# *De Dicto* and *De Re*: A Brandomian Experiment on Kierkegaard

[*De Dicto* e *De Re*: um Experimento Brandomiano sobre Kierkegaard]

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**Abstract**: The recent historical turn within the analytic tradition has experienced growing enthusiasm concerning the procedure of rational reconstruction, whose validity or importance, despite its paradigmatic examples in Frege and Russell, has not always enjoyed a consensus. Among the analytic philosophers who are the frontrunners of such a movement, Robert Brandom is one of a kind: his work on Hegel as well as on German Idealism has been increasing interest in, as well as awareness of, Hegel's contributions to some current problems in that tradition. Thus, this work aims to show Brandom's methodology of rational reconstruction, based on the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* inferences. Afterwards, I turn to Kierkegaard in order to make explicit some of his ontological commitments by applying Brandom's approach as a valuable tool for doing history of philosophy.
**Keywords**: Kierkegaard, Brandom, Rational Reconstruction, Ontology, Metaphilosophy.

**Resumo**: A recente virada histórica no interior da filosofia analítica tem contribuído para o crescimento no interesse acerca do procedimento da reconstrução racional, cuja validade ou importância, a despeito de ter exemplos paradigmáticos em Frege e Russell, não foi sempre um consenso. Entre os filósofos analíticos pioneiros nesse movimento, Robert Brandom merece especial destaque: seu trabalho sobre Hegel e o Idealismo Alemão tem despertado a atenção tanto sobre a exegese do filósofo de Jena, quanto acerca de suas possíveis contribuições para problemas atuais. Assim, este trabalho tem como objetivo expor o método de Brandom baseado na distinção entre inferências *de dicto* e *de re*. Num segundo momento, faço um exercício de aplicação de tal método a Kierkegaard, explicitando seus comprometimentos ontológicos evidenciando tal abordagem como uma valiosa ferramenta para a história da filosofia.
**Palavras-chave**: Kierkegaard, Brandom, Reconstrução Racional, Ontologia, Metafilosofia.

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# 1 - Introduction

Analytic philosophy had a self-image as a trend or philosophical perspective that was not only non-historic, but even opposed to any interference of a historical approach to philosophy (see BEANEY, 2016; RECK, 2013). However, such a view has been challenged in different ways; among them, I would like to point two that are especially relevant for my purposes here. Firstly, as it is now widely acknowledged, the quarrel between Dummett and Sluga on the influences of previous philosophers –mainly Lotze– on Frege, as well as Soames's book and the debates after it, revealed new facets of the then standard narratives about analytic philosophers. As Beaney (2016) points out, even the view about some of the archetypical figures of the anti-historical approach, like Frege himself, but also Russell and Wittgenstein, have changed since then. The second aspect where we can see the "historical turn" in analytic philosophy is not related to what we could call a historical sensibility when it comes to interpretation of now canonical analytic philosophers like Frege or Russell—which is a historical enterprise in itself—but in the reassessment of possible contributions to current philosophical problems by philosophers from the past. Starting with different modes of engagement with Kantian philosophy by analytic philosophers like Sellars, Strawson and Rawls, but also with Descartes, Leibniz, Hume, and even ancient philosophy, analytic philosophers have been increasing the place and importance for dialogue with the history of philosophy. It is in this scenario that the "Pittsburgh School," led by Robert Brandom and John McDowell, moves into what Paul Redding calls "Analytic Neo-Hegelianism" (2011). Brandom himself presents some aspects of his philosophical contributions in terms of an approximation to Hegel. In fact, quoting Richard Rorty, Brandom says that his work, as well as McDowell's, helps to push analytic philosophy from its Kantian phase into its unavoidable Hegelian phase (BRANDOM, 2011).

