

Verstehen
nach Heidegger und Brandom

PHÄNOMENOLOGISCHE FORSCHUNGEN

Phenomenological Studies

Recherches Phénoménologiques

Im Auftrage der
Deutschen Gesellschaft für phänomenologische Forschung
herausgegeben von
KARL-HEINZ LEMBECK, KARL MERTENS
und
ERNST WOLFGANG ORTH

Beiheft 3

FELIX MEINER VERLAG
HAMBURG

Verstehen

nach Heidegger und Brandom

Barbara Merker (Hg.)

unter Mitarbeit von Éva Gedő und Tibor Schwendtner

FELIX MEINER VERLAG
HAMBURG

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

ISBN 978-3-7873-1896-4

www.meiner.de

© Felix Meiner Verlag 2009. Alle Rechte, auch die des auszugsweisen Nachdrucks, der fotomechanischen Wiedergabe und der Übersetzung vorbehalten. Dies betrifft auch die Vervielfältigung und Übertragung einzelner Textabschnitte durch alle Verfahren wie Speicherung und Übertragung auf Papier, Transparente, Filme, Bänder, Platten und andere Medien, soweit es nicht §§ 53 und 54 URG ausdrücklich gestatten. Satz: Type & Buch Kusel, Hamburg. Druck und Bindung: Druckhaus »Thomas Müntzer«, Bad Langensalza. Werkdruckpapier: alterungsbeständig nach ANSI-Norm resp. DIN-ISO 9706, hergestellt aus 100% chlorfrei gebleichtem Zellstoff. Printed in Germany.

INHALT

<i>Barbara Merker</i>	
Einleitung	7
<i>Sebastian Knell</i>	
Diskursive Kontoführung als bedeutungskonstitutive Praxis des Verstehens. Reflexionen zur Sprachtheorie Robert Brandoms	17
<i>Jasper Liptow</i>	
Zur Rolle der Sprache in <i>Sein und Zeit</i>	27
<i>Csaba Olay</i>	
Verstehen und Auslegung beim frühen Heidegger	47
<i>Christoph Demmerling</i>	
Implizit und Explizit. Überlegungen zum Verstehensbegriff im Anschluß an Heidegger und Brandom	61
<i>Éva Gedö · Tibor Schwendtner</i>	
Dimensionen des Verstehens. Bemerkungen zu Brandoms Heidegger-Interpretation	79
<i>Gerson Reuter</i>	
Ein individualistischer Blick auf normativistische Erklärungsansprüche und ›das Soziale‹ bei Heidegger	95
<i>Barbara Merker</i>	
Verstehen und Klassifizieren: Drei Probleme mit Brandom-Heidegger	129
<i>Bernd Prien</i>	
<i>Making it Explicit</i> und die Priorität des Zuhandenen gegenüber dem Vorhandenen.....	147
<i>Wolf-Jürgen Cramm</i>	
Zum Verhältnis von symbolbezogenen und nicht-symbolbezogenen Formen des Verstehens	165

Karl Mertens

Die Kontextualität des Verstehens in Heideggers
Daseinshermeneutik und Brandoms inferentialistischer
Heidegger-Interpretation 191

Gábor Forrai

Brandom and Two Problems of Conceptual Role Semantics 211

Gergely Ambrus

Inferentialism and the Content of Perception..... 233

Tamás Demeter

Where Rationality is 247

Gesamtbibliographie..... 263

Biographische Notizen..... 271

Gábor Forrai

Brandom and Two Problems of Conceptual Role Semantics¹

One of the crucial assumptions of Robert Brandom's ambitious project in *Making It Explicit*² (hereafter *ME*) is inferentialism, the idea that meaning or conceptual content can be analyzed in terms of inferential role. Inferentialism took different forms in the last century, but has never become a majority view. Brandom offers no separate argument for it. He rests its plausibility on that of the large project. In this paper I seek to appraise how Brandom's inferentialism can resist the two most important objections raised against another current version of inferentialism, conceptual role semantics (CRS), which was proposed in the eighties by Ned Block and others as a way naturalizing mental content.³ I begin with a brief comparison of Brandom's inferentialism and CRS (I). Then I examine his response to the Twin-Earth cases (II). The final three sections are devoted to the problem of intersubjective understanding. Brandom's account is sketchy and not fully coherent. First I give a reconstruction (III), then take a closer look on a part of *ME* which appears to clash with it (IV). Finally, I expose a tension in Brandom position, which, however, does not undermine his solution (V).

I

Inferentialism starts from the general view that it depends on the meaning of a sentence what other sentences (or sets of sentences) it can be inferred from and what other sentences it implies (alone or in conjunction with other sentences). It suggests, however, that the order of explanation be reversed. Instead

¹ The research leading to this paper was supported by the National Foundation for Scientific Research (OTKA), grant no. T46757.

² Cambridge/Mass. 1994. References to Robert Brandom: *Articulating Reasons*. Cambridge/Mass. 2000 will be abbreviated as AR.

