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Robert Brandom on Semantics and the Objectivity of Conceptual Norms

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts from
William & Mary

by

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Robert Brandom on Semantics and the Objectivity of Conceptual Norms

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Abbreviations

AR Brandom, Robert. *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000

MIE Brandom, Robert. *Making it explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994

PI Wittgenstein, Ludwig, G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009

INTRODUCTION

In arguing for an inferentialist understanding of conceptual contents, Robert Brandom claims that a fundamental feature of the norms that govern our concept-using practices is that they are *objective*. Brandom believes that the objective aspect of conceptual norms is grounded in the distinction between the *normative status* of a performance *being* a correct (or incorrect) application of a concept and the *normative attitude* of a performance being *taken* as a correct (or incorrect) application. In the first two sections of this thesis, I will offer an overview of Brandom's inferential approach to semantics and his normative approach to pragmatics. In the third section, I will explain what Brandom calls a "deontic scorekeeping" model of discursive practice, which is the result of combining his inferential semantics and normative pragmatics. In the fourth section, I will explain why the notion of normative attitude matters for Brandom's understanding of conceptual norms. This gives rise to his normative phenomenalism, which is the idea that normative statuses are instituted by normative attitudes. I will then point out that, because Brandom understands normative attitude as a kind of communal assessment, he needs to demonstrate how it is that conceptual norms have an essentially objective aspect, for without this his argument will be unable to avoid collapsing into the position that whatever the community takes to be correct is correct. Finally, I will examine Brandom's account of the objectivity that he takes conceptual norms to have and further argue that although this account satisfies a weak notion of objectivity, it is not compatible with Brandom's overall phenomenalist approach toward conceptual norms.

1. AN *INFERENTIAL* APPROACH TO SEMANTICS

1.1

Brandom's 2000 book, *Articulating Reasons*, begins with the words: "This is a book about the use and content of *concepts*." (AR, 1) In offering an account of the use and content of concepts, Brandom is interested in capturing the distinction between *sapience* and *sentience*. What is

distinctive of sapient awareness, according to him, is *conceptual classification* i.e., being aware of something requires bringing it under a concept (AR, 26). The notion of sapience is therefore identified with concept use. Notice that in making such distinction, Brandom adopts an *exceptionalist* approach, which, contrary to the *assimilationist* approach, focuses on the *dis*continuities instead of *continuities* between the conceptual and non-conceptual (AR, 2). In other words, Brandom is more interested in what distinguishes concept users from non-concept using ones than in what they have in common.

1.2.1

Brandom approaches his topic from the starting point of Immanuel Kant's account of conceptual classification as consisting in the subsuming of something particular under a universal by assimilating it to other particulars that fall under the same universal (MIE, 86). Accordingly, a pragmatic version of this approach holds that to have a concept is to act in a certain way that treats something (particular) as being of a certain kind (universal). For example, in responding to different kinds of prey in ways that are alike, animals are said to demonstrate the awareness that each particular thing they prey on is an instance of a general kind and thus conceptual classification is identified in such behaviors. As Brandom sees it, one problem with this line of reasoning is that it construes conceptual activity solely in terms of the differential responsive dispositions that an individual exhibits (MIE, 87). In more concrete terms, on this view, if an individual reacts to a set of stimuli in a similar way, then it is reasonable to say on the basis of these repeated reactions that the individual has a proto-concept under which those stimuli can be classified (MIE, 87). Brandom argues that this Kantian classificatory model is not sufficient to explain either concept use or sapient awareness. As he points out, "Such [responsive] classification…cannot by itself constitute discursiveness. [For] [t]he chunk of iron is not conceiving its world as wet when it responds by rusting." (MIE, 87) Others examples used by Brandom are measuring devices such as thermometer and spectrophotometer which also have reliable dispositions to respond in a way that distinguishes

between particular stimuli. Moreover, a parrot, for instance, may be trained to say "It is red" whenever a red thing is present. In that case, Brandom asks, "What are the salient differences between a measuring instrument…and an observer who non-inferentially acquires beliefs or make claims about environing temperatures and colors?"(MIE, 88) It is clear at this point that understanding conceptual classification in terms of the repeatable responses elicited by the dispositions to classify particular stimuli as being of a general kind does not provide an adequate answer to the question above. Thus, the account we need is one that distinguishes the judgments and actions of concept users from the responsiveness to the external environment of non-concept-using organisms and artefacts.

1.2.2

Brandom's philosophical mentor and teacher, Wilfred Sellars, holds that what demarcates the conceptual, in other words, what distinguishes *conceptual* classification from mere *responsive* classification, is a kind of practical mastery of the game of giving and asking for *reasons* and the ability to make explicit such reasons by putting them in the form of claims which can both serve as and stand in need of reasons or justifications (MIE, 89). According to Sellars, for a concept user to grasp or understand the content of a concept (i.e., conceptual content) is for him to participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons. Brandom calls the line of thought that Sellars pursues here an *inferential* understanding of conceptual content. This is because in participating in the game of giving and asking for reasons, one is said to have practical mastery over the inferences in which the content in question is involved. Brandom notes that for conceptual contents to stand in need of reasons, on the one hand, is for them to have inferential antecedents. Consider, for example, the concept *mammal* and the claim "If Jones is a human, then he is a mammal". It is clear that what gives reason for one's saying that Jones is a mammal, that is, her application of the concept *mammal* to Jones, is the inferential antecedent that Jones is a human. For conceptual contents to serve as reasons, on the other hand, is for them to have inferential consequences. Consider the concept

human from the example above. We can see that one's application of the concept *human* to Jones gives her reason to say that Jones is a mammal. In other words, she commits herself to the applicability of the concept *mammal* to Jones as an inferential consequence of her application of the concept *human* to him. What this example reveals is that conceptual content is to be understood in terms of the roles that it plays in a set of inferences. Thus, Brandom holds that what characterizes the conceptual is not differential responsive dispositions but rather inferential articulation. The fact that conceptual content is articulated by means of inferential roles is what distinguishes it from the non-conceptual. To grasp or understand a certain concept is therefore to have practical mastery over the inferences it is involved in (MIE, 89).

1.3.1

In illustrating the notion of inference, Brandom employs Dummett's two-aspect model which is generalized from Gentzen's specification of the inferential roles of logical connectives to account for other grammatical categories such as sentences, predicates and singular terms by considering their conceptual contents as inferential roles (MIE, 117). According to Brandom, Gentzen defines logical connectives in terms of their *introduction rules* which specify "[the] inferentially sufficient conditions for the employment of the connective", and *elimination rules* which specify "[the] inferentially necessary consequences of the employment of the connective" (MIE, 117). Thus, the inferences with which the application of a concept is concerned are, on the one hand, the set of inferentially sufficient conditions (the appropriate *circumstances*) for applying the concept and, on the other, the set of inferentially necessary *consequences* of such application (MIE, 118).

1.3.2

Brandom also distinguishes between inferences which are materially good and those which are good solely in virtue of their form. An example of the former is the inference from "Jane is taller than Jones" to "Jones is shorter than Jane". Its goodness is grounded in the propositional content of

non-logical locutions such as “taller” and “shorter” instead of the propositional form that it exhibits. An example of the latter is the inference from “All men are mortal” and “Socrates is a man” to “Socrates is mortal”. Since its validness is determined by its logical form, substituting the non-logical vocabularies will not turn it into a logically invalid one. For example, the inference from “All carnivores eat meat” and “Lions are carnivores” to “Lions eat meat” is equally valid. Sellars points out that such a way of conceiving inferences renders many materially good inferences, for example, “the inference which finds its expression in ‘It is raining, therefore the streets will be wet’”, enthymemes i.e., an argument in which one of its premises is not explicitly stated (MIE, 98). (Here the implicitly stated premise is “If it is raining, the streets will be wet”.) Notice that the kind of inferences Brandom thinks that matter for conceptual contents are *material inferences* i.e., inferences whose correctness depends upon the propositional contents of their premises and conclusions instead of their logical forms. What makes an inference content-conferring, on his view, is therefore its material correctness rather than formal validity.