From a historical point of view, such a move is quite interesting if we consider that a major part of contemporary philosophy raised upon the explicit and deliberate rejection of Hegel's philosophy and his epigones. Almost every aspect of the philosophy of the second half of 19$^{th}$ century and beginning of 20$^{th}$ was directly or indirectly influenced by the refusal of Absolute Idealism and its consequences not only for logic

and natural sciences, but also for history, sociology and culture. Yet, despite the specific importance of that revival of philosophers from the past, what is particularly noteworthy is the progressive acknowledgement of the procedure of rational reconstruction as a valid, justified and profitable way of doing philosophy even inside the analytic tradition.

Following Beaney's definition, "A rational reconstruction of a (purported) body of knowledge or conceptual scheme or set of events is a redescription and reorganization of that body or scheme or set that exhibits the logical (or rational) relations between its elements" (BEANEY, 2013, p. 253).[1] In modern philosophy, its roots can be broadly found in Neo-Kantianism and in logicism, which is itself another interesting sign of proximity between the two philosophical trends in the 19th century. On the one hand, the distinction between *quid juris* and *quid facti* is crucial to Kant and his followers. Such a differentiation was reworked and presented under various other terms, like Lotze's distinction between genesis (*Genese*) and validity (*Geltung*), or Windelband's distincti-

ons between the genetic and the critical method or the differentiation between discovery and justification. All of them are conditions of possibility of a "redescription" or "reorganization" of a given body or set of claims aiming to make explicit its sometimes-hidden internal logic. On the other hand, the logicist project, which assumes the idea that one set of elements can be reconceived in terms of another (numbers in terms of extensions of concepts, for example) is also a type of rational reconstruction[2]; Carnap's *Aufbau* is another. Frege himself is absolutely committed to the principle, exposed in the *Grundlagen*, that "There must be a sharp separation of the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective" (FREGE, 1997, p. 90).

However, because rational reconstruction is a philosophical procedure that focuses on the independence and precedence of the logical validity and structure over the psychological dimension of a set of claims, it is totally justified when it comes to taking such a set or body of claims, like the set of claims of a third person or even a philosopher from the past. In fact, once again, even

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[1]The general reconstruction presented in the next paragraphs are drawn from BEANEY, 2013.

[2] Like Beaney points out, despite Frege uses the term "reduction", it is a sort of rational reconstruction (2013, p. 235).

inside the analytic tradition, we have examples of such exercises in Russell's book on Leibniz (*A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, 2005) and Dummett's work on Frege (*Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 1973), not to mention Strawson's on Kant. In Russell's own words, in the scope of rational reconstruction

> We may even learn, by observing the contradictions and inconsistencies from which no system hitherto propounded is free, what are the fundamental objections to the type in question, and how these objections are to be avoided. But in such inquiries the philosopher is no longer explained psychologically: he is examined as the advocate of what he holds to be a body of philosophic truth. By what process of development he came to this opinion, though in itself an important and interesting question, is logically irrelevant to the inquiry how far the opinion itself is correct; and among his opinions, when these have been ascertained, it becomes desirable to prune away such as seem incon-

sistent with his main doctrines, before those doctrines themselves are subjected to a critical scrutiny. (RUSSELL, 2005, xx)

We arrive here at a very interesting metaphilosophical point. In reconstructing an author's thought, we are not simply extracting ideas from the text but doing at least two creative processes. Firstly, when we talk about "reconstruction" we should really mean it. The interpreter-reconstructor is not only understanding theses or ideas from a previously given set of claims, but is actively suggesting a different composition or structure for that set of claims that could be, eventually, for the sake of an argument, for instance, even better than the original made by the author himself. Of course, such meaning of reconstruction presupposes the possibility of detachment of the *rationale* from the original form and frame. But such presupposition is the very basis of rational reconstruction and is usually not so hard to defend; suffice it to say that the same presupposition is being held when it comes to the translation of a statement or argument to a symbolic language.

The second and, for my purposes here, the most important crea-

tive aspect of rational reconstruction is the procedure of ascription. In a rational reconstruction, the interpreter is not being merely prompted by a given work (cf. BEANEY, 2013, p. 253), but is actively ascribing inferential propositions to an author. And here we are at the very tensional point regarding an approach that wants to be both historically informed and coherent and philosophically relevant. Like Beaney says, "a rational reconstruction is better the more it is historically informed, and vice versa; so that ideal work in history of philosophy combines both." (BEANEY, 1996, p. 3)[3].

