenance of this distinction. Thus with respect to the specification of truth-conditions for the commitments of the “we,” these conditions cannot be specified de re and hence in terms of how things stand with objects, but only de dicto in terms of how things are seen from the perspective of the “we.” The reason for this is that – on Brandom’s reading – the upshot of positing an I-We social practice as a ground for objectivity is that, on such a view, the “we” perspective determines what is and is not the way things must be taken to be by members of that community. If this is so, then, the way I ought to take things to be with objects just is the way things are seen from the perspective of the “we” and hence there is no distinction between my attributing commitments to the community de re and de dicto.99 In other words, if truth just is what the community says it is, then in the community’s perspective the distinction between how things really are and how it takes things to be is moot; but the point of a theory of objectivity is precisely to make sense of that distinction.

Similarly, the notion that the perspective of the “we” is the final word on the way things are (and the way things are rightly taken to be100) makes nonsense of the possibility of self-criticism, according to Brandom. This is because an authoritative “we”-perspective cannot avoid the “No First Person Error Condition” of Brandom’s “objectivity proofs.”101 It cannot offer a way to avoid the conclusion that – from the community’s own perspective – [(I claim that \( p \)) \( \rightarrow \) \( p \)]; i.e., that there is no difference for

99 See Chapter 3.
100 Putting the issue in terms of “the way things are” specifies the objectivity concept in terms of the objectivity of conceptual content, while putting it in terms of “the way things are rightly taken to be” specifies it in terms of the objectivity of discursive norms. As discussed in Chapter 2, these two issues are, for Brandom, inextricably intertwined.
101 Cf. Chapter 2.
the “we” between taking something to be the case and its actually being the case. This means that, from the perspective of the “we”, there are no grounds for admitting the possibility that “we” are wrong about anything and no perspective from which to correct our errors. What this leaves is a perspective that has no fallibilistic consciousness and no possibility for self-criticism. What self-criticism requires, says Brandom, is the possibility of taking up a “hypothetically third-person perspective” on one’s own views from which these views can be specified *de re* in terms not specifiable *de dicto* (i.e., from one’s own first-person perspective). Without such an “outside” position on one’s commitments, self-criticism is impossible.

In response to these concerns it is first necessary to point out that Hegel nowhere makes the reductive claim that Brandom ascribes to advocates of an I-We approach to objectivity, namely, that the community’s discursive attitudes *straightforwardly determine* the appropriate attitudes of its members; i.e., that what it is right to believe/do *just is* what the community says it is right to believe/do. For Hegel as I have characterized him, the shared perspective of self-conscious agents in *Sittlichkeit* (the “common will,” the “customs and laws of the nation,” the “universal self-consciousness” etc.) is indeed *authoritative* for the individuals that make it up (and which are in turn made up by it), but this does not amount to the uni-directional derivation of normative propriety from the “We” to the “I” any more than the other way around. The whole point of Hegel’s dialectical articulation of the Concept of Spirit (“the I that is We and the We that is I”) is to help us to resist the temptation to think that either the community simply gives law to its members or vice versa; they are mutually constitutive.102 Thus Hegel’s

---

102 In a sense, both individuality (whether epistemic or moral) and sociality (in the sense of embeddedness in a “we”) each have a kind of priority to the other; individuality is genetically prior to sociality but
version of I-We sociality is by no means the same as the version that Brandom ascribes to
(intel alia) Crispin Wright’s Wittgenstein, and yet it also cannot be reduced to a version
of Brandom’s own I-Thou sociality since it depends upon attributing (prima facie)
discursive authority to a robustly shared doxastic perspective rather than meting out
discursive authority entirely between individual scorekeepers with distinct perspectives.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to show that Brandom’s concerns about I-We social
practices do not hit home even for this “relativized” version, since Hegel does offer a
view of our knowledge of self and world that situates them against a background of
commitments specified in the first-person plural, and the authority of that background
perspective is thus considered to be constitutive for the possibility of objective (self-)
consciousness. In other words, for Hegel the possibility of truth (and hence of its
conditions) cannot be understood outside of I-We social practices. The first three
chapters of the Phenomenology are put forward in order to do away with the Concept that
“what is true for consciousness is something other than itself.” This implies, says
Robert Pippin, that “what is now realized is that ‘what is true for consciousness’ is not
‘something other than itself,’ that what we appeal to, what makes knowledge-claims true
or false, is internal too [sic], not other than consciousness itself.” The consciousness
that we then come to see as able to bear the weight of being the true for itself is the
universal self-consciousness of Spirit, articulated and actualized socially in the ethical life
of communities.

sociality is constitutively prior to individuality. Thus no attempt to derive the norms for discursive practice
can simply begin with one and then proceed to the other; the picture is irreducibly more complex. Cf.
Chapter 8.

\[103\] PS, 104.

\[104\] Robert Pippin, “You Can’t Get There from Here: Transition Problems in Hegel’s Phenomenology of
Spirit,” in Frederick Beiser, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Hegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Furthermore, the shape of Spirit that can be said to be \textit{true} – in the sense of reconciling Concept and Object in such a way that there is no gap between the being-in-itself of the objects of knowledge and their being-for-consciousness – is that of Absolute Knowing, which does not admit of an \textit{outside} perspective: “[Spirit] has defined itself as the truth of soul and consciousness – the former a simple immediate totality, the latter now an infinite form which is not, like consciousness, restricted by that content, and does not stand in mere correlation to it as to its object, but is an awareness of this substantial totality, neither subjective nor objective. [Spirit], therefore, starts only from its own being and is in correlation only with its own features.”\(^{105}\) In other words, Absolute Knowing as a mode of social life which makes truth possible is one that does not posit any doxastic perspectives outside of itself from which it might hypothetically take up a third-person perspective with respect to its own commitments. This would seem to contravene Brandom’s insistence that the possibility of objectivity and hence self-criticism depends upon maintaining an openness to such an “outside” perspective. Thus it is necessary to show that Hegel’s conception of Absolute Knowing is not fatally self-contradictory, as it would be if it tried to account for objectivity and truth by reference to a condition that undermines them.

Absolute knowing is “absolute” in the sense that it is knowledge that has shed the mantle of “appearance” \([Erscheinen]\) and become “Science” \([Wissenschaft]\). What this means is that it is knowledge that does not depend upon any “external” object for its determination or validation, but is rather self-determining or “self-mediating.” It is not so much a body of doctrines or contents as a social practice: “Absolute knowledge is the

internal reflection on the social practices of a modern community that takes its authoritative standards to come only from within the structure of the practices it uses to legitimate and authenticate itself.”

In absolute knowing, the standards for evaluating the truth of knowing do not come from outside of the social practices that find their reflective expression in absolute knowing; what makes this kind of knowing true is not a favor the external world bestows on reflective social practices, but simply having a certain sort of standing within those practices. The “true” for consciousness is revealed to be nothing outside of consciousness itself. This would seem to be an invocation of a thoroughly coherentist conception of truth; absolute knowing is true insofar as it is entirely reconciled with and adequate to itself, no reference to the “world” necessary. Absolute knowledge is then just consciousness that is bei sich, at home with itself. Since the practices that absolute knowing reflects upon are social practices (of an I-We structure at that), this would seem to be exactly what Brandom is concerned

---


107 This way of expressing the “absoluteness” of absolute knowing prefigures John McDowell’s complaint that Brandom fails to grasp what it means for knowledge to be a “standing in the space of reasons” because Brandom maintains the separation of truth – a standing with respect to objects not achieved by our efforts – from justification – a standing in the space of reasons achieved entirely by our discursive efforts. As I will discuss in Chapter 9, McDowell urges that this dichotomy needs to be overcome by seeing the natural world of objects and facts as immanent to the space of reasons and hence, conversely, seeing our efforts to achieve standings in the space of reasons as essentially world-involving. I am arguing here that this is Hegel’s conception as well.

108 As Merold Westphal puts it: “Although Hegel talks freely here of Absolute Knowledge he has not abandoned his original concept of Spirit as the I that is We and the We that is I. He calls Science the ‘pure being for itself of self-consciousness. It is the I that is I and no other I, just as much as the immediately mediated or transcended universal I.’ [PS, 486] This means that just as it is the self which realizes the life of absolute Spirit, so the bearers of Absolute Knowledge are individuals. But it is not as sheer individuals that they are the locus of Absolute Knowledge. Only as their personal self-consciousness can be said to be a particular expression of the collective self-consciousness which Hegel has been describing as absolute Spirit do they express Absolute Knowledge.” History and Truth, 217. In the Encyclopedia Logic, Hegel expresses the point that Absolute Knowledge becomes possible only within the thick social practices described as the realm of Spirit: “In my Phenomenology of Spirit...the procedure adopted was to begin from the first and simplest appearance of spirit, from immediate consciousness, and to develop its dialectic right up to the standpoint of philosophical science [Absolute Knowing], the necessity of which is shown by the progression. But for this purpose it was not possible to stick to the formal aspect of mere
about: a standard of truth that admits of no outside perspective such that its content
cannot be specified *de re* – i.e., in terms of how things stand with objects in the world –
and hence a standard that makes no space for objectivity, fallibilism or self-criticism.

However, if we see that what Hegel means by absolute knowing is not a static
body of doxastic *commitments* or even merely a set of social-discursive normative
*attitudes*, but rather a *world-involving, dynamic social process*, these concerns are
alleviated. With such a view in mind we can see absolute knowing as *essentially* self-
critical and fallibilist as well as invoking a standard of truth that is not merely coherentist,
but simultaneously a correspondence theory (and hence specifiable also in terms of how
things stand with objects). I shall unpack this conception by first looking at absolute
knowing as *process*.

That absolute knowing or “philosophical science” is not in the first case a body of
knowledge but a dialectically unfolding (and hence “self-opposing”) social practice can
be seen most clearly in Hegel’s discussion of its “ontological” correlate, the “Idea” of his
logic. As John Russon explains, the *Logic* follows the same dialectical path as the
*Phenomenology*, reflecting not on the *experience* of consciousness in its various forms
(as in the *Phenomenology*) but on the kinds of *being* attributed by each form of
consciousness to its world.¹⁰⁹ Because these two perspectives are correlative perspectives
on the same movement, we can infer from the structure of one to the other and hence
from the structure of the conclusion of the *Logic* (namely, the Idea) to that of its

¹⁰⁹ John Russon, *Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 224-
227. In taking up a certain stance with respect to the world (i.e., a Concept), consciousness implicitly
ascribes to the world a certain mode of being (the Object). The focus of the *Phenomenology* is on the
former, and the experience of consciousness is the dialectical sublation of each successive Concept. The
focus of the *Logic* is on the latter and the dialectical sublation of each successive understanding of being.
“experiential” correlate (namely, Absolute Knowing). The Idea – and hence the Absolute Knowing by which it is expressed – “shows itself as the thinking that is strictly identical with itself, and this at once shows itself be the activity of positing itself over against itself, in order to be for-itself, and to be, in this other, only at home with itself.”110 Once consciousness has grasped the Idea in absolute knowing, what it has done is to grasp fully and explicitly what it has, in a sense, been doing all along, namely, opposing two moments of itself (Concept and Object) and experiencing continual correction and revision of both its view of itself and of its world as a result.111 But once this perspective – that where being is grasped as Idea – is attained, the story is not over, since it remains to philosophy to follow the self-opposing path of the Idea. This is the task that Hegel pursues in his Encyclopedia, which thus has three parts: “In the Logic, the science of the Idea in and for itself; The Philosophy of Nature, as the science of the Idea in its otherness; The Philosophy of Spirit, as of the Idea that returns into itself out of its otherness.”112 Philosophical science/absolute knowing follows this self-opposing development of the Idea precisely by undergoing the process itself; it cannot present the Encyclopedia simply as a catalogue of the results of wissenschaftliche reflection, because the result is unintelligible apart from the process.113

110 EL, §18. Later, Hegel puts the point more abstractly: “The Idea is essentially process, because its identity is only the absolute and free identity of the Concept, because this identity is the absolute negativity and hence dialectical. The Idea is the course in which the Concept (as the universality that is singularity) determines itself both to objectivity and to the antithesis against it, and in which this externality, which the Concept has with regard to its substance, leads itself back again, through its immanent dialectic, into subjectivity.” (§215)

111 Hence the viewpoint of “we” phenomenologists in PS is the viewpoint of absolute knowing. It is the perspective that understands itself as undergoing the dialectical unfolding that it observes in the “experience of consciousness.”

112 EL, §18.

113 This is why the various parts of the Encyclopedia are presented as they are – i.e., as the unfolding of a dialectic of reflection on thought, nature and spirit – rather than simply by declaring “this is what it means to think,” “this is how nature is,” “this is the shape of human agency.”
What this means is that absolute knowing is essentially *self-opposing* and *self-transcending*. The externalization of itself creates a kind of negativity that must itself be negated only through the transcendence of its earlier forms; this is precisely the structure of self-criticism. Absolute knowing/philosophical science is—like all consciousness—essentially self-critical. What is distinctive about absolute knowing is that the moment of negativity that causes the revision of Concept is not the imposition of something *outside* of itself; the resources on which absolute knowing calls in its self-criticism are not an external perspective, but unreconciled moments within itself. Put less abstractly: when, through reflection on our cultural, social, moral practices, “we” face a crisis in our collective cultural, social, moral life and then overcome that crisis by transcending aspects of those practices, neither the crisis nor the resources we draw upon to overcome it come from outside of those practices.

Thus, for example, before roughly the turn of the 19th century, “we” largely accepted slavery as socially normal. Even those who opposed slavery participated to some degree in this acceptance insofar as they (tacitly) granted that the burden of moral argument lay on themselves and their reasons for opposing the practice, rather than on those who would want to defend it. In a sense, the acceptance of slavery was part of the taken-for-granted background that Habermas calls the “lifeworld.” Nevertheless, a crisis

---

114 Kenneth Westphal takes pains to lay this structure out with respect to consciousness in *Hegel’s Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), pp. 40-44.

115 We moderns; absolute knowing is, for Hegel, an achievement of modern social life not of sociality simpliciter. This is because it requires the right kinds of institutions, practices, etc. to be in place. The “right” kind are the “rational” kind, i.e., those which support and are supported by justifications, norms, etc. that are explicit, publicly contestable and discursively redeemable or “self-justifying.” In other words, absolute knowing depends upon modern *Sittlichkeit*. Cf. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 265 ff. For Robert Pippin, this makes Hegel the philosopher of modernity par excellence. Cf. Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: The Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden MA: Blackwell, 1999).
emerged in that shared understanding because the acceptance of slavery sat uneasily (ultimately contradictorily) with other features of our lifeworld (say, those expressed in the opening sentences of the Declaration of Independence). The crisis – the negation of our shared self-understanding – did not emerge from outside of that self-understanding; we found ourselves to be self-opposed. In response to the crisis we have come to a point where – though the practice of slavery is not entirely gone – virtually no-one accepts it as socially normal. Even those who would wish to affirm the practice (tacitly) grant that the burden of argument lays with them and their reasons for accepting the practice; this is exactly the opposite situation as that which prevailed 200 years ago. Nevertheless, the moral, conceptual, practical resources that both precipitated the crisis that lead to this transformation and that allowed us to effect it did not come from “outside” of our social practice, but from within it.116

This is, of course, a greatly simplified example. What matters for the current discussion is that it shows how it is possible for the “we” perspective of absolute knowing (philosophical reflection upon our cultural practices) to have no recourse to data or resources from “outside” of those practices but to nevertheless be self-critical. “We” – Hegel’s universal self-consciousness embodied in the *Sittlichkeit* of modern forms of life – changed our attitudes and dispositions toward slavery completely without ever losing the concrete, universal and robustly shared cultural and moral reference points that constitute us as a “We.” The opposition of “I’s” and “Thou’s” (i.e., those that opposed and defended slavery respectively) always (before, during and after the crisis that lead to social and moral transformation) took place within a shared self-understanding. Indeed,

---

116 These resources include (but are not limited to) an emerging consensus on the notion of universal human rights, the undermining of the scientific basis of racism (i.e., the recognition, at least, that we are all members of the same species), the political movements emerging from evangelical Protestantism, etc.
this shared self-understanding—the common acceptance of certain social norms, practices, understandings—is what made it possible for the opposition of “I” and “Thou” to be productive of social transformation. Without this shared lifeworld as both background and a horizon to be pursued, the negative relationship between them could not be a determinate negation, which requires that the opposition of perspectives be grasped as an opposition (rather than, say, mere difference) and hence seen as reconcilable. The fact that parties to the disagreement are able to view their interlocutors as parties to a disagreement (and not, say, as morally mad or unintelligible) is made possible by their recognition that they share a lifeworld. Both “I” and “Thou” must—as a condition for constructive moral disagreement—take both ourselves and one another as members of the same moral discursive community, i.e., as one of “us.” I will argue in Chapter 8, that Brandom’s I-Thou construal of discursive social practice is blind to this condition.117

Hegel’s conception of absolute knowing, then, can make sense of a kind of self-criticism that does not make reference to a hypothetical third-person perspective. This takes care of one side of Brandom’s reservations about I-We social practices, but it seems to aggravate the other, namely, that it reduces objective correctness to social consensus and hence makes reference to objects in the world moot as an element of determining proper standing in the space of reasons. Put in terms of truth, Hegel’s picture seems here to be thoroughly coherentist; we discover untruth in the contradiction between moments of our collective self-consciousness and overcome it (i.e., reach truth) by reference to

---

117 In fact, this is a compound condition. It not only requires recognition of a shared “we” perspective, but also of a self-conscious, first-person “I” perspective and a discursively performative, second-person “Thou” perspective (which grasps others as co-participants in a practice rather than merely as repositories of commitments and entitlements upon which we keep score). My argument in Part 3 will be that Brandom’s philosophy fails to properly acknowledge any of these.
other moments thereof. No reference to how things stand with the objective world – one might say: no reference to a correspondence condition of truth – seems necessary. Given that the truth of absolute knowing is itself and not adequation to something outside of itself, the world seems to be lost, thus rendering unintelligible the notion that our conceptual practices are objective insofar as they are about objects.

This however is not Hegel’s view. The objective, physical world of facts and things does not lie outside of the universal self-consciousness of Spirit; the I that is We and the We that is I is also the “It” that is “We” and the “We” that is “It.”\footnote{John Russon puts it thus: “The Phenomenology and the Logic both conclude with being as communication, with, we might say, an is that is we and a we that is is” (Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology, 225).} The development of consciousness described in the Phenomenology is, in one respect, the gradual overcoming of the sense of the “otherness” of the objects of consciousness. Through the processes by which the world is constituted as being-for-us that I have described above (knowing, labour, desire, property), what is destroyed or transcended is not the object itself and its “worldliness,” but rather its Gegenständlichkeit, consciousness’s sense that its objects “stands over and against it” as something alien.\footnote{Cf. Merold Westphal, History and Truth, pp. 212-213.} The truth of consciousness is just that there is no ontological gap between itself and its objects and the “world” they constitute. Even the an sich sein of objects is a moment of consciousness, as the Concept and Object dialectic of the “Introduction” already suggests.

But this is not a “losing” of the world of physical things and “objective” facts. Labour, for example, does not destroy the physicality and concreteness of its object, but transforms it such that it is no longer something that confronts the slave as an alien
imposition on him, but a part of his world, even an expression of himself. He is with-
himself (bei sich) in what is other. Objects (things, worldly facts) can, as a matter of fact, only act as checks or constraints on the activities of rational agents insofar as they are not pure others that address agents from across an ontological gap. As we have seen, the sense of “objectivity” that Hegel (and Kant, Fichte and Brandom) needs is one that accounts for how things in the world can have normative significance for the concept-
mongering practices of sapient creatures, i.e., how the way things stand with the world can be the occasion for accepting, rejecting or revising conceptual commitments and comportments. This cannot happen as long as the world is thought of as ontologically different from consciousness as in, say, a construal where it is assumed to be only a system of causally articulated “forces” in contrast to a normatively and conceptually articulated “understanding.” The terms of our self-understanding must, in other words, not be fundamentally different from the terms in which we think about the so-called “external” or “sensible” world and vice-versa: “[N]either the Idea, as a purely subjective thought, nor a mere being on its own account, is what is true; for being on its own account, any being that is not that of the Idea, is the sensible finite being of the world. But what is immediately asserted by this is that the Idea is what is true only as mediated by being and, conversely, that being is what is true only as mediated by the Idea.”

The world, then, must be seen to be in-itself infused with normative, conceptual significance (to be geistlich, if you will) and, conversely, Spirit must be seen to be in-and-for-itself

---

120 EL §70. This view is described in this section as “what the principle of immediate knowing rightly insists on” even though (at this stage in the dialectic) “immediate knowing” fails to see that “the unity of distinct determinations is not just a purely immediate, i.e., a totally indeterminate and empty unity, but that what is posited in it is precisely that one of the determinations has truth only through its mediation by the other; or, in other words, that each of them is mediated with the truth only through the other.” (EL §70)
worldly, natural and embodied; all of the attempts to apply self-conceptions and world-conceptions that posit an ontological gap between them are shown in both the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* to be internally contradictory and hence untrue.

So, if in absolute knowing – and the Idea that it grasps – Spirit is thoroughly worldly and world-involving, then this means that a coherence criterion of truth is simultaneously a correspondence criterion insofar as being right about how things stand with objects is a necessary condition for truth. This is because there is no fundamental or ontological distinction between how things stand with objects and how things stand with Spirit itself, since Spirit is both mediated in and mediates the physical and sensible world of objects. Things stand with Spirit the way they do because the world is thus-and-so, but the world could not be thus-and-so if things did not stand this-way-or-that with Spirit. This importantly does not mean for Hegel that the one is reduced to the other. It does not imply that how things stand with objects just is how things stand with Spirit’s cognitive commitments as if social consensus uni-directionally determines the way things must be taken to be and not also the other way around. The Idea (qua subjective taking-as) is just as much mediated in being as vice-versa. The point is

---

121 This is part of the burden of my discussion above of the necessity that, for Hegel, our conceptual or epistemic grasp of a world of things must be grounded in active, physical involvements with that world in the form of labour, property, desire, etc.

122 I mean this only in a loose sense. Hegel sees traditional correspondence theories of truth as only grasping a moment of the full concept of truth. What they grasp is merely “correctness” in which “external things correspond with my representations…held by me as this [individual],” (EL §213). Correctness is truth seen from the finite perspective of understanding where individual things confront individual knowers “from the outside” and happen to match up (i.e., to be as they are represented to be). This is all well and good, but ultimately unintelligible as a possibility outside of the infinite perspective that sees correctness as embedded in a “truth” that is where “objectivity corresponds with the Concept” (EL §213); i.e., where the knower does not take itself (in the Concept) to be ontologically distinct from its Object.

123 This resonates with, but is justified differently than, Davidson’s argument that “coherence yields correspondence” in Donald Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,” in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, 137. Where Davidson and Hegel converge is on the notion that there is no necessary dilemma between evaluating validity claims in terms of their coherence and in terms of their correspondence to the world; at least in favoured cases, these conditions are one, even if they are not identical.
precisely that the unity of taking-as and being is the result of mutual mediation and transformation, which is unintelligible if there were an ontological gap between them.

As a result, in identifying truth-conditions there is no dilemma between putting them in *de re* terms (i.e., in terms of how they stand with respect to objects in the world) and putting them in *de dicto* terms (in terms of how things stand with respect to Spirit’s commitments and entitlements – including coherence, justificatory status etc). Both of these are meaningful and significant ways of unpacking the conditions under which absolute knowing is *true*. But what is crucial with respect to Brandom’s view (and by reference to the discussion above about the possibility of self-criticism in I-We social practices) is that the ability to move between these ways of specifying truth-conditions does not require moving back and forth across a doxastic gap between rival discursive scorekeeping perspectives. Spirit itself is capable of doing this because “how things stand with objects” is not – as in Brandom’s view – constituted by how things look specified from an *outside*, third-person scorekeeping perspective; it is a status *internal* to Spirit’s own self-understanding.

As long as we understand the world and Spirit to be mutually mediated such that each is with itself in the other (i.e., as long as we do not see an ontological gap between them), the distinction between *de re* ascriptions of conceptual content and *de dicto* ascriptions need not be underwritten by a form of sociality that sees discursive practitioners keeping track of one another’s views across a doxastic gap (i.e., Brandom’s I-Thou social practices), but rather it can be understood as possible *within* a worldly and world-involving doxastic perspective (that of Spirit, the I that is We and the We that is I). Thus Hegel’s version of an I-We grounding of objectivity does not lose the possibility
for truth to be about the relationship of thought to objects; this relationship is internal to the “We” and partly constitutive of it. Of course, for Hegel, within this “We” perspective there are “I” and “Thou” perspectives from which *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions function very much as Brandom suggests. The point here is just that the very ability to specify *de re* what is also specifiable *de dicto*, and to do so without reducing the one to the other, does not depend upon the existence of an external (third-person) scorekeeping perspective symmetrical to that of the “We” and entitled to an equal share of discursive authority.

I will argue in Chapter 9 that Brandom’s conception of the natural world of objects does not adequately account for the necessity of overcoming the notion that the world confronts knowledge from across an ontological gap. This in spite of his attempt in the conclusion of MIE to do just this (by, for example, asserting that “facts are just true claims.”124) My argument will be that his commitment to normative phenomenalism pulls away from this view towards a kind of nominalism about the natural world; in other words, that he cannot eat both his phenomenalist cake and have a propositionalism about thought-world relationships too. The central core of Brandom’s project – which relies heavily on phenomenalism – pulls him toward nominalism, and his protestations of conceptual realism do not avail to check this pull; ultimately he is – as John McDowell argues – committed to an “interiorization of the space of reasons” where the world is left outside of that space. Hegel’s conception of absolute knowing does not divide Spirit’s standing in the space of reasons from its standing with respect to objects, because these are two sides of a coin. Because Brandom fails to properly account for this possibility, he needs to “rescue” the rationality of standings with respect to objects (i.e., their normative

124 MIE, 622.
significance for discursive practice, their conceptual articulation) by placing them within the scorekeeping perspective of another discursive practitioner attributing (in a \textit{de re} mode) statuses to an agent.\textsuperscript{125} This I-Thou view and not Hegel’s world-involving I-We view risks reducing objectivity to doxastic perspective and hence “losing the world.”

What all of this amounts to – taking together the self-opposing nature of absolute knowledge and the dual specifiability of its criterion of truth (as both how things stand with itself and how things stand with objects) – is that Hegel’s I-We social practices do not constitute an indefeasible, super-perspective that rules out the possibility that the commitments of the “We” can be answerable to the world. Although there is no “outside” perspective or “outside” world to adjudicate whether its commitments are true or false or to distinguish what is taken-true from what is in fact true, the self-opposing structure of absolute knowing underwrites a kind of fallibilism (where Spirit finds itself opposed to itself), and its world-involving nature underwrites the possibility that some forms of that self-opposition can be (if they are not all, in some respects) an opposition between how Spirit takes the world to be and how the world really is.\textsuperscript{126} I have said and clarified enough, I hope, to move on to an internal critique of Brandom, the main lines of which I have anticipated in the preceding paragraphs.

\textsuperscript{125} As I will discuss in Chapter 9, Brandom argues explicitly that his I-Thou social articulation of “the space of reasons” is necessary to make a non-interiorized epistemology intelligible. McDowell argues that this social articulation is just more interiorization, sociality notwithstanding.

\textsuperscript{126} I.e., if the world is not outside of Spirit, then this opposition is a self-opposition.
Chapter 6: Introduction to Part 3 and The First Person

Introduction to Part 3

In Part 1 of this essay, I situated Robert Brandom’s pragmatist semantics within the tradition of post-Kantian Idealism, arguing that – whatever the substantial differences between Brandom, Kant and Fichte – each addresses the same set of problems and that, moreover, Brandom is guided in his doing so by a set of commitments that overlap substantially with those of Kant and, especially, Fichte. My particular concern was with Brandom’s attempt to articulate a conception of discursive objectivity that is compatible with his commitment both to the idea that discursive practices are irreducibly normative, on the one hand, and to the idea that the norms that govern discursive practices are creatures of the activities of discursive practitioners themselves, on the other. I argued that his way of articulating such a conception bears a strong resemblance to Fichte’s own, in that both seek to ground objectivity in the essentially social nature of discursive practices. In doing so I noted one major difference between Brandom’s and Fichte’s respective social theories of objectivity, namely, that whereas Fichte is unequivocal about the essentially first-personal (and hence, self-conscious) character of discursive practice, Brandom’s thought pulls in two opposing directions with respect to the issue, with Brandom himself seeming to take as his “official” line that the “expressive resources” made possible by the use of the first person pronoun were not essential for a discursive practice capable of supporting objectivity.

In the second part, I argued that Hegel’s epistemological project in many ways overlaps with that of Fichte and Brandom. Hegel too attempts to provide a “social” theory of objectivity that simultaneously holds to the notion that such social practices are
irreducibly normative. However, in outlining his account of this, I noted some significant ways in which Hegel’s thought differs from that of Fichte and Brandom. Most importantly, I argued that, whereas for Fichte and Brandom, social practices with an I-Thou social structure float freely of concrete embeddedness in social practices with an I-We structure, Hegel insists that such free-floatingness is a form of theoretically illegitimate “abstraction,” and that the objectivity of both the norms for and content of discursive practice cannot be understood outside of an account of how they are embedded within more I-We social practices. Ancillary to this difference I further noted how this results in a different conception of subjectivity (self-consciousness) and truth, both of which concepts are inseparable from the systematic reflections of any of the figures under consideration.

The primary goal of this essay, however, is not simply to note that Brandom’s philosophy is not Hegelian in crucial respects (but is rather much more “Fichtean”); laying bare the differences between Brandom and Hegel is meant as prolegomena to an internal critique of Brandom’s own thought. That is, it is not merely my goal to argue that Brandom is not as Hegelian as he seems to think (or, perhaps more appropriately, that Hegel is not so Brandomian), but rather to argue that Brandom’s social theory of objectivity fails on its own terms, for reasons that Hegel’s version of such a theory is best placed to identify. Making this case is the burden of Part 3.

My starting point will be Brandom’s ambivalence about the first-person that I identified in part 1. I will argue that various of his own commitments as well as other considerations would require him to affirm the essentiality of the essential indexical for discursive practice as such and hence to affirm the irreducibility and necessity of the first-
person attitude for understanding the (social, inter-subjective) grounds for the objectivity of such practices. In other words, I will make the case that, contrary to his own remarks, Brandom must, on pain of incoherence, acknowledge that a discursive practitioner that is conscious must also be at least intuitively self-conscious. Because Brandom’s unwillingness to acknowledge this point depends upon a significant number of very foundational commitments of his project (e.g., the priority of anaphora to indexicals, of inference to representation, of rationality to logic, and of weak to strong de re beliefs), I will argue that the necessity of self-consciousness on his own terms should lead us to question many of the architectonic themes of his thought. But to leave it at that would be to go too quickly.

Thus, from the necessity of the first-person perspective for discursive practice, I will further argue that (again, on Brandom’s own terms) this necessity implies another, namely, that of the irreducibility of second-person attitudes to third person attitudes in an adequate reconstruction of discursive practice as a kind of “score-keeping” practice. In other words, the ability to take up the first-person perspective is co-relative with the ability to take a genuinely second-person perspective with respect to other discursive practitioners. Once again, I will show that this cuts against the grain of Brandom’s own reconstruction of discursive scorekeeping, which treats third-personal attitudes to be foundational to both first- and second-person perspectives; and hence the ambivalence with respect to the first-person in Brandom’s thought is extended also to an ambivalence about the second-person.

I will then proceed to argue that even robustly first- and second-personal I-Thou social practices (which, as just mentioned, Brandom needs but fails to provide) must be
embedded within social practices with a kind of I-We social structure and that, moreover, these social practices must be more than merely discursive. This follows, I will argue, from commitments that Brandom himself undertakes (whether by acknowledgment or consequentially), though it conflicts fundamentally with his consistent assertion that objectivity can be founded only social practices with an I-Thou structure and not upon those with an I-We structure. Thus the ambivalent consequences of Brandom’s theoretical commitments spread from his conception of subjectivity to both sides of his conception of sociality (i.e., to his views on the respective priority of I-Thou and I-We social practices). I will be making the case throughout that, in his explicit statements on these matters, Brandom comes out on the wrong side in each case.

Since it is within a certain account of subjectivity and sociality that Brandom attempts to articulate the basis of discursive objectivity, and since he consistently mischaracterizes subjectivity and sociality (even on his own terms), I will then go on to argue that he ends up with a distorted and internally insufficient account of objectivity. Brandom’s theory of objectivity, as discussed in Part 1, is ultimately deflationary, based on a deflationary account of intentionality and truth funded by his understanding of discursive scorekeeping. Given the above considerations about sociality and subjectivity, I will argue that a deflationary approach to intentionality and truth will not do; a social account of objectivity must involve a substantive and robust account of our interactions with a world of things. In short, Brandom’s account of discursive practice (and hence his account of objectivity, truth, subjectivity and sociality) floats too freely from a robust account of supra-discursive social practices, on the one hand, and from concrete, “ground-level” interactions with a world of things, on the other. It is Hegel, I contend,
that provides a more adequately robust and concrete social theory of objectivity from the perspective of which we can see the internal shortcomings of Brandom’s.

I will do more than just draw upon Hegel to make these points. Each part of the overall argument will involve weaving together different strands of criticism of Brandom’s project, most crucially from Jürgen Habermas, John McDowell, Sebastian Rödl, and John Haugeland, as well as invoking substantial considerations from the thought of Hegel and Heidegger. In each case, I cannot attempt to do full justice to the nuances and backgrounds of their arguments; what I will attempt to do instead is to show how a common thread connecting their various concerns, criticisms and alternatives can be discerned by following the line of inquiry I propose. In some cases, the views of these critics come into conflict;¹ I will not try to gloss these over, but nevertheless I want to show that a kind of synthesis is possible between their concerns and commitments that can amount to a coherent counter-perspective from which to both show the internal inconsistencies of Brandom’s arguments and to diagnose the underlying problems in his approach. The full contours of this approach are what I take Hegel to have offered most adequately.²

6.1. The First Person

As discussed at length in Part 1, Brandom locates the “objective” dimension of discursive practice – both the objectivity of propositional content and the objectivity of normative status – in the role played by de re ascriptions of attitudes and statuses in the inter-

¹ Most crucially between Habermas and McDowell on the proper way of conceiving “nature.”
² I will, however, conclude by suggesting that even Hegel’s perspective is insufficient because it is not sufficiently open to a transcendent religious horizon within which the (imminent) mutual imbrication of sociality, subjectivity and objectivity must be seen.
subjective practice of discursive scorekeeping. Through the use of *de re* ascriptions, we keep track of the commitments and entitlements of others by indexing them to our own and to the way the world appears to be from the standpoint of our own commitments. This allows us to keep track of the differences of perspective between ourselves and our interlocutors by: (a) stipulating the content of their commitments in terms of what in the world they are *about* (as seen from one’s own perspective); and (b) stipulating the difference between what they take their normative statuses (entitlements and commitments) to be and what (from one’s own perspective) they are really committed or entitled to. Discursive objectivity is underwritten by the fact that, *from the perspective of one attributing commitments to another*, the distinctions are always kept open between: (a’) what they are saying and what they are saying it about, and (b’) what they take themselves to be committed to and what they are actually committed to; there is never a point at which these distinctions do not hold. This goes even for one’s own attitudes and commitments, since it is always possible to recognize that these distinctions hold even for oneself, which is to say that it is always a standing possibility that one can take up an attributor’s perspective with respect to one’s own commitments and hence can invoke the distinctions made possible by *de re* style attributions.

What this amounts to, as discussed, is that Brandom is committed to the notion that objectivity is a structural feature of the perspective of an attributor in the practice of discursive scorekeeping. The attributor-perspective is specified in third-person terms: “she is committed to X”, “she is saying of X that it is Y,” “she takes herself to be entitled to X on the basis of Y, but she is not”. Even when turned on one’s own commitments, objectivity requires the ability to “hypothetically a sort of third-person scorekeeping
attitude toward my own present commitments and entitlements.”

This notion leaves open the question of what role first- (and second-) person attitudes play in a discursive practice that can be called “objective.” For Kant, Fichte, and Hegel such attitudes are inextricably tied to the possibility of objectivity, since each of them in their own ways accepts the transcendental unity of apperception as a condition for conscious as such.

I argued in Part 1 that many of Brandom’s commitments (acknowledged or consequential) point in the direction of affirming the indispensability of first-person attitudes (expressible only using “I”) for discursive practice. Amongst these were his affirmation of Perry’s argument about the special motivating role of the essential indexical in practical reasoning, the necessity of being able to stipulate one’s own perspective in discursive scorekeeping and, above all, the primacy of acknowledgement to other forms of undertaking. However, other commitments, which help to define the architectonic features of Brandom’s explanatory strategy as a whole, lead him to forthrightly deny the essentiality of the essential indexical.

Indexical expressions (such as those using “I”) are, on Brandom’s view, strongly de re insofar as they depend upon “being en rapport with a particular object in a stronger sense than merely having some way or another of denoting it.” These expressions involve ways of identifying or “picking out” just which object one is talking about in a way that goes beyond merely using a denoting expression for it. Many argue that what strongly de re expressions express is a direct representational connection with objects that is prior to and a condition for the “taking up” of such representations into inferentially articulated discourse. Brandom seeks to turn this “representationalist” explanatory

---

3 MIE, 605.
4 MIE, 548.
strategy on its head, insisting instead that the kind of special epistemic rapport expressed by strongly *de re* attitudes and expressions is made possible by a thoroughly inferential set of practices that can function with the use of only weak *de re* attitudes. He unpacks this prioritizing of inference to representation and hence of weak to strong *de re* attitudes by means of the priority of anaphora to indexical and demonstrative expressions with respect to the fine structure of discursive practice. Thus, just as inference precedes reference and anaphora precedes indexicals, so weak *de re* attitudes precede strong *de re* attitudes (such as those using the essential indexical “I”) in such a way that the latter “do not form an autonomously intelligible sort or stratum of beliefs,” and “what is of primary significance for understanding the representational dimension of thought and talk is the combination of doxastic perspectives expressed by (weak) *de re* specifications of conceptual contents… *not* the special sort of content possessed by strong *de re* beliefs, nor the special sort of rapport with objects they embody.”

In each of these couples (inference/representation, anaphora/indexicals, weak/strong *de re* beliefs), the first term denotes some part of discursive practice which is decisive for making rational (and hence) discursive practice possible, whereas the second term denotes a kind of “logical” vocabulary which does not make this practice possible as such, but which allows us to express explicitly what we are doing when we are involved in such practices. But one can be involved in a discursive practice, thinks Brandom (one can have practical “know-how” of the practice), without being able to *say* what one is doing (i.e., without having knowledge *that* one’s practical skills consist in this and that); a discursive practice can be rational without being logical, hence it can be inferential without using specifically representational locutions, it can employ anaphora without

---

5 MIE, 551-2.
specifically indexical expressions and it can express weak de re beliefs without being able to express strong de re beliefs. Since “logic is the organ of semantic self-consciousness,” it is then possible for a practice (and hence for practitioners) to be (semantically) conscious but not yet (semantically) self-conscious; in other words, one can be a skilled practitioner in a discursive practice without being able to do the sorts of things made possible by the use of essentially indexical expressions like “I.” For Brandom to admit that semantic self-consciousness (and hence “I”) was essential to the existence of objective discursive practices would upset the fundamental features of his explanatory strategy, namely, the prioritizing of rationality to logic, of inference to reference, of anaphora to indexical and of weak to strong de re beliefs. He can hardly continue to be a Brandomian if he accepts this.

I will now argue that he cannot be a successful Brandomian either way, since he must on his own terms admit what he cannot admit without abandoning his central explanatory strategy. Without the conceptual resources made possible by the use of the essential indexical, essential features of Brandom’s social-practice account of meaning, objectivity and truth would be unintelligible. My central argument will be that the social-perspectival character of his conception of discursive practice cannot be made sense of without some account of what it is to have a perspective, and that this in turn requires of anyone who has a perspectives that she be able to take up (and express) a first-person perspective. In doing so I will weave together arguments from Sebastian Rödl and Mark Lance and Rebecca Kukla.
6.2. Having a Perspective

Already in Chapter 1 I argued that the primacy of acknowledgment as a mode of undertaking discursive commitments and entitlements implied that Brandom must make room for irreducibly first-personal (i.e., self-) ascriptions as a condition of possibility for being able to participate in discursive practice. On Brandom’s model, discursive practice can be portrayed as an ongoing score-keeping operation in which players in a language-game keep track of both their own and their interlocutor’s commitments and entitlements, remaining constantly cognizant of the fact that the content of these discursive statuses varies between different speakers because each speaker has a different set of collateral commitments that determine the inferential proprieties that the statuses in question are taken to have. It is the ways in which we keep track of these differences in score (most centrally through the use of de re ascriptions) that determine both the capacity of the practice to be objective and crucially also the ability of the practice to function at all as a communicative one. Without these tools, we would be unable to communicate, since communication just is discursive score-keeping (giving and taking reasons). Thus being able to negotiate across the doxastic gaps between different perspectives (or points of view) just is the ability to be sapient if, as Brandom insists, sapience just is mastery of a discursive practice.

Now, if one were unable to acknowledge commitments and entitlements, one could not negotiate across a doxastic gap by the use of de re ascriptions. One cannot keep track of the difference between someone else’s point of view and one’s own if one cannot take oneself to have a point of view, in other words, to be able to say “I believe X”
or “I am not entitled to Y.”

Having a point of view in the sense of being a competent discursive practitioner depends upon being able to take oneself to have a point of view; that is what acknowledgment does, and it essentially involves first-person reference that is epistemically strong (because you know whose point of view you’re talking about simply by being the person you’re talking about⁷), and hence it can only be articulated by using “I.” I want now to fill in this argument first by following Lance and Kukla in their argument that having a point of view necessarily involves first-person reference, and, second, by following Rödl in arguing that even ascribing a point of view to another (or ascribing points of view to a variety of practitioners from the perspective of a theoretician describing the practice) involves ascribing to that other a first-person perspective.