1.3.3

As we noted earlier, Brandom holds that what confers contents on concepts or claims are inferences. Therefore, in applying a concept or making a claim, one is implicitly undertaking a commitment to a set of inferences. Such implicit endorsement of inferences, as Brandom states, “is a bit of know-how that consists in being able to discriminate what does and does not follow from the claim, what would be evidence for and against it, and so on” (AR, 19). It is worth noticing here that in arguing for an inferential rendering of conceptual content, Brandom’s approach focuses on the notion of expression. As we have just seen, inferring, according to Brandom, is a kind of doing i.e., knowing how to do something. The inferential commitments and entitlements implicit in such practical doings are therefore to be made explicit by being put in the form of a claim that things are thus-and-so so that the articulated claim can serve as both premise and conclusion in inferences. Brandom believes that this task of making what is implicit in practice explicit through inferential

articulation is distinctive of logical vocabulary. Basic logical vocabulary, as Brandom indicates, plays an expressive role of making explicit commitments to the inferential antecedents and consequences of applying a concept or making a claim that would otherwise remain implicit in inferential practices. An example of this is the conditional. In applying the concept *wooden* to certain objects, for instance, one is implicitly committed to the inferential consequence that they are *solid*. Such implicit inferential commitment can be made explicit by means of a conditional: "If something is *wooden*, then it is *solid*." Thus, the sort of expressivism that Brandom pursues here is a form of *logical* expressivism.

1.3.4

We may conclude at this juncture that the upshot of Brandom's line of thought is that a concept has content conferred on it by being involved in material inferential relations. The inferential relations which implicitly articulate the content of a concept are further to be made explicit in the form of claimable contents by logical vocabulary (paradigmatically, conditional ones e.g., "If it is *red*, then it is *colored*"). Understanding or grasping conceptual content (knowing *that* such and such is the case) requires being able to distinguish in practice the circumstances for applying a concept, and what follows from its application (knowing *how* to do something). Conceptual contentfulness for Brandom is therefore grounded in the the implicit commitments we undertake in material inferential practices.

1.4.1

There are several themes to be detected here. First of all, in illustrating his inferentialist picture, Brandom is pursuing a *pragmatist* order of explanation which starts from the use of the concepts and proceeds to an account of conceptual contentfulness. According to this line of thought, it is the acts of, for example, asserting, claiming, judging, believing and thinking that confer contents on what is asserted, claimed, judged, believed and thought (AR, 4). This is to be contrasted with a kind of semantic or conceptual *platonist* strategy whose order of explanation prioritizes

content over use. Given his inferentialist pragmatism, it is not difficult to understand Brandom's position that semantics must answer to pragmatics (MIE, 83). The inferential role semantics that he develops therefore must be situated in the broad, pragmatic context. Pragmatics, as Brandom writes, is "[t]he study of the practical significance of intentional states, attitudes, and performances (including speech acts)" (MIE, 68). On the one hand, the semantic contents of intentional states, attitudes, and performances determine their pragmatic force. On the other hand, the conferral of semantic contents is to be explained in terms of pragmatic significance. Thus, although conceptual content specifies the correct use of linguistics expressions, "[i]t must be explained how expressions can be used so as to confer on them the contents they have — what functional role the states they manifest must play in practice for them to be correctly interpreted as having certain [conceptual] contents." (MIE, 133)

1.4.2

Brandom's pragmatist strategy further gives rise to his *top-down* approach toward semantic explanation which gives priority to the sort of content expressed by whole declarative sentences. The reason is that pragmatism prioritizes the use of concepts which can only be expressed by propositionally contentful claims and beliefs rather than by sub-sentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates. In addition, only sentences are able to play the roles of premise and conclusion in inferences. This approach is taken to be the opposite of the *bottom-up* approach which starts with an understanding of the sort of content expressed by sub-sentential expressions, paradigmatically singular terms and predicates, and elaborates on that basis an account of the formation of judgments by associating those expressions and of the properties of inferences associating those judgments (AR, 13).

1.4.3

The roots of the bottom-up semantic approach are to be found in construing propositional contentfulness of intentional states, attitudes, and performances in *representational* terms. The sort of contentfulness expressed by singular terms, which the representationalist understanding treats as prior in the order of explanation to the propositional, Brandom terms "object-representing contentfulness" (MIE, 68). Singular terms are linguistic expressions that name or stand for particular objects and therefore by appearing in a sentence, they make it possible for us to talk *about* specific objects they designate. The traditional way of demarcating concept users which was initiated by Descartes was to conceive them as representers (MIE, 6). Intentional states and acts are *of*, *about*, or *directed at* things in the world by being "representings", and in this way they are said to have "representative" content (MIE, 6). The representationalist order of semantic explanation therefore begins with sub-sentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates which are the smallest unit of representation, and then moves to sentences which are constructed by relating those expressions and further elaborates on that basis an account of truth conditions and inferences. This representationalist line of thought identifies propositional contentfulness of intentional states with representational contentfulness: "The problem of intentionality is a problem about the nature of representation." (MIE, 69) For an intentional state to have propositional content is thus for it to represent or be about something.

Nevertheless, the representationalist picture is inadequate on Brandom's view for the following reasons. One problem is that it treats the notion of representation as an unexplained explainer (AR, 46). It fails to explain why the world is divided into what is capable of representing and what is represented and, moreover, what it is for one thing to represent another and what grounds one's grasp of such representational content (AR, 46). It is worth pointing out that Brandom does acknowledge that there is a representational aspect of concept use and one of the tasks of his inferentialist project is to account for representation in terms of inferential relations.

Additionally, the idea of representation derives from the Enlightenment tradition of characterizing the mind as a mirror (AR, 8). According to this Enlightenment understanding, awareness of representings and representeds is present in the activity of creatures including non-concept-using ones, despite the fact that non-concept-using creatures only have "indirect awareness of representeds via representations of them" (AR, 7). Conceptual representation, which is distinctive to concept-using creatures, is therefore only one kind of representation(AR, 7). Note that this is a form of assimilation of conceptual activity to non-conceptual activity and therefore is rejected by Brandom. The upshot of this discussion is that in characterizing his inferentialism as a top-down approach toward semantic explanation, Brandom rejects a representational account that explains the notion of content in terms of what is being represented, talked or thought about.

1.4.4

In addition to anti-representationalism, another component of Brandom's inferentialist program is *expressivism*. As we noted earlier, the sort of expressivism that Brandom pursues is logical expressivism. However, there are other aspects of his expressivist approach that needs to be addressed here. First of all, the expressivist approach that Brandom adopts is a *pragmatist* one. To turn commitments and entitlements implicit in inferential practices into claims that can serve as premises and conclusions in inferences is to turn something we *do* into something we are able to *say* (AR, 8). More concretely, the target of this approach is a sort of know-how which allows us to distinguish in practice what entitles us to apply the concept and what other commitments we consequently undertake in doing so. This practical knowledge is made explicit by being put in a form of knowing-that which typically contains the logical vocabulary of a conditional e.g., "If it is a carnivore, then it eats meat". Notice that Brandom's expressivist approach also has a *conceptual* dimension. The process of expression, on his view, essentially involves conceptual articulation. That is, to make something explicit is to put it into conceptual form (AR, 16). Therefore, Brandom calls the sort of explicitness achieved by his expressivist approach *conceptual* explicitness.