Of course, that is a regulative ideal which presents many obstacles and can be reached only to varying degrees. We can have a glimpse of such difficulties in Daniel Garber's example of reading Descartes' *Meditations* (2005). Everybody knows that its metaphysics is supposed to be the ground of a broader project for Descartes' system of sciences. Thus, it should be read together with his other works having in mind his analogy of a tree and its branches. But, like Garber says, why stop here? To fully unders-

tand his project, it is important to know that it was designed against the Aristotelian model taught at La Flèche, which takes us to other proponents of similar candidates – like Gassendi and Galileo, as well as to Aristotle himself in order to understand and evaluate how Descartes' thoughts are good against their self-imposed aim. But, once again, why stop here? Garber reminds us that Descartes project was also designed against the whole social, theological and university system based on authority and it is really helpful to know its elements and structures. Well, why, then, stop here? It would be really useful to know about the Church dependence on some views based on an Aristotelian metaphysics. Garber's example can be puzzling because it is very justifiable and, actually, it is justified for me, even though, as Garber says, "I can see certain readers becoming more and more impatient: where is the philosophical interest in all of this?" (GARBER, 2005, p. 138)

I certainly don't intend to present any final solution to such a problem. However, I do think that Brandom's approach to his-

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[3]Thus, I can see no reason for identifying Rational Reconstruction and Appropriationism as Mercer (2019, p. 30) does. Of course, a deeper engagement with her thesis would demand another paper, but I think it is a defensible position to say that GTRC principle can include what (logically) follows from a statement; in other words, to understand what a philosopher is saying can include its inferential consistence, even though such inferences were not fully explicit.

tory of philosophy can be seen as a good tool to deal with it. To some extent, it is what Brandom does when he turns to Kant, Frege, Heidegger and, mainly, Hegel. But more than that, Brandom's way of dealing with philosophers from the past is also a device to expand our understanding of them.

## 2 - **History of Philosophy** *De Dicto* **and** *De Re*

In order to fully understand Brandom´s approach, we need to explore a bit of its background which is rooted on a concept of rationality which, at the same time, provides the foundations for his inferentialism. In the Introduction of TMD, Brandom presents five models of rationality (logical, instrumental, translational, inferential, and historical). The distinctive mark of the first two is that they see rationality "as being a matter of the structure of reasoning rather than its content" (TMD, 4). Instead, the last three understand being rational as a matter of what makes a proposition interpretable or playing a role in a material inference. For Brandom´s purpose -and mine- the inferential model not only explains

how reason works but provides a tool to evaluate philosophical positions and commitments.

It is important to see that it is not necessary that one commits himself to Brandom´s inferentialism from cover to cover. Considered in itself, inferentialism is a view about what language is and how it works, i. e. through the process of making inferences rather than representations (as a representationalist would argue). However, it is fundamental to see the importance of making material inferences and what it means concerning philosophical commitments. For the inferential model, "to be rational is to be a producer and consumer of reasons: things that can play the role of both premises and conclusions of inferences. So long as one can assert and infer, one is rational" (TMD, 6). It means that to be rational means to be able to articulate conceptual contents in material, rather than logical, inferences like "If A is at the right of B, B is at the left of A"[4].

If we accept such a core inferentialist view, we can understand how Brandom develops such a view as a device for rational interpretation. If rationality is inherently inferential, conceptual in-

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[4]As Brandom says, the inferential incorporates the logical and the interpretational models, since logic does not define what rationality is, but makes it possible for us to express our commitments and its structure.

terpretation can be seen not only as a matter of making more or less explicit what is hidden somehow in a concept or a set of concepts, judgements and arguments, but also as a matter of drawing inferences from them. In Brandom's words, conceptual interpretation under an inferential role is "the ability to distinguish what follows from a claim, and what would be evidence for or against it, what one would be committing oneself to by asserting it, and what could entitle one to such a commitment" (TMD, 95).