For Lance and Kukla, Brandom’s pragmatics fail to account for the necessarily agential, bodily and irreducibly perspectival dimensions of discursive practices, as a result of his continuing insistence on the explanatory primacy of assertion over all other kinds of speech acts. The kind of “practice” that Brandom describes is “individuated merely formally”⁸ because “the only pragmatic dimension we are interested in is in the

---

⁶ This is a way of rephrasing Kant’s argument for the necessity of a unity of apperception as the standing possibility of saying “I think.”
⁷ Rödl puts this point thus: “First person knowledge depend on a knowledge-providing relationship with the object. This relationship must differ from perception in that it must follow from its nature that she to whom one bears it is oneself… First person reference depends upon a way of knowing an object such that I know an object in this way by being this object.” Sebastian Rödl, Self-Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): p. 8-9. [Hereafter cited as SC] This is a way of establishing first-person knowledge as what Brandom calls strongly de re, since it provides a special kind of epistemic access to the object of that knowledge.
⁸ Mark Lance and Rebecca Kukla, “Perception, Language and the First Person,” in Weiss and Wanderer, eds., Reading Brandom: On Making It Explicit (London: Routledge: 2010), 116. [Hereafter cited as PLFP]. Unfortunately, I acquired the book that this manuscript is published in too late in the process of revising this essay to engage with the many compelling essays (and, indeed with Brandom’s responses) published therein. I should remark, however, that, though in his response to Lance and Kukla, Brandom insists that his theory in MIE provides ample resources for an understanding of the first-personal character of discursive practice (partly on the grounds that I have been urging, namely the irreducibility of acknowledgment to attribution), he does not recognize the structural dynamics of his project that militate against his recognition of the first-person. In other words, in his response, Brandom comes out on one side of the ambivalence with respect to the first-person that I have described, but makes no attempt to reconcile
way truth claims circulate and grant commitments and entitlements.”

This overriding concern with the exchange of propositionally contentful reasons blinds him to the importance of other pragmatic dimensions of discursive practice expressed in non-assertoric speech acts that, according to Lance and Kukla, actually ground the possibility of circulating truth claims between different speakers. The reason why the primacy of the propositional blinds Brandom thus is that “a crucial feature of declarative truth claims is that they are not essentially indexed to any speaker or audience – they are inherently ‘impersonal’ rather than structurally bound to a first-, second-, or third-person voice.”

Any declarative (Lance and Kukla use the example “Ottawa is the capital of Canada”), since its pragmatic force consists in its status as a truth-claim, “can be translated from one personal voice to another without changing its force in the least;” i.e., it still asserts the same content regardless of whether it is put in first-, second-, or third-person form. Since this dimension is, according to Brandom, explanatorily fundamental, differences of voice will make little explanatory difference; hence his tendency to see all pragmatic moves in a language game as being translatable into third-person terms.

Lance and Kukla argue that, in addition to the “agent-neutral” practice of asserting, there are “types of utterance to which pragmatic voice is structurally
essential,” including imperatives and vocatives, which must be issued in the second-person voice in order to have their pragmatic force. These utterances are agent-relative in that they depend for their pragmatic force on being spoken in a particular voice, and they cannot be simply translated (salve force) into any other. Brandom, they argue, because he “builds his philosophical account of language entirely out of assertions… makes no room for any discovery that agent-relative features of discourse play an important role in constituting or enabling discursive practices within a linguistic community.” This is precisely what Lance and Kukla proceed to argue, namely, that agent-relative utterances do play a necessary enabling role in discursive practice that Brandom does not account for; and, moreover, that these utterances show the irreducible (and untranslatable) necessity of the first-person perspective.

In the first place, they argue – as I have above – that “we cannot engage in a Brandomian practice of imputing and assuming entitlements and commitments unless (at a bare minimum) we are able to responsively recognize other speakers, their claims and their normative position in a game of giving and asking of reasons, and to actively take up and accord normative statuses ourselves.” More particularly, we have to have the conceptual resources to be able to locate ourselves within the web of circulating truth-claims, and this means being able to recognize “which scores are mine and which changes in score affect me.” No perspectival practice can function without self-locating beliefs, a belief of which kind “can’t itself be just another piece of third personal

---

13 PLFP, 117.
14 PLFP, 118.
15 PLFP, 118.
16 PLFP, 118.
theoretical knowledge” as Perry forcefully argues (and which Brandom implicitly at least seems to acknowledge). 

That much I have already argued. What Lance and Kukla add is a demonstration that these agent-relative beliefs are intimately tied to bodily acts of perceiving (such that the first-person perspective must be that of an embodied agent) and that “a functioning language must include speech acts that give expression to such perceptual episodes and mirror their agent-relativity,” and hence that any possible language game must include irreducibly first-personal expressions. In the first case, they argue that perceptual episodes (which Brandom acknowledges as are necessary discursive-entry points) are structurally agent-relative, such that they cannot be unpacked theoretically as “funny kinds of assertions” but rather are “essentially individuating” in such a way that they “cannot be shared among several agents even though several agents may perceive the same thing as a result of similar interactions with the world.” Brandom’s way of unpacking perceptual episodes as quasi-assertions cannot account for the ways in which they are structurally first-personal and hence agent relative. It is not just that my and your perception of the same object may differ with respect their respective contents (given our different bodily positions, eyesight, etc) – which are expressible assertorically – but that they differ in to whom they are essentially indexed, which is a formal (or structural) feature of the episode that makes it nontransferable.

---

17 PLFP, 118-119.
18 See Chapter 3. I argued that Fichte clearly sees the need for self-locating belief in a way that anticipates Perry and Lewis’ (and Lance and Kukla’s) arguments, but that Brandom gives these short shrift (or at least that he fails to grasp their theoretical significance).
19 PLFP, 119.
20 PLFP, 119-120.
21 PLFP, 120.
22 Differences in content between episodes – understood as differences in commitment and entitlement as a result of the perceptual episode – can be overcome or transferred between different perceivers. I may
Secondly, and more importantly for my purposes, they go on to argue that this structural agent-relativity of perceptual episodes must be expressed as such in any possible discursive practice. They do this by identifying a speech act that does just that and then go on to argue that it is “essential to any language rich enough to offer the capacity to make empirical claims.”

Recognitives, argue Lance and Kukla, are just such speech acts. Saying “Lo, a rabbit!” does not “merely make the declarative claim that a rabbit is present. Nor does it merely make the declarative claim that someone sees a rabbit. Rather, it serves a special recognitive function: it marks or expresses my detection of a rabbit. It is the recognizing… that is given expression in such a claim.”

From a discursive-pragmatic perspective, my saying “Lo, a rabbit!” might entitle you to the claim that there is a rabbit or to the claim that I see a rabbit, but you are not entitled to utter “Lo, a rabbit” “unless you see the bunny yourself.” Recognitives are thus agent-relative, they are essentially indexed to the speaker such that they individuate her (in that she and only she is entitled to utter it on the basis of her perceptual experience), “and, likewise, they are inherently and ineliminably spoken in the first-person singular voice.”

Unlike saying, in the assertoric mood, “there’s a rabbit in the bush” – which my tokening can entitle you to say exactly the same thing – saying “Lo, a rabbit” expresses, not a truth claim, but an act of perceiving, which is essentially first-personal.

Lance and Kukla then go on to argue that such essentially first-personal locutions are necessary for “any functioning language with the capacity to make empirical
Such a language can, of course, include a wide variety of ways of undertaking, inheriting, etc., empirically significant claims but, say Lance and Kukla, “to the extent that our discourse as a whole counts as about and accountable to the concrete empirical world… our declarative entitlements must be traceable, though chains of entitlement, back to direct experiences, whether ours or someone else’s.”

Without any discursive-entrances, in the form of perceptual experiences, there would be nothing to talk about (at least in empirical discourse); this is “fairly uncontentious” and something that Brandom (following McDowell) does not deny. However, Lance and Kukla have already argued that these discursive-entrances are not – as Brandom asserts – agent-neutral in structure or form, but are rather agent-relative; they are “inherently individuating and first-personal.”

This feature must, moreover, show up in language in order that we can have a way “to distinguish, within language, between those empirical claims that are merely inherited through the passing on of an inference or resassertion licenses, and those that function as the termination of a set of claims in someone’s receptive contact with the external world.”

If there were no way to mark this distinction in language, we would have no grounds for thinking that attempts to justify any set of empirical claims is not just the frictionless spinning in a void that McDowell is so keen to avoid. It is not sufficient that we can declaratively report on our perceptual episodes, since – qua assertoric speech acts – “making such assertions would precisely not give expression to the termination of empirical knowledge in first-person, owned experience – an experience that is practically

---

27 PLFP, 124.
28 PLFP, 124-125.
29 PLFP, 125.
30 PLFP, 125.
31 PLFP, 125.
grasped as mine.” 33 Without the expressive resources made available by recognitives (and similarly essentially agent-relative first-person expressions) we would have no ability to demonstrate the grounding of our empirical claims in experience, and hence empirical justification could not get off the ground (and, hence, a discursive practice of giving and asking for such justifications would be impossible).

Lance and Kukla thus conclude that, on Brandom’s own terms, “the speaking subject who participates in the Brandomian game of giving and asking for reasons is one who is ineliminably embodied in a way that allows her to have a concrete point of view and to speak in a first person voice.” 34 Brandom’s inability to acknowledge the irreducibility and essentiality of differences of voice (between first-, second- and third-persons) – which results from his prioritizing of assertion as the fundamental speech act – makes him unable to articulate how it is possible for discursive practitioners to take up a point-of-view within a perspectival practice and to thus get involved in the practice of giving and asking for reasons between different points-of-view. Lance and Kukla call this a “friendly – albeit serious – amendment” 35 to Brandom’s program; what I have said above about the choices that underlie his blindness to the matter of voice, I am not sure how friendly the amendment is. I will now turn to an argument to the effect that the first-person voice is essential, not just for a participant in a discursive practice, but also for a theoretician describing the practice as it were “from the outside.” In doing so, I hope to show from yet another angle the indispensability of the first-person perspective and the expressive resources it makes available.

33 PLFP, 126.
34 PLFP, 127.
35 PLFP, 127.
6.3. Attributing a Perspective

The heart of Rödl’s argument is that one cannot explain what and why an agent believes what they do – in his terms, one cannot offer a “belief explanation” – without ascribing to her the ability to offer that same explanation from a first-person perspective as “a ground upon which she determines it as something it is right to believe.”\(^\text{36}\) That is, the ability to give a third-personal account of someone’s belief – an account that ascribes beliefs to them and gives some account of why they believe what they do – depends upon the capacity of that person to offer that account in the first person. If the latter was not possible, then there could be no valid belief-explanations, since there would be no answer to the question: what does she believe and why? Brandom’s model of discursive scorekeeping depends upon the ability to offer these kinds of belief-explanations, both by the theorist describing the practice and by participants in the practice. In the latter case, “keeping score” on one’s interlocutors means making claims about what they are committed to and on what grounds. Since the contents of commitments are determined inferentially, one cannot decide upon the content of a particular commitment without being able to articulate the inferential grounds upon which one’s interlocutor holds that commitment (in other words, attributing a commitment and explaining its grounds are not separate activities). In the case of consequential commitments, the grounds may not be inferences endorsed by the speaker herself (but rather by the attributor, and hence specified de re), but – as discussed in Part 1 – this cannot be done unless one can attribute at least some acknowledged commitments to the speaker and, furthermore, unless one can articulate the content of those commitments in terms of inferences that she would

\(^{36}\) SC, 88.
endorse.\textsuperscript{37} Doing this just is offering a belief-explanation, and hence offering belief-explanations is indispensable to discursive scorekeeping.

In the case of the theorist describing a discursive practice, belief-explanation of this sort is essential since, in doing so, she must represent discursive scorekeepers as forming belief-explanations as part and parcel of their discursive practice for precisely the reasons just discussed. Forming belief explanations, of course, means undertaking (by acknowledgment) certain commitments and entitlements oneself (i.e., beliefs to the effect that one’s interlocutor believes X on the basis of Y, etc.), and hence a theorist must represent discursive scorekeepers as having and formulating beliefs on some grounds or other; in other words, he must offer belief explanations of their belief explanations. If Rödl is right that belief explanation as such cannot happen except by attributing a first-person perspective, then even a theorist describing a discursive practice in entirely third-personal terms must also attribute first-person knowledge. Thus no matter which perspective one wants to treat as explanatorily fundamental (that of a participant in a discursive practice or that of a theorist describing it\textsuperscript{38}), first-person knowledge (essentially invoking the first-person pronoun) is theoretically indispensable. I shall discuss Rödl’s argument for the essential premise, namely, that belief explanation is one

\textsuperscript{37} These explanations are given \textit{de dicto} (i.e., in terms of commitments and inferences that the speaker would be prepared to endorse). Hence the priority of \textit{de dicto} over \textit{de re} attributions. Cf. MIE, 522-526.

\textsuperscript{38} It is not perfectly clear which perspective Brandom wants to treat as fundamental. Steven Levine calls the first option – of treating the perspective of a discursive practitioner fundamental – “internal expressivism” and the second – that of a theorist reconstructing the practice – “external expressivism.” (Levine, “Expressivism and I-Beliefs in Brandom’s \textit{Making it Explicit},” 104-106). He argues that, though Brandom makes some comments to the effect that internal expressivism is the way to go (cf. MIE, 644), he nevertheless consistently privileges external expressivist explanations on the grounds that only they can show the rootedness of semantic phenomena (truth, reference, meaning, etc.) in pre-semantic (but nevertheless normative) practical attitudes (Levine, 107-108). Though I think that Levine is right about this, Rödl’s point here discussed counts against Brandom whichever case obtains. This difference will become important, however, in my discussion in Chapter 7 of the place of second-person attitudes in Brandom’s discursive practices.
with the process of theoretical reasoning, which must be making the decision about what it is right to believe that can be offered in first-personal terms.

According to Rödl, believing just is answering the question of what it is right to believe; in other words, belief just is the conclusion of theoretical reasoning.\(^3^9\) This accords with Brandom’s conception of belief as an inferentially determined commitment; for Brandom, one is committed to a claim (and thus one can be said to “believe” it) as a consequence of endorsing certain inferential antecedents to it; endorsing those antecedents just is being committed to the claim. Adding an act of endorsement or acknowledgment to one’s commitment is not necessary for belief, since there are things which we can rightly be said to believe, Brandom asserts, that one does not acknowledge or endorse.\(^4^0\) There is no gap between making the inferences that determine what to believe and the act of believing; they are the same act.

From this notion, Rödl draws some important conclusions. If belief just is the conclusion of an order of theoretical reasoning that determines what it is right to believe, then belief is by its very nature subject to a normative order and, furthermore, this order determines what it is to believe. Explaining belief, then, depends upon grasping and representing this normative order. To explain what someone believes and why, one must describe how her commitments, dispositions, etc., conform (or fail to conform) to the order of theoretical reason. This order, however, must be more than merely inferential. To say that it is right to believe \(q\) on the grounds that I believe \(p\) does not explain what it is to believe either \(p\) or \(q\), because my belief that \(p\) just is my conclusion that it is right to believe \(p\): “an inference leads from one thing it is right to believe to another, and we

\(^{3^9}\) MIE, 66-67. Thus it is not that one decides what it is right to believe and then undertakes to believe it; rather one’s conclusion that is it right to believe \(X\) or \(Y\) just is believing it.

\(^{4^0}\) Cf. MIE, 507.
cannot explain the notion of something it is right to believe by saying that it is right to believe what follows from what it is right to believe.”41 The notion of inference itself is in fact empty until we can find another answer to the question of what it is right to believe; what is needed is some kind of ground that can show the unity of all propositions it is right to believe precisely as something it is right to believe. This unity cannot be provided by inference, since inference itself presupposes it.

This unity, furthermore, cannot be coherence as the norm of the order that governs belief, because it is not a norm that is necessarily represented by a reasoner in answering the question of what to believe. Referring specifically to Brandom’s claim that recognizing that I hold incompatible beliefs is sufficient grounds for self-criticism, Rödl asks how it is that this recognition shows me that “I deploy an inadequate concept, i.e., that the norms that constitute it are inadequate.”42 In order to have this recognition – in order to recognize that holding to both p and non p constitutes a problem in the norms of inference I employ – I must have some concept of the unity of all my beliefs such that it excludes the possibility of holding both simultaneously. The source of this concept of unity, however, cannot be the “given norms of inference” themselves, since it is just these norms that led me to hold incompatible beliefs simultaneously: “Following given inferential norms, I come to be committed to p and I come to be committed to non p. This is supposed to show, and show me, that I employ an inadequate concept…. If indeed it shows me that, then the order under which I know myself to be having these commitments cannot be identified with given norms of inference. Inferentialism… can

---

41 SC, 70.
42 SC, 70.
give no account of this order." 43 What is important here is Rödl’s conclusion that the order that gives unity to and hence explains belief must be represented by a believer44 and that inferentialism alone is insufficient to articulate how that is possible. To put it differently, because inferentialism cannot show how it is possible that a believer can represent the unity of belief in their believing, it is an inadequate account of the normative order that constitutes belief.

After rejecting another candidate for the key to understanding the normative order that constitutes belief – namely, sensation unified by calculation – again, on the grounds that “a non-rational cause [sensation] affords no representation of the unity of its effects,”45 Rödl offers an account of what this key must be. The source of the unity of all of our acts of knowing cannot be found in any of those acts, but rather in the “power of knowledge”46 that underlies each act. If I answer the question “what is right to believe” by saying “It is right to think \( p \) because \( q \)”, I have represented no unifying ground upon that can explain what it is to believe either \( p \) or \( q \).47 On the other hand, if I answer the question by saying “It is right to think \( p \), for I have perceived it”48 I have represented something more than just accepted beliefs, I have made recourse to “a new description of my relation to the proposition in question,”49 i.e., I have represented \( p \) as an act of a power of knowledge in myself, namely, the power of receptive perceptual knowledge.

---

43 SC, 70, n. 6.
44 “[I]t is useless to ensure, or stipulate unity… if the subject does not represent the unity. And… it is the representation of the relevant unity that requires concepts that depend on other forms of reasoning [than inferential coherence].” SC, 70.
45 SC, 80.
46 SC, 83.
47 Rödl thus calls inferential grounding a search for “finite grounds,” each of which – since they are “exhausted by propositions following from it” (SC, 82) – do not represent an order that transcends the order of accepted beliefs. Without such an order, no account of the unity and ground of accepted beliefs as such is possible.
48 SC, 82.
49 SC, 82.
This power underlies each of my beliefs, but is not exhausted by them (no power is nothing but the sum of its acts); hence unlike inference or sensation, it can provide a ground of unity for my beliefs (all of my beliefs form a unity insofar as they are acts of the same power of knowledge) that transcends the set of beliefs themselves. Being acts of a power of receptive knowledge constitutes a formal unity for all of my beliefs, hence it provides an answer to the question of what it is to believe: believing is an act of a power of knowledge. When I attempt to answer the question “what is it right to believe?” I necessarily represent to myself this unity of beliefs (without which I could not think of them as my beliefs): “the unity of all answers to the question what to believe of this form is contained in the form of each answer. Hence, the unity is necessary and necessarily represented.” This implies that believing – answering the question what to believe – necessarily involves a form of self-consciousness, since it must represent beliefs as acts of a power of knowledge, which can only be one’s own. In other words, believing necessarily involves representing oneself as the ground of unity of one’s own beliefs; self-consciousness is a formal feature of theoretical reasoning and hence of belief.

But Rödl’s argument doesn’t end there. Engaging in theoretical reasoning is not only self-conscious, but, furthermore, self-consciousness is an essential feature of third-person belief-explanation. Such an explanation seeks to ascertain the cause of someone’s belief. Empiricists may seek such a cause in a sensory event of some sort, neuroscientists seek it in a brain state, but neither of these, according to Rödl counts as a belief explanation, since neither of them represent its object (what is to be explained) as a belief. This is because a belief just is the conclusion of theoretical reasoning and hence

---

50 Hence Rödl calls it an “infinite ground.”
51 SC, 83.
the cause of a belief must ipso facto be the grounds upon which that conclusion was arrived at. To represent the cause of a belief as anything other than its rational theoretical grounds is to fail to portray the belief as a belief, but to describe it as something else. It is a formal condition of genuine belief-explanation that one represents the belief as a result of a causality of reason rather than a natural causality. This requires that the “why” of belief explanation (“why does X believe Y?”) is identical with the “why” of theoretical reasoning (“what should I believe and why?”); the cause referred to in explaining the belief is identical to the ground referred to in theoretical reasoning.

We have just seen that, in theoretical reasoning, this ground must be self-conscious; i.e., it must represent one’s own power of knowledge as the infinite ground (source of unity) of one’s beliefs. If the causality referred to in belief explanation is identical to the ground of theoretical reasoning, then it follows that the causality must be represented as self-conscious; i.e., as necessarily involving first-person reference on the part of the believer. This implies, moreover, that a valid belief explanation (one that correctly explains what and why someone believes X) must be such that “its subject is in a position to give this explanation. The causality of the explanation contains the subject’s representation of this very causality.” Belief explanation in the third-person must be

52 SC, 89-91.
53 This (as yet) doesn’t rule out a kind of “error theory” about belief-explanation, which admits the point that belief explanation necessarily requires positing a causality of reason, but which takes an anti-realistic attitude toward the whole project of belief-explanation, perhaps preferring to say that – whatever the pragmatic value of belief explanation – it fails to actually “limn the structure of reality” the way an empiricistic or naturalistic explanation (that forgoes the language of belief entirely) would do. This, I take it, is the point of Quine’s “double standard.” Cf. W.V.O. Quine, Word and Object (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960): pp. 216-221. Paul Franks raises this possibility as a response – which he attributes to Salomon Maimon – to Kant’s anti-skeptical transcendental arguments in “From Quine to Hegel: Naturalism, Anti-Realism, and Maimon’s Question Quid Facti.” However, since my point here is to argue that what Brandom accepts is necessary for discursive practice (belief-explanation) necessarily requires first-person knowledge, rather than arguing for the necessity of positing first-person knowledge as necessary for any true account of the world, I will not follow up on this point.
54 SC, 97. Italics in original.
rooted in that offered in the first-person, i.e., by the believer herself. This first-person knowledge of the causality or ground of belief cannot simply be translated into a kind of third-person knowledge ascribed to oneself, since – like all first person knowledge – it is immediate in the sense that the thing known (why I believe X) is not a separate reality from the knowledge of it: “When I know that someone believes that \( p \) from ascertaining that \( p \) is true [i.e., from concluding in theoretical reason that it is right to believe that \( p \)], then I know that \( I \) believe that \( p \).”\textsuperscript{55} If belief just is the conclusion of theoretical reasoning, then the concept of belief cannot be grasped (either by a believer or by one explaining that belief) without seeing that first-person reference is a formal feature thereof.\textsuperscript{56}

According to L & K and Rödl, then, Brandom must make space in his account of discursive practices for irreducibly first-personal thought and reference.\textsuperscript{57} This follows, they argue from commitments Brandom himself holds or from the conditions for features of discursive practice that he cannot do without. For L & K, this primarily concerns Brandom’s need to articulate what it is to take up a point of view in a discursive practice; without essentially first-personal attitudes and expressions, no one could have a point of view within a discursive practice. Rödl expands this by showing that one cannot attribute a point of view to others (by offering belief explanations) without presupposing essentially first-personal attitudes on their part. I have discussed these claims at length in

\textsuperscript{55} SC, 100.
\textsuperscript{56} "We have uncovered the inner nexus of self-consciousness and belief. Beliefs essentially figure in explanations that, in virtue of their form, she who is the object of the explanation is in a position to give and that she therefore expresses by the first-person pronoun. Someone who falls under the concept of belief brings herself under it in first-person thought. Acquiring the power of theoretical thought and belief is acquiring the concept of belief and with it the power of first person thought.” (SC, 103).
\textsuperscript{57} For neither is it acceptable that first-person thought be merely implicit; they both argue that a functioning discursive practice must come equipped with linguistic devices (recognitives, the first-person singular pronoun) that can make first-person thought explicit.
order to elaborate my contention that acknowledgment must be unpacked in first-personal terms and that Brandom himself cannot do without such a notion if he wants to move from the perspectival nature of social discursive practices to semantic and deontic objectivity. Before I conclude this case by discussing its consequences for Brandom’s system, I will address a recent paper in which Brandom can be taken to offer just what I (along with Lance and Kukla and Rödl) have suggested that he does not.

6.4. Self-Recognition

In “The Structure of Desire and Recognition: Self-Consciousness and Self-Constitution,” Brandom offers a reconstruction of the dialectic that leads from desire to self-consciousness in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. There he offers an account of how a practice involving mutual recognition must be undertaken by “essentially self-conscious creatures.” Though offered as an account of Hegel’s arguments, Brandom’s *de re* historiographical approach “translates” Hegel’s account into Brandom’s own preferred philosophical vocabulary and can thus be read also as offering an account of self-consciousness that Brandom himself would be prepared to endorse. I will argue, however, that the kind of self-consciousness offered in this paper does not satisfy the requirements of an irreducibly first-person perspective discussed above.

Brandom interprets the relation between desire and self-consciousness to be structural or formal: the basic structure of desire is also the basic structure of self-

---

59 SDR 127.
consciousness, but at a higher level.\textsuperscript{60} Whereas for simple desire, this structure plays out in the desire for, say, food, self-consciousness originates in the desire for recognition, which involves also recognizing others as desirers. Without getting into unnecessary detail, for my purposes it will suffice to focus on the role that \textit{reciprocal recognition} plays in Brandom’s reconstruction of the foundation of self-consciousness in desiring creatures.

All erotic awareness has a tripartite structure, according to Brandom’s Hegel: “1: an \textit{attitude} (desire), e.g. \textit{hunger}; 2: a responsive \textit{activity}, e.g. \textit{eating}; and 3: a \textit{significance}, e.g. \textit{food}.”\textsuperscript{61} Someone who exhibits this kind of desire \textit{takes} (a practical attitude) something (say, a donut) as something (food, a kind of significance) and by engaging in an activity (eating); such a person is a food-taker in that she can take something to be food. In more general terms, a person who exhibits this tripartite structure of erotic awareness is a K-taker. With respect to simple desire, this does not seem to be self-conscious, but it is the way this structure unfolds with respect to a particular kind of desire that holds the key to self-consciousness. The desire for recognition has this same structure, but it also involves attributing this structure to someone. If I seek recognition from another I must exhibit the \textit{attitude} of taking them to be someone capable of recognizing me and hence they have the \textit{significance} for me of being a self. That is, I must take them to be a K-taker: “recognizing others is attributing to them the practical significance of exhibiting the tripartite structure of erotic awareness: taking them to be takers.”\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} This resembles, then, Brandom’s idea that Hegel sees a structural isomorphism between concepts and selves in “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism.”
\textsuperscript{61} SDR, 138.
\textsuperscript{62} SDR, 139.
Brandom then goes on to argue that, when this recognition is fully developed, it necessarily involves self-consciousness on the part of all participants such that “being able to treat things as subjects things can be something for, recognizing them and being self-conscious in the sense of reciprocal recognition are two aspects of one achievement, two sides of one coin.”\(^{63}\) This is because part of taking someone to be a K-taker is attributing a kind of authority to their K-takings. If John is to recognize Sally as a food-taker, he must attribute to her the ability to take things to have the significance of food for her. But this is a normative judgment, since it can only be done from John’s own perspective about what is and isn’t food; i.e., he must apply a standard of correct or successful food-takings to Sally’s food-takings. If Sally consistently failed to give correct food-takings on John’s view, she could not be thought to be a food-taker; attributing to her the status of a food-taker requires being disposed to “take as a K the thing you took to be a K.”\(^{64}\) This means that John must take Sally to be a (defeasible) authority on what is and is not food.

In the sophisticated case of the desire for recognition, the desirer (John) must not just recognize the one from whom he desires recognition (Sally) as a K-taker in general, but more specifically he must recognize her as a recognizer; in his recognition of her, he must take her to be engaged in the same activity (recognition) that he is engaged in so recognizing her. In that sense, Brandom says, recognition is “de jure transitive.”\(^{65}\) He then goes on to argue that “if recognition could be shown to be de jure transitive, then any case in which it was also de facto symmetric (reciprocal) would be one in which it

\(^{63}\) SDR, 140.
\(^{64}\) SDR, 141.
\(^{65}\) SDR, 143.
was also *de facto* reflexive;" in other words reflexivity (self-recognition) would follow from reciprocal recognition. This is because of the requirement that in recognizing Sally, John must attribute authority to her recognitions. If his recognition of her is reciprocated by her recognition of him, he must therefore be disposed to take her recognition of him to be correct and he must thus be self-aware. In taking Sally to be a recognizer, John must be capable of “recognizing whomever…she recognizes.” Put differently, to apply the concept of a robust “self” (not just a K-taker, but a recognizer) to Sally, John must apply the concept of a “self” to himself just as long as Sally recognizes him as a self. Since “self-consciousness... consists in applying this practical proto-conception of a self to oneself,” this kind of reciprocal recognition [where John recognizes Sally as a recognizer of (amongst others) John] is essentially self-conscious. Brandom says that “a community... is implicitly constituted by one’s own robust recognitions, and actually achieved insofar as they are reciprocated. That is the sort of reciprocally cognitive community within which alone genuine (robust) self-consciousness is possible: the ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and the ‘We’ that is ‘I.’” Thus Brandom concludes that, for Hegel, mutual recognition essentially involves self-consciousness and *vice-versa*.

I want to argue now that, even if incorporated within Brandom’s own account of the social-perspectival character of discursive practices, this reconstruction of the grounds for the essentiality of self-consciousness does not provide the resources that L & K, and Rödl argue (correctly on my view) are indispensable to Brandom’s own project, namely,

---

66 SDR, 143.
67 SDR, 144.
68 SDR, 148. I have suggested before and will argue at some length that this is not an adequate concept of community to satisfy the requirements of a genuine “We” on Hegel’s (and, indeed on Brandom’s) terms, since discursive authority is still parcelled out only between individuals; i.e., the social structure is still merely I-Thou and a kind of I-We sociality is necessary to explain robust self-consciousness.
a genuinely and irreducibly first-person perspective. It is not his assertion that mutual recognition and self-consciousness are correlates (“two sides of the same coin”) that I object to – the next section will argue that this is in fact true, but that Brandom fails to do it justice – but rather that both mutual recognition and self-consciousness are, on Brandom’s reconstruction, couched in third-person terms. For Brandom, both recognition and self-recognition (self-consciousness) consist in the application of the “conception of a self” to either someone else or oneself. In other words, it consists in ascribing a certain normative status to the subject of the ascription. The ascription of normative statuses, in Brandom’s discursive pragmatics, tends to be either agent-neutral – and hence translatable into either first-, second- or third-person voices – or else essentially grounded in the third-person voice. Thus in the case of self-consciousness, one finds oneself as the subject of an ascription of a normative status (being a self) by another to whom this attitude of ascription is ascribed. Both John’s recognition of Sally as an ascriber of normative statuses (which consists of ascribing to her the conception of a self) and his self-recognition as the subject of one of her ascriptions of the conception a self are specifiable in agent-neutral or third-personal terms. Just as self-criticism for Brandom consists in taking up a “hypothetically third-person stance” with respect to oneself so self-consciousness is mediated by taking up a (double) third-person stance with respect to another.

But even on its own terms this will not do. Self-consciousness cannot be the ascription of the conception of a self to oneself, particularly as reconstructed by Brandom. This is because the self-recognition that is grounded in my recognition of

---

69 See Chapter 3, on the idea of a self as a normative status.
70 Cf. Chapter 2.
another as a recognizer of myself cannot lead to genuine self-recognition unless it is already grasped that I am the subject of her recognition; that the person she is recognizing is me. If John is to recognize himself as the subject of Sally’s recognition, it is not sufficient for him to be able to say “I recognize Sally recognizing John;” what is missing is his ability to grasp that “I am John.” That understanding cannot be achieved by the application of the concept of self to John on the authority of Sally’s application of it to John; John must already grasp himself as a self in an immediate (or in Fichte’s terms “intuitive”) way in order not just to apply the concept to John but to apply it to himself as John. This case is analogous to the need for a self-locating belief to ground the applicability of certain information in order to motivate practical action as discussed by John Perry.71 If a man lost in a library has a detailed map including even the information of his own location – but specified in third personal terms – he cannot use that information to find his way out unless he can grasp that he is the person referred to on the map. Self-consciousness might be thought of as self-location within the space of reasons, but Brandom’s account of how it emerges from reciprocal recognition cannot account for this self-location because it lacks an authentically and irreducibly first-person voice. In L & K’s terms, Brandom’s account fails to account for the necessity of essentially agent-relative attitudes and locutions; in Rödl’s terms, Brandom fails to account for self-consciousness as immediate knowledge in which an object (oneself) is known in a certain way simply by being that object; in Fichte’s terms, Brandom fails to notice that first-person reference is an intuitive grasp of one’s own practical activity before it is a conceptually mediated grasp; in my own terms, Brandom fails to account for the

71 Cf. Chapter 3.
72 SC, 9.
insufficiency of ascription as the basic discursive attitude and the requirement for seeing acknowledgment as irreducible to ascription and foundational to the possibility of discursive practice.

As discussed above, for Brandom to admit these points – to acknowledge that the first-person perspective, anchored in a strongly de re attitude expressed by the use of an essentially indexical expression is constitutive for discursive practice – would require him, not to reverse his explanatory strategy, but at least to work simultaneously from both sides of a number of distinctions in his attempt to lay bare the foundations of intentionality and human sapience: inference/representation; anaphora/deixis; weak/strong de re attitudes; rationality/logic. Insofar as Brandom attempts to construct an account of the latter phenomenon in each pair out of the raw materials provided in the former, he cannot account for self-conscious, first-person thought as foundational in the order of explanation, since this form of thought necessarily involves non-inferential (i.e., immediate) (self-)knowledge that is strongly de re and that is necessarily expressible and is only so by means of irreducibly indexical and/or agent-relative locutions.

John McDowell has criticized the one-sidedness of Brandom’s explanations on more than one occasion, arguing that inferentialism – the explanatory privileging of inference to representation – is under-motivated by either the failures of the reverse (“representationalist”) strategy or by the authority of many of Brandom’s heroes. In doing so, he argues that the notion that rationality (the possibility of discursively giving, asking for and contesting about reasons) is autonomously intelligible and possible without the invocation of logic (for Brandom, that set of locutions that can make explicit

---

what is done in practice in antecedently rational discursive practices) will not do. According to Brandom, logic is the “organ of semantic self-consciousness,” and hence it is quite possible to imagine discursive practitioners who are rational but not semantically self-conscious; i.e., who can do the things necessary to be rational but who cannot say what it is they are doing when they do those things. McDowell argues to the contrary that logic is not merely a device that allows us to express what we do implicitly in practice (i.e., the organ of semantic self-consciousness), but also an organ that allows us to do what is necessary in order to engage in rational deliberation (about other’s and one’s own commitments and entitlements) at all, since rational deliberation requires making at least some things explicit: “Just because it is the organ of rational self-consciousness, logic is the organ of self-consciousness überhaupt, in particular, then, of semantic self-consciousness… Semantic self-consciousness is required, and hence a command of logical vocabulary is required, if one is to be able to make anything explicit – including explicitly undertaking assertional commitments.”

---

74 MIE, xix.
75 McDowell, “Brandom on Representation and Inference,” 162. It bears consideration, though, whether relinquishing either Brandom’s “one-sided” inferentialism or the equally one-sided “representationalism” which he opposes would mean relinquishing the possibility of the kind of reconstructive explanation of human conceptual capacities (i.e., sapience, rationality, concept-mongering) that Brandom seeks to provide. If one cannot derive one set of phenomena from another (logic from rationality, deixis from anaphora, representation from inference, semantic vocabulary from norms implicit in practice, etc.), then is it possible to “explain” the terms of either set? Is there a kind of explanation that is not a derivation? McDowell, of course, given his philosophical “quietism” (cf. Mind and World, 175 ff.), would be amenable to such a conclusion, but Brandom is not. Hence, in his replies to McDowell on this issue, he acknowledges that McDowell is right that his inferentialist strategy is undermotivated, but replies that without such a strategic choice, something theoretically significant is lost: “Looking for a way to get an independent theoretical grip on one range of concepts, and then explicating the other in terms of it is only one strategy for illuminating the relations between the representational and inferential perspectives on semantic content. If an account of this shape is possible, however, then we understand the relations between the two perspectives better in terms of it than we would if we did not realize that fact and content ourselves from the outset with a holistic relational picture.” (Brandom, “Responses” 233-234) It is an interesting question, but beyond the scope of the current argument, what effect that admission has on thinking about how we are to conceive of Brandom’s theoretical project as a whole. If it is only one amongst other possible reconstructions, does it make a claim to truth? Are we to assume that it is better than an atomistic, “bottom-up” strategy, and, if so, on what grounds? Is it empirically more adequate? Is it more coherent? Is it true in a way its opposite is
of “I” and the irreducibly first-personal thought that underlies it is a form of just such logical vocabulary, without which no practice of giving and asking for reasons could get off the ground, since without it we could not be rationally self-conscious, much less semantically self-conscious.

not? Can Brandom’s own account of truth shed light on how we should understand the kinds of claims his theoretical project makes? If not, is his project self-referentially incoherent?

76 It is not the one that McDowell focuses on; he uses the conditional to make his argument.
Chapter 7: The Second Person

Introduction

I now want to argue that the shortcomings of Brandom’s account with respect to the first-person are correlative with another shortcoming, namely, his failure to adequately account for the irreducibility and centrality of the second-person perspective in discursive scorekeeping. To do so I will again pursue the criticism from two different directions: first, following Sebastian Rödl, from the perspective of the necessary relationship between the first- and second-person perspective; second, following Jürgen Habermas and Kenneth Baynes, from the perspective of the necessity of a distinction between third- and second-person approaches to describing discursive practices. Though both of these directions lead to the conclusion that Brandom’s theoretical resources are insufficient to account for the conditions that make objective discursive practices possible, it will be noted that Rödl’s and Habermas’ criticisms presuppose differing understandings of what an adequate account of objectivity will entail. This difference, and the need to overcome it, will be an important feature of my subsequent critique of Brandom’s deflationary account of objectivity and truth.

7.1. First and Second Persons

According to Rödl, Brandom’s commitment to normative phenomenalism – the idea that normative statuses are instituted by normative attitudes – makes him unable to recognize the mutual imbrication of first- and second-person thought. In other words, Brandom’s account of second-person thought makes it impossible to see how it can be a case of taking one’s interlocutor to be the same kind of subject that one knows oneself to
be, which is the very nature of second-person thought. In addressing another in the second-person – i.e., as “you” or “thou” – I am treating them as a co-participant in a discursive practice; in other words, I attribute to them the same kind of discursive agency that I take myself to have. It is just this that Rödl takes Brandom to render unintelligible.

Rödl begins from his contention – discussed above in Chapter 6 – that the concepts of belief and action are bound up with belief- and action-explanations. To believe just is to conclude in theoretical reasoning that it is something that it is right to believe, and to explain a belief just is to show how – from the perspective of the believer – it could be concluded to be what it is right to believe. In other words, believing X means being in a position to give a belief-explanation that shows why X is right to believe, and to attribute a belief X to another is to attribute to them the ability to give such an explanation. As John McDowell puts it: “The concepts of propositional attitudes [including belief] have their proper home in explanations of a special sort: explanations in which the things are made intelligible by being revealed to be, or to approximate to being, as they rationally ought to be.”¹

More particularly, the cause of a belief is the thought that one’s believing X conforms to the order of reason (i.e., that it is right to believe): “belief explanations represent a causality of thought, which is conceived by the subject as a causality of reason.”² From the first-person perspective, the subject takes her belief to be grounded in the order of reason, which makes it right to believe X, and her taking it to be so just is believing X. Thus for the subject herself, the ultimate cause of her belief – that which explains why she believes it – is the order of reason, its being right to believe, which is a

¹ From “Functionalism and Anomalous Monism” quoted in SC, 167.
² SC, 168.
normative status. Her belief is explained by the fact that it has the status of being in conformity with the order of reason.

Now the crucial question is whether a second-person belief-explanation must also take that normative status to be the ultimate cause of belief. McDowell takes it that it must be so. In the quote above he asserts that belief explanations must show that someone’s propositional attitudes are made intelligible by “being revealed to be… as they rationally ought to be.” In other words, second-person belief explanation appeals to a causality of reason (i.e., of a normative status) just as does first-person explanation. For Brandom, however, this is not the case. What explains someone’s belief (or action) for Brandom is not the normative status of being in actual conformity to the order of reason, but the normative attitude of seeming to the subject to be in conformity to the order of reason; belief explanation in the second-person must be couched in terms, not of what is in fact rational, but what the subject takes to be rational.3 For Brandom, as opposed to McDowell: “what explains her act [or belief] is not this order [of reason], but rather her idea of it.”4

This difference is a result of Brandom’s commitment to a phenomenalist approach to explanation in his normative pragmatics. As discussed in part 1, he takes normative statuses to be instituted by normative attitudes and ultimately to be explicable entirely in

---

3 “In truth, her act is explained by a cause in the light of which it appears to her to conform to an order of reason. It is irrelevant to the causality of the cause whether the act indeed conforms to this order.” SC, 168-169.

4 SC, 169. Rödl – speaking also for McDowell – acknowledges that a belief explanation must include an account of normative attitudes (a causality of thought), but argues that the ultimate cause must be not merely the idea that one’s belief conforms to the order of reason, but that it actually (or approximately) so conforms. This is because the attitude itself must be made intelligible in terms of the order of reason it purports to represent: “‘Ultimate’ is crucial here: since a causality of reason essentially passes through a representation, normative attitudes figure essentially in the explanation of self-conscious acts on any account. The issue is whether they are the ultimate cause or whether they are in turn to be traced to the order they represent.” SC, 170.
terms of those attitudes. Indeed even the “objectivity” of such statuses (their susceptibility to the distinction between what one’s status actually is and what you and others take that status to be) is parcelled out in terms of the social-perspectival character of the discursive practices in which normative attitudes are assumed, attributed and revised. Hence no explanation that appeals to a normative status can be “ultimate” since these statuses just are creatures of the attitudes of the participants in a practice. As Brandom himself puts it: “Norms (in the sense of normative statuses) are not objects in the causal order… Normative statuses are domesticated by being understood in terms of normative attitudes which are in the causal order. What is causally efficacious is our practically taking or treating ourselves and each other as having commitments.”5 As Rödl points out, this is more that just an explanatory strategy for Brandom; it is “a metaphysical thesis”6 to the effect that normative statuses cannot be the cause of anything, and hence it is the representation of such statuses in normative attitudes that must be the causality averted to in belief-explanation.

