

# Concepts as inferential roles



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Course: Philosophy of mind

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# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Course materials:**

- Robert Brandom, *Articulating reasons. An introduction to inferentialism*. Harvard University Press 2000. [Introduction; Chap. 1].
- Jaroslav Peregrin, *Inferentialism: Why rules matter*. Palgrave Mcmillan, 2014. [Chap. 1];

- **Secondary literature:**

- Jerry Fodor, Concepts. *Where cognitive science went wrong*. Oxford University Press 1998, (chapters 1 and 2).
- Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence 'Concepts'. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concepts/>
- ***The slides*** will be publicly available to you at the end of the course. I can help providing some of the course materials, if needed (write at psalis@unica.it).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **The texts:**
- Robert Brandom, *Articulating reasons. An introduction to inferentialism*. Harvard University Press 2000. [Introduction; Chap. 1].
- The introduction and the first chapter are the best resources available to provide a short but complete introduction to inferentialism as an account of concepts and linguistic meanings.
- For those interested, Brandom's book is available in Italian translation by Il Saggiatore, with the title *Articolare le ragioni. Un'introduzione all'inferenzialismo* (out of print but available in our library).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **The texts:**
- Jaroslav Peregrin, *Inferentialism: Why rules matter*. Palgrave Mcmillan, 2014. [Chap. 1];
- Peregrin's chapter offers a shortened overview of semantic inferentialism that provides a minimum guide for inferentialism's main tenets.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **The texts:**
- Secondary literature:
- Jerry Fodor, *Concepts. Where cognitive science went wrong*. Oxford University Press 1998, (chapters 1 and 2).
- Fodor is surely one of the main opponents of inferentialism: these chapters depict his atomistic and representationalist view about concepts. Especially chapter 2 offers an overview of the main theoretical desiderata that a theory of concept must display according to Fodor.
- These materials could be the focus of students' seminars\* at the end of the course (especially chap. 2).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **The texts:**
- Secondary literature:
- Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence 'Concepts'. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concepts/>
- This is the Stanford entry for concepts. It presents all the main theories of concepts available on the market.
- These materials could be the focus of students' seminars\* at the end of the course.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- FROM THE SYLLABUS:
- [https://unica.esse3.cineca.it/auth/docente/DefinizioneOfferta/DettaglioAttivitaDidatticaDocente.do;jsessionid=691F79A3F2EB8C5657D91DE1913BEE97.esse3-unica-prod-04?AA\\_OFF\\_ID=2024&CDS\\_ID=11068&AD\\_ID=21921](https://unica.esse3.cineca.it/auth/docente/DefinizioneOfferta/DettaglioAttivitaDidatticaDocente.do;jsessionid=691F79A3F2EB8C5657D91DE1913BEE97.esse3-unica-prod-04?AA_OFF_ID=2024&CDS_ID=11068&AD_ID=21921)
- Written exam (optional):
- Argumentative skills (33%); Good writing in terms of syntactic correctness and proper terminology (34%); Text elaboration skills (33);
- Oral exam:
- Mastery of the concepts and arguments of the course (30%); Understanding of the theoretical categories and key problems of the course (30%); Theoretical and contextual framing of the topic of the course (10%); The capacity to reason by means of the course's key categories (30%).
- Exams will be **in Italian** (apart from international students; in this case, exams will be in English).
- N.B. International students who master the Italian language may choose between Italian and English.

# Concepts as inferential roles

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- **Seminars**

- The final lecture (April 28th, 2025) of the course will focus on student seminars, starting with the secondary literature (i.e., Fodor's chapters and Laurence's and Margolis's Stanford entry).
- Seminars will entitle students to cut the secondary literature from the exam. People willing to participate should provide a list of participants by the end of March.
- In case, also Fodor's further chapters could be selected.

# Concepts as inferential roles



- **Robert Boyce Brandom** (born 1950)
- US analytic philosopher.
- Works at the University of Pittsburgh (PA, USA)
- His main interests include philosophy of language, philosophy of logic, and philosophy of mind.
- His publications include *Make It Explicit* (Harvard 1994), *Articulating Reasons* (Harvard 2000), *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Harvard 2002), *Between Saying and Doing. Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford 2008), *Reason in Philosophy. Animating Ideas* (Harvard 2009), *Perspectives on Pragmatism* (Harvard 2011), *From Empiricism to Expressivism: Brandom Reads Sellars* (Harvard 2015), *A Spirit of Trust* (Harvard 2019), *Pragmatism and Idealism* (Oxford 2022) and tens of papers in peer reviewed journals.
- He has been inserted in the list of the 50 most influential living philosophers:  
<https://www.keithbuhler.com/jasper/most-influential-living-philosophers>

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Jaroslav Peregrin** (born 1957)



- Works at the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (Prague) and at the University of Hradec Kralove (Czech Republic).
- His main interests involve logic, philosophy of language, linguistics, and philosophy of science.
- His main publications include ***Inferentialism. Why rules matter*** (Palgrave McMillan 2014), ***Normative Species*** (2024) and tents of papers in peer-reviewed journals.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **What are concepts?**
- Concepts are said to be the constituents of thought. What does it mean?
- It's a general truth that if you know *what an X* is, then you also know what it is *to have an X*. And ditto the other way around. This applies to concepts in particular: the question what they are and the question what it is to have them are logically linked; if you commit yourself on one, you are *thereby* committed, willy nilly, on the other (Fodor, *Concepts*, p. 2).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **What are concepts?**
- Concepts are the building blocks of thoughts. Consequently, they are crucial to such psychological processes as categorization, inference, memory, learning, and decision-making. This much is relatively uncontroversial (Laurence and Margolis, Stanford Encyclopedia).
- Every content, or proposition, is supposed to be **constituted by the application of some concepts**. The content of the sentence “the cat is on the mat” is determined by the application of the concepts “cat,” “to be,” and “mat,” for instance.
- More problematic is to explain how this is done: here **theories and approaches divide** (see Laurence and Margolis). In this course we will explore **inferentialist views**: the idea that concepts play some role in reasoning and constitute contents by playing these roles.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- I. Strategic Context: The Nature of the Conceptual
  
- This is a book about the use and content of concepts. Its animating thought is that the meanings of linguistic expressions and the contents of intentional states, indeed, awareness itself, should be understood, to begin with, in terms of playing a distinctive kind of role in reasoning. The idea of privileging inference over reference in the order of semantic explanation is introduced and motivated in the first chapter (p. 1).
  
- Here Brandom declares (1) that this is a book about concepts, (2) that concepts are going to be understood in terms of the role they play in reasoning, and (3) that it will offer reasons to motivate the preference for exploiting inference instead of reference to explain concepts.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- [...] The overall topic is the nature of the conceptual as such. This choice already entails certain significant emphases of attention: within the philosophy of mind, on awareness in the sense of *sapience* rather than of mere sentience; within semantics, on specifically *conceptual* content, to the detriment of concern with other sorts of contentfulness; within pragmatics, on singling out *discursive* (that is, concept-using) practice from the background of various other kinds of skillful doing. The aim is to focus on the conceptual in order to elaborate a relatively clear notion of the kind of *awareness* of something that consists in applying a concept to it—paradigmatically by saying or thinking something about it (p. 2).
- Brandom offers some of the most important ideas characterizing his approach to the conceptual: **sapience** is conceptual awareness, that is awareness open to the use of reasons; we can have different types of content (e.g., phenomenal or perceptual contents), but here we are interested only in **conceptual content**; among many kinds of skillful doing we are especially interested in **discursive practice**; among many types of **awareness** we are interested in the one involving the application of concepts (e.g., ruling out animal or even only sensorial kinds of awareness).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Addressing this topic requires making a series of choices of fundamental explanatory strategy. The resulting commitments need to be brought out into the open because they shape any approach to the conceptual in such important ways. Making this background of orienting commitments explicit serves to place a view in a philosophical space of alternatives. Features of an account that otherwise express nearly invisible (because only implicit) assumptions then show up as calling for decisions, which are subject to determinate sorts of challenges and demands for justification. The major axes articulating the region inhabited by the line of thought pursued here can be presented as a series of stark binary oppositions, which collectively make it possible to map the surrounding terrain (p. 2).
- The method exploited by Brandom consists of introducing inferentialism's main theoretical choices **in the context of the alternatives to which they belong**. This will be useful to explore the main motivations and justifications for each of them.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 1. *Assimilation or Differentiation* of the Conceptual?
- One fork in the methodological road concerns the relative priority accorded to the *continuities* and *discontinuities* between discursive and nondiscursive creatures: the similarities and differences between the judgments and actions of concept users, on the one hand, and the uptake of environmental information and instrumental interventions of non-concept-using organisms and artifacts, on the other. We can ask how sharp this distinction is— that is, to what extent and in what ways the possibility of inter-mediate cases can be made intelligible (pp. 2-3).
- A first option is distinguishing between **creatures capable of performing judgments and actions** (discursive) from those (non discursive) **creatures who merely respond to environmental stimuli** (animals and artifacts). Is this a sharp alternative? Can we spot inter-mediate cases?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- And more or less independently of the answer to this question, it is possible for theorists to differ as to whether they *start* by describing a common genus and go on to elaborate differentiae (whether qualitative or in terms of some quantitative ordering by a particular kind of complexity), as opposed to beginning with an account of what is distinctive of the conceptual, which is only later placed in a larger frame encompassing the doings of less capable systems. Of course, wherever the story starts, it will need to account both for the ways in which concept use is like the comportments of nondiscursive creatures and the ways in which it differs (p. 3).
- A theory of concepts cannot ignore the connections of concept use that can be found in discursive and non-discursive contexts. So, if our account is developed with a preference here, it must somehow **explain how things are concerning the alternative option** (e.g., if we opt for the discursive option, we must explain how things are for the non-discursive domain).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Theories that *assimilate* conceptually structured activity to the nonconceptual activity out of which it arises (in evolutionary, historical, and individual-developmental terms) are in danger of failing to make enough of the difference. Theories that adopt the converse strategy, addressing themselves at the outset to what is *distinctive* of or exceptional about the conceptual, court the danger of not doing justice to generic similarities. The difference in emphasis and order of explanation can express substantive theoretical commitments (p. 3).
- There are dangers both in assimilating and in distinguishing the approaches too much. The first risks **failing to capture differences**. The latter risks **deleting some significant similarities**.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Along this dimension, the story told here falls into the second class: *discontinuities* between the conceptual and non- or preconceptual are to the fore. The discussion is motivated by a concern with what is special about or characteristic of the conceptual as such. I am more interested in what separates concept users from non-concept users than in what unites them. This distinguishes my project from that of many in contemporary semantic theory (for instance, Dretske, Fodor, and Millikan), as well as from the classical American pragmatists, and perhaps from the later Wittgenstein as well (p. 3).
- Here Brandom declares his preference for privileging **discontinuity** between discursive and non-discursive creatures over continuity. This option separates Brandom's project from **many naturalistic views** on semantic content (e.g., the ones defended by Fred Dretske, Jerry Fodor, and Ruth Millikan).
- Naturalistic accounts try to explain in general how semantic content **arises in nature, in continuity with nonhuman animals**. Brandom is here interested only in **what is especially human** about discursive activity.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 2. Conceptual *Platonism* or *Pragmatism*?
- Here is another strategic methodological issue. An account of the conceptual might explain the *use* of concepts in terms of a prior understanding of conceptual *content*. Or it might pursue a complementary explanatory strategy, beginning with a story about the practice or activity of applying concepts, and elaborating on that basis an understanding of conceptual content. The first can be called a *platonist* strategy, and the second a *pragmatist* (in this usage, a species of functionalist) strategy (p. 4).
- Another relevant option is the methodological distinction between **Pragmatism** and **Platonism**: can we explain concept use by applying a previously clarified content (the Platonist option)? Or should we do the opposite, that is, start with what we do by applying concepts and exploiting this activity to understand content (the pragmatist option)?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- One variety of semantic or conceptual platonism in this sense would identify the content typically expressed by declarative sentences and possessed by beliefs with sets of possible worlds, or with truth conditions otherwise specified. At some point it must then explain how associating such content with sentences and beliefs contributes to our understanding of how it is proper to use sentences in making claims, and to deploy beliefs in reasoning and guiding action (p. 4).
- Brandom defines the Platonist option a bit better: one **starts** by explaining conceptual content in terms of truth conditions or sets of possible worlds and **then exploits** such contents in order to explain how they are applied in belief, in judgement, in reasoning, and in action (PLATONISM: FIRST CONTENT, THEN APPLICATION).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The pragmatist direction of explanation, by contrast, seeks to explain how the use of linguistic expressions, or the functional role of intentional states, confers conceptual content on them (p. 4).
- The pragmatist reverses the Platonist order of explanation: one **starts** with the use of expressions and **then tries to understand** content in terms of such use (PRAGMATISM: FIRST APPLICATION, THEN CONTENT).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The view expounded in these pages is a kind of conceptual pragmatism (broadly, a form of functionalism) in this sense. It offers an account of knowing (or believing, or saying) *that* such and such is the case in terms of knowing *how* (being able) to *do* something. It approaches the contents of conceptually *explicit* propositions or principles from the direction of what is *implicit* in practices of using expressions and acquiring and deploying beliefs. ‘Assertion’, ‘claim’, ‘judgment’, and ‘belief’ are all systematically ambiguous expressions—and not merely by coincidence (p. 4).
- The pragmatist order of explanation endorsed here proceeds as follows: the **explicit dimension** of content must be understood as the byproduct of the practices of asserting and inferring. Starting with **what we implicitly do in our practices**, we can **make the concepts we employ explicit** (more on this in the next slide).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The sort of pragmatism adopted here seeks to explain what is asserted by appeal to features of *assertings*, what is claimed in terms of *claimings*, what is judged by *judgings*, and what is believed by the role of *believings* (indeed, what is expressed by *expressings* of it)—in general, the content by the act, rather than the other way around (p. 4).
- Hence, this pragmatist strategy tries to explain what is asserted (the content) **in terms of our assertory practices** (assertings; i.e., the practice of asserting). The same goes for what is claimed, judged, or believed. **FIRST THE ACT (OR DOING), THEN THE CONTENT.**

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 3. Is *Mind* or *Language* the Fundamental Locus of Intentionality?
- Concepts are applied in the realm of *language* by the public use of sentences and other linguistic expressions. They are applied in the realm of *mind* by the private adoption of and rational reliance on beliefs and other intentional states. The philosophical tradition from Descartes to Kant took for granted a *mentalist* order of explanation that privileged the mind as the native and original locus of concept use, relegating language to a secondary, latecoming, merely instrumental role in communicating to ready-made thoughts already full-formed in a prior mental arena within the individual (p. 5).
- Concepts, according to philosophers, can belong to the **public realm of language** or to the **private realm of mind**. The mainstream approach in the tradition, at least from Descartes to Kant, has been the **mentalist** one. **Intentionality**, the capacity of mental states to be about something, for mentalism is an **inherent property of the mind**. Communication works by means of **ready-made** intentional states.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The period since then has been characterized by a growing appreciation of the significance of language for thought and mindedness generally, and a questioning of the picture of language as a more or less convenient tool for expressing thoughts intelligible as contentful apart from any consideration of the possibility of *saying* what one is *thinking*. The twentieth century has been the century of language in philosophical thought, accelerating into something like a reversal of the traditional order of explanation (p. 5).
- After Kant we attended to a growing tendency to focus on **the centrality of language** for thought and mindedness. The 'linguistic turn' has **contrasted traditional mentalism** in many ways.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Thus [Michael] Dummett defends a *linguistic* theory of intentionality: “We have opposed throughout the view of assertion as the expression of an interior act of judgment; judgment, rather, is the interiorization of the external act of assertion.” Dummett’s claim is emblematic of views (put forward in different forms by thinkers such as [Wilfrid] Sellars and [Peter] Geach) that see language use as antecedently and independently intelligible, and so as available to provide a model on the basis of which one could then come to understand mental acts and occurrences analogically: taking thinking as a kind of inner saying. Such a view just turns the classical early modern approach on its head (p. 5).
- Important philosophers like Dummett claim a **linguistic view of intentionality**: intentionality belongs **primarily to acts of assertion**; then we can repeat what we publicly assert **in introspection, interiorizing a doing** that is basically public. Thinking, according to this view, is a kind of **inner saying** (Sellars held a similar view).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- [Donald] Davidson claims that to be a believer one must be an interpreter of the speech of others, but that “neither language nor thinking can be fully explained in terms of the other, and neither has conceptual priority. The two are, indeed, linked in the sense that each requires the other in order to be understood, but the linkage is not so complete that either suffices, even when reasonably reinforced, to explicate the other” (pp. 5-6).
- For example, there is Davidson’s **‘relational’ approach**: according to this, **language does not explain mind, and mind does not explain language**; they are both on the same level, and we should not accord any conceptual or explanatory priority to either of them.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Although Davidson shares some important motivations with Dummett's purely linguistic theory, in fact these two views illustrate an important difference between two ways in which one might give prominence to linguistic practice in thinking about the use of concepts (p. 6).
- So, even if Dummett defended a purely linguistic approach to intentionality, we can be more inclusive just like Davidson. Is this more comfortable for the theorist?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Davidson's claim, by contrast to Dummett's, serves to epitomize a relational view of the significance of language for sapience: taking it that concept use is not intelligible in a context that does not include language use, but not insisting that linguistic practices can be made sense of without appeal at the same time to intentional states such as belief (p. 6).
- So, if we endorse Davidson's relational view, then we can acknowledge the significance of language for understanding sapience [conceptual awareness] **even without denying that beliefs and other intentional states play some role** [Dummett seems to deny this by his linguistic view].