As he puts it, "Traditional romantic expressivism took as its paradigm something like the relationship between an inner feeling expressed by an outer gesture. The rationalist expressivism informing the present account is quite different. Where, as here, explicitness is identified with specifically conceptual articulation, expressing something is conceptualizing it: putting it into conceptual form" (AR, 16).

Another important point to note about Brandom's expressivist approach is that it has a *rational* aspect. Recall Sellars's account of conceptual content which is where we start from: to be contentful is to be involved in the inferential game of giving and asking for *reasons*. Thus, what we are trying to make explicit by specifying inferential relations are the reasons that govern our application of a concept, our formation of a claim, or more generally, our moves in the language game. The idea of treating propositionally contentful intentional states, acts, or beliefs as something that can both serve as and stand in need of reasons is a form of "linguistics rationalism" according to Brandom (AR, 189). He further illustrates this notion by appealing to two sorts of *normative* status. In making a claim, the first kind of normative status that one is subject to is what Brandom calls *entitlements* i.e., a kind of inferential antecedent "that *license*[s] or *entitle*[s] one to [a claim]" (AR, 190). Asking for what entitles one to the claim is therefore asking for the reasons that justify it. The second kind of normative status that one is subject to is known as *commitments* i.e., a kind inferential consequence that one is subsequently committed to in making a claim (AR, 190). Commitment to a claim in this way offers reasons for commitment to other claims that are entailed from it. What Brandom is trying to get us to see here is that linguistic practices, or more specifically, inferential practices are essentially rational practices. The rational dimension of those practices consists in the normative status of entitlements and commitments to the inferential relations in which a given concept or claim is involved.

What makes Brandom's expressivist approach a rational (i.e., reason-based) one is also the fact that making explicit inferential commitments and entitlements which are implicit in practice enables us to determine whether the inferences that underlie those commitments and entitlements are *good*. An example that Brandom uses is the concept *Boche* (MIE, 127). In applying this concept, one is committed to the inference from being a German to being cruel. However, this is the kind of inference whose appropriateness may be objectionable. Therefore, turning implicit material inferential commitments into explicit claims allows us to examine and further rectify concepts whose content is controversial. As Brandom illustrates, this can be seen as analogous to the Socratic method which "bring[s] our practices under rational control, by expressing them explicitly in a form in which they can be confronted with objections and alternatives" (MIE, 106).

2. A *NORMATIVE* APPROACH TO PRAGMATICS

2.1

In illustrating what is distinctive of the employment of *concepts*, Brandom embraces the Kantian insight that concept-using activities are demarcated by their *normative* character (MIE, 8). According to Brandom, Kant thinks that the normative character of conceptually structured activities lies in the fact that those activities are rule-governed (MIE, 8). For Kant takes the content of a concept (i.e., conceptual content) to be a kind of rule that specifies how the concept is correctly (and incorrectly) applied. To grasp a concept is therefore to grasp the rules that determine its correct (and incorrect) application. Consider, for example, the concept *mammal*. Its conceptual content determines that it is correct to apply *mammal* to human beings and that it is incorrect to apply *mammal* to plants. On Brandom's view, Kant holds that what distinguishes a sapient, discursively intentional being from a merely sentient, practically intentional being is that the former is *responsible for* its judgements and actions (MIE, 8). This is because, unlike the responses of nondiscursive creatures, judgements and actions of discursive creatures involve the use of concepts

and, as we noted earlier, Kant understands concepts as having the form of rules. Thus, judging and doings are rule-governed acts. These rules determine what discursive creatures are responsible for in making a judgement that things are thus-and-so or performing an action. According to this line of thought, an important feature that is distinctive of discursive (i.e., concept-using) creatures is that they are normative creatures. This is because, first of all, in applying a certain concept, one binds himself by rules that specify how the concept is correctly or properly applied. His performance therefore becomes subject to normative assessment. That is, his performance can be assessed as correct or incorrect according to those rules. Additionally, Brandom notes that to employ a concept is to undertake or to acquire an obligation or commitment (MIE, 8). "Responsibility" and "commitment", as he points out, are both normative terms (Brandom, 2014, p. 351). An example that he uses to illustrate this point is the concept *copper*. The application of the concept *copper* to a coin, for example, commits one to the claim that the coin conducts electricity and that it melts at 1085°C (ibid.). It also precludes him from entitlement to the claim that it is less dense than water (ibid.). What this example shows is that conceptual activities are activities of normative significance. Therefore, what distinguishes discursive (i.e., concept-using) from nondiscursive (i.e., non-concept-using) creatures, according to Brandom, is that the former "live, and move, and have their being in a *normative* space" in the sense that they have "the ability to bind [themselves] by concepts, which are understood as a kind of *rule*" (ibid.).

At this point, we may conclude that, on Brandom's view, (i) what demarcates concept-using activities is that they have a normative aspect, in other words, they are activities that are governed by rules or norms and that (ii) sapient, discursively intentional creatures, who participate in these activities, are normative creatures. Note that in arguing that conceptual activities have a normative dimension, Brandom rejects two particular models of the normative, that is, two ways of understanding the norms that govern conceptual activities.

2.2.1

The first model of the normative that Brandom rejects is what he calls *regulism*. Regulism is the view that performances are assessed according to some explicit rules which determine what is correct or incorrect by explicitly saying what is correct or incorrect, e.g., explicit prescriptions, prohibitions, and permissions (MIE, 19). Brandom believes that this is the view held by Kant. A regulist conception of norms understands norms as explicit in the form of rules. Performances are governed by norms in the sense that "[n]ormative assessments of performances are understood as always having the form of assessments of the extent to which those performances accord with some [explicit] rules" (MIE, 19). In other words, to assess the correctness of a performance is to make at least implicit reference to a rule that determines what is correct or incorrect by explicitly saying so (MIE, 10).

Brandom notes that there is a problem with this way of understanding norms. This problem is first raised by Wittgenstein in section 201 of the *Philosophical Investigations* where he discusses the rule-following paradox:

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule. The answer was: if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.
>
> That there is a misunderstanding here is shown by the mere fact that in this chain of reasoning we place one interpretation behind another, as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another lying behind it. For what we thereby show is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call "following the rule" and "going against it". (*PI* §201)

Brandom takes this passage to be a rejection of the Kantian notion of regulism. For, according to him, what Wittgenstein is trying to get us to see in this passage is that if correctnesses of performances are determined by some explicit rules, in order to determine whether those rules are correctly applied, we need to appeal to some further rules. But, in that case, how are correctnesses of applications of those further rules to be determined? It seems that if the regulist understanding of

all norms as having the form of explicit rules is right, the application of a rule is itself something that can be assessed as correct or incorrect according to some further rules (MIE, 20). However, as Brandom suggests, "To conceive these practical properties of application as themselves rule-governed is to embark on a regress." (MIE, 20) He further points out that it is for this reason that Wittgenstein claims in section 201 that "there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call 'following the rule' and 'going against it'" ((*PI* §201). (Brandom notes that Wittgenstein calls a rule for applying a rule an "interpretation".) Thus, the problem with regulism is that it would generate a regress of rules as interpretations of rules. In that case, as Wittgenstein observes in section 198 of the *Investigations*, "every interpretation hangs in the air together with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support" (*PI* §198). Therefore, if regulism is right, it seems that there is no way to determine whether a performance is correct or incorrect. The normative distinction between correct and incorrect performance, that is, the distinction between acting according to the norm and acting against it, would then be obliterated (MIE, 21).