This view, however seemingly “sane,”7 makes it impossible to grasp the necessary unity of first- and second-person knowledge, argues Rödl. This is because, as mentioned, second-person knowledge must take the other to be the same kind of subject that one knows oneself to be in first-person knowledge. In other words: “I think of another subject only if I deploy concepts under which I view myself in first-person thought.”8 To take others to be potential subjects of an address in second-person terms – someone to

---

5 MIE, 626; quoted in SC, 169.
6 SC, 170. I believe that Rödl is right that Brandom’s phenomenalism is grounded in a metaphysical assumption for which he makes no argument. Without that, there is little account for why he accepts the approach. His account in MIE does not provide an argument for phenomenalism, but rather shows it to be the conclusion of a certain historical trajectory, one which he only implicitly endorses. See my discussion in Chapter 1. Chapter 9 will give me opportunity to discuss the consequences of this at length.
7 SC, 170.
8 SC, 171.
whom I can say “you” – I must take them to be the same thing I know myself to be: an acting, believing, self-conscious subject capable of answering the questions “what is it right to do” and “what is it right to believe.” I know myself to be responsive to reasons in my determining what to do and believe, and anyone to whom I address reasons in the second person I must also take to be responsive to reasons under the same conditions that I am.\(^9\)

Brandom’s account of second-person thought – according to which it is not the order of reason, but the attitude of thinking oneself to be in accordance with the order of reason, that is the ultimate causality invoked in a second-person belief explanation – creates a formal distinction between first- and second-person thought in this regard. The causality invoked in second-person thought (a normative attitude) cannot be the same causality invoked in first-person thought and vice-versa. In first-person belief-explanations (i.e., practical reasoning), the subject must take her believing to actually accord with the order of reason that determines what it is right to believe; the act of believing just is coming to the conclusion that one’s belief has that normative status. In other words, in first-person thought it is the status of being in accordance with the order of reason that determines what it is I believe. In yet other terms, first-person thought has an irreducibly normative sense; in offering my own belief-explanation I cannot separate a description of my reasoning from an evaluation (i.e., endorsement) of it. This is not the case in second-person thought on Brandom’s terms.

If second-person belief-explanations do not refer to the order of reason as the ultimate cause of belief, but rather to a normative attitude, it is one thing to describe

\(^9\) Here Rödl’s view dovetails with Habermas’ and Baynes’ insistence —to be discussed below— on the essential role of a “deliberative stance” that is a kind of “performative attitude” in deontic scorekeeping and is irreducibly second-personal.
another subject’s beliefs (according to their attitudes) and another thing to make an
evaluation as to whether they do or don’t accord with the order of reason (from one’s
own point of view). In fact, such an account would go so far as to treat the subject of a
second-person belief explanation as labouring under the illusion that the order of reason
is the ultimate cause of belief, rather than their own attitudes: “Thus we explain the
illusory appearance of a causality of reason as the distorted conception of a causality of
normative attitudes by the subject of these attitudes.”\(^{10}\) But such an explanation cannot
be accepted by a self-conscious subject as an adequate account of her beliefs. The form
of belief-explanation in the first person – which necessarily refers to a causality of reason
– and in the second person – which refers to a causality of normative attitudes – are
mutually incompatible. As such, when a self-conscious subject engages in second-person
thought as construed by Brandom, he fails to bring the other under the same concepts
under which he brings himself in first-person thought, and hence he fails to represent the
other as the kind of subject that he knows himself to be. In self-consciousness, the agent
takes himself to be genuinely responsive to reasons, while in second-person thought he
takes his interlocutors to be responsive to their own ideas of reasons, and he thus fails to
treat them as genuinely reason-responsive agents.

As I will discuss further below (in Chapter 9), Rödl takes this antinomy to vitiate
Brandom’s phenomenalist (and deflationary) approach to intentional explanation, since it
follows from that commitment. In its stead, he advocates for McDowell’s view that, just
like first-person belief-explanation, in second-person thought “explaining the act is
representing it to conform to an order of reason.”\(^{11}\) This requires also rejecting

\(^{10}\) SC, 171.
\(^{11}\) SC, 173.
Brandom’s notion that normative statuses cannot count as objects in the causal order and that we must treat the causality of reason as a genuine cause. This means, as we will see, altering the conception of objectivity and the objective world (“nature”) that Brandom presupposes; in other words, in order to do justice to the unity of first- and second-person thought, Brandom’s implicit conception of nature must be revised in line with McDowell’s “partial re-enchantment.”

7.2. Second and Third Persons

For his part, Jürgen Habermas is not concerned in the first instance with Brandom’s failure to show the unity of first- and second-person thought, but rather wants to argue that Brandom fails to adequately make the distinction between second- and third-person thought. Brandom’s primary failing in this case is not that he relies upon an inadequate conception of the objective world (“nature”), but that his conception of intersubjectivity is insufficiently robust. In order to take seriously what distinguishes a genuinely second-personal approach to understanding a social practice from a third-person stance, Habermas insists that Brandom must invoke the horizon of a genuinely shared life-world as well as the regulative ideal of reaching a shared understanding as the goal of all discursive practice. By contrast, Brandom’s discursive-scorekeeping model abstracts from both of these horizons, leaving discursive practitioners permanently on either side of the doxastic gaps between perspectives, affecting and responding to one

---

12 I will discuss this in the context of McDowell’s rebuff of Brandom’s assertion that his social account of objectivity grounds McDowell’s notion that the natural world is not exterior to the space of reasons.

13 However, as I will discuss below, this criticism is linked to another which does in fact assert that Brandom fails to account for the rootedness of discursive practice in concrete (instrumental) relations to the objective world. The conception of nature that is invoked in this latter criticism stands (at least apparently) opposed to the one preferred by Rödl and McDowell.
another but not moving from or toward shared understandings or commitments. In that sense, Brandom’s model takes discursive practitioners to relate to one another in a third-person rather than an authentically second-person manner.

At the heart of Habermas’ criticism of Brandom on this point is his claim that the latter fails to acknowledge that taking up the perspective of a participant in discursive practice means not just attempting to interpret the sentences of others, but “adopt[ing] the performative attitude of a participant in interaction who ‘takes or treats’ the speech act of an interlocutor as a claim in order to find out whether she herself can accept it.”

Co-participants in a discursive practice do not just make claims that can be attributed or undertaken, but they make claims on one another; they do not merely assert, deny or deliberate about facts, but they also call upon one another to take up a position on them, to answer “yes” or “no.” This is a pragmatic dimension of discourse that Brandom’s discursive scorekeeping model is largely blind to, according to Habermas, but which is the necessary horizon within which alone discourse can be understood.

The “thou” in Brandom’s “I-Thou” construal of social practices is not, according to Habermas, a genuine “thou” to whom the “I” addresses validity claims and from whom the “I” expects a reply. Rather “he actually construes what he calls the ‘I-Thou relation’ as the relation between a first person who raises validity claims and a third person who attributes validity claims to the first.” This is because Brandom construes assertion and interpretation in a more or less Davidsonian manner, which involves “a certain theoreticism in that he conceives understanding an expression as a mapping operation –

---


15 TJ, 162.
rather than as the hermeneutic interpretation of a text.\textsuperscript{16} In discursive scorekeeping, we keep track of the commitments and entitlements of others by mapping them onto our own (and onto the world as we see it in accordance with our own commitments) as well as placing them on the map of their own auxiliary commitments. Understanding one’s interlocutor, then, means formulating a kind of theory that creates correspondences between uttered sentences and sentences that the interpreter would be prepared to endorse.\textsuperscript{17} As Habermas puts it: “Brandom assumes that the result of communication consists in the simplest case in an epistemic relation – a relation between what the speaker says about something in the world and the attribution of what is said undertaken by the interpreter.”\textsuperscript{18} The interpreter, then, is more a spectator than an addressee of the speaker, or perhaps appears more as an anthropologist trying to create a translation manual for spoken language than someone involved in a hunt needing to do something in response to the native’s expression “Gavagai!”\textsuperscript{19} The difference here is not (at least in the first case) semantic but pragmatic – it concerns the attitudes of discursive practitioners to one another and what it is that they are doing while speaking and interpreting – and for that reason it addresses exactly the level that the pragmatist Brandom thinks is crucial for getting to the root of understanding the semantic dimension of our conduct and hence also of our capacities as concept-mongering creatures. It is

\textsuperscript{16} TJ, 163.
\textsuperscript{17} The clearest expression of this is in Brandom’s discussion of the “three-level” solution he offers to the problem of how we can understand “taking true” across a doxastic gap, which involves formulating “equivalence classes” that fix the extensions of other’s expressed commitments in terms of features of the world as I take it to be from the stand point of my own commitments. Cf. MIE, 484-487, and my discussion in Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{18} TJ, 164.
\textsuperscript{19} Habermas makes the distinction between a “listener” in courtroom who “take on the role of third persons waiting to see what happens” and “hearers” who are “directly involved” and hence must “adopt a performative attitude and, in thus taking toward each other the attitude of a first person toward a second, expect a response from each other… The mere attribution of a validity claim… does not as yet constitute a reply.” (TJ, 163)
precisely this pragmatic dimension about which Habermas thinks Brandom, which his “objectivist description” of communication “misses the point of linguistic communication.” 20

Speakers do not merely intend, he argues, “that an interpreter attribute to him the right belief without his being interested in the interpreter’s stance regarding this belief.” 21 What I take myself to being doing when making an assertion is not simply making a validity-claim that I intend for others to attribute to me as part of my discursive “score.” I am making a claim on others, I am asking them to do or not to do something; most crucially I am asking them to take a stance on what I am asserting, using my assertion “to make a demand on an addressee, to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ publicly.” 22 At this point Habermas has pushed the pragmatic dimension “deeper” than Brandom acknowledges, going past the level of discursive scorekeeping to a more robust form of interaction. It does not stop there, however, since demanding and receiving a response from an interlocutor is not the highest or most fundamental end in the hierarchy of communicative ends. The reason why I intend to elicit a public “yes” or “no” from my interlocutor is that that I desire to “coordinate [our] action-plans” 23 within the context of a shared social and objective world.

As a rule, communication happens within the horizon of broadly shared assumptions, expectations, and commitments, and it is this background against which each agent makes decisions about how to act. If we are to act together, then, it is necessary that individually deciding agents are able to “[keep] these beliefs and opinions

20 TJ, 164.
21 TJ, 164.
22 TJ, 164.
23 TJ, 164.
consonant with one another,\(^{24}\) in order that the actions that each of them perform on the basis of those beliefs and opinions can be coordinated (at least insofar that they are mutually intelligible). The goal of linguistic communication – the raising, asserting, attributing, etc. of validity claims – is thus not that “interlocutors reciprocally inform each other about their beliefs and intentions”\(^{25}\) but that they are equipped to act together by coming to a shared understanding in their beliefs and intentions: “it is only the imperative of social integration… that explains the point of linguistic communication.”\(^{26}\) Discursive practice is by its very nature oriented toward the social integration constituted by shared beliefs, intentions and actions.\(^{27}\)

According to Habermas, Brandom cannot make sense out the of the possibility of genuinely shared commitments and entitlements. On Brandom’s scorekeeping model, “discursive practice emerges from inferences that each individual draws for herself based on mutual observation;”\(^{28}\) from my perspective I keep track of you in yours and you keep track of mine from your perspective. We might both have certain commitments, but these can never be truly shared since the content of these commitments will be different for both us, given the fact that no two scorekeepers ever have exactly the same set of collateral commitments in virtue of which any particular commitment has its content. Brandom’s content-holism combines with his “methodological individualism” to “rule

---

\(^{24}\) TJ, 164.  
\(^{25}\) TJ, 164.  
\(^{26}\) TJ, 164.  
\(^{27}\) Habermas elaborates the critical social theory into which his account of communication is embedded in The Theory of Communicative Action. I will not discuss this at length here, except to note that, on his view, the orientation of discourse to shared belief and action is the crucial element that makes it possible to achieve communicatively rational social integration in modern societies that can resist the colonizing pressures of merely instrumentally rational systemic integration (or, alternatively, the pressure toward either social fragmentation or non-rationalized forms of social integration). I will make a couple of more remarks about this at the conclusion of Chapter 8.  
\(^{28}\) TJ, 165.
out the possibility for the participants to converge in their intersubjective recognition of the same validity claim and [to] share knowledge in the strict sense of the term."²⁹

For Habermas, then, the raising, contesting and revising of validity claims in discourse (or alternatively, the attributing and undertaking of commitments, the giving of and asking for reasons that constitute discursive practice on Brandom’s telling) only makes sense within the context of a shared life-world and with the telos of reaching shared understanding and intentions. We simply cannot properly understand discursive practices without seeing them as integral to a particular form of human action, namely, communicative action that is constitutively tied to the forging of social integration. Brandom’s discursive scorekeeping abstracts from that context and treats the making, attributing and undertaking of validity claims as an autonomously intelligible practice. In this context, reaching agreement or consensus plays no role in “assuming the warrant for truth and objectivity.”³⁰

What Habermas means by this is that, on his own more robustly communicative view, what one might call the authentication of truth claims— the way in which truth claims are made good on by showing them to be true – depends upon the hard work of a community of reasoners working toward consensus, a fallible, human process that depends essentially on the orientation toward social, communicative integration that is embodied practically in the performative attitude characteristic of genuinely second-person discourse. Brandom, on the other hand, sees no need to include that orientation and attitude in his account, since he shifts the burden of responsibility for the objectivity

²⁹ TJ, 165.
³⁰ TJ, 166.
and truth of concepts onto the objective world itself. Habermas thinks that Brandom’s mistake here is rooted in his “objective idealism” – the view that the very nature of reality is conceptually articulated – which he sees as characteristic of Hegel as well. On this view, the working out of discursive practice actually follows the structure of reality itself. This means “conceiving of the objectivity of ‘our’ concepts as an articulated mirroring of the objective content of a world that is in itself conceptually structured.”\textsuperscript{32} If the objectivity of our concepts is underwritten by the structure of reality itself, then Brandom’s methodological individualism can be justified, since there is no burden placed on the linguistic community to sort out what is justified from what is merely taken to be justified; this burden is entirely taken on by the conceptual articulation of the objective world:

Distinguishing between truth and ‘taking-true’ can remain up to each individual participant in discourse. It does not require a ‘community of justification’ to direct itself toward the goal of a discursively achieved agreement because... the objectivity of propositional contents in guaranteed by the conceptual structure of the world, which is merely unfolded and articulated in discourse. Only an objectively embodied reason, as it were, that has shifted from the lifeworld into the objective world can relieve intersubjective justificatory practices of the burden of collectively assuming the warrant for truth and objectivity.\textsuperscript{33}

Objective idealism thus negates the central importance of reaching intersubjective agreement and the responsibility of the linguistic community for sorting out validity claims. On this view, communicative social integration is moot, since “the cooperative learning by way of the constructive interpretations of a linguistic community... is replaced by a ‘movement of the concept’ which proceeds through discourse and experience but over the heads of most of the participants.”\textsuperscript{34} Objectivity is underwritten

\textsuperscript{32} TJ, 158. Cf. MIE, 621-622, and my discussion in Chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{33} TJ, 166.
\textsuperscript{34} TJ, 161.
not by the effort to reach consensus within a community, but by the structure of reality which unfolds though social interaction but does not live in it.

For Habermas, Brandom has no need for a genuinely second-person perspective, since the horizon that makes it essential – the orientation toward shared understanding and the rooting in a shared life-world – are replaced by a conceptually structured objective world. To do justice, then, to the necessity of the second-person perspective, Habermas insists that we must abandon objective idealism for a view of nature as the merely causally (as opposed to conceptually) articulated domain of instrumental action. This stands in opposition, of course, to Rödl’s assertion that doing justice to the integration of first- and second-person thinking requires rather a view of nature in which reasons (normative statuses) are seen to genuinely causal in belief explanations rather than one in which normative attitudes are both necessary and sufficient to explain beliefs in the second-person.35 In my discussion of objectivity below, I will take up this conflict again and try to show that – whatever the differences between them – these two avenues of criticism can be reconciled into a single, albeit dialectical, critique by means of a view of nature that is neither nominalistic nor a form of objective idealism (at least as presented by Habermas). Before I do so, however, I will first discuss Brandom’s reply to Habermas and Kenneth Baynes’ attempt to show in a quasi-transcendental argument the necessity of Habermas’ position even from within some of Brandom’s own

---

35 It says something, of course, about Brandom’s thought that two such astute critics can challenge him on his view of nature from such opposing sides. Rödl takes him to task essentially for being a nominalist, while Habermas thinks he is too much the conceptual realist. This can either suggest that Brandom’s view of nature is powerfully multi-dimensional and perhaps dialectical (as is Hegel’s) or that it is insufficiently developed and perhaps internally inconsistent when it is touched upon. My disposition is toward the latter interpretation. Brandom’s denial of causal status to normative statuses is inconsistent with his affirmation of the “unboundedness of the conceptual.” When push comes to shove, I believe that the weight of Brandom’s thought tends away from the latter affirmation towards a naturalistic, fully disenchanted view of nature. As such I am in agreement with McDowell. I will discuss this further in Chapter 9.
commitments. I will then (in Chapter 8) take up the issue that I take to the central point
do Habermas’ criticism, namely, Brandom’s insufficiently robust social ontology, arguing
that if we think these criticisms through we will see the need to affirm, with Hegel, the
constitutive necessity of I-We social relations for genuinely second-personal I-Thou
social practices.

7.3. Brandom’s Reply to Habermas

Interestingly, Brandom begins his reply to Habermas by admitting that the
description of Brandom’s I-Thou social practice as third-personal rather than genuinely
second-personal is “on the whole a fair characterization.” However, he does not feel
that this admission is injurious to the validity of his project, since Habermas is wrong
about what communication is, at its most fundamental level. Rather than being by its
very nature oriented toward shared beliefs and intentions,

the essence of communication is taken to consist in coming to be able to navigate
smoothly across the doxastic and inferential gulf excavated between interlocutors
by their differing commitments, so that they can gather information from the other
(as required to specify the content of the other’s commitments in the way made
explicit by \textit{de re} ascriptions) and see the world from the other’s perspective (as
required to specify the content of the other’s commitments in the way made
explicit by \textit{de dicto} ascriptions. But nothing is made of the notion of \textit{face to face},
\textit{reciprocal} communicative interaction aimed at the sort of understanding that
consists in \textit{convergence} of the contents of commitments as specified \textit{de re}, from
one participant’s perspective and \textit{de dicto}, from that of the other. This is what is

It might be said that this could well have been an excerpt from Habermas’ paper, except
that in his mouth this would be a criticism of the project described, not a defence of it.

The reason that Brandom takes this description to be a defence is that he thinks that
communication so described – without convergence of commitments that can be known to be shared – is autonomously intelligible and practicable, whereas Habermas’ more robust communicative practice depends upon this more basic communication. Navigation across doxastic gaps through the use of *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions – even if it “observational” rather than genuinely second-personal – provides “the conceptual raw materials” that “are entirely sufficient to characterize such [robust] interactions (and so the fact that ‘listeners have a different role than hearers’).” In other words, Brandom’s bare-bones, third-personal discursive practice is genetically and constitutively prior to Habermas’ socially integrative communicative action, since the latter depends upon the former as its essential building-blocks, but the former is intelligible and practicable prior to and without the latter.

Naturally Habermas’ response would be that what Brandom describes is not genuinely communicative (and hence not discursive) practice, since the performative attitude that characterizes second-personal communication is constitutive for communication as such; there is no communication where there is no addressee, where there is no claim made on the other that demands a response. Brandom acknowledges this response but rejoins that he is “not convinced.” In the first place, he argues, “mutual understanding in the strong sense Habermas is insisting on is not required for the undertaking of joint projects.” Even if a belief or intention is not *shared* in the strong sense that Habermas intends, that does not stand in the way of the formation

---

38 FNNF, 362.
39 In the next chapter this identification of genetic and constitutive priority will be a focus of direct discussion and criticism. It is a frequent argument of Brandom’s, but I will argue that it is essentially flawed since it does not acknowledge that what comes later in the order of generation can be constitutively prior in the order of intelligibility.
40 FNNF, 363.
of a joint intention which “can appropriately be subject to different specifications by the various individuals who nevertheless share it.”\textsuperscript{41} Such a joint commitment is, according to Brandom, sufficient to organize joint action even though the gap between interlocutors (and hence also of actors) is never overcome.\textsuperscript{42} There is no overcoming of the distinction between the perspectives of the agents involved, but this distinction is “maintained and managed” in the process of mutual understanding. Rather, “what is ‘shared’ in such a process is in principle not specifiable except by reference to the various perspectives from which it may appear.”\textsuperscript{43} There is no perspective – whether established or projected – beyond that of the various actors from which to authoritatively specify the content of the commitments and intentions held jointly. I will argue in the next chapter that this view is insufficient to support an adequate account of discursive practices.

Brandom adds another rejoinder to Habermas’ notion that shared understanding is the constitutive “point” of communication: he argues that “it is a mistake to think of [linguistic practice] as having a point at all.”\textsuperscript{44} The ends that communication serves are internal to the practice of communication and hence cannot be specified antecedent to engaging in the practice: “linguistic practice is not for something.”\textsuperscript{45} To claim that it does have such antecedently intelligible aims is to fall into a kind of “Gricean analysis” in which propositional attitudes (such as intention or belief) can be understood before one

\textsuperscript{41} FNNF, 363. Charles Taylor’s distinction between goods that are, on the one hand, “irreducibly social” and others that are “convergent” may help to illustrate the distinction between “shared” and “joint” commitments. I have discussed this distinction in Chapter 5. Brandom is arguing, in essence, that convergence is sufficient for discursive practice, whereas Habermas’ point is that, at very least, a degree of commonness is necessary as an end to be pursued in discursive practice.

\textsuperscript{42} He employs the analogy of a ballroom dance to illustrate this possibility. Each dancer is doing something different (one is going backwards and wearing high-heels while the other is going forward in flats) but that does not eclipse the fact that they are “sharing” the dance. FNNF, 363.

\textsuperscript{43} FNNF, 363.

\textsuperscript{44} FNNF, 363.

\textsuperscript{45} FNNF, 363.
understands speech acts, a kind of analysis that violates Brandom’s “essential methodological commitment… not to help [himself] to concepts (such as belief, intention, expectation) which are themselves intelligible in principle only in a context that includes assertional practice.”46 Rather than making such appeals, Brandom says that his goal is to make the whole bundle of assertions and propositional attitudes intelligible in terms of more fundamental pragmatic attitudes of treating a certain performance as appropriate or correct. Thus he does not posit “ends” or “points” of discursive practice outside of that practice itself, but nevertheless does offer an explanation of the terms of those practices from some more fundamental terms and hence does not treat discursive phenomena (especially semantic ones) as if they were *sui generis*. Thus he again claims that he can make the ends that Habermas calls “the whole point” of communication – making claims on one another with the aim of social integration and action-coordination – intelligible in terms of a practice of deploying attitudes “that can be intelligible as making claims and inferences, as so as *discursive* practices, even if they lack that species [of assertional ends] – however much they might for that reason in other ways fail to resemble our own sophisticated practices.”47 Once again, the claim that Brandom is making is familiar: Habermas might be right that most “sophisticated” discursive practices aim at social integration, but those depend upon the raw materials provided in

46 FNNF, 364. 47 FNNF, 364. Brandom’s explanatory strategy is thus “reconstructive” and decidedly not teleological; he wants to reconstruct the semantic and teleological features of discursive practice out of some more fundamental stuff that does not presuppose either the semantic terms or the ends that full-blown discursive practices hold. If he were not so resolutely non-teleological he could treat the ends of discursive practice as “internal” to that practice (and hence not specifiable in Gricean terms outside of an account of speech acts) but nevertheless *fundamental* to the very notion of engaging in that practice. Final causes are, after all, not “external” to the phenomenon they explain since they are first in the order of causes and the phenomenon is inexplicable without it. I will argue in the next chapter that, at least if brought into Hegel’s framework, Habermas’ criticisms point in the direction of positing the necessity of discursive consensus as the *telos* or *final cause* of discursive practice and hence not subject to being called “Gricean” but equally not merely “reconstructive.”
discursive practices as elaborated in MIE, which – though admittedly not “socially integrative” in the way Habermas intends – are intelligible and practicable quite apart from how they may later be elaborated in “sophisticated” practices.

I will now argue, following Kenneth Baynes, that Brandom is mistaken in this claim, at least if he desires to hold onto important parts of his theory of interpretation: the deliberative stance characteristic of the second-person perspective and the aim of reaching shared understanding are not optional for discursive practice or superadded onto a more fundamental but still genuinely discursive practice in which these do not figure. Baynes begins his argument by reflecting on Brandom’s endorsement, in Tales of the Mighty Dead, of what he calls certain “Gadamerian platitudes” about interpretation. Amongst these platitudes are “the denial of privilege of authorial intention, the relativizing of meaning to context; the model of dialogue, meaning pluralism and the open-endedness and mutability of semantic perspective;”\(^48\) each of these platitudes has its analogue in Brandom’s own theory of interpretation.\(^49\) Baynes focuses in particular on his endorsement of a dialogical model of interpretation, arguing that serious commitment to this model entails – contrary to Brandom’s own assertions – giving a central role to the deliberative, second-person stance urged by Habermas.

In such a dialogical model, says Baynes, “understanding is an achievement whereby neither the interpreter’s expectations nor the text alone constitute a fixed


\(^49\) For example, for Brandom authorial interpretation has no privileged status because the contents of our commitments, and indeed what commitments we do and do not have, are not determined entirely by our own attitudes and commitments, but equally those of others; thus offering an interpretation in terms of what the author intends (i.e., in terms of what she is prepared to endorse, a \textit{de dicto} interpretation) is not the fundamental touchstone that hits “her real meaning.” Similarly, for Brandom, the meaning of any commitment is determined by its inferential connections to other (collateral) commitments, and these are not the same for any two interlocutors or indeed for any one person at varying times of their life; this is the Brandomian sense of the relativizing of meaning to context.
criterion or standard for determining meaning, but rather where each must, so to speak, open itself up to the inquiry or questioning of the other.”

Both assertion and interpretation are dialectical processes wherein the interpreter questions the text, and thereby brings forward a notion of what the text is about, and is answered in a way that changes the question and the original suggestion about what the text has to say. The text itself is, however, not left unchanged – it is no more the standard of interpretive correctness than is the questioning interpreter – since its being interpreted brings it into the context of a new set of references (those of the questioning interpreter) which (as meaning is context-relative) transform the sense of the text. The achievement of understanding is the result of the interplay between question and answer in a dialectical fashion.

Brandom sums up his affirmation of this dialogical model thus: “Understanding (practical grasp of meaning) consists in exercising a practical capacity to adjudicate reciprocal claims of authority and responsibility on the part of the text and various contexts.” In de dicto interpretation, the text is understood in terms that ascribe a kind of authority to the way in which it takes things to be – i.e., in the text’s own terms – while in de re interpretation, the interpreter claims that authority and responsibility for stipulating how things in fact are and thus by stipulating the claims of the texts in those terms. In the interplay of these two ways of approaching a text (or any interprettee), both the interpreter’s own commitments and the commitments ascribed to the text are transformed, though the difference between the claims of authority and responsibility on both parts is never entirely overcome. For Baynes, Brandom’s approach to interpretation

---

50 GPRI, 69.
51 TMD, 93, quoted in GPRI, 69.
52 Cf. TMD, 94-103; my discussion in Chapter 4.
here is very much in the Gadamerian vein; however, he will go on to claim that commitment to this approach undermines Brandom’s dismissal of the deliberative, second-person stance as essential for discursive practice.\(^5^3\)

Turning his attention to the Habermas-Brandom exchange, Baynes begins by arguing that Habermas’ theory of communicative action is also a species of this broadly Gadamerian approach to interpretation. By thus placing the two sides of the debate within the context of a general agreement on the nature of interpretation, Baynes hopes to show that Habermas’ attempt to account for the conditions of interpretation so construed is superior to Brandom’s; Habermas and Brandom are not trying to account for different phenomena, as Brandom’s reply to Habermas suggests,\(^5^4\) they are rather both giving an account of the conditions under which the dialectic of question and answer that characterizes Gadamerian interpretation can take place. The crucial difference – underlying the obvious bone of contention, namely, the necessity of attributing to interpreters a deliberative stance and hence an orientation toward a shared understanding – is the role of what Habermas calls the “idealizing pre-suppositions” of communicative action. Baynes’ fundamental argument is that it is a condition of ascribing agency to an interpretee that one views them under these idealizing presuppositions and hence that one takes up the deliberative stance with respect to them.

\(^5^3\) One potential dis-analogy between Gadamer and Brandom is the question of the claim to authority made by tradition and the necessity of deferring to that authority (at least provisionally) as a condition for interpretation. Baynes argues that this is not a significant difference, since for Gadamer, tradition’s claim to authority is on par with those of the questioning interpreter and the answering text; in a sense tradition too is a text that is part of the give-and-take of hermeneutics. Thus the kind of sociality demonstrated in Gadamer’s view of tradition is still an I-Thou form on Brandom’s terms. Here he distinguishes himself from both Habermas and McDowell, who take it that Gadamer offers here an I-We horizon (for Habermas this is a bad thing, since it means giving up the critical stance with respect to tradition, while for McDowell it is a potential gain). Cf. GPRI, 70. I will discuss this issue in the next section, particularly with respect to McDowell’s defense of a Gadamerian view of tradition (which he takes to be I-We) against a Davidsonian objection to McDowell’s own project.

\(^5^4\) Brandom suggests that Habermas is probably right about full-blown, “sophisticated” discursive practices, but that’s not what he (Brandom) is describing in MIE.
On Habermas’ model of communicative action, the question and answer structure of interpretation revolves around the raising and contestation of three kinds of validity claims: a claim to truth, a claim to normative rightness and a claim to expressive truthfulness or authenticity. Taking someone to be engaged in making, affirming or denying such claims – and hence to be engaged in communicative action – requires viewing their behaviour under certain idealizing suppositions. Amongst these are “the pragmatic presupposition of a common objective world… the pragmatic presupposition of the rationality of accountable agents… the unconditionality of validity claims raised in communicative action; and… rational discourse as the unavoidable forum of possible justification.”\(^{55}\) In each of these cases, the interpreter must “shoot beyond” the vagaries and details of the particular context or the available evidence, to “assume that individuals generally act under these idealizing presuppositions.”\(^{56}\) After all, one never actually encounters an unconditionally valid claim or the common world in itself, but without assuming the unconditionality of genuine validity or the commonness of the objective world, according to Habermas, we could not recognize a claim to objective truth for what it is and hence we could not recognize other agents as making such claims. The idea of communicative action as oriented toward reaching a shared understanding is another one of these idealizing presuppositions. It is true that we probably never encounter action that is purely communicative (as opposed to action that may also be partly strategic, dramaturgical, etc. and hence oriented also to aims other than reaching an understanding), but in order to be able to recognize communicative action at all, we must place other agents under the idealizing presupposition that they are (or could be) acting


\(^{56}\) GPRI, 72.
communicatively with an eye to reaching a shared understanding. Applying this
idealizing presupposition is of a piece with applying those – including the
unconditionality of validity claims, the common objective world, the idea of an ideal
communication situation, etc. – that make it possible to make and understand the various
validity claims that are the stock in trade of communicative action.

Baynes offers a “transcendental (or quasi-transcendental argument)” for the claim
that interpreting the action of others as rational action must mean viewing them under
these idealizing presuppositions and that, moreover, doing so involves adopting the
deliberative stance with respect to those others.57 He begins with the claim that
“ascriptions of agency involve not only the assumption that the agent’s conduct can be
predicted via beliefs and desires attributed to him, but also that the agent is appropriately
sensitive or responsive to reasons.”58 Being a rational agent is more than behaving in
ways that can be modelled as if they were responses to reasons but rather behaving such
that the actions and attitudes attributed are taken up by the agent because they are – at
least to the agent’s own lights – right to undertake under the circumstances. Ascribing
agency is not just giving an account of another’s action under the description of
rationality, but attributing to them a power to respond to reasons and a corresponding
degree of discursive authority.59 This much at least Brandom is committed to, since he
views attributing discursive authority to others as an intrinsic part of discursive

57 And hence a genuinely second-person attitude. If the idea of action as oriented toward a shared
understanding is an idealizing presupposition and if these idealizing presuppositions are constitutive rules
for interpreting action as rational, then the idea of action oriented toward a shared understanding is not
optional for interpretation.
58 GPRI, 75.
59 To take others to have the power to respond to reasons, one must – on pain of contradiction – view them
as at least largely rational (i.e., to respond rightly to reasons) and hence as having at least a prima facie
authority to make claims about what is and is not rational.
scorekeeping, and attributing this kind of authority just is attributing the ability to respond to reasons.

Baynes argues further, though, that this view of what it is to attribute rational agency imposes four further conditions upon such ascriptions. First, it means that when one attributes rational agency, one takes one’s interlocutor to be acting, not merely in accordance with a rule (i.e., reason), but to be acting “from a rule or a norm”\(^{60}\) (i.e., in Kant’s terms, to be acting according to a conception of a rule).\(^{61}\) Second, since it attributes action to the formulation of a conception of a rule, it “requires a conception of the agent as ‘active’ and not merely as passive with respect to her desires;”\(^{62}\) and this condition requires in turn, third, “something like the capacity for critical reflection and/or ‘reflective endorsement’ (Korsgaard): the ability to step back from a potentially motivating desire and ask whether one endorses or wants to treat it as a reason for action.”\(^{63}\) Finally, Baynes asserts (and both Habermas and Brandom would agree) that this capacity for reflective endorsement is “best understood in connection with…the ‘sociality of reason’ – roughly the claim that reflective endorsement is not a solitary endeavour but requires social practices of justification that include other reason-givers and co-deliberators.”\(^{64}\)

\(^{60}\) GPRI, 75.

\(^{61}\) This, too, Brandom acknowledges to be constitutive of rational agency. Cf. MIE, 30ff; Chapter 1.

\(^{62}\) In other words, the desires that move us to action must also be responses to norms, otherwise the formulation of a conception of those norms would be moot in terms of the explanation of action.

\(^{63}\) GPRI, 75. It is worth asking to what extent this ability plays a role in Brandom’s normative pragmatics. Since it seems to require a fairly robust self-consciousness (one capable of deploying the expressive resources made possible by “I”), it would seem that his official version could not see it as constitutive for discursive scorekeeping. My arguments in the section on the first person have the force of asserting that he would be wrong to make that claim. However, this is not where Baynes presses his attack, and enough has been said, I think, about the first person for the time being.

\(^{64}\) GPRI, 75.
Out of the third and fourth requirements in particular, Baynes derives the necessity of taking a deliberative stance for ascribing rational agency. Recognizing another person as having the capacity for reflective endorsement means recognizing in them a kind of first-person authority with respect to their own explanations of their beliefs: “the fact that the agent endorses a particular desire as a reason is a prima facie, though defeasible, reason to consider it a reason for her or his action.”65 This ascription requires viewing them under the idealizing presuppositions of communicative action. One must presuppose, amongst other things, that they are making unconditional validity claims, that they are able and willing to provide reasons for their claims, that they are making reference to a common world, that they are acting in accordance with an ideal (i.e., in no manner coercive) communication situation, etc. However, the sociality of reason implies that the content of anyone’s commitments and entitlements is not entirely up to them, since even the ability to reflectively endorse a view (and hence to acknowledge it) depends upon the contributions of others in one’s discursive community. Recognizing this means tempering the attribution of first-person authority with a critical posture that takes a distance from the content of others’ practical self-conception as presented by themselves and the need to make a decision on one’s own part about what they are really committed to.

What this amounts to is that – in the interplay between first-person authority and the sociality of reason as they play out in ascriptions of rational agency – an interpreter must view an intereperee as offering a claim for which she is prepared to give reasons and must simultaneously decide whether or not to endorse that claim. The first-person authority attributed in accordance with the third requirement makes a claim on the

65 GPRI, 75.
interpreter, whereas the interpreter – in accordance with the fourth requirement – also makes a claim to interpretive authority which the interpreter takes to make a claim on the interepreee. The reciprocity of these claims, and the requirements they impose to co-ordinate the reflective endorsement of the interepreee with the interpretive authority of the interpreter, implies that interpretation always means taking a deliberative stance with respect to others: one must view them as a co-participant in the space of reasons, offering and responding to claims that require from both sides a yes or no response. Even if one has no intention of answering the claims of one’s interlocutors, one must interpret them as a “virtual participant” in the same discursive practice and hence act as if both interpreter and interepreee were involved in action oriented toward mutual understanding (this is one of the idealizing presuppositions of communicative action). Put in Brandomian terms, even if one attempts to take up a third-person perspective with respect to an interepreee – i.e., to merely ascribe commitments and entitlements to them without making that ascription the basis of one’s own deliberations about what to acknowledge – this cannot be done without at least taking a hypothetical second-person standpoint, since to attribute a claim to another requires that one at least know what it would be to acknowledge that same claim.66

If this is true – that ascribing propositional attitudes requires the ascriber to be able to grasp what it would mean for herself to acknowledge the claim and hence to adopt an at least hypothetical deliberative stance (wherein they must decide whether the claim made by their interlocutor is one that they should acknowledge or endorse) – then Brandom’s notion that second-person approaches to interpretation are derivative from third-personal approaches is exactly backwards. Third-person interpretations that ascribe

66 GPRI, 79.
but do not attempt to decide whether to acknowledge claims are rather the result of a kind of subtraction or abstraction from second-personal, deliberative interpretations. The real home of interpretation is in actual deliberative practices, though this can be stretched by an abstraction to include “hypothetical” or “virtual” participation in those practices. To move to the third-person stance is to invoke a further abstraction whereby reference to even the hypothetical possibility of acknowledging the ascribed claim is bracketed.67 There are many good uses and appropriate circumstances in which to take this abstracted attitude, but it should not be thought to be fundamental to discursive practice, even if it is “simplest” and hence may appear to be more fundamental in a reconstructive project.68

Baynes goes on to argue that, if we are to accept Brandom’s assertion that normative statuses are instituted by pragmatic normative attitudes, then we cannot do without the second-person standpoint constituted by the deliberative stance. What Brandom’s claim amounts to is that there are no binding norms outside of social practices within which interlocutors hold one another responsible for the claims they make; in other words, where claims to discursive authority are made, challenged, and revised. It is just such a practice – with its Gadamerian question-and-answer structure – that Baynes (and Habermas) argues has an irreducibly second-personal structure. It is precisely in the dialectic between first-person authority (attributed in accordance with the requirement that ascriptions of rational agency include the ascription of the capacity for reflective endorsement) and the countervailing authority of the interpreter (undertaken in

67 In this paragraph I am elaborating Baynes’ argument here beyond his explicit statements, but I take it that I am still following his essential points.
68 This is, I take it, a Hegelian argument: what comes first in a rational reconstruction is not in fact constitutively fundamental since it is discovered to be an abstraction from a more complete, coherent and concrete reality. One might say that Brandom’s discursive practice is merely an sich, which – though it shows up first – is really nothing outside of a reality an und für sich. I will elaborate this issue in the next chapter.
accordance with the sociality of reason) that Baynes locates the need for a deliberative attitude and the necessity of viewing each interlocutor under the idealizing presuppositions of communicative action. Normative phenomenalism without an irreducible second-person perspective will not fly.

It is important to note that Baynes here is accepting normative phenomenalism and criticizing Brandom for failing to account for what is necessary to support that view (namely, the second-person perspective). This contrasts with Rödl’s claim that to do justice to the second-person perspective, Brandom must do away with normative phenomenalism, since that doctrine is the basis of his failure with respect to the second person. Baynes’ critique thus moves between Rödl’s and Habermas’. Granting that Rödl is right that Brandom’s phenomenalism is grounded in a metaphysical thesis, Rödl takes Brandom to task for having an impoverished metaphysics that cannot admit normative statuses as members of the causal order. Habermas, on the other hand, takes Brandom to be too metaphysically realist about concepts and asserts that an adequate account of knowledge and discursive practice should forswear conceptual realism in favour of a nominalistic view of nature. Baynes basically accepts Brandom’s metaphysical picture or at least does not raise it as an item of criticism, but argues on the basis of that acceptance that Brandom’s rejection of the second-person view is inconsistent. As mentioned repeatedly, in my discussion of the kind of objectivity that Brandom’s project requires, I will attempt to show that Hegel’s philosophical perspective can provide a basis from which to synthesize each of these differing criticisms with their differing approaches to the understanding of nature.
To summarize my arguments in this section: Brandom’s failure to adequately address the place of the first-person perspective has the consequence causing a corresponding failure in his conception (or lack thereof) of the place and role of the second-person perspective in discursive practices. On the one hand, Brandom’s account of the second person (such as it is) fails to show its necessary unity with the first-person perspective (Rödl). On the other hand, Brandom fails to adequately distinguish the second-person perspective from a third-person perspective and fails to see the constitutive priority of the former for making discursive practice possible (Habermas and Baynes). In the first of these critiques it was revealed that Brandom’s failure was connected with an inadequate account of the objectivity of normative statuses. In the second it was similarly revealed that Brandom’s blindness to the irreducibility of the second-person perspective was due in part to an inadequate account of sociality that held no place for the horizon of genuinely shared commitments, projects and intentions.69 Thus an attempt to get a full sense of the limitations and lacunae of Brandom’s project (and hence also to articulate how these might be avoided) will need to explore the issue of both what an adequate account of sociality and what an adequate account of objectivity would be to sustain the social-practice account of objectivity that Brandom tries to articulate. I will begin with the issue of sociality.

---

69 Also, Habermas’ criticisms point to an inadequacy in Brandom’s account of objectivity, as will be unpacked in greater detail below.
Chapter 8: I, Thou, and We.

Introduction

Thus far I have argued – largely by weaving together a number of different critiques offered in the literature – that Brandom’s systematic project has a fundamental weakness. It is located in his failure to attend to crucial differences of voice in his account of the basic features of discursive practices, and this failure undermines his attempt to derive objectivity from the social articulation of discursive practice. In the first case, Brandom requires but does not provide a place to an irreducible distinction between the first-person perspective or voice and a third-person or perhaps agent-neutral voice. What he requires is both an account of the possibility of practical self-consciousness as a condition for having a doxastic perspective and also an account of how the means to express such a practical self-consciousness (through the use both of recognitives and of the first-person singular) must be available to agents in a discursive practice. Without these desiderata, Brandom cannot account for how it is possible to have a doxastic perspective at all and, therefore, how it is possible to keep a running track of the distinctions between one’s own perspective and those of one’s interlocutors, which is the ground for objectivity described in MIE. Neither the ability to take up perceptual experience nor the ability to locate oneself in the space of reasons is possible without an expressible first-person perspective.

These shortcomings with respect to the first-person perspective are ramified in Brandom’s inattention to the importance of maintaining a distinctive second-person voice. As just discussed, he fails to account for the necessary imbrication of first- and second-person thought and also fails to account for the necessary distinction between the second- and third-person perspectives. As such he cannot account for the conditions
under which alone it is possible to regard one’s interlocutor as a co-participant in the space of reasons, i.e., as a reason-responsive agent whom one can address as “thou.” Yet it is precisely in the give-and-take between discursive practitioners (i.e., rational agents who take one another’s commitments as potential reasons for their own action and their own commitments as potentially motivating reasons for the actions of others) that Brandom locates the possibility of semantic and normative objectivity. For Brandom, objectivity is a structural feature of I-Thou social practices. If the criticisms I have offered stand, he has failed to offer a convincing account of both the “I” and the “thou” to which he refers.