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The line of thought pursued here is in this sense a *relational linguistic* approach to the conceptual. Concept use is treated as an essentially linguistic affair. Claiming and believing are two sides of one coin—not in the sense that every belief must be asserted nor that every assertion must express a belief, but in the sense that neither the activity of believing nor that of asserting can be made sense of independently of the other, and that their conceptual contents are essentially, and not just accidentally, capable of being the contents indifferently of both claims and beliefs (p. 6).
- Brandom defends a **linguistic relational view**: we cannot make sense of believing without taking into account asserting and vice versa.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- In the context of the commitment to the kind of explanatory relation between those activities and those contents mentioned above, this approach takes the form of a linguistic pragmatism that might take as its slogan [Wilfrid] Sellars's principle that *grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word* (p. 6).
- The relational linguistic view, according to Brandom, is a kind of linguistic pragmatism: following Sellars, grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word (and, according to Wittgenstein, using a word is a practice). How does linguistic pragmatism differ from traditional pragmatism?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- James and Dewey were pragmatists in the sense I have picked out, since they try to understand conceptual content in terms of practices of using concepts. But, in line with their generally assimilationist approach to concept use, they were not specifically linguistic pragmatists. The later Wittgenstein, Quine, and Sellars (as well as Dummett and Davidson) are linguistic pragmatists, whose strategy of coming at the meaning of expressions by considering their use provides a counterbalance to the Frege-Russell-Carnap-Tarski platonistic model-theoretic approach to meaning (pp. 6-7).
- Traditional pragmatists looked at the practices to explain meaning, but they were assimilationists. Other pragmatists like Wittgenstein, Quine, and Sellars are proper linguistic pragmatists: they emphasize use to explain meaning, and their approach directly contrast model-theoretic approaches (that we find in Frege, Russell, Carnap, and Tarski).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 4. The Genus of Conceptual Activity: *Representation or Expression?*
- Besides this issue about the original *locus* of the conceptual, there is an issue about how to understand the *genus* of which it is a species. (As I have indicated, this is no less urgent for theories that concern themselves in the first instance with what is distinctive of the conceptual species of that genus than it is for those adopting the assimilationist order of proceeding.) (p. 7).
- Another issue concerns the genus of conceptual activity: is it something representational, or is it something expressive?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The master concept of Enlightenment epistemology and semantics, at least since Descartes, was *representation*. Awareness was understood in representational terms—whether taking the form of direct awareness of representings or of indirect awareness of representeds via representations of them. Typically, specifically conceptual representations were taken to be just one kind of representation of which and by means of which we can be aware (p. 7).
- The philosophical tradition is undoubtedly representationalist. Knowledge represents reality. Meanings/contents are representations.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- This orienting thought remains active to this day, surviving the quite substantial transformations required, for instance, for naturalistic and broadly functional accounts of awareness by and of representations. The result is a familiar, arguably dominant, contemporary research program: to put in place a general conception of representation, the simpler forms of which are exhibited already in the activity of non-concept-using creatures, and on that basis elaborate ever more complex forms until one reaches something recognizable as specifically *conceptual* representation (p. 7).
- Today the situation is similar, and representationalism is still the dominant paradigm. Furthermore, representationalism can explain low-level (non-conceptual) cognition in terms of low-level representations and high-level (conceptual) cognition in terms of conceptual representations. This comes in especially handy for an assimilationist program.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- This representational paradigm of what mindedness consists in is sufficiently ubiquitous that it is perhaps not easy to think of alternatives of similar generality and promise. One prominent countertradition, however, looks to the notion of *expression*, rather than representation, for the genus within which distinctively conceptual activity can become intelligible as a species (p. 7).
- Even though representationalism is dominant, we can find alternatives. An alternative genus for the conceptual is **expression**. How can we define expression as a genus of the conceptual? What does it mean to say that conceptual activity is expressive?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- To the Enlightenment picture of mind as *mirror*, Romanticism opposed an image of the mind as *lamp*. Broadly cognitive activity was to be seen not as a kind of passive reflection but as a kind of active revelation. Emphasizing the importance of experimental intervention and the creative character of theory production motivated an assimilation of scientific to artistic activity, of finding as constrained making—a picture of knowing nature as producing a second nature (to use Leonardo da Vinci's phrase) (p. 8).
- A first grasp of expression is provided by picturing the **mind as a lamp** (with an idealist flavor). The subject is active and not passive in knowing (experiments, creativity), and hence knowledge does not reduce to mere mirroring. Knowing nature provides an (Aristotelian) second nature.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The sort of expressivism Herder initiated takes as its initial point of departure the process by which inner becomes outer when a feeling is expressed by a gesture. We are then invited to consider more complex cases in which attitudes are expressed in actions, for instance, when a desire or intention issues in a corresponding doing, or a belief in saying. So long as we focus on the simplest cases, an expressivist model will not seem to offer a particularly promising avenue for construing the genus of which conceptual activity is a species (though one might say the same of the representational model if attention is focused on, say, the imprint of a seal on a wax tablet). But a suitable commentary on the model may be able to repair this impression somewhat (p. 8).
- Expression, more broadly, can be defined as the **passage from the inner to the outer**. This is useful in introducing certain cases (feeling-gesture; attitude-action; intention-doing; belief-saying). But this does not seem enough to replace representation. Can we find more in expression?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- First, we might think of the process of expression in the more complex and interesting cases as a matter not of transforming what is inner into what is outer but of making *explicit* what is *implicit*. This can be understood in a pragmatist sense of turning something we can initially only *do* into something we can *say*: codifying some sort of knowing *how* in the form of a knowing *that* (p. 8).
- Brandom answers in the affirmative for three reasons. The **first** comes in by considering expression as the passage from the **implicit** to the **explicit**. (This makes expressivism **pragmatist: a passage from 'doing' to 'saying'** and a passage from **'knowing-how'** to **'knowing-that'**.)

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Second, as is suggested by this characterization of a pragmatist form of expressivism, in the cases of most interest in the present context, the notion of explicitness will be a *conceptual* one. The process of explicitation is to be the process of applying concepts: conceptualizing some subject matter (p. 8).
- The **second** reason is that **the explicit** can be easily equated with **the conceptual**. **Making something explicit** means **putting it in conceptual terms**, i.e., applying concepts.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Third, we need not yield to the temptation, offered by the primitive expressive relation of gesture to feeling, to think of what is expressed and the expression of it as individually intelligible independently of consideration of the relation between them. At least in the more interesting cases, specification of what is implicit may depend on the possibility of making it explicit. And the explicit may not be specifiable apart from consideration of what is made explicit (pp. 8-9).
- **Third reason.** We should resist the temptation to understand the expressive relation as independent from what is expressed and its expression: it is a **holistic and relational process**. For example, we could not think in explicit terms about what cannot be made explicit.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- On such a view, what is expressed must be understood in terms of the possibility of expressing it. Such a *relational* expressivism will understand linguistic performances and the intentional states they express each as essential elements in a whole that is intelligible only in terms of their relation. According to such an approach, for instance, one ought not to think that one can understand either believing or asserting except by abstracting from their role in the process of asserting what one believes (that is, this sort of expressivism has as a consequence a relational linguistic view of the layout of the conceptual realm) (p. 9).
- Expression is a relation always involving the relevant relata: what is made explicit and the possibility of making it explicit. This extends to **asserting** (linguistic activity) and **believing** (mental activity) and so fits with Davidson's **relational view** about mind and language.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Understanding the genus of which the conceptual is a species in representational terms invites a platonist order of explanation. That it does not demand one is clear from the possibility of psychologically or linguistically functionalist accounts of representational content. Nonetheless, expressivism is particularly congenial to a pragmatist order of semantic explanation, as is indicated by the formulation of the relation between what is implicit and what is explicit in terms of the distinction between knowing how and knowing that. The account presented in the body of this work is one kind of constitutive, pragmatist, relationally linguistic, conceptual expressivism (p. 9).
- Representationalism, the view that semantic content is a representation, seems to invite Platonist approaches, thinking about contents as already there. This **does not** entail the impossibility of functionalist alternatives. Among alternatives, expressivism – the idea that concepts are expressive rather than representational; the idea that concepts articulate the transition from what is implicit to what is explicit – is congenial for pragmatist views on content: starting with use to explain contents. This makes Brandom's pragmatism fully expressivist.
- N.B. this conceptual expressivism must be distinguished from 'metaethical' expressivism (the idea that moral vocabulary is expressive instead of representational).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The commitment to trying to make expressivism work as a framework within which to understand concept use and (so) conceptual content sets this project off from most others on the contemporary scene. For a representational paradigm reigns not only in the whole spectrum of analytically pursued semantics, from model-theoretic, through possible worlds, directly counterfactual, and informational approaches to teleosemantic ones, but also in structuralism inheriting the broad outlines of Saussure's semantics, and even in those later continental thinkers whose poststructuralism is still so far mired in the representational paradigm that it can see no other alternative to understanding meaning in terms of signifiers standing for signifieds than to understand it in terms of signifiers standing for other signifiers. Even contemporary forms of pragmatism, which are explicitly motivated by the rejection of platonist forms of the representational paradigm, have not embraced or sought to develop an expressivist alternative (pp. 9-10).
- The expressivism introduced above distinguishes Brandom's pragmatism from the majority of contemporary semantic projects. **Representationalism is the main paradigm** not only of analytic philosophy of mind and language, but also for structuralism and post-structuralism. Even many contemporary pragmatist views do not endorse conceptual expressivism (as an alternative).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 5. Distinguishing the Conceptual: *Intensionalism* or *Inferentialism*?
- I am not in this introduction pretending to argue for any of the methodological commitments I am rehearsing. My aim is to offer a quick sketch of the terrain against the background of which the approach pursued in the body of this work (and at greater length and in greater detail in *Making It Explicit*) takes its characteristic shape—to introduce and place those commitments, rather than so much as to begin to entitle myself to any of them (p. 10).
- This introduction will not argue for the commitments introduced so far and for those that come next. It basically **introduces** those commitments by **mapping the argumentative terrain**.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- I said at the out-set that I am particularly interested in what *distinguishes* the conceptual from the nonconceptual. This is not a topic that has attracted as much philosophical attention in contemporary circles as I think it deserves. Insofar as there is a consensus answer abroad, I think it must be that the conceptual (or the intentional) is distinguished by a special sort of intensionality: intersubstitution of coreferential or coextensional expressions or concepts does not preserve the content of ascriptions of intentional states, paradigmatically propositional attitudes such as thought and belief (p. 10).
- Brandom is interested in concepts's **distinctive traits**. The received view in the debate is that the intentionality of conceptual contents – that is their capacity to represent – lies in their **intensionality**. Conceptual contents are intensional as far as these are contexts in which we cannot substitute *salva veritate* co-referential expressions with each other.
- E.g., “John believes that Hesperus is a Star”. Here I cannot substitute the proposition “Hesperus is a star” with the co-referential “Phosphorous is a star”. Such substitution depends **on the kind of access that John has to such information** and nothing else (see below). All contexts relative to knowledge, belief, hope and so on (‘that-clause’ contexts) are intensional in this sense.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **INTENSIONALITY**

- *Intensional notions* are those concepts that are '*not extensionally transparent*'; extensional idioms are those in which the referential dimension can be made fully explicit, e.g., the extension of 'red' is the collection of red things. Consider the following sentences A and B:

A. George believes that Tully is a spy;

B. George believes that Cicero is a spy;

- If George does not know that Cicero = Tully, we are not allowed to substitute Tully for Cicero in (A) or Cicero for Tully in (B).
- Such substitutions are, in fact, (referentially) **opaque** (Quine).
- Such substitutions fail in all propositional attitudes (believing, knowing, hoping, etc.), in which the object is a proposition (the object of an attitude).
- These are called **intensional contexts**: in such contexts, substitutions of co-referring expressions fail (Other intensional contexts regard modalities). **Extensional contexts** permit substitutions between co-referring expressions; **Intensional contexts** do not permit such substitutions between co-referring expressions.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- [...]. The master idea that animates and orients this enterprise is that what distinguishes specifically *discursive* practices from the doings of non–concept-using creatures is their *inferential* articulation. To talk about concepts is to talk about roles in reasoning. The original Romantic expressivists were (like the pragmatists, both classical and contemporary) *assimilationists* about the conceptual. My way of working out an expressivist approach is *exceptionalist*, focusing on the differentiae distinctive of the conceptual as such (pp. 10-11).
- Inferential articulation – the set of features that shape the content of expressions’s roles in reasoning: that is, such contents **can play the role of premises and conclusions in inference** – is what distinguishes the contents entertained by discursive creatures from those of nondiscursive ones. This makes the current expressivist quite different from traditional expressivism.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- It is a *rationalist* pragmatism, in giving pride of place to practices of giving and asking for reasons, understanding them as conferring conceptual content on performances, expressions, and states suitably caught up in those practices. In this way it differs from the view of other prominent theorists who are pragmatists in the sense of subscribing to use theorists of meaning such as Dewey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Dummett, and Quine (p. 11).
- The inferential explanation of contents is rationalist: it confers on them a role only in the practices of 'giving and asking for reasons'. Other forms of pragmatism are not rationalist in this way.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- And it is a rationalist expressivism in that it understands *expressing* something, *making it explicit*, as putting it in a form in which it can both serve as and stand in need of *reasons*: a form in which it can serve as both premise and conclusion in *inferences* (p. 11).
- Expressing something means, in this sense, ‘making it explicit’ as something that can show up as a premise or a conclusion in inferences. Inferentialism and expressivism go hand in hand.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Saying or thinking *that* things are thus-and-so is undertaking a distinctive kind of *inferentially* articulated commitment: putting it forward as a fit premise for further inferences, that is, *authorizing* its use as such a premise, and undertaking *responsibility* to entitle oneself to that commitment, to vindicate one's authority, under suitable circumstances, paradigmatically by exhibiting it as the conclusion of an inference from other such commitments to which one is or can become entitled (p. 11).
- Asserting that things are thus and so (advancing a claim) means undertaking a commitment (and its content is inferentially articulated); this assertion authorizes using it *as a premise* for further inferences or can be exhibited *as a conclusion* from other claims.
- From a pragmatic and normative perspective, asserting a claim C **commits** us to the claims from which it follows and to the claims that follow from it. If these inferential transitions hold, one becomes **entitled** to that commitment.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Grasping the *concept* that is applied in such a making explicit is mastering its *inferential* use: knowing (in the practical sense of being able to distinguish, a kind of knowing *how*) what else one would be committing oneself to by applying the concept, what would entitle one to do so, and what would preclude such entitlement (p. 11).
- To grasp a concept in these *expressive relations* means mastering its inferential role: how it is used in inferential transitions between certain premises and conclusions.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- What might be thought of as Frege's fundamental *pragmatic* principle is that in *asserting* a claim, one is committing oneself to its *truth*. The standard way of exploiting this principle is a platonist one: some grip on the concept of *truth* derived from one's semantic theory is assumed, and an account of the pragmatic force or speech act of assertion is elaborated based on this connection (pp. 11-12).
- The Fregean view on assertion is determined by Frege's **pragmatic principle**: asserting commits one to the truth of what is asserted. This principle is usually explained and exploited according to the Platonist order of explanation (CONTENT FIRST, THEN APPLICATION). Could we use it in a pragmatist way (i.e., reversing the order)?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- But the principle can be exploited in more than one way, and linguistic pragmatism reverses the platonist order of explanation. Starting with an account of what one is *doing* in making a claim, it seeks to elaborate from it an account of what is *said*, the content or proposition—something that can be thought of in terms of truth conditions—to which one commits oneself by such a speech act (p. 12).
- In fact, we can reverse the order and provide a pragmatist version: what is said can be specified as a feature of what one is doing in asserting (ACTION FIRST, THEN CONTENT). It is true that propositions can be specified in terms of truth conditions (how things are if the claim is true), but they can be specified also in terms of the legitimate inferences they are involved in.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- What might be thought of as Frege's fundamental *semantic* principle is that a good inference never leads from a true claim(able) to one that is not true. It, too, can be exploited in either of two reductive orders of explanation. The standard way is to assume that one has a prior grip on the notion of truth, and use it to explain what good inference consists in. Rationalist or inferentialist pragmatism reverses this order of explanation also. It starts with a practical distinction between good and bad inferences, understood as a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate *doings*, and goes on to understand talk about truth as talk about what is preserved by the good moves (p. 12).
- This can be repeated in an analogous way for Frege's **semantic** principle: "a good inference never leads from a true claim(able) to one that is not true". This principle can be specified in pragmatist terms (and not only in Platonist ones). We can start with a basic distinction between good and bad **inferences** (as good and bad **doings**) and then understand talk about truth as **what is preserved** by good transitions.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 6. *Bottom-up* or *Top-down* Semantic Explanation?
- According to such an inferentialist line of thought, the fundamental form of the conceptual is the *propositional*, and the core of concept use is applying concepts in propositionally contentful *assertions*, *beliefs*, and *thoughts*. It claims that to be propositionally contentful is to be able to play the basic inferential roles of both premise and conclusion in inferences (p. 12).
- According to inferentialism, conceptual thought is propositional, and the basic application of concepts deals with asserting, believing, and thinking. A propositional content is something that can play the role of premise or of conclusion in inference.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Demarcating the conceptual realm by appeal to inference accordingly involves coming down firmly on one side of another abstract methodological divide. For it entails treating the sort of conceptual content that is expressed by whole declarative sentences as prior in the order of explanation to the sort of content that is expressed by subsentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates (pp. 12-13).
- Another commitment involved in inferentialist semantics is explanatory priority accorded to declarative sentences (judgements; whole sentences) over singular terms and predicates (subsentential expressions).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Traditional term logics built up from below, offering first accounts of the meanings of the concepts associated with singular and general terms (in a nominalistic representational way: in terms of what they name or stand for), then of *judgments* constructed by relating those terms, and finally of proprieties of *inferences* relating those judgments. This order of explanation is still typical of contemporary representational approaches to semantics (paradigmatically Tarskian model-theoretic ones) (p. 13).
- Mainstream representationalist semantics starts with reference relations of names and satisfaction relations for predicates. Then the content of judgements is achieved through composition. And finally inference is explained in terms of the valid transitions involving those judgements.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- There are, however, platonistic representational semantic theories that begin by assigning semantic interpretants (for instance, sets of possible worlds) to declarative sentences. Pragmatist semantic theories typically adopt a top-down approach because they start from the *use* of concepts, and what one does with concepts is apply them in judgment and action. Thus Kant takes the judgment to be the minimal unit of experience (and so of awareness in his discursive sense) because it is the first element in the traditional logical hierarchy that one can take *responsibility* for. (Naming is not a doing that makes one *answerable* to anything.) (p. 13).
- Starting with subsentential expressions is not mandatory, not even for representationalism: possible world semantics is a case in point; Kant's theory of judgement is another (according to Kant, judgement is the minimum unit of semantic awareness because we can take responsibility for it).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Frege starts with judgeable conceptual contents because that is what pragmatic force can attach to. And Wittgenstein's focus on use leads him to privilege sentences as bits of language the utterance of which can make a move in a language game. I take these to be three ways of making essentially the same pragmatist point about the priority of the propositional. Again, the connection between propositionalism and pragmatism in the broad sense of approaching meaning from the side of use is not a coercive one, since a functionalist version of this approach might privilege contents associated with subsentential expressions. Inferentialism, however, is an essentially propositional doctrine (p. 13).
- Frege and Wittgenstein, in different ways, agree with Kant about the priority of the propositional (of judgements over subsentential expressions). Even though one can develop an inferentialist semantics starting with subsentential expressions, Brandom's inferentialism is committed all the way down to propositionalism.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- In this respect, inferentialism and expressivism dovetail neatly. For the paradigm of expression is *saying* something. And what can play the role of premise and conclusion of inference is a saying in the sense of a *claiming*. Expressivism, like inferentialism, directs our attention in the first place to *propositional* conceptual contents. A further story must then be told about the *decomposition* of such contents into the sort of conceptual contents that are expressed (in a derivative sense) by subsentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates (pp. 13-14).
- In this respect, inferentialism and expressivism fit well with each other. Both deal with propositional contents (as what is expressed/made explicit and as what is claimed, in the sense of inferential articulation). Finally, inferentialism needs to explain how subsentential expressions can be obtained by decomposing sentences.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Representationalism, by contrast, is motivated by a designational paradigm: the relation of a name to its bearer. In one standard way of pursuing this direction of explanation, one must then introduce a special ontological category of states of affairs, thought of as being represented by declarative sentences in something like the same way that objects are represented by singular terms (p. 14).
- Representationalism, on the contrary, works in terms of designation: a name designates its bearer. To extend such name-designation to sentences, one must select the right ontological correspondence: sentences here correspond to states of affairs.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- *Rationalist* expressivism understands the explicit (the sayable in the sense of claimable, the form something must be in to count as having been expressed) in terms of its inferential role. Coupled with a linguistic pragmatism, such a view entails that practices of giving and asking for reasons have a privileged, indeed defining, role with respect to linguistic practice generally (p. 63).
- ‘The explicit’ (the propositional) can be analyzed in terms of inferential role. Hence, our inferential practices, that is, **asserting** and **inferring**, play a pivotal role for linguistic practice (Brandom often claims that ‘language has a downtown’: this downtown is the game of giving and asking for reasons).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- What makes something a specifically *linguistic* (and therefore, according to this view, discursive) practice is that it accords some performances the force or significance of *claimings*, of *propositionally* contentful commitments, which can both serve as and stand in need of reasons. Practices that do not involve reasoning are not linguistic or (therefore) discursive practices (p. 14).
- Linguistic practice, in fact, acknowledges as claimings propositional contents, that is, the contents that can play the role of premise or of conclusion in our pattern of reasoning. Practices deprived of such reasoning features are not properly linguistic.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Thus the 'Slab' *Sprachspiel* that Wittgenstein introduces in the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* should not, by these standards of demarcation, count as a genuine *Sprachspiel*. It is a *vocal* but not yet a *verbal* practice. By contrast to Wittgenstein, the inferential identification of the conceptual claims that language (discursive practice) has a *center*; it is not a motley (p. 14).
- Wittgenstein's language game of workers calling for a slab, according to Brandom, is not as a language game: it is vocal but not verbal. There are **special language games**, like **the game of giving and asking for reasons**, that demarcate certain contents as propositional (verbal) and certain practices as discursive.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Wittgenstein's 'slab' language game**
- ***Philosophical investigations §2***. That philosophical concept of meaning has its place in a primitive idea of the way language functions. But one can also say that it is the idea of a language more primitive than ours.
- Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out;—B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.—Conceive this as a complete primitive language.
- According to Augustine, language works by naming. In the building site, when builder A calls for a slab, is not naming it; he is doing something else, that is, giving an order. Hence language does not just work in terms of naming (like Augustine and the young Wittgenstein thought) but plays many more functions.
- According to Brandom's propositionalism this is not a true language game, because 'slab' is not a complete sentence (and so cannot count as a proper conceptual move in the practice). Nothing conceptual follows from it; only complete sentences have proper inferential implications.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Inferential practices of producing and consuming *reasons* are *downtown* in the region of linguistic practice. Suburban linguistic practices utilize and depend on the conceptual contents forged in the game of giving and asking for reasons, are parasitic on it. Claiming, being able to justify one's claims, and using one's claims to justify other claims and actions are not just one among other sets of things one can do with language. They are not on a par with other 'games' one can play (pp. 14-15).
- Other uses of language, that is, nondeclarative uses, are parasitic on the priority of declarative uses (judgements and assertions). Such abilities are not equal to other linguistic moves. The 'slab' language game is parasitic in this sense.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- They are what in the first place make possible talking, and therefore thinking: sapience in general. Of course we do *many* other things as concept users besides applying concepts in judgment and action and justifying those applications. But (by contrast to the indiscriminately egalitarian picture presented by contemporary neo-Romantic theorists such as Derrida) according to this sort of semantic rationalism, those sophisticated, latecoming linguistic and more generally discursive activities are intelligible in principle only against the background of the core practices of inference and-assertion (p. 15).
- Asserting and inferring are the mark of sapience. Other uses of language are legitimate, granted they depend on a background practice of giving and asking for reasons (GOGAR).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 7. *Atomism or Holism?*
  
- Closely related to the issue of top-down or bottom-up semantic explanation is the issue of semantic *holism* versus semantic *atomism*. The tradition of formal semantics has been resolutely atomistic, in the sense that the assignment of a semantic interpretant to one element (say, a proper name) is taken to be intelligible independently of the assignment of semantic interpretants to any other elements (for instance, predicates or other proper names) (p. 15).
  