2.2.2

Following Wittgenstein, Brandom holds that one way to avoid the problem of generating a regress of rules interpreting rules is to adopt a *pragmatist* conception of norms. According to this way conceiving norms, there is a notion of primitive correctnesses of performance that is implicit in practice (MIE, 21). These correctnesses of performance are primitive in the sense that they precede and are presupposed by their explicit formulation in rules and principles (MIE, 21). Note that the kind of correctness that Brandom has in mind is a kind of correctness of practice (MIE, 22). In other words, it does not depend upon any justification expressed in the form of explicit rules or principles (MIE, 22). Brandom thinks that this is what Wittgenstein is trying to convey in saying that "there is a way of grasping a rule which is…exhibited in what we call 'following the rule' and 'going against

it" (*PI* §201) and that "'following a rule' is a practice" (*PI* §202). Therefore, unlike the regulist understanding which treats all norms as explicit in the form of rules or principles, the pragmatist understanding holds that there are norms that are implicit in practices and that these norms are more fundamental. In more concrete terms, according to the pragmatist line of thought, norms implicit in practices precede and are presupposed by norms explicit in rules or principles. As we have seen, in saying that correctnesses of performance are assessed according to some explicit rules, regulism fails to take into account that applications of those rules are themselves subject to normative assessment. Thus, when applied to the norms governing the application of rules, regulism faces the problem of a regress. Brandom points out that this regress can be halted only by acknowledging that there exists some more primitive form of norms, that is, norms that are implicit in practices (MIE, 23). The upshot of this discussion is that, on Brandom's view, in explaining the norms that govern concept-using activities, the regulist order of explanation, which understands the normative as "rules all the way down", must be supplemented by that of the pragmatist (MIE, 23).

2.2.3

The second model of the normative that Brandom rejects is what he calls *regularism*. Regularism holds that there are norms that are implicit in practices. However, it takes these implicit norms to be a kind of regularity of performance. According to a regularist conception of norms, "being correct according to (norms implicit in) practice…[is identified with] producing performances that are regular in that they count (for us) as correct according to it" (MIE, 27). Similarly, being incorrect according to (norms implicit in) practice is identified with producing performances that are irregular in that they count (for us) as incorrect according to it. Brandom points out that in treating regularities of performance as practices governed by implicit norms, regularism avoids "the regress of rules as interpretations that plagues fully [regulist] account" (MIE, 27). Nevertheless, this view faces the following problems.

The first problem that regularism faces is raised by Wittgenstein in section 201 of the *Investigations*. Brandom calls it the Gerrymandering Objection. Note that Brandom takes section 201 to be not only a rejection of regulism, but also a rejection of regularism. As he puts it, "Where [Wittgenstein's] master argument against regulism has the form of an appeal to the regress of interpretations, his master argument against regularism has the form of an appeal to the possibility of gerrymandering" (MIE, 28). The Gerrymandering Objection says that any set of performances demonstrate many regularities (MIE, 28). A performance may count as regular according to some of the regularities exhibited by the original set of performances and as irregular according to others (MIE, 28). In that case, how are we to pick out the sort of regularity according to which the performance is judged as regular or irregular? Thus, Brandom maintains that "[t]here simply is no such thing as the…regularity exhibited by a stretch of past behavior, which can be appealed to in judging some candidate bit of future behavior as regular or irregular" (MIE, 28). Therefore, one problem with regularism is that there is always some regularity with respect to which a further performance is judged as regular and therefore, on the regularist line, as in accord with the norm (i.e., as correct). But, as Wittgenstein notes in section 201, "if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it" ((*PI* §202). Thus, if regularism is right, "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with [or into conflict with] the rule" (*PI* §201). The normative distinction between acting according to the norm and acting against it would again be lost.

<u>2.3.2</u>

The second problem with regularism is that, according to this line of thought, the normative distinction between what is correct and incorrect is understood in terms of the distinction between what is regular or irregular. The regularist line therefore does not view us as bound by norms which determine how we ought to or must act, but by laws of nature which determine how we will act.

According to Brandom, Kant holds that "All nature is actually nothing but a nexus of appearances according to rules; and there is nothing without rules." (MIE, 27) However, Brandom points out that the way in which our practices (especially concept-using ones) are governed by norms has an essentially normative aspect. This is to be distinguished from the way in which they are governed by natural laws, which overlooks the normative aspect by "identifying the [normative] distinction between *correct* and *incorrect* performance with that between *regular* and *irregular* performance" (MIE, 27).

2.3.3

At this juncture, we may attribute to Brandom two theses. The first one is a normative thesis. For Brandom holds that concept-using activities have a normative character and that the normative distinction between the correct and incorrect application of a concept is not to be obliterated. The second one is a pragmatist thesis. For Brandom thinks that the kind of norms that govern concept-using activities are norms that are implicit in practice. These two theses constitute Brandom's normative pragmatism, which is the idea that "discursive practice is implicitly, but essentially, and not just accidentally, a kind of normative practice" (Brandom, 2018, p. 4).

3. PUTTING TOGETHER BRANDOM'S INFERENTIAL SEMANTICS AND NORMATIVE PRAGMATICS: A DEONTIC SCOREKEEPING MODEL

3.1.1

A point that is worth noticing here is that discursive practice for Brandom is a kind of deontic scorekeeping practice. As we noted earlier, a fundamental move in the game of giving and asking for reasons is claiming or asserting (such-and-such). On Brandom's view, an assertion has conceptual content conferred on it by playing a role in a social-practical structure of inferentially articulated commitments. According to this line of thought, in making an assertion, one is

undertaking or acknowledging a certain kind of *commitment*. Brandom calls this kind of commitment "doxastic" or "assertional" commitment (MIE, 142). Note that a doxastic commitment is a normative commitment. For one is held responsible for the doxastic commitment he undertakes or acknowledges both by himself and by others. Such a commitment is therefore subject to normative assessments. Thus, to be doxastically committed is to acquire a *normative* status — more specifically a *deontic* status (MIE, 142). Such a status is instituted by the practical attitudes of the discursive practitioners of the individual's community in the sense that whether an individual is committed to a claim (i.e., his normative status) is determined by whether the discursive practitioners in his community take him to be so committed (i.e., their normative attitudes). In other words, the normative (or deontic) status of *being* committed is to be understood in terms of the normative (or deontic) attitude of *being taken* or *treated* as committed.

3.1.2

In addition to the notion of commitment, another fundamental normative concept that discursive practice requires is the notion of *entitlement*. Note that discursive practice is a practice that incorporates the game of giving of asking for reasons. Therefore, we must distinguish between, on the one hand, "a kind of *commitment*, undertaken by the assertional speech acts by which alone anything can be put forward *as* a reason", and, on the other, "a kind of *entitlement*, which is what at issue when a reason is requested or required" (AR, 195). That is, we must distinguish between the normative status of being committed and the normative status of being entitled. This is because an assertional practice for Brandom has two dimensions. In making an assertion, one is undertaking or acknowledging a commitment. This is the *committive* dimension of assertion practice (AR, 193). In addition to this dimension, there is the *critical* dimension, which is "the aspect of the practice in which the propriety of those commitments is assessed" (AR, 193). This is where the notion of entitlement comes into play. For there are commitments to which one is entitled and those to which

one is not. That is, there are commitments for which one can give a reason and those for which one cannot. For example, one may form the belief on the basis of his wishful thinking that "The number of stars in the sky is even". Given that the person has no good reasons for believing this to be the case, it is clear that although he is committed to this claim, he is not entitled to his commitment. Therefore, a reason is required for one to be entitled to the commitments he undertakes or acknowledges. Notice that the normative (or deontic) status of *being* entitled is also to be understood in terms of the normative (or deontic) attitude of *being taken* or *treated* as entitled. In other words, whether one is entitled to his commitment is determined by whether the discursive practitioners of his community takes him to be so entitled.