I will now argue that underlying this failure is Brandom’s resolute refusal to acknowledge the vital role of the first-person plural voice in making objective discursive practice possible. More specifically, I will argue that the kind of sociality that participants in a discursive practice are involved in not only must parcel out deontic authority “locally” to this agent and that one (specifiable as “I” or “you” or “him” or “her”) but also must acknowledge a kind of discursive authority residing essentially in communities, traditions and social institutions that can be specified as “We.” This means re-evaluating Brandom’s rejection of I-We social practices as being in any way constitutive for objectivity, although it will also mean re-evaluating what Brandom takes these practices to include and imply.

8.1. Review of Brandom on I-We Social Practices

It might be useful to begin by reviewing Brandom’s own account of I-We social practices and his reasons for rejecting them. In I-We social practices it is the discursive
attitudes of the community as a whole (what “we” think) that determine the propriety of
the attitudes of individuals within that community. As such, the perspective of the
community is granted ultimate discursive authority; objective normative statutises just are
what the attitudes of the community says they are. To make a “right” move in a language
game is to act in accordance with what the community is disposed to endorse, to make a
“wrong” move is to go against the normative attitudes of the community. In I-Thou
social practices, on the other hand, the propriety of attitudes is settled by the differing
attitudes of individual scorekeepers, and hence discursive authority is apportioned only
“locally” rather than – as in I-We practices – “globally” (i.e., in all situations authority
rests in the same set of attitudes). What moves are right and wrong are determined by the
attitudes of the participants (and hence judgments about the propriety of the same move
may differ between scorekeepers). I-We accounts of social practice attempt to underwrite
the objectivity of content and status by showing that it is always possible to make a
distinction between the commitments and attitudes of individual agents and that of the
community as a whole; hence it is always possible to say of any individual agent’s
commitments or attitudes that they might take X to mean Y or saying “X” to be an
appropriate move, but really X does not mean Y and saying “X” is inappropriate in this
context. What X really means and what the appropriate conditions are for uttering it are
just what the community as a whole takes them to be.

Brandom rejects the I-We picture (and its attempts to ground objectivity) for three
inter-related reasons. In the first place, this view falsely reifies a “community,” treating it
as if it were a discursive agent or a “super-person” capable of having attitudes,
commitments, entitlements, etc. of its own accord. On Brandom’s own view, a
community is nothing more than the aggregate of the to-ings and fro-ings between individual agents. A community (a “we”) is constituted by individuals-in-relation; it is built out of the raw materials provided in I-Thou social practices and has no sui generis existence of its own. Secondly, I-We approaches attempt to “bake a normative cake with non-normative ingredients,” since they treat the dispositions of the community as explanatorily primary and then develop an account of (normative) rightness and wrongness out of them. Brandom calls this view “regularism,” since it treats the statistical preponderance of certain reactions on the part of the community as the basis for normative assessment: what makes a performance right is that it accords with the way things tend to go. Given Brandom’s attachment to the idea that normative propriety cannot be reduced to factual regularity, I-We approaches to discursive practice are unacceptable to him. Finally, I-We practices cannot underwrite a genuine conception of objectivity, since they treat at least one doxastic perspective (that of the community as a whole, the “we”) as immune to error and, as such, they fail to pass the test of Brandom’s objectivity proofs. The distinction between attitude and status might, in such a view, apply to each individual in the community but not to the community as a whole, since the community’s normative attitudes just are the real discursive proprieties in the practice they govern; there is no way to ask whether what the community takes to be right really is right, since its taking it to be so just makes it so. In the course of my argument in this section, I will argue that, properly understood, I-We social practices are not subject to any

1 Once again, then, we meet Brandom’s familiar contention that the discursive practices described in MIE are the most fundamental building blocks out of which much else can be constructed but which, for that reason, are intelligible and practicable quite outside of whether anything is actually (or could actually be) built out of them. Thus he does not deny that there is such a thing as a community perspective (or a second-person deliberative attitude, etc.) but only that such a thing is in any way essential for discursive practice as such. These things are derivative phenomena and can be stripped away, while still leaving a practice that can rightly be described as discursive (i.e., trading in reasons) and hence of practitioners that can be said to be sapient.
of these three critiques, and hence these critiques pose no barrier to construing a prima facie ascription of discursive authority to a “we-perspective” to be essential to the possibility of objective discursive practice.

8.2. Validity and Lifeworld

I will begin my argument that this construal is indeed correct by returning to Habermas’ criticisms of Brandom. As discussed above, Habermas argues that Brandom’s failure to properly distinguish the second- from the third-person perspective is wrapped up with his “objective idealism,” i.e., his belief that the objective world itself is conceptually articulated and that the objectivity of our concepts is underwritten by that objective conceptuality. The structure of the objective world thus acts as the guarantor of the adequacy of our concepts, which, according to Habermas, “relieves the finite and fallible human mind of the burden of the constructive endeavor to develop its own concepts in terms of which it can interpret what happens in the world.”

Discursive communities, then, do not bear the burden of authenticating their validity claims and justifying their conceptual repertoire; this responsibility is shifted from human agents acting in concert to the necessary unfolding of ever more adequate concepts in accordance with the necessary structure of the objective world. In Brandom’s world, says Habermas, “the ‘effort of the concept’ which would otherwise be a matter of cooperative learning by way of the constructive interpretations of a communication community is replaced by a ‘movement of the concept,’ which proceeds through discourse and experience but over the heads of most of the participants.”

---

2 TJ, 161.
3 TJ, 161.
concrete, contingent and fallible discursive practices is accidental to their authentification; the concept is merely mediated though communication communities, not at home in them.

This has the effect of removing from these communities “the epistemic authority (and also…the moral autonomy) they have to assert so long as they do not have the option of direct access to a supposed conceptual structure of the universe.”⁴ That a particular set of concepts is the consensus outcome of deliberation within a discursive community – or that such a set of concepts is the taken-for-granted background for the successful cooperative action of such a community – counts not at all toward establishing their objective adequacy. No member of this community has any epistemic responsibility to credit this consensus above her own or some other community’s alternative conceptual scheme. On Brandom’s construal, each member should relate to these concepts in the same way that they would relate to concepts as deployed by another individual actor within a discursive practice, to treat the community as a “Thou” in an I-Thou social practice, exerting no special claim on the “I” and bearing no special epistemic authority. In an I-Thou social practice, the ground of objective validity – how things “really” are as opposed to how they are taken to be by the objects of one’s propositional attitude ascriptions – lies in the way things stand with the world (as seen from the interpreter’s point of view), not with the way things stand with the commitments, entitlements, attitudes, etc. of a discursive community.

According to Habermas, by divesting the communicative community of any real epistemic (or more broadly normative discursive) authority, Brandom fails to account for the necessary embeddedness of validity claims within “an intersubjectively constituted

⁴ TJ, 161.
The practice of making and validating truth claims emerges out of and is oriented toward return to the taken-for-granted background consensus that constitutes the lifeworld. Moreover, Habermas insists, only with that pragmatic background in mind can we make sense of the orientation of validity claims to unconditional truth.

In the first case, human action is made possible by implicit reliance on “a broad background of intersubjectively shared or sufficiently overlapping beliefs.” These beliefs, in order to guide action, must have a “Platonic connotation” for actors; that is, it must be assumed that they are unconditionally true, that they correspond to “sentences whose truth conditions are fulfilled.” For example, in order to walk, I must take for granted that what appears to be solid ground ahead of me is in fact solid; any doubt about the truth of that belief would leave me paralyzed until I had reasoned my way to that conclusion. This is also the case with respect to joint or co-operative action; two or more agents acting together must share a network of background beliefs and each must accept these beliefs as being unconditionally true. There is, in other words, in human action a kind of “practical certainty” that guides our actions, particularly those that involve “everyday routines and habituated communication.”

The practice of raising explicit validity claims emerges from out of this background when the practical certainty of these beliefs is interrupted, either as a result of recalcitrant experience, failed action or a failure to properly co-ordinate our actions with those of others. When this occurs, we shift from action to discourse such that “what is taken to be true…shed[s] its mode of practical certainty and… take[s] on instead the form

---

5 TJ, 161.
7 TJ, 253.
8 TJ, 253.
of a hypothetical statement whose validity remains undetermined until it passes or fails the test of argumentation. Some aspect of the background loses its taken-for-granted character and becomes an object of our thematic attention. However, from the point of view of action, this thematizing is not an end in itself, but a means to the end of re-establishing the object of our attention as an appropriate ground of practical certainty upon which we can act. In order to do this, participants in discourse raise validity claims about it; they say “this is how it is with X” in the hopes of having the terms of that claim become the shared basis and background for future action. Explicit raising of validity claims, then, emerges from and is oriented toward re-integration into the taken-for-granted background of human action. Within discourse, the authentification of validity claims is presented as an end in itself, but discourse itself must be understood in the context of action, within which contestation about validity is a means to the end of successful coping with the world.

What is more, Habermas argues that two crucial features of discursive practice cannot be understood outside of the point of view of the embeddedness of discourse in action (and hence of the doxastic conditions for action, i.e., the lifeworld), namely, the orientation of discourse to unconditional validity and the “fallibilist consciousness of participants in discourse.” In the latter case, the practical certainty (the “natural Platonism”) of the lifeworld – since it remains the horizon of discourse (both as its origin and its destination) – “furnishes a justification-transcendent standard for orienting ourselves by context-independent truth claims – a standard that is always already

---

9 TJ, 253.
10 TJ, 254.
presupposed in action.”¹¹ In other words, participants in discourse can recognize that even their well-justified validity claims may yet be false (i.e., they can have a fallibilist consciousness) because there is a standard of acceptability for their validity claims that transcends the question of how well established they are in discourse (i.e., how well justified they are in light of discursive reasons and evidence).¹² This standard is whether the claim can bear the weight of the natural Platonism of background beliefs in the lifeworld; i.e., can the claim function successfully as a taken-for-granted guide to cooperative action within the lifeworld? The fact that beliefs are confirmed differently in action (i.e., by successful “coping” with the world we do not make) than in discourse provides participants in discourse a horizon within which to question the completeness of discursive confirmation by reasons.

This further underwrites the orientation of validity-claims and their discursive contestation toward unconditionality and objectivity (in the robust sense of being right or wrong in virtue of the way things stand with a world we did not make). Purely within discourse, there are many possible worlds: “Here there is no pressure to take action and

¹¹ TJ, 254.
¹² As Habermas discusses on pp. 36-42 of TJ, the lack of such a standard in his previous account of truth (the so-called “discursive theory of truth”) was his motivation for revising his understanding of assertoric validity and more rigorously distinguishing it from normative validity. In the case of normative validity, he maintains that the validity of, say, moral rules consists in their discursive acceptability under ideal communicative circumstances (i.e., subject to a number of idealizing presuppositions). His previous theory of truth looked very similar (what is true is what can be the focus of a consensus under ideal communicative circumstances – akin to Pierce’s definition of truth). However, in TJ he offers a new account – one that carefully situates discourse within action in a shared lifeworld – precisely because the old exclusively discursive theory offered no justification-transcendent criterion of truth and hence could not underwrite so-called “cautionary” uses of truth (“that may be a great theory but it still might not be true”). The importance of this change for my purposes is that Brandom too (like the later Habermas) wants to mark a distinction between truth and justification and to do it in terms of the pragmatic dimension of discursive practice. Habermas’ point in response then (at least as I am constructing it) is that this project cannot be seen through without keeping the discursive authority of a shared lifeworld in view. Restricting attention exclusively to discourse and discursive practice with its I-Thou articulation of authority (as Brandom does) deprives one of the horizon necessary to fund a justification-transcendent criterion that can underwrite a fallibilist consciousness within discourse.
only reasons count. In the interpersonal dimension, where participants cast their objectivifying regard away from the world and turn toward the objections of their opponents in a performative attitude, it is possible for as many worlds to view with one another as there are interpretations.”\footnote{TJ, 255. This is a way of describing how things stand in Brandom’s perspectively articulated discursive practice, where “the way things are” is always at least implicitly “how things are from this perspective or that one.”} However, when discourse is oriented toward making its validity claims count as guides to action in a shared lifeworld and an objective world that we don’t create (a world that is “the same for all us”\footnote{TJ, 254.}); it cannot be content with satisfying the objections of opponents (i.e., justification); it must turn toward a justification-transcendent standard that can be satisfying for all (possible) agents because that standard has its home in the world they all share. Even when engaging in the process of negotiating validity claims across the various worlds present in discourse, “interlocutors continue to associate the connotation of ‘grasping facts’ with the goal of discursively redeeming \textit{unconditional} claims to truth – and thus they \textit{keep} the objective world in view indirectly. They have not forgotten that, having finished their interpretive dispute, they will again refer to \textit{the same} world together as actors as soon as they return to the lifeworld.”\footnote{TJ, 255.} If discourse was not always oriented toward action in a shared lifeworld, there would be no impetus to make \textit{unconditional objective} validity a goal of interpretive dispute. In terms that I will employ at length below, a conception of discursive practice that floats freely from embeddedness in co-operative action in a shared lifeworld (and hence of shared beliefs) cannot account for two basic features of discourse itself (fallibilistic consciousness and orientation toward unconditional validity).
Discursive practitioners, then, must attribute a significant degree of authority to the shared beliefs that (at least in part) constitute the lifeworld. In action this attributed authority is very strong: these beliefs are treated as practical certainties. In discourse at least one of these beliefs is treated as problematic, but the possibility of unconditional validity and fallibilistic consciousness within discourse depends upon treating other features of the lifeworld as having a degree of practical certainty and hence as determining (at least in part) the conditions under which the discursive redemption of validity claims happens. If the validity of a claim depends (in part) upon the possibility of its functioning as a practically certain guide to action in the lifeworld, then the assumptions and beliefs that constitute the lifeworld itself have authority to determining discursive validity.

What is crucial to my argument, moreover, is the question: “whose beliefs are these background beliefs?” The orientation of discursive practice to action in the lifeworld and the corresponding attribution of discursive authority to the lifeworld might supplement, but not fundamentally disturb Brandom’s I-Thou social practice account of discursive practice if the lifeworld is perspectively parcelled out (as “collateral commitments”) between individual discursive practitioners. But this is not how the lifeworld is experienced. The beliefs that (in part) constitute the lifeworld are constitutively not experienced as internal, doxastic commitments, but as practical certainties that bear not only on one’s own practical and theoretical commitments, but on those of everyone; it is “a social a priori built into the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding in language.”16 Attributions of commitment in the singular (whether first, or second person) specify these commitments in terms of a subjective world to which

their subject has a form of privileged access.\textsuperscript{17} This is not the same with respect to the practical commitments implicit in the lifeworld: “The members of a collective count themselves as members belonging to the lifeworld in the first person plural.”\textsuperscript{18} It is within the horizon of a lifeworld specified in the first-person plural that contestations (in an I-Thou social practice) about the validity of claims in discourse arise and to which they are structurally oriented to return. Thus the discursive authority that discourse itself requires to be accorded to the lifeworld attaches to a set of commitments constitutively specified in the first-person plural: the “we” of co-participants in the lifeworld must have at least a \textit{prima facie} discursive authority\textsuperscript{19} in order for discursive practice to be oriented toward unconditional validity and for discursive practitioners to have a fallibilistic consciousness.

8.3. Tradition and Authority

One of the ways in which the lifeworld bears on discourse is not merely as a background for action, but also as an interpretive, cultural tradition: “The cultural reproduction of the lifeworld ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions in the world in the semantic dimension: it secures a \textit{continuity} of the

\textsuperscript{17} Brandom accounts for this domain of first-person authority by characterizing essentially indexical beliefs (especially I-beliefs) as strong \textit{de re} attitudes offering a special kind of access to their object that weak \textit{de re} attitudes do not. As discussed at length, however, Brandom must deny that such attitudes (and hence of first-person authority) are \textit{essential} to discursive practice as such. Cf. Levine, “Expressivism and I-Beliefs.”

\textsuperscript{18} Habermas, TCA, v. II: 131.

\textsuperscript{19} This authority, as will be discussed below, is not indefeasible. Any lifeworld belief may become a matter for discursive contestation with respect to its validity; no part of it is immune. However, a la Sellars, this can only happen if substantial swaths of the lifeworld are not raised to discourse in this manner and hence retain the status of practical certainties. Thus this Habermasian argument for the constitutive priority of I-We social practices (counting oneself a member of a community and acting within a lifeworld) to discursive I-Thou practices does not, pace Brandom, fall into the temptation of making the community the absolutely indefeasible arbiter of validity, even while it accords it \textit{prima facie} discursive authority.
tradition and coherence of knowledge sufficient for daily practice.”

In a cultural, interpretive tradition, the lifeworld is reproduced and renewed in such a way that participants in the lifeworld can maintain a shared set of interpretations and significances necessary for social integration as well as personal orientation (knowing where one stands). When this cultural reproduction fails, the legitimacy of various means of social integration enters crisis and persons suffer from social and normative alienation, which cripples their ability to engage in communicative action: “There can be disturbances of cultural reproduction that get manifested in a loss of meaning and lead to corresponding legitimation and orientation crises. In such cases, the actors’ cultural stock of knowledge can no longer cover the need for mutual understanding that arises in new situations. The interpretive schemes accepted as valid fail, and the resource ‘meaning’ becomes scarce.”

Traditions – understood in terms of the cultural reproduction of the lifeworld – are crucial for the possibility of reaching mutual understanding through communicative action (i.e., discourse).

John McDowell takes this point up in a defense of Gadamer’s traditionalism against a Davidsonian attempt to pull mutual understanding apart from standing within a tradition. The Davidsonian viewpoint attempts to articulate the possibility of mutual understanding (in conditions of radical interpretation) in terms of an I-Thou social practice; McDowell argues that Gadamer is correct in viewing this as impossible; a tradition – specified in first-person-plural terms – is constitutively prior to the communication situation described by Davidson.

---

20 TCA, II: 140.  
21 TCA, II: 140.
In his famous paper “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” Davidson argues from our ability to understand Mrs. Malaprop in spite of her frequent misuse of words in respect of their “conventional” meaning to the conclusion that the practice of linguistic communication does not essentially depend on any shared meanings, conventions or rules -- in other words, that “there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what philosophers and linguists have supposed.”22 All there is is linguistic practice between various speakers employing constantly shifting theories of meaning to make sense of one another’s linguistic performances. In rejecting the necessity of the notion of “a language” for understanding the possibility of discursive practice, Davidson is rejecting three widely held assumptions about meaning and interpretation: (1) that “first meaning is systematic;” (2) that “first meanings are shared;” and (3) that “first meanings are governed by learned conventions or regularities.”23 Possession of a shared system of conventional meaning – a structure called a “language” – is not a prerequisite for engaging in communication, and lacking it is no barrier to reaching understanding.

Malapropisms are violations of all three conditions (they defy syntax, they are idiolectical and they are apparently random with respect to actual meaning), and yet we have little difficulty in understanding what Mrs. Malaprop means when she says of her own spoken prose that it is “a nice derangement of epitaphs”. From this ability, Davidson generalizes that this is in fact what we all do all of the time. What we are able to do when interpreting malapropisms, he argues, is to formulate a “passing theory” of meaning for

23 NDE, 254. “First meaning” is Davidson’s replacement for “literal meaning.” It is the “normal” or “standard” meaning of a term (to be distinguished from, say, metaphorical meanings), the meaning that “should be found by consulting a dictionary based on actual usage” (253).
an utterance that departs from our “prior theory.” A prior theory, for a hearer, “expresses how he is prepared in advance to interpret an utterance of a speaker, while the passing theory is how he does interpret the utterance.” In the prior theory, “epitaph” when spoken by another English speaker is taken to mean “epitaph” and sentences in which it is the subject are true or false of epitaphs. However, faced with Mrs. Malaprop’s utterance, the prior theory is revised in a passing theory that instead takes “epitaph” to mean “epithet”. In this explanation, it seems easy to assert that a prior theory is the shared, systematic, conventional “language” that generally makes communication possible, and a passing theory is merely a momentary revision of the prior theory.

However, Davidson goes on to argue that the distinction between prior and passing theories as a way of mapping the distinction between a shared, conventional language and negotiation of diversions from this structure will not go through, since “what must be shared for communication to succeed is the passing theory.” In fact “the prior theory is neither shared by speaker and interpreter nor is it what we would normally call a language. For the prior theory has in it all the features special to an idiolect of the speaker that the interpreter is in a position to take into account before the utterance begins.” There is no generalized prior theory, Davidson argues, only expectations about what this or that speaker will mean based on what we know of them; the relativity of prior theories to speakers means that interpretation is largely a matter of trying to understand the idiolect of each individual speaker. Interpretation succeeds, then, when

---

24 For Davidson, all interpretation is a matter of formulating a theory of meaning for another’s utterances that can be modeled as the formulation of a Tarski-style theory of truth that specifies the truth conditions of each sentence uttered and in so doing fixes the extensions of each singular term employed (cf. “Truth and Meaning” and especially “Radical Interpretation”).
25 NDE, 260.
26 NDE, 261.
27 NDE, 262.
revision of the prior theory in the passing theory yields a passing theory that is “shared,” in the sense that the interpreter employs a theory of meaning that corresponds to the way the speaker intends for the interpreter to interpret her: “[W]e might try to say in what a person’s ability to interpret or speak to another person consists: it is the ability that permits him to construct a correct, that is, convergent passing theory for speech transactions with that person.”28 Neither a prior nor a passing theory is what we might call a shared, common language; a prior theory is speaker-relative and hence idiolectical and only the passing theory must be shared. And yet nothing besides these is necessary to explain the practical ability of speakers and hearers to understand and to make themselves understood. One might say that we are all speaking idiolects and interpreting one another as speaking idiolects (albeit with substantial overlap).

This corresponds significantly with Brandom’s idea that the perpsectival and holistic character of meaning creates an inevitable doxastic gap between different discursive practitioners that needs to be negotiated for discourse to occur. All that we need is you and your way of speaking, me with mine and for each of us to deploy revisable theories of meaning for one another’s way of speaking. Two speakers who shared nothing describable as a language (no shared, systematic, conventional meanings or rules) could, with sufficient effort, make themselves understood to one another. If this model is sufficient, then all that is needed is an I-Thou social practice; there is no shared horizon of meanings or rules necessary as a condition for that practice; all that needs to be shared (or rather, converged-upon) is the temporary result of that practice (i.e., a passing theory).

28 NDE, 264.
It should be noted that what Davidson offers here is a reconstructive approach to making sense of our discursive capacities that is very much in line with what Brandom takes himself to be doing. In his response to Habermas about the place of the second-person voice, Brandom admits that the second-person perspective may play a role in much of our actual discursive practice, but insists that a discursive practice in which it does not do so is possible. What he seeks to give is not an account of everything we do, but what are the very basic requirements without which nothing that could be described as discursive or conceptual is possible. Similarly, Davidson is denying not that there are such things as linguistic conventions and so on, but simply that they play any constitutive role for communication as such. In other words, we can reconstruct a successful discursive (communicative) practice in which they are not present. Thus a successful rejoinder to Davidson’s take on the I-Thou sociality of linguistic practice will hit on Brandom’s as well, not only at the level of results or conclusions, but also at the level of explanatory approach.

In “Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism,” John McDowell attempts to make just such a rejoinder. The paper begins with a defense of his own Gadamerian approach to understanding the conditions under which our experiences “allow the world itself to figure into the rational background of the fixation of belief.”

29 John McDowell, “Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism,” in Gadamer’s Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer, ed. by Malpas, Arnswald and Kertscher (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), p. 173. [Henceforth: GDUR] McDowell describes his approach to the conditions under which the world “comes into view” in Mind and World, Lecture IV. Drawing on Aristotle and Gadamer, he discusses the possibility of a kind of socially-endowed “second nature” that can explain how it is that we come to have the conceptual capacities to be rationally response to “rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them… When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons” (82). This concept of second nature, moreover, gives us tools to think about nature in a way that falls neither into the complete disenchantment of “bald naturalism,” on the one hand, nor into “rampant Platonism,” on the other. I shall discuss this further in Chapter 9.
Michael Friedman argues that McDowell’s affirmation of Gadamer’s invocation of tradition as a necessary horizon for the deployment of our rational faculties in experience must succumb to a conceptual relativism that a Davidsonian approach successfully avoids. After arguing that the Gadamerian “fusion of horizons” avoids this particular pitfall, McDowell goes on to argue that there are considerations that recommend Gadamer’s insistence that “any understanding consciousness is situated in tradition“ over the Davidsonian approach.

The primary issue at stake, according to McDowell, is whether “the primary context for the intelligibility of linguistic items” is “a community’s language or the linguistic practice of an individual.” Davidson is at pains to argue that “language” construed as linguistic rules and conventions is not this primary context and hence that linguistic competence is not in the first instance the “shared ability to produce linguistic behaviour in conformity to specifiable rules.” About this McDowell (and McDowell’s Gadamer) is in agreement: “Nothing could be further from the spirit of Gadamer’s reflections about hermeneutics than to suppose there could in principle be a method, in a narrow sense, for arriving at an understanding of another person’s linguistic productions.” He furthermore grants Davidson’s point that two individuals who shared

31 It is worth noting that this criticism dovetails with Brandom’s rejection of I-We approaches to objectivity on the grounds that they make one perspective (that of the community) immune to criticism. If Brandom is right, then the objective validity of any claim made by a member of that community is relative to the perspective of the community as a whole and not to the way things stand with the world. Given the possibility that there are different discursive communities with different sets of commitments, this opens the door to an ineluctable relativism of the type that Friedman is concerned about and which closes the door to rational scrutiny of commitments of a discursive practice from outside of the community of practitioners.
32 GDUR, 174.
33 GDUR, 181.
34 GDUR, 182.
35 GDUR, 182.
no linguistic conventions or rules could, with sufficient effort, come to understand one another.

However, Davidson makes a “leap” beyond these points to advance “the claim that understanding does not require anyone ever to have spoken as anyone else speaks.”

Sharing a language – speaking as someone else speaks – need not be understood in terms of producing linguistic behaviours in accordance with conventional rules, but rather in “a more ordinary interpretation… say, as one speaks German and the other speaks Xhosa.”

One might say that one is here immersed in and acts out of a linguistic tradition rather than producing performances in accordance with rules. On this view of sharing a language, McDowell argues, it is impossible for someone who has never shared a language with anyone to reach an understanding with someone with whom she does not share a language. By contrast, Davidson, “if [he] is to sustain his doctrine that shared practice is of no philosophical interest beyond what derives from its utility in facilitating communication… must suppose this feature of the thought experiment is inessential.”

In other words, though sharing a practice with one’s interlocutor may not be a condition for mutual understanding, McDowell asserts – and Davidson denies – that sharing a linguistic practice with someone (i.e., being a part of a tradition) is essential.

It is essential because sharing a language – which for Gadamer entails sharing a tradition and a worldview – and “familiarity with a human way of life” are “conditions for being potential subjects of understanding at all.” Davidson rejects the necessity of shared practice (tradition, language, etc.) on the grounds that it does not “[suffice] of

---

36 GDUR, 183.
37 GDUR, 183.
38 GDUR, 183.
39 GDUR, 184-185.
itself, for mutual understanding between parties to it.\textsuperscript{40} About this he is surely right, but, as far as Davidson is concerned, that would be the only way in which shared practice could contribute to the possibility of mutual understanding. This is part of his methodological commitments discussed above, namely, to a reconstructive approach that attempts to include only the ingredients of a discursive practice that are necessary for mutual understanding at its most basic level. Davidson (like Brandom) attempts to reconstruct a successful case of communication (an “occasion of verbal behaviour”\textsuperscript{41}) out of only the barest ingredients: two speakers with a set of beliefs about the world, the capacity to deploy a theory of truth for a language, and the intention to understand and be understood; nothing shared here. An element of discursive practice is then only significant if it is an ingredient in this basic recipe.

For McDowell (and Gadamer), this methodological commitment blinds Davidson to the real significance of a shared language: it is not an ingredient in an occasion of verbal behaviour, but the form of human being-in-the-world, the horizon without which it would be impossible to have the world in view at all. A language is a worldview, “a whole in which verbal behavior is integrated into a form of life, including practices that if considered on their own would have to be counted as non-linguistic.”\textsuperscript{42} Hence the very presence of two people with a set of beliefs and an intention to understand and be understood is only explicable if we see both as already having a language, without which they could have neither these beliefs nor these intentions. If this is so, McDowell wonders “does it make sense to suppose there could be this pervasive shaping of life by language if everyone’s verbal behavior was completely idiosyncratic? Surely the

\textsuperscript{40} GDUR, 185.

\textsuperscript{41} GDUR, 185.

\textsuperscript{42} GDUR, 185.
understanding baulks…” This is particularly so since the language that forms our being-in-the-world is not an abstract structure (a logical syntax if you will) that may shape any language and even each idiolect (in which case verbal behaviour for each could be idiosyncratic with respect to meaning as long as it followed the logical syntactical form). Rather, “verbal form and traditionary content cannot be separated in hermeneutical experience. If every language is a view of the world, it is not so primarily because it is a particular type of language (in the way linguists view language) but because of what is said or handed down in this language.” Traditionary content is not something individuals speaking idiolects have access to; being a human with a linguistic form of being-in-the-world necessarily involves being part of a tradition of speaking, meaning and understanding, a tradition that one did not originate and that one thus shares with others.

McDowell argues further that “like the ability to intend to trump one’s righthand opponent’s ace” the “ability to intend some performance to be understood in one way or another has to be learned.” The speakers in Davidson’s reconstructed situation of radical interpretation cannot have the intentions they have if they have not learned how to play a language-game, and this means that they need to have learned it from someone(s). Being a subject of understanding – having the world in view in a set of beliefs and having the intention to make oneself understood and to understand – requires being initiated into a linguistic tradition, a concrete and particular set of practices and meanings that are shared both synchronically and diachronically.

43 GDUR, 185. Recall that one of the consequences of Davidson’s conclusion that shared practice and language was not constitutive for understanding is that interpretation proceeds (via passing theories) in all such cases as if each speaker were speaking an idiolect.
44 GDUR, 185.
45 GDUR, 191.
McDowell moves on to applying this point to Brandom’s reconstruction of discursive practices, which share both a reconstructive methodology and (as a result) an account of mutual understanding couched entirely in I-Thou terms. Specifically, he asks “whether an I and a thou can be intelligibly in place without a shared language – something that belongs to a we – to enter into constituting them. Brandom attempts to do this by showing how intentionality – understood as taking up discursive commitments about a shared world – emerges within discursive scorekeeping practices and hence also that the selves that are the subjects of those commitments (selfhood being a normative discursive status) also emerge within those practices. To this McDowell replies: “It is mysterious how the appeal to scorekeeping can help here. How can a pair of items neither of which is on its own intelligible as a perspective on the world – this is why the construction is supposedly necessary – somehow become perspectives on the world by means of the inclusion, in what they are not on their own intelligible as perspectives on, of stretches of the other’s behavior?”46

In a sense, McDowell is turning Brandom’s criticisms of regularism – that they attempt to bake a normative cake with non-normative ingredients – back against Brandom, but this time with respect to intentionality. How can just combining two non-intentional sets of behaviours (however complexly arranged) magically make intentionality appear in both of them? Rather than explaining how it is possible for discursive practitioners to have a perspective on the world, Brandom’s reconstruction presupposes that capacity. Thus this argument dovetails with the arguments I marshaled above to the effect that Brandom cannot explain how it is possible to (1) take oneself to have a perspective on the world (self-consciousness and the first-person perspective); and

46 GDUR, 188.
(2) take others to have a perspective on the world (the second-person perspective), except that here McDowell is concerned primarily with what is necessary for a speaker to have the objective world in view (about which I shall say more below). McDowell’s argument in this paper is no more than this question, but I take my arguments heretofore to fill in the chain of reasoning: discursive practitioners cannot be taken to have a perspective on the world if they cannot have a first- and a second-person perspective (i.e., if the resources necessary to make sense of these perspectives are not present), and Brandom’s own account of the capacities of discursive practitioners (to acknowledge and attribute commitments) presupposes that they have these perspectives. However, his methodological and ontological assumptions undercut his ability to acknowledge these presuppositions, to the extent that he explicitly disowns them. Thus his attempt to bake an intentional cake with non-intentional ingredients is bound to fail, and this failure can be accounted for from a perspective that takes first-, second- and first-person plural attitudes to be constitutive for discursive agency.

Gadamer offers one such perspective, and this, according to McDowell, recommends his views over Brandom’s and Davidson’s: “There is no such difficulty [as Brandom’s failure to account for how the I and the thou are possible as perspectives on the world] about the Gadamerian I-We picture. Here familiarity with a natural language, in which verbal form and traditionary content are inseparable, constitutes an individual stance that is perfectly intelligibly [sic] all on its own as an orientation toward reality.” If we allow that language is a mode of human being-in-the-world and that having a language is having a perspective on the world, there is no mystery about how it is that an I and a thou who, though they don’t share a language with one another, nevertheless share

47 GDUR, 188.
a language with others, can reach an understanding with one another through a fusion of horizons. What cannot be explained in an I-Thou reconstruction a la Davidson and Brandom is fully explicable in an account that prioritizes the sharing of a language over reaching understanding in a situation of radical interpretation.

Brandom is bound to object to such a view, McDowell acknowledges, on the grounds that it falsely reifies the “we” perspective of a shared language such that it “speak[s] of ‘the community’ as acting in norm-involving ways in which only persons can intelligibly act… Thereby such approaches unacceptably treat ‘the community’ as a superlative individual.” This super-person would then have the added function that its attitudes and dispositions would be what determines the propriety of the attitudes and dispositions of its members. McDowell argues, however, that this is not a telling criticism of Gadamer’s version of the priority of I-We social relations. In the first case, saying that there exists a natural language that we share does not imply that there is “a community” that deploys that language in its behaviours in the same manner as an individual is a subject of behaviours. Secondly, and more importantly, an I-We picture must involve a super-person whose attitudes determine normative proprieties only if normative phenomenalism obtains:

“It might seem that the point of invoking a we must be to ensure that there is someone – if not other individuals then a super-individual – to hold speakers to the norms (in Brandom’s rather than Davidson’s sense) of their linguistic practice. But this reflects a metaphysical scruple about the very idea of subjecting to norms, a scruple that finds comfort in seeing norms as instituted by personal activity – if not on the part of ordinary persons then, in a version of the picture

48 GDUR, 188.
49 “But there is no super-person in the picture I have been recommending. I have not credited the we who share a language with a super-personal counterpart to the deontic attitudinizing by individuals that is central to Brandom’s picture” (GDUR, 189).
that would certainly be confused, on the part of a super-person. And I think the scruple is baseless.  

Brandom’s super-person objection assumes that I-We construals of social practice must attribute normative personality to the community, since otherwise there would be no set of attitudes (the attitudes of individuals not counting in such a construal) that could determine the normative statuses of various moves in the practice. This assumes, of course, that there can be normative statuses only if they are instituted by normative attitudes. But McDowell (like Rödl) rejects this assumption: being subject to norms (and hence for one’s performances to have normative status) does not depend on being subject to someone’s normative attitudes. The super-person objection to I-We social practice accounts of discursive intentionality only holds if one grants Brandom’s phenomenalism and its underlying metaphysical (or ontological) assumptions. As mentioned repeatedly, the question of the metaphysical view of nature that Brandom’s account of objectivity and sociality presuppose will be given explicit attention in the next section.

McDowell, then, develops an aspect of the Habermasian argument that I gave above for the priority of I-We to I-Thou social practices. For Habermas, the possibility of discursively contesting validity claims in a way that is oriented toward unconditional validity and subject to a fallibilistic consciousness depends upon the embeddedness of discourse within a shared lifeworld. This lifeworld and the beliefs that (in part) constitute it are experienced in first-person plural terms (as what “we” assume) and are accorded a prima facie authority even in discourse. One aspect of this lifeworld is its character as an

---

50 GDUR, 189.
51 See above on Rödl’s view that Brandom’s phenomenalism – based as it is on a metaphysical scruple with allowing normative statuses to be parts of the causal order – undercuts his ability to see the unity of first- and second-person thought.
enduring tradition in which social integration is possible and through which the lifeworld is reproduced culturally. McDowell (and Gadamer) develop this theme by showing how immersion in such a tradition – and in particular in a tradition insofar as it is embodied in a natural language – is a condition also for being a potential participant in a discursive practice, in McDowell’s terms, for “having the world in view.” As such, embeddedness in a “we” that is granted discursive authority is a condition both for the logical features of discursive practice and for the existence of discursive practitioners. Furthermore, this embeddedness is subject neither to Brandom’s criticisms that such a view makes the “we” perspective indefeasible nor to his objection that it falsely reifies this perspective as if it were a super-person.

8.4. Constitutive and Genetic Priority: Hegel and Teleology

Brandom, however, is bound to respond that this view is still subject to another of his complaints about I-We social practices, namely, that they presuppose what he wants to explain, i.e., how a “we” perspective can come to be. How does a lifeworld or a

52 It should be said here that this discursive authority is, in virtue of being an authority within a practice of giving and asking for reasons, a norming authority. That is to say, it is not merely a constitutive condition of discursive practice that it be embedded in a “we” but the commitments that are held in virtue of being so embedded have prima facie authority in respect to their discursive validity, and – since they are held to be valid within a holistically-determined web of other discursive commitments – they play a crucial role in determining the validity of these other commitments. Holist arguments of the sort that I am making (of the necessity that one practice or attitude be embedded in some wider, more inclusive practice or attitude) do not always necessarily demonstrate the normative authority of the wider practice, but only its constitutive priority. However, in the case of a discursive practice (which is, at least for Brandom and the other figures I am discussing, irreducibly normative) it must be both. For an example of an embeddedness claim (with respect to economic practices) that is not obviously normative, see Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). I have started work on disambiguating the normative significance of Polanyi’s work (drawing on Aristotle and Hegel) in Michael DeMoor, “Aristotle and Hegel on Private Property and the Common Good” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Montreal, Canada, June 2010).

53 For Habermas, the lifeworld has prima facie authority, but any part of it can be challenged and revised in discourse; hence no part of it is indefeasible.
tradition or a natural language (all interconnected versions of the “we” perspective) come into existence if not through the discursive efforts of individuals (“I’s” and “thou’s”) who originally do not share these perspectives and who hence resemble Davidson’s hypothetical interlocutors? In other words, this would be an objection to the I-We perspective of Habermas, McDowell and Gadamer from the genetic priority of I-Thou to I-We social practices. The arguments of Habermas, McDowell and Gadamer all point to the constitutive priority of I-We to I-Thou social practices; but if these could only have come about as a result of I-Thou social practice, then their theses seem to be falsified, whatever their philosophical attractiveness. How could I-We social practices be constitutively prior to I-Thou practices if I-Thou practices are genetically prior to I-We practices? To answer this question – and hence to defeat this potential defeater of Habermas, McDowell and Gadamer’s views – I will turn, once again, to Hegel.

I will argue that Hegel shows that there is no contradiction between the idea that I-We sociality is constitutively prior to I-Thou sociality in discursive practice and the admission that I-Thou sociality is genetically prior to I-We sociality. I will develop this argument by examining his conception of the teleological character of the development of social practices from an I-Thou structure to an I-We structure. In teleological explanations of social practices (or indeed, in teleological explanations generally) what comes last in the order of genesis can nevertheless be first in the order of intelligibility in such a way that what is first in the order of genesis is unintelligible (is not what it is) apart from its role in attaining the telos of that genesis. Because Brandom rejects teleological explanation, he cannot see that there is no contradiction in the Habermas, McDowell, Gadamer view I offer and hence that the genetic priority of I-Thou sociality is
no objection to the validity of their defenses of the (constitutive) priority of I-We sociality. It makes sense to begin, then, by revisiting the issue of teleology and Brandom’s rejection thereof.

In the Habermasian argument for the priority of I-We sociality discussed above, orientation toward a robustly shared understanding – in the form of a lifeworld consensus serviceable as the taken-for-granted background of co-operative action – is taken to be constitutive for communicative practice as such. In other words, what makes discourse possible is the fact that it is directed toward the end (telos) of strongly shared understanding; that is, toward the formation of a “we” beyond the convergence of I and Thou. As discussed above, Brandom rejects the notion that such a teleological orientation is essential to discursive practice as such and hence that it can be constitutive for it. He argues that such practices need not be thought to have a “point” outside of the proximate ends of discursive practice itself; a discursive practice that pursues only discursive ends is intelligible in abstraction from one that serves extra-discursive ends such as providing a shared background for action. As such, a reconstructive explanation – one that seeks to isolate those ingredients without which no practice could count as discursive from those ingredients that supplement such a bare-bones practice – is adequate to get to the heart of discursivity (and hence sapience) without attributing a teleological orientation to those reconstructed practices.

54 “Strongly shared” in two senses. First, the conclusion of communicative action must be capable of being “returned” to the lifeworld in such a way that it has the epistemic “strength” of being a practical certainty with respect to action. Second, this conclusion, since it has the character with respect to co-operative action of a taken-for-granted aspect of the lifeworld must be shared in the sense that agents relate to it as what “we” believe or assume (just as agents count themselves as belonging to the lifeworld in general in the first person plural).
What is essential here is that Brandom bases his rejection of teleology – and hence of the constitutive necessity of orientation toward robustly shared understanding – on a certain understanding of what teleological explanation involves, namely, the ordering of discursive practice in accordance with an extra-(or supra-) discursive end. In other words, the telos that Brandom takes Habermas to refer to – shared understanding acting according to the character of the lifeworld as a background for co-operative action – is extrinsic to discourse itself. Brandom calls such a teleology “Gricean,” since it treats the intended ends of speech acts as if they were intelligible autonomously from those speech acts themselves. On the contrary, he calls discursive practice “a mighty engine for the envisaging and engendering of new ends – thereby transforming the very concept of an end or goal, giving it for the first time its proper practical-rational sense.”55

Hegel’s teleology, however, is not “Gricean” and hence not subject to this critique. It does not treat the telos of discursive social practices as something extrinsic to them, but rather their internal “truth.” I will argue, then, that Hegel’s teleological reconstruction of human consciousness – as discussed at some length in Part 2 – provides a point of view from which Habermasian talk of the constitutive orientation of discourse toward mutual understanding does not fall afoul of Brandom’s criticisms and, as such, offers a horizon within which the apparent contradiction between constitutive and genetic priority can be resolved teleologically. Before rehearsing Hegel’s account of consciousness, it is fitting to look directly at his approach to teleological explanation to see how it is not “Gricean.”