³ E. g. Advertisement for a Semantics of Psychology. In: *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 10 (1986). 615–678. The third important objection to CRS was that it cannot accommodate compositionality. This has been answered by Mark McCulloch: *Do Inferential Roles Compose?* In: *Dialectica* 57 (2003). 431–438. Interestingly, McCulloch uses Brandom's version of inferentialism.

of explaining inferential role in terms of meaning, we should analyze meaning in terms of inferential role. The inferential role of a sentence comprises both the sets of inferences of which it is the conclusion and the sets of inferences in which it figures as a premise. The inferences included in the inferential role may be both deductive and inductive. Most versions of inferentialism, including CRS and Brandom's, also include in the inferential role certain non-inferential routes to or from sentences. On the to-side we may have perception, on the from-side action. Seeing a dog non-inferentially licenses the utterances of ›Here is a dog‹, and the utterance of ›The dog's gonna bite you‹ licenses not simply the inference to the sentence ›It is advisable to jump‹, but jumping itself. Inferentialism can be offered both as an account of meaning of linguistic items, and as an account of mental content. This difference does not matter for the purposes of the current discussion, and will be ignored.

The advocates of CRS and Brandom agree that semantic theory should be developed along these lines. However, they disagree on three major points. CRS is naturalistic, whereas Brandom's approach is normative. CRS operates on the level of the individual, Brandom on the social level. Brandom is a deflationist, CRS is not. Let us see how these differences are connected.

CRS took shape in the context of the philosophy of cognitive science. A leading task of cognitive science is to explain behavior in terms of environmental stimuli and internal states. This task of explanation is thoroughly individualistic: the internal states and the stimuli both belong to the individual. The social does not appear in its own right but only in so far as it affects the individual. Cognitive science is also naturalistic: it does not allow explanatory role to anything which is not the sort of thing, or cannot be reduced to the sort of things which make up the natural world according to science. What makes CRS attractive is exactly that it offers a way to accommodate mental content within a naturalistic ontology, along the following lines. Content is inferential role. Inferential role can be reduced to functional role, i.e. a place in a causal network. Functional roles can be realized by brain states (the places in the network can be occupied by brain states). Causal networks and brain states are impeccable from the naturalistic point of view. So the notion of content does not assume any new entity over and above the naturalistic ontology.

The point where Brandom comes closest to CRS is that he denies the existence of special semantic facts. But his reasons are not naturalistic, his problem is not that the putative semantic entities do not fit the scientific world view. Rather, he is generally inhospitable to two semantic concepts, reference and truth. On the common understanding these notions capture genuine relations between the linguistic or conceptual on the one hand and the world on the other, and these relations are just as real as, for example, gravitational inter-

action. If this is right, semantic phenomena, just like gravity, have a nature which can be explored. Brandom, however, is a deflationist in semantics. In his view the common understanding makes semantic terms into something much more than they really are, i.e. it inflates them. In fact, semantic terminology does not provide a way of accessing a special domain of facts like physical terminology provides a way of accessing physical facts (*ME* 329). It simply provides a way to make our commitments explicit. He offers an elaborate account of how the use of the semantic idiom can be reinterpreted along these lines. So he is harder on semantics than CRS. CRS denies the existence of autonomous semantic facts, i.e. of semantic facts which cannot be reduced to something naturalistically respectable. Brandom denies the very existence of semantic facts involving reference and truth. It is his deflationism which makes inferentialism attractive to him. Surely, there is a semantic difference between ›water‹ and ›elephant‹. Inferential roles allow one to capture this difference without invoking reference as a real relation.

So Brandom's motivations are not naturalistic. He is not an anti-naturalist; he is simply not pursuing that project. This makes a big difference between his inferentialism and CRS. Since norms and values do not exist in nature, a naturalist must be wary of applying the normative idiom. Brandom, however, is free of these constraints, and his theory is indeed unabashedly normative. His crucial reason for preferring a normative approach is Wittgensteinian: any account of the content of concepts must distinguish between correct and incorrect applications. The way he builds normativity into the account is that he interprets the inferential relations making up the inferential role as obligations and permissions. Deductive relations impose obligations, inductive relations give permissions. To use his own terms, he construes inferential roles in terms of ›commitments‹ and ›entitlements‹: the inferential role of a proposition includes on the to-side whatever commits us or entitles us to that proposition, on the from-side whatever the given proposition commits or entitles us to (in conjunction with other propositions).⁴ The social character of his account is closely connected to normativity. The commitments and entitlements responsible for conceptual content are grounded in social practice. To put it very roughly, a claim gets associated with commitments and entitlements because the members of the community take someone making it to be committed to or entitled to further claims and sanction him for not behaving accordingly.

⁴ Brandom uses a third term as well, ›incompatibility‹. Two claims are incompatible, if commitment to one precludes entitlement to another (*AR* 194). For the sake of simplicity, this third aspect of the inferential role will be ignored.

As a result of these three differences, Brandom's inferential roles, even though structurally similar to those of CRS, are quite different. In CRS inferential role captures how a particular individual, as a matter of fact, is disposed to employ the given concept in inferences. Brandom's inferential roles, on the other hand, express the correct inferential applications, where correctness is judged by the standards of the given society.

II

One objection to CRS is that it is incompatible with externalism about mental content. Externalism holds that what we think about, i. e. what our concepts refer to, is not determined exclusively by ›what is in the head‹. Reference depends on external factors as well. Take two thinkers, whose thoughts are qualitatively identical, i. e. whose thoughts do not differ at all from the introspective point of view – or, alternatively, whose brains processes are indistinguishable. This internal qualitative identity does not guarantee that they think about the same thing, for the content of their thoughts also depends on what is outside.