- Connected with semantic explanation, there is the issue of holism vs. atomism.
- Atomism is the view that linguistic expressions' meanings depend on a single feature/interpretant; holism is the view that they depend on many features/interpretants.
- Atomism is the standard view in the tradition of formal semantics (e.g., the meaning of a proper name depends on its bearer).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Holism and atomism in semantics**
- **Semantic atomism** is the idea that single words are meaningful in isolation (like proper names). This idea has been defended by the young Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, logical positivists, and, more recently, by such philosophers of cognitive science as Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore (according to them we can even admit the existence of ‘pointed minds’, that is, minds entertaining only one concept);
- **Semantic holism** is the idea that the meaning of a linguistic expression depends on many other linguistic expressions. This idea has been defended, in many ways, by Willard Van Orman Quine, the late Wittgenstein, Wilfrid Sellars, Donald Davidson, Michael Dummett, and Robert Brandom.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- One does not need to know anything about what other dots represent, or what blue wavy lines represent, in order to understand that a particular dot stands for Cleveland on a map. The task of formal semantics is the bottom-up one of explaining how semantically relevant whatsits can systematically be assigned to complex expressions, given that they have been assigned already to simple ones. Atomism adds that the assignments to the simple ones can be done one by one (p. 15).
- Atomistic semantic explanation proceeds one by one, piece by piece. Holism, we are going to see, is quite different.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- By contrast, inferentialist semantics is resolutely *holist*. On an inferentialist account of conceptual content, one cannot have *any* concepts unless one has *many* concepts. For the content of each concept is articulated by its inferential relations to *other* concepts. Concepts, then, must come in packages (though it does not yet follow that they must come in just one great big one). Conceptual holism is not a commitment that one might be motivated to undertake independently of the considerations that lead one to an inferential conception of the conceptual. It is rather a straightforward consequence of that approach (pp. 15-16).
- Holism is the view that having a concept means having many of them. Holism depends on inferentialism (not the other way around)—hence, holism is not defended on independent grounds: it is a corollary of inferential semantics.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 8. *Traditional or Rationalist Expressivism?*
- The heart of any expressivist theory is of course its account of expressing. What is expressed appears in two forms, as implicit (only potentially expressible) and explicit (actually expressed). To talk of expression is to talk about a process of transformation of what in virtue of its role in that process becomes visible as a *content* that appears in two *forms*, as implicit and then as explicit. As I indicated above, traditional Romantic expressivism took as its paradigm something like the relationship between an inner *feeling* expressed by an outer *gesture* (p. 16).
- Again, expressivism deals with the passage from what is implicit to what is explicit. Traditional expressivism, in its most famous version, talks about inner feelings that become explicit in gestures.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 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. I said at the outset that the goal of the enterprise is a clear account of sapient awareness, of the sense in which being aware of something is bringing it under a concept (p. 16).
- Brandom's expressivism is quite distinct from the traditional one: 'explicitness' here means conceptual articulation, and 'expressing' means conceptualizing.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- On the approach pursued here, doing that is making a claim or judgment about what one is (thereby) aware of, forming a belief about it— in general, addressing it in a form that can serve as and stand in need of reasons, making it *inferentially* significant. The image of conceptualizing the unconceptualized is a familiar focus of philosophical attention, and it has given rise to a familiar panoply of philosophical pathologies. The rationalist expressivist course pursued here is distinguished by the particular strategy it employs for understanding the relation between the merely implicit and the conceptually explicit (p. 16).
- The starting point is uttering a judgement, making an assertion, as what can serve and stand in need of reasons. That is, something that is inferentially articulated. We can make explicit that the claim C follows from premises P<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>2</sub>, P<sub>3</sub>...or that a particular conclusion follows from it.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- That strategy depends on a constellation of related inferentialist ideas. The first and most fundamental idea, already mentioned above, is a way of thinking about conceptual explicitness. To be explicit in the conceptual sense is to play a specifically *inferential* role. In the most basic case, it is to be *propositionally* contentful in the sense of being fit to serve both as a premise and as a conclusion in inferences (p. 17).
- To be explicit, a content C needs to make its inferential role explicit, that is, making explicit the inferences in which C is correctly involved. Put this way, C can follow from certain premises or be the premise for other consequences.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- According to the relational linguistic view, to be thinkable or believable in this sense is to be assertible. The basic way of working out the pragmatist explanatory strategy is to understand saying (thinking, believing . . . ) that such and such (that is, adopting a propositionally contentful attitude) in terms of a distinctive kind of knowing how or being able to do something. Inferentialism picks out the relevant sort of doing by its inferential articulation (p. 17).
- Again, we have methodological pragmatism: starting with a **doing** (asserting, inferring, making moves in the practice – this is the dimension of what is **implicit**) and then characterizing such doings in terms of **inferential articulation** (what follows from what – this is the dimension of what is **explicit**).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Propositional (and more generally conceptual) contents become available to those engaging in linguistic practices, whose core is drawing conclusions and offering justifications. Merely reliably responding differentially to red things is not yet being *aware* of them *as* red. Discrimination by producing repeatable responses (as a machine or a pigeon might do) sorts the eliciting stimuli, and in that sense classifies them. But it is not yet *conceptual* classification, and so involves no awareness of the sort under investigation here (p. 17).
- Propositional contents become available **only in the context of asserting and inferring**, and **not just** for those creatures able to reliably respond to differential stimuli. Responsive dispositions enable only **nonconceptual and noninformative classifications**. **Conceptual informative classifications** require a context of conceptual abilities (**judging, asserting, inferring**).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- [...]As a next stage, we might imagine a normative practice, according to which red things are *appropriately* responded to by making a certain noise. That would still not be a conceptual matter. What is *implicit* in that sort of practical doing becomes *explicit* in the application of the *concept red* when that responsive capacity or skill is put into a larger context that includes treating the responses as inferentially significant: as providing reasons for making other moves in the language game, and as themselves potentially standing in need of reasons that could be provided by making still other moves. The first advantage that this rationalist pragmatism claims over earlier forms of expressivism is provided by this relatively clear inferential notion of conceptual explicitness (pp. 17-18).
- Responding to red stuff with “red” is **not enough** to perform a conceptual job: if one can respond with “red,” **it does not follow that she knows/masters** what follows from it, for example, and so on. Responsiveness is **necessary but not sufficient**. Only knowing/mastering such premises and implications marks the boundaries of conceptual activity (sapience). So we can define conceptual explicitness **as that involved in informative conceptual classifications**.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Pragmatism about the conceptual seeks to understand what it is explicitly to *say* or *think that* something is the case in terms of what one must implicitly know *how* (be able) to *do*. That the relevant sort of doing is a constellation of asserting and inferring, making claims and giving and asking for reasons for them, is the essence of rationalist or inferentialist pragmatism about the conceptual. But once such an inferential notion of explicitness (propositional or, more generally, conceptual contentfulness) has been put in place, we can appeal to this notion of expressing (what is explicit) to understand various senses in which something can be expressed (what is implicit) (p. 18).
- Having a conception of conceptual explicitness is the premise to look at what should be said about expressing what is implicit. How should we qualify the latter expression?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The inferentialist picture actually puts in play several notions of implicitness. The first is what is made explicit by a claim or becomes explicit in it: a proposition, possible fact, what is said (sayable) or thought or believed. But in another sense we can talk about what still remains implicit in an explicit claim, namely, its inferential consequences. For in the context of a constellation of inferential practices, endorsing or committing oneself to one proposition (claimable) is implicitly endorsing or committing oneself to others which follow from it (p. 18).
- Many notions of implicitness are involved: a proposition, what is said, and so on; what remains implicit in what is made explicit (that is, certain inferential consequences). In fact, in what is said are implicit a number of inferential transitions.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Mastery of these inferential connections is the implicit background against which alone explicit claiming is intelligible. Actually drawing inferences from an explicit claimable (something that can be said, thought, and so on) is exploring the inferential relations that articulate its content. Since in *saying* that things are thus-and-so, for instance, that the cloth is red, one is not in the same sense *saying* (making explicit) that it is colored and spatially extended, those consequences count as only implicit. Since they articulate the content of the original saying, they are at least implicit in it. 'Implicit' is once again given a relatively clear inferential sense, but one that is distinct from the sense in which the fact that the cloth is red (to which one can reliably respond differentially) is made explicit in the claim (p. 18).
- Saying that a patch is red is expressing what is just implicit in a perceptual act; saying what follows from it is expressing another kind of implicitness: its inferential connections. Hence, there are two distinct senses of 'implicit'.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- In different but related senses, an explicit claim has implicit in it:
  - 1. proprieties governing inferential moves to and from the commitments to the claimable content in question;
  - 2. the other claims that are inferential consequences of the first one, according to the practical proprieties mentioned in (1); and
  - 3. the conceptual content of the claim, which is articulated by the inferences in (1).
- These notions of implicitness are direct products of the basic inferential model of explicitness (pp. 18-19).
- There are **three** related senses of **what is implicit** in definitions 1-3: proprieties of inferential moves (which moves are correct); inferential consequences of a claim (what follows from it); and the entire inferential role of the claim (its content). These aspects depend on the concept of explicitness in terms of permitting informative classifications.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- 9. Is the Semantic Task of Logic Epistemological or Expressive?
- One standard way to think of logic is as giving us special epistemic access to a kind of truth. Logic is for establishing the truth of certain kinds of claims, by *proving* them. But logic can also be thought of in expressive terms, as a distinctive set of tools for *saying* something that cannot otherwise be made explicit. Seeing how this can be so depends on making a further move: applying the original model of explicitness to the inferential consequences that are implicit (in the sense just considered) in any explicit claim (p. 19).
- A traditional view is that logic helps us secure a certain access to truth, and this is done by means of proofs. But there is an alternative reading of how logic works, and it is an **expressive** one: it helps **say something that could not otherwise be made explicit** (and this works thanks to the concepts of explicitness and implicitness we just defined).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- According to the inferentialist account of concept use, in **making a claim** one is implicitly endorsing a set of inferences, which articulate its conceptual content. Implicitly endorsing those inferences is a sort of **doing**. Understanding the conceptual content to which one has committed oneself is a kind of **practical mastery**: 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 (p. 19).
- This is the list of things that we do implicitly, and that logic can help us make explicit. How exactly?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Making explicit that know-how, the inferences one has implicitly endorsed, is putting it in the form of a claim *that* things are thus-and-so. In this case a central expressive resource for doing that is provided by basic *logical* vocabulary. In applying the concept *lion* to Leo, I implicitly commit myself to the applicability of the concept *mammal* to him. If my language is expressively rich enough to contain *conditionals*, I can say that *if* Leo is a lion, *then* Leo is a mammal (pp. 19-20).
- This is where **logical** resources become helpful: If I say that Felix is a *cat*, I commit myself to it being a *mammal*. And if I **master conditionals** (if they belong to my resources), I can **explicitly say** that **if Felix is a cat, then Felix is a mammal**: I can make explicit that being a mammal is an implicit conceptual feature (and an inferential trait) of being a cat.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- (And if the language is expressively rich enough to include quantificational operators, I can say that if *anything* is a lion, then it is a mammal.) That Cleo is a cephalopod is good (indeed, decisive) evidence that she is not a lion. If my language is expressively rich enough to contain *negation*, I can make that implicit inferential component articulating the content of the concept *lion* explicit by saying that if Cleo is a cephalopod, then Cleo is *not* a mammal (p. 20).
- Not only conditionals but also **quantifiers**: if anything is a cat, then it is a mammal. Not only conditionals and quantifiers, but also **negation**: if Felix is a cat, **then** it is **not** a reptile. So, conditionals and negations are logical locutions that play clear expressive roles.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- By saying things like this, by using *logical* vocabulary, I can make explicit the implicit inferential commitments that articulate the content of the concepts I apply in making ordinary explicit claims. Here the original inferential-propositional model of awareness (in the sense of sapience) is applied at a higher level (p. 20).
- Logical vocabulary permits us to **make explicit** the implicit inferential commitments that we undertake making our claims. This is the basic idea of **logical expressivism**, according to which **logical vocabulary** plays a fundamental **expressive function**.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- In the first application, we get an account of *consciousness*—for example, *that* Leo is a lion. In the second application we get an account of a kind of semantic *self-consciousness*. For in this way we begin to say what we are *doing* in *saying* that Leo is a lion. For instance, we make explicit (in the form of a claimable, and so propositional content) that we are committing ourselves thereby to his being a mammal by saying *that* if something is a lion, then it is a mammal (p. 20).
- So, logical expression helps us in saying first that we are conscious of something (Felix is a cat) and then self-conscious about what we are doing in saying something (that Felix is a cat). Semantic self-consciousness is explicit awareness of certain inferential commitments that we undertake by uttering a claim.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- [...] Inferentialism about conceptual content in this way makes possible a new kind of expressivism about logic. Applying the inferential model of explicitness, and so of expression, to the functioning of logical vocabulary provides a proving ground for the model that permits its elaboration at a level of clarity and exactness that has (to say the least) been unusual within the expressivist tradition (p. 20).
- So, inferentialism suggests an expressive reading of logical locutions that makes it more precise and clear than any other form of expressivism.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Conditional claims—and claims formed by the use of logical vocabulary in general, of which the conditional is paradigmatic for the inferentialist—express a kind of semantic self-consciousness because they make explicit the inferential relations, consequences, and contents of ordinary nonlogical claims and concepts. [...](p. 21).
- This is a complete working definition of logical expressivism. So logic (and logical resources in general) is **the organon of semantic self-consciousness** as it permits us **to make explicit the contents of the concepts we apply** (by making explicit which inferences follow from our moves in discursive practice).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- This development of the relation of expression between what is explicit and what is implicit is guided throughout by the fundamental idea of demarcating the conceptual by its specifically inferential articulation. At the first stage, that idea yields an understanding of the end result of making something explicit in a claimable (judgeable, thinkable, believable), that is, propositional content, of the sort expressed by the use of basic declarative sentences (p. 22).
- The idea guiding this process of expression is the idea of **demarcating the conceptual** by means of inferential transitions. A first stage of it deals with expressing something **by means of making a claim** or making an assertion (uttering a declarative sentence) to the effect of saying that things are 'thus and so'. This is the **basic move** in the game (to be sapient beings).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- At the second stage, the same inferentialist idea leads to an expressive model of the conceptual role distinctive of logical vocabulary, which serves to make explicit in the form of claimables (paradigmatically, conditional ones) the inferential relations that implicitly articulate the contents of the ordinary nonlogical concepts we use in making things explicit in the sense specified at the first stage (p. 22).
- The second dimension deals with exploiting certain bits of logical vocabulary to make explicit the inferential transitions involved in uttering a claim. E.g., for claim C, “Fido is a dog”; if C, then Fido is a mammal; if C, then Fido barks; etc.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- At the third stage, the notion of the expressive relation between what is explicit and what is implicit that was developed at the second stage in connection with the use of distinctively logical concepts is applied to illuminate further the relation between what is explicit in the sense of the first stage and what is made explicit thereby (p. 22).
- The final stage puts together the two dimensions involved in the expression relation: what is explicit by means of logical articulation is exploited to illuminate what is expressed by the act of assertion.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The result is an account with a structure recognizable as Hegelian: a rationalist, expressivist account of (a kind of) consciousness (namely, sapient awareness) provides the basis for a corresponding account of (a kind of ) self-consciousness (namely, semantic or conceptual self-consciousness), which is then called upon to deepen the original story by providing a model for understanding the sort of consciousness with which the account began (pp. 22).
- The account is structured in a way that it is capable of illuminating, by its dynamic development—that is, through the two relations of expressions highlighted so far—the kind of consciousness we started with at the beginning.
- This movement, according to Brandom, is of Hegelian kind: it is a kind of development of consciousness by means of further conceptual resources along the way (**expression as Hegelian mediation**), so that the final stage contains a better understanding of the starting resources (what is intuitive and immediate).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Summary**
- **Introduction's Binary Oppositions** (and Brandom's Commitments)
- **Assimilation vs. Differentiation**: Brandom endorses **differentiation**, emphasizing that the conceptual is uniquely human.
- **Platonism vs. Pragmatism**: Brandom supports **pragmatism**, suggesting that we understand language through practical moves such as assertions and inferences.
- **Locus of Intentionality: Language or Mind?**: Brandom advocates for a **relational middle view**, where contents exist between mind and language. A content can be the object of a belief (mental state) or an assertion (linguistic act), with beliefs and assertions being two sides of the same coin.
- **Representation vs. Expression**: Brandom favors **expressivism**, contrasting the traditional view of conceptual activity as representation with an expressivist view that sees it as the transition from implicit practice to explicit speech.
- **Intensionalism vs. Inferentialism**: Brandom endorses **inferentialism**, moving away from the traditional understanding of propositions as those where substitutions of coreferential terms fail in belief ascription, towards viewing propositions as entities that can serve as premises or conclusions in inferences.
- **Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Explanatory Strategy**: Brandom supports **propositionalism**, which contrasts with the traditional approach of explaining meaning starting from names and singular terms. Instead, he aligns with the Kantian tradition that begins with complete sentences.
- **Holism vs. Atomism**: Brandom endorses **holism**, opposing the atomist tradition that assigns meaning to individual expressions. The holistic approach connects the meaning of expressions with many others, aligning with inferentialism.
- **Traditional vs. Rationalist Expressivism**: Brandom supports **rationalist expressivism**, which focuses on the transition from implicit to explicit, rather than the traditional expressivist concern with the inner/outer transition.
- **Role of Logic: Epistemological or Expressive?**: Brandom endorses **logical expressivism**, which views logical vocabulary (especially conditionals) as tools for making explicit the contents of non-logical expressions, rather than merely epistemological tools for proving claims or theorems.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- II. Historical Context: Rationalism, Pragmatism, and Expressivism
- At the very center of this account is its *rationalism*: the pride of place it gives to specifically *inferential* articulation, to playing a role in practices of giving and asking for *reasons*. It provides the answer I offer to the question how to demarcate the distinctive realm of the *conceptual*. Specifically *linguistic* practice is picked out (and recognized as discursive) by its incorporation of inferential-and-assertional practices: attributing and undertaking commitments to the propriety of making certain moves and occupying certain positions whose contents are determined by their places in those practices (pp. 22-23).
- Rationalist expressivism, through the inferences concepts entail, can distinguish between what is conceptual and what is not. Linguistic practices are identified by their structure, which involves **asserting** and **inferring**. Moreover, this fundamental structure can be specified, always through reasons, in terms of the claims one is **committed** to and the claims one is **entitled** to.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The resulting *rationalistic pragmatism* is importantly different in just this respect from that of other semantic pragmatists such as Dewey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Quine, and Rorty. Again, *rationalistic expressivism* has important conceptual resources and advantages denied to traditional Romantic expressivism. This version of expressivism offers a framework within which it is possible to do detailed semantic work [...] (p. 23).
- Brandom's rationalistic pragmatism is different from typical semantic pragmatism—that is, the idea that meaning does not work in terms of 'representing'—because it can afford more conceptual resources. Brandom's inferentialist expressivism can explain the representational aspect of an assertion using inferences, so it's not completely anti-representationalist. It also works well for constructive work in semantics, since inferentialism can explain all semantic phenomena using its explanatory notions (inference, substitution, anaphora), which is what Brandom does in the book *Making It Explicit*.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- And that same framework makes possible an expressivist approach to logic, which provides potentially important new insights—for instance, into the expressive role distinctive of *normative* vocabulary [...], and the expressive role distinctive of *intentional* or explicitly *representational* vocabulary [...] (p. 23).
- So, again, inferentialism can illuminate our use of normative ('right', 'wrong', 'commitment', 'entitlement') and representational ('of', 'about') vocabularies. Such vocabularies, like logic, help us make explicit certain normative or representational features of our assertions.