In my discussion of the development of self-consciousness and objectivity in Part 2, I was at pains to emphasize the ways in which the theoretical account offered in the

55 Brandom, FNNF, 363-364.
Phenomenology was wrapped up with the practical account offered in the Philosophy of Right. I argued that, when we see these two accounts unified (as it were, as two sides of the same coin), we can most clearly see the ways in which self-consciousness and objective consciousness emerge fully, for Hegel, only against the background of a shared world that is simultaneously social and objective. As Willem de Vries makes clear, it is in this unity of the practical and theoretical perspectives that Hegel’s teleology must be understood as well. In the practical perspective, the world appears as the field of our instrumental action and the things in it as mere means to our own ends; one might say that the world of practical activity is a world that is entirely for-us.

On the other hand, “the theoretical approach to nature is intended to capture the world as it is in itself, but it can grasp nature only by transforming it into an abstract structure of forces, laws and genera.” Both approaches – to nature as purely for-us and nature as entirely in-itself – are one-sided, abstract and inadequate. However, simply placing the two approaches side-by-side will not suffice to rectify their respective inadequacies: “a deeper synthesis must be reached, one in which the two approaches or languages do not simply coexist alongside each other but inform each other and meld into a complete and unified vision of the world.”

Simultaneously, because the objective world has been mediated by social human activities (as in labour) and meanings such that the world of “things” and the world of social practices and meanings are mutually imbricated to the extent that they are inseparable.

Willem de Vries, Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1988), 4-5. [Henceforth: HTMA]

HTMA, 5.

HTMA, 7. In the Phenomenology the development of “Observing Reason” – reason aimed at establishing the logically necessary laws in nature – testifies to the necessity of this unity: the laws of physics – which operate independently of subjectively held ends – must give way to biological explanation that must be, at least in part, teleological (in that the laws binding the activities of biological creatures are mediated in their subjective ends). But even in biology there is a tendency to abstract the objective picture from the subjective teleological one (as exemplified in physiognomy and the study of the brain), and hence a deeper synthesis must be sought in the unity of subjective teleology and objective physicality in an approach that focuses on self-conscious agency.
This deeper synthesis is to be found in the concept of “objective purpose” – purpose that is both for-us (insofar as it makes a thing available for some uses) and in-itself (insofar as it has these purposes independently of our subjective purposes for the thing). What is crucial here, for my purposes, is that Hegel sees a “subjective” model of teleology (whereby a thing’s purposes are simply the extension of the subjective purposes of agents) as an abstraction from – and hence unintelligible outside of reference to – a kind of objective teleology. In this claim, Hegel breaks from any simply “Gricean” model of teleology, whereby the ends a thing is put to are intelligible outside of an understanding of the intrinsic qualities of the thing.\textsuperscript{60} The kind of teleology that is most fundamental is not the ends of subjective agents imposed on some natural object (and hence intelligible in abstraction from that object), but the object’s own ends which exist simultaneously in-itself and for subjective agents; Gricean teleology is an abstraction from natural, objective teleology. Objective purpose is purpose that is in-itself-for-us. Furthermore, as de Vries makes clear, this objective teleology “is at heart self-realization.”\textsuperscript{61} Every natural object “activity aims at the objective good of the organism,” which is ultimately the realization of “an ideal paradigm of [its] thing-kind of which all individuals of the kind can be seen as approximations.”\textsuperscript{62} Thus an action toward a natural object’s natural ends is just a movement toward its becoming fully what it already is. Here teleology makes no reference to ends external to the thing itself; the telos of an object is to be itself. This is the horizon within which “Gricean” (subjective purposive)

\textsuperscript{60} With respect to discursive practice, the “Gricean” approach treats the ends of speech acts to be intelligible outside of an understanding of the speech acts themselves. In the cases Hegel is primarily concerned with in de Vries’ discussion (natural objects), the ends of, say, a cork tree are stipulated (on the “subjective” Gricean model) independently of the intrinsic qualities of the tree (because they are a person’s ends, not the tree’s). Both of these cases, though, have the same structure: in Brandom’s case, discursive practices are treated as natural objects in very much the same way as is a cork-tree).

\textsuperscript{61} HTMA, 9.

\textsuperscript{62} HTMA, 8.
teleology is to be understood, namely, a teleology in which ends are intrinsic to the being of the means, where teleology is self-realization.

With this non-Gricean picture of teleology in place, we can see that attributing a teleological character to discursive practice need not fall afoul of Brandom’s criticisms to the effect that it is a mistake to think of such practices having a “point” at all. Thus Habermas’ contention that the telos of discursive practice is robust mutual understanding (and hence an I-We form of sociality) is still on the table. This, in turn, implies that a teleologically structured discursive practice can stand as a rebuttal to the objection that what comes later in the order of genesis (I-We sociality) cannot be constitutively prior in the order of intelligibility. What remains to be shown, however, is that the postulated telos (robust mutual understanding sufficient as a background for co-operative action) is in fact an intrinsic end of discourse such that action toward it is a kind of self-realization. To show this I will turn again to Hegel’s account of the movement of consciousness.

For Hegel, as we have just seen, teleological explanation takes the form of following the self-realization of a thing through the reconciliation of what the thing is in-itself or for-itself and what that thing is for-another. Only when these two moments form a unity is the thing truly what it is and, conversely, the thing is not itself if it is not “moving toward” that reconciliation. Thus this unity is constitutive for its moments.

---

63 If it were not, then discursive practice would not be objectively purposeful in the Hegelian sense and hence any discursive action toward mutual understanding would be only subjectively teleological (i.e., in a Gricean manner). If that were the case, then Brandom’s objections to thinking of orientation to mutual understanding as constitutive for discursive practice as such would still stand.

64 In de Vries’ explanation these moments are what theoretical reason takes a thing to be in-itself and what practical reason takes the thing to be for-us (i.e., as an extension of our subjective purposes). Objective purposefulness is the reconciliation of these moments: whereby a thing is for-us what it is in-itself. The “for-us” moment is, from the perspective of the object, what it is for-another (namely, instrumental agents), and what a thing is in-itself is, from the perspective of that object, what it is for-itself at least if that object (as in the case of consciousness) has an agency.
insofar as they are moments of the thing in question. In the *Phenomenology* this
dialectical, teleological explanation is directed at consciousness itself as the object of
explanation, and the unity that constitutes the various moments of that development as
*moments of consciousness* is the Concept of Spirit: an “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and a ‘We’ that is
‘I’.” Only in the unity of ‘I’ and ‘We’ is consciousness fully itself and hence are the
conscious phenomena brought forward initially (Sense Certainty, Perception,
Understanding, etc.) moments of consciousness. Thus the Concept of Spirit is
constitutive for consciousness as such, even if it appears later in the unfolding of
consciousness’ development. This conclusion bears some unpacking.

The analytical argument of the *Phenomenology* follows the dialectic between
what a form of consciousness *takes itself to be* (what it is for itself, in the Concept) and
what we (the Phenomenologists undertaking the analysis) take consciousness to be (what
consciousness is for-another, namely, what it is for we phenomenologists). What it is for-
us is at least provisionally put forth in the “Introduction,” namely, the self-opposition and
reconciliation of an “Object” (what a thing is taken to be in-itself) and “Concept” (how
that thing is taken to be related to consciousness, i.e., what that thing is for-
consciousness).65 What consciousness is in- (or, rather, for-) itself is what it takes itself
to be in the “Concept.” Because the “Concept” involves consciousness relating its object
to itself, it works with a particular conception – not only of what the object is – but of
what it is itself (i.e., consciousness always has a working Concept of consciousness). The
*Phenomenology* follows the revision of this self-conception and, in doing so, follows the
movement of consciousness with respect to its developing ability to give an accurate
account of itself from the perspective of what the phenomenologist takes it to be from the

---

65 This self-opposition as the basic structure of consciousness is unpacked in Chapter 5, section 5.1.
outset. Consciousness cannot be satisfied until it has a self-conception that can accurately account for what it is doing when forming Concepts and knowing Objects; it must know what it is doing when it is knowing. Thus “Consciousness” must develop into “Self-Consciousness.” When that happens fully, then consciousness is for-itself what it is for-another (i.e., for-we-phenomenologists) and for-another what it is for-itself.

In its first appearance – Sense Certainty – consciousness takes itself to be a pure immediacy, which we know it cannot be (since we know that consciousness is only a unity through the reconciliation of two opposed moments: Concept and Object). Consciousness itself discovers this in its revision of the Object (from the simple immediacy of Sense Certainty to the self-opposed Object of Perception). In this revision, its self-conception changes as well: in Perception, “the behaviour of consciousness… is thus so constituted that consciousness no longer merely perceives, but is also conscious of its reflection into itself, and separates this from simple apprehension proper.”66 Only in the conclusion of “Force and the Understanding,” however, does consciousness become fully aware that the dual character of the Object as both Being-for-itself and Being-for-Another – first unearthed in Perception – is a result of consciousness’ own activity. Consciousness has then become self-conscious in that it has a self-conception that at least provisionally accounts for what we know it to be, namely, that it consists in the opposition and reconciliation of two moments, which opposition is a form of self-opposition. Thus it is – in a provisional way – for-itself what it is for-us; in order for sensation, perception and understanding to be moments of consciousness, this consciousness must be self-conscious.

---

66 PS, 72.
Things do not end there, however, since a new gap opens up between what self-consciousness takes itself to be and what it is for-another. This gap is described in “the Truth of Self-Certainty” in the dialectic of desire as the first appearance of self-consciousness. In this case this “other” is not just us (we phenomenologists), but crucially, other self-consciousnesses with whom incipient, desiring self-consciousness comes to interact. As discussed in Part 2, self-consciousness does not become explicit except when it finds itself opposed to another desiring self-consciousness, which presents it with a vision of itself that is opposed to what it takes itself to be. When desires conflict, an agent finds itself to be for-another an obstacle to the satisfaction of desire, whereas it takes itself to be the agent of the satisfaction of desire. This opposition of the for-itself and the for-another can only be overcome in the creation of cooperative endeavours, i.e., in the creation of a kind of like-mindedness between formerly competing parties. As described in Part 2, this nascent “universal will” is itself fully realized only in ethical life in which the individual locates him- or herself against the background of a community sharing practices, commitments and institutions. In engaging in self-location of that form, self-consciousness takes the form of the Concept of Spirit: an “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and a ‘We’ that is ‘I’;” it takes itself to be what it is in virtue of its participation in an ethical community. We can see already, then, that the end Habermas attributes to discourse – the creation of robust mutual understanding as the background for cooperative action – is, for Hegel, a condition for realized self-consciousness (self-consciousness that is for-itself what it is for-another), which in turn is a condition for realized consciousness. Thus we see how, in Hegel’s form of teleological explanation,  

---

67 Which, as we have just seen (qua underlying unity), is a condition for sensation, perception and understanding to be moments of consciousness.
robust mutual understanding is not an external (Gricean) end, but rather the intrinsic end of consciousness: only in mutual understanding is consciousness fully itself.

8.5. Back to Brandom.

I want now to bring this Hegelian analysis to Brandom’s picture of the necessary sociality of discursive practice. Brandom acknowledges that a social context is necessary for conceptual understanding (and, hence, for sapience), but believes that his context must have an I-Thou structure. From a Hegelian point of view, however, there is in an I-Thou social practice always a gap between what a discursive practitioner is for-herself and what she is for-another; a gap that cannot be ultimate if consciousness (sapience) is to be possible at all. In Brandom’s account of an I-Thou social practice, my self-conception amounts to a notion of what I take myself to be committed and entitled to; i.e., to what I take my discursive “score” to be.68 However, though he insists that we are enabled to have a self-conception only because we recognize others recognizing us as selves,69 there is nevertheless a difference between the score I attribute to myself and the score that others attribute to me. This is most clearly the case with respect to “consequential commitments:” others may attribute to me a commitment that I do not acknowledge on the basis of a commitment that I do acknowledge, as long as they take the former to be an inferential consequence of the latter and I do not. This is, for Brandom, not an exceptional circumstance, but rather the usual pattern. Given the fact that no two discursive practitioners will have the same set of inferential commitments with respect to

68 This is a “self”-conception because, on Brandom’s view, a “self” just is a discursive co-responsibility class; I take myself to be a “self” insofar as I attribute more than one commitment to myself and thus assume that I am responsible for both (or all) commitments (and their consequences).
69 Cf. Chapter 3, section 3.2.
what follows from a particular claim (as a result of the fact that no two practitioners will have an identical set of collateral commitments), we should expect to see these differences occurring everywhere we look. On Brandom’s I-Thou picture, overlap about the inferential consequences of a commitment (and hence about what a given agent is “really” committed to) is never the norm and, moreover, where it does occur, it is never absolute (there will always be some degree of divergence, even if very little). What this amounts to, on a Hegelian view, is that there is a permanent and unavoidable difference between what a discursive scorekeeper takes herself to be committed and entitled to and what other scorekeepers take her to be committed and entitled to; i.e., between what she is for-herself and what she is for-another.

Moreover, for Brandom, this gap is not just permanent and unavoidable, it is also highly desirable since, without it, there could be no sense in which there could be a distinction between what A takes herself to be committed to and what she is really committed to (or vice versa). In other words, it is precisely in this gap that Brandom locates the possibility of the objectivity of discursive status and hence also of semantic content. However, the argument that I have provided in this Part has made the case that without positing a background and horizon of robust I-We sociality (i.e., one in which the gap between the for-itself and for-another is closed), we cannot understand how it is possible to be in the position of being party to a disagreement about the scores in a scorekeeping practice.70 I have also argued that the grounds on which Brandom rejects the possibility that I-We sociality can serve as a necessary condition for discursive

---

70 We cannot understand: 1) how it is possible to have a first-person perspective; and 2) how it is possible to take-another to have a first-person perspective (i.e., to take a second-person perspective) without situating these in terms of an I-We horizon, where that horizon is both the background for discursive practice and the horizon to which it is oriented as a telos.
objectivity do not count against the version of that sociality that, by ventriloquizing Habermas, McDowell and Hegel, I have presented. However, it is necessary also to show how Brandom’s own reconstruction of the possibility of objectivity fails on its own terms as a result of his inadequate conception of subjectivity and sociality. If the arguments offered thus far are adequate, we have shown that it must fail (given the fact that it cannot account for conceptions that it must invoke), but I will now try to show that failure in action.

The gap between deontic scorekeeping perspectives – which I have interpreted here in terms of a gap between what each scorekeeper is for-herself and what she is for-another – is, for Brandom, not only unavoidable and desirable, but also symmetrical. Brandom makes this clear in his discussion of the interplay of what is specified as objective content and what is specified as subjective attitude in propositional-attitude ascriptions. Bob and Mary are in the presence of a physical object, which Bob believes to be a MacIntosh computer and Mary believes to be a PC. In keeping score on Mary’s commitments, Bob will say: “She believes of the Mac that it is a PC”. This ascription has both a de re specification of the content of her belief – that she believes something “of the Mac” – which specifies that belief in terms of what Bob takes to be the objective facts about the object of common concern, and a de dicto specification thereof that specifies the content from what he takes to be Mary’s perspective (“that it is a PC”). For Mary’s scorekeeping on Bob, of course, the order will be precisely the opposite when she attributes to Bob that “he believes of a PC that it is a Mac.” What is to Bob a

---

71 This version of I-We sociality does not present a community’s view to be an indefeasible discursive authority, nor does it falsely reify the community, nor does it fall into a kind of a-normative regularism.
72 Such as the distinctiveness of first- and second-person thought from third-person thought.
73 See Chapter 3.
specification of the objective content (and hence specified de re) is to Mary merely Bob’s subjective attitude (and hence specified by de dicto) and what to Bob is merely Mary’s subjective attitude toward the object of common concern (specified de dicto) is to Mary the objective content of the belief in question. Objective content and subjective attitude are mirror images of one another when articulated across a doxastic gap between scorekeepers.

The conclusion that Brandom draws from this fact is that – as long as discursive practice is a social practice (and hence that there is always a doxastic gap between scorekeepers) – this symmetry means that every discursive attitude is subject to evaluation in terms of objective correctness, since what is to Bob the way things are is to Mary merely the way Bob takes things to be and vice versa; there is a structural distinction in social practices between what an individual takes something to be and what it really is. Thus the question of whether a belief is objectively right or wrong is always alive as long as there are scorekeepers who disagree about the objective content of a set of beliefs.

I chose the example I did – mundane as it is – for a reason. Brandom’s account of discursive disagreement (doxastic gaps) and the possibility of objectivity masks a more primordial question, one that cannot be answered without the invocation of a community standard of validity, a “we” belief. Bob and Mary, as discussed above, disagree with one another because they take each other to be participants in the same discursive practice. The idea that the semantics of the social symmetry of discursive scorekeeping perspectives can underwrite a conception of discursive objectivity holds only if those
engaging in the scorekeeping take up a certain *pragmatic performative attitude*\(^{74}\) with respect to one another, namely, that of being parties to a disagreement that is rational in the sense that is can be settled or managed through the deployment of reasons in conversation. Objectivity is a feature of discursive practices within which practitioners engage in mutual criticism, and doing that means taking this performative attitude to one another. What I want to argue is that taking this performative attitude requires recourse (if only implicitly) to beliefs that are shared by a discursive community.

Let us imagine that Bob and Mary disagree, not about whether an object is a Mac or a PC, but about whether it is a bowl of porridge or the King of Siam. The difference here is not just a difference of the *degree* of disagreement, but one that makes a fundamental difference about the possibility of each taking the performative attitude necessary for a shared discursive practice. This is because (at least) one of Bob and Mary is not just wrong about the object; he or she is insane. At least one of them is so massively out of touch with reality that their disagreement could hardly be described as *reasonable* in the sense specified above. If one’s interlocutor is massively out of touch with reality, the proper response is not to argue with them, but to help them get treatment; this means taking a radically different performative attitude towards them.\(^{75}\) What this means is that every discursive practitioner must make a decision about which

\(^{74}\) Which, as argued above, involves a second-person perspective rather than merely a third-person one as Brandom describes it.

\(^{75}\) This, of course, does not mean that there is no place for *talking* and hence for social interaction aimed at mutual understanding (after all, one of the goals of therapy is a restoration of normative social interaction). My point, though, is that such interaction is different in kind from the kinds of reciprocal recognition characteristic of rational discourse in the form that Brandom envisions. In a therapeutic situation, discursive authority is not parcelled out equally between participants, nor does it rest upon a “we” perspective that we can take for granted (since the restoration of this common perspective is precisely what is at stake). If this is so, then, the performative attitudes at work in Brandomian discourse, on the one hand, and therapy, on the other, will be different as well (since performative attitudes involve decisions about how to assess and where to locate discursive authority). My point is that Brandom is generally insensitive to this, and hence that he does not see the role that community (“we”) constituting commitments play in Brandomian discourse.
performative attitude to take with respect to other people. We need – as a condition for a diachronically extended and reciprocal practice\(^\text{76}\) of deontic scorekeeping – to decide who can and cannot be “talked with”; we need to make a distinction between those with whom we disagree and those with whom we cannot discuss (but with whom we must take up another performative attitude). This decision cannot be made without reference to a “we” (and hence a perspective in which believers are for-themselves what they are for-others).

This is because the decision about what performative attitude to take is a decision about who is and who is not a part of one’s discursive community. Judging someone to be insane (in the sense of being so far out of touch with reality as to be in need of treatment, not rational deliberation) means judging them not to be one of “us,” i.e., not one of the community of those who can reasonably disagree. Brandom himself recognizes this at the level of the distinction between creatures who are sapient and those who are merely sentient; attributing sapience means including someone in the “we” that is the community of those who have and deploy conceptual capacities.

At the level that Brandom recognizes this decision, what constitutes the “we” is the capacities for conceptual thought, not their contents. As such you might say that his “we” is specified formally. If I am right, however, this decision must be made also at a level where we distinguish between who “we” are as reasonable disagreers and who is not one of us on the basis of not merely of basic conceptual capacities but also of the content of concepts deployed. In other words, we need to base a decision about who “we” are not just on the basis of what “we” can do, but what “we” believe. This is because when, say, Mary judges Bob to be insane – and hence not a member of the community of

\(^\text{76}\) Brandom’s model of discursive scorekeeping is and must be a diachronically extended and reciprocal practice.
reasonable disagreers – she does so not because she takes him not to have beliefs at all, but because she takes his beliefs to diverge wildly from the acceptable range of disagreement within her discursive community. Membership in her discursive community – which implies for her the necessity of taking a *discursive* rather than a *therapeutic* performative attitude – is constituted not merely by capacities, but by *shared commitments*. Although this decision can accommodate some degree of disagreement over what the object in the room really is (an acceptable range of disagreement), members of Mary’s discursive community must at least agree that it is a person and not a food item. When making her judgment about whether Bob is one of “us,” Mary takes recourse to what “we” believe about the object.

This “we”-belief is one which is not taken to be specified differently for oneself and for another, at least not on the level constitutive of discursive community. *That* the object in the room is a person is something that we must agree on, even if we can accept some disagreement on another level (say, on the name of the person). When Mary implicitly attributes this belief to others in her discursive community, she does so with the presumption that there will not be a gap between how it is specified *de re* (i.e., according to her understanding of how things are) and *de dicto* (i.e., according to the way these others take things to be): “they believe of this person that it is a person.” A criterion for membership in Mary’s discursive community is that there is no gap between the content of a critical belief as it is specified by her and as it is specified by other members.

What this “argument from insanity” amounts to is that Brandom’s construction of the possibility of objectivity out of the symmetry of scorekeeping perspectives in an I-Thou social practice is incoherent in that it rejects what it must assume. The very
existence of I-Thou social practices with an inter-subjectively symmetrical gap between what each interlocutor takes themselves to be committed to and what others take them to be committed to depends on those interlocutors having made a prior commitment to viewing one another as members of the same discursive community constituted (at least in part) by commitments that are shared and hence not specified differently for.oneself and for.another.

As made clear in the above analysis of Habermas’ insistence that discourse must work against a background of (and be oriented toward a “return to”) a robustly shared lifeworld, the constitutive necessity of a horizon of belief not specified differently for.oneself and for.another does not compromise the possibility recognizing error in these “we-beliefs.” It is true that, where there is no gap between the content of a commitment specified from the perspective of one speaker and that content specified by another (i.e., between the for.oneself and for.another), Brandom’s preferred way of grounding the defeasibility of any one discursive perspective is closed off. This way is based on the connection of the possibility of critique to the possibility of taking a third-person attitude toward a commitment specified in the first-person. However, where the gap between the for.oneself and for.another is not open, then this way is not open, since it is that gap (and its ubiquity and necessity) that underwrites the possibility of taking up a third-person attitude toward any first-person belief.

However all is not lost: admitting the constitutive priority of a “we” perspective where there is no such gap does not necessarily mean positing an indefeasible perspective that thus undermines the possibility of discursive objectivity. It simply means that the possibility of critique will have to be grounded in something other than the possibility of
taking up a third-person perspective on a given commitment; it will instead require the possibility of a self-opposition within the first-person (plural) perspective.

This, as I argued in Part 2, is what Hegel offers. In the case of individual consciousness, the gap between an object in-itself and for-consciousness — a gap which underwrites the possibility that what we take a thing to be might not be how it is — is a gap within consciousness; it is the basic movement of consciousness to distinguish between these two moments, and hence these two moments are moments of consciousness. As Robert Pippin puts it, the opposition of the in-itself and the for-consciousness is a form of self-opposition. Here no “external” perspective is essentially appealed to. The “in-itself” is not how the object is for-itself, or for-God, or as it is grounded in a deep metaphysical order. As I discussed at greater length in Part 2, Hegel’s conception of absolute knowing and the absolute Idea demonstrate the possibility of a “We” perspective that has no appeal to either an “outside” world or to an “outside” (third-person) perspective on its commitments, but which can nevertheless understand itself as fallible, capable of self-criticism and answerable to a world of objects.77

Crucially, being able to see how critique of a “we” perspective can be possible without recourse to a third-person perspective, it is necessary to have a more robust conception of discursive social practices than Brandom allows for. This is because such a perspective must be more than merely discursive. And so also with the subjects of discursive practice as well as their objects. The “we” that makes possible the opposition of I and thou in discursive practice must be an ethical community aimed not only at grasping the true but realizing the good. Furthermore this community must be embodied in forms of sociality that have the character of concrete social communities, institutions,

77 Cf. Part 2.
etc. I will make this case, drawing on both Habermas and Hegel, and then I will move on to a discussion of how this rethinking of subjectivity and sociality as being more concrete and robust than Brandom’s in turn requires a re-thinking of the nature of objectivity understood in terms of the nature of things.

8.6. Sociality Beyond Discourse

The pragmatic necessity of distinguishing who can be talked with and who must be dealt with extra-discursively that I appealed to in my “argument from insanity” assumes there are ends of social interaction playing a role in discursive practice (i.e., determining who is and who is not a potential member of our discursive community) that are more than merely discursive. We take up a performative attitude that either treats one as a potential interlocutor or does not (which is a presupposition of discursive practice) not for merely discursive reasons but because we seek to achieve certain goods by the social interaction that may or may not be achieved discursively. For example, when faced with someone who is apparently disconnected from reality, we must decide whether to “talk it through” or to seek therapy. In the first case we take a discursive attitude, in the latter one that does not treat this person as a member of a discursive community (at least not in the first instance). All discursive action presupposes the taking up of the former attitude, but what determines the decision to take up that attitude is not merely the potential for discursive communication as such, but the potential for discursive communication to achieve the ends of coming to a shared understanding. It is not just a question of whether we can talk, but whether there is any hope of resolving our massive disagreement about matters of fact in a shared world. In other words, what motivates and shapes the act that makes
discursive practice possible – i.e., the inclusion or exclusion of someone from our
discursive community – is not merely a concern about the abstract possibility of
discourse; it is a concern about what ends social interaction should pursue and how they
should be pursued. Discourse is only one form of social interaction, and the recognition
of this is embedded in the decisions about practical attitude that are conditions of
possibility for discursive practice.

Habermas is clear that discursive practice is constitutively oriented to social
practices that are more than discursive. As discussed above, he argues that a fallibilistic
consciousness and the concept of unconditional validity – which are both constitutive for
discursive practice – cannot be made sense of entirely from within discourse itself. In
and of itself, discursive practice is an unending process where no answer can be final
since there are as many “worlds” as there are contested interpretations. If there is to be a
standard of unconditional validity – i.e., an appeal to what is true rather than to what
seems to be true to one or another discursive practitioner\textsuperscript{78} – it must come from outside of
discourse, namely, from the “practical certainty” of lifeworld commitments functioning
as a shared background for cooperative action. Discursive practice – understood as a
practice of giving and asking for reasons for our commitments – must occur against the
background of social practices oriented toward the achievement of shared ends beyond
those of discursively justifying or critiquing our commitments. Moreover, the give and
take of reasons in discursive practice must be oriented (at least formally) toward the
return of the commitments or validity claims contested and examined therein to the
situation of shared action within a lifeworld. Were it not so, there would be no need to

\textsuperscript{78} As discussed, Brandom acknowledges the necessity of this distinction for discursive practices that can
have an objective dimension.
invoke a standard of unconditional validity and no context within which even commitments ideally justified in discourse could be shown nevertheless to be false (i.e., for a fallibilistic consciousness).

Discursive practice as Brandom reconstructs it in MIE – where the extra-discursive (i.e., perception and action) are treated merely as discursive entries and exits and hence not any more than causally necessary for discursive practice\(^79\) – is, on this Habermasian argument, abstract and thus unintelligible. Discursive practitioners in Brandom’s reconstruction lack the performative attitudes – orientation toward shared understandings that can function as the background for shared action – that make constitutively necessary elements of discursive practice possible.\(^80\) It is the performative dimensions of discursive practice that demonstrate the necessity of understanding it as embedded in social practices that are supra-discursive, but Brandom’s formalisms (e.g. his prioritizing of the propositional and hence his tacit commitment to the inter-translatability of all discursive voices into agent-neutral or third-personal terms) make him blind to the constitutive necessity of these dimensions.

In other works, Habermas develops these points by showing that the necessity of the embeddedness of discourse in social practices that are supra-discursive (but not for that reason non-discursive) requires a robust social theory that sees discursive practice as embodied in social institutions where certain discursive commitments and norms have “the force of the factual” and hence impinge on us as common and shared in a way analogous to the objective world. These commitments are thus “ours” not merely “mine”

\(^79\) In other words, for Brandom perception and action – the orientation of discourse to what is non-discursive – do not really shape or determine discursive practice as such, they are merely causal antecedents and consequences of discursive practice.

\(^80\) This point shows that Habermas’ objection to Brandom’s blindness to the distinction between second and third-person attitudes and Habermas’ recognition of the necessity of “we”-commitments are intertwined.
and “yours;” they define and make possible a social space in which our discursive practice can take place. The place of law in democratic societies provides an example.

Plain discourse, though constitutively oriented toward social integration through the sharing of doxastic and practical commitments, is not sufficient to make even a discursive democracy possible. Though we can, perhaps, project an ideal situation in which these kinds of solidarity are “no longer merely rooted through the medium of communicative action, but [are] saddled upon the interpretive accomplishments of the actors themselves” (i.e., when the practice of conversation itself is sufficient to sustain solidarity), in the kinds of modern society we live in, the burden of social integration cannot be borne simply by talking. As Habermas points out, in modern societies where “metasocial guarantees” of social integration such as shared religious worldviews are increasingly absent, “the burden of social integration shifts more and more onto the communicative achievements of actors” which are not themselves grounded in a foundational consensus. However, these societies also experience a great deal of functional differentiation (e.g., the division of labour) that adds a whole range of domains that must be integrated communicatively (e.g., the workplace, the home, the voluntary organization). Says Habermas: “According to this scenario, the increasing need for

81 For Habermas, the legitimacy of coercive legislation lies in its susceptibility to (or, better, its genesis in) discursive moral justification by all citizens subject to that legislation. In other words, holding for all norms of action – and thus a fortiori for coercive legislation – the “discourse principle” requires that “Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses.” Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), p. 107. [Henceforth: BFN] That is, a legitimate piece of legislation is valid only in the case that it would be agreed to by every participant in an ideal communication situation (i.e., one where every affected person is included and given equal consideration).

82 TCA, v. 2: 145.

83 BFN, 26.
integration must hopelessly overtax the integrating capacity of communicative action.”

Citizens simply don’t have the time or energy to achieve social integration through communicative action (reasonable discourse) in all spheres of life, or even satisfactorily in any of them. This means that there must be ways to unburden this kind of action by other forms of plurality-management.

We have already discussed how one aspect of these other forms of plurality management is always already accomplished for agents; namely, a lifeworld of background knowledge that has the force of the factual simply because it is taken for granted in communicative (and other) action and thus does not need to be discursively redeemed in order to achieve a kind of social integration. However, in functionally differentiated societies, this lifeworld is too thin to suffice (and it can be less than entirely shared when people’s perspectives are shaped by their participation in differing functional contexts). Another aspect that does this work is the material substructure that underlies (and helps to reproduce) this common lifeworld. However, in modern societies, this material element itself begins to be uncoupled from the lifeworld and “takes on a life of its own” as it were. When this is the case, the kind of integration that it affords is no longer the kind of social integration based on mutual understanding, but a system integration based on the steering media of money and power. As such, this way of unburdening communicative action moves away from the very kind of integration that it aims at.

---

84 BRN, 26.
85 Furthermore, it might be pointed out that lifeworld rationalization – which is required for it to carry the burden of social integration where there is any significant doxastic plurality – goes hand in hand with the kind of system differentiation that places such strong burdens on communicative action. The more we rely on the lifeworld for social integration, the more we correspondingly burden communicative action.
Habermas identifies law as a further way of unburdening communicative action that is appropriate to modern societies. Law has two aspects. On the one hand, it has the "force of the factual" in that it carries with it coercive sanctions against anti-social activity, which can thus take up the burden of maintaining social integration that would otherwise have to be assumed by communicative action. On the other hand, laws have a validity-dimension insofar as they can stand either in need of or be supported by discursive redemption in communicative action. Thus they do not fall into the tendency of the material substructure to be produced and reproduced simply according to the imperatives of money and power (in such a way that they cannot be raised as criticizable validity claims) and are thus genuinely socially integrating not merely systemically integrating. In other words, law is a place where the border between discursive practice and other social practices is straddled; it is simultaneously discursive and supra-discursive (insofar as it has the "force of the factual"). Habermas’ argument is that discursive democracy depends upon such bridges between discourse and other social practices.

This account of law can be extended to include also the constitutions of voluntary (civil society) organizations as well as states. These kinds of socially-integrating forces then make it possible for explicit communicative action (public reasoning, conversation) to focus on particularly problematic or pressing areas in need of social integration. The practice of conversation as an integrating force in democratic societies must, then, not be assumed to be "free-floating;" it must rely on a background of valid law and institutions that have the force of the factual. Thus the I-We social practices within which I-Thou

---

87 BFN, 25.

88 Though it should be pointed out that, when the law-forming processes become too dependent on money and power for their material reproduction, the risk exists for law to cross this divide.
discursive practice must be embedded are and must be supra-discursive (i.e., grounded in and oriented toward co-operative action) and – when worked out – take the form of social institutions or communities. To attempt a reconstruction of discursive social practice that floats freely from social practices with an institutional or communal structure is a bare abstraction in the Hegelian sense.

That Hegel would offer a corresponding criticism of Brandom is perhaps sufficiently clear from the discussion in Part 2 and above. Suffice it to say, Hegel is everywhere adamant that purely discursive practices (e.g. those accounted for in the first chapters of the *Phenomenology*) are unintelligible outside of their embeddedness in social practices that include, *inter alia*, the active transformation of the material world though the satisfaction of desire, productive labour and the taking of property. It is only in the pursuit of these ends that abstract self-consciousness is actualized. These activities in turn are themselves abstract, depending for their actualization upon the various forms of social life that Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*. These forms of life are embodied in social institutions of various kinds, institutions that – though “rational” and hence discursive – simultaneously bear on human activity within them with the force of the factical; they provide a socially common framework or background within which individual activity takes place and, moreover, they set out the ends that individual activity within those spheres seeks to realize. From this Hegelian perspective, Brandom’s purely discursive, I-Thou social practice is painfully abstract, such that it cannot account for the conditions that alone make inter-subjective reason-giving and scorekeeping possible (namely, self-consciousness, a second-person attitude and a shared horizon of commitments and practices specified in the first-person plural that bears prima facie discursive authority for
individual action). By reconstructing a discursive practice that floats freely from these more robust and supra-discursive forms of sociality, Brandom has failed to offer a satisfying account of the conditions for genuine discursivity and hence for intentionality, objectivity, sapience.

In the next chapter I will develop this critique in the other direction, if you will. Not only does Brandom’s account float too freely from more robust forms of sociality, it also abstracts wrongly from more robust forms of the embeddedness of our discursive practices in an objective world of things. This will bring into question his deflationism about intentionality and truth. I will conclude that chapter by showing how this direction of critique is of a piece with the direction pursued in the present chapter.89

89 This can already be glimpsed in the way in which my account of Hegel weaves together the embeddedness of (self)-consciousness in Sittlichkeit with the transformation of the material world in labour and private property.
Chapter 9: I, We and It

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I discussed three themes in Brandom’s thought that had an important bearing on his theory of discursive objectivity: sociality, subjectivity and truth. Thus far in Part 3 I have discussed the first two themes at length. I have argued that, if we work out Brandom’s ambivalent account of subjectivity, we can see also that his understanding of discursive sociality fails to account for the constitutive conditions for a discursive practice that can be genuinely objective, even on his own terms. In this chapter, I will return to Brandom’s account of truth and argue that, here too, his reconstruction of discursive practice and its conditions is inadequate; in particular, his attempt to elide the necessity of offering a substantive theory of truth by offering a deflationary theory of intentionality and truth will not do.

This chapter may be read, in a sense, as an attempt to flesh out an insight offered by Paul Franks. He argues that Brandom’s anti-naturalism preserves Fichte’s strategy for refuting a naturalist challenge by Salomon Maimon. Fichte “is prepared to agree with Maimon and hence with Hume that the imagination plays an essential role in experience… However, Fichte rejects the anti-realist characterization of the imagination as generating ‘deception.’… Instead, the imagination should be understood in transcendental terms, as constituting the possibility of experience, both formally and materially.”¹ Similarly, Brandom invokes a kind of “use theory” of meaning that implies that “meaning is just as determinate as use enables it to be, and there is no ‘meaning in itself’ of which use falls short. Meaning may not be a natural reality, susceptible to investigation with the help of naturalistic methods, but it can be accounted for by non-

¹ Franks, “From Quine to Hegel,” 63.
naturalistic methods, and there is consequently no need to adopt Quine’s disparaging ‘double standard.’”

What is crucial to these approaches is that they attempt to combat naturalism without saying much about nature: “they accept the dichotomy of nature and rational agency or meaning, and seek to develop the only – or, at least, the optimal – account of the conditions and structure of rational agency leaving nature to its own devices.” Hegel (as discussed in Part 2) and Schelling argue, on the other hand, that defeating the naturalist challenge put forward by the likes of Maimon and Quine requires that “a transcendental account of rational agency must be accompanied by an account of nature that explains how it is possible for natural beings to be rational agents.” Franks does not develop an extensive account of this dispute, nor does he get into detail about how the Hegelian/Schellingian case may be made against Brandom. It is this that I propose to undertake in this chapter (though my terms of reference will not be the naturalist/anti-naturalist debate, but rather the relationship between objectivity, subjectivity and sociality).

9.1. Deflationism, Phenomenalism, Propositionalism

Brandom’s theory of truth is deflationist at both the semantic and pragmatic levels. At the semantic level, he offers an account of truth-locutions that do not include robust word-world relationships, but which are instead ways of making explicit the proprieties of the inter-substitutability of sentences, particularly across doxastic gaps between

---

2 “From Quine to Hegel,” 64. I discussed the Quinean double standard in a footnote in Chapter 6, section 6.2. Here is another ground for suggesting that Brandom is more Fichtean than Hegelian (besides the ones I offer in Part 1 of this essay).

3 “From Quine to Hegel,” 64.

4 “From Quine to Hegel,” 64.
speakers. At the pragmatic level – which the semantic proprieties of truth-talk are meant to subserve – truth-locutions are ways of expressing the taking up of certain normative attitudes with respect to commitments, namely, undertaking them by acknowledging them. The concept of truth thus plays no explanatory role for Brandom in his account of how speakers and their acts can be said to be about the world and how things in the world can act as a standard for or check on the validity of their speech acts. Rather, truth-talk is expressive, serving to articulate pragmatic relationships between speakers and sentences (including, and especially, the relationship between a speaker and the sentences uttered by other speakers).

Underlying Brandom’s explanatory deflationism about truth are two fundamental theoretical commitments: phenomenalism about norms and propositionalism about word-world relations (and of intentionality generally). With respect to phenomenalism, the pragmatic meaning of truth-talk (which is basic) consists of expressing normative attitudes. Though truth-talk often sounds as if it were attributing a normative status to a sentence or a speech act, for Brandom this attribution can be unpacked without remainder into a network of normative attitudes. Thus, I may say of your statement “snow is white” that it is “true” – thus apparently attributing to it a normative status, namely, truth. On Brandom’s theory, however, what I am really doing – given his phenomenalistic commitment to the notion that normative statuses are instituted and can be resolved into normative attitudes – is expressing my willingness to undertake the commitment you have expressed; i.e., a normative attitude. This approach allows Brandom to avoid treating “truth” as a property (even a normative one) of sentences or speech acts and thus
to avoid having to offer a theory of what that property consists in and how a sentence comes to have that property (which would be to offer a substantive theory of truth).

If truth-talk is ultimately resolved into expressing certain normative attitudes, it is furthermore important to note that these are, for Brandom, *propositional* attitudes. What I undertake by using truth-talk to endorse your statement\(^5\) is a commitment that has a propositional structure, it predicates something of a subject (in this case, it predicates the property of whiteness of snow). This commitment is indeed *about* something in the objective world, but not because it depends upon any more primordial contact between its utterance, myself and some thing, but rather because it can be attributed *de re* in the social process of discursive scorekeeping by referring it either to *my* perspective on how things are with the world (if I am making the attribution) or to *my* interlocutor’s perspective on how things are with the world (if she is making the attribution). The concept of truth does no work in explaining this intentionality (“aboutness”), and this intentionality is not explicable in terms of any pre- or proto-propositional relationship between speech acts, speakers and things. By giving a theory of how sentences are “about” the world couched entirely in terms of the social articulation of a phenomenalistically construed discursive practice within which propositional attitudes are basic, Brandom seeks to offer a deflationist account of what it means to “be in touch with the world.”

Together these commitments form a problematic (indeed, an irresolvably dialectical) view of the nature of the objective world in which discursive practice takes place and about which much of discursive practice is concerned. Normative phenomenalism – entailing as it does that normative statuses are not a part of the causal

\(^5\) Or, at the semantic level, what I identify and attribute by using “true” as a prosentence-forming operator.
order of things – tends toward a nominalistic and thoroughly “disenchanted” view of nature. Conversely, Brandom’s propositionalism about semantic intentionality gets unpacked in terms of what Habermas calls his “objective idealism;” i.e., the view that the objective world is conceptually (and hence, normatively) structured. If Brandom is indeed committed to a substantive theory of nature in his account of truth and intentionality, then it could hardly be deflationist. I want to argue that he is so committed and hence that: (1) his attempt at deflationism is a non-starter, and he would do better to acknowledge a theory of nature and make that part of his account of truth and intentionality; and (2) that this theory of nature is dialectical in a way that Brandom cannot resolve from his own resources. I will explore this dialectic by showing how it is made manifest in two (apparently) opposing criticisms of Brandom’s project that I have already touched on above. I will then attempt to show how this dialectic can only be resolved by taking up the perspective of, first, Heidegger and then Hegel. Doing so, however, means rejecting both propositionalism and phenomenalism.

9.2. Objective Idealism and Nominalism: Habermas

Two very astute critics of Brandom, both of them pursuing the same problematic feature(s) of Brandom’s project, each trace the problem to a flaw in his theory of nature and of the human orientation toward it. However, in doing so, they attribute two very different theories to Brandom and hence propose two very different revisions to his

---

6 My use of this terminology derives from McDowell’s use, in Mind and World, but it goes back at least to Weber’s understanding of the rationalization process in modernity.

7 “Normatively” because, for Brandom, conceptual structure is necessarily inferential and inference is a matter of reason and normativity (i.e., susceptible to criticisms about the propriety of certain inferential connections).