Brandom presents, then, both in *Making it Explicit* and in *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, two major ways of doing that, namely, what he calls *de dicto* and *de re* inferential interpretations. The distinction traces back to Quine (1956) and his account on propositional attitudes which is, to some extent, what we are dealing with. Under such inferentialist point of view, conceptual or textual interpretation is to be seen as ascription of propositional attitudes, roughly understood as an attitude someone has towards a proposition[5]. Its structure can be also roughly understood like

S believes (hopes/thinks) that

Q Ps

Exs.:

(a) Gabriel believes that Mario considers Brentano a great philosopher.

(b) Gabriel thinks that Ernesto agrees with Mario about the content of the former example.

Where the main parts are verbs like *believe*, *hopes*, *thinks* and what literature usually calls the "*that* clause,*" followed by a proposition.

In order to interpret conceptual content and ascriptions in this way, Brandom reminds us that we must always appeal to a context, "for the inferential significance of a claim –what follows from it– depends on what other claims one can treat as auxiliary hypotheses in extracting those consequences" (TMD, 95). When it comes specifically to such ascriptions related to making conceptual and inferential interpretations of philosophical texts, which is the goal of Brandom's book, one of the main sources for such a set of auxiliary or collateral hypotheses is provided by other claims that the author who is being analyzed acknowledges as expressing his

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[5] See Quine, 1956 and Russell, 2010. Russell does not like using the term "attitude" (p. 60) because it points to a psychological trace, but the expression "propositional attitude" has been used notwithstanding it.

thoughts or, simply, as true. Such claims can be extracted from his other writings, historical contexts, letters, disputes, etc., as long as the (interpreter knows that the) author acknowledges them as stating his own claims. Hence, in such a way, the textual interpretation of ascription is a sort of paraphrase (see TMD, 96) that takes its premises from the author's acknowledged or acknowledgeable universe of claims. When it follows such a way, we have what Brandom calls a *de dicto* specification of content or commitment. Thus,

**De dicto** $=_{df}$ an inferential conceptual interpretation or specification of a claim through appealing only to collateral premises or auxiliary hypotheses that are co-acknowledged with that claim (TMD, 97).

In other words, *de dicto* ascriptions want to determine "what the author would in fact have said in response to various questions of clarification and extension" (TMD, 99). The context is supplied by the author himself, either directly (in the text itself or not) or indirectly (via historical context, connections etc.). For instance, if "*S believes that the sum of the internal angles of every triangle equals 180º*", we can infer that

"*S co-acknowledge[6] that the sum of the internal angles of every triangle equals two right angles*".

For Brandom, *de dicto* interpretation is a very important and demanding mode of doing intellectual history (see TMD, 99). In order to do so, one has to have a mastery over what a philosopher wrote, said, and read, as well as what he, to some extent, lived.

However, the process of making clearer and more explicit what a philosophical text says, bringing to the surface its hidden assumptions or pretexts, reveals only one philosophical dimension of it. By interpreting a text we want to understand

> (. . .) what speakers *think* they are committing themselves to by what they say, what they in some sense *intend* to be committing themselves to, what they *would take* to be consequences of the claims they made. But besides the question of what one *takes* to follow from a claim one has made, there is the issue of what *really* follows from it. (TMD, 100).

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[6](TMD, 97).

Thus, beyond the process of making explicit some claims through paraphrase, substitutions and conceptual interpretations, Brandom points out to a different perspective or inferential approach whose goal is, now, making explicit what inferentially really follows from a claim. Such emphasis in the "really follows" clause is very important here for what it means in interpretational terms. It means, above all, that inferences derived under such perspective are independent of the author's acknowledgement or, in other words, it derives actual commitments independently of what the author actually acknowledges. For instance, if one believes that the content of this bottle is water, and that water quenches thirst, one is committed to the fact that $H_2O$ quenches thirst whether one realizes or not the chemical formula of water. That is what Brandom calls *de re* inference. But in order to make such kind of inferences, the interpreter also needs an auxiliary set of claims. However, in *de re* ascriptions, such a set does not come from what the analyzed author would "co-acknowledge" as his own set, but comes from what the interpreter takes as being true. Getting back to the former example:

(P1) S believes that the sum of the internal angles of every triangle equals 180º.