# Concepts as inferential roles

Brandom: Articulating Reasons

Introduction

Empiricism has been the fighting faith and organizing principle of philosophy in the English-speaking world since at least the time of Locke. Its distinctive twentieth-century form, developed by thinkers such as Russell, Carnap, and Quine, joins to the classical insistence on the origin of knowledge in *experience* an emphasis on the crucial cognitive role played by *language* and *logic*. A central goal of this book is to introduce a way of thinking about these latter topics—and so about meaning, mind, and knowledge—that swings free of the context of empiricist commitments that has shaped discussion within this tradition (p. 23).

The first phase of analytic philosophy has been broadly empiricist: knowledge originates in experience, together with the typical analytic insistence on language and logic. Inferentialism, in an important way, breaks this empiricist paradigm by **thinking about concepts in terms of the role they play in reasoning rather than in terms of their putative origin in experience.**

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- In turning away from empiricism I do not mean to deny that consideration of perceptual practices must play a crucial role in our epistemology and semantics. What might be called *platitudinous empiricism* restricts itself to the observations that without perceptual experience we can have no knowledge of contingent matters of fact, and more deeply, that conceptual content is unintelligible apart from its relation to perceptual experience. These are not controversial claims (pp. 23-24).
- Rejecting empiricism does not mean denying a role of perception in epistemology and in semantics. There is a sense in which the role of perception in knowledge and cognition is platitudinous. (This can be understood as a noncontroversial 'minimal' empiricism that also Brandom endorses.)

# Concepts as inferential roles

Brandom: Articulating Reasons

Introduction

[...] [Empiricism's] general course, though, is marked out by commitment to grounding theoretical and practical reasoning and concept use in the occurrence of episodes we immediately find ourselves like sense experiences on the cognitive like felt motivations or preferences on the active side. In the forms I find most objectionable, having these experiences is thought of as not requiring the exercise of specifically conceptual abilities. It is understood rather as a preconceptual capacity shareable with non-concept-using mammals. Its deliverances are accordingly conceived of as available to explain what concept use consists in, and as providing the raw materials conceptual activities work on or with. (Traditional abstractionist and associationist strategies are just particular ways of working out this line of thought; many others are possible.) (p. 24).

The empiricism Brandom finds mostly problematic is the one according to which mental episodes and experiences are the way they are before and without conceptual resources and abilities. So, in a sense, mentality becomes like what we attribute to non-conceptual or non-linguistic animals. And concepts are explained in terms of such experiences and abilities.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Classical empiricist philosophy of mind takes immediate perceptual experiences as the paradigm of awareness or consciousness. Classical empiricist epistemology takes as its paradigm of empirical knowledge those same experiences, to which it traces the warrant for and authority of all the rest. As the tradition has developed, it has become clearer that both rest on a more or less explicit semantic picture, according to which the content of experience, awareness, and knowledge is to be understood in the first instance in *representational* terms: as a matter of what is (or purports to be) represented by some representing states or episodes (pp. 24-25).
- Empiricism explains perceptual experiences in terms of direct perceptual awareness. Such awareness states become authoritative in epistemology for all the other kinds of epistemic states. Especially, what is represented in perceptual experience is the source of mental or epistemic states. Concepts, according to this view, are basically representations.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- In contemporary incarnations, this notion of representational content is most often unpacked in terms of what objects, events, or states of affairs actually causally elicited the representation, or which ones would reliably elicit representations of that kind under various conditions. This way of thinking about the content of empirical knowledge, to begin with perceptual experience, is then naturally seen to be complemented by a philosophy of language that focuses on reference, denotation, and extension, following the pattern of extensional model-theoretic semantics for the language of first-order predicate logic (p. 25).
- Contemporary empiricism understands representational contents in causal terms: what objects, events, or states cause a certain representation in our minds. Representation, furthermore, is typically understood in terms of some 'referential semantics': what terms denote, what they refer to, and so on.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Empiricism attempts to understand the content of concepts in terms of the origin of empirical beliefs in experience that we just find ourselves with, and the origin of practical intentions in desires or preferences that in the most basic case we just find ourselves with. The *rationalist* order of explanation understands concepts as norms determining what counts as a *reason* for particular beliefs, claims, and intentions, whose content is articulated by the application of those concepts and which such statuses can be reasons for (p. 25).
- Empiricism about concepts understands them in terms of their origin in experience. A different approach is the rationalist: this understands concepts as norms capable of establishing what counts as a reason for a claim, a belief, an intention, and so on.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Its impetus is a classically rationalist thought, which Sellars (in an autobiographical sketch) says motivated his philosophical development starting already in the 1930s: the thought that “what was needed was a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than supposed origin in experience, their primary feature” (p. 25).
- So, this contrast is drawn by Sellars for the first time. As we will see, Sellars is responsible for certain crucial arguments against empiricism.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The difference is most telling when we ask about the relation between awareness and concept use. The empiricist understands concept use as an achievement to be understood against the background of a prior sort of awareness, which justifies or makes appropriate the application of one concept rather than another. To play this latter role, the awareness in question must amount to something more than just the reliable differential responsiveness of merely irritable devices such as land mines and pressure plates that open doors in supermarkets. For the rationalist, on the contrary, awareness of the sort that has a potentially normative significance (the genus of which cognitive significance is a species) consists in the application of concepts. One must already have concepts to be aware in this sense (pp. 25-26).
- The contrast is emphasised by talking about the relation between awareness and concept use. For the empiricist, application of concepts is understood in terms of a prior awareness (that is supposed to be more than just reliable responding to stimuli). This is what Brandom calls **sentience** (preconceptual awareness). For the rationalist, the significance of any awareness consists in the application of concepts (to be aware—in the sense of sapience—is to apply a concept to something). Hence, for the rationalist, one has to already have concepts. This is what Brandom calls **sapience** (conceptual awareness).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Of course, this immediately raises the question how one could come to be a concept user unless one could already be aware of things. But to this a pragmatist such as Sellars can reply with a story about how initially merely differentially responsive creatures can be initiated into the implicitly normative social practice of giving and asking for reasons, so that some of their responses can come to count as or have the social significance of endorsements, of the making or staking of inferentially articulated *claims* (p. 26).
- So, there is a potential problem of circularity for the rationalist: if one already needs to have concepts to be aware of something, does this mean that babies are born equipped with ready-made concepts?
- There is a pragmatist rationalist response—the one endorsed by Brandom—according to which **our reliable dispositions to respond differentially to perceptual stimuli are enough to be ‘initiated’ in the game of giving and asking for reasons**. The many passages from the implicit to the explicit then make such responses more and more similar to inferentially articulated claims.
- Becoming thinkers/speakers/concept-users means becoming participants in discursive practices (especially GOGAR).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Besides rejecting empiricism, the rationalist pragmatism and expressivism presented here is opposed to *naturalism*, at least as that term is usually understood. For it emphasizes what distinguishes discursive creatures, as subject to distinctively conceptual norms, from their non-concept-using ancestors and cousins. Conceptual norms are brought into play by social linguistic practices of giving and asking for reasons, of assessing the propriety of claims and inferences. Products of *social* interactions (in a strict sense that distinguishes them merely from features of populations) are not studied by the *natural* sciences—though they are not for that reason to be treated as spooky and *supernatural* (p. 26).
- Brandom's normative inferentialism opposes naturalism (the idea that philosophical explanation and scientific explanation are continuous with each other). In fact, it emphasises the normative aspect of concept application (doing it right or wrong) in the perspective of social agents in social interactions. The fact that social sciences are not reducible to natural sciences does not entail that such anti-naturalism is mysterious or supernatural.
- The naturalist philosopher of the social sciences, Stephen Turner, defending a naturalistic view of social science explanation, has criticised Brandom's normativist views as slight attempts to reenchant the world.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- In conferring conceptual content on performances, states, and expressions suitably caught up in them, those practices institute a realm of *culture* that rests on, but goes beyond, the background of reliable differential responsive dispositions and their exercise characteristic of merely natural creatures. Once concept use is on the scene, a distinction opens up between things that have *natures* and things that have *histories*. Physical things such as electrons and aromatic compounds would be paradigmatic of the first class, while cultural formations such as English Romantic poetry and uses of the terms 'nature' and 'natural' would be paradigmatic of the second (p. 26).
- Brandom defends his non-naturalistic perspective by invoking a realm of **culture**, relevant for concept application, from a realm of **nature**. This is the premise for distinguishing between things that have a nature from those that have a **history**: electrons and gravity have no history; Romantic poetry does have it.
- This is a traditional Hegelian move (to have a history, you need freedom).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The relations between these categories is a complex affair. Physical, chemical, and biological *things* have natures rather than histories, but what about the disciplines that define and study them? Should physics itself be thought of as something that has a nature, or as something that has a history? Concluding the latter is giving a certain kind of pride of place to the historical, cultural, and conceptual. For it is in effect treating the *distinction* between things that have natures and things that have histories, between things studied by the *Naturwissenschaften* and things studied by the *Geisteswissenschaften*, as itself a cultural formation: the sort of thing that itself has a history rather than a nature (pp. 26-27).
- To defend the goodness of the Hegelian distinction between things that have a history and things that have a nature, Brandom exploits another argument: we also have **histories of the disciplines that study things that have a nature** (like the history of physics, the history of chemistry, and so on). As these are **cultural formations**, these belong to the realm of culture and seem to have a history rather than a nature (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word—and uses of words are a paradigm of the sort of thing that must be understood historically. In this sense even concepts such as *electron* and *aromatic compound* are the sort of thing that has a history. But they are not *purely* historical. For the proprieties governing the application of those concepts depend on what inferences involving them are *correct*, that is, on what *really* follows from what. And that depends on how things are with electrons and aromatic compounds, not just on what judgments and inferences we endorse (p. 27).
- The argument is further developed: to grasp a concept is to master the use of a word, the typical thing that has a history. Also, scientific concepts and their applications have histories as well (even though they are **not purely** historical). The inferences determining the **correctness** of their application depend on **how things are** (and so also on things that have a nature).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- In addition to rejecting empiricism and embracing nonnaturalism, the rationalistic semantic theory introduced here is unusual in not taking *representation* as its fundamental concept. A methodological commitment to beginning an account of concept use (and so, eventually, of conceptual content) with reasoning rather than representing does not require denying that there is an important representational dimension to concept use. Indeed, the unusual explanatory starting point has the advantage of bringing into relief certain features of conceptual representation that are hard to notice otherwise (p. 28).
- Not only does inferentialism contrast with empiricism and with naturalism, but it is also a version of 'explanatory' anti-representationalism: representationalism is the view that meaning is explained in terms of what a statement S represents, hence the concept of representation plays here an explanatory role.
- Inferentialism does not deny the importance of the representational dimension of what we say, but it seeks to explain it in terms of our inferential activities. Inference is the new explanatory concept that replaces representation.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- I call the view that inferential articulation is a *necessary* element in the demarcation of the conceptual '*weak* inferentialism'. The view that inferential articulation broadly construed is sufficient to account for conceptual content I call '*strong* inferentialism'. The view that inferential articulation narrowly construed is sufficient to account for conceptual content, I call '*hyperinferentialism*'. The difference between the broad and the narrow construal of inferential articulation is just whether or not *noninferential* circumstances of application (in the case of concepts such as *red* that have noninferential reporting uses) and consequences of application (in the case of concepts such as *ought* that have noninferential practical uses) are taken into account (p. 28).
- Taking inferences to be **necessary** for demarcating 'the conceptual' is a **weak** version of inferentialism.
- Taking inferences to be **sufficient** for explaining conceptual content (**broadly** construed, i.e., counting perceptual circumstances of application) is **strong** inferentialism.
- Taking inferences to be **sufficient** to explain conceptual content (**narrowly** construed, i.e., without counting noninferential circumstances of application) is **hyperinferentialism**.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Inferentialism ‘broadly’ construed (i.e. the basis of ‘strong’ inferentialism)**
- Wilfrid Sellars (1974): *Meaning and functional classification* (pp. 424-425).
- **(1) Language Entry Transitions:** The speaker responds to objects in perceptual situations, and in certain states of himself, with appropriate linguistic activity.
- **(2) Intra-linguistic Moves:** The speaker's linguistic conceptual episodes tend to occur in patterns of valid inference (theoretical and practical), and tend not to occur in patterns which violate logical principles.
- **(3) Language Departure Transitions:** The speaker responds to such linguistic conceptual episodes as 'I will now raise my hand' with an upward motion of the hand, etc.



# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The broad sense focuses attention on the inferential commitment that is implicitly undertaken in using any concept whatever, even those with noninferential circumstances or consequences of application: the commitment, namely, to the propriety of the inference from the circumstances to the consequences of application. The view endorsed here is strong inferentialism (pp. 28-29).
- Brandom officially endorses **strong inferentialism: inferential role is construed in a broad way**, involving **noninferential circumstances** of application (perceptual inputs) and **noninferential consequences** of application (actions, etc.). Furthermore, accepting strong inferentialism is a **commitment to the fact that the inference** from circumstances of application CR of a statement S to its consequences CS **is a good/correct one**.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Inferentialism of any sort is committed to a certain kind of semantic *holism*, as opposed to the *atomism* that often goes hand in hand with commitment to a representationalist order of semantic explanation. For if the conceptual content expressed by each sentence or word is understood as essentially consisting in its inferential relations (broadly construed) or articulated by its inferential relations (narrowly construed), then one must grasp many such contents in order to grasp any (p. 29).
- Inferentialism embraces semantic holism: to say that to understand/apply a concept one has to master a number of inferential transitions is exactly a way to say that to have a concept one has to have many. Inferentialism is structurally holistic.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Such holistic conceptual role approaches to semantics potentially face problems concerning both the *stability* of conceptual contents under change of belief and commitment to the propriety of various inferences, and the possibility of *communication* between individuals who endorse different claims and inferences. Such concerns are rendered much less urgent, however, if one thinks of concepts as *norms* determining the correctness of various moves (p. 29).
- Two problems: Can holistic contents (inferential roles) be **stable** under **conceptual change** and in **communication**?
- Such questions, according to Brandom, are less urgent if concepts are thought of as **norms** (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The norms I am binding myself to by using the term ‘molybdenum’ —what actually follows from or is incompatible with the applicability of the concept— need not change as my views about molybdenum and its inferential surround change. And you and I may be bound by just the same public linguistic and conceptual norms in the vicinity in spite of the fact that we are disposed to make different claims and inferential moves. It is up to me whether I play a token of the ‘molybdenum’ type in the game of giving and asking for reasons. But it is not then up to me what the significance of that move is. (And I do not take the case to be significantly different if I play such a token internally, in thought.) (p. 29).
- The norms governing the public use of a concept (molybdenum) can be stable even if we endorse slightly different inferences and claims. The same applies in the case of thought (out of the public sphere).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- As I have already remarked, inferentialism also carries with it a commitment to the conceptual primacy of the *propositional*. Thus inferentialist semantic explanations reverse the traditional order: beginning with proprieties of inference, they explain propositional content, and in terms of both go on to explain the conceptual content expressed by subsentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates (pp. 29-30).
- Inferentialism is, once again, characterised by a commitment to the **primacy of the propositional**: full sentences are the **units of semantic explanation** (and not subsentential expressions alone, like names or predicates).
- This ‘propositionalism’ aligns well with semantic holism; on the contrary, the ‘primacy of the subsentential’ aligns well with semantic atomism.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The rationalist form of expressivism pursued here also involves rejecting conventional wisdom about the nature and philosophical significance of *logic*. Logic is not properly understood as the study of a distinctive kind of *formal* inference. It is rather the study of the inferential roles of vocabulary playing a distinctive *expressive* role: codifying in explicit form the inferences that are implicit in the use of ordinary, nonlogical vocabulary. [...](p. 30).
- Inferentialism entails original commitments on the role of logic. Logic does not (or not only) deal with formal inference. Logical vocabulary plays an expressive role: making explicit the inferences implicit in the use of ordinary concepts.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The task of logic is in the first instance to help us *say* something about the conceptual contents expressed by the use of nonlogical vocabulary, not to *prove* something about the conceptual contents expressed by the use of logical vocabulary. On this picture, *formal* proprieties of inference essentially involving logical vocabulary derive from and must be explained in terms of *material* proprieties of inference essentially involving nonlogical vocabulary rather than the other way around (p. 30).
- Expression, for logical expressivism, matters more than proof. Logical expressivism is also capable of explaining formal proprieties of inferences and formal proofs as derived from the role logic plays in making explicit features of non-logical (material) concepts. (Traditional views starting from formal logic do not have the inverse capability). (See below for ‘material inferences’ as opposed to ‘formal’ ones).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Logic is accordingly not a canon or standard of right reasoning. It can help us make explicit (and hence available for criticism and transformation) the inferential commitments that govern the use of all our vocabulary, and hence articulate the contents of all our concepts (p. 30).
- So, according to logical expressivism, logic is not a canon or a standard: its role is entirely expressive.
- Today, logic is not a canon or a standard for many reasons: especially **logical pluralism**, the fact that we have many logics, and that we do not have a 'true' logic, involves rejecting the idea that logic is a standard. **We have many standards, as many logics.**

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Finally, the views presented here turn on their head prevailing humane ideas about practical reasoning. According to this common approach—which is very much in evidence in Davidson’s writings on action, and of rational-choice theorists and others who approach the norms of rationality through decision theory or game theory—the norms governing practical reasoning and defining rational action are essentially *instrumental* norms, which derive their authority from intrinsically motivating preferences or desires. Those states are the empiricist analogs, on the side of agency, to the preconceptual episodes of awareness to which epistemic authority is traced on the side of cognition (pp. 30-31).
- Inferentialism entails the rejection of **Humean views on practical reasoning** (reasoning involving ‘action’ and ‘deliberation’). These views are typically **instrumentalist** about the norms of rationality (means-ends rationality). (Inferentialism opposes these instrumentalist views by endorsing an expressive view on rationality.)