8 One might even call it a “metaphysics,” but I shall resist doing so to the best of my abilities.
As discussed above (Chapter 7), Habermas argues that Brandom’s failure to properly distinguish the second- from the third-person voice is underwritten by his objective idealism or, alternatively, his “conceptual realism,” namely, the view that the “world itself is conceptually structured.” On this view “the conceptual relationships of
the world, it appears, merely unfold discursively in our argumentations, thus finding expression in the conceptual structures of our knowledge of language and the world."\textsuperscript{10} If this is the case, then the objective world itself guarantees the adequacy of our concepts and, correspondingly, the discursive community is relieved of “the burden of the constructive endeavor to develop its own concepts in terms of which it can interpret what happens in the world.”\textsuperscript{11} Without this burden, there is no fundamental need for discursive communities to expend the effort of reaching a common understanding, of constructing a shared conceptual framework for interpreting and coping with the world; the commonality of our concepts is guaranteed by the objective world not by inter-subjective effort. In such a picture, there is indeed no constitutive necessity for discursive agents to adopt the second-person discursive stance oriented toward reaching shared understandings. This stance may be, as Brandom asserts, a feature of most fully developed discursive practices, but it is not a necessary feature of any discursive practice; a third-person scorekeeping stance is all that is requisite for discursivity as such.

Habermas, as we have seen, rejects this picture and not only because he is uncomfortable with the “metaphysical” tone of Brandom’s conceptual realism. It will not do also because it fails to account for the constitutive necessity of a shared life-world for certain structural features of discourse. The orientation toward shared understanding – and hence the deliberative, second-person stance – is not simply a bonus feature of discursive practice; it is anchored in the fact that discourse must presuppose and be oriented toward a network of shared understandings that can be the basis for co-operative

\textsuperscript{10} TJ, 156.
\textsuperscript{11} TJ, 161.
action. If it were not, there would be no explanation for the fallibilistic consciousness and the ideal of unconditional validity that are constitutive elements of a workable discursive practice. In other words, objective idealism, by restricting the range of necessary attitudes to intra-discursive, propositional attitudes, abstracts from the only horizon – instrumental action within a shared life-world and a common objective world – that can explain how the world can put a check on our discursive practices. This bears a little more unpacking.

Conceptual realism (apparently) allows Brandom to offer a theory of how the objective world impinges on discourse that does not rely on any extra-discursive attitudes or comportments on the part of discursive actors. It is the social articulation of discursive, propositional attitudes that grounds the referential capacities of language, and the world then impinges on one’s discursive practice as a check demanding correction only in the form of resistance from other discursive actors. As Habermas puts it: for Brandom “the objectivity of the world is not attested to by contingencies that we experience through sensation and our practical coping with the world but only through the discursive resistance of persistent objections.”12 It is the appeal to the conceptual structure of the objective world that prevents this view of Brandom’s from offering just an elaborate version of what John McDowell calls “coherentism,” where the world provides no rational constraint upon the activity of discursive practitioners (or “spontaneity” as McDowell puts it).13 The objective world impinges on discourse because “facts are just true claims;” that world is itself discursive in the sense of being conceptually (i.e., inferentially) articulated. No appeal to anything non- or even proto-

12 TJ. 159.
conceptual needs to be made on this picture; nothing needs to mediate between the direct contact of the world and our talk about it, since both are conceptually, inferentially, propositionally structured. If the world were not so, then the friction between the world and our propositions about it would have to pass through a more primordial, non- or at least proto-conceptual form of intentionality. Thus Brandom’s propositionalism is underwritten by his conceptual realism/objective idealism.

For Habermas, however, this will not do. Discursive (and hence, conceptually or propositionally inflected) attitudes alone cannot account for how the world can check our discursive activities and demand correction from them; in other words, we must appeal to something language-transcendent to understand how we can learn from experience. To show this, Habermas appeals to one of Brandom’s own examples of how the world causes us to correct our view of things, namely, “observing how a piece of litmus paper unexpectedly turning blue provides a reason for correcting hitherto established rules of application for the concept ‘acid.’”\(^{14}\) Two factors are needed to explain how the perception of the paper turning blue can lead us to revise our concept: 1) an “internal connection between perception and action that already exists in everyday practices;”\(^{15}\) and 2) “generalized behavioral certainties – beliefs that have congealed into behavioral habits – [that] form the background that, as it were, hones dissonant perceptions into negations of expectations.”\(^{16}\) In other words, for perceptual judgments (“oh… it turned blue”) to correct our deployment of certain concepts, they must be connected to a success-driven action grounded in habitual expectations (in this case, an experiment). The world checks our concepts by resisting active attempts to put those concepts to use.

\(^{14}\) TJ, 153.
\(^{15}\) TJ, 153.
\(^{16}\) TJ, 154.
practically: “in perceiving an unsuccessful action, the actor ‘rubs up’ against a frustrating reality that terminates its hitherto attested willingness to play along, as it were, in an action-context that is no longer functioning.” Recalcitrant experience is only recalcitrant because it interrupts taken-for-granted habits of action, forcing us to objectify or thematize those habitual assumptions and then revise them. Those revisions can only count as successful, moreover, if they can become the basis for successful, uninterrupted instrumental action. The moral is that – as discussed at length in Chapter 8 – discourse itself cannot account for the standards invoked in discourse (of unconditional truth and the perennial possibility of being mistaken); these must originate in success-orientated action within a life-world consisting of beliefs with the force of the factical.

This means, moreover, that “thematic,” propositional thought must be grounded in pre-thematic and hence pre-propositional modes of experience or “engaged coping with reality.” This of course, cuts against Brandom’s propositionalism, his notion that propositional attitudes are explanatorily basic for discursive practice. According to Habermas, if propositional attitudes are to be revisable in the light of experience, that experience must have a form oriented toward instrumental action as well as toward the discursive redemption of validity-claims. Brandom’s view leads him to “proceed unwaveringly straight from perception to action without taking account of how perceptions are embedded in contexts of action and without paying attention to the revisionary power that accrues to perceptions only through their feedback relation to

---

17 TJ, 154.
18 Habermas refers in this context to Heidegger’s distinction between readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand. I will discuss Heidegger at greater length below. For now, though, I will say that, though Habermas’ point here is broadly in keeping with Heidegger’s, the picture of the objective world that he appeals to (as “nominalistically conceived”) differs in important respects from Heidegger.
19 TJ, 155.
‘coping’ – to the success-controlled practice of dealing with problems.” This means that “truth” must be something more than just the taking up of certain normative, propositional attitudes; truth answers to the possibility of success in our pre-conceptual coping with the world; “truth” in discourse (the idealized rational justification of validity claims) must be grounded in an answerability to the world that is supra- (and pre-) discursive.

Crucially, this rejection of propositionalism about intentionality requires a re-thinking of the nature of the world that this pre-thematic experience is “about.” It makes little sense to hang on to conceptual realism if conceptual thought is possible only in the context of pre-conceptual coping with the world. The world of success-oriented action is not conceptually, but rather causally articulated. This world takes on conceptual significance only for actors who direct their action in it on the basis of various tacit or habitual expectations in it; i.e., a lifeworld. It is, in other words “a nominalistically conceived objective world [that] makes itself known to the active intelligence solely in the horizon of a lifeworld in which we ‘always already’ find ourselves as the members of a linguistic and cooperative community.” This world is not in-itself articulated conceptually or rationally and hence cannot impinge “directly” in discursive practice (practice oriented toward truth); imaging that it is and can do so means missing the only context in which a world can cause revision of our concepts.

20 TJ, 155.
21 TJ, 158. “Nominalism” here is just the thesis that the objective world is only causally, and not conceptually or normatively, articulated. Obviously the term can mean a great deal more, but for current purposes, this bare definition is all that is intended.
9.3. Nominalism and The Space of Reasons: Rödl and McDowell

Sebastian Rödl’s criticism of Brandom, like Habermas’, takes aim at both his conception (or lack thereof) of second-person knowledge and at his conception of the structure of the objective world. However, rather than attributing to Brandom an undue reliance on a metaphysical objective idealism, Rödl objects to Brandom’s thoroughly disenchanted view of the objective world implicit in his normative phenomenalism.

As discussed at some length above (Chapter 7), Rödl traces Brandom’s failure to grasp the unity of first- and second-person thought to his refusal to grant normative statuses (i.e., being in accordance with an order of reason) a causal role, reserving membership in the causal order for only normative attitudes. To recall, Rödl insists that in second-person thought one must take one’s interlocutor to be the same kind of subject that one knows oneself to be in first-person thought, i.e., a self-conscious agent responding to reasons. In first-person thought, one takes oneself to be responding to an actual order of reasons (i.e., what is in fact right to believe) and hence normative statuses that have a causal role in one’s coming to believe something (one believes something because it is right to believe). Given Brandom’s phenomenalism, however, there is no such thing as a genuine causality of reason (i.e., of normative statuses), only a causality of thought (i.e., of normative attitudes – not “what it is right to believe” but “what one takes to be right to believe”). This implies that attributions of belief to others presents them as responding to a causality of thought, rather than a causality of reason, the latter being the conception under which one interprets one’s own beliefs. But such a situation falls afoul of the necessity that second-person thought presents others as being the same kind of agent that one knows oneself to be.
On Brandom’s model, it is a matter of indifference with respect to successful belief-explanation whether or not what one’s interlocutor takes to be a good reason to believe something is actually a good reason. If normative attitudes (a causality of thought) suffice to explain why someone believes what they do, then “a false belief provides as good an explanation as a true one.”\(^{22}\) That is, second-person thought need only attribute the normative thought that X is a good reason to believe Y in explain A’s belief that Y; there is no necessity to attribute to A normative knowledge about what it is right to believe. However, as just mentioned, this would make a dog’s breakfast of the unity of first- and second-person thought, since one must take oneself to be active upon normative knowledge.

John McDowell, on the other hand, does make the case that second-person thought requires the attribution of normative knowledge and hence to a causality of reason beyond a mere causality of thought: “the concepts of propositional attitudes have their proper home in explanations of a certain sort: explanations in which things are made intelligible by being revealed to be, or to approximate to being, as they rationally ought to be.”\(^{23}\) McDowell does not say that these explanations make things intelligible by being revealed to be in line with what someone thinks is (or “takes it to be”) how it rationally ought to be. For McDowell, attributing normative knowledge – not just the attitude of thinking one has normative knowledge – is necessary for belief explanation and hence for second-person thought.

Rödl defends the McDowellian thesis by appeal to the Sellarsian notion that the concept of a successful representation is logically prior to the concept of an apparent

\(^{22}\) SC, 169.

\(^{23}\) Cited in SC, 167.
representation or, to put it otherwise, that being is prior to seeming. Sellars argues against the independence of the Given, understood as raw phenomenal data (the way the world just appears to us) by showing that “looks talk” – i.e., locutions such as “that looks like Socrates, but might not be” – is parasitic upon talk about how the world actually is. Thus “looks talk” does not pick out a domain of facts about how things appear as opposed to a domain of facts about how things really are, there is only the one kind of fact. The latter facts do not appear through the mediation of the former facts (as in empiricist theories), since there are not two separate facts.24 In much the same way, talk about normative attitudes is parasitic upon talk about normative statuses. Brandom’s phenomenalism can be characterized as the notion that what seems to be (or what is merely represented as) in accordance with an order of reason (quite independently of whether or not it in fact is so) is what is causally efficacious in discursive practice. In fact, these representations – these seemings – are said to institute normative statuses. There is no being normatively right without seeming to be normatively right. But this turns the Sellarsian view upside-down.

Rödl makes this point in terms of the place of a causality of thought in intentional action:

[T]his destroys the idea of a representation that causes actions so as to accord with it, which is the idea of a self-conscious end. Instead we must proceed from the concept of an act of a power to represent ends in a way that is productive of their reality. A representation that merely seems to be productive (as his representation of replenishing the water supply seems to him who is pumping water into broken pipes) is to be explained in terms of the same power by negation and subtraction: it results from unfavorable circumstances thwarting the proper exercise of the power.25

If the Sellarsian point is correct – that seeming to be X is parasitic upon being X, and hence that thinking that something seems to be X is parasitic upon knowing it to be X – then Brandom’s prioritizing of normative attitudes in discursive practice has it

24 EPM, 127-153.
25 SC, 176.
backwards. Keeping normative statuses out of the causal order in explanations of discursive practice makes Brandom unable to explain how it is we can take up – and take others to take up – a position in the space of reasons by means of discursive practice.

There are two morals to this critique, which I want to highlight. First is the obvious one, namely, that Brandom needs to revise his theory of nature to allow for normative statuses to be part of the causal order. His phenomenalism is ultimately grounded in a metaphysical scruple he can ill afford. This requires being more “realist” about norms than Brandom would like to be; it means rejecting the simple notion that normative attitudes just institute normative statuses. If phenomenalism were true – if the attitude of acknowledging a law institutes the authority of that law – then, Rödl argues, the concept of action in accordance with an idea of law would be unintelligible. If the phenomenalist thesis is that acknowledgment is the ground of the authority of a law, then “the acknowledgment is not internal to the acts governed by the law. Hence such acts are not performed according to a representation of this law.”

That is, the acts (of acknowledgment) that institute laws or norms would be external to the actions performed out of a representation of these laws, and hence not themselves acts in accordance with the representation of a law. As such they would not be autonomous (indeed, they would not be self-conscious, which – since they are acts of acknowledgment – would be odd indeed). McDowell makes a similar argument in “Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint”: “[W]e [need] not pretend to make sense of the idea of a legislative act that confers authority on the norms of reason. If the legislative act is not already subject to the norms of reason, how can it be anything but arbitrary? But nothing instituted by an act that is arbitrary could be intelligible as the authority of reason. If self-

26 SC, 116.
legislation of rational norms is not to be a random leap in the dark, it must be seen as an
acknowledgement of an authority that the norms have anyway.”27 As I will discuss
further, this means recognizing in a way that Brandom is never quite able to do that the
space of reasons is not merely “interior” to the human mind, even to that mind articulated
socially, but extends to the world itself.

Second, Rödl’s critique points to the necessity of invoking a more robust
conception of truth than Brandom allows, and to do so in a way that is explanatory rather
than merely expressive. If the deployment of the concept of propositional attitudes
requires explaining people’s attitudes in terms of a normative knowledge rather than
merely in terms of normative attitudes, then – since knowledge is at very least true belief
– we do not know how to take up or ascribe propositional attitudes if we do not deploy (at
least implicitly) the thought that they are true. If all that was needed was the attitude of
taking oneself or another to have normative knowledge, then Brandom’s deflationary
concept of truth – according to which truth talk is just a way of expressing taking up
certain attitudes (“taking-true”) – would suffice. But Rödl and McDowell’s point is that
we don’t understand these attitudes unless we understand what it means for an attitude to
be actually in accordance with an order of reason, i.e., for it to be true.

Rödl’s argument leads to the conclusion that discursive normativity (the order of
reason) is not merely a feature of the attitudes of discursive practitioners, but rather
something that constitutes those attitudes and makes them intelligible. One way to put
this is to say that the logical space of reasons cannot simply be the creature of our reason-
giving and reason-asking attitudes. McDowell extends this point to the claim that we

must not think of the space of reasons as being restricted to “interior” states, attitudes or
statuses, but must include the objective world as well. As I will discuss, though Brandom
claims to accept this point in his social-perspectival account of discursive objectivity,
McDowell argues that this account is in fact guilty of interiorizing the space of reasons
and hence subject to the problems outlined in “Knowledge and the Internal.”

McDowell takes as his starting point Sellars’ claim that “knowledge…is a certain
sort of standing in the space of reasons.”28 To “interiorize” the space of reasons – to
subject it to a “withdrawal from the external world”29 – he argues, makes this claim
unintelligible. This happens when we separate justification, understood as having a
certain standing in the space of reasons, from truth understood as the superadded fact that
things are in the world as we claim them to be from our standpoint in the space of
reasons. On such a picture, justification is achieved entirely from our own resources
“without needing the world to do us any favours,”30 whereas truth is a favour the world
bestows on us quite independently of our efforts because it offers it from outside of the
space of reasons. Epistemologies that accept the interiorization of the space of reasons
generally offer a way to infer from justification to truth, but McDowell suggests that the
history of modern epistemology (which is in some respects the history of working out the
problems of interiorization) does not give us much hope for thinking this will work.

Accompanying the interiorization of the space of reasons is the prioritizing of
appearance to being in the order of knowing; and hence, in opposing the interiorization,
McDowell follows Sellars also in turning this prioritization around. If our standing in the

28 John McDowell, “Knowledge and the Internal,” in Meaning, Knowledge and Reality (Cambridge:
29 KI, 395.
30 KI, 396.
space of reasons is taken to be something achieved entirely by our own efforts, then the objective world can have a role to play in that space only as appearances and not as realities, and thus – in the order of knowing – talk of how things appear to be ("It looks to her as if X") is prior to talk of how things are ("She sees that X"). McDowell presents this idea as an Argument from Illusion:

Seeing, or perhaps, having seen that things are thus and so would be an epistemically satisfactory standing in the space of reasons. But when I see that things are thus and so, I take it that things are thus and so on the basis of having it look to me as if things are thus and so. And it can look to me as if things are thus and so when they are not; appearances do not give me the resources to ensure that I take things to be thus and so, on the basis of appearances, only when things are indeed thus and so. If things are indeed thus and so and so when they seem to be, the world in doing me a favour. So if I want to restrict myself to standings in the space of reasons whose flawlessness I can ensure without external help, I must go no further than taking it that it looks to me as if things are thus and so.31

An interiorized epistemology will thus have to construct an account of how we can know (i.e., to have justified and true belief) that things are thus and so out of the raw materials offered only by how we take things to be, plus some entirely accidental help from the world.32 The motive that drives us to interiorize the space of reasons – to make our standing therein contingent entirely upon our own efforts – underlies the credibility of the Argument from Illusion, while the argument in turn re-enforces the picture of mind and world offered by way of that interiorization.

The problem with this picture, according to McDowell, it that it cannot make sense of the “critical function of reason,” that is, the ability to “refine one’s policies or habits of basing beliefs on appearance, taking more and more circumstances into account,

31 KI, 396.
32 We can, then, perhaps already see how Brandom’s adoption of phenomenalism as an explanatory strategy can be read as a version of this kind interiorized epistemology.
with a view to improving the proportion of truths to falsehoods in their output.”33 It cannot do this as long as our standings in the space of reasons can only respond to how things seem to us (i.e., to interior episodes that may or may not correspond to how things actually are). To make sense of the critical function of reason, interiorized epistemology needs to show how we can get from “looks like” to “sees that” – the latter expresses a standing in the space of reasons that includes the way the world actually is, rather than how it merely appears. But the resources provided in an interiorized epistemology are not adequate to this task. The primary candidate for justifying this move – some reliability function – cannot get us to “sees that” since what is required to do so is for “reason [to] come up with policies or habits that will never lead us astray.”34 To say “She sees that X” is to attribute a falsity-excluding attitude to a perceiver (“seeing that” implies truth), but any “internal” reliability function – i.e., one generated from or relying on merely our own resources as knowers – can never guarantee truth.

This problem is not a problem as long as we reject the interiorization of the space of reasons, and hence McDowell recommends that “we should jettison the whole approach to knowledge that structures epistemology around the Argument from Illusion.”35 In other words, we need to get rid of the picture of knowing that consigns reliability or justification – standing in the space of reasons – to an “internal” subjective realm and truth to an “external” objective realm such that it is only by lucky accident that internally justified appearances correspond to external realities. In other words, we need

33 KI, 398. Importantly, this argument – when deployed against Brandom – reiterates Habermas’ claim that Brandom’s conceptual realism fails to account for how the world can act as a check on our beliefs and hence how it can cause us to revise those beliefs. Obviously, however, for Habermas this is an argument against extending the space of reasons to a world otherwise nominalistically conceived, whereas the same criticism for McDowell is an argument for that.
34 KI, 399.
35 KI, 399.
a picture that treats “she sees that X” as a genuine, primordial standing in the space of reasons, one that is not constructed out of “It looks to her as if X” plus some help from the world. This picture would, obviously, justify her believing X and it would do so, moreover, in a falsity-excluding manner; truth and justification are one in this picture and hence cannot be consigned to different realms. What makes this picture intelligible is the notion that X – the fact that she perceives – is not outside of the space of reasons; there is a “standing in the space of reasons that consists in a cognitive purchase on an objective fact,”36 and hence the fact itself is internal to that space.

Another way to get at this point is to argue that interiorizing the space of reasons – and hence starting from appearances – makes us unable to grasp how our thoughts can have objective content that can also provide reasons to act or revise our beliefs. If thought is conceptual (and hence, rational – responsive to reasons) and the world is not, then either the world appears in our thoughts as an non-conceptual given – in which case it is not clear how it could be an occasion for rational revision or action – or it does not appear in our thoughts at all, and hence we could not revise our beliefs or act on the basis of “the way things in fact are.” McDowell puts the latter point thus:

If we conceive what we want to think of as the space of concepts, the realm of thought, in a way that alienates it so radically from the merely material that we seem to be faced with those familiar modern problems of reconciling the subjective with the objective, we undermine our right to think of it as the realm of thought at all. When we set it off so radically from the objective world, we lose our right to think of moves within the space we are picturing as content-involving. So we stop being able to picture it as the space of concepts. Everything goes dark in the interior as we picture it.37

This in turn shows that the attempt to treat appearance as prior to reality in the order of understanding is self defeating: “it makes no sense to suppose [that] a space sufficiently

36 KI, 402.
37 KI, 409.
interiorized to be insulated from specific manifest fact might nevertheless contain appearances.”38 If we reject interiorization and the Argument from Illusion, however, no such problems apply, since the common-sense notion that “she sees that X” is perfectly intelligible as a basic standing in the space of reasons is not thrown into confusion by the separation of justification from truth.

This dialectic within interiorized epistemology – between admitting non-conceptual content that cannot be the basis for critical reasoning or denying non-conceptual objective content and thus denying objective content altogether39 – is fleshed out in *Mind and World* as the unresolvable (from the standpoint of interiorized epistemology) dialectic between the Myth of Given and “coherentism.”40 The solution offered in that work is to 1) reject the notion that thought can have non-conceptual content; 2) break the restriction of the conceptual (the “space of reasons”) to thought (i.e., admit the “unboundedness of the conceptual”); and hence 3) be willing to accept a “partial re-enchantment” of nature that refuses to view nature as simply the causally-articulated “realm of law” as distinct from the conceptually articulated “space of reasons.”41 It was a picture that held epistemology captive and the price for getting out of the problems attendant upon interiorization and the argument from illusion is just that we need to reject that baldly naturalist picture and admit that the limits of thought are not the

---

38 KI, 410.
39 In case it is not clear: if the world is non-conceptual (if it exists outside of the space of reasons) then it cannot be the content of thoroughly conceptual thought.
40 Cf. *Mind and World*, Lecture I.
41 *Mind and World*, Lecture IV. As we will discuss below, the thoroughly dis-enchantment view of nature that he rejects has a foil – “rampant Platonism” – that he also rejects. Rampant Platonism treats the space of reasons as “an autonomous structure – autonomous in that it is constituted independently of anything specifically human, since what is specifically human is surely natural (the idea of the human is the idea of what pertains to a certain species of animals), and we are refusing to naturalize the requirements of reason” (77). Partial re-enchantment avoids both of the “bald-naturalism” of interiorized epistemology and rampant Platonism. How it does so will be discussed below in the context of McDowell’s criticism of Brandom’s connection of sociality to objectivity.
limits of the subjective mind; the world itself is immanent to the conceptual space of reasons.

In his response to “Knowledge and the Internal,” Brandom expresses wholehearted agreement with McDowell – “I think everything he says is true and important” – with the caveat that “there are a number of points that bear expanding on in order to be properly understood.” In order to substantiate McDowell’s central claims and simultaneously to show where those claims need to be grounded in something deeper than McDowell offers, Brandom undertakes – in keeping with his de re hermeneutic – to “reconstruct that argument” in his own terms, with the (unsurprising) result that doing so provides insight into “the context of a crucial dimension of the space of reasons that McDowell never mentions: its essentially social articulation.” I will not follow the detail of this reconstruction, but rather focus on his “friendly amendment to or clarification of [McDowell’s] account.”

McDowell’s mistake, says Brandom, is to treat the problem of the interiorization of the space of reasons as the primary or fundamental flaw of the kinds of epistemology that he takes it that both he and McDowell reject. The problem of interiorization “should come at the end of the story,” since (he believes) one can reconstruct the argument against interiorized epistemology without ever having to use McDowell’s imagery of an internal space where we do everything on our own and an external space where the world must do us favours. Rather, “the mistake to begin with is to individualize the space of

---

43 KSASP, 895.
44 KSASP, 895.
45 KSASP, 901.
46 KSASP, 902. It is significant that, in MIE as well, Brandom reserves endorsement of what Habermas calls his “objective idealism” for the conclusion.
reasons,” and this is a problem for McDowell because “he makes nothing of the essential social articulation of that space.”

The flaw of past epistemologies is that they fail to be able to make sense of how knowledge could be simply a standing in the space of reasons, since that leaves out the truth-condition for knowledge (justified true belief), given that – on their view – this condition comes from outside of the space of reasons. However, Brandom claims, we can make sense of how both the justification- and the truth-conditions for knowledge are immanent to the space of reasons as long as we see that space as constituted by a kind of social practice (and one with an I-Thou social structure). The justification-condition is satisfied by the fact that such a social practice must involve attitudes of attributing commitments and (crucially) entitlements. As for the truth-condition, this does not need to be thought of as impinging from outside of the discursive practice, since “taking the belief in question to be true,” though it “is not a matter of attributing a commitment,” is nevertheless a social-discursive attitude, namely, “of undertaking one – endorsing the claim oneself.” As long as the status of being a knower is understood in terms of a social practice – within which one attributes commitments and entitlements to others and simultaneously decides whether to undertake them oneself – all that is requisite for having that status is contained within the space of reasons (that “space” being the social practice of giving and asking for reasons).

47 KSASP, 902.
48 For Brandom, any practice that involves attributing commitments also means attributing entitlements, since the contents of attributed commitments are determined inferentially. Hence having a commitment automatically entitles you to take up other commitments on the basis of the inferential connections between them.
49 KSASP, 903.
50 “Knowledge is intelligible as a standing in the space of reasons, because and insofar as it is intelligible as a status one can be taken to achieve in the game of giving and asking for reasons. But it is essentially a social status, because it incorporates and depends on the social difference of perspective between
The cardinal sin of previous epistemology has thus – on Brandom’s view – been that of individualizing standing in the space of reasons. If it has also interiorized it, this is the result of individualizing it first. Hence, he implicitly suggests, to defeat the interiorization of the space of reasons, it is both necessary and sufficient to de-individualize it. That is precisely what the social-perspectival account of discursive practice (the “space of reasons”) in MIE does, and hence it is proof against interiorized epistemology. McDowell is right in everything he says about the perils of interiorization, “but sometimes he leaves stuff out.”

McDowell responds in “Knowledge and the Internal Revisited” with a reproof against Brandom’s attempt to swallow him up and to “appropriate my work as a kind of promissory note for his.” Brandom’s social-perspectival, phenomenalist understanding of knowledge is in fact, he argues, exactly the kind of internalized epistemology that “Knowledge and the Internal” was meant to combat. Thus, far from grounding the problem of internalization in the problem of individualization, Brandom’s anti-individualism does nothing to defeat internalization; it is merely a socially-articulated species of it.

McDowell begins by re-iterating the main point in “Knowledge and the Internal:” “to protest against an interiorization of the justifications available to us for claims about

\[\text{attributing a commitment (to another) and undertaking a commitment (oneself). If one individualizes the space of reasons, forgetting that it is a shared space within which we adopt attitudes towards each other – and so does not think about standings in the space of reasons as socially articulated, as potentially including the social difference in perspective between attributing and undertaking commitments, that is between your standing and mine – then one will not be able to understand knowledge as a standing in the space of reasons.} \] (KSASP, 904)

51 KSASP, 908.
53 And, what’s more (as I shall discuss below), the working conception of “sociality” in Brandom’s account is insufficiently social.
the external world." The problem is that the way the world actually is – truth – is detached from our entitlements – justification – to beliefs about that world; the latter being something achieved “internally” by our own resources and the former being a gratuitous aid the world gives beliefs so justified. This picture “threatens to deprive us of the justificatory power of, for instance, the form ‘I see that…’ I insist that statements of such forms are proper moves in the game of giving reasons, and their truth fully vindicates entitlement to the embedded propositions. This ought to be sheer common sense, and it would if questionable philosophy did not put it at risk.” When such statements are used for justification, however, that depends upon their truth (it must be true that I see that X); but when they are true they provide a kind of justification for X that is “incompatible with any possibility of falsehood.” In other words, truth and justification are not different statuses achieved by different means; in these cases, they are one. Hence truth – the world’s contribution – is not separate from the space of reasons within which justification happens.

Brandom’s “social articulation” of knowledge as a hybrid deontic status, however, fails to do this; in fact it insists on the rigorous separation of truth and justification (entitlement); Brandom “makes the interiorizing move I attack, when he assumes that justification must fall short of guaranteeing truth.” On Brandom’s account, entitlement to a commitment is inherited from other commitments by virtue of the inferential connection between these commitments from the point of view of either the subject (call her A) herself or someone ascribing entitlement to the subject. Truth, on the other hand,

54 KIR, 98.
55 KIR, 98.
56 KIR, 98.
57 KIR, 99.
is just a question of the willingness of one ascribing commitments and entitlements (call him B) to undertake those commitments himself. The social-perspectival difference between entitlement and truth (the former is person A’s normative status with respect to some claim, the latter is person B’s normative attitude toward that claim) means that they can never be one as McDowell’s anti-interiorization requires for favoured cases. In fact, Brandom’s account of entitlement “is always indifferent” to whether or not things are as A claims or believes they are. Thus, says McDowell – by reference to an example Brandom offers about someone’s entitlement to a belief that there is a candle in a dark room – “even in the best case, the subject’s does not go beyond the fact that she *seems* to see a candle ten feet in front of her, which of course does not guarantee that there is a candle there.” If entitlement is just a matter of the inferential inheritance between one commitment and another, it can never offer falsehood-excluding grounds for belief. Truth is always a condition external to entitlement so conceived; hence Brandom’s social account of knowledge conditions is interiorizing even if it is not individualist.

Even the best entitlements on Brandom’s picture cannot get beyond appearances since – qua merely inferential inheritance between normative statuses instituted by normative attitudes – it amounts to a “refusing to let the connivance of the world enter into constituting them.” What McDowell requires it that “in the best case the subject can have an entitlement consisting in the fact that she *sees* that there is a candle in front of her. Or, to put it another way: for a subject in the best case, the appearance that there

---

58 KIR, 99.
59 KIR, 99.
60 KIR, 102.
is a candle in front of her is the presence of the candle making itself apparent to her.”

Perceptual experience, on Brandom’s picture, cannot be fully world-involving since it does not offer a site where justification and truth can be fully intertwined; truth remains an “extra condition, over and above whatever entitlement can be attributed to the candidate knower.”

Having made this point, McDowell anticipates that Brandom might reply by arguing that McDowell’s picture is *individualistic* and hence that it commits the cardinal sin that – according to Brandom – underlies the interiorization of the space of reasons. To such an objection, McDowell hearkens to a point discussed above concerning the place of I-We social practices with respect to I-Thou practices in constituting us as being potential communicators.

We can, he says, have the capacities which “transform their possessor into an individual who can achieve standings in the space of entitlements by her own efforts” only by having been “initiated into a social practice.” If we read this argument in connection with his arguments in the Gadamer paper discussed above, we can infer that this initiation into a social practice entails a kind of robust sharing of a language that has an I-We social structure. In fact, as he does in that paper, McDowell

---

61 KIR, 99. I will suggest below that this point – which draws on the Sellarsian notion that “mere” appearance is derivative from (and parasitic upon) reality – dovetails with Heidegger’s phenomenological conviction about appearances. The difference that I will take up is that Heidegger gives an account of this appearance that does not accept that what makes itself manifest in experience is *conceptually or propositionally* articulated and hence neither is that experience of appearing.

62 KIR, 102-103.

63 See above, Chapter 8.

64 KIR, 105.

65 KIR, 105. McDowell elaborates on this notion at length in *Mind and World*, arguing that this social development of conceptual capacities can explain how we can develop an attunement to a partially reenchanted world through the development of a kind of “Second Nature.” This notion is also meant to provide a hedge against rampant Platonism, but my current concern lies with how it uses an account of sociality to make intelligible a kind of intentionality that does not slide into “bald naturalism.” Cf. *Mind and World*, Lecture IV, esp. pp. 84 ff. It should be noted, though, that McDowell is not trying to offer a new *theory* of nature to replace bald naturalism and rampant Platonism, but rather just to articulate (in a Wittgensteinian manner) a picture that would allow us not to be tempted into having to do philosophy as a result of buying into the kinds of insoluble problems that the old picture subjected us to.
turns the individualism charge against Brandom: “Which is closer to individualism: a position according to which initiation into a social practice yields individuals of a special kind, able to achieve standings in the space of reasons by, for instance, opening their eyes, or a position according to which we supposedly accommodate the very idea of such standings by contemplating individuals individually incapable of achieving them, who somehow nevertheless keep one another under surveillance?”\textsuperscript{66} Not only is Brandom guilty of interiorizing the space of reasons, his I-Thou manner of conceiving its social articulation is individualistic since each agent is merely an individual scorekeeper keeping tabs on other individuals and the inferential inheritance of entitlements within their epistemic perspective. Thus, according to McDowell, Brandom’s failure to account for the possibility of the involvement of the objective world in the practice of reasoning (and hence in the logical space of reasons) is connected to his misunderstanding of the social nature of that practice and the conceptual capacities of practitioners.

9.4. Between Nominalism and Objective Idealism: Summary and Set-up.

Thus far in this chapter I have discussed two criticisms of Brandom that have remarkably similar structures, but which are ultimately based on the attribution to Brandom of vastly different views of the objective world and our relation to it. Both Habermas’ argument and that offered by Rödl and expanded by McDowell start from a criticism of Brandom’s view of the place of a second-person standpoint, extend to a

\textsuperscript{66} KIR 105. This echoes his charge in GDUR that Brandom’s I-Thou picture, in which neither agent individually has what is needed to have a perspective on the world, yet somehow gain that by keeping track of the others non-intentional discursive doings. In that paper, he argued that Gadamer’s notion of having a shared language (and hence also a shared tradition) (i.e., a “we” perspective) can explain what Brandom cannot, namely, how each individual in a situation of radical interpretation can be counted as having a perspective on the world. I am arguing that he makes the same point in the current context, but not at such length.
criticism of his view of nature – as a way of explaining the reasons for his failures with respect to the second-person – and include also a (mostly tacit) criticism of his failure to attend to the importance of I-We social practices. The extensive overlap suggests to me that both arguments are on to something fundamental in Brandom’s project, while the radical divergence about the concept of nature at work in that project suggest to me that the project implies an unresolved dialectic between two views of nature and our fundamental orientation to it.

Habermas argues that it is Brandom’s commitment to objective idealism that makes him inattentive to the need to distinguish between the second- and third-person attitudes of discursive practitioners. What is more, this objective idealism – because it restricts considerations of truth and justification to entirely discursive attitudes and statuses – makes him unable to understand how the objective world can act as a rational constraint on those practices, namely, by the frustration of success-oriented action (which, of course, does not have a conceptual structure) within a nominalistically conceived objective world against the background of a socially shared life-world. Thus, on Habermas’ telling, commitment to objective idealism/conceptual realism frustrates Brandom’s ability to recognize both the embeddedness of discursive practice in intentional action within an objective world of things and its embeddedness in a social context constituted by orientation toward (and foundations in) robustly shared (in a way specifiable in the first-person plural67) commitments and projects.

Rödl, on the other hand, traces Brandom’s errors with respect to the second-person perspective not to a belief that reasons (i.e., discursive normative statuses) are objective features of the natural order (i.e., objective idealism), but rather to the opposite

67 Cf. Chapter 8.
belief, namely, that they do not have any role in the causally-articulated order of nature, but are that only discursive normative attitudes (their taking-things to be reasons) can be. McDowell picks up this criticism by taking Brandom to task for interiorizing the space of reasons; i.e., treating the world (and hence, truth) as being external to that space. Like Habermas, he sees Brandom as being insufficiently attentive to the ways in which robustly shared social practices make us able to respond rationally to the world, but he insists that this ability is also underwritten by the conceptual articulation of the world itself, i.e., its immanence to the space of reasons. In other words, on the Rödl-McDowell view, Brandom’s problem is that his conception of nature is too nominalistic; whereas Habermas thinks he is insufficiently nominalistic.

Clearly there is a contradiction between these two lines of criticism that troubles their extensive overlap. One could, of course, conclude from this situation that one side is right and the other wrong and hence just reject one line of criticism (and its proposed solutions) in favour of the other. However, this approach would make it difficult to explain the great deal of overlap between them. If, say, Habermas’ approach to nature and our responsiveness to it is thoroughly wrong, how can he – on the basis of that approach – come to such correct insights (at least from the point of view of Rödl and McDowell) about other problematic aspects of Brandom’s theory? There is, however, another way to approach this (apparent) contradiction, and that is dialectical. First, we may conclude that they both really do have their fingers on important and problematic features of Brandom’s theory, but that this is evidence that his theory is self-contradictory on the point of the conception of nature and our orientation toward it (i.e., “truth” in the broad sense). The grounds I have offered for this conclusion are that Brandom’s
deflationism rests on giving a *formalistic* account of the openness of our discursive practices to the objective world, backed up by two assumptions: 1) propositionalism about the fundamental “objective” attitudes of discursive practitioners; and 2) phenomenalism about the order of explanation and understanding of discursive practices. According to Brandom, together these give the resources for a deflationary account of truth and intentionality, since such an account need make no substantive metaphysical or ontological assumptions in offering a model for understanding how “truth-talk” and “intentionality-talk” are deployed. What examining these assumptions from the point of view of Habermas, Rödl and McDowell has turned up is that neither propositionalism nor phenomenalism are metaphysically neutral and that, furthermore, they pull in different metaphysical directions. Propositionalism requires – if it is going to give form to our “openness to the world” – an account of that world as conceptually structured. On the other hand, phenomenalism requires that Brandom deny himself exactly the resources that propositionalism requires; i.e., a world where discursive normative statuses (i.e., *reasons*) are part of the causal order of the world rather than something imposed on it from the resources internal to the attitudes of discursive practitioners. About this essential incompatibility (and hence the failure of Brandom’s deflationism) Habermas, Rödl and McDowell are largely agreed. Where they differ is on the question of what Brandom should abandon and what he should affirm. Habermas takes the incompatibility of propositionalism and phenomenalism to mean that he should abandon the former to save the latter; Rödl and McDowell take the opposite view.

The second part of this dialectical response is that we may hope to find another perspective that *reconciles* the apparently contradictory directions of both critiques; a
perspective that acknowledges the truth in both but which demonstrates that neither can
be the whole truth by showing each to be moments of the whole truth (or at least a more
whole truth then each offers by themselves). It is this possibility that I want to explore in
the remainder of this chapter.

9.5. The Unboundedness of the Normative without the Unboundedness of
the Conceptual: Heidegger.

I want to argue in this section that Martin Heidegger offers such a perspective in Being
and Time. He does this by showing how the “space of “reasons” can be extended to
include the objective world, but without “reasons” having to have a conceptual or
propositional68 shape; in other words, he offers a kind of intentional normativity without
a conceptual structure. In doing so, he satisfies Habermas’ requirement that discursive
practice (and, hence truth as a normative status within that practice) be anchored in more
priomordial, pre-conceptual and active engagement with the world. However, unlike
Habermas, he does not treat that world as being nominalistically conceived – i.e.,
articulated only causally – but rather, like Rödl and McDowell, he sees it as always
already having normative significance for how we think and talk about it. I will begin by
discussing Heidegger’s conception of truth and then offer a “Heideggerian” critique of
Brandom’s conception of truth. Having done so, I will draw Habermas and
Rödl/McDowell back into the discussion.

68 Or “predicative” or “assertoric;” I shall – at least until I discuss Hegel in Chapter 10 – use these terms
more or less interchangeably. Any exemption will be noted.
9.5.1. Heidegger on Truth

Heidegger famously asserts that “assertion is not the primary ‘locus’ of truth… the most primordial ‘truth’ is the ‘locus’ of assertion.” That is, truth is not first and foremost an agreement between an assertion and the way things are, but rather characterizes the kind of being that is the ground and condition for the assertion, namely, Dasein in its disclosedness: “it [Dasein in its disclosedness] is the ontological condition for the possibility that assertions can be either true or false – that they may uncover or cover things up. Truth, understood in its most primordial sense, belongs to the basic constitution of Dasein.” Thus Heidegger’s conception of truth is a non-assertoric (or non-propositional) theory, but one that (he believes) can give an account of the conditions for the truth of assertions. It is the requirements of this derivation of assertoric truth from Dasein’s disclosedness that are the basis of the Heideggerian objection to Brandom’s theory that I will offer.

To begin to see how the truth of assertions is grounded in the being of Dasein, Heidegger imagines a fairly straight-forward case of “assertoric” truth. There is a picture hanging askew on the wall and a person with his back to it who “makes the true assertion that ‘the picture on the wall is hanging askew.’” The person then turns around and “confirms” the truth of his assertion. What is going on here? A preliminary approach to the question of what the truth of the assertion consists in is the question of what gets confirmed when he turns around. Is it an agreement between our knowledge and what is known? Yes and no, says Heidegger. No, if what we have in mind here is that the
person, when he does not perceive the image directly, is firstly related to a representation of the picture about which he makes the assertion; that is, if we imagine that the assertion has some ideal content that is a representation of the actual picture on the wall. To think this way is an unnecessary positing of more entities than we need: “Any Interpretation in which something else is here slipped in as what one supposedly has in mind in an assertion that merely represents, belies the phenomenal facts of the case as to that about which the assertion is made.”\textsuperscript{72} It is, in fact, probably a mistake to think of the assertion itself as an entity standing in a representational relation to the picture on the wall as if the person asserts an assertion that is related to the picture on the wall.\textsuperscript{73} In Heidegger’s view, anything that supposedly stands between the person and the thing in question (i.e., the picture) as that to which the person is proximally related is a mistake; the relation at stake here is between the person in a particular mode of being (i.e., as asserting) and the picture. Thus he says: “Asserting is a way of Being toward the Thing itself that is.”\textsuperscript{74} That is, what is confirmed \textit{is} a relation between knowledge and what is known, but only where knowledge is understood as a way of being of the person – a Being-towards the thing – not as a representation that mediates the relation between the person and the picture. It is the person, not the assertion as an entity, that is Being-toward the thing, and (conversely) it is the picture, not a representation of it, that is put forward or uncovered in the asserting: “What comes up for confirmation is that this entity [the picture] is pointed out by the Being in which the assertion is made – which is Being towards what is put

\textsuperscript{72} SZ, 217-218.