Externalism is best illustrated with Putnam's Twin-Earth argument. Let us suppose that there is a planet which is exactly like Earth except for this. The tasteless, odorless, colorless liquid, which flows in rivers, falls as rain, which is drunk by people and animals, etc., which is marked by the word ›water‹, does not have the chemical composition H_2O . Imagine that people on both planets still adhere to the Aristotelian worldview and regard their respective liquid as one of the four elements. Under these circumstances the inferential role of ›water‹ is identical on the two planets, but its reference is not. On Earth ›water‹ refers to water, i. e. H_2O , on Twin-Earth it refers to a liquid different from earthly water, to *twater*, if you like. The reason is that the identity of natural kinds goes with their structure rather than with the observable properties.

Before seeing how Brandom responds, let us make clear that his deflationism does not affect the problem. Even though the problem was formulated in terms of reference, the force of the argument does not depend on whether we take the term as standing for a real relation or we understand it in a deflationist way. We might simply replace reference with ›content‹, and take the argument to show that content cannot be inferential role, since inferential roles are the same on the two planets, but contents are not.

Brandom is fully aware of this problem. He accepts Putnam's conclusion, but believes that it does not present any difficulties, because the intentional contents on the two planets are different. It is just that the inhabitants of the

two planets do not know this. »[E]arthlings and twin-earthlings need not be able to tell that they have different concepts, if water and twater are indistinguishable to them. They are not omniscient about the inferential commitments implicit in their own concepts. For the interpreter who is making sense of their practices, and who *is* able (not perceptually, but conceptually) to distinguish H₂O and XYZ, can understand transported earthlings as *mistaking* the XYZ they look at for water, as *inappropriately* applying the concept they express with their word ›water‹ to the unearthly stuff. The circumstances of appropriate noninferential application of the concept expressed by the English word ›water‹ require that it be applied in response to a sample of H₂O.« (ME 119–120)

This answer is acceptable, but it takes some effort to see this. Let us start with the following question. If earthlings and twin-earthlings have different concepts, what is that difference? This seems a rather stupid question to ask because the answer is all too obvious. Earthlings and twin-earthlings have different stuff about them. Facts matter for the identity of concepts. Factual differences lead to conceptual differences. After all, this is what the Twin-Earth argument establishes.

However, Brandom cannot answer this way. The reason is that he does not assign *facts* the kind of metaphysical independence that is usually supposed. The general view is that facts are outside the conceptual. They are there no matter what concepts we have. Their composition and structure is completely independent of our thoughts and concepts. Brandom does not think so. In his view »facts are true claims« (ME 327). Of course, he does not mean that we have the power to create facts simply by saying things. Facts are independent of our *claimings*, i. e. the acts of making claims. What they are not independent of is what is *claimed*, i. e. the contents of true claims. But claims, even in the sense of contents, are crucially dependent on our practices. Contents, in Brandom's view, are individuated by the role they play in our game of giving reasons and asking for reasons. So on his view the factual does not stand outside the conceptual.

This way of thinking about facts is just the other side of his deflationism about semantics. For someone who is not a deflationist, semantics concerns the relationship between independent facts on the one hand, and psychological processes and verbal productions described in nonsemantic terms on the other. Psychological processes and verbal productions qualify as thought and language in virtue of being appropriately related to facts, i. e. in virtue of having semantic properties. When Brandom rejects the idea of semantic facts, he also rejects the idea that facts are completely independent of the conceptual. Briefly, the difference between the customary picture and the Brandomian

picture is this. In the customary picture, unconceptualized, extralinguistic facts are cut off from psychological and verbal processes, and the gap between the two is bridged by semantic facts. Brandom rejects semantic facts because he does not think there is a gap to be bridged. »Discursive practices incorporate actual things. They are solid – as one might say, corporeal: they involve actual bodies, including both our own and the others (animate and inanimate) we have practical and empirical dealings with. [...] According to such a construal of practices, it is wrong to contrast discursive practices with a world of facts and things outside it, modeled on the contrast between words and the things they refer to. It is wrong to think of facts and the objects they involve as constraining linguistic practice from the outside – not because they do not constrain it but because of the mistaken picture of facts and objects as outside it.« (*ME* 332)

Now it emerges why the simple answer to the stupid question is not good enough for Brandom's purposes. Of course, he can and does accept that the difference between earthly and twin-earthly concepts is due to a factual difference between Earth and Twin-Earth. But this factual difference cannot be invoked to explain the conceptual difference, because factual difference is one piece with conceptual difference.