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Chapter 2 offers an account in which statements about what an agent prefers or desires are interpreted instead as codifying commitment to certain specific patterns of practical reasoning, selected from among a wide variety of patterns that are codified by the use of other normative vocabulary. The concepts of desire and preference are accordingly demoted from their position of privilege, and take their place as having a derivative and provincial sort of normative authority. Endorsement and commitment are at the center of rational agency—as of rationality in general—and inclination enters only insofar as rational agents must bring inclination in the train of rational propriety, not the other way around (p. 31).
- According to inferentialism, preferences and desires can be expressed via patterns of practical reasoning. Endorsement and commitment become the central notions in this field (while preferences and desires become decisively less important). Desires and preferences lose strength in the dynamics of rational practices.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- So I am putting forward a view that is opposed to many (if not most) of the large theoretical, explanatory, and strategic commitments that have shaped and motivated Anglo-American philosophy in the twentieth century: empiricism, naturalism, representationalism, semantic atomism, formalism about logic, and instrumentalism about the norms of practical rationality. In spite of my disagreements with central elements of the worldview that has animated analytic philosophy, I take my expository and argumentative structure and the criteria of adequacy for having made a claim with a clear content, argued for it, and responsibly followed out its consequences resolutely from the Anglo-American tradition (p. 31).
- So, at the end, inferentialism contrasts with empiricism, naturalism, representationalism, semantic atomism, formalism about logic, and instrumentalism about practical reasons. Notwithstanding such disagreements, inferentialism is developed according to the style, methods, criteria of adequacy, and theoretical desiderata of analytic philosophy.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- I do not think those standards need be taken to entail or be warranted only by this one constellation of ideas. Indeed, although the enterprise I am engaged in here is not happily identified with *analysis of meanings* in a traditional sense, it is properly thought of as pursuing a recognizable successor project. For what I am trying to do is in a clear and specific inferential sense make *explicit* what is *implicit* in various philosophically important concepts. Among the examples treated in the following pages are concepts such as *conceptual content*, *logic*, *ought*, *reliable*, *singular term*, what is expressed by the 'of' or 'about' of intentional directedness, and *objectivity* (pp. 31-32).
- We can save analytic criteria of adequacies from those ideas popular in analytic philosophy (representationalism, naturalism, etc.). Even though inferentialism does not reduce to proper conceptual analysis, it is clearly a connected project. So, inferentialism takes the task of making explicit many philosophically charged concepts (meaning, content, etc.) and vocabularies (normative, modal, logical, etc.).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Sellars once said that the aim of his work as a whole was to begin moving analytic philosophy from its *humean* phase into a *kantian* one. The full implications of this remark include reverberations contributed by many of the chambers and corridors of the Kantian edifice. But at its heart, I think, is the conviction that the distinctive nature, contribution, and significance of the *conceptual* articulation of thought and action have been systematically slighted by empiricism in all its forms (p. 32).
- Sellars's program can be summarised by the idea of moving analytic philosophy from its Humean (i.e., empiricist) phase to a Kantian (i.e., rationalist) one. So, the idea is putting concepts, reasons, and norms at the centre of the program. It is not by chance that Sellars's major work (*Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*) is a very influential attack on the foundations of empiricist epistemologies and philosophies of mind.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Although the addition of logic to the mix in the twentieth century was a promising development, there was from Sellars's point of view a failure to rethink from the beginning the constraints and criteria of adequacy of the enterprise in the light of the expressive power the new formal idioms put at our disposal. The result was the pursuit of traditional empiricist visions by other means—ones that could not in principle do justice in the end to the normativity of concept use that finds its expression variously in the distinction between laws of nature codifying inferential relations among facts, on the one hand, and mere regularities regarding them, on the other, and in the difference between acting for a reason and merely moving when prompted (p. 32).
- Even the progresses provided by the new logic were promising indeed, Sellars was unimpressed by their use in the service of old empiricist ideas. This empiricist perspective was not fit to explain the normativity of concept use, and in order to explain the difference between acting for a reason and merely reacting to an external stimulus.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The more promising alternative is to focus to begin with on the conceptual articulation of perceptually acquired and practically pursued commitments and entitlements rather than on the experiences and inclinations with which we simply find ourselves. That Kantian strategy is a better one for the same sort of reasons that lead us to expect that one will learn more about a building by studying blueprints than by studying bricks (p. 32).
- The inferentialist alternative focuses more on the conceptual articulation of our commitments and entitlements than on the experiences (which are instead fundamental for empiricists and phenomenologists). To use an image, this Kantian project is like privileging the study of blueprints (holistic and normative) over the study of bricks (atomistic and empirical).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- My teacher Richard Rorty has described the enterprise to which this volume is a contribution as an extension of Sellars's: to make possible a further transition from a *kantian* to a *hegelian* approach to thought and action. The justice of this characterization can be understood in terms of the strategic options already rehearsed here (pp. 32-33).
- This book, in an important sense, can be read as promoting a further transition (than Sellars's): moving analytic philosophy from a Kantian trajectory to a Hegelian one. This can be explained by summarising many things already introduced (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- First, [...] the divide between *nature* and *culture*. [...] we can identify the realm of the cultural with activities that either consist in the application of concepts in judgment and action [...]. The *Geisteswissenschaften* have as their proper aim the study of concept use and things made possible by it—activities of which only concept users are capable. One of my principal goals is to present and explore the consequences of a particular sort of principle of demarcation for the realm of culture, so understood. Although of course cultural activities arise within the framework of a natural world, I am most concerned with what is made possible by the emergence of the peculiar constellation of conceptually articulated compartments that Hegel called “Geist.” Cultural products and activities become explicit as such only by the use of normative vocabulary that is in principle not reducible to the vocabulary of the natural sciences (though of course the same phenomena under other descriptions are available in that vocabulary). Indeed, the deployment of the vocabulary of the natural sciences [...] is itself a cultural phenomenon, something that becomes intelligible only within the conceptual horizon provided by the *Geisteswissenschaften*. The study of nature itself has a history, and its own nature, if any, must be approached through the study of that history. This is a picture and an aspiration that we owe to Hegel (p. 33).
- Brandom widens the former anti-naturalistic argument based on the contrasts nature/culture and nature/history. Cultural activities differ from natural ones because they are characterized by freedom. Such freedom is fully captured by the use of normative vocabulary. The vocabularies of the natural sciences are not fit for this task, and they, by having themselves a history, in an important sense belong more to culture than to nature (since this nature is revealed by the history).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- A second dimension [...] is [...] *pragmatism* about conceptual norms. One of Kant's great insights is that judgments and actions are to be distinguished from the responses of merely natural creatures by their distinctive *normative* status, as things we are in a distinctive sense *responsible* for. He understood concepts as the norms that determine just what we have made ourselves responsible for, what we have committed ourselves to and what would entitle us to it, by particular acts of judging and acting. Kant, however, punted many hard questions about the nature and origins of this normativity, of the bindingness of *concepts*, out of the familiar phenomenal realm of experience into the noumenal realm. Hegel brought these issues back to earth by understanding *normative* statuses as *social* statuses—by developing a view according to which (as my colleague John Haugeland put the point in another context) *all transcendental constitution is social institution*. The background against which the conceptual activity of making things explicit is intelligible is taken to be implicitly normative essentially *social* practice (pp. 33-34).
- The normativity of judgment and action, via the normativity of concept and concept application is the core of pragmatism about norms. These normative ideas go back to Kant, though he thought about them as belonging to a spooky noumenal dimension of reality. Hegel is the one who provided a Kantian normativity explained in social and historical terms. Reasons and norms constitutively belong to social practices.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Pragmatism about the norms implicit in cognitive activity came down to us in the first half of the twentieth century from three independent directions: from the classical American pragmatists, culminating in Dewey; from the Heidegger of *Being and Time*; and from the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In trying to work out how the insights of these traditions (partly common, partly complementary) could be applied to make progress within contemporary philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, however, I found myself driven back to Hegel's original version. For unlike all three of these more recent sorts of social practice theory, Hegel's is a *rationalist* pragmatism. By contrast to their conceptual assimilationism, he gives pride of place to *reasoning* in understanding what it is to say or do something (p. 34).
- Such pragmatism here encompasses, first of all, three directions: 1) Classical pragmatists; 2) the first Heidegger; 3) the late Wittgenstein. But Hegel here counts as more central because of his **rationalist pragmatism**: practices are full of embedded rationality; that is, reasoning is essential to them.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- [...]Dewey and James, the early Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein each resisted, in his own way, the representational semantic paradigm. But none of them evidently provides an alternative paradigm that is structurally rich enough and definite enough either to do real semantic work with [...] or to provide an account of the distinctive function of logical vocabulary. Hegel's rationalistic, inferentialist version of the Romantic expressivist tradition he inherited, it seemed to me, holds out the promise of just such an alternative paradigm. Hegel's version of expressivism is further attractive in that it is not only pragmatic and inferentialist about the conceptual but also relational, in the sense that the implicit and the explicit are each at least in part constituted by their expressive relation to each other. The inferentialist understanding of explicitness is just what is needed to make an expressive alternative to representationalism viable. As I put the point above, rationalist expressivism understands the explicit—the thinkable, the sayable, the form something must be in to count as having been expressed—in terms of its role in inference. I take Hegel to have introduced this idea, although he takes the minimal unit of conceptual content to be the whole holistic system of inferentially interrelated judgeables, and so is not a propositionalist (pp. 34-35).
- Old and new pragmatists typically resist representationalism. But they are **all silent** on what is the alternative. Hegel is in a sense a **precursor** of the inferentialist/expressivist alternative to representationalism. Hegel's dialectics is in a sense a form of **expression as conceptual making explicit**. So, in a sense, Hegel introduced these ideas (even though he was not a propositionalist).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- Finally, this rationalist expressivist pragmatism forges a link between *logic* and *self-consciousness*, in the sense of making explicit the implicit background against which alone anything can be made explicit, that is recognizably Hegelian. For it offers an account of a kind of *consciousness*, awareness in the sense of sapience, which underwrites a corresponding account of a kind of self-consciousness: *semantic* or *conceptual* self-consciousness. This notion of what is made explicit by the characteristic use of specifically *logical* vocabulary then makes possible a new appreciation of the sort of consciousness with which the story begins (p. 35).
- The inferentialist connection between logic and self-consciousness is Hegelian as well. The expressive role of logical vocabulary permits us to clarify the contents of the concepts we employ: this is semantic or conceptual self-consciousness.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- I think this is a constellation of ideas that has the prospect of enlarging the frontiers of contemporary analytic philosophy. My hope is that by slighting the similarities to animals which preoccupied Locke and Hume and highlighting the possibilities opened up by engaging in social practices of giving and asking for reasons, we will get closer to an account of being human that does justice to the kinds of consciousness and self-consciousness distinctive of us as cultural, and not merely *natural*, creatures (p. 35).
- This set of ideas is presented as widening the program of current analytic philosophy. The ambition is to explain our social cultural practices by focusing on concept application and on its peculiar normativity (and this is again introduced with a nonnaturalist emphasis).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- III. Structure of the Book [this only concerns chapter 1]
- [...] Chapter 1, “Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism,” introduces and motivates two basic ideas. The first is that to have specifically *conceptual* content is to play a certain kind of role in *reasoning*. The most basic sort of conceptual content is *propositional* content: the sort of content expressed by declarative sentences (and the ‘that’ clauses or content-specifying sentential complements of propositional attitude ascriptions). Because contents of this sort are the right shape to be sayable, thinkable, and believable, they can be understood as making something *explicit*. The claim is that to have or express a content of this kind just is to be able to play the role both of premise and of conclusion in inferences. (pp. 36-37).
- The first chapter is devoted to fully introducing the idea of conceptual content in terms of inferential role. A first layer of the account is devoted to propositional contents expressed by declarative sentences. These are easily explained in inferentialist terms. To have content is to be capable of playing the role of premise or of conclusion in inference.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Introduction
- The second idea is that the expressive role characteristic of logical vocabulary as such is to make inferential relations explicit. Thus *conditionals* are treated as paradigms of logical locutions. This line of thought makes sense only if one thinks of proprieties of inference as extending beyond those underwritten by logical form. That is, one must acknowledge that besides inferences that are *formally* good in the sense of being *logically* valid, there are inferences that are *materially* good in the sense of articulating the contents of the *nonlogical* concepts applied in their premises and conclusions (p. 37).
- The second idea will be logical expressivism. Conditionals (if...then...) are the paradigms of logical locutions, as they are perfect to make the inferences explicit as good inferences. Clarifying what follows from what. The relevant inferences here are not formal inferences—valid in terms of logical form—but materially good ones, that is, those good on the basis of the nonlogical concepts involved.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- I. Introduction
- I want to introduce here a way of thinking about semantics that is different from more familiar ones, and on that basis also a new way of thinking about logic. In case that seems insufficiently ambitious, I will introduce these ideas by sketching a different way of thinking about some important episodes in the history of philosophy in the era that stretches from Descartes to Kant. I then explain and motivate the two ideas indicated in the title by putting together considerations drawn from three different thinkers, Frege, Dummett, and Sellars, or, as I think of them, the sage of Jena, the sage of Oxford, and the sage of Pittsburgh. In each case I pick up strands other than those usually emphasized when we read these figures (p. 45).
- The first basic ideas of this chapter start in modern philosophy. Other ideas are more recent and are based on the work of Gottlob Frege, Michael Dummett, and Wilfrid Sellars.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- II. Representationalism and Inferentialism
- Pre-Kantian empiricists and rationalists alike were notoriously disposed to run together causal and conceptual issues, largely through insufficient appreciation of the normative character of the “order and connection of ideas” (Spinoza) that matters for concepts. But there is another, perhaps less appreciated, contrast in play during this period, besides that of the causal and the conceptual, the origin and the justification of our ideas. Enlightenment epistemology was always the home for two somewhat uneasily coexisting conceptions of the conceptual. The fundamental concept of the dominant and characteristic understanding of cognitive contentfulness in the period initiated by Descartes is of course *representation*. There is, however, a minority semantic tradition that takes *inference* rather than representation as its master concept (pp. 45-46).
- During the Enlightenment, two main conceptions of the conceptual were coexisting. A majority approach understood the conceptual in terms of representation (and this is the starting insight of the representationalist program); a minority approach understood the conceptual in terms of inference (and this is the early version of the inferentialist program).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- II. Representationalism and Inferentialism
- Rationalists such as Spinoza and Leibniz accepted the central role of the concept of representation in explaining human cognitive activity. But they were not prepared to accept Descartes's strategy of treating the possession of representational content as an unexplained explainer—just dividing the world into what is by nature a representing and what by nature can only be represented. Each of them developed instead an account of what it is for one thing to represent another, in terms of the inferential significance of the representing (p. 46).
- Representation was important for Spinoza and Leibniz, but they were not convinced to use 'representation' as an 'unexplained explainer', that is as an explanatory primitive concept (unlike Descartes). Spinoza and Leibniz thought about representing as something that must have an inferential significance. That is, representations can be made explicit in terms of certain inferential transitions (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- II. Representationalism and Inferentialism
- They were explicitly concerned, as Descartes was not, to be able to explain what it is for something to be understood, taken, treated, or employed *as* a representing *by* the subject: what it is for it to be a representing *to* or *for* that subject (to be “*tanquam rem*,” as if of things, as Descartes puts it). Their idea was that the way in which representings point beyond themselves to something represented is to be understood in terms of *inferential* relations among representings. States and acts acquire content by being caught up in inferences, as premises and conclusions (p. 46).
- What does it mean ‘to represent’? According to Spinoza and Leibniz it is something the subject does (hence, representation is mostly an activity – we should care about distinguishing ‘the activity’ from ‘the thing’). Representings find their full rational exploitation when they are embedded in inferential/rational relations with other representings. So their content is not just exhausted by what they directly represent, but also by their inferential role.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- II. Representationalism and Inferentialism
- Thus a big divide within Enlightenment epistemology concerns the relative explanatory priority accorded to the concepts of representation and inference. The British empiricists were more puzzled than Descartes about representational purport: the property of so much as seeming to be *about* something. But they were clear in seeking to derive inferential relations from the contents of representations rather than the other way around (p. 46).
- According to this account, during the Enlightenment, there was a main divide between epistemologists: those willing to explain knowledge (and contentful states) in terms of 'representations' and those willing to explain such states in terms of inference. British empiricists not only were on the representationalist side but also wanted to explain inferential transitions in terms of representations.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- II. Representationalism and Inferentialism
- The post-Cartesian rationalists, the claim goes, give rise to a tradition based on a complementary semantically reductive order of explanation. [...]. These *inferentialists* seek to define representational properties in terms of inferential ones, which must accordingly be capable of being understood antecedently. They start with a notion of content as determining what is a *reason* for what, and understand truth and representation as features of ideas that are not only manifested in but actually *consist* in their role in reasoning. I actually think that the division of pre-Kantian philosophers into representationalists and inferentialists cuts according to deeper principles of their thought than does the nearly coextensional division of them into empiricists and rationalists, though it goes far beyond my brief to argue for that thesis here (p. 47).
- On the contrary, rationalists overturn the explanatory priority: inference over representation. They, like Spinoza, start with an account of what is a reason for what (that is, inference) as the basis to understand the contents of their 'ideas' by looking at their role in reasoning. This could serve as the foundation for exploring new, pertinent classifications within modern philosophy.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- III. Inferentialism and Noninferential Reports
- The concepts for which inferential notions of content are least obviously appropriate are those associated with observable properties, such as colors. For the characteristic use of such concepts is precisely in making *noninferential* reports, such as “This ball is red.” One of the most important lessons we can learn from Sellars’s masterwork, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (as from the “Sense Certainty” section of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*), is the inferentialist one that even such noninferential reports must be inferentially articulated (p. 47).
- The intuitions that seem to be more obviously representational (rather than inferential) are non-inferential (that is, directly perceptual) reports, like ‘this patch is red’. But Hegel’s warnings against immediate sense perceptions and Sellars’s criticism of the myth of the given (the idea that certain perceptual episodes are contentful alone, without any other presuppositions) propose a reading according to which also such reports are inferentially articulated (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- III. Inferentialism and Noninferential Reports
- Without that requirement, we cannot tell the difference between noninferential reporters and automatic machinery such as thermostats and photocells, which also have reliable dispositions to respond differentially to stimuli. What is the important difference between a thermostat that turns the furnace on when the temperature drops to sixty degrees, or a parrot trained to say “That’s red” in the presence of red things, on the one hand, and a genuine noninferential reporter of those circumstances, on the other? (pp. 47-48).
- Without attributing an inferential role to such noninferential reports, we could not distinguish between photocells and thermostats and us: we, like such machines, are capable perceptors who can respond in a reliable way to environmental stimuli. In what sense are we different from them?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- III. Inferentialism and Noninferential Reports
- Each classifies low-level as being of a general kind, the kind, namely, that elicits a repeatable response of a certain sort. In the same sense, of course, a chunk of iron classifies its environment as being of one of two kinds, depending on whether it responds by rusting or not. It is easy, but uninformative, to say that what distinguishes reporters from reliable responders is awareness. In this use the term is tied to the notion of understanding: the thermostat and the parrot do not understand their responses, those responses mean nothing to them, though they can mean something to us. We can add that the distinction wanted is that between merely responsive classification and specifically *conceptual* classification. The reporter must, as the parrot and thermostat do not, have the *concept* of temperature or cold. It is classifying under such a concept, something the reporter understands or grasps the meaning of, that makes the relevant difference (p. 48).
- Such perceptual responses work by classifying. But such low-level perceptions determine **uninformative classifications**. Thermostats and parrots **do not understand** what they say/display: they **do not know what follows from their reports**. But our responses are instead higher-level: they are informative because **our classifications are conceptual and informative** (we understand what we say and know what follows from our reports). We do not just respond to stimuli; we put them in the 'space of implications'.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- III. Inferentialism and Noninferential Reports
- It is at this point that Sellars introduces his central thought: that for a response to have *conceptual* content is just for it to play a role in the *inferential* game of making claims and giving and asking for reasons. To grasp or understand such a concept is to have practical mastery over the inferences it is involved in—to know, in the practical sense of being able to distinguish (a kind of know-*how*), what follows from the applicability of a concept, and what it follows from. The parrot does not treat “That’s red” as incompatible with “That’s green,” nor as following from “That’s scarlet” and entailing “That’s colored.” Insofar as the repeatable response is not, for the parrot, caught up in practical proprieties of inference and justification, and so of the making of further judgments, it is not a *conceptual* or a *cognitive* matter at all (p. 48).
- The parrot does not know what ‘that’s red’ means, because **it does not have mastery of the inferences that provide such understanding**. It does not know that if something is red, then it is coloured; it does not know that it is incompatible with ‘that’s transparent,’ and so forth. Automatic repeatable responses like those of parrots and machines are not informative because they **do not belong to the cognitive and conceptual network of inferential transitions** that are typical of ‘our’ (sapient) responses.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- III. Inferentialism and Noninferential Reports
- It follows immediately from such an inferential demarcation of the conceptual that in order to master *any* concepts, one must master *many* concepts. For grasp of one concept consists in mastery of at least some of its inferential relations to other concepts. Cognitively, grasp of just one concept is the sound of one hand clapping. Another consequence is that to be able to apply one concept *noninferentially*, one must be able to use others *inferentially*. For unless applying it can serve at least as a premise from which to draw inferential consequences, it is not functioning as a concept at all (p. 49).
- So, in order to master the concept 'red' a subject must master many other concepts ('colored', 'not transparent', 'not black', etc.). We know how to use a concept when we grasp at least some of these inferential relations among concepts. A relevant consequence of this is that also to apply concepts *noninferentially*, one must know/use/grasp other concepts *inferentially*. If something cannot work as a premise for some consequence, then it does not work as a concept.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- III. Inferentialism and Noninferential Reports
- So the idea that there could be an autonomous language game, one that could be played though one played no other, consisting entirely of noninferential reports (in the case Sellars is most concerned with in “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” even of the current contents of one’s own mind) is a radical mistake. (Of course this is compatible with there being languages without theoretical concepts, that is, concepts whose *only* use is inferential. The requirement is that for *any* concepts to have reporting uses, some concepts must have *nonreporting* uses.) (p. 49).
- So it is implausible that one can have a capacity of uttering noninferential reports without presupposing any other capacities and resources; it is a myth (the **myth of the given**). To have the ability to use concepts when one utters and uses them in noninferential reports, one must already have the ability to use such concepts in nonreporting cases.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
  
- My purpose at the moment, however, is to pursue not the *consequences* of the inferential understanding of conceptual contents that Sellars recommends, but its *antecedents*. The predecessor it is most interesting to consider is the young Frege. Frege may seem an unlikely heir to this inferentialist tradition (p. 49).
  