\textsuperscript{73} Heidegger does not rigorously distinguish between the two senses of “assertion,” namely, as an action and as an accomplishment. However, it is clear that he treats the sense of assertion as “an asserting” as more primordial than as “an accomplished assertion as something either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand.” For the sake of expediency, I will only try to dis-ambiguate Heidegger’s use where it is necessary to do so.

\textsuperscript{74} SZ, 218.
forward in the assertion; thus what is to be confirmed is *that* such Being *uncovers* the entity towards which it is. What gets demonstrated is the Being-uncovering of the assertion.”75 The truth of the (accomplished) assertion, then, does not lie primarily in its relation to the thing, but is grounded in a relation between the person in a particular way of being – that is, Being-towards (asserting) the picture in a way that uncovers it (Being-uncovering *[Entdeckend-sein]*) – and the picture in a particular way of its being – that is, Being-uncovered *[Entdeckt-sein]* or showing itself.76 As Heidegger puts it: “To say that an assertion ‘is true’ signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself. Such an assertion asserts, points out, ‘lets’ the entity ‘be seen’ in its uncoveredness. The Being-true of the assertion must be understood as Being-uncovering.”77 Thus assertoric truth as agreement is grounded in assertoric truth as a way of Dasein’s Being-towards things. Assertoric truth as Being-uncovering (or “uncovering Being-towards”) is itself grounded in a deeper horizon, to which I shall now turn.

Immediately after unpacking assertoric truth thus, Heidegger says: “Being-true as Being-uncovering, is in turn ontologically possible only on the basis of Being-in-the-world. This latter phenomenon, which we have known as a basic state of Dasein, is the foundation for the primordial phenomenon of truth.”78 Circumspective concern, as Dasein’s everyday manner of Being-in-the-world, uncovers entities-within-the-world.

---

75 SZ, 218.
76 “The entity itself which one has in mind shows itself *just as* it is in itself; that is to say, it shows that it, in its selfsameness, is just as *it* gets pointed out in the assertion as being – just as *it* gets uncovered as being.” SZ, 218. Being-uncovered (passive voice) and showing itself (active) are then two ways of getting at the Being of the entity in its involvement with Dasein as Being-uncovering and Being-toward (interestingly, these are both active voice – one would suspect that there would be a passive voice way of getting at Dasein’s being here that would correspond to Being-uncovered on the entity’s part; I don’t know if this is significant or not).
77 SZ, 218. I will return to this point below in my discussion of how Heidegger’s view accounts for McDowell’s Sellarsian attempt to overcome the interiorization of the space of reasons by showing the primacy in the order of understanding of Being to Appearing.
76 SZ, 219.
These entities, insofar as they are uncovered, are “true in a second sense. What is primarily true – that is, uncovering – is Dasein.”\(^79\) That is, if a worldly entity’s Being-uncovered is a way of being true, this is only possible on the basis of Dasein’s Being-uncovering.

_Dasein_ is primarily true, according to Heidegger, because Dasein is (in a sense) its disclosedness – “the disclosedness of [Dasein’s] ownmost Being belongs to its existential constitution”\(^80\) – and this disclosedness is what underlies Dasein’s Being-uncovering. Simply put, Dasein’s disclosedness is its openness to its world, both in an openness to other ‘things’ within the world and a temporal openness to future possibilities: “This entity [Dasein] carries in its ownmost Being the character of not being closed off. In the expression ‘there’ we have in view this essential disclosedness. By reason of this disclosedness, this entity (Dasein), together with the Being-there of the world, is ‘there’ for itself.”\(^81\) State-of-mind – by which Dasein’s Being-in-the-world as a whole is disclosed to itself as thrown\(^82\) – understanding – by which Dasein is disclosed in its practical abilities or competence in sorting out its own possibilities\(^83\) – and discourse (to which I shall return below) together constitute this disclosedness; Dasein is disclosed as thrown into a situation and oriented toward its own possibilities; open in not having put itself where it is (i.e., not being self-determined) and open to the future. Being open in

\(^79\) _SZ_, 220.

\(^80\) _SZ_, 221.

\(^81\) _SZ_, 220.

\(^82\) Cf. _SZ_, 134-140. One might paraphrase by saying that through state-of-mind, Dasein is “aware of” or (better) “attuned to” its own condition as being thoroughly immersed in and open to a world: “An entity of the character of Dasein is always its ‘there’ in such a way that, whether explicitly or not, it finds itself in its thrownness. In a state-of-mind Dasein is always brought before itself, and has always found itself, not in the sense of coming across itself by perceiving itself, but in the sense of finding itself in the mood that it has.” _SZ_, 135.

\(^83\) “Understanding is the existential Being of Dasein’s own potentiality-for-Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of.” _SZ_, 144.
these ways is what allows entities in the world to be uncovered by Dasein. For example, in the case of understanding, this mode of Dasein’s disclosedness allows entities to be discovered in their equipmental context (i.e., in their Being as ready-to-hand): “Not only is the world qua world disclosed as a possible significance, but when that which is within-the-world is itself freed, this entity is freed for its own possibilities. That which is ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its serviceability, its usability and its detrimentality.”

That is, Dasein’s disclosedness as something that has possibilities that it can realize (understanding), reveals things in the world as not only useful for Dasein, but as having possibilities of their own. Thus a hammer is discovered as something that can pound nails by reason of Dasein’s ability to realize its own possibility of building a house. Outside of Dasein’s understanding – which is a mode of its disclosedness – the hammer could never be discovered as what it is (namely, a thing for driving nails).

Dasein’s disclosedness, then, underlies and makes possible its Being-uncovering and thus the Being-uncovered of entities. This disclosedness is therefore the most primordial truth and, since Dasein is its disclosedness, Heidegger concludes that “Dasein in ‘in the truth.’”

Although this is the case, Heidegger is at pains to show that Dasein is also and simultaneously “in untruth.” Because Dasein’s disclosedness is always projected towards its potentiality for Being, it may be authentic or inauthentic. This disclosedness can be

---

84 SZ, 144. It should be noted that this kind of being – i.e., as equipment in referential involvements – belongs to the entities themselves. Though being ready-to-hand is (in a sense) “relative” to Dasein’s being, Heidegger does not believe that it is something imposed on beings that are, in themselves, something already there (as present-at-hand). An entity’s involvements are its own. Thus Heidegger can say that in Being-uncovered, entities show themselves “as they are in themselves.” By this phrase he doesn’t intend a Kantian Ding an sich lying behind what a thing is for-Dasein, but rather that they are put in a horizon that lets them be seen for what they are. In the case of a hammer, this means seeing it as something to pound nails with. In terms I shall employ below, understanding discovers things as simultaneously in-themselves and for-us.

85 SZ, 221.
authentic if Dasein “understand[s] itself… in terms of its ownmost potentiality-for-Being.” What this amounts to is that Dasein freely chooses to choose its ownmost possibility – namely, its Being-toward-death – which thus allows it to be-itself, which Heidegger calls “resoluteness.” However, for the same reason, Dasein can also be (and, proximally and for the most part, it is) inauthentic. Instead of understanding itself in terms of its ownmost possibility, Dasein is projected upon other possibilities, namely, those of the world. In this state of “falling,” Dasein is absorbed in the “they” and is “dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted.” Since, in in-authenticity, Dasein lets the world determine its possibilities, it gets “closed-off” (its disclosedness is diminished) and thus its ability to uncover (its Being-uncovering) is also counter-acted: “That which has been uncovered and disclosed stands in a mode in which it has been disguised and closed off by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity.” Things still show themselves to Dasein but, in falling, they do so “in the mode of semblance.” Though this closing and covering-up can never be complete, the truth of Being-uncovering and disclosedness is made into untruth in its falling. Furthermore, just as Dasein is essentially its disclosedness and thus “in the truth,” it is also essentially falling – since being

---

86 SZ, 221.
87 That is, Dasein can be itself (i.e., be authentic) only by seizing upon its ownmost potentiality for being; that possibility that is its own and nothing/no-one else’s. For a better discussion of authentic disclosedness, see Lambert Zuidervaart “Truth and Authentification: Heidegger and Adorno in Reverse,” pp. 4-7.
88 SZ, 222.
89 SZ, 222.
90 SZ, 222. A semblance, as opposed to a phenomenon, is a “mere appearing… something good which looks like but ‘in actuality’ is not what it gives itself to be.” SZ, 29. The thing is still showing up (as it were) but not as it is in itself but as something that it is not. I will return to this.
91 In fact, it is only possible on the basis of Dasein’s disclosedness: “Only insofar as Dasein has been disclosed has it also been closed off; and only in so far as entities within-the-world have been uncovered along with Dasein, have such entities, as possibly encounterable within-the-world, been covered up (hidden) or disguised.” SZ, 222.
immersed in the world and the ‘they’ constitutes Dasein in its everydayness— and thus “in untruth.” Thus, though intersubjectivity is constitutive for Dasein (and thus for its disclosedness), it also seemingly guarantees that it will always be falling.

Thus far we have shown how Heidegger grounds a conception of assertoric truth as agreement in a conception of assertoric truth as Being-uncovering and this in turn in the more primordial truth of Dasein’s disclosedness. Can the direction of explanation go the other way? That is, can Heidegger show how assertoric truth as agreement can arise from Dasein’s disclosedness? Heidegger thinks that he can. As we have just seen, understanding partly constitutes Dasein’s disclosedness. Assertion is founded upon interpretation (indeed it is a mode thereof), which is understanding made explicit, and thus we can see that assertion itself is a working out of a primordial mode of Dasein’s disclosedness. But what of the truth of assertions? To understand this, we need to turn our attention to discourse, which makes it possible for Dasein to express itself and thus to express itself as a Being-toward entities, indeed as “a Being-towards which uncovers.” Assertions, then, make explicit and communicate this Being-towards which uncovers – they tell how Dasein uncovers entities—and thus also expresses entities in their uncoveredness (since the uncoveredness of entities is a correlate of the Being-uncovering of Dasein). The accomplished assertion carries the uncoveredness of the entity with it (as that which the assertion is about) and becomes something ready-to-hand; that is, the assertion becomes an iterable tool that can be used repeatedly while containing the

---

92 In fact, being a part of the “they” (and thus participating in publicness and idle talk) constitutes everyday Dasein as a subject; that is, as “what maintains itself as something identical throughout changes in its experiences and ways of behavior, and which relates itself to this changing multiplicity in so doing.” SZ, 114. Cf. SZ, 126-130.
93 SZ, 224.
94 For example, the assertion: “The chair is red” shows how (i.e., in what respect) I discover the chair (i.e., as red).
uncoveredness of the entity in the entity’s absence. Dasein is thus exempted from having to uncover the entity again and can pass it along in its uncoveredness without having to re-introduce the entity itself, while yet remaining a Being-toward the entity. However, as the entity’s uncoveredness gets passed from person to person (by hearsay), the ‘content’ of the assertion itself (i.e., the assertion as a “fact” rather than as putting forward an entity) “takes over Being-towards entities which have been uncovered in the assertion” and becomes something present-at-hand. In such a situation, if we want to check whether the assertion is true, then, in doing so, the assertion itself changes from being ready-to-hand to being present-at-hand just like its content. The relation between the assertion and the asserted entity, which was formerly grounded in the fact that the assertion preserved the uncoveredness of the entity, thus becomes a relation between two entities present-at-hand. This relation, then, cannot be one of Being-uncovering, but of “the present-at-hand conformity of one thing which is present-at-hand – the assertion expressed – to something else present-at-hand – the entity under discussion.” And so, the original truth-relation of uncovering and being-uncovered is replaced by one of agreement. That this is a move into untruth shows again that assertoric truth has its truthfulness only in its continued connection to Dasein’s disclosedness; i.e., in pre-representational modes of openness to the world.

9.5.2. Heidegger Contra Brandom

Both Heidegger and Brandom, then, seek to understand truth not first and foremost as a language-world relation, but in terms of human practices and comportments

95 SZ, 224.
96 That is: “If these entities are to be appropriated explicitly with regard to their uncoveredness” SZ, 224.
97 SZ, 224.
in the world. However, from a Heideggerian perspective, Brandom’s account of these practices floats too freely with respect to the most fundamental ways of being in the world. As a result of an insufficient account of these comportments, Brandom fails to account for the very possibility of being “in touch” with the world in a way sufficient to ground his conception of discursive practice. In other words, Brandom treats discursive practice as *sui generis*, thereby failing to realize that the world-involving aspects of this practice are a result of something more primordial, the human agent’s essential openness to the world through state of mind and understanding.

Brandom is content to treat the normative attitudes of participants in practices of giving and asking for reasons as unexplained explainers. Indeed, he offers good reasons why he need not unpack these attitudes about proprieties of practice in terms of “objective” or “non-normative” properties of practice (particularly regularity or even reliability). However, this kind of reduction is not what Heidegger wants to urge, since what he seeks is not something specifiable from an observer’s perspective (say, that of a social scientist charting regularities in social behavior and accounting for the normative elements of practices in those terms), but rather the most basic forms of first-personal awareness of a (objective and social) world which – as I will discuss further – always already has a normative structure.

Heidegger’s reasons for going deeper than Brandom’s phenomenalist explanation are aimed at its *conceptual* or, more importantly, *propositional* articulation. The contents of the deontic statuses instituted by discursive normative attitudes, for Brandom, are to be understood in terms of their material-inferential roles. It is in virtue of having these contents that these attitudes are *discursive*; i.e., moves in the game of giving and asking
for reasons. If discursive-practical attitudes are to be treated as unexplained explainers, then these attitudes must be understood primarily as propositional. Propositional contentfulness, then, is the most primitive form of intentionality that Brandom is prepared to recognize. For Heidegger, this fails to account for the way in which the world plays a constitutive role in our practices.

As discussed, on Heidegger’s view, if propositional contentfulness (the truth of the assertion) loses touch with the more fundamental existentialen of Dasein’s disclosedness, it “loses” the world. The world first comes “into” these practices particularly in pre-propositional coping – getting around in an equipmental context – and reveals itself as the ready-to-hand. As such it is already within the domain of truth, insofar as it is therefore caught up in Dasein’s understanding (a fundamental mode in its disclosedness), which (as discussed) discloses not only Dasein’s possibilities but also the possibilities of things in the world. This concernful coping with the thing can be “made explicit” via discourse, and thus some aspect of the world becomes present-at-hand. Only then does it become a possible object of propositional attitudes, that is, only then does it become a graspable content. However, this is possible, first, only against a background where most of the world remains a pre-thematic “object” of circumspective concern; and, second, when something happens to interrupt the process of pre-thematic understanding of the thing through its use (i.e., when the entity itself resists Dasein’s coping).98 This latter condition implies that the proper “home” of the present-at-hand is the equipmental context in which it is ready-to-hand, since its failure to fit into that system of references is

---

98 This need not necessarily be the “breaking down” of the entity (say, the hammer breaking). There are any number of ways in which coping can be interrupted. What is essential here is just that the nature of the interruption (and thus the reference to the pre-thematic coping that has been interrupted) is what sets out the aspect under which the entity will be treated as present-at-hand, thus preserving the reference to the original equipmental context.
the “theme” of its being objectified. Outside of the system of references within a world disclosed in understanding (and indeed, in state of mind), the thematic availability of the entity in presence-at-hand is unintelligible. If presence-at-hand looses this connection to readiness-to-hand (as in hearsay), then its connection to the world (it’s “objectivity” if you will) is lost.

Brandom’s account of truth in terms of discursive deontic attitudes floats free of this grounding of the propositional in a pre-thematic background of world-involving (and, more importantly, world-disclosing) comportments. He is satisfied with an inferential account that treats the world-involvement of practical attitudes as having a content. In so doing, it makes a mystery out of how the world “gets into” our practices right from the get-go. Brandom’s account of the use of de re ascriptions of propositional attitudes may offer an account of how these practices are formally open to the world (although I have expressed doubts about even this), but it fails to offer an account of the material worldliness not only of our concepts but our attitudes. A form does not provide its own content; this either has to be magically invoked as a “Given” arising from outside of our practices and inserting itself within them (which Brandom would not accept) or it must “come up to discourse” from our pre-thematic coping with the world. Furthermore, the discursive entrances and exits that Brandom describes (perception and action) cannot suffice for unpacking how concept-mongering practices answer to the objective world, since – on a Quinean holist picture like Brandom’s – recalcitrant non-inferential commitments do not dictate how our discursive practices should be revised and certainly do not dictate that this requires any changes in the inferential-conceptual structure of our

99 Brandom sums up his account of the representational (i.e., world-directed) aspect of discursive practice, saying “On this account, objectivity is a structural aspect of the social-perspectival form of conceptual contents.” MIE, 597.
practices: “Perceptions certainly mark a point of intersection between language and the world. However, this does not yet say anything about the extent of the veto power that an objective world can exert vis-à-vis unsuitable semantic rules.” Even non-inferential commitments are world-disclosive (for Brandom) in virtue of having inferentially articulated contents; these contents, however, must be explained by and grounded in copings with the ready-to-hand. Thus Brandom’s account of the world-disclosing character of our discursive practices is, from a Heideggerian perspective, too thin and too free-floating, largely as a result of is treating propositionally articulated attitudes as explanatorily basic (and sufficient).

John Haugeland, explicitly inspired by Heidegger, provides a substantially similar critique of Brandom. At an earlier point in his career, Haugeland had espoused (and even taken Heidegger to have espoused) a basically social-phenomenalist approach to intentionality very much in the style of Brandom. In fact, Haugeland coined a phrase that Brandom still likes to cite as a pithy summary of his own approach to the conditions for intentionality: “all constitution is institution” or, as Brandom elaborates it, “all transcendental constitution is social institution.” The idea expressed is that what Kant chalked up to the constitutive role of the transcendental ego (namely, the existence of a world for-us and hence of our ability to know that world) should instead be seen as the result of the social articulation of normative attitudes of a certain sort; the (rational) norms that constitute our ability to have a world in view are instituted in social practices.

---

100 Habermas, TJ, 150.
102 TMD 216.
Brandom obviously persists in this view, but Haugeland has come to reject it (and, moreover, to see that it is quite antithetical to Heidegger’s view). The fundamental problem with it is that it “can have no account of what it is to ‘consult’ an object.” In other words, it offers no account of a truthful (i.e., “world-disclosive”) relationship with objects outside of or prior to an account of social practices consisting of claim-making. But trying to construct an account of truth-talk out of an account of claim-making is question-begging, since “claim making… just is taking something to be true; and that presupposes the notion of truth.” Moves in a discursive practice can count as claim-makings or fact-statings only if we have some prior notion about how the contents of such moves can “answer to the way things are.” In other words, a social-pragmatist account of “taking-true” as a move in a game of giving and asking for reasons presupposes a grasp of truth that consists in a kind of “beholdenness to objects” that does not take the propositional, predicative form of claim- or fact-stating. Truth must be prior to taking-true in the order of understanding and explanation – hence Brandom’s

104 Having Thought, 357, n. 14.
105 Having Thought, 357, n. 14.
106 Having Thought , 358, n. 14.
107 In “Truth and Rule Following” Haugeland unpacks this conception of truth as “beholdenness to objects” as being grounded in the pre-discursive (even pre-linguistic) stance of “existential commitment.” The constitutive standards in virtue of which things in the world are objects to which we are obliged to respond in various ways are anchored in “no sort of obligation, but something more like a dedicated or even devoted way of living: a determination to maintain and carry on. It is not a communal status at all but a resilient and resolute first-person stance. (Marriage and monastic vows may be deontic commitments; love and faith are existential.)” (341) Haugeland thus also grasps the necessity of an irreducibly first-person stance (as well as of a supra-discursive set of commitments) for the possibility of objectivity, which I have argued at length; Brandom does not (at least not unequivocally). Where my arguments in Part 3 diverge from Haugeland’s views is in his pressing of a sharp distinction between existential commitment to carrying on a certain way and social commitment to carrying on a certain way with and in a community. On my view, the requirement that existential commitment have a first-person character does nothing to vitiate the possibility that it has a simultaneously social character, since the latter can be first-personal as well (the first-person plural).
108 This is the Sellarsian point that Rödl and McDowell insist upon against Brandom’s phenomenalism. I will suggest in the next section that Heidegger holds it as well.
deflationism will not fly – but truth must be understood to be a kind of being *en rapport* with objects that is not conceptually structured (i.e., it must be first personal and pre-predicative). Though the terms are different, I take Haugeland’s critique of Brandom to be very much in the Heideggerian vein.

**9.5.3. Nominalism and Space of Reasons Again**

The Heideggerian critique of Brandom just offered clearly parallels Habermas’ criticism discussed in section 4.2 (in fact Habermas is explicit about his debt to Heidegger). Having restricted his explanatory resources to *discursive* (and hence propositional) attitudes, Brandom cannot make sense of either the material contentfulness of those attitudes nor, as a result, of the ways in which the objective world impinges upon those attitudes such that they can be said to *answer to* that world. What is needed instead is an account that grounds discursive attitudes in practical, non-discursive coping with the world, but which also provides a way in which what is uncovered in this coping can be made the topic of explicit attention and rational deliberation. The world as it appears in such explicit attention should not, then, be confused with the way the world “really” is; in the fundamental case the world is the domain within which agents (“Dasein”) find themselves always already taken up in a network of references and involvements that are matters of circumspective concern and primarily ready-to-hand rather than present-at-hand. If we imagine that the world has an in-itself conceptual character we will fail to attend to the existential pre-conditions for conceptual thought itself.

However, against Habermas, it is important to see that, for Heidegger, this is not a nominalistic world articulated causally according to natural laws. It is not what
McDowell calls the “realm of law” any more than it is the “space of reasons” construed conceptually. A nominalistic world – as the object of physical science – is just as much an abstraction from the worldhood of the world as is an objective idealist world. Dasein’s involvement with this world does not take a given non-rational, non-normative set of materials and shape rational and normative significance of them out of its own internal resources. Apart from its involvement in and openness to the world, Dasein has no internal resources; the world is no more external to Dasein than normativity and purpose is internal to it; Dasein is Being-in-the-World. These considerations point in the direction of Rödl and McDowell’s concerns.

Heidegger’s concern in his fundamental ontology is with “Being.” Being is what determines entities as entities, it is (if you will) the fundamental determination(s) of the ways that they show themselves to us. That which shows itself to us is, in Heidegger’s terminology, a “phenomenon;” or, more accurately “phenomenon’ signifies that which shows itself in itself, the manifest.” Any entity can show itself in many different ways “depending on the kind of access we have to it,” but – as phenomenon – this is always a disclosure of itself in or from itself. This use of the phrase “in itself” already marks the departure from a Kantian viewpoint (like Habermas’). phenomena (as the “for us” –

---

109 For Heidegger, fundamental ontology (the investigation of the meaning of Being) has a transcendental role vis-à-vis the sciences. Each of the sciences takes as its starting point certain “basic concepts” of entities in a particular domain of their Being. These basic concepts themselves must arise from a pre-scientific understanding of entities in their Being: “The basic structures of any such area have already been worked out after a fashion in our pre-scientific ways of experiencing and interpreting that domain of Being in which the area of subject-matter is itself confined. The ‘basic concepts’ which thus arise remain our proximal clues for disclosing this area concretely for the first time.” (SZ, 9) Since the sciences are thus dependent upon these pre-scientific understandings of the Being of entities, the investigation that discloses this Being has a foundational role to play in grounding their basic concepts.

110 SZ, 28.
111 SZ, 28.
112 Habermas is, in a broad sense, a Kantian in that he accepts something like the “Two Standpoints” view articulated in the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (ch. 3), according to which “[A rational being] has therefore two points of view from which he can regard himself and from which he can know laws
i.e., the entity as it shows itself to us) is not separated from the noumena (the “in itself”); the thing (in) itself does not hide behind its phenomenal self-showing but is right up front in it. Thus phenomena are not to be transcended in the ontological grounding project that is Being and Time, but will be shown to constitute the grounds appealed to. In order to understand this properly, though, a few distinctions have to be made.

First, “phenomena” must be distinguished from “semblances.” Entities can show themselves in a variety of ways, depending on how we access them, and this can even mean that “it is possible for an entity to show itself as something which in itself it is not.”¹¹³ As such, the self-showing is a semblance: it pretends to be what in actuality it is not. However, Heidegger insists that “what is designated in the first signification of phenomenon (‘phenomenon’ as that which shows itself) and what is designated in the second (‘phenomenon’ as semblance) are structurally interconnected. Only when the meaning of something is such that it makes a pretension of showing itself… can it show itself as something which it is not.”¹¹⁴ In other words, semblance is parasitic upon the phenomenon, understood as “showing itself in itself.” Thus Heidegger unpacks the distinction between “how a thing really is” and “how it just seems to be” in terms of a

governing the employment of his powers and consequently governing all his actions. He can consider himself first – so far as he belongs to the sensible world – to be under laws of nature (heteronomy); and secondly – so far as he belongs to the intelligible world – to be under laws which, being independent of nature, are not empirical but have their grounding in reason alone.” (Groundwork, 120) Habermas, in TJ accepts – as does Kant – the irreducibility of either standpoint to the other (which he calls a “methodological dualism” between observation and understanding, the one being articulated in the “spectator” third-person perspective and the other in the “participant” perspective (TJ, 16-17), and the only “bridge” he constructs between them is that of holding it out as a theoretical possibility (the “basic background assumption”) that “the biological endowment and the cultural way of life of Homo sapiens have a ‘natural’ origin and can in principle be explained in terms of evolutionary theory.” TJ, 28. Habermas calls this modified Kantianism “Kantian Pragmatism” combined with a “weak naturalism.” A fine account of Habermas’ views in these terms is articulated by Matthew Klaassen, in “Kantian Pragmatism, Weak Naturalism, and Objectivity: The Persistent Problem of Nature in Habermas” (unpublished).

¹¹³ SZ, 28.
¹¹⁴ SZ, 29.
disconnect between the in-itself and the for-us (i.e., the entity shows itself for us as what it is not in itself) but only against the background (in the domain of) the in-itself-for-us (to put it in Hegelese); they can only be disconnected if they are essentially a unity. Here again, then, the noumenal and phenomenal (in Kant’s terms as the in-itself and the for-us) are what they are (and are distinguishable) only within the domain of the phenomenal (in Heidegger’s sense; i.e., as a unity).

The phenomenon, and its sub-species the semblance, are both to be distinguished from “mere appearance.” The appearance [Erscheinen] is not in fact a showing of the entity at all, but rather the indication of an entity that is not showing up. Translated into the terms I have been using: it is neither the in-itself nor the for-us, but the sign of an entity that is in-itself but not for-us.115 As with the entity that shows itself for-us as it is not in itself (semblance), the appearance of an in-itself that is not for-us is parasitic upon the entity as it shows itself for-us-in-itself (the phenomenon): “In spite of the fact that ‘appearing’ is never a showing-itself in the sense of ‘phenomenon’, appearing is possible only by reason of a showing-itself of something. But this showing-itself, which helps to make possible the appearing, is not the appearing itself.”116 Thus we are left with three ways in which entities show up – phenomena, semblance and appearance – but the most fundamental of these is the phenomenon: “Both appearance and semblance are founded upon the phenomenon, though in different ways.”117

Heidegger is thus affirming the Sellarsian notion that (mere) appearance is derivative from reality, that “looks” or “seems”-talk is derivative from “sees that…” He

115 Heidegger gives as an example of appearance the symptom of a disease: it indicates what does not show itself in itself. The symptom is not the disease as it is for-us (the disease for-us would be a deterioration of health) but merely a mark that there is such a thing. SZ, 29.
116 SZ, 29.
117 SZ, 31.
affirms, in other words, what McDowell hopes to make intelligible by de-interiorizing the space of reasons: that “for a subject in the best case, the appearance that there is a candle in front of her is the presence of the candle making itself apparent to her.”¹¹⁸ The world does not impinge on our experience from the outside – as if our experience is the sum total of internal, subjective appearances that correspond to the world only by luck or favour – there is no “inside” and “outside” of experience. In more Sellarsian terms, for both Heidegger and McDowell “looks talk” does not pick out a domain of facts about how things appear as opposed to a domain of facts about how things really are; there is only the one kind of fact. What is more, there is a sense in which this unity of experience and its world can be described even for Heidegger as the “space of reasons,” albeit with the caveat that “reasons” here point to a pre-conceptual mode of world-disclosure.

The Heideggerian notion that backs up this thematizing of the world as the “space of reasons” is that discourse [Rede] constitutes a fundamental existentiale of Dasein’s disclosedness. To get at this, we need to look further at his account of the self-showing of entities in the phenomenon. The phenomenon must not simply be identified with the entity: “the showing-itself-in-itself signifies a distinctive way in which something can be encountered.”¹¹⁹ In the phenomenon we genuinely encounter the entity itself²⁰ but, if you will, according to a certain form or, perhaps, under a certain light. The phenomenon is not the brute “givenness” of the entity – like an “intuition” in Kant – but rather the mode of that givenness which reveals the entity itself. As such, Heidegger correlates his conception of phenomenon not with Kant’s intuitions, but with the forms of intuition.

¹¹⁸ KRI, 99.
¹¹⁹ SZ, 31.
²⁰ Heidegger is no empiricist (as suggested above): the phenomenon is not a representation of the entity which mediates our encounter with the latter.
(though sans the transcendental idealist caveat that the forms of intuition are no part of the object in itself but only of the subjective conditions for experiencing the object). Understood thus, what the phenomena make manifest (namely, the Being of entities), like the forms of intuition, can remain “hidden” from view in the encounter with the entity though it is the condition and ground of the encounter: “…it is something that lies hidden, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself, but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and ground.” The task of phenomenology, then, is to bring these formal and meaning-conferring conditions for the entity’s self-showing into view.

To understand how this can be achieved, Heidegger turns the focus onto the “logos” of phenomenology. To make a long story short, Heidegger insists that the logos is not the intervention of a rational faculty into a pre-rational manifold by means of a judgment but rather “discourse” by which we “make manifest what one is ‘talking about’.” Discourse is a kind of apophansis, by which what is already understood – what has already shown itself or been disclosed – is made explicit as such and such a thing; because its function lies “in merely letting something be seen, in letting entities be perceived, logos can then signify the reason [Vernunft].” Discourse is identified with reason, but not as a faculty separate from our pre-thematic understandings and states of mind, but as a way of bringing these to thematic attention, what Taylor Carmen calls a

---

121 “…what thus shows itself in itself (the ‘forms of the intuition’) will be the ‘phenomena’ of phenomenology.” SZ, 31.
122 SZ, 35. My italics.
123 “Logos does not mean ‘judgment’, and it certainly does not mean this primarily – if one understands by ‘judgment’ a way of ‘binding’ something with something else, or the ‘taking of a stand’ (whether by acceptance or rejection).” SZ, 32.
124 SZ, 32.
125 SZ, 34.
This demonstrative practice develops the possibilities within understanding (i.e., the possibilities of being expressed explicitly) rather than bringing something to it, and it is thus essentially tied to understanding for the intelligibility of its contents. As discussed above, Heidegger discusses the relation of assertion and truth, arguing that the truth of assertions (which are the deliverances of Discourse, ways of expressing the “apophantic as”) depends upon and must be understood in terms of the more primordial truth of Dasein’s disclosedness (i.e., its openness to the world in state of mind and understanding). The horizon of truth, then, is not primarily the judgment, but the pre-thematic self-showing of entities to Dasein.

Discourse thus embodies a kind of normativity (“reason,” if you will) irreducible to that of practice as disclosed in understanding, but rooted in it. Understanding — a primordial existentiale of Dasein and thus a co-constituent of its disclosedness — is the practical competence of Dasein in sorting out and making good on its own possibilities; by means of understanding, Dasein and its World are disclosed as never simply present-at-hand but always projected forward as potentiality-for-Being. Now this projective competence has possibilities of its own, namely, that of being developed, articulated or made explicit; this development is called “interpretation,” whereby “the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it.”

We can unpack this esoteric conception by taking understanding as a kind of “knowing how,” whereby entities are discovered circumspectively in their readiness-to-hand; that is, I “know” the

---


127 SZ, 148.
hammer in understanding by being able to use it competently. In interpretation, this know-how is articulated and made manifest; one might say that this know-how is brought to Dasein’s own attention or to the attention of someone else. As Taylor Carmen puts it: “If understanding is knowing how, interpretation must be a kind of showing how… [a] demonstrative practice.” Thus know-how (understanding) competently (understandingly) knows-how (understands) it knows-how (understands).

Furthermore, the entity understood practically in this know-how is thus brought out explicitly as the useful ready-to-hand thing that it is. For example, if I show someone how to use a hammer, I am demonstrating my understanding and at the same time making clear what the hammer is for (i.e., what it is in its readiness-to-hand). As Heidegger himself puts it: “That which has been circumspectively taken apart with regard to its ‘in-order-to’ and taken apart as such… has the structure of something as something. The circumspective question as to what this particular thing that is ready-to-hand may be, receives the circumspectively interpretive answer that it is for such and such a purpose.” This “as-structure” is the hallmark of interpretation, which sets it apart from understanding know-how and allows Dasein to have a knowledge-that the entity is such-and-such. Carmen unpacks this further by suggesting that, besides the norms for how to (and how not to) understandingly cope with entities, there is an irreducible form of normativity at work in interpretation, namely, “norms governing how to comport oneself”

128 See SZ, 144; by understanding not only are Dasein’s own possibilities disclosed but so are the possibilities of things ready-to-hand. Because these possibilities are the thing’s own, Dasein can be said to know the thing in its readiness-to-hand by being able to exploit these possibilities. Thus I know the hammer itself by being able to use it as what it really is, namely, a thing for driving nails, and can fail to know it by trying to use it as something it is not, say, a thing for cleaning my teeth.

130 SZ, 149.
so as to highlight salient aspects of those practices." Comportment according to this latter normativity allows things and activities to be shown explicitly in some aspect or another; i.e., to be seen as what they are. Thus my demonstrative practice with the hammer lets it be seen as a thing for driving nails or – depending on how I focus my explanation – perhaps as a thing with a right and wrong end for holding, and so on.

This latter form of normativity is characteristic of discourse. It is a kind of normativity that goes beyond the end-seeking normativity of understanding, and it governs the ways we comport ourselves in making the practices of understanding explicit. This latter form of normativity thus makes interpretation – which is the comportment of making understanding explicit – possible. According to Carmen: “This normativity specific to interpretation, governing the intelligibility of demonstrative practices as such, is what Heidegger means by ‘discourse.’” Discourse must be an equiprimordial mode of Dasein’s disclosedness (alongside state-of-mind and understanding) because it is irreducible to and cannot be derived from the norms governing the practical comportments that fall under the understanding, which are purposive (end-seeking) rather than expressive in character. Furthermore, discourse is just as ubiquitous in Dasein’s Being-in-the-World as are state-of-mind and understanding, since “every intelligible situation Dasein finds itself in is intelligible in two complementary ways: first, in its directedness to purely pragmatic ends; and second, in the expressive possibilities that lie

131 HA, 215.
132 HA, 235.
133 These two always occur together: “A state-of-mind always has its understanding… understanding always has its mood.” SZ, 142-143.
open to us in making our understanding explicit,”¹³⁴ and it is discourse that constitutes this latter possibility.

Discourse, as a mode of Dasein’s disclosedness, reveals the ways (or “forms”) in which entities are given in experience; it reveals the *reasons* they appear as they do. What is crucial here is to note that these *reasons* that discourse discloses are immanent to the phenomenon, i.e., to the entity’s *self*-showing (in-itself-for-us). They are not something imposed on the entity from outside (an outside which is *inside* of Dasein); they are the entity’s *own* modes of appearing.

Furthermore, discourse embodies a kind of normativity irreducible to and equiprimordial with norms for practical coping with the world, a normativity that directs us about how we are to engage in the demonstrative practice that expresses what is disclosed in practical coping; this is a normativity of *reasons*. But again, the “space” in which these norms consist is not *internal* to Dasein, and Dasein’s status as having a proper standing in respect to those reasons is not separable from its standing in the world. There is, one might say in McDowell’s idiom, no gap between *truth* and *justification* here, since justification – doing well with respect to the norms of discourse – *just is* a mode of the most primordial truth, namely, Dasein’s disclosedness; proper standing in the space of reasons does not stop short of truth, and this truth is world-involving since it is the truth of Dasein’s openness to the world.

If discourse is a fundamental mode of Being-in-the-World, and if Being-in-the-World (“experience”) involves the presence of worldly entities rather than their mere appearance, then the space of reasons that discourse discloses does not stop short of the objective world itself. The world that Dasein always already finds itself involved with is

¹³⁴ HA, 236.
a world in which there are irreducibly discursive, normative significances (reasons), and not because Dasein projects them there: these significances are *conditions for* Dasein’s understanding and disclosive coping in the world, not mere *effects* thereof (i.e., they are the world’s *own* significances). Thus Heidegger would affirm in his own way the notion that the space of reasons includes the objective world itself, and hence that *reasons* (discursive normative statuses or “significances”) play a “causal” role in the world.

However, Heidegger is at pains to make it clear that the seeing-as in interpretation that discourse makes possible does not necessarily have a propositional structure: “what we have thus interpreted need not necessarily be taken apart by making an assertion which definitely characterizes it.”135 The kind of demonstrative practice (discourse) that constitutes interpretation may be (in fact is usually is) “pre-predicative.” It is rather a condition for the ability to make a predicative assertion that one has already interpretively articulated the circumspectively discovered entity *as* something. The “as” is already there when (in my example) I take the hammer from the hands of my befuddled assistant and slowly pound a couple of nails with it in order to show him how it is done. I have at this point not made any expressed assertion; I have not predicated anything of the hammer, but merely articulated (showed step-by-step, if you will) what goes into the successful use of the thing. By showing the hammer *as* something for driving nails or *as* having a right and wrong end for gripping it, I have, however, made these facts expressible; I have now made a statement – such as “the long wooden end is for holding and the blunt metal bit is for pounding” – intelligible by showing the salient aspects of the hammer *as* the

135 SZ, 149.
things they are. This being the case, there are no grounds for seeing the norms that
guide the demonstrative practice as being (primarily or exclusively) conceptual or
propositional in structure, at least not primordially (such a practice can, of course, be
given an assertoric, propositional form, but that is derivative from a pre-propositional
*apophainsis*).\(^{137}\)

The world that discourse discloses, then, though—as just discussed—part of the
space of reasons (and hence not nominalistic) should not be thought of as inherently
conceptually articulated; the “reason” of inference and predication is grounded in and
answerable to the more primordial reason of discourse as an *existeniale* of Dasein. The
picture Heidegger offers us is one where there exists a kind of unboundedness of the
discursively normative, but where that discursivity is not in the first case understood
conceptually or propositionally. Thus Heidegger’s view can account for Habermas’
insistence that conceptually articulated discourse must answer to involvements with the
world that are pre-conceptual, without thereby giving up the notion that this world is part
of the space of *reasons*.

Heidegger provides a standpoint from which to reconcile the dialectic that begins
in Brandom’s implicit understanding of the objective world—pulled in different
directions by his simultaneous adherence to propositionalism and phenomenalism—and

---

\(^{136}\) “That which is understood gets Articulated when the entity to be understood is brought close
interprettively by taking as our clue the ‘something as something,’ and this Articulation lies before our
making any thematic assertion about it. In such an assertion, the ‘as’ does not turn up for the first time; it
just gets expressed for the first time, and this is possible only in that it lies before us as something
expressible.” SZ, 149.

\(^{137}\) I should say that, though the normativity (“rationality”) characteristic of discourse is grounded in and
answerable to the pre-propositional, pre-predicative “as” of primordial interpretation, this does not imply
that Heidegger’s “discourse” is non-linguistic; *Rede* is languaged, but—as the illustration I have used about
discourse in the showing of the use of a hammer demonstrates—it is not necessarily or even fundamentally
given a linguistic form. Discourse, if you will, straddles the boundary between assertoric speech and
human comportments that lie “deeper.” What is crucial for my argument is that there is, in discourse, a
kind of normativity which shapes our demonstrative practices (and hence is a form of “reason” in a broad,
Sellarsian manner), but which does not necessarily have a propositional/conceptual form.
is manifest in the diverging views of Habermas, on the one hand, and Röld and
McDowell, on the other, about the direction that should be followed. What remains is
neither propositionalist nor phenomenalistic (neither objective idealist nor nominalist) –
and is, furthermore, anything but deflationist about the explanatory role of the concept of
truth for understanding discursive practices – but it does nevertheless account for both the
requirement that the space of reasons not be restricted to an “internal” realm (even a
socially articulated “internal” realm) and the requirement that rational beholdenness to
the world not be thought to be freefloating from attitudes and comportments that are
supra-discursive and non-conceptual in structure.

This Heideggerian perspective provides a good overview, then, of Brandom’s
failure to adequately account for the relationship between discursive practitioners and the
world (between I and It, if you will), which has been the subject of this chapter. However, I will argue in the next (and concluding) chapter that we need to turn to Hegel
to offer a viewpoint which can account both for the line of critique followed in the
present chapter (I and It) and that pursued in the previous chapter(s) of Part 3 (on the
social relationship between I, Thou and We). Thus I will conclude that it is from Hegel’s
perspective that we can most adequately see the problems of a reconstruction of
discursive practice that floats freely from both robust social practices with an I-We
structure (Chapter 8) and from attitudes and comportments constitutive of a supra-
discursive, but nonetheless rationally normative relationship with the objective world.
Chapter 10: Hegel and Conclusion.

Introduction

Thus far Part 3 – the critical part of this essay – has developed two lines of criticism of Brandom’s semantics. The groundwork for these criticisms is articulated in Chapters 6 and 7, in which I drew out the consequences of his equivocal view on the place of self-conscious subjectivity, arguing that this view prevents him from properly accounting for crucial aspects of his own project, primarily for what it is to take up a (first-person) doxastic perspective in a social practice (Chapter 6) and what it is to take others (in the second-person) to have a doxastic perspective in the same social practice in which one takes up one’s own perspective (Chapter 7). Out of this groundwork, in Chapter 8, I examined the social ontology that must underlie an adequate account of first- and second-person attitudes in a discursive practice, concluding that it must hold in view social practices of an I-We structure that also include supra-discursive relationships, commitments and communities. In Chapter 9, I then pursued another line of criticism emerging out of the groundwork provided in Chapters 6 and 7, namely, that Brandom fails to provide an adequate account of the objective world (“nature”) and the ways that we take up that world in discursive practices. In the first line of criticism (i.e., regarding social ontology) I drew extensively on Hegel, but I did not do so in the second. Rather, in Chapter 9, I argued that it is from the perspective of Heidegger that we can account for both the problems in Brandom’s theory and for a more promising way of conceiving things.