The difficulty becomes easier to see if we rephrase the question in this way. How could it be that earthlings and their twins have different concepts even though this difference is completely unknown to them? The simple answer is this. Earthlings and their twins do not know the facts about the chemical composition of the stuff around them. It is these unknown facts which make the two kinds of stuff different. Since the word ›water‹ is tied to different kinds of things on the two planets, the semantic facts about the word ›water‹ are different on the two planets. Since earthlings and twin-earthlings are not aware of the factual difference between their planets, they are not aware of the conceptual difference between them either. Factual ignorance explains semantic ignorance. But on Brandom's view the factual is permeated by the conceptual, it is not an independent factor. So appealing to unknown factual differences cannot provide an explanation. Facts are true claims, and the conceptual resources of earthlings and twin-earthlings are insufficient to formulate claims about the chemical composition of the colorless, tasteless stuff around them. So it seems that the difficulty the conclusion of the Twin-Earth argument presents for Brandom is not that it clashes with his view, but rather that he cannot explain what makes it true.

But we can find a way out. Brandom says that the inferential commitments implicit in the use of the concepts on the two planets are different. On his account commitment is a normative notion. To say that we are committed

to something is not to describe what we, as a matter of fact, do but what we ought to do. So even though the earthling transported to Twin-Earth does call the local stuff ›water‹, and thus behaves exactly like the natives, there is a crucial difference between them: the transported earthling is wrong, whereas the natives are right. So the unknown difference underlying the difference between the earthly and twin-earthly concept is a difference in the norms governing the use of concepts. The earthly concept ought to be applied to H₂O, its twin ought to be applied to twater.

This reply is of the right form. But how could we establish that the norms applying on Earth and Twin-Earth are indeed different? Conceptual norms, according to Brandom, are instituted by the normative attitudes of concept-users: concept-users assess the particular applications of the concept as correct or incorrect (*ME* 37), and it is from these assessments that the norms emerge. So, if the norms governing the word ›water‹ are indeed different on the two planets, the normative attitudes exhibited by the inhabitants must be different. They must find particular applications of the word ›water‹ correct and incorrect in a way that gives rise to a systematic difference. But how could the practical activity of assessment systematically diverge if neither earthlings nor their twins can tell water from twater?

Putnam's original discussion provides a clue. (I adapt the story to the Brandomian framework.) The first idea is this. The norm governing the use of ›water‹ is indexically tied to the liquid we actually have around us. When we assess someone's using the term in non-inferential reports, i. e. when he describes what he sees, we evaluate his claim with respect to the stuff right there, the stuff he is looking at. Now the stuff, we, the inhabitants of Earth are exposed to, is water, i. e. H₂O. By approving the non-inferential application of ›water‹ to H₂O, we maintain the norm that it is correct to call H₂O ›water‹. Of course, we are not aware of maintaining this norm. All the same, water gets caught up in our linguistic practice. But this is only part of the story. The normative practice as described so far does not forbid the application of ›water‹ to twater. The norm it gives rise to rules out the application of the word to vodka and other liquids, but not to twater. First, because there is no twater around us; second, because if there were, we could not tell it from water.

What we have here is a problem of projection. Our normative attitude exhibited towards non-inferential applications is compatible both with the norm that ›water‹ applies to and only to H₂O, and with the norm that the word applies to and only to colorless, tasteless etc. liquid. How can we explain that it is the first rather than the second norm which gets established? In other words, how do we fix what should count as the same thing as the one we call ›water‹? And here is the second idea. The projection is made along the line

of hidden structure, nature or essence, whatever it is which explains why all pieces of water are pretty much alike and have the observable properties they do, and not along the line of the observable properties themselves.

This kind of projection can be instituted by our normative attitudes. Here is an example. Suppose my daughter surprises me with the idea that what I am drinking consists of a vast number of small, transparent people whom I thoughtlessly murder by drinking them. Then I ask whether she is drinking the same, and she answers that she would not be that cruel, and it is only me committing the massacre. If I respond by saying ›So you're drinking water, and I drink little people‹, tacitly disapproving the application of the word ›water‹ to the water-looking crowd of little people, I exhibit a normative attitude which favors one line of projection rather than the other. What is in her glass and what is mine may look alike, but they cannot be the same, because their structure is different.

Summing it up, the norm tying ›water‹ to water is established this way. First, the word is indexically linked to H_2O . Second, the projection is made on the basis of hidden structure. Both parts can be instituted by normative attitudes. So the situation matches Brandom's description. On the one hand, earthlings would not know that their concept does not apply to *twater*. On the other hand, they would still violate the norm governing the use of the concept if they called *twater* ›water‹. The norm, implicit in their practice, is roughly this: ›water‹ applies to whatever has the same hidden structure as the stuff around you. But the liquid on Twin Earth does not have the same structure.

I conclude that the Twin Earth argument is not a threat for Brandom's inferentialism. He has the resources to accommodate externalism within his account.

III

The second objection to CRS concerns the possibility of intersubjective understanding. Understanding is normally explained in terms of shared meanings. But inferential roles are not shared. Suppose Romeo and Juliet have met different bachelors and have developed different inferential habits. Drawing on his experience, whenever Romeo meets a bachelor, he infers that the person in question is free and happy, whereas Juliet, whose experience is different, infers that he is lonely and miserable. If the inferential role ›bachelor‹ plays in their intellectual economy is different, how can they understand each other? The source of the problem is that inferential practice is sensitive to the information possessed, and people possess different information. So

the inferential roles, which determine their concepts, are different. So their concepts are different.