3.2.1

Brandom takes assertion to be the fundamental speech act of discursive practice. In participating in such a practice, competent discursive practitioners have to constantly keep track of their own and each other's scores, that is, the commitments and entitlements that are undertaken and attributed. In this respect, they are (we are) what Brandom calls deontic scorekeepers (MIE, 142). Discursive practice is thus a deontic scorekeeping practice (MIE, 142). A point that is worth noticing here is that the deontic scorekeeping model of discursive practice is the result of putting together Brandom's social normative pragmatics and his inferential semantics. This is because, first of all, this model treats the speech acts of claiming or asserting as prior to what is claimed or asserted. In addition, it explains the significance of various speech acts in terms of the normative notions of commitment and entitlement. Finally, the contents of those discursive commitments and entitlements are to be further understood as inferentially articulated.

3.2.2

The deontic scorekeeping model of discursive practice reflects Brandom's phenomenalism about norms: the idea that normative *statuses* must be understood as being instituted by practical

normative *attitudes* that are implicit in practices. Before we take a closer look at this line of thought, let us first consider why Brandom thinks that it is important to adopt a phenomenalist approach to norms. Recall that one problem with the regularist account of norms is that it does not take us to be bound by norms which determine how we ought to or must act, but by natural laws which determine how we will act. Brandom suggests that one way to avoid this problem is to appeal to the Kantian idea of acting according to our conceptions of norms (MIE, 50). On Brandom's view, Kant holds that what demarcates us as normative (or more specifically rational) creatures is that we act not only according to norms but according to a conception of them (MIE, 33). For what is distinctive to norms that govern our practices is that they do not immediately compel us as natural laws do (MIE, 31). They govern our practices in the sense that we acknowledge them and act according to our understanding of them. In other words, what makes us bound by a certain norm is not the norm itself, but rather our acknowledgment or understanding of it. This is what distinguishes us from mere natural creatures. As Brandom puts it, "It is not being bound by necessity […] that sets us apart; it is being bound not just by natural but by rational necessity." (MIE, 30) Therefore, the notion of normative attitude is fundamental to an account of discursive practice. For what makes us act as we do is not a commitment or entitlement *per se*, but our practical attitudes toward it, that is, *how we take it to be* (Kiryushchenko, 2016, p. 24).

3.3.1

There are two sorts of normative practical attitude that one can adopt toward a commitment. That is, one can either *undertake* a commitment or *attribute* a commitment (MIE, 161). Therefore, in participating in discursive scorekeeping activities, a discursive scorekeeper must keep two sets of books, the first one containing commitments that he attributes to other scorekeepers (i.e., commitments that are undertaken by other scorekeepers *according to him*), the second one containing commitments that are actually undertaken by other scorekeepers (MIE, 646).

3.3.2

According to Brandom, for one to *undertake* a commitment is for him to do something that makes it appropriate for others to *attribute* that commitment to him (AR, 174). Brandom notes that undertaking a commitment can be done in two different ways. First, one may *acknowledge* the commitment by an overt assertion or by acting on it, that is, by employing it as a premise in the practical reasoning that underlies his intentional action (AR, 174). Consider, for example, the claim "Going to sleep before 9 o'clock is good for my health". If one is to acknowledge a commitment to this claim, he can either assert that "Sleeping before 9 o'clock is good for my health". Or he can go to sleep before 9 o'clock every night. For in this way he is acting on this claim practically. Second, one may undertake the commitment *consequentially* (AR, 174). That is, he may undertake the commitment as an inferential consequence that is entailed by a claim to which he is committed. Consider, for example, the claim "Snowball is a dog". If one is committed to this claim, then he is also committed to the claim "Snowball is a mammal". For "Snowball is a dog" entails "Snowball is a mammal".

3.3.3

On Brandom's view, *attributing* a commitment is a practical attitude that is implicit in deontic scorekeeping practices (AR, 174). To make such an attitude explicit is to express it as a propositional content by using propositional attitude-ascribing locutions such as "believes that" or "claims that". Making the implicit practical attitude of attributing a commitment explicit is what Brandom calls *ascribing* a commitment (AR, 174). He points out that without ascriptional terms such as "believes" or "claims", attributing a commitment is something one can only do (AR, 174). For those vocabularies make it possible to explicitly say that that is what one is doing (AR, 174).

3.4

The line of reasoning that Brandom pursues in illustrating the deontic scorekeeping model of discursive practice can therefore be summed up as follows. States and performances have

propositional contents conferred on them in virtue of their relation to certain kinds of speech acts, paradigmatically claims or assertions (MIE, 649). The pragmatic significance of those speech acts are described in terms of what one is committed or entitled to in performing those acts. This is a normative construal of the discursive in terms of deontic *statuses*. What it is to for one to be committed or entitled, that is, to acquire those deontic statuses, is then explained in terms of deontic *attitudes*. Finally, such practices of instituting deontic statuses by attributing or undertaking deontic attitudes are made intelligible in terms of the notion of normative phenomenalism.

4. A SOCIAL-PERSPECTIVAL ACCOUNT OF OBJECTIVITY

4.1

At this point, recall that, according to Brandom, "We rational beings are […] capable of grasping or understanding the norms, of making assessments of correctness and incorrectness according to them." (MIE, 32) These assessments of performances as correct or incorrect according to our conceptions of certain norms are what Brandom calls practical normative *attitudes*. The notion of normative attitude is to be contrasted with the notion of normative *status*, which is the status of being correct or incorrect according to those norms. It is worth pointing out here that the sort of normative attitude that Brandom is concerned with is to be understood in terms of *communal assessment* (MIE, 37). That is, it is the community to which the individual belongs which takes the individual's performance to be or not to be in conformity with the norms (i.e., to be correct or incorrect). Its normative status is thus, in Brandom's terms, "instituted", by the normative attitude of the community. This, as we have seen, is the upshot of Brandom's normative phenomenalism.

Note that, according to such a phenomenalist approach toward norms, we can only talk about normativity at the level of individuals. While it is his community which determines whether an individual's performance is correct or incorrect, there is no further criterion according to which those community attitudes are themselves determined to be correct or incorrect. In other words,

there is no way to distinguish what the community *thinks* is the correct or incorrect performance according to certain norms from what *is* the correct or incorrect performance, regardless of what the community thinks. Therefore, it seems that, on the phenomenalist view, the normative status of a performance (i.e., being or not being correct) is determined by the normative attitude of the community. That is, what is *taken* to be correct by the community *is* correct. Brandom points out that this kind of community view is held by Crispin Wright, who "identif[ies] the normative status of being a correct application of a concept with being taken to be such a correct application […] by the whole community" (MIE, 53). On Wright's account, the community's assessment cannot be mistaken, because "for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet" (Wright, 1980, p. 220). Notice that to say this is to deny that our conceptual norms have an objective aspect.

Nevertheless, although Brandom takes normative attitude to be a kind of communal assessment, he is not endorsing Wright's community view. In other words, to adopt Brandom's normative phenomenalism is not to say that the community cannot coherently be conceived to be wrong about what is a proper application of a concept and what is not, nor is it to say that the objectivity we take our conceptual norms to have is a mere illusion. For Brandom holds that an important feature of our concept-using activities is that "they incorporate *objective* commitments." (MIE, 53) As he puts it, "[w]e could all be wrong in our assessment […] could all be treating as a correct application of the concepts involved what is objectively an incorrect application of them" (MIE, 53). Therefore, as Grönert (2005) points out, an important task of Brandom's account of the objectivity of conceptual norms is to explain how to accommodate this account within his general phenomenalist approach toward normativity (Grönert, 2005, p. 161). For a commitment to the phenomenalist approach seems to be incompatible with a commitment to the claim that conceptual norms are essentially objective.