(P2 De Dicto) S believes that the sum of the internal angles of every triangle equals two right angles.

(P3) S is committed to the truth of Euclid´s proposition I. 32.*(De Re)*.

Hence, *De re* $=_{df}$ an inferential conceptual ascription of what really follows from the premises, even against a different background or starting from a different set of auxiliary hypotheses that is now supplied by what the interpreter, rather than the author, holds to be true. Thus, "in *de re* readings, by drawing conclusions from the text in the context, the interpreter is actively mediating between two sets of commitments. Text-and-context on the one hand, and interpreter on the other, both have their distinctive

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[7]Brandom points to D. Lewis as a precursor of such way of thinking: "This sort of stripping down and building back – a process whose moto is "reculer pour mieux sauter" – is a form of understanding. When I was a graduate student, my teacher, David Lewis advocated a picture of philosophy like this. The way to understand some region of philosophical terrain is for each investigator to state a set of principles as clearly as she could, and then rigorously to determine what follows from them, what they rule out, and how one might argue for or against them. The more disparate the starting points, the better sense the crisscrossing derivational paths from them would give us of the topography of the landscape they were embedded in. What is recommended is hermeneutic triangulation: achieving a kind of understanding of or grip on an object (a conceptually articulated content) by having many inferential and constructional routes to and through it. The more paths one knows through the wood, the better

roles" (TMD, 109).[7] Therefore, as Brandom sums it up in *Making it explicit*,

> The ascriber of a doxastic commitment has got two different perspectives available from which to draw those auxiliary hypotheses in specifying the content of the commitment being ascribed: that of the one to whom it is ascribed and that of the one ascribing it. Where the specification of the content depends only on auxiliary premises that, according to the ascriber, the target of the ascription acknowledges being committed to, it is put in *de dicto* position, within the 'that' clause. Where the specification of the content depends on auxiliary premises that the ascriber endorses, but the target of the ascription may not, it is put in *de re* position. (MIE, 506. Cf. 507)

It is noteworthy that Brandom advocates the importance and legitimacy of *De Re* inferences as an approach to the history of philosophy. Besides the usual *De Dicto* perspective, we should acknowledge the worth of *De Re* historiography since it aims at the same kind of universe of inferences or ascriptions, namely, the author's commitments. The only difference is upon where the set of auxiliary claims comes from[8]. In the end, such type of historiography is precisely what Brandom did in part two of TMD with Leibniz, Hegel, Frege, Heidegger, and Sellars, through the four following steps (see TMD, 112-114):

1. Selecting the texts;

2. Further selection (aiming central claims which will be used) and supplementation;

3. Deriving (from multipremise inferences) claims;

4. Assessing the adequacy of such inferred claims.

Well, that is what I am going to do, as a little exercise, with a couple excerpts by Kierkegaard in the next section.

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one knows one´s way around in it" (TMD, 114-115).

[8]"As was indicated by the discussion of *de re* readings, there is no reason why the target claims need be restricted to *de dicto* characterizations of what appears in the text" (TMD, 112).

## 4 - Kierkegaard *De Dicto* and *De Re*

For better or for worse, the philosophical network of Kierkegaard's relations sometimes seems to be completely done[9]. Whether it be the range of philosophical topics or his relations to the philosophical context of 19th and 20th century, the interpretative literature seems to have little space for improvements. However, a couple of works have pushed those boundaries in recent years, bringing to the surface hidden themes or connections, like Kierkegaard's reception of and dependence on Trendelenburg's *logische Frage* when it comes to his criticism on Hegel's logic, for instance[10]. Among the unexplored topics, Kierkegaard's ontology is one of the most interesting. If it is true, on the one hand, that Kierkegaard's *existential turn* became commonplace in the literature, on the other hand, its metaphysical roots and unfoldings are still an almost untouched topic. Just to shed some light on what I am talking about, consider that one of Kierkegaard's philosophical worries is, in a nutshell, in his claim that