- Before going on to explore the implications of the inferentialist understanding of concepts, it is necessary to go back to a relevant (and surprising, see below) antecedent: the young Frege with his *Ideography*.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
  
- After all, he is usually thought of as the father of the contemporary way of working out the *representationalist* order of explanation, which starts with an independent notion of relations of reference or denotation obtaining between mental or linguistic items and objects and sets of objects in the largely nonmental, nonlinguistic environment, and determines from these, in the familiar fashion, first truth conditions for the sentential representings built out of the subsentential ones, and then, from these, a notion of goodness of inference understood in terms of set-theoretic inclusions among the associated sets of truth conditions (pp. 49-50).
  
- Frege is typically understood as the starting point of semantic representationalism: representational relations of reference/denotation between propositions and states of affairs expressed in terms of truth conditions; such treatment starts with subsentential expressions like names and predicates and then is extended to sentences via compositionality (the meaning of a compound expression is a function of the meanings of the embedded subsentential expressions plus rules of syntactic formation). Inference is then explained as a set-theoretical operation.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
- But insofar as it is appropriate to read this twentieth-century story back into Frege at all, and I am not sure that it is, it would be possible only beginning with the Frege of the 1890s. He starts his semantic investigations not with the idea of reference but with that of inference. His seminal first work, the *Begriffsschrift* of 1879, takes as its aim the explication of “conceptual content” (*begriffliche Inhalt*) [...] (p. 50).
- Brandom introduces his reading of the young Frege. He did not start with ‘reference’ as the key concept for the conceptual, but with inference: his idea of conceptual content as ‘inferential potential’. By inferential potential we get inferential roles in Frege’s terminology.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
- *There are two ways in which the content of two judgments may differ; it may, or it may not, be the case that all inferences that can be drawn from the first judgment when combined with certain other ones can always also be drawn from the second when combined with the same other judgments. The two propositions 'the Greeks defeated the Persians at Plataea' and 'the Persians were defeated by the Greeks at Plataea' differ in the former way; even if a slight difference of sense is discernible, the agreement in sense is preponderant. Now I call that part of the content that is the same in both the conceptual content. Only this has significance for our symbolic language [Begriffsschrift] . . . In my formalized language [BGS] . . . only that part of judgments which affects the possible inferences is taken into consideration. Whatever is needed for a correct [richtig, usually misleadingly translated as "valid"] inference is fully expressed; what is not needed is . . . Not (Frege 1879, section 3.).*
- In this quotation from Frege, we can see how he used the idea of the 'inferential potential' as demarcating the conceptual content: a conceptual content is identified by its inferential potential (what is common between the proposition 'the Greeks defeated the Persians at Plataea' and the proposition 'the Persians were defeated by the Greeks at Plataea'). Even though they are slightly different in sense, they serve the same inferential functions: they follow from the same premises/circumstances; they have the same consequences.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
- Two claims have the same conceptual content if and only if they have the same inferential role: a good inference is never turned into a bad one by substituting one for the other. This way of specifying the explanatory target to which semantic theories, including referential ones, are directed is picked up by Frege's student Carnap, who in *The Logical Syntax of Language* defines the content of a sentence as the class of nonvalid sentences which are its consequences (that is, can be inferred from it). Sellars in turn picks up the idea from him, as his references to this definition indicate. By contrast, the tradition Frege initiated in the 1890s makes truth, rather than inference, primary in the order of explanation (pp. 50-51).
- The former propositions can be substituted with each other in inference without making the inference bad. This idea inspired Carnap (who was one of Frege's students), and Sellars inherited this view from him. The later Frege began the new story, which made 'truth' rather than 'inference' the explanatory key.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
  
- Dummett says of this shift:
- In this respect (and [Dummett implausibly but endearingly hastens to add] in this respect alone) Frege's new approach to logic was retrograde. He characterized logic by saying that, while all sciences have truth as their goal, in logic truth is not merely the goal, but the object of study. The traditional answer to the question what is the subject-matter of logic is, however, that it is, not truth, but inference, or, more properly, the relation of logical consequence. This was the received opinion all through the doldrums of logic, until the subject was revitalized by Frege; and it is, surely, the correct view (Michael Dummett, *Frege's Philosophy of Language*, p. 432).
  
- As Dummett remarks, 'inference' is the proper topic of logic, not 'truth'. From this point of view, *this aspect* of the late Frege represented a retrograde move.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
  
- And again:
- It remains that the representation of logic as concerned with a characteristic of sentences, truth, rather than of transitions from sentences to sentences, had highly deleterious effects both in logic and in philosophy. In philosophy it led to a concentration on logical truth and its generalization, analytic truth, as the problematic notions, rather than on the notion of a statement's being a deductive consequence of other statements, and hence to solutions involving a distinction between two supposedly utterly different kinds of truth, analytic truth and contingent truth, which would have appeared preposterous and irrelevant if the central problem had from the start been taken to be that of the character of the relation of deductive consequence (Michael Dummett, *Frege's Philosophy of Language*, p. 433).
  
- Dummett goes on explaining why the shift from 'inference' to 'truth' was deleterious. It was the starting point of a troublesome issue like 'analytic truths'. So, Carnap's views on 'logical truth' and 'analytical truth', and subsequent criticism from Quine, all were consequences of this bad shift from Frege.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
- The important thing to realize is that the young Frege has not yet made this false step. Two further points to keep in mind regarding this passage are, first, shifting from concern with inference to concern with truth is one move, understanding truth in terms of prior primitive reference relations is another. Since the mature Frege treats truth as indefinable and primitive, the extraction of a representationalist commitment even from the texts of the 1890s requires further showing [...](pp. 51-52).
- The young inferentialist Frege was still safe from this issue. Two further remarks: first, as Frege was a primitivist about truth (truth is primitive and indefinable), then also the late representationalist story is questionable and needs further proof.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IV. Frege on *Begriffliche Inhalt*
- Second, understanding the topic of logic in terms of inference is not the same as seeing it in terms of logical inference, or of “deductive consequence,” as Dummett puts it (I talk about this below under the heading of “formalism” about inference). The view propounded and attributed to Frege below is different from, and from the contemporary vantage point more surprising than, the one Dummett endorses here (p. 52).
- Saying that inference is the explanatory key does not mean to interpret it in terms of ‘logical’ inference or ‘deductive’ inference: we shall see that Frege had in mind something to what Sellars and Brandom call ‘material’ inference (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
- The kind of inference whose correctnesses determine the conceptual contents of its premises and conclusions may be called, following Sellars, *material* inferences. As examples, consider the inference from “Pittsburgh is to the west of Princeton” to “Princeton is to the east of Pittsburgh,” and that from “Lightning is seen now” to “Thunder will be heard soon.” It is the contents of the concepts *west* and *east* that make the first a good inference, and the contents of the concepts *lightning* and *thunder*, as well as the temporal concepts, that make the second appropriate. Endorsing these inferences is part of grasping or mastering those concepts, quite apart from any specifically *logical* competence (p. 52).
- Brandom introduces the first examples of material inferences. These are good in terms of the contents of the nonlogical concepts involved (‘east,’ ‘west;’ ‘lightning,’ ‘thunder’).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
- Often, however, *inferential* articulation is identified with logical articulation. Material inferences are accordingly treated as a derivative category. The idea is that being rational—being subject to the normative force of the better reason, which so puzzled and fascinated the Greeks—can be understood as a purely logical capacity. In part this tendency was encouraged by merely verbally sloppy formulations of the crucial difference between the inferential force of reasons and the physically efficacious force of causes, which render it as the difference between ‘logical’ and ‘natural’ compulsion (pp. 52-53).
- Such inferences, like material ones (examples above), are usually treated as derivative (from the formalist tradition). The formalist view claims to treat the force of reasons as an entirely logical capacity (and so logical or deductive inferences would be the standard of logicity).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
  
- Mistakes ensue, however, if the concept *logical* is employed with these circumstances of application conjoined with consequences of application that restrict the notion of logical force of reasons to formally valid inferences. The substantial commitment that is fundamental to this sort of approach is what Sellars calls “the received dogma . . . that the inference which finds its expression in ‘It is raining, therefore the streets will be wet’ is an enthymeme” (p. 53).
  
- According to the formalist view, material inferences are, in a sense, defective: they are enthymemes, inferences that are not valid because they lack an explicit, **suppressed premise**. For example, “If it is raining, then the streets will be wet.” In order to follow in a valid way, such conclusion needs the other premise. This, according to Sellars and Brandom is a kind of formalist dogma (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
- According to this line of thought, wherever an inference is endorsed, it is because of belief in a conditional. Thus the instanced inference is understood as implicitly involving the conditional “If it is raining, then the streets will be wet.” With that “suppressed” premise supplied, the inference is an instance of the formally valid scheme of conditional detachment. The “dogma” expresses a commitment to an order of explanation that treats all inferences as good or bad solely in virtue of their form, with the contents of the claims they involve mattering only for the truth of the (implicit) premises. According to this way of setting things out, there is no such thing as material inference (p. 53).
- According to the formalist dogma, all inferences are valid (or not) just in virtue of their form (that is, according to logical principles) and not in virtue of the contents of the claims that work as premises or conclusions. This view pushes one to deny the very existence of material inferences.
- Conditional detachment here is another way of saying ‘modus ponens’ reasoning scheme: P1) A, P2)  $A \rightarrow B$ ; C) B. (The conditional P2 is one of the premises together with its antecedent P1).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
- This view, which understands “good inference” to mean “formally valid inference,” postulating implicit premises as needed, might be called a formalist approach to inference. It trades primitive goodnesses of inference for the truth of conditionals. Doing so is taking the retrograde step that Dummett complains about. [...]The grasp of logic that is attributed must be an implicit grasp, since it need be manifested only in distinguishing material inferences as good and bad, not in any further capacity to manipulate logical vocabulary or endorse tautologies involving them. But what then is the explanatory payoff from attributing such an implicit logical ability rather than just the capacity to assess proprieties of material inference? (p. 53).
- The formalist view prefers the truth of a conditional (in assessing the validity of an inference) to some kind of primitive/implicit goodness of an inference (like in material inferences). The formalist view has the problem of needing logical capacities in order to assess reasoning: this is probably too much. Reasoners distinguishing good material inferences from bad ones would be intuitively more in line with actual practice.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
  
- The approach Sellars endorses is best understood by reference to the full list of alternatives he considers:
- We have been led to distinguish the following six conceptions of the status of material rules of inference:
  - (1) Material rules are as essential to meaning (and hence to language and thought) as formal rules, contributing to the architectural detail of its structure within the flying buttresses of logical form.
  - (2) While not essential to meaning, material rules of inference have an original authority not derived from formal rules, and play an indispensable role in our thinking on matters of fact.
  - (3) Same as (2) save that the acknowledgment of material rules of inference is held to be a dispensable feature of thought, at best a matter of convenience.
  - (4) Material rules of inference have a purely derivative authority, though they are genuinely rules of inference.
  - (5) The sentences which raise these puzzles about material rules of inference are merely abridged formulations of logically valid inferences. (Clearly the distinction between an inference and the formulation of an inference would have to be explored.)
  - (6) Trains of thought which are said to be governed by “material rules of inference” are actually not inferences at all, but rather activated associations which mimic inference, concealing their intellectual nudity with stolen “therefores” (p. 54).
  
- Sellars’s statement is taken from “Inference and Meaning” (1953). Sellars proposed options (1-6) as candidates for the general definition of material inference, but it is option (1) that, according to him, is the only tenable one (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
- His own position is that an expression has conceptual content conferred on it by being caught up in, playing a certain role in, material inferences: “It is the first (or ‘rationalistic’) alternative to which we are committed. According to it, material transformation rules determine the descriptive meaning of the expressions of a language within the framework provided by its logical transformation rules . . . In traditional language, the ‘content’ of concepts as well as their logical ‘form’ is determined by the rules of the Understanding.” (pp. 54-55).
- Sellars’s statement is again from “Inference and Meaning” (1953). Sellars calls material inferences here “material transformation rules,” which determine the descriptive meaning of ‘nonlogical expressions’ in a context in which logical operations are regulated by logical rules.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
  
- Should inferentialist explanations begin with inferences pertaining to propositional *form* or those pertaining to propositional *content*? One important consideration is that the notion of formally valid inferences is definable in a natural way from that of materially correct ones, while there is no converse route (p. 55).
  
- Brandom provides the main argument for **the primacy** of material inferences (pertaining to content) over logical inferences (pertaining to form). The argument is about the possibility of **naturally explaining logical inferences on the basis of material inferences** (while the opposite does not hold) (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
  
- For given a subset of vocabulary that is privileged or distinguished somehow, an inference can be treated as good in virtue of its form, with respect to that vocabulary, just in case
- It is a materially good inference, and
- It cannot be turned into a materially bad one by substituting nonprivileged for nonprivileged vocabulary in its premises and conclusions.
- Notice that this substitutional notion of formally good inferences need have nothing special to do with *logic*. If it is *logical form* that is of interest, then one must antecedently be able to distinguish some vocabulary as peculiarly logical (p. 55).
  
- As the substitutional scheme shows, formally good inferences presuppose some implicit notion of material inference (and the possibility of substituting some nonlogical expressions for other nonlogical expressions; that is, meanings are presupposed). Logical vocabulary must be already available (and so it is not clear what such formal inferences add to it).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- V. Material Inference
- That done, the Fregean semantic strategy of looking for inferential features that are invariant under substitution yields a notion of *logically* valid inferences. But if one picks out *theological* (or aesthetic) vocabulary as privileged, then looking at which substitutions of nontheological (or nonaesthetic) vocabulary for nontheological (nonaesthetic) vocabulary preserve material goodness of inference will pick out inferences good in virtue of their *theological* (or aesthetic) form. According to this way of thinking, the *formal* goodness of inferences derives from and is explained in terms of the *material* goodness of inferences, and so ought not to be appealed to in explaining it. Frege's inferentialist way of specifying the characteristic linguistic role in virtue of which vocabulary qualifies as logical is discussed below (p. 55).
- Formally valid inferences are those valid in virtue of logical rules only. Frege's substitutional strategy for logically valid inferences depends on the material goodness of certain inferences; furthermore, logically valid inferences are explained by materially good ones.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VI. Elucidative Rationality
  
- So far I have indicated briefly two related claims: that conceptual contents are inferential roles, and that the inferences that matter for such contents in general must be conceived to include those that are in some sense *materially correct*, not just those that are *formally valid*. I will argue in a moment that a commitment to the second of these, no less than the first, is to be found already in Frege's early writings, though not in the developed form to which Sellars brings it. But in both thinkers these ideas are combined with a third, which I believe makes this line of thought especially attractive (p. 56).
  
- Beyond the idea that concepts are inferential roles and that the inferential transitions responsible for concepts must include those materially good and not those formally valid. The two strategies, Brandom claims, can be retrieved in the work of Frege and Sellars. These ideas combine with a third main claim that is going to be introduced.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VI. Elucidative Rationality
- In one of his early papers, Sellars introduces the idea this way: “Socratic method serves the purpose of making explicit the rules we have adopted for thought and action, and I shall be interpreting our judgments to the effect that A causally necessitates B as the expression of a rule governing our use of the terms ‘A’ and ‘B’.” Sellars understands such modal statements as inference licenses, which formulate as the content of a claim the appropriateness of inferential transitions. More than this, he understands the function of such statements to be making explicit, in the form of assertible rules, commitments that had hitherto remained implicit in inferential practices (p. 56).
- According to Sellars, giving reasons (Socratic method) is needed to make explicit the rules that govern thought and action. So they play a role that is expressive (elucidative). Elucidative statements like “A causally necessitates B” make explicit the goodness of a certain inferential transition. So what is implicit in the way we reason and talk can become explicit in the form of rules.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VI. Elucidative Rationality
- Socratic method is a way of bringing our practices under rational control by expressing them explicitly in a form in which they can be confronted with objections and alternatives, a form in which they can be exhibited as the conclusions of inferences seeking to justify them on the basis of premises advanced as reasons, and as premises in further inferences exploring the consequences of accepting them (p. 56).
- So this **elucidative method**, that is, the game of **giving and asking for reasons**, by making rules and options explicit, permits us to see potential mistakes and objections, to better evaluate our views in light of alternatives, and to see our claims as the basis for further consequences and so forth.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VI. Elucidative Rationality
- In the passage just quoted, Sellars tells us that the enterprise within which we ought to understand the characteristic function of inference licenses is a form of rationality that centers on the notion of *expression*: making *explicit* in a form that can be thought or said what is *implicit* in what is done. This is a dark and pregnant claim, but I believe it epitomizes a radical and distinctive insight (p. 56).
- So this making explicit, via the game of giving and asking for reasons, is an expressive type of rational activity (and more generally of rationality). It permits us to make explicit (in thought/language) what is implicit (in action).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VI. Elucidative Rationality
- In what follows I hope to shed some light on it and its role in an inferentialist vision of things. The general idea is that the paradigmatically rational process that Sellars invokes under the heading of “Socratic method” depends on the possibility of making implicit commitments explicit in the form of claims. *Expressing* them in this sense is bringing them into the game of giving and asking for reasons as playing the special sort of role in virtue of which something has a conceptual content at all, namely, an inferential role, as premise and conclusion of inferences (p. 57).
- The main point of this method is the possibility of expressing our implicit commitments in explicit linguistic form, like claims. What is made explicit becomes available in the game of giving and asking for reasons, as everything which is propositionally contentful (that is, that can play the role of premise or conclusion in inference).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VI. Elucidative Rationality
- This sort of rationality is distinct from, but obviously related to, the sort of rationality that then consists in making the appropriate inferential moves. Even totalitarian versions of the latter—for instance, those that would assimilate all goodness of inference to logical validity, or to instrumental prudence (that is, efficiency at getting what one wants)—depend on the possibility of expressing considerations in a form in which they can be given as reasons, and reasons demanded for them. All the more does Socratic reflection on our practices—particularly on those material-inferential practices that determine the conceptual contents of thoughts and beliefs—depend on the possibility of their explicit expression (p. 57).
- This type of rationality differs from logical rationality, which involves drawing valid conclusions, and from instrumental rationality, which focuses on means/ends rationality to achieve desired outcomes. However, these forms of rationality are, in a sense, dependent on the expressive rationality advocated here: by expressing considerations as claims, they become accessible as tools for drawing logical conclusions or evaluating the best means to achieve our goals.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
- To begin to explicate this notion of explication, it is helpful to return to the consideration of the young Frege's inferentialist program. Frege's *Begriffsschrift* is remarkable not only for the inferential idiom in which it specifies its topic, but equally for how it conceives its relation to that topic. The task of the work is officially an expressive one: not to prove something but to say something. Frege's logical notation is designed for expressing conceptual contents, making explicit the inferential involvements that are implicit in anything that possesses such content (p. 57).
- This view on explicative rationality needs an account of explication. So, let us go back to its roots in Frege's program. The starting idea of a logical language, for Frege, was an expressive one: a language to say something in a certain way (clearer, more explicit, more precise, and so forth).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
- [...] Talking about this project, Frege says: “Right from the start I had in mind the expression of a content. . . But the content is to be rendered more exactly than is done by verbal language. . . Speech often only indicates by inessential marks or by imagery what a concept-script should spell out in full.” The concept-script is a formal language for the explicit codification of conceptual contents (pp. 57-58).
- As the quotation clearly states, Frege’s intention was to provide a language more expressive than natural ordinary language, one to say more and better things.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
- In the Preface to *Begriffsschrift*, Frege laments that even in science concepts are formed haphazardly, so that the ones employing them are scarcely aware of what they mean, of what their content really is. When the correctness of particular inferences is at issue, this sort of unclarity may preclude rational settlement of the issue. What is needed is a notation within which the rough-and-ready conceptual contents of the sciences, beginning with mathematics, can be reformulated so as to wear their contents on their sleeves. The explanatory target here avowedly concerns a sort of inference, not a sort of truth, and the sort of inference involved is content-conferring material inferences, not the derivative formal ones (p. 58).
- So, the idea of making explicit the contents of our concepts was indeed present in Frege's seminal work. Clear inferences are easier to evaluate when their validity is at stake, and so forth.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
  
- Frege explicitly contrasts his approach with that of those, such as Boole, who conceive their formal language only in terms of formal inference, and so express no material contents:
- The reason for this inability to form concepts in a scientific manner lies in the lack of one of the two components of which every highly developed language must consist. That is, we may distinguish the formal part . . . from the material part proper. The signs of arithmetic correspond to the latter. What we still lack is the logical cement that will bind these building stones firmly together. . . In contrast, Boole's symbolic logic only represents the formal part of the language (p. 58).
  