On Brandom's view, understanding the objectivity of conceptual norms requires making a distinction between normative *status* and normative *attitude*. He further illustrates that such a distinction can be made intelligible in terms of the difference between the social perspectives of *undertaking* and *attributing* a commitment in discursive practices. Therefore, Brandom's account of objectivity is what he calls a "social-perspectival account" (MIE, 597). For, according to this account, the distinction between objective normative status and subjective normative attitude is to be understood in terms of the social-perspectival character of discursive practices. In the following sections, I will explain Brandom's social-perspectival approach toward objectivity and then argue that it is incompatible with his normative phenomenalist approach toward conceptual norms.

4.2.1

As we noted, in making a move in the game of giving and asking for reasons, one acquires two sorts of normative status. The first sort is what Brandom calls *commitments*. Undertaking a commitment is doing something—that is, saying or thinking that things are thus-and-so—that makes it appropriate for others to attribute that commitment. For example, in saying that it is raining outside, one undertakes a commitment to the claim "It is raining outside". Others may therefore attribute to him a commitment to this claim. The second sort is what Brandom calls *entitlements*. Asking what entitles one to a claim or belief is asking for the reasons that justify it. For example, one is entitled to claim "The notebook is colored", if he can offer justifications such as "The notebook is red". Thus, as we have seen, discursive practices for Brandom are essentially *deontic scorekeeping* practices. For competent, or more importantly, rational, linguistic practitioners are deontic scorekeepers who keep score of one another's normative statuses of commitments and entitlements involved in discursive practices.

A point that is worth noticing here is that, on Brandom's view, the activity of deontic scorekeeping has a social-perspectival character. This is because ascribing a commitment essentially involves two social perspectives, namely, that of the person who ascribes the commitment (i.e., the

ascriber) and that of the person to whom the commitment is ascribed (i.e., the *ascribee*, or "target" of the ascription) (MIE, 504). These two scorekeeping perspectives can be understood in terms of the normative (or deontic) attitudes of *undertaking* and *attributing* a commitment (MIE, 504). For example, suppose that S claims that Ukraine will win the war. In making his ascription that "S claims that Ukraine will win the war", one is, on the one hand, *attributing* a commitment to the target of his attribution, viz. S's commitment to the inferential consequences of claiming that Ukraine will win the war, and, on the other, *undertaking* a commitment to the inferential consequences of his ascription, viz. his claim that S claims that Ukraine will win the war. Therefore, according to this line of thought, there are two ways of construing an ascription of a commitment. The ascription may be construed in the way that it is *attributed* by the ascriber to the target of ascription or it may be construed in the way that it is *undertaken* by the ascriber himself.

4.2.2

Brandom holds that such a distinction can be made explicit by the *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions of propositional attitudes. These two sorts of ascriptions, as he illustrates, specify in different ways the propositional content of an ascribed commitment in deontic scorekeeping practices (AR, 186). As we noted earlier, an inferential understanding of conceptual content requires the use of explicating vocabulary, paradigmatically conditionals. For conditionals make implicit inferential commitments explicit as the contents of claims. In this form they can appear as premises or conclusions of inferences, that is, as something which can serve as reasons and for which reasons can be demanded. By the same token, the function of propositional-attitude-ascribing vocabulary is to make implicit normative (or deontic) attitudes of undertaking or attributing discursive commitments explicit (i.e., in the form of propositionally-explicit ascriptions). Without such vocabulary, attributing commitments is something that scorekeepers can only *do*. The introduction of the *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions of propositional attitudes therefore allows scorekeepers to explicitly *say* something that they can previously only do. As Brandom himself puts it,

“[ascriptional vocabulary] makes it possible, not merely implicitly or in practice to *take* someone to be committed to a claim, but explicitly to *say* that someone is committed to a claim, and to which claim” (MIE, 498).

Brandom notes that an ascription *de re* specifies the content of an ascribed commitment by indicating the *res* or thing that the commitment i*s about*, whereas an ascription *de dicto* specifies the content of the same commitment in a *dictum* expressed by a “that” clause (AR, 170). An example that Brandom gives is as follows (AR, 176). Suppose a prosecutor says that “The defense attorney claims a pathological liar is a trustworthy witness.” Notice that the defense attorney may well not take the dictum of his commitment to be that “A pathological liar is a trustworthy witness.” For the content to which he acknowledges commitment is that the man who just testified is a trustworthy witness – and not that this man is a pathological liar. However, the prosecutor may have good reason to believe that the man who just testified is a pathological liar. Therefore, as Brandom points out, one way for the prosecutor to make explicit the commitment which he is attributing to the defense attorney is for him to use a *de re* ascription, namely, “The defense attorney claims *of* a pathological liar that he is a trustworthy witness”. Putting the ascription in this *de re* form makes explicitly clear the distinction between what the ascribee (the defense attorney) would acknowledge commitment to (viz. that he claims that the witness is a trustworthy witness) and what the ascriber (the prosecutor)—but not the ascribee (the defense attorney)—would acknowledge commitment to: viz. that he (the defense attorney) claims that the witness is a pathological liar. This distinction is obscured in the *de dicto* form of the ascription: “The defense attorney claims a pathological liar is a trustworthy witness.” What this example shows is that *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions allow us to be clear about a difference in social perspective. In more specific terms, they allow us to draw a social-perspectival distinction between what the ascribee would acknowledge (i.e., the content of the commitment that the ascriber *attributes* to the ascriptional target) and what the ascriber would acknowledge (i.e., the content of the commitment that is *undertaken* by the ascriber himself).

4.3.1

Brandom takes the *objective* feature of our conceptual norms to be the fact that what is *objectively* the correct or incorrect application of a concept does not, in his terms, "collapse into" what is *taken* to be the correct or incorrect application (MIE, 63). Note that at the core of Brandom's account of objectivity is the distinction between one's deontic attitude, namely, what one *takes* himself to be committed to, and his deontic status, namely, what he is *actually* committed to, regardless of the attitude of anyone (MIE, 597). In other words, it is the distinction between the normative status that one subjectively acknowledges (his normative attitude) and the normative status which one undertakes objectively, whether one acknowledges it or not. Brandom believes that what makes it possible for us to draw such distinction and therefore to provide an account of the objective dimension of conceptual norms is precisely the social-perspectival character of deontic scorekeeping activities, which, as we noted above, can be further made explicit by the *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions of propositional attitudes.

To see why this is so, consider the following example that he offers:

> Suppose the Constable has said to the Inspector that he himself believes that the desperate fugitive, a stranger who is rumoured to be passing through the village, is the man he saw briefly the evening before, scurrying through a darkened courtyard. Suppose further that according to the Inspector, the man the Constable saw scurrying though the darkened courtyard is the Croaker, a harmless village character whom no one, least of all the Constable (who knows him well), would think could be the desperate stranger. (MIE, 595)

The Inspector can thus specify the part of the commitment that he undertakes using the ascription *de re*: "The Constable claims *of* the Croaker (a man who could not possibly be the fugitive) that he is the fugitive." Brandom notes that here the *de re* ascription expresses the objective representational content of the Constable's claim: namely, that the Croaker is the fugitive (MIE, 595). For, according to the Inspector's assessment of the facts, the Constable's claim is about the Croaker, even though the Constable does not realize this. Therefore what the *de re* ascription specifies is what the Constable is really committed to. On the other hand, the *de dicto* ascription expresses the subjective

content of the Constable's claim, that which he thinks he is committed to: namely, that the man he saw is the fugitive (MIE, 595).