(...) speculative thought repeatedly wants to arrive at actuality and gives assurances that what is thought is the actual, that thinking is not only able to think but also to provide actuality, which is just the opposite; and at the same time what it means to exist is more and more forgotten. (*CUP1*, 319 / *SKS* 7, 291)

And yet when we read through most of his interpreters, we find that they focus exclusively on the ethical or religious effects of his quest for the meaning of existence and rarely say a word about the metaphysical ground. Moreover, such a perspective also plays a dominant role when it comes to evaluating his thematic relations to later philosophy. However, if we agree with Brandom and with the reasons I presented above on the legitimacy of a *De Re* historiographic/philosophic approach, I think we can push the boundaries a lit bit through Kierkegaard*'s de*

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[9]I am fully aware of the bundle of aspects and problems one can face when ignoring Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms and ascribe views and statements to Kierkegaard himself. However, what is at stake here are the philosophical inferences one can derive from his work and, rather than verify if such and such theses belong to his personal set of beliefs.

[10]See FERREIRA, 2013; 2015; 2017. For excellent examples of such "pushing the boundaries" on other topics, see WEBB, 2017, and THONHAUSER, 2016.

*re* interpretation. In order to illustrate, allow me to carry out a short experiment along these lines.

One of the central problems in ontology can be stated like this: we surely know that there are different kinds of existing things, namely, humans, tables, properties, geometrical relations, numbers, fictional characters, and maybe even God. But does it mean that there are different ways of existing or being? If it does, are all of such ways of being on the same level or are there degrees of being? Is any of them primitive and, others, derived? On the other hand, if different kinds of existing things do not mean different ways of being, how can we understand such a difference in a unified (or univocal?) way?

In contemporary analytic philosophy, partially inspired by Frege and Russell, and fully by Quine, the dominant view is that there are not different ways of being, which means that whatever being means, it has the same meaning for all entities about which we could they *are*. Nevertheless, history has plenty of examples of philosophers who endorse the opposite position. We could mention Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Meinong, Lotze, Husserl, Moore,

Heidegger, but also young Brentano, young Russell and, arguably, Frege.[11] Nowadays, we are having a revival of this dispute, with some new contenders on the side of what has been called Ontological Pluralism (OP) (see MILLER, 2002; TURNER, 2010; CAPLAN, 2011; BERTO, 2013; GABRIEL, 2015; MCDANIEL, 2009, 2017).[12] One of the strategies of Ontological Pluralists has been, besides the straightforward argumentation, revisiting old philosophers looking for their arguments for OP, as well as their reasons for holding such a position. In this sense, it is noteworthy that some of them call themselves as "Neo-Meinongnians". If "existence" is the central theme of Kierkegaard's thought, does he have any side in such a dispute? Let's briefly consider some propositions from Kierkegaard's work:

(P1) God does not exist (*existerer ikke*), he is eternal (*CUP1*, p. 332 / *SKS* 7, 303);

(P2) A human being exists (*existerer*) (*CUP1*, p. 332 / *SKS* 7, 303);

(P3) Ideas have a thought-existence (*Tanke realitet*) which is neither human's existence (*CUP1*, p. 329 / *SKS* 7, 301);

(P4) nor a physical object's way

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[11] See Turner (2010) and McDaniel (2017).

[12] McDaniel (2017) just won the American Philosophical Association's 2018 Sanders Book Prize.

of being (*CUP1*, p. 330-331 / *SKS* 7, 301);

(P5 *De dicto* paraphrase) There are irreducible different modes of being;

(P6 – Interpreter´s claim) A philosopher who assumes there are irreducible different modes of being believes that ontological pluralism is true;

(P7 *De Re*) Kierkegaard believes that ontological pluralism is true[13].