- Here Frege contrasts explicitly his interest in the material part of language and reasoning with Boole's preference for the formal aspects.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
  
- By contrast, Frege continues:
  - 1. My concept-script has a more far-reaching aim than Boolean logic, in that it strives to make it possible to present a content when combined with arithmetical and geometrical signs . . .
  - 2. Disregarding content, within the domain of pure logic it also, thanks to the notation for generality, commands a somewhat wider domain...
  - 4. It is in a position to represent the formation of the concepts actually needed in science...(pp. 58-59).
  
- Here Frege clearly states that he is interested in presenting 'content'; this domain (of content) is wider than that of pure logic; this permits the representation of the formation of scientific concepts.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
- It is the wider domain to which his expressive ambition extends that Frege sees as characteristic of his approach. Since contents are determined by inferences, expressing inferences explicitly will permit the expression of any sort of content at all: “It seems to me to be easier still to extend the domain of this formula language to include geometry. We would only have to add a few signs for the intuitive relations that occur there. . . The transition to the pure theory of motion and then to mechanics and physics could follow at this point.”(p. 59).
- This language is of great utility for the sciences and can be easily extended to incorporate relevant segments of their concepts.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
- Frege's early understanding of logic offers some specific content to the notion of explicitly expressing what is implicit in a conceptual content, which is what is required to fill in a notion of expressive or elucidating rationality that might be laid alongside (and perhaps even be discovered to be presupposed by) notions of rationality as accurate representation, as logically valid inference, and as instrumental practical reasoning [...](p. 59).
- So, again, Frege's early project is expressive/elucidative and promotes a new formal language for a kind of explication of contents useful for science.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
- Consider the conditional, with which the *Begriffsschrift* begins. Frege says of it: “The precisely defined hypothetical relation between contents of possible judgments [Frege’s conditional] has a similar significance for the foundation of my concept-script to that which identity of extensions has for Boolean logic.”[...] (p. 59).
- The conditional in Frege’s logic, for example, plays a clear expressive function: it permits us to ‘state explicitly’ what (judgement) follows from what (judgement).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
- Why the conditional? Prior to the introduction of such a conditional locution, one could *do* something, one could treat a judgment as having a certain content (implicitly attribute that content to it) by endorsing various inferences involving it and rejecting others. After conditional locutions have been introduced, one can *say*, as part of the content of a claim (something that can serve as a premise and conclusion in inference), *that* a certain inference is acceptable. One is able to make explicit material inferential relations between an antecedent or premise and a consequent or conclusion (p. 60).
- The conditional (if... , then...) is the most expressive logical operator: it permits us to make fully explicit that a certain transition is good, that a certain judgement entails some other judgement, and so forth. Conditionals make material inferences fully explicit.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
  
- Since, according to the inferentialist view of conceptual contents, it is these implicitly recognized material inferential relations that conceptual contents consist in, the conditional permits such contents to be explicitly expressed. If there is a disagreement about the goodness of an inference, it is possible to say what the dispute is about and offer reasons one way or the other. The conditional is the paradigm of a locution that permits one to make inferential commitments explicit as the contents of judgments (p. 60).
  
- Again, the conditional is perfect as making explicit the commitments implicit in judgements, and then to better evaluate them in terms of their consequences, for example.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
- In a similar fashion, introducing negation makes it possible to express explicitly material incompatibilities of sentences, which also contribute to their content. The picture is accordingly one whereby, first, formal validity of inferences is defined in terms of materially correct inferences and some privileged vocabulary; second, that privileged vocabulary is identified as logical vocabulary; and third, what it is for something to be a bit of logical vocabulary is explained in terms of its semantically expressive role (p. 60).
- Negation plays as well an expressive/elucidative function: it expresses relations of material incompatibility between claims ('the patch is red' is a good premise to infer 'the patch is not black' – because 'black' is a feature which is materially incompatible with being 'red': a thing cannot be red and black at the same time).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VII. Frege on the Expressive Role of Logic
  
- Frege is not as explicit about the role of materially correct inferences as Sellars is, but his commitment to the notion is clear from the relation between two of the views that have been extracted from the *Begriffsschrift*: expressivism about logic and inferentialism about content. Expressivism about logic means that Frege treats logical vocabulary as having a distinctive expressive role: making explicit the inferences that are implicit in the conceptual contents of nonlogical concepts. Inferentialism about those conceptual contents means taking them to be identified and individuated by their inferential roles [...] (pp. 60-61).
  
- So, again, even though Frege is not so explicit as Sellars in defending such views, we can certify that at least in the *Begriffsschrift* he defended both expressivism about logic and rationality and inferentialism about content.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VIII. Dummett's Model and Gentzen
  
- So far three themes have been introduced:
- That conceptual content is to be understood in terms of role in reasoning rather than exclusively in terms of representation;
- That the capacity for such reasoning is not to be identified exclusively with mastery of a logical calculus; and
- That besides theoretical and practical reasoning using contents constituted by their role in material inferences, there is a kind of expressive rationality that consists in making implicit content-conferring inferential commitments explicit as the contents of assertible commitments. In this way, the material inferential practices, which govern and make possible the game of giving and asking for reasons, are brought into that game, and so into consciousness, as explicit topics of discussion and justification (p. 61).
  
- Brandom summarizes the views introduced so far about content, logic, and rationality.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VIII. Dummett's Model and Gentzen
- These three themes, to be found in the early works of both Frege and Sellars, provide the beginnings of the structure within which modern inferentialism develops. These ideas can be made more definite by considering a general model of conceptual contents as inferential roles that has been recommended by Dummett. According to that model, the use of any linguistic expression or concept has two aspects: the *circumstances* under which it is correctly applied, uttered, or used, and the appropriate *consequences* of its application, utterance, or use (p. 62).
- The ideas introduced so far can be improved thanks to the work of people like Michael Dummett, who provided a useful model to characterise the inferential role of an expression: the proper circumstances of its application and its consequences of application. How does it work?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VIII. Dummett's Model and Gentzen
- Though Dummett does not make this point, this model can be connected to inferentialism via the principle that the content to which one is committed by using the concept or expression may be represented by the inference one implicitly endorses by such use, the inference, namely, from the circumstances of appropriate employment to the appropriate consequences of such employment (p. 62).
- This model is connected to inferentialism by the fact that the content of an expression  $E$  can be represented by the inference from its circumstances  $CR$  to its consequences  $CS$ .
- That is, for any  $E$ ,  $CR \rightarrow CS$  is always a good inference.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VIII. Dummett's Model and Gentzen
- The original source for the model lies in a treatment of the grammatical category of sentential connectives. Dummett's two-aspect model is a generalization of a standard way of specifying the inferential roles of logical connectives, owing ultimately to Gentzen. Gentzen famously defined connectives by specifying introduction rules, or inferentially sufficient conditions for the employment of the connective, and elimination rules, or inferentially necessary consequences of the employment of the connective. So, to define the inferential role of an expression '&' of Boolean conjunction, one specifies that anyone who is committed to  $p$ , and committed to  $q$ , is thereby to count also as committed to  $p \& q$ , and that anyone who is committed to  $p \& q$  is thereby committed both to  $p$  and to  $q$  (p. 62).

- Dummett extracts this model from Gerhard Gentzen's definitions of logical connectives by means of introduction and elimination rules.

- **I&** A, B
- -----
- A&B
- **E&<sub>1</sub>** A&B
- -----
- A
- **E&<sub>2</sub>** A&B
- -----
- B

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- VIII. Dummett's Model and Gentzen
- The first schema specifies, by means of expressions that do not contain the connective, the circumstances under which one is committed to claims expressed by sentences that do contain (as principal connective) the connective whose inferential role is being defined, that is, the sets of premises that entail them. The second schema specifies, by means of expressions that do not contain the connective, the consequences of being committed to claims expressed by sentences that do contain (as principal connective) the connective whose inferential role is being defined, that is, the sets of consequences that they entail (pp. 62-63).
- So, it is clear how this scheme is an excellent candidate for explicating the inferential role also of sentences (see below).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IX. Circumstances and Consequences for Sentences
  
- Dummett [...] [shows] how this model can be generalized from logical connectives to provide a uniform treatment of the meanings of expressions of other grammatical categories, in particular sentences, predicates and common nouns, and singular terms. The application to the propositional contents expressed by whole sentences is straightforward. What corresponds to an *introduction* rule for a propositional content is the set of *sufficient* conditions for asserting it, and what corresponds to an *elimination* rule is the set of *necessary* consequences of asserting it, that is, what follows from doing so (p. 63).
  
- This model can be applied to sentences, predicates, and nouns. The introduction rules for a sentence S are the set of sufficient conditions/circumstances to assert S. The elimination rules for S are the necessary consequences of asserting it.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IX. Circumstances and Consequences for Sentences
  
- Dummett says: “Learning to use a statement of a given form involves, then, learning two things: the conditions under which one is justified in making the statement; and what constitutes acceptance of it, i.e., the consequences of accepting it.” Dummett presents his model as specifying two fundamental features of the *use* of linguistic expressions, an idea I will return to below. In what follows here, though, I apply it in the context of the previous ideas to bring into relief the implicit material inferential *content* a concept or expression acquires in virtue of being used in the ways specified by these two ‘aspects’. The link between pragmatic significance and inferential content is supplied by the fact that asserting a sentence is implicitly undertaking a commitment to the correctness of the material inference from its circumstances to its consequences of application (p. 63).
  
- Dummett is trying to capture the features of linguistic use of an expression. This goes in the in the direction of pragmatics (use): especially, the conditions of justification for a statement S and the consequences of accepting S.
- This comes handy for Brandom’s view of expressive rationality: ‘asserting a sentence is implicitly undertaking a commitment to the correctness of the material inference from its circumstances to its consequences of application’.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IX. Circumstances and Consequences for Sentences
- Understanding or grasping a propositional content is here presented not as the turning on of a Cartesian light, but as practical mastery of a certain kind of inferentially articulated doing: responding differentially according to the circumstances of proper application of a concept, and distinguishing the proper inferential consequences of such application. This is not an all-or-none affair; the metallurgist understands the concept *tellurium* better than I do, for training has made her master of the inferential intricacies of its employment in a way that I can only crudely approximate (pp. 63-64).
- There is no faculty of rational intuition. **Grasping propositional contents**, according to this model, **means just doing two things**: ‘responding differentially according to the circumstances of proper application of a concept and distinguishing the proper inferential consequences of such application.’ There are degrees (we do not see all the same consequences of a statement, for instance). Some of us may be **experts** about certain transitions.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IX. Circumstances and Consequences for Sentences
- Thinking clearly is on this inferentialist rendering a matter of knowing what one is committing oneself to by a certain claim, and what would entitle one to that commitment. Writing clearly is providing enough clues for a reader to infer what one intends to be committed to by each claim, and what one takes it would entitle one to that commitment. Failure to grasp either of these components is failure to grasp the inferential commitment that use of the concept involves, and so failure to grasp its conceptual content (p. 64).
- Clarity in thinking and writing, accordingly, means expressing who is committed to what, and who is entitled to what. Inferential articulation is pivotal for expressing such commitments and entitlements in terms of circumstances and consequences of a statement.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IX. Circumstances and Consequences for Sentences
- Failure to think about both the circumstances and consequences of application leads to semantic theories that are literally one-sided. Verificationists, assertibilists, and reliabilists make the mistake of treating the *first* aspect as exhausting content. Understanding or grasping a content is taken to consist in practically mastering the circumstances under which one becomes entitled or committed to endorse a claim, quite apart from any grasp of what one becomes entitled or committed to by such endorsement (p. 64).
- The theories that focus just on one aspect (among circumstances and consequences) are one-sided: verificationists rely on circumstances; assertibilists on circumstances; and reliabilists on circumstances, for instance. But, for Brandom, circumstances do not exhaust content. One thing is being justified in uttering a claim; quite another is the set of commitments and entitlements that uttering that claim determines.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IX. Circumstances and Consequences for Sentences
- But this cannot be right. For claims can have the same circumstances of application and different consequences of application, as for instance “I foresee that I will write a book about Hegel” and “I will write a book about Hegel” do. We can at least regiment a use of ‘foresee’ that makes the former sentence have just the same assertibility conditions as the latter. But substituting the one for the other turns the very safe conditional “If I will write a book about Hegel, then I will write a book about Hegel,” into the risky “If I *foresee* that I will write a book about Hegel, then I will write a book about Hegel.” The possibility that I might be hit by a bus does not affect the assessment of the inference codified by the first conditional, but is quite relevant to the assessment of the second inference (p. 64).
- Brandom has an argument for the view that theories of concepts must be two-sided: certain claims can have the same circumstances of application but different consequences of application. Such claims are different, but would look the same by considering circumstances of application alone.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IX. Circumstances and Consequences for Sentences
- And the point of the discussion, at the beginning of this chapter, of Sellars's application of inferentialist ideas to the understanding of noninferential reports was that parrots and photocells and so on might reliably discriminate the circumstances in which the concept red should be applied, without thereby grasping that concept, precisely in the case where they have no mastery of the consequences of such application—when they cannot tell that it follows from something being red that it is colored, that it is not a prime number, and so on (p. 65).
- Another argument comes from **Sellars**: circumstances alone are sufficient for parrots uttering “that’s red” in front of a red patch, but this is **insufficient for grasping the concept ‘red’**. The parrot does not know the consequences of it (it is colored, it is not black, and so forth). And in fact, the parrot does not master the concept (such mastery requires consequences as much as circumstances).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- IX. Circumstances and Consequences for Sentences
- [...]Pragmatists of the classical sort, by contrast, make the converse mistake of identifying propositional contents exclusively with the *consequences* of endorsing a claim, looking downstream to the claim's role as a premise in practical reasoning and ignoring its proper antecedents upstream. (For present purposes, that the emphasis is on *practical* consequences does not matter.) Yet one can know what follows from the claim that someone is responsible for a particular action, that an action is immoral or sinful, that a remark is true or in bad taste, without for that reason counting as understanding the claims involved, if one has no idea when it is appropriate to make those claims or apply those concepts. Being classified as AWOL does have the consequence that one is liable to be arrested, but the specific circumstances under which one acquires that liability are equally essential to the concept (p. 65).
- Pragmatists like Peirce, on the contrary make the opposite one-sided mistake: the content of a claim is not just grasped via the consequences of endorsing it. For example, being AWOL [absent without official leave] has certain consequences; but knowing this tells us nothing about when it is correct to apply such concept. So, again, we need a two-sided approach putting together verificationists's circumstances and pragmatists's consequences.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Brandom: Articulating Reasons
- Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism
- XIII. From Semantics to Pragmatics
  
- In the first part of this chapter I introduced three related ideas:
  1. the *inferential* understanding of conceptual content;
  2. the idea of *materially* good inferences; and
  3. the idea of *expressive* rationality.
- These contrast, respectively, with
  1. an understanding of content exclusively according to the model of the *representation* of states of affairs (I think I have managed to say rather a lot about conceptual content in this essay, without talking at all about what is represented by such contents);
  2. an understanding of the goodness of inference exclusively on the model of *formal* validity;
  3. and an understanding of rationality exclusively on the model of *instrumental* or means-end reasoning (pp. 76-77).
  
- Brandom here summarises the main points of the chapter so far: inferentialism about conceptual content, material inferences, and expressive rationality. Such views oppose traditional semantic representationalism, the formal view about inferences, and the instrumental view of rationality.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.1 What is meaning?
- We may say, and we often do say, that what makes the difference between a word and a kind of sound that is not a word is that the former *has meaning*. Yet what does this mean? Thousands of books and articles have been written about the nature of meaning and I have no intention to survey them all here (needless to say, this would not be a humanly accomplishable task). For our present purposes it suffices to note that despite the immense efforts that have been put into these investigations no general agreement about the nature of meaning has yet been reached (p. 1).
- What is meaning? First of all, there is no general agreement on this.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.1 What is meaning?
- The question regarding the nature of linguistic meaning is approached in multifarious ways. The first crossroad is opened up by the question of whether the phrasing 'has meaning' should be taken at face value, as expressing a relation between the word and some preexisting entity called meaning. Many philosophers have taken this for granted and have not seen it as disputable. A word, it is often claimed, stands for – or represents, or expresses – its meaning, and the reason it can do so is that we humans are simply symbol-mongers: we have the peculiar ability to let one thing stand for another (p. 1).
- Are meanings independent properties attached to words? Usually this is taken for granted as something implicit in our uses of symbols (something that stands for something else).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.1 What is meaning?
  
- However, the trouble is that it is very difficult to explain, in a non-mysterious way, how we do it and what the relation so established consists in. Is there some unanalyzable power of our minds that is capable of establishing symbols, and is the symbol bound to what it symbolizes by some mental fiber? It seems to me that it remains utterly mysterious not only what the nature of such mental mechanism would be, but especially how the mind could establish such public links as are essential for public language, and what these would consist in (p. 1).
  
- But that does not explain much. It remains mysterious how a word gets its meaning and the relation between the two.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.1 What is meaning?
- [...] we need not take the meaning talk at face value; we could take it instead as metaphoric talk about some properties of words. Maybe what is characteristic of words – as contrasted with sounds that are not words – is not, or is not literally, that they stand for something, or express it, or represent it, but rather that they have some peculiar property. (The fact that we tend to talk about having a property as about being related to some reification of the property is not in itself mysterious, for it is something we do as a matter of course: we do not hesitate to speak about things having height, color, etc.) (p. 2).
- An interesting approach is considering meaning as a kind of property attached to a word (and this may be just something physical as a sound or an inscription). But what property? (In the case of meaning the question looks different).

# Concepts as inferential roles

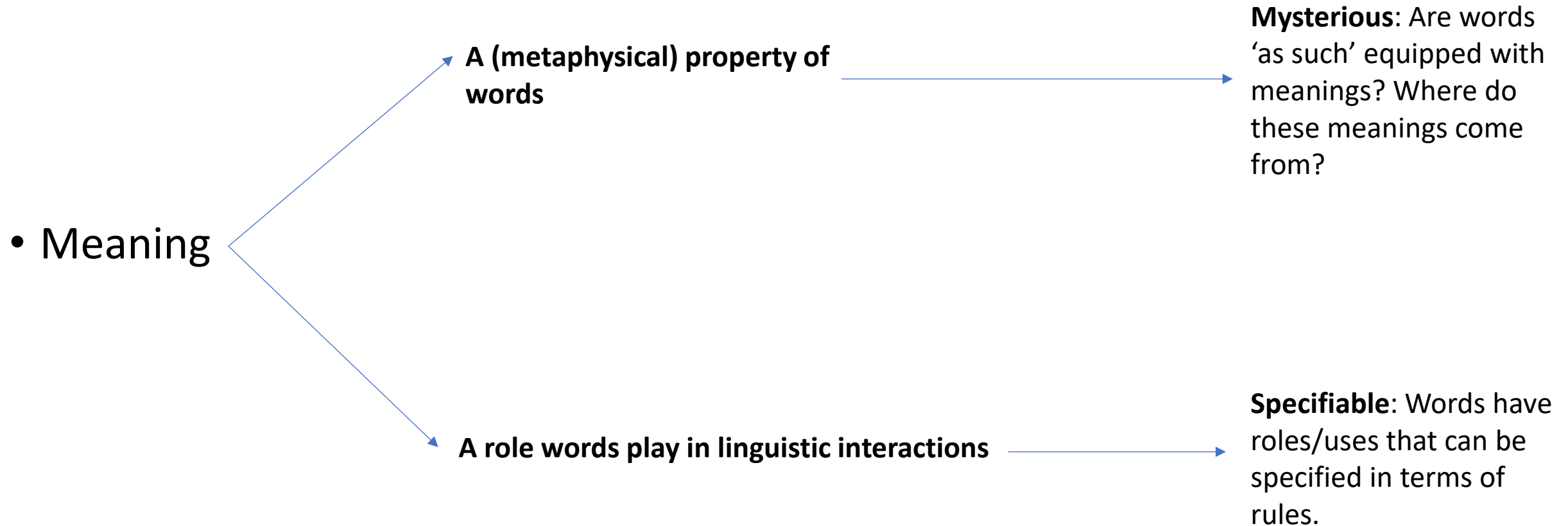
- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.1 What is meaning?
- One of such explanations, the popularity of which has been on the increase over recent decades (especially thanks to the impact of the legacy of the later Wittgenstein), is that what characterizes a word is the way it is employed within our language games. According to this view, what we call meaning is, in fact, a reification of use. But the trouble is that all kinds of things around us have uses, and yet it seems that to be meaningful as a linguistic expression is something very different from being used, say, as a hammer. Could the difference consist merely in the complexity of the respective uses? (p. 2)
- Meaning, according to a popular Wittgensteinian view, are the uses of words in our language games—the ways in which we use words in ordinary interactions. But many things have uses: what is so illuminating about words?