We may conclude at this juncture that ascriptions *de dicto* specify the content of a commitment from the point of view of the interlocutor (i.e., the relevant speaker like the Constable in the previous discussion) to whom the commitment is attributed. Therefore, it is the *subjective* content of the commitment that *de dicto* ascriptions specify. The *objective* content of the commitment, namely, what the commitment is actually about, is specified by ascriptions *de re*. It is to be assessed by the scorekeeper by appeal to statements of facts and true claims and therefore it "determine[s] the truth or falsity — that is, the objective correctness — of the ascribed [commitment]" (MIE, 596).

Brandom takes the representational dimension of our concepts to be the fact that those concepts are *about* an objective world. As he puts it, "they answer for the ultimate correctness of their application not to what you or I or all of us *take* to be the case but to what actually *is* the case" (MIE, 594). Such a representational dimension is underwritten by *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude. As we noted in section 1, although Brandom rejects the representationalist line of thought which understands conceptual contentfulness in representational terms, he acknowledges that concept-using activities have an essentially representational aspect: that is, concepts purport to represent the world. Thus, one of the tasks of his deontic scorekeeping model is to offer an account of the representational aspect of discursive practice in non-representational, or more specifically, deontic scorekeeping, terms. Notice that this is made possible by *de re* ascriptions. As we have just seen, the *de re* style of ascribing a commitment in deontic scorekeeping practices expresses the world-directedness of our claims and beliefs: that is, they make explicit what our claims and beliefs are of, about, or represent *according to the objective world*. *De re* ascriptions therefore secure the objectivity of conceptual norms.

To see why this is so, consider again the line of communitarian position, which identifies the normative status of being a correct application of a concept with being taken to be such a correct application by the *community*. According to this line of thought, in order to determine whether an application of a concept is correct or incorrect, one has to consult the practical attitudes of the whole community (i.e., whether the community thinks the application is correct or incorrect). For the community itself is the standard, in other words, what the community *takes* to be correct *is* correct. This obliterates the objective aspect of concept application. For, on this line, there is no longer an objective sense of correctness that governs the application of concepts, that is, as Brandom elaborates it, "a sense of appropriateness that answers to the objects to which they are applied and to the world of facts comprising those objects" (MIE, 594). However, given that what *de re* specifications make explicit are the representational relations that our concepts stand in to the world, in ascribing a commitment in deontic scorekeeping practices in the *de re* style, one has to appeal to how things are in the objective world rather than anyone's (including the community's) attitudes toward them. Whether a concept is correctly or incorrectly applied in his interlocutor's commitments is therefore assessed according to how the things they are applied to actually are instead of to how they are taken to be (MIE, 599).

Brandom notes that in this way a further distinction can be made between the interlocutor's normative attitudes and normative statuses, which is the distinction between what commitments the interlocutor acknowledges and what he is actually committed to. On his view, this is what underlies the objective aspect of conceptual norms. In other words, this is what makes it possible for us to distinguish between applications of a concept that are merely treated as correct and those that are objectively correct according to how things objectively are.

4.3.2

An important point to notice about this line of thought is that it frames objectivity in terms of a kind of intersubjectivity, as understood in the *I-thou* way. The *I-thou* account of intersubjectivity

focuses on the relation between the commitments undertaken by a scorekeeper (i.e., the “I”) interpreting an interlocutor and the commitments attributed by that scorekeeper to the interlocutor (i.e., the “thou”) (MIE, 599). According to this account, the objective aspect of concept-using is grounded in the social-perspectival feature of discursive scorekeeping activities. In more specific terms, our ability to grasp the objective content of a claim or belief and to assess applications of concepts according to truths and statements of facts depends upon our ability to distinguish (i) what we take ourselves to be committed to from (ii) what we are really committed to by navigating between the scorekeeping perspective of the one to whom the commitment is attributed and that of the one attributing it. The notion of objective truth therefore arises only in the context “of interpretation”, which is made available by deontic scorekeeping activities (MIE, 599). For to specify the content of a commitment in the *de re* style from the perspective of an ascriber (i.e., the one who attributes the commitment) is to assess this commitment by conjoining it with truth, that is, statements of facts. This secures a distinction between what is *merely* held true and what is *correctly* held true (MIE, 599). Thus, Brandom notes that objectivity on the *I-thou* account is to be found in a kind of “perspectival *form*”, rather than in a “nonperspectival or cross-perspectival *content*” (MIE, 600). For what underwrites the objective aspect of discursive scorekeeping activities is that “there is a difference between what is objectively correct in the way of concept application and what is merely taken to be so, not *what* it is — the structure, not the content” (MIE, 600).

Intersubjectivity understood in this *I-thou* way is to be contrasted with intersubjectivity understood in what Brandom calls the *I-we* way, which focuses on the relation between the commitments of one individual and the commitments of the whole community (notice that this is what Wright’s community view endorses) (MIE, 599). Brandom holds that the *I-thou* understanding of intersubjectivity is superior to the *I-we* understanding for three reasons. First, the *I-we* understanding gives rise to a “mythological conception of communities” (MIE, 594). For, on this understanding, the community is acting as if it is an individual discursive practitioner. As Brandom

elaborates it, “This sort of view […] depends on an illegitimate assimilation of linguistic communities to the individuals who participate in them — treating communities as producing performances and assessing them, undertaking commitment and attributing them” (MIE, 594). Second, according to the *I-we* picture, norms that are implicit in practice are rendered as regularities of communal behavior. Therefore, this picture avoids *regulism* (i.e., understanding norms as explicit rules or principles), but at the cost of collapsing into *regularism* (i.e., understanding norms as mere regularities). Third, the *I-we* picture “mistakenly postulates the existence of a privileged perspective — that of the ‘we’, or community” (MIE, 599). As Brandom points out, the consequence of privileging one kind of perspective is that “The objective correctness of claims (their truth) and of the application of concepts [is identified with] what is endorsed by that privileged point of view.” (MIE, 599) This obliterates the representational dimension of our concepts. As we have already seen, what it is for our concepts to be about and answerable to an objective world is that the correctness of their application answers not to what anyone (including the community) thinks, but to the facts about the objects to which they are applied (MIE, xix). According to this line of thought, even the assessments of the community with regard to the correctness of an application of a concept can be mistaken. That is, as Brandom puts it, “even if all of us agree and always will agree that the mass of the universe is small enough that it will go on expanding forever, the possibility remains that we are all wrong, that there is sufficient matter undetected by us to make it collapse gravitationally” (MIE, 594).

Recall from the earlier discussion that in explaining normative attitude in terms of communal assessment, Brandom believes that a distinction must be made between the normative status of correctness of a performance and the community’s normative attitudes of treating that performance as correct. For it is precisely because this distinction exists that Brandom thinks that it is important to provide an account of the objectivity of conceptual norms. Therefore, it seems that understanding objectivity as a sort of perspectival *I-thou* intersubjectivity, which does not privilege any

perspective, offers Brandom a solution to the problem he faces in trying to understand normative attitude in terms of what he calls "communal assessment".

4.4.1

Let us consider whether Brandom has offered an adequate account of the objectivity of conceptual norms. In his article "Brandom on norms and objectivity", Marchettoni (2018) notes that there are two senses of objectivity: a strong sense and a weak sense (Marchettoni, 2018, p. 217).