Concerning the propositions above, some things are noteworthy. As indicated by the references, P1 to P4 are extracted directly from quotations by Kierkegaard and have their truth value drawn from the philosopher´s own statements. P5, on the other hand, is never asserted like that by Kierkegaard, but follows directly from the claims above with no need of any other premise. When it comes to P7, our *De Re* conclusion, things are slightly different. The interpreter, in this case, is deeply interested in ontological questions and provides an auxiliary claim (P6) which comes from a different context. Howe-

ver, Kierkegaard´s claims (P1 to P4) and what *de dicto* follows from them (P5), can now be put against (P6) in order to see what follows. When it comes to (P6), it is worth noticing that there is a twofold way; on the one hand, we could proceed to examine if the author, Kierkegaard in this case, provides any arguments supporting it and, on the other hand, we could assume (P6) as true on the interpreter's basis. Therefore, in assuming the second way, namely, that (P6) is true –and that is the interpreter´s responsibility, as Brandom says–, it is also true that (P7), even though the author of (P1) to (P4) never heard about (P6)[14].

If we turn back to Kierkegaard's main concern – in order to verify the adequacy of our conclusion – namely, "what does it mean to exist?", one can see that ontological pluralism is absolutely central to his philosophical endeavor. Reversely, understanding Kierkegaard's ontological commitments in terms of ontological pluralism helps us to understand his own objectives in a better and clearer fashion. The main problem for which ontological plu-

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[13] As McDaniel defines, "So I offer up the following more general sufficient condition: one believes in ways of being if one believes that there is more than one relatively fundamental meaning for an existential quantifier." (2017, 37).

[14] It is important to have in mind that the burden of proof regarding the truth-value of auxiliary claims must not necessarily be on the author, since it can be the case he never explicitly formulated it. The point is that, since such auxiliary claim is provided, such and such consequences follow from it.

ralism is an answer can be stated as: "Do some objects enjoy more being or existence than other objects?" (see MCDANIEL, 2017, 1). The way Kierkegaard understands the mode of existence of human beings cannot be fully grasped unless we recognize two ontological features of reality. Thus, on one hand, it is true that some entities can be said to be univocally actual, like God, human beings, and a fly, since actuality is not subject to degrees (see *PF*, 41- 42 / *SKS* 4, 246). But on the other hand Kierkegaard is ontologically committed to degrees of being that are irreducible to any other, namely, the eternal uncreated being (of God), the infinite created being or subsistence (or what he calls "ideas"—i.e., logical and mathematical relations and properties), the intermediate existential being (of human beings) and finite being (of physical objects).

Now, we have some very interesting roads before us. One possible next step of our *de re* inferential exercise would be to keep on this track and try to find out whether Kierkegaard has any hints on the primitiveness of a restricted existential quantifier (over an unrestricted existential quantifier), since contemporary defenders of Ontological Pluralism argue that the Quinean unrestricted existential quantifier is not enough to deal with different modes of being because, using David Lewis-Plato's terminology, they do not "carve nature at the joints." But another interesting path would be to evaluate how Kierkegaard's ontological commitments are close to or distant from, for instance, Meinong's. Is there for Kierkegaard any space and arguments for *Außerseiend* or is he another victim of "the prejudice in favor of the actual" (MEINONG, 1999, §§2, 11)? Yet another road would lead us to *de re* infer Kierkegaard's positions on central quarrels of 19th century philosophy that are, despite the chronology, inside his scope, like *Materialismusstreit* and *Psicologismusstreit*, for instance. The Danish philosopher, we know, was a fierce critic of what we would call "reductionism" or "eliminativism" concerning consciousness today, but he also dealt with the question of how an actual existent relates to ideal entities, for instance. It seems to me that we have promising roads to tread.