Even though Brandom's inferential roles are social and normative rather than individual and factual, he is equally affected by the problem. Relying on the social and normative character of inferential roles he can say that certain speakers apply the concept correctly whereas others have only partial understanding of it. Say, Juliet is right, from ›bachelor‹ one should infer to ›miserable‹ and not ›happy‹, and Romeo's use of the word is not quite right. But this does not explain how they can understand each other. The existence of a right concept does not help, unless the concept is shared.

Once again, Brandom is fully aware of this problem. His answer (*ME* 477–490, 633–636) is intriguing but somewhat sketchy and not fully coherent. In this section I give a reconstruction, and leave the problems for the following sections.

Brandom first offers a diagnosis. The problem, he says, arises from the tension between inferentialism and the commonsensical picture of communication. According to the commonsensical picture, communication is like transportation. Thoughts are the goods to be transported, and words are the vehicles. An act of communication is successful if the goods arrive in good order, i. e. if the recipient grasps the thoughts the speaker intended to get across. Understanding then consists in sharing thoughts. So meanings, the thoughts words carry, must be shareable by the speaker and the recipient. If the meanings are not common to them, the recipient cannot grasp what the speaker means. The transportation model of understanding therefore presupposes shareable and thus transportable contents. But inferentialism, as we have seen, does not seem to countenance entities which could serve as such contents.

Given this diagnosis, the inferentialist might respond by adjusting his notion of content so that it could be shared and transported. The easiest way is to select from the totality of the inferential role a set of inferences which are somehow privileged and show that this privileged core is intersubjectively shared. One may, for example, say that the inferences from ›bachelor‹ to ›male‹ and to ›unmarried‹, which both Romeo and Juliet endorse, belong to the privileged core, whereas the inferences to ›happiness‹ or ›misery‹ do not. Inferences in the privileged core are constitutive of meaning, inferences outside it are not. The former depend on the mastery of the concept, the latter are underwritten by real world knowledge. In this way ›bachelor‹ would have the same meaning for Romeo and Juliet, and they would only differ in their opinions about bachelors. Brandom holds that this solution is perfectly compatible with his account, but, for reasons whose discussion I defer until

the last section, he does not choose this path.⁵ What he suggests instead is getting rid of the transportation model. This alone is not enough. The transportation model is commonsensical, and nearly all theoretical accounts of understanding are varieties of this model. We cannot abandon it without putting something in its place. So the tenability of Brandom's solution depends on the plausibility of what he suggests as a replacement.

What he suggests is ›scorekeeping‹. As it was mentioned earlier, Brandom describes inferential role in terms of commitments and entitlements. Scorekeeping is keeping track of the others' commitments and entitlements. I keep score on you when I register, for example, that given your claim that *p*, you should also believe *q* and you also have reasons to believe *r*. Understanding is successful scorekeeping. »The sort of understanding or uptake of such a performance [making a claim] required for successful communication is for the audience to figure that performance correctly in its score: to attribute the right commitment to the one making the claim.« (ME 479–480)

But the problem, as we have seen is that inferential role is sensitive to collateral information, or, to put it differently, what the person in question believes. Suppose you say ›Deans are generally incompetent‹. This claim entitles you to question the competence of particular deans. Wasserkopf is a dean. Should we put in your score the entitlement to the claim ›Wasserkopf is incompetent? That depends on whether you know that Wasserkopf is a dean, and whether you believe he is an exception to the rule. I can only keep your score right, if I have exactly the same information as you, which is impossible. So, at first sight, scorekeeping does not get us any further than transportation.

Adhering to the idea that there is one right score would be assuming the existence of shared contents. This would not be but a variation of the transportation model. What Brandom suggests is more radical. »The inferential contents are essentially perspectival – they can be specified only from a given point of view. What is shared is a capacity to navigate and traverse differences in points of view, to specify contents from different points of view.« (ME 485)

⁵ There are two reasons for not taking the route which Brandom would not find convincing. First, the distinction between meaning-constitutive and non-meaning-constitutive inferences corresponds to the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. But Brandom rejects analytic truths only in so far as they are regarded as a priori and unrevisable – but meaning-constitutive inferences need not be analytic in that sense (ME 634). Second, one might wonder what psychological difference there is between the two kinds of inference. How are certain inferences marked in the mind as underwritten by meaning? This is a problem for CRS, but not for Brandom. He may say that the distinction is not psychological but depends on the normative practice of the community. The privileged, meaning-constitutive inferences are supported by social norms.

So there is no such thing as *the* content of a claim. The content of a claim varies with the framework of auxiliary information within which it is considered. Viewed together with different background assumptions one and the same claim confers different commitments and entitlements. So there is no single correct score. Understanding a claim is to know what difference it makes when it is added to particular systems of beliefs, e. g. to figure out what commitments and entitlements Romeo and Juliet would undertake – given their different opinions on bachelors – by asserting ›Lonesome Jim is a bachelor‹ or ›Lonesome Jim, a long time bachelor, has recently got married‹. To understand a claim thus is to be capable of identifying its inferential significance against various backgrounds.