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.1 What is meaning?
  
- One alternative way of conceiving the difference is to distinguish between items like hammers, which merely have uses, and items like words, which have *roles*, where a role in the sense entertained here is something that is conferred on an item by *rules*. Here is where the underlying idea can be elucidated by comparing words with chess pieces (a comparison frequently used in this book): just as to make a piece of wood (or, for that matter, whatever substance) into a rook it is enough to subordinate it to the rules of chess, what makes a type of sound into an expression meaning thus and so are again certain rules – rules constitutive of our language games (pp. 2-3).
  
- An alternative, which will be pursued here, is that **the uses of words are roles in a context of regulated activities**. Like the role of ‘the queen’, in chess. To play the role of ‘the queen’ one must move according to certain rules and not according to other rules. So, meanings would be the rules of use of words.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Two possible perspectives on meanings/concepts (Peregrin):**



# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.1 What is meaning?
- It seems to me that this opens up a non-mysterious way to explain meaning (chess does not seem to be a mystery!), and because such ways are in short supply, it is a view we might want to take seriously. Hence the idea is that what makes linguistic meaningfulness (aka having meaning) categorically different from other kinds of usefulnesses are the *rules* that govern the enterprise of language. According to this view, it is the fact that they are constituted by these rules that makes meanings into something special. Moreover, the fact that meanings presuppose a very specific kind of rules (including, be it only in the background, a framework of most basic rules, rules related to what we call logic) makes them into a sui generis, into entities of a kind that has nothing comparable in our world (p. 3).
- So, since rules are not mysterious, we can exploit them to clarify the nature and structure of the meanings of our linguistic expressions. This (normativist) view determines the specialness of meaning (as an entity) by its 'dependence on rules'. Dependence on rules makes meanings non-mysterious.
- N.B. Peregrin adds that rules 'constitute' meanings; 'constitution' here sounds like a metaphysical relation; a less metaphysical interpretation might be the idea of simple 'specificability' in terms of rules (while remaining silent on constitution and the nature of meaning). So there are degrees of metaphysical commitments in the understanding of meaning.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.1 What is meaning?
- *Inferentialism*, the topic of this book, is a specific version of this view, according to which the most important kind of rules that constitute meanings are inferential rules. The term was coined by Robert Brandom [*Making It Explicit* 1994; *Articulating Reasons* 2000] as a label for his theory of language, which draws extensively on the earlier views of Wilfrid Sellars ['Inference and meaning' 1953; 'Some reflections on language games' 1954]. (Brandom has engaged the term especially to contrapose it to the common *representationalism*, i.e., the doctrine that meaningfulness consists in representing, i.e. in 'standing for'.) However, the term is also naturally applicable (and is growing increasingly common) within the philosophy of logic [...](p. 3).
- Although inferentialism, as a view based on rules, is defined in contraposition to representationalism (that is, explaining meaning in terms of inference rather than in terms of representation), it is also a name of an influential view in the philosophy of logic (i.e., logical inferentialism).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- Unlike Dummett, Brandom [...] does not concentrate on logical constants; his inferentialism extends to the whole of language. As a pragmatist, Brandom concentrates on our linguistic *practices*, on our *language games* and on their place within our human coping with the world and with each other, but, unlike many postmodern followers of Wittgenstein, he is convinced that one of the games is 'principal', namely, the game of *giving and asking for reasons*. It is this game, according to him, that is the hallmark of what we are – thinking, concept-possessing, rational beings abiding to the force of better reason (p. 6).
- Brandom extends and generalises inferentialism on logical constants to the meanings of linguistic expressions. Inferential relations between meanings, according to Brandom, are explored in the main linguistic game: the game of giving and asking for reasons.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- To make inferentialism into a doctrine applicable to the whole of language we must make sense of the view that inferences are crucial for all kinds of words, including empirical ones. The weakest way to do this would be to claim that an expression cannot be meaningful without playing some part in some inferences, i.e., that each meaningful expression must be part of some sentences that are inferable from other sentences and/or from which some other sentences are inferable. This is a position that Brandom [...] calls weak inferentialism. This position is clearly not necessarily incompatible with representationalism: believing that to mean something is to represent something is not incompatible with believing that sentences are inferable from other sentences. (Brandom himself conjectures that everybody would be a weak inferentialist, but I think that some representationalists would claim that an expression may be meaningful without being part of any sentence, or at least any sentence having inferential links to other sentences.) (p. 6).
- **Weak inferentialism, as we know, is the view that “each meaningful expression must be part of some sentences that are inferable from other sentences and/or from which some other sentences are inferable”. This view is not incompatible with representationalism.**

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- A stronger version of inferentialism, which Brandom (ibid.) terms *strong inferentialism*, claims that this kind of 'inferential articulation' (i.e., being part of sentences that enter into inferential relationships) is not only a necessary, but also a sufficient, condition of meaningfulness – though construing the concept of inferential rule rather broadly, so that it encompasses 'inferences', as it were, from situations to claims and from claims to actions. (Hence it accepts such 'inferential rules' as 'It is correct to claim 'This is a dog' when pointing at a dog.')
- This is Brandom's own version, and it is a version to be discussed in this book – though not necessarily in Brandom's own terms, nor sharing his emphases. (Besides these two versions, Brandom also considers hyperinferentialism, the claim that inferential articulation is a necessary and sufficient condition of meaningfulness on the narrow construal of inferential rules, and he rejects it as clearly untenable for a language containing empirical vocabulary.) (p. 7).
- Just like Brandom, Peregrin endorses 'strong inferentialism': “'inferential articulation' [...] is not only a necessary, but also a sufficient, condition of meaningfulness – though construing the concept of inferential rule rather broadly, so that it encompasses 'inferences', as it were, from situations to claims and from claims to actions”.
- So, this 'broad' view of inferential articulation includes perceptual circumstances of application (and empirical concepts) and (practical) consequences of application (and practical concepts).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- Why language must be inferentially articulated is because of its crucial role of being the vehicle of the game of giving and asking for reasons. To be able to *give* reasons we must be able to make claims that can serve as reasons for other claims, hence our language must provide for sentences that *entail* other sentences. To be able to *ask* for reasons we must be able to indicate that a claim is in need of being justified, i.e., we must be able to make claims that count as a *challenge* to other claims. (We may, of course, ask for reasons for a claim without explicitly challenging it, but the most primitive way of asking for reasons seems to be a doubt expressed by a challenge.) Hence our language must provide for sentences that are *incompatible* with other sentences; our language must be structured by these entailment and incompatibility relations (p. 7).
- Peregrin encapsulates inferentialism succinctly: providing reasons requires **employing claims as justifications** for other claims; seeking reasons necessitates the ability to either **demand justification for one's claims or challenge them**. The latter task is achieved by demonstrating incompatibility with a particular claim. This framework of reason-giving practices inherently relies on the inferential articulation—or the inferential specificity—of language.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- In fact, for Brandom the level of inference and incompatibility is merely a deconstructible superstructure, underlain by certain normative statuses that communicating people acquire and maintain via using language. These statuses comprise various kinds of *commitments* and *entitlements*. Thus, for example, when I make an assertion, I *commit* myself to giving reasons for it when it is challenged (that is what makes it an assertion rather than just babble), and I *entitle* everybody else to reassert my assertion deferring any possible challenges to me. I may commit myself to something without being entitled to it, i.e., without being able to give any reasons for it, and I can be committed to all kinds of things, but there are certain things the commitment to which blocks my entitlement to certain other things (p. 7).
- By asserting and giving reasons, one is acquiring some form of deontic status (*commitment* when I commit myself to claim C via assertion; *entitlement* when I am able to justify my commitments in view of some challenges).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- Brandom's idea is that living in a human society amounts to steering within a rich network of normative social relationships and enjoying many kinds of normative statuses that reach into many dimensions. Linguistic communication institutes an important stratum of such statuses (commitments and entitlements) and to understand language means being able to keep track of the statuses of one's fellow speakers – to keep score of them, as Brandom puts it. And the social distribution is essential because it provides for the multiplicity of perspectives the intersections of which make the objectivity of linguistic content possible (pp. 7-8).
- Communication, according to this view, is a kind of navigation across normative statuses instituted by linguistic acts of assertion. This means that agents **keep score** of other agents's statuses (who is entitled to what).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- This interplay of commitments and entitlements is also the underlying source of the relation of incompatibility: commitment to one claim excluding the entitlement to others. Additionally, there is the relation of inheriting commitments and entitlements (by committing myself to 'This is a dog' I commit myself also to 'This is an animal,' and being entitled to 'It is raining' I am entitled also to 'The streets are wet'), and also the relation of inheritance of incompatibilities (A is in this relation to B iff whatever is incompatible with B is incompatible with A). This provides for the inference relation (more precisely, it provides, according to Brandom, for its several layers) (p. 8).
- Certain entitlements(commitments) can be incompatible with some entitlements(commitments): If I commit myself to "the patch is red", this commitment is incompatible with being committed(entitled) to "the patch is black", "the patch is white" and many more.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- Brandom's inferentialism is a species of pragmatism and of the use theory of meaning: he sees our expressions as tools that we employ to do various useful things (though they should not be seen as *self-standing* tools like a hammer, but rather as tools, like, say, a toothwheel, that achieve useful results only in cooperation with other tools). Brandom gives pride of place to the practical over the theoretical, seeing language as a tool of social interaction rather than an abstract system. Thus any explication of concepts such as *language* or *meaning* must be rooted in an account of what one *does* when one communicates, hence semantics, as he puts it, 'must answer to pragmatics' (1994, p. 83) (p. 8).
- Another forceful idea in Brandom's inferentialism is **inherent pragmatism**: it starts from **what we do** and tries to understand language from this practical dimension. Semantics, that is, the theory of meaning, must start from an account of what we do in the practice (pragmatics).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.3 Brandom's inferentialism
- What distinguishes Brandom from most other pragmatists and exponents of various use-theories is the essentially normative twist he gives to the pragmatist attitude to language. Thus we can say that what his inferentialism is about are not inferences (as mental actions or episodes of speakers or thinkers), but rather *inferential rules*. This is extremely important to keep in mind, for it is this that distinguishes Brandom's inferentialism from other prima facie similar approaches to meaning, from theories that try to derive meaning from the episodes of inferring rather than from rules (p. 8).
- As we are going to see, Brandom's inferentialism is a normative theory: the inferences relevant for meaning are mostly inferential rules—that is, the rules of use for our linguistic expressions. Many views based on inferences can be different from Brandom's from this point of view (many of them, for example, can be dispositional or causal).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.4 'Normative' inferentialism vs. 'causal' inferentialism
- This brings us to an issue that must be clarified right at the outset. There is a doctrine that, although superficially similar to the Brandomian inferentialism, should not be confused with it (as, unfortunately, often happens). This doctrine was discussed in the early nineties by Peacocke (1992), Boghossian (1993), and others and it has become popular under the term 'inferential role semantics' (pp. 8-9).
- Another important point is the necessity to distinguish Brandom's 'normative' version of inferentialism from certain views that show some relevant similarities to it and that go under the heading "inferential role semantics" (or "conceptual role semantics"), especially the work of people like Christopher Peacocke and Paul Boghossian.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.4 'Normative' inferentialism vs. 'causal' inferentialism
- What this doctrine shares with the Brandomian inferentialism is the conviction that meaning is an inferential role, viz. the role conferred on an expression by our inferential practices. However, the crucial difference lies in the aspect of the practices taken to be relevant for the determination of the role. Whereas this theory concentrates on inferences individual human subjects really carry out, or have dispositions to carry out, Brandomian inferentialism concentrates, as we have seen, on inferential *rules*. Let us discuss this difference in greater detail (p. 9).
- A main difference here deals with **the way in which inferential roles are conceived**: according to inferential role semantics, they depend on the **inferences that we are disposed or caused to draw**; according to normative inferentialism, inferential roles depend on the **inferences that we ought to draw**.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.4 'Normative' inferentialism vs. 'causal' inferentialism
  
- Consider the exposition of the theory given by Boghossian ([‘Does an Inferential Role Semantics Rest upon a Mistake?’,] 1993, p. 73):
- Let’s suppose that we think in a language of thought and that there are causal facts of the following form: the appearance in *O*’s belief box of a sentence *S1* has a tendency to cause the appearance therein of a sentence *S2* but not *S3*. Ignoring many complications, we may describe this sort of fact as consisting in *O*’s disposition to *infer* from *S1* to *S2*, but not to *S3*. Let’s call the totality of the inferences to which a sentence is capable of contributing, its *total inferential role*. A subsentential constituent’s total inferential role can then be defined accordingly, as consisting in the contribution it makes to the total inferential role of the sentences in which it appears (p. 9).
  
- Peregrin quotes a relevant passage from Boghossian, providing a clear exposition of his inferential role semantics: Boghossian explains **the inferential role of a sentence S as the set of inferences we are disposed to draw (or not to draw) based on S**. Such inferences compose *S*’s inferential role.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.4 'Normative' inferentialism vs. 'causal' inferentialism
- The role, then, is determined by what a subject does, or is disposed to do. In this sense, this theory appears to be a subspecies of 'conceptual role semantics', and thereby a subspecies of the *functionalism* well known in the philosophy of mind. As the functioning that plays the crucial role here is the causal functioning of the human brain (at least insofar as we see mind as supervening on the brain; otherwise it would be a pseudo-causal functioning of the mind), we can call this variety of inferentialism *causal* inferentialism. Hence there is a basic difference between this variety of inferentialism and the normative variety promoted in this book (p. 9).
- Peregrin describes Boghossian's inferentialism in **causal/dispositional terms**: it is a causal inferentialism to be distinguished from normative inferentialism. Causal inferentialism, as a matter of fact, is a thesis that goes hand in hand with functionalism in the philosophy of mind (Ned Block defended the idea that conceptual role semantics is a semantics that fits for functionalism);
- **Functionalism** is the theory that mental states are defined by their causal or functional roles within the cognitive system. Specifically, a mental state  $M$  is characterized by the functional processes that mediate between a given input  $I$  and a resulting output  $O$ . This perspective emphasizes the relational and operational aspects of mental states, rather than their physical or intrinsic properties.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.4 'Normative' inferentialism vs. 'causal' inferentialism
- The difference is more far-reaching than it might prima facie seem, and to appreciate it we must clarify the nature of the *rules* that play such a crucial role in the characterization of inferentialism. In Chomskian linguistics (and elsewhere too), rules are considered as something that can be directly implemented within the human brain; hence they are again certain causal mechanisms. But this – and this is the key point – is *not* the notion of rule essential for inferentialism. Rules as understood here are not causal determinants of human conduct, but rather something that it is *not* causally necessary, for any given subject, to follow; it is merely *proper* for the subject to follow them (pp. 9-10).
- According to Peregrin, the difference between these types of inferentialism is deeper than it seems. This difference depends mainly **on the nature of the relevant rules**. According to a certain Chomskian, or even functionalist, view, rules can be seen as algorithms in the brain. The problem with this view is that it is completely different from the idea of rules in Brandom's inferentialism: for normative inferentialism, the relevant rules are **those governing proprieties of inferences in discursive practices** (that for normativists are not dependent on causal mechanisms).
- The relevant rules here entail **freedom**: the possibility to act in alternative ways ('obeying' or 'disobeying' the rule).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.4 'Normative' inferentialism vs. 'causal' inferentialism
- However, what does it mean that something is *proper* for a subject? Does this not lead us to some esoteric stratum of reality populated by *proprieties*? Not really; for a propriety is nothing other than a resultant of certain attitudes of many people. It follows that to be able to accommodate proprieties, we need to consider the subject in the context of a society, with the interlocking stances of its members creating a filigree web of social relationships. A human as a social being not only reacts to her natural environment, but also reacts to her peers' reactions. In the course of time she develops what I tend to call *ought-to-be*-thinking (appropriating the terminology of Wilfrid Sellars), which means that she perceives some ways of behaving and acting as agreeable and others as reprehensible. And what I call a propriety, or an (implicit) rule, grows out of such attitudes resonating throughout the surrounding society (p. 10).
- Peregrin emphasises that "proper" here is not something mysterious, even if it is not causal. A social propriety is merely the result of the normative attitudes of many individuals. These properties are **social entities**, such as institutions and money, that depend on people's mental states, like attitudes, to exist. These attitudes resonate through society, relying on and reacting to others' reactions and expectations.
- Sellars differentiated between 'ought-to-be' rules and 'ought-to-do' rules. The former pertain to the standards we use to **evaluate the actions and behaviors of others** within specific circumstances. The latter, by contrast, refer to the principles **we adopt and endorse when engaging in personal deliberation** about how to act and conduct ourselves.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.4 ‘Normative’ inferentialism vs. ‘causal’ inferentialism
- It follows that rules are far from etheric entities beyond the causal order; they are a social, and, especially, what we usually call *institutional*, matter. (As Wittgenstein and the post-Wittgensteinian discussion has taught us, rules in the relevant sense of the word cannot exist other than in the public, social space – for it is only this space that provides for *following the rule* not collapsing into *thinking one is following the rule*.) Thus they are not a matter of merely resonating attitudes, but rather they tend to invoke a superstructure of customized and institutionalized reactions to *improper behavior* (‘punishments’) as also to *proper* ones (‘rewards’) that are often wielded in a cooperative manner. And such institutions, though they are a matter of the causal order, are *not* a matter of the causal structures of an individual brain. The existence of a rule is thus a matter of the interlocking patterns of attitudes, actions, and reactions of many people (p. 10).
- Rules are social institutions (and public, hence, not mysterious). Otherwise, according to Wittgenstein, we could not distinguish following the rule from mere thinking one is following the rule. Hence they depend on wider structures, that is, **cooperative social practices**, in which such proprieties are institutionalised. These practices, even though they belong to the causal order, do not depend solely on causal processes in the brain.

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Wittgenstein's *private language argument*:**
- The distinction between following a rule and merely believing that one is following a rule is a central implication of Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §§ 202, 258);
- Wittgenstein asserts that a language comprehensible to only a single speaker is impossible, as such a speaker would lack the criteria to differentiate between genuinely adhering to a rule and merely presuming to do so;
- The criteria for following rules inherently require a social framework, involving both the perspectives of agents executing actions and those of assessors evaluating these actions. Without such a social space language would not be possible.



# Concepts as inferential roles

- Peregrin: Inferentialism: why rules matter
- Inferentialism: State of Play
- 1.4 'Normative' inferentialism vs. 'causal' inferentialism
- Saying that an inferential role of an expression that amounts to its meaning is instituted by such social rules, rather than individual dispositions, has profound consequences. First, there is straightforwardly room for *error*: the way somebody uses an expression may be *wrong*; her individual disposition may not chime with the social rule. [...]. (pp. 10-11)
- Finally, an advantage of normative inferential roles is that they make room for **error**: one can be wrong about a social rule; one cannot be wrong if a rule depends on a causal mechanism (one would be simply **compelled**);
- This is why normative inferentialism requires a **social space of freedom** (the possibility to act in the wrong way and later to recognize errors **as** errors).

# Concepts as inferential roles

- **Normative vs. causal inferentialist views:**

- **Normative Inferentialism:**

- Inferential roles are determined by the inferential moves that speakers *ought* to make, grounded in norms of reasoning and justification.
- This framework necessitates a *social context for the assessment* of these moves, highlighting the communal nature of rule-following and the shared evaluation of correctness, as opposed to individual deliberation alone.

- **Causal Inferentialism:**

- Inferential roles are shaped by the inferential moves that speakers are *disposed* or *caused* to make, emphasizing the mechanisms underlying reasoning and behavior.
- These rules are encoded within the brain, functioning as *causal determinants* of inferential practices; as such, they are compelling and cannot be disobeyed.