As a way of concluding Part 3 – and hence also the essay as a whole – I want to argue now that Hegel’s philosophy offers a perspective from which to bring both lines of
criticism together, and hence from which to grasp and think through all of the fundamental problems I have discerned in Brandom’s reconstruction of objective discursive practice. Since what I have said already about Hegel in Part 2 and the first three chapters of Part 3 suffices, I hope, to establish that Hegel offers a perspective from which to grasp the intricacies of self-consciousness (“I”), mutual recognition (“Thou”) and robust social embeddedness (“We”), I will pass that by (for now) and focus on how Hegel in his own way can offer a version of the “Heideggerian” perspective that concluded Chapter 9. I will argue that his understanding of truth and objectivity in the *Phenomenology* can offer grounds for a parallel critique to Heidegger’s and that, moreover, this understanding commits him to two features of a view of nature and our knowledge of it that were discovered to be crucial: 1) the prioritizing (in the order of understanding) of truth or reality to “mere” appearance; and 2) to the “unboundedness of the conceptual,” but where the “conceptual” is not cashed out first and foremost in propositional or assertoric terms. Having so argued, I will then bring the discussion back around to issue of the social ontology of discursive practice to show that, on a Hegelian view, both lines of criticism are two sides of a coin.

### 10.1. Appearance, Truth and the Unboundedness of the Conceptual in Hegel

Hegel’s conception of truth in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* sets the frame for the whole work. One can view the “argument” of the *Phenomenology* as an attempt to show what conditions must obtain for the criterion of truth to be satisfied. I do not intend to rehearse this argument here, of course, but merely to set out his conception of truth and its
criterion and then show how, despite Hegel’s espousal of a thoroughly conceptually articulated view of truth, it preserves the grounds for the Heideggerian critique of Brandom and thus has its own way of accounting for what Heidegger sees as the necessity for grounding world-disclosure in practical, pre-thematic comportments in the world.

As discussed in Part 2, in the “Introduction,” Hegel distinguishes two moments of consciousness, outside of which knowledge (and therefore truth) is not possible: “being-for-another” – which is how we have seen the object to exist for us – and “being-in-itself” – which is the “True.” Knowledge consists in two movements of consciousness with respect to a thing in the world: “Consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something, and at the same time relates itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists for consciousness.”¹ The object of knowledge is thus taken to be both a thing-in-itself (insofar as consciousness distinguishes itself from it) and to be something that is essentially related to it (and thus to be something for-consciousness – a being-for-another). Now both of these moments are moments of the act of knowing a thing, and thus the opposition between the being-for-another and the being-in-itself can be understood to be an opposition within consciousness. In relating the object to itself, consciousness forms a conception of itself as knowing the thing in a certain way, which Hegel calls a “Concept.” In distinguishing itself from the thing it knows, consciousness posits the Object as the variable that must satisfy the function that is the Concept. In other words, the Concept determines what will count as knowledge and the Object determines whether we have knowledge. The Concept must correspond to the Object; this is the criterion of truth, on Hegel’s view.

¹ PS, 52.
However, as mentioned, both the Concept and the Object are moments *within* consciousness; together they constitute a “form of consciousness.” In the Concept, a criterion of knowledge is projected (if you will) which our actual experience (our encounter with the thing understood as Being-in-itself, the Object) must satisfy. But experience is not just a brute given. How we experience things is determined (at least in part) by what *counts for us* as knowledge of things. Thus, for example, if only colour experiences are going to count for me as knowledge, then my experience of a green ginger ale can and a green mug will be indistinguishable as far as my sapient knowledge of them are concerned. Thus, when one moment of consciousness is revised in the light of “recalcitrant experience,” the other is too: “Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test: in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is.”

If our conception of knowledge fails to correspond to our actual experience of things, both undergo a revision in the search for a more adequate Concept; Concept and Object are thus mediated through each other in the process of seeking knowledge.

The general movement of the *Phenomenology* charts various attempts to show the coincidence of Concept and Object. It tells a story about natural consciousness, how it sets up criteria for its own experience, and shows how each of these breaks down until it arrives at the Concept in which being-for-another and being-in-itself are identical and

---

2 PS, 54-55.
thus the criterion of truth is satisfied. Moving through these successive forms of consciousness, the *Phenomenology* develops an account of just what kind of a Concept – and thus also what kind of an object – can meet this criterion. This criterion (though, as a relation of identity, it appears to demand *immediacy*), as already hinted at, can only be satisfied in the successive mediations of Concept and Object; the Truth only comes about through mediation. As it turns out, only a Concept that includes an understanding of the knowing subject’s consciousness of itself as depending essentially on its mediation through recognition by other knowing subjects and an understanding of the object of knowledge that is likewise mediated (in its relations to other things in the world, but also in relation to the knowing subject) can satisfy the criterion of truth. Knowledge must not only be conscious, then, but also self-conscious.

It would seem, then, that the Heideggerian objections against Brandom’s view of truth and discursive practice – which were a result of the latter’s dependence on the conceptual/propositional articulation of agent’s busy-ness with the world – would also apply to Hegel’s. And so it would, if Hegel had a similarly free-floating notion of the conceptual. However, he does not. The realm of the conceptual, on Hegel’s view, *includes* the understanding coping with worldly entities with which an agent finds itself always already involved in a way constitutive of its agency. The important thing is that this “conceptual” articulation of understanding and state of mind (in Heidegger’s terms) does not imply a *propositional* attitude (i.e., an attitude with a content that is present-at-hand) any more than Heidegger’s “as-structure” does. The structure of conceptuality is

---

3 “Upon this distinction [between the in-itself and for-consciousness], which is present as a fact, the examination rests. If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too…” PS, 54.

4 Cf. Part 2.
rather simply that of the mediation of the agent in worldly entities, or, put differently, a self-relation in otherness.\(^5\) There is no implication here that this self-relation in otherness (conceptuality) is a matter of taking an otherwise bare particular thing (something present-at-hand, existing outside of the normative space of reasons) and inserting it into a network of inferences so as to “make it” intelligible. This primitive conceptuality is something that the agent always already finds itself involved in; it has no self-conscious (indeed, no conscious) being outside of it. Thus Hegel’s view does not fall afoul of Heidegger’s assertion that: “In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present at hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world.”\(^6\) That this is so – and its significance for the conception of truth – can be most clearly seen in Hegel’s connection of desire and self-consciousness.

As mentioned, Hegel believes that the criterion of truth can only be satisfied in a Concept that takes human knowing to be \(\text{self-conscious}\); a Concept that does not account for this condition cannot account for discursive practices either, or indeed for any knowledge whatsoever. This is because, unless a consciousness is conscious of itself (and indeed, can take itself to be self-conscious), it cannot even account for the criterion of knowledge much less fulfill it, since (as we have seen already) knowledge requires relating an object to oneself, an act that involves reflexivity. This is to say that Hegel holds to a version of the Kantian apperception thesis; namely, that a conscious subject must be able to ascribe her experiences to herself as their subject and thus be self-

---

\(^5\) The Concept just is the relating a thing to oneself, i.e., a self-relation mediated by relation to the thing.

\(^6\) SZ, 150.
conscious. Self-consciousness, on his view, cannot be immediate, but must be mediated through an other. This happens first, not in any kind of full-fledged cognitive grasp (i.e., not in intra-discursive propositional attitudes), but in desire (i.e., in pre-discursive, non-propositional attitudes).

Actual self-consciousness, he says, is desire, since, in desiring an object and satisfying itself, consciousness relates to itself (satisfaction) through another (the object). This happens, too, in perception – the object is experienced as being-for-consciousness – but in this unity of apperception, the object loses (or rather, is not seen to have ever had) the character of something genuinely other; it is merely experienced as my experience. The self-relation in apperception (as opposed to the object’s mediation which has been established) is not seen, then, to be mediated by a genuine other and thus cannot be actual self-consciousness.\(^7\) This self-relation (self-consciousness), then, depends on a prior self-relation in which the other remains other. In desire – the drive for the satisfaction of a lack – the object first appears as other, as independent of the desiring subject. In the experience of a lack, then, the agent finds itself related to an object that it can understand (as something that it does not have) as being genuinely distinct from itself. Only then can consciousness become self-conscious by finding itself within and involved (via desire) with a world that is actually other. The state of desire is thus conceptual – it involves a self-relation in the other insofar as it takes the desired thing as the object of desire – but this conceptuality is not a cognitive net thrown around something antecedently present-at-hand; it is, instead, a world-disclosing involvement that the agent finds itself always already a participant in.

\(^7\) In such a situation, the difference between the ‘I’ and the object is immediately superseded and thus the movement of self-consciousness appears a “the motionless tautology of: ‘I am I.’” PS, 105.
In and of itself, of course, this is not sufficient, and so the conception of self-consciousness as desire must be superseded. However, this does not mean that it is lost or falsified; it is merely shown to be an abstract moment of a greater unity. Though self-consciousness must, in the end, be understood in terms of the Concept of Spirit, it remains the fact that “self-consciousness is desire in general.” It is in desire (and, I would add, in taking possession of things) that self-consciousness — and thus a conscious relation of an object to oneself (i.e., the Concept) — is first established, and this moment of self-consciousness does not disappear, even though in more sophisticated forms it ceases to be taken as the “essential” moment. The relation to the object in these more sophisticated forms is and remains dependent on the self-relation in otherness that is characteristic of desire. In so far as Brandom’s account of discursive practice has no place for this kind of relating to objects, the more sophisticated objectivity-involving discursive practices that he describes are, on Hegel’s view, groundless. In other words, an account of taking-true must include an account of taking-as-good-for-me (i.e., desiring) or taking-possession, pre-predicative (but not for that reason pre-conceptual) takings that first introduce a thing in the world as other than me and yet related to me. Thus Hegel gives his own version of the grounds of the Heideggerian critique of Brandom presented above.

The dialectic of Concept and Object, which articulates Hegel’s conception of truth — which, I have just argued, requires grounding in pre-propositional, pre-discursive modes of world-disclosure — also then articulates his view of appearance. In the

---

8 PS, 105.  
9 This is why Hegel uses the concept of desire to characterize self-consciousness “in general” rather than using self-consciousness to characterize desire in general. Self-consciousness (to put it cheekily) does not cease to be erotic.
Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel sets out what he means by the book’s subtitle: “The Science of the Experience of Consciousness.” The aim of the book is to develop a Science; that is, a true, systematic knowledge that can attain the standpoint of the Absolute. This Science, however, cannot be cognized purely *a priori*, nor can the absolute, but rather must be developed through “the education of consciousness itself into the standpoint of Science.” When Science first shows up on the scene, then, it has no special claim to a grasp of anything, much less the Absolute; “it is itself an appearance [*Erscheinung*]: in coming on the scene it is not yet science in its developed and unfolded truth.” This does not mean, however, that it has the character of an illusion, or pure untruth, only that it stands in need of development. The development of the “apparent knowledge” [*erscheinende Wissen*] is “the path of the natural consciousness which presses forward to true knowledge;” the appearance is not that which is to be discarded in the search for truth or even that which must be “got beyond,” but that which must be raised to the level of Science, or Truth.

To understand this better, we need to see what is meant by calling natural consciousness “apparent knowledge.” As just discussed, there are two moments in any instance of apparent knowledge: a Concept (being-for-another – or for-us) by which the

---

10 “But gradually we come to see that this kind of lazy talk which goes back and forth only leads to a hazy distinction between an absolute truth and some other kind of truth, and that words like ‘absolute’, ‘cognition’, etc. presuppose a meaning which has yet to be ascertained.” PS, 48.
11 PS, 50.
12 PS, 48.
13 PS, 49. Miller translates this as “phenomenal knowledge,” but I think that confuses the issue, since twice in the previous paragraph Hegel refers to the knowledge under consideration (the putative Science) as “an appearance” [*Erscheinung*], and the preceding sentence claims for his work “an exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance [*Erscheinung*]…” (49) The use of the noun in adjectival form as *erscheinende Wissen*, would then seem likely to be linked to these previous uses, rather than to a more technical philosophical (and Kantian) sense suggested by the translation “phenomenal knowledge.” As a matter of fact, the story Hegel tells about natural consciousness does begin with a form that takes phenomenal knowledge (in the Kantian sense) as immediately given (Sense Certainty), but I don’t think that this is the intent of the use of the phrase in the current context.
14 PS, 49.
experience of the thing is related to the knower under a certain description, and an Object (being in-itself), which is the experience of the thing as standing over and against this Concept to which the latter must correspond. If these two moments fail to correspond, then they must jointly be revised in the development of a new form of consciousness that can hope to be more adequate. Only a Concept of knowledge that corresponds entirely with its Object – i.e., a form of knowing in which the known is in-itself what it is for-us – can claim to have accounted satisfactorily for its moment of truth and can thus be called “absolute” knowing.

This process of the continual revision of forms of consciousness is a “dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge [Concept] and its object” and which Hegel calls “experience.” It is the dialectical structure of this movement that is important for the point I am trying to make about “appearance.” As mentioned, an apparent knowledge of an object can fail to stand up to its own criteria, in which respect it is “untrue” and hence an “appearance.” Both the knowledge and the criterion must be revised, but it is crucial to see that they are not therefore discarded. It is precisely in their failure to achieve absolute knowledge that forms of apparent knowledge can guide and create the conditions for the development of more adequate forms: “…in every case the result of an untrue mode of knowledge must not be allowed to run away into an empty nothing, but must necessarily be grasped as the nothing of that from which it results – a result which contains what is true in the preceding knowledge.” Appearance, when grasped as such (i.e., as untruth) is thus the determinate negation that guides us in the development of a Concept that is true in the

15 PS, 55. Hence the subtitle: Science of the Experience of Consciousness.
16 PS, 56.
full sense. Thus the way to truth must lead *through* appearance, and it must not *transcend* appearance in the sense of “leaving it behind;” rather, appearance must undergo a *sublation* [*Aufhebung*] which simultaneously negates (i.e., takes it *as* an appearance) and preserves it (as a part of the whole truth).

It would appear, then, that appearance is for Hegel prior to truth if the way to truth must lead through appearance. This would, then, seem to cut against the Sellarsian theme that I drew through McDowell and Heidegger, namely, that truth – understood as both a standing in the space of reasons and a standing with respect to the objective world (because these are not separate things) – is prior in the order of understanding to appearance. In other words, a phenomenalist and deflationist strategy that attempts to build an account of being-true (as a normative status, a world-disclosing standing in the space of reasons) out of an account of taking-true (a normative attitude) will not do; unless we understand what it is for a claim to be true, we cannot understand what it is to take it to be true. If Hegel is more in line with Brandom than McDowell and Heidegger here, then my argument has a problem.

But he is not. In order for appearance to be a *determinate* negation – i.e., for it to be a step on the road to truth – it must be grasped *as an appearance*. In order for experience to lead to truth, we must be able to see our experience *as* less than the whole truth, or – in more Hegelian terms – to see that Concept and Object, being-for-another (us) and being-in-itself fail to correspond. But in order to have that understanding, we need to already have the concept of truth as a knowledge where being-in-itself and being-for-another are *not* separate; without the concept of truth we could not grasp appearance *qua* appearance. When we cannot do so, however, we have no *experience* in Hegel’s
sense of the term. There is no experience – no learning from our contact with the world – where there is not at least a preliminary grasp on the concept of truth.

In the terms I employed in Chapter 8, appearance is only genetically prior to truth, truth is constitutively prior to appearance. In Chapter 8, I discussed how we can make sense of this distinction within a teleological framework like the one Hegel offers, where everything is structurally oriented toward its perfection, wherein its being-in-(or for-)itself is identical with its being-for-another. We do not really understand a thing unless we see it as being ordered toward that telos. Truth, for Hegel, is the telos of appearance, and we do not grasp appearance qua appearance unless we see it as oriented toward truth. Brandom’s phenomenalism and his generally “reconstructive” approach to theoretical explanation blind him to this possibility. So he just has to cash-out truth (normative statuses, being-true) entirely in terms of appearances (normative attitudes, taking-true). In fact, his robust perspectivalism – wherein no commitment has precisely the same content specified from different perspectives (i.e., wherein there is no shared “we”-perspective) – leads him to believe that there is no real possibility (either as an origin or an end) of truth as the identity of being-in-itself and being-for-another. For Hegel – as for Heidegger and McDowell – there must be.

Hegel’s account of consciousness also recognizes what McDowell calls the “unboundedness of the conceptual,” by which McDowell means that the objective world should be thought of not only as the realm of law – and hence only articulated causally and outside of the space of reasons – but also as being immanent to the logical space of reasons (or, alternatively, that the space of reasons extends to include not only subjective states of knowers but also the objective realm of facts and things). On McDowell’s
picture, standings in the space of reasons are world-involving not insofar as the world – by causally impinging on our mental states through surface irritations on our sense organs – provides some “non-conceptual content” for our conceptually articulated discursive practices, but rather such that – in favoured cases – our conceptually justified attitudes do not stop short of, but are in fact identical with, the worldly states of affairs in virtue of which they are true. McDowell states the point thus: “there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks is the case… there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world.”

Hegel accords with both parts of this view, namely, that, on the one hand, there is no non-conceptual content to thought or consciousness, and that, on the other hand, there is no “outside” to the domain of the conceptual, including the objective world itself. As discussed, all consciousness involves both a Concept and an Object, the former being a way of understanding an object as related to oneself in a certain way (taking it to be something for-another) and the latter being a way of distinguishing that same object from oneself (taking it to be something in-itself). There is no form of consciousness, then, that is non-conceptual in the sense that it does not essentially involve a kind of self-relation in otherness, which is the very structure of the Concept. Non-conceptual knowledge, on Hegel’s view, would have to be either immediate self-relation – i.e., self-relation not mediated by relation to something other than oneself – or an immediate relation to an

17 Mind and World, 27.
18 Hegel summarizes such a view in the Fichtean slogan “I=I” but dismisses it as a “motionless tautology.” (PS, 105)
other, one that as such involves no relation to oneself. Both of these are impossible (as the argument of “Sense Certainty” and of “Consciousness” generally makes clear).\(^{19}\)

If there is no non-conceptual consciousness or knowledge, there is also no non-conceptual content to that consciousness. It would seem, of course, that the Object “in-itself” – where the matter \([\text{die Sache}]\) is distinguished from oneself as other – would be \textit{ipso facto} non-conceptual. But the Object is not independent of the Concept; they are each moments of a single act of consciousness. What the Object is taken to be (i.e., the as-structure it has) “in-itself” is thoroughly bound up with how that Object is related to oneself in the Concept. This is why Hegel insists that any revision of the Concept involves a revision of the Object as well; the Object is not a Given or Datum, impinging on consciousness from outside of the system of conceptual involvements or (what Heidegger calls) references, which retains its form and content while we try to formulate an adequate concept or theory to grasp it as it presents itself. In other words, all consciousness (and this includes all volition as well\(^{20}\)) is a self-relation in otherness, and the otherness (the Object, the in-itself) is one with the self-relation (the Concept, the for-another); there is no non-conceptual content in thought.

This could of course, be compatible with an entirely other-worldly idealism where consciousness spins freely from any contact with the hard objective world of things-in-themselves. The fact that there is no non-conceptual content to thought could imply that all the contents of thought are \textit{subjective} and hence that there is no \textit{objective} or world-involving consciousness; it’s all just us (all things for thought are just thinks). What prevents this is Hegel’s insistence that the Objects of thought are not thoughts-about

\(^{19}\) See Part 2.  
\(^{20}\) See discussion of the “Introduction” to the \textit{Philosophy of Right} in Part 2.
objects (or representations of objects), but worldly things themselves, physical items or relations existing in a shared world in which we always already find ourselves immersed (akin to Heidegger’s phenomena). Indeed the Concept itself is not merely a way of thinking about the world; in some of its most fundamental forms it is simply a way of physically interacting with physical things. Desire, labour, taking private property are all Conceptual comportments, and the Objects desired, worked upon or taken as one’s own are things in the world. I have argued, in fact, that Hegel sees these forms of consciousness, which are transparently embodied in an “objective” world, as foundational for the possibility of more “abstract” forms of consciousness (such as approaching the world as merely a realm of forces exerted according to mathematical physical laws).  

Indeed, the realm of nature, properly understood, has for Hegel what one might call a proto-conceptual structure. As discussed in Chapter 8, all natural things have a teleological structure, they are all simultaneously being-in (or –for) themselves and being-for-another. There is a “natural teleology” according to which natural things unfold in such a way that they seek a kind of being where they are for-themselves what they are for-others and vice-versa. This is precisely the two-fold structure of consciousness and of the objects of consciousness (true knowledge is when the content of knowledge is in-itself what it is for-consciousness and vice versa). This means that consciousness is a natural phenomenon (our knowledge of the world is structurally a part of the world) but also that nature is in a sense a “conceptual” phenomenon (its structure is

---

21 I.e., on Hegel’s view, the picture of the objective world as what McDowell calls the “Realm of Law” is abstract and hence intelligible only from within a form of consciousness (and, indeed of social life) that it does not itself encompass. Cf. “Force and the Understanding” and my discussion in Part 2.
teleological – oriented toward truth – and not merely causal). 22 Hegel would affirm therefore McDowell’s notion that there is “no ontological gap” between the world and our knowledge of it; true knowledge is thoroughly world-involving and is itself thoroughly worldly.

Thus Hegel offers a version of what Heidegger offers, a standpoint that can encompass and account for both Habermas’ and Rödl/McDowell’s criticisms of Brandom’s view of truth, intentionality and nature. Crucially, though, the same comportments that for Hegel anchor our conceptual (discursive) practices in direct contact with the natural world, also point toward the necessity of the robust social articulation of those practices. Labour, Desire, Property are both forms of objective consciousness constitutive for knowledge of the world (i.e., they ground the embeddedness of consciousness in a real world of things rather than an abstract world of sensations or forces) and also forms of social activity that themselves must be understood in terms of embeddedness in Sittlichkeit. In other words, Hegel provides another direction from which the “free-floatingness” criticism against Brandom’s account of truth and objectivity can be leveled, one which Heidegger’s ontology does not support in the same way.

Since Heidegger sees an immersion in the They as an in-authentic moment of Dasein’s being (i.e., falling), it is essentially a movement in the direction of untruth. This happens because this immersion directs Dasein away from the understanding working out

---

22 It is beyond the scope of this essay to offer a full justification for such a reading of Hegel’s philosophy of nature and of its place in his epistemology. Paul Franks characterizes the aim of Hegel’s Naturphilosophie thus: “to employ distinctively philosophical methods to interpret the results of natural science as contributions to an account of the proto-rationality of nature, and hence of the naturalness of reason.” “From Quine to Hegel,” 65. Cf. also Alison Stone, Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel’s Philosophy (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005).
of its own possibilities and towards the possibilities of the public. Being cut off from its own understanding, then, Dasein falls into untruth. Hegel’s account of inter-subjectivity allows for a more positive evaluation of the world-disclosive potential of the social mediation of an agent’s understanding, since the “mineness” of the understanding is, on his terms, made possible – rather than adulterated – by identification with a public.\(^\text{23}\) In this respect, I think Hegel has one up on Heidegger.

From this other direction, Brandom’s account of the social articulation of truth is also problematically abstract. Recall that Brandom has individual subjects with their own constellations of commitments trying to ascribe and evaluate one another’s commitments across a doxastic gap. He identifies this model of sociality as having an “I-Thou” structure. Brandom’s project in defining the use of the truth predicate in terms of anaphoric pro-sentence operators was an attempt to show how this doxastic gap between I and Thou can be negotiated.

As I have argued, Hegel would cheerfully admit that there are individual agents with their own projects and commitments who need to find ways to align those in spite of differences between them. However, this kind of social structure is not self-supporting. First of all, in order for negotiation across a doxastic gap to get going in the first place, there must be at least one thing held in common between I and Thou: we must be participating in the same social practice, namely, the practice of giving and asking for reasons. This much Brandom cheerfully admits.\(^\text{24}\) However, I must then be able to

\(^{23}\) Cf. Part 2.

\(^{24}\) He argues that the apparently absurd consequences of a conceptual relativism created by inferential holism in a situation where no two individuals have the same set of commitments can be avoided if instead of thinking of communication “in terms of sharing a relation to one and the same thing” one considers it “in terms of cooperation in a joint activity (coordinating social perspectives by keeping deontic score according to common practices).” MIE 479.
recognize Thou as participating in the same practice as I am in order to hold out any hope whatsoever of coordinating our commitments, and Thou must be able to do the same with respect to me. This means that we must take one another to be involved in a common project. The commonness of this project, however, cannot be accounted for simply in terms of the fact that I am doing it and Thou art doing it; it is something that we are embarking upon together (hence the need for the performative attitudes constitutive of second-person thought).\(^{25}\) Furthermore, sharing a practice means sharing certain commitments (for example, to the legitimacy of the practice) and understandings (for example, of the rules of the game).\(^{26}\) This means that, whatever the doxastic gap between us, it must be a gap within a practice that includes our individual perspectives but nevertheless transcends them, and with which we each identify: a “We.” In Habermasian terms: doxastic gaps occur only within a common lifeworld, and the negotiation of them is made possible only by the social integration that this sharing affords. In Hegel’s own terms, mutual recognition requires an “I that is We and We that is I”\(^{27}\) that he calls “the Concept of Spirit.” That is to say, the Concept by which I can recognize an other person is one that understands both that person and myself in terms of a set of (institutionalized) practices, commitments and projects that we share in a robust way, in which (so to speak) we are not masters but moments (albeit free, self-conscious moments). Since Brandom’s account of discursive practice – and hence of truth as a discursive normative status – is

\(^{25}\) Cf. Chapter 7.

\(^{26}\) Cf. Chapter 8 (esp. the “argument from insanity,” which concluded that shared commitments – and hence shared conceptual content – are necessary for judgments about the possibility of discursive community, not merely convergent formal capacities).

\(^{27}\) PS, 110. Terry Pinkard gives a much more elaborate argument along the lines of the one I offer here, in Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason, pp. 53-63.
content to remain at the level of I-Thou social interactions, it must thus be taken to be abstract on Hegel’s terms and insufficient to account for its own conditions.

10.2. Conclusion: Brandom, German Idealism and Hegel

I have come (at long last, perhaps) to the conclusion of my argument. By way of conclusion I will rehearse the central tasks and conclusions of the three parts of my essay. I will then reflect – only very briefly – on the limitations of the (Hegelian) perspective that I have articulated in the process.

The first task, discharged in Part 1, was to offer an account of Brandom’s systematic project in terms of the preoccupations and assumptions of Kant and the post-Kantian Idealists. The central theme of this shared project is, I argued, to offer an account of human sapience in terms of conceptual practices governed not by natural laws or habit but by norms, crucially norms of our own making (or, better put, norms that have their grounds within human practices of concept-mongering rather than relying for their authority either on an appeal to God or to non-human nature). I argued that this project leads to an unavoidable problem, that of the objectivity of the norms that govern our concepts and in virtue of which they have their contents. Answering this problem – given the assumptions of the project – requires thinking through the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity understood as apperceptive self-consciousness. In Fichte’s thought (in his later Jena period) – and Brandom follows him in this respect – a further relationship must be invoked in order to answer the objectivity problem, namely, the social relationship between self-conscious rational agents. I then turned to Brandom’s

28 I argued that the question of the objectivity of normative statuses (being right or wrong, etc.) and the question of the objectivity of conceptual contents (being about and answerable to the world) were – for Kant, Fichte and Brandom – indissolubly related problems, which can either be solved together or not at all.
thought at length to show how his proposed solution to the objectivity problem bears important structural similarities especially to Fichte’s, with the crucial exception of the fact that Brandom is less clear than Fichte (in fact he is philosophically ambivalent) about the role of self-conscious subjectivity in grounding the possibility of objectivity.

In Part 2, I turned to an analysis of how Hegel discharges the task of fulfilling the Idealist project as I unpacked it in Part 1. In so doing, I meant not only to set out a number of points that I would pick up in Part 3 as part of my criticisms of Brandom, but also to show that Hegel’s way of thinking through the relationship between objectivity, subjectivity and sociality differs in important respects from Brandom’s. This was intended to have the effect of showing Brandom’s theory to be more Fichtean than Hegelian in its fundamental terms and commitments.

Though this situating of Brandom’s project in terms of Kant and the post-Kantians is significant in itself, it is intended as groundwork for an internal critique of that project; in other words, it set up a way of understanding the architectonic of Brandom’s systematic project meant to bring into clear focus the places where that project fails on its own terms. Working this critique out was the goal of Part 3. I began with the place where Brandom most clearly diverged from Fichte (and indeed also then from Kant and Hegel), namely, regarding the place and significance of self-conscious subjectivity in the construction of a workable social account of objectivity. From this point, weaving together a number of different critiques of Brandom, I argued that we could draw a line from his inadequate account of subjectivity to problems in both his (I-Thou) conception of sociality and his (deflationist) conception of objectivity and truth. In doing so, I also found reason to critique Brandom’s methodological reliance on a
resolutely non-teleological philosophical method – namely, the rational reconstruction of a bare-bones discursive practice – which, it is worth pointing out, separates his thought further from Kant’s transcendental approach and Hegel’s acceptance of a dialectical version of teleology. The upshot of this critique of Brandom is that it is internally inconsistent; denying to itself the conceptual resources it needs in order to make sense of what it is committed to.29

Furthermore, I turned to the perspective of Heidegger and Hegel to show that, lying behind these repeated and related inconsistencies is Brandom’s commitment to a view of discursive practice that is too “free-floating” vis-à-vis non- or pre-propositional engagements with a world always already charged with normative significances on the one hand, and vis-à-vis robust, supra-discursive social practices and relations on the other. The fact that Hegel’s philosophy – as discussed in Part 2 – offered critical insight and corrective resources on both sides of this critique had the effect of recommending that philosophy as a more promising way of discharging the German Idealist, (post-) Kantian project in which Brandom too is immersed.

To sum up my summary, then: this essay, if successful, will have accomplished the following goals:

1) To convincingly situate Brandom’s systematic philosophy in the context of a philosophical project that extends from Kant to Fichte and Hegel.

29 I found this inconsistency in a number of different places: inter alia 1) with respect to first-person thought, his commitment to the priority of rationality to logic (and hence also of inference to representation, of anaphora to indexicals, etc.) made him unable to account of the necessity of self-consciousness for the attitudes he ascribes to discursive practitioners; 2) with respect to his account of sociality, I argued that his commitments simultaneously require him to posit a kind of discursive community with an I-We structure, and yet also deny him the ability to do so; 3) with respect to his account of intentionality and truth, his commitment to phenomenalism denied him the resources he needs to make good on his propositionalism about basic discursive attitudes, leaving him vacillating between nominalism and objective idealism.
2) To offer a detailed account of Brandom’s approach to the objectivity problem that shows how his proposed solution follows the lines of, and yet diverges from Fichte’s.

3) To offer an overview of how Hegel’s philosophy attempts to pull off the (post-) Kantian project and a sense of the ways in which his attempt differs from Brandom’s.

4) To offer an internal critique of Brandom’s systematic thought starting from the themes identified as crucial to the (post-) Kantian project.

5) To show how Hegel’s version of the project offers a more fruitful way of discharging that project.

All of this would seem, of course, to be an extended apologia for Hegelianism rightly conceived. And so it is, to a certain extent. Within the parameters of the post-Kantian project as I have defined it, I find Hegel’s approach to be closest to the truth (at least compared to the other figures I have discussed at length). There are many aspects of Hegel’s thought that I find congenial, most centrally:

a) The acceptance of the task of systematic philosophy in Sellars’ sense of an attempt “to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.”

b) The recognition that this task requires a consistent, non-reductionist ontology that can offer a synoptic view, such that it can grasp and articulate the relationship among various kinds of social practices, the

---

30 Sellars, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,” in *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 1. This means rejecting the kind of philosophical quietism advocated by McDowell. In wanting to offer more than just a picture that can release us from the pseudo-problems associated with the old Weltbild, Brandom is more in line with Hegel (and myself) on this score at least.
natural world, the human person as agent and knower and the various ways in which such agents interact in these subjective, social and objective worlds. In other words, this ontology must offer us, inter alia, a social philosophy, a philosophy of nature, a philosophical anthropology, etc.

c) A rejection of both “baldly naturalist” and “rampantly Platonist” (to use McDowell’s terms) versions of such an ontology. This means rejecting both the conceptual vocabularies of natural science and of abstract metaphysics as offering privileged access to the world as it is or as being the final vocabulary in which all valid statements need to be cashed out in the end.

d) A recognition that a systematic philosophy and its ontology must, then, take some kind of a “teleological” form in which a proper understanding of worldly phenomena (whether subjective, objective or social) depends in part upon understanding their proper ends. This means that philosophical ontology must be in some respects a normative ontology, in that it must not merely “reconstruct” our practices and experiences, but it must think them in such a way that sees them as being oriented toward certain ends which are determinative for them being what they are. In some respect or another, this normativity must be thought to be “natural” and not limited to actions, attitudes or practices that are merely “human;” nature (in-)itself must not be taken to be thoroughly dis-enchanted.

31 In a sense, the broadest articulation of this ontology is contained in Hegel’s Logic, as long as it is read as not merely an articulation of the formal qualities of our thinking about the world, but also (a la Kant’s transcendental logic but without the restriction of the validity of that logic to the realm of appearances) as an account of the essential contents of thought. Obviously, a defense of such a reading is far beyond the scope of this essay.
Although Brandom accepts the challenge of (a), at least in some respects, he fails to offer his reconstruction of discursive practices in terms of what is required in (b) and (d), and hence also fails to adequately distinguish his approach from either of the poles that (c) cautions against.\(^{32}\) My central criticisms (hinging on the “free-floatingness” of his reconstruction) reflect my sense that these failures are fatal to his project. Hegel’s philosophy does not make these same mistakes.\(^{33}\) Though, in the final analysis, I would not identify myself as a Hegelian,\(^{34}\) this at least makes me inclined more to Hegel’s version of things than Brandom’s.

\(^{32}\) This last point is a way of restating my point about the irresolvable dialectic in Brandom’s understanding of nature offered in Chapter 9. The “spiritual” core of this dialectic – between an absolutization of human freedom (i.e., of the determinative nature of our attitudes expressed in Brandom’s phenomenalism) and an absolutization of nature (i.e., of the determination of our attitudes by natural phenomena expressed in terms of natural causality and law) – is unpacked by Herman Dooyeweerd in *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. Freeman and Young (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), vol. 1, part II.

\(^{33}\) Both Habermas and Heidegger come close to doing so. However, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology is inadequate, on my judgment, to offer a sufficiently robust (and positive) account of sociality, while Habermas’ conception of nature or the objective world is vestigial at least insofar as he insulates it from teleology (a la Kant). Again, I plead the benefit of the cursory conclusion to excuse me from having to defend these claims. On Habermas’ philosophy of nature and an argument for why Habermas’s account in inadequate in light of naturalistic challenges, see Klaassen, “Kantian Pragmatism, Weak Naturalism, and Objectivity: The Persistent Problem of Nature in Habermas.”

\(^{34}\) My differences with Hegel revolve primarily around his understanding of the relationship between religion and philosophy and hence of the relationship between the social practices oriented toward forming communities in right relationship with God and those oriented toward the formulation of the best rational articulation of the fundamental structure of our practices. Growing out of this difference are differences in matters of ontology regarding the concept of unity, diversity, coherence and the like, which I cannot begin to justly formulate here. For the best articulation of my own philosophical orientation (particularly about the relationship between religion and philosophy), see Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. 1, Prolegomena.
Dit proefschrift is een uiteenzetting en beoordeling van Robert Brandom's theorie van discursieve objectiviteit dat veel ontleent aan de wijsbegeerte van G.W.F. Hegel. Hoewel Brandom zelf beweert dat hij in zijn poging om een rekenschap van objectiviteit af te leiden uit een theorie van sociale herkenning geïnspireerd is door Hegel, is het mijn stelling dat zijn theorie meer weg heeft van die van J.G. Fichte en dat het dus aan veel van dezelfde problemen lijdt dan bij Fichte ook het geval is. Hegel's eigen versie van een sociale theorie van objectiviteit biedt een meer veelomvattend perspectief van waaruit wij de interne problemen in Brandom's theorie en ook een veelbelovender alternatieve theorie kunnen onderscheiden.

Het Eerste Deel begint met een overzicht op Brandom's pragmatistische semantische theorie dat laat zien hoe deze ontleend is aan de problemen en bindingen die kenmerkend zijn in het denken van Kant en zijn intellectuele nakomelingen. Deze bindingen -- vooral aan het idee dat onze conceptuele capaciteiten onherleidbaar normatief zijn, maar dat deze normen niet zelfstandig zijn ten opzichte van onze discursieve praktijken -- brengen zowel Brandom als de traditie van Kant naar een eigen vorm van het objectiviteit probleem. Als conceptuele inhoud afhankelijk is van de normen die wij gebruiken, en als die normen zelf niet af te lezen zijn van de structuur van ultieme realiteit, hoe kunnen wij er dan op vertrouwen dat onze intentionaliteit niet alleen maar een constructie of alleen maar een uitdrukking is van een subjectief gevoel, houding of voorkeur? Hoofdstuk 2
gaat in op Brandom's poging om deze vraag te beantwoorden door een gevoel van discursive objectiviteit af te leiden uit het sociale karakter van discursive praktijken, een poging die sterk doet denken aan Fichte's verantwoording in zijn *Foundations of Natural Right*. Hoofdstuk 3 laat dan verder drie aan elkaar gerelateerde aspecten van Brandom's theorie zien, met name de aangenomen begrippen van zelfbewuste subjectiviteit, socialiteit, en waarheid. Deze drie aspecten geven dan vorm aan de beoordeling van zijn theorie in Deel Drie.

Na een korte bespreking (in Hoofdstuk 4) van Brandom's inzicht in Hegel, biedt Deel Twee mijn eigen reconstructie van Hegel's theorie van objectiviteit aan. Hoewel Hegel, net zoals Fichte en Brandom, socialiteit beschouwt als beslissend voor de mogelijkheid van objectiviteit, geeft hij een andere rekenschap daarvan die deze mogelijkheid verklaart. Hoewel Fichte en Brandom beiden sociale praktijken met een "I-Thou" structuur beschouwen als constitutief voor de objectiviteit van discursive normen, plaatst Hegel's theorie deze juist in sociale praktijken met een "I-We" structuur. Dit verschil werkt zich dan door in Hegel's begrip van zelfbewuste subjectiviteit en waarheid, resulterend in een karakterisering van subjectiviteit, objectiviteit, en socialiteit dat tegelijk robuuster en concreter is dan Brandom's reconstructie.

Deel Drie bestaat uit vijf hoofdstukken die trachten aan te wijzen dat Brandom's theorie niet alleen op belangrijke punten verschilt van Hegel's, maar dat deze ook intern tegenstrijdig is op manieren die niet van Hegel gelden. Hoofdstuk 6 stelt dat Brandom's begrip van zelfbewuste subjectiviteit -- de belangrijkste zaak waarin hij verschilt, zelfs
van Fichte -- zeer gebrekkig is; zijn theorie van discursieve sociale praktijken maakt het noodzakelijk voor hem om de constitutieve noodzakelijkheid van een robuuste vorm van zelfbewustzijn toe te geven, maar tegelijkertijd ontkent het hem de conceptuele middelen die juist nodig zijn om deze noodzakelijkheid begrijpbaar te maken. Hoofdstuk 7 breidt deze kritiek dan uit naar de verhoudingen tussen zelfbewuste ego's, stellende dat Brandom's theorie geen rekenschap kan geven voor de mogelijkheid en noodzakelijkheid van tweede-persoon discursieve houdingen -- die hij zelf als niet essentieel beschouwt -- zelfs voor de "I-Thou" sociale praktijken waarvan hij de mogelijkheid van objectiviteit afleidt. Hoofdstuk 8 stelt dat zelfbewustzijn en tweede-persoon houdingen beiden niet verklaard kunnen worden door middel van sociale praktijken met een "I-Thou" sociaal struuktuur. Het model van sociale praktijken waaraan Brandom de voorkeur geeft moet zelf ingebouwd zijn in sociale praktijken met een "I-We" struuktuur, waarin discursief normatief gezag niet alleen uitgedeeld wordt aan individuele beoefenaars maar ook gehouden wordt door discursieve gemeenschappen in hun geheel. Ik stel in Hoofdstuk 9 dat een beslissend deel van Brandom's wijsbegeerte, dat hem juist belet om de redeneringen in Hoofdstukken 6-8 te erkennen, een zeer ambivalent begrip van de natuur is. Bepaalde aspecten van zijn theorie trekken in de richting van nominalisme, terwijl andere aspecten hem juist leiden naar een soort "objectief idealisme." Bovendien, anders dan in Hegel's wijsbegeerte, ontbreekt een openstaan voor teleologische verklaring die de mogelijkheid zou kunnen bieden om deze ambivalentie te verzoenen. Door het werk van Martin Heidegger aan te halen laat ik zien dat een verzoening mogelijk is, maar alleen als Brandom de aspecten van zijn theorie bekritiseerd in Hoofdstukken 6-8 prijsgeeft.
Deel Drie ontwikkelt dus twee lijnen van kritiek: ten eerste, dat Brandom's reconstructie van objectief discursieve praktijken te vrijelijk wegdrijft van robuuste, supra-discursieve sociale verhoudingen (met een "I-We" sociaal structuur); en, ten tweede, dat het te vrijelijk wegdrijft van een robuuste, zelfs teleologische theorie van de natuur en haar verhouding met menselijke ego's. In Hoofdstuk 10, de conclusie van het proefschrift, stel ik dat Hegel's wijsbegeerte (zoals in Deel Twee weergegeven) rekenschap kan geven van beide lijnen van kritiek en ze samen kan brengen in een veelomvattend begrip van de verhouding tussen menselijke ego's, maatschappij en natuur, iets waartoe Brandom's wijsbegeerte niet voldoende in staat is.

*****
Bibliography


__________. “Second Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre For Readers Who Already Have a Philosophical System of Their Own.” In Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800, edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale, 36-105. Indianapolis, Hackett, 1994.


Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: The Dissatisfactions of European

“...You Can’t Get There from Here: Transition Problems in Hegel’s
Phenomenology of Spirit.” In The Cambridge Companion to Hegel, edited by

Polanyi, Karl. The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our


Redding, Paul. Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought. Cambridge:


Russon, John. Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology. Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
2004.

Schmitt, Frederick F., ed. Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of

Sellars, Wilfred. “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind.” In Science, Perception and

“Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man.” In Science, Perception and


Taylor, Charles. “Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind.” In Human Agency and Language:

“...Irreducibly Social Goods.” In Philosophical Arguments, 127-145.

Westphal, Kennet. Hegel’s Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the

Westphal, Merold. History and Truth in Hegel’s Phenomenology. 3rd edition.