What underwrites this capacity is the semantic property Brandom calls *intension*. It is a function from collateral information to commitments and entitlements (*ME* 482). Basically, it tells us what commitments and entitlements the acceptance of a claim brings with it, given a prior set of beliefs. Brandomian intension, of course, is not intension in the usual sense, since it is not defined in terms of possible worlds. Brandom uses the term, because this semantic property resembles usual intensions in its ability to capture subtle differences.⁶ Notice that Brandomian intension should not be confused with content. Intension is a constant property, which belongs to the expression itself. Content is a variable property; it is what the intension function yields when it is applied to a given set of collateral information. Intension is the rule of calculation of inferential significance, content is the inferential significance the calculation yields when a particular background is assumed.

Even though Brandom does not discuss this, it is clear that intension conceived in this way can be put to two sorts of uses: to learn *about* and to learn *from* others. From the claims one makes and from what we know about his beliefs we can guess what else he might believe – what reasons he might have for making that claim and what he might think the claim provides reason for. The more we know about the other – the better we know his background beliefs –, the better our guesses will be. If we keep the score from our own perspective, rather than from the other's, we can figure out how our own commitments and entitlements should change if we were to accept a given claim. For instance, if Romeo says ›Lonesome Jim is a bachelor‹, Juliet learns from this that Lonesome Jim is miserable, even though Romeo himself believes

⁶ In fact, it is more fine-grained. Usual intensions cannot distinguish between necessarily coextensive expressions like ›3‹ and › $1^7 + 1^8 + 1^9$ ‹. But saying to a kid ›You get 3 pieces of chocolate‹ and ›You get $1^7 + 1^8 + 1^9$ pieces of chocolate‹ will change the kid's score differently if he does not know that $3 = 1^7 + 1^8 + 1^9$.

the contrary. This twofold applicability is an attractive feature of the account, because the notion of understanding indeed comprises two things: finding out what goes on in other people's minds and using other people's ideas in developing our own picture of the world.

We may also see that the Brandomian account abandons the transportation model indeed. Even though intensions are shared, they do not get transported. Knowledge of intensions is like knowledge of the language. It is a prerequisite of understanding what is said by a particular person on a particular occasion rather than understanding it. It is not something we learn when somebody says something. It is a precondition of learning about and from the speaker. And the actual learning of something is again no transportation. The commitments and entitlements we register in the score are not associated with a claim as it is itself. They attach to a claim plus a given set of collateral information. The claim alone does not carry a specific class of commitments and entitlements.

But this is not yet the complete picture. Brandom offers a »three-leveled approach« (*ME* 484). Inferential significance or content is on the middle level. From this we may move »up« to intension, which is a relativization of content to collateral information, but we may also move »down« to extension (*ME* 485). The downward move is also scorekeeping, it is keeping score from our perspective. So how does it differ from the case just described as learning from others, when we feed our own background knowledge into the intension of the speaker's claim and thus calculate how our commitments and entitlements should change if we accept the claim? Extension is to be invoked when intension cannot enable us to calculate the score from our perspective. This may happen in two ways. First, as we will see in the next section, sometimes intension is not shared. Second, the speaker's way of identifying the object of discourse may involve commitments which the hearer does not share.

Imagine that you discuss the government's policy and your partner, who has a pretty low opinion of the prime minister says: ›That scumbag has called a press conference‹. Even though you do not share his opinion, you may still »extract information« (*ME* 700, *AR* 180) from his claim, use it as a premise to reason with, say, to conclude that the prime minister wants to make an announcement. This cannot be explained in terms of intension. Intension can be invoked to explain how your partner derives his entitlement to that claim. His background assumptions entitle him to a low opinion of the prime minister and he also knows that the prime minister has called a press conference. This and the intension of ›That scumbag has called a press conference‹ together explain why he says just that. But your capacity to extract information from this claim cannot be explained in this way. The collateral information you operate

with is that the prime minister is a nice guy and the intension of ›scumbag‹ prohibits its application to nice guys. So the information you have and the intension of the claim do not tell you how to modify your commitments and entitlements. What you need to realize is that ›that scumbag‹ as it was used by the speaker can be substituted with ›the prime minister‹. To make this substitution is to figure out that the two expression tokens are correferential, in other words, that their extension is identical.

It is important that extension as used here should not be construed as a semantic property underlying scorekeeping in the way which intension underlies scorekeeping in the other cases. Brandom is not going for the Kripkean-Putnamian idea that mutual understanding between people with different or even incompatible convictions can be explained in terms of reference. First, the Kripkean-Putnamian approach applies only to rigid designators, and Brandom does not make this qualification. Second, and more importantly, the Kripke-Putnam view works with a substantive notion of reference: it assumes that reference is a genuine relation between words and things like ›heavier than‹ is genuine relation between the blackboard and a piece of chalk. But Brandom is a deflationist about reference. In his view, the statement, ›that scumbag‹ said by you and ›the prime minister‹ said by me have the same reference does not describe a genuine semantic fact that the two expression tokens stand in a semantic relation with one and the same thing. There are no genuine semantic facts of this kind. The statement about the identity of reference merely expresses – i. e. makes explicit – my willingness to substitute your ›that scumbag‹ with the ›prime minister‹.