> Strong Objectivity (SO): a given conceptual norm is strongly objective = it is independent of the attitudes of the linguistic practitioners i.e., it is attitude-transcendent
>
> Weak Objectivity (WO): a given conceptual norm is weakly objective = its proper applicability is determined by how things are in such a way that everybody might be wrong in taking it to apply in particular circumstances

Given Brandom's social-perspectival account of objectivity, which understands objectivity as consisting in the difference between deontic scorekeeping perspectives, it seems that SO is not the sort of objectivity that he has in mind. For what the social-perspectival account suggests is, first, that concepts are essentially perspectival, that is, as Brandom elaborates it, " [i]t makes no sense to specify or express a propositional or other conceptual content except from some point of view — which is subjective […] in the practical sense that it is the point of view of some scorekeeping subject"; second, that objectivity is grounded in the practical activity of comparing and contrasting the commitments acknowledged by one interlocutor in deontic scorekeeping practices with those acknowledged by another (MIE, 594). Therefore, it is clear that in accounting for the notion of objectivity in terms of a social-perspectival framework, Brandom does not take the objective dimension of conceptual norms to be that those norms are independent of people's attitudes and practices.

Brandom maintains that objectivity lies in the fact that "We could all be wrong in our assessments of [a] claim, could all be treating as a correct application of the concepts involved what is objectively as incorrect application of them." (MIE, 53) Notice that, on his view, "this is to

demonstrate only that a fairly *weak* [my italics] necessary condition on a conception of objectivity has been satisfied" (MIE, 606). Therefore, it seems that the kind of objectivity that Brandom has in mind is WO. Let us, however, set aside the question of whether the notion of objectivity that is constructed here, namely, WO, is the right sort of objectivity and consider instead whether Brandom's social-perspectival account is an adequate account of WO. As we noted above, concepts for Brandom are essentially perspectival, yet the world they purport to apply to is not perspectival. In that case, how are we supposed to get a perspectival grip on a non-perspectival world? Brandom holds that what gives us a perspectival grip on a non-perspectival world is the representational aspect of concepts, which is underwritten by *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes in discursive scorekeeping practices (MIE, 594). An important point to note is that although the content of a commitment specified by an ascription *de re* is to be assessed according to how things stand with objects, such an assessment is always made from the point of view of a particular scorekeeper. As Brandom points out, "Traditional philosophy says that beliefs are many, but the truth is one; the same point arises here in the contrast between scorekeeping perspectives, which are many, and the world, which is one." (MIE, 594) If this is correct, then how should we determine which scorekeeping perspective is the one that grasps what is objectively true of the world? Brandom's answer is that "[s]orting out who should be counted as correct […] is a messy retail business of assessing the comparative authority of competing evidential and inferential claims" (MIE, 601). Thus, there is no bird's-eye view above different individual scorekeeping perspectives. In other words, there isn't a scorekeeping perspective that is *globally* privileged. For "[t]here is only the actual practice of sorting out who has the better reason in particular cases" (MIE, 601). The perspectives of the scorekeepers who have the better reason in those cases are at most *locally* privileged. Note that this is to be contrasted with the *I-we* account of conceptual norms which treats the perspective of the community as the authority, that is, as globally privileged. According to the *I-we* account, truth is defined as how things seem from the point of view of the community.

Therefore, on the *I-we* account, it seems impossible for everyone to be wrong about how a concept is correctly applied. For the assessments of the community are by definition correct. We may thus conclude that if conceptual norms are construed in the *I-thou* fashion which denies the existence of a single privileged scorekeeping perspective, it is reasonable to say that they are objective in a weak sense, that is, their proper applicability is determined by how things are in such a way that anybody and everybody might be wrong in taking them to apply in particular circumstances. This further secures a distinction between the normative status of correctness of an application of a concept and the normative attitude of assessing that application as correct.

4.4.2

Let us now turn to the question of whether Brandom's account of the objectivity of conceptual norms is compatible with his normative phenomenalist approach. Recall that normative phenomenalism is the idea that normative statuses are instituted by normative attitudes. As we have seen, ascriptions *de re* specify the objective representational content of an ascribed commitment (MIE, 600). Ascriptions *de dicto*, on the other hand, specify the subjective attitude that the target of ascription (i.e., the ascribee) holds toward that commitment (MIE, 600). From the point of view of a scorekeeper, the part of the commitment specified by a *de dicto* ascription is what he attributes to his interlocutor, whereas the part of the commitment specified by a *de re* ascription is what he himself undertakes. Therefore, Brandom maintains that what appears to a scorekeeper as the distinction between what his interlocutor is actually committed to (i.e., her objective normative status) and what she is merely taken to be committed to (i.e., her subjective normative attitude) appears to us as the distinction between what is acknowledged by the scorekeeper ascribing the commitment (i.e., the commitment that the scorekeeper *undertakes*) and what is acknowledged by the interlocutor to whom the commitment is ascribed (i.e., the commitment that the scorekeeper *attributes* to the interlocutor) (MIE, 597). Following this line of reasoning, the distinction between what is objectively correct and what is merely taken to be or treated as correct is rendered as a

social-perspectival distinction between the normative attitudes of *undertaking* and *attributing* commitments. As Brandom elaborates it, "the normative statuses in terms of which deontic score is kept are creatures instituted by the […] normative attitudes whose adoption and alteration is the activity of scorekeeping" (MIE, 597). This is the upshot of his normative phenomenalism. Brandom holds that "[i]n this way the maintenance, from every perspective, of a distinction between status and attitude is reconciled with the methodological phenomenalism that insists that all that really needs to be considered is attitudes" (MIE, 597). However, as mentioned, the objectivity that Brandom takes conceptual norms to have is such that everyone might be mistaken is his assessment of the correctness of the application of concepts. What follows is that any application of a concept that we currently take to be correct can be proven to be incorrect and that we do not know and perhaps could never know the objectively correct application of a concept. We may at best say that what is objectively correct is somewhere out there, but since there is no such thing as a bird's-eye view, as Brandom points out, "[t]here is never any final answer to what is [objectively] correct; everything, including our assessments of such correctness, is itself a subject for conversation and further assessment, challenge, defense and correction." (MIE, 647) Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1997) notes that we can think of this approach toward objectivity as similar to the so-called "error" theory in moral philosophy: "familiar from ethics are so-called 'error'-theories which specify the contents of ethical claims […] but then argue that nothing in reality can answer to that content" (Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne, 1997, p. 174). Given this situation, it seems that, on Brandom's account of objectivity, there is always a distinction between normative attitude (i.e., what one takes himself or others to be committed to) and normative status (i.e., what one is committed to according to the objective world). For what his account entails is that we might all be mistaken in our assessments of what a commitment is really about. If this is understood correctly, then how can we reconcile this point with the phenomenalist idea that normative attitude institutes normative status in light of the fact that there is always a gap between them? As we noted, according to normative

phenomenalism, normative status is to be understood in terms of normative attitude in the sense that "all the facts about the former can be accounted for by all the facts about the latter" (DeMoor, 2011, p. 87). This seems incompatible with Brandom's account of objectivity which maintains that the normative status of correctness of a performance does not collapse into the normative attitude of assessing that performance as correct. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that although Brandom has offered an adequate account of a weak notion of objectivity, this account is not compatible with his overall phenomenalist approach toward conceptual norms.

CONCLUSION

So far, I have shown that Brandom takes the objectivity of conceptual norms to be consisting in a social-perspectival distinction of normative attitudes (i.e., the distinction between undertaking a commitment and attributing one). This seems to resolve the apparent conflict between his normative phenomenalism, which holds that normative statuses are to be accounted for in terms of normative attitudes, and the idea that conceptual norms have an essentially objective aspect. However, given that the objectivity that Brandom takes conceptual norms to have is such that their proper applicability is determined by how things are in such a way that everybody might be wrong in taking them to apply in particular circumstances, that is, there is always a distinction between the normative status of being a correct (or incorrect) performance according to a certain norm and the normative attitude of being taken to be a correct (or incorrect) performance according to that norm, his account of objectivity cannot be reconciled with his phenomenalist approach toward conceptual norms.

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