## 4 - Conclusion

Therefore, as far as I can see, Brandom's approach is interesting in three ways:

1. By getting back to philosophers from the past in order

to infer *De Re* commitments, Brandom does, at the same time, (a) a rational reconstruction exposing how Kant, Hegel, Frege, and Heidegger foresaw some aspects of his pragmatic semantics and inferentialism, but also, how such positions help us to understand theirs. Thus, by connecting a contemporary view to dead philosophers' positions via inferential commitments, we can leave aside Rorty's and Beaney's worries about anachronism; it is not a matter of suspiciously and doubtfully ascribing contemporary views to a philosopher from the past, but, rather, making explicit what is, so to speak, already there. As Brandom reminds us, *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions are not two different realms of truths or commitments, but "specify the single conceptual content of a single belief in two different ways, from two different perspectives, in two different

contexts of auxiliary commitments" (TMD, 102)[15];

2. Therefore, *de re* textual interpretations of philosophers from the past are as legitimate as *de dicto* ones. In other words, specifying *de re* inferences should be seen as a logically justified source for doing history of philosophy and, conversely, helps us to deal with Garber's-style-problems. If, like Beaney reminds us, a rational reconstruction is better the more it is historically informed, in the case of *de re* inferences it is evident that putting such inferences against a historical background is essential, at least to evaluate if, on the one hand, a logically justified position is not, on the other hand, contextually contradictory. However, since in this inferential game we are not trying to exclusively understand a philosopher's thesis, but rather, to expose what follows (logically) from his

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[15]The controversy about anachronism is long and it would demand another paper. However, there are good works reassessing and even defending its importance for doing history of philosophy. See LÆRKE; SMITH; SCHLIESSER (2013) and LENZ (...), who makes a very interesting point: "Of course, Descartes did not read Wittgenstein. But does that also mean that reading Wittgenstein can tell us nothing about Descartes? Let me consider two objections to the historian's answer. Firstly, this answer ignores the fact that philosophers and other authors often write for *future generations*. Descartes, Spinoza, but also Kant, Nietzsche and others were clearly writing decidedly *for* future audiences. To explain their texts only by reference to their time impoverishes the philosophical potential. In fact, this point generalizes: any research project is future directed. We would not begin to do research, had we not the hope that it might lead to more knowledge in the future. If we study the development of ideas, it's crucial to look at their potential futures, and this could very well involve Wittgenstein's reaction to the Cartesian concept of mind." (p. 4)

positions, it seems, at least, easier to have a clue about how to answer Garber's "inconvenient" "why stop here" question, namely, because the contextual-fact x cannot be *de re* connected to the ascription A[16].

3. TMD connects a "motley group" of philosophers (Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Frege, Heidegger, and Sellars) (TMD, 16). However, one of the explicit goals of the book is to make such a connection "seem less so after we work through this material than they would before" (TMD, 16). Hence, more specifically about Kierkegaard and the broader scenario of 19th/20th century philosophy, such a way can also make an approximation of Kierkegaard, Lotze, and Meinong less weird, as well as, for instance, Kierkegaard and Heidegger –through the ontological commitment to ways of being– less obvious and less *cliché*. As one can see, a desirable outcome, such reassessments provide us tools and arguments for rethink the very philosophical canon.

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[16]Since the approximation between Garber's example and Brandom's model of rational reconstruction is being made by me, Brandom does not offer, as far as I know, such a kind of answer. However, it makes sense to think that a good reason to stop is the awareness of the distance of a contextual or historical remark H from the *de re* ascription A. Let's consider the Geometry example given above. Let it be the subject S as having the belief expressed in the proposition (P1). We could infer (P3) *de re*. However, a possible historical fact H1 that S firmly believed that Euclid was totally wrong (as expressed in one of S letters to Z, for instance) is a very relevant historical fact to evaluate S positions: in this case, S was either wrong about his belief on Euclid or wrong about square triangles. The same for the historical fact H2, namely, that S never really read Euclid's *Elements* and knew it only by second hand readings, what we can know reading his autobiography. But when it comes to the historical fact H3, namely, what are the mathematical textbooks S had in his personal library, we can say that it is not so relevant since, even though we come to know one of those books had a really good exposition of proposition 32. In this case, H3 is not relevant for the inference of (P3) from (P1), like H1 is, but, at most, for our knowledge that S maybe never had read that book.

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