If this is the way reference or extension is understood here, two things follow. First, we do not have transportation of shared contents here either. Since extension is no genuine property, it is not something that your words and my words can have in common. So it cannot be transported. Second, our capacity to extract information difference of opinion notwithstanding has no special semantic grounding. We need to know the intension, but we do not need a different sort of semantic knowledge. All we need in addition is some knowledge of background assumptions and a bit smartness. Indeed, what Brandom discusses in this context is merely the linguistic devices with which we can maintain the identity of reference across differences in opinion. Such devices include anaphoric pronouns (›You said *he* will hold a press conference?‹), quotations (›You said ›*that scumbag*‹ will hold a press conference?‹) and *de re* locutions (›You said *of the prime minister* that he will hold a press conference?‹). These devices enable one to keep talking of the same thing without embracing the convictions of the speaker. Their competent use enables one to express the information extracted, i. e. to reformulate the speaker's claim

within the hearer's perspective, but it is not what makes extracting information possible.

IV

There is a three-page long stretch in *ME* (482–485) with which the reconstruction in the previous section seems difficult to square. Brandom makes there two claims: the notion of intension is problematic, and, *therefore*, we should not try to solve the problem of understanding by identifying meaning with a shared core of inferential roles. The second claim is clear: we have already seen that Brandom does not wish to privilege certain inferences as meaning-constitutive and identify content with this set. What is unclear is the first claim and the transition to the second. The first claim is unclear because intension is explicitly invoked and endorsed later on (*ME* 485, 635). The transition is unclear because we have no explanation of how the notion of intension is linked to the privileged core strategy.

I think the confusion derives from two things. First, Brandom does not distinguish here between the general notion of intension and a more specific one we get if we adopt a certain restriction. According to the general notion, as described above, intension is a function from collateral information to commitments and entitlements. Suppose we adopt the restriction that intension is a constant function, i.e. it yields the same commitments and entitlements whatever collateral information we have. For example, the intension of ›bachelor‹ could be this:

whatever information one has, ›x is male and x is unmarried‹ commit one to ›x is a bachelor‹; and whatever information one has, ›x is a bachelor‹ commits one to ›x is male‹ and ›x is unmarried‹.

This notion of intension corresponds to the traditional notion of meaning against which Quine's criticism in »Two Dogmas« is directed. This traditional notion indeed distinguishes between two kinds of inferences: ones which are constitutive of meaning and ones which are underwritten by collateral information. The inference from ›bachelor‹ to ›male‹ would count as constitutive of meaning, but Juliet's inference from ›bachelor‹ to ›happy‹ and Romeo's inference to ›miserable‹ would be licensed by collateral information. Hence, this notion indeed leads to the privileged core strategy, which Brandom rejects.

The same is not true of the general notion. If intension is not a constant function, the intension of ›bachelor‹ may include the following:

given the information that most bachelors are *happy*, ›x is a bachelor‹ commits one to ›x is male‹ and ›x is unmarried‹ and entitles one to ›x is happy‹;
given the information that most bachelors are *miserable*, ›x is a bachelor‹

commits one to ›x is male‹ and ›x is unmarried‹ and entitles one to ›x is miserable‹.

Intensions which include clauses like these do not support a distinction between inferences based on meaning and inferences based on collateral information. Someone who draws an inference following one of these patterns relies both on meaning and collateral information, because meaning includes reference to collateral information. Therefore, if intension is not a constant function, meaning cannot be set against collateral information.⁷

Keeping this in mind, this part of *ME* should be read in this way. At the beginning Brandom introduces the general notion of intension, then he shifts the discussion to intension as constant function. This explains how he can move from the criticism of intension to the rejection of the privileged core strategy: intension as constant function, i. e. meaning in the traditional sense, is committed to the privileged core. It also explains one of his arguments against the notion of intension: if you are not free to stipulate intensions, but regard them as implicit in language use, what features of language use determine the intension (*ME* 482–483)? This, as he points out, is just Quine's worry: how do you decide which inferences are included in the privileged core (*ME* 484)? The criticism in the section is directed against the restricted notion of intension but does not affect the general one. This is why he can use the general notion later on.

A second thing which aggravates the confusion is that Brandom does not distinguish the criticism of the notion of intension as such and the criticism directed against using it within the framework of the transportation model of communication. He points out that in communication across generations we cannot rely on shared intensions. Rutherford and Bohr did not associate the same intension with ›electron‹ as contemporary physicists, we may still understand them (*ME* 483, see also *AR* 167). This is why – says Brandom – »it is hard to find a champion for an intensional transportation model of communication« (*ME* 483). This remark is not directed against the notion of intension itself, but against its use as a shared and transportable entity within the transportation model. Consequently, it does not contradict anything in the previous section. In the reconstruction intensions appear as entities which are shared but not transported. We rely on them in calculating the commitments and entitlements in the light of sets of collateral information which may differ from person to person.

⁷ Another way of seeing this is that intensions which are constant functions can be rendered in the traditional ›... means ...‹ form – e. g. ›bachelor‹ means ›unmarried male‹ –, whereas intensions which are not constant cannot be expressed in this way.

All in all, these pages do not undermine the reconstruction offered in the previous section.

V

We saw that Brandom's account has two prongs: one employing the notion of intension, and one employing the (non-substantial) notion of extension. Apart from saying that they are aspects of one and the same scorekeeping activity, he does not discuss how the two are related (*ME* 485). I suggest that they are importantly different, which Brandom does not see, and this creates tensions in his conception.

One may distinguish between two conceptions of understanding. These are not contradictory views but different targets for explanation. The first, which might be termed *narrow or linguistic* conception, takes understanding to be something automatically achieved if one knows the language. This is the conception which is associated with the idea of linguistic rules or conventions, the idea that it is in virtue of certain rules or conventions that physical items – like spoken or written words – have meanings. It holds that all it takes to understand a sentence is to know the meanings of the lexical items and the rules of grammar. The second conception, call it understanding in the *broad* sense, regards understanding as involving more than grasping what the rules determine. A couple of examples might help: finding out that a remark is ironical; identifying the unpronounced premise of an enthymematic inference; guessing why someone says something; understanding someone who mixes up similar sounding words. Take someone who, on a particular occasion, fails to do one of these things, say, does not notice the irony. Does he understand what was said? Yes and no. Yes: he understood the words. No: he did not get the point. The sense in which he understood what was said is the narrow, the sense in which he did not is the broad sense of understanding. To understand in the first sense we only need to know the language, to understand in the second sense we also need a kind of smartness or intelligence.⁸

Keeping this distinction in mind, talk of intension may be seen as an attempt to capture what is involved in narrow or linguistic understanding. It is the intension which tells one what to make of a claim in general. It provides the rules for scorekeeping: it says what commitments and entitlements flow from the claim given any particular set of collateral information. Intension does not reveal whether the speaker is serious; it does not shed light on his motivations; it does not tell us what the speaker must have thought when

⁸ The distinction is not beyond dispute. Davidson, for example, denies it.

what he says sounds too wrong to be seriously meant; it does not tell us how fragmented or confused speech can be best made to cohere. In short, it appears to afford the sort of understanding which does not require intelligence in addition to the knowledge of language. At one point Brandom himself links intension to linguistic competence: »Sharing intensions is speaking the same language in the strong sense« (ME 483). In the strong sense, because it is obvious that we can speak the same language without sharing intensions: Bohr and Rutherford spoke English just as contemporary physicists do.

If intension is tied to narrow or linguistic understanding, extension seems to be connected to understanding in the broad sense. As it has been argued in section III, understanding via identification of extension does not have a semantic basis of its own. Moreover, Brandom appeals to extension exactly in those cases which involve the use of non-linguistic abilities. First, in the Bohr-Rutherford type cases, in which intensions are not shared (AR 167), where the concepts are radically different. Like understanding Aristotle, this is not just a matter of linguistic competence but of interpretative intelligence. Second, in cases described by Donnellan and Kripke in terms of »referential use« and »speaker's reference«, respectively (ME 488). Here the speaker offers an identifying description which, taken literally, does not identify anything or identifies something else than what the speaker is thinking of. When this happens, getting the message requires not just linguistic competence, but an ability to guess what the other must be thinking about. Indeed, these kinds of cases are standard examples of what I called broad understanding.

These considerations are not sufficient to show that Brandom tacitly invokes two different conceptions of understanding. This might be just forcing a distinction on him which he might reject or find irrelevant. I think, however, that these two conceptions are indeed present, and the failure to realize it produces tensions in his account. First, intension, which, on the face of it, seems to explain narrow understanding is also invoked for the explanation of broad understanding. Second, and much more importantly, Brandom thinks he rejects the privileged core strategy whereas he is committed to it. I start with the second and explain the first on the way.

One way to solve the problem of intersubjective understanding would be to individuate concepts in terms of a limited number inferences, i. e. to adopt the privileged core strategy. Even though Brandom does not rule this out as an option, he does not adopt it (ME 484, 634). One of his reasons is that »mastery of a special subset of distinguished inferences [...] is not in general sufficient for grasp of the concept. For such grasp requires that one be hooked up to a *function* that takes as its argument repertoires of concomitant commitments available as auxiliary hypotheses and yields inferential significances as its val-

ues. Carrying on a conversation involves being able to move from perspective to perspective, appreciating the significance a remark would have for various interlocutors.« (*ME 635, italics in the original*)

The idea is that the privileged inferences are insufficient: we need all inferences, not just the privileged ones. Here is an example. You, John and I sit down to eat. John, even though he is very hungry, eats very little. You tell him: ›You're stupid. You aren't overweight at all‹. In order to understand you, I must figure out that you believe that John does not eat because he is on a diet, and he is on a diet because he thinks he is overweight. This takes knowing the inferential connections between being hungry and eating, thinking oneself overweight and going on diet, being on diet and repressing one's hunger, thinking falsely that one is overweight and being stupid, etc. There are good many inferences which go into understanding your claim. I need all of them to get what you mean. If we accept the distinction between inferences which are meaning-constitutive and which are not, presumably, some inferences employed here end up in the second group. Now if we drop these non-meaning-constitutive inferences, the story will not add up. So the subset of a privileged subset of inferences is insufficient for understanding.

The quotation exposes the first tension. The kind of understanding we have here is broad. One may very well know what the sentences ›You are stupid‹ and ›You are not overweight at all‹ literally mean and yet fail to grasp their significance in the given context. This failure is then not linguistic or semantic. However, the »function« mentioned in the quotation is intension. So it seems that intension provides understanding in the broad sense, in contrast with the remarks which suggest that it has to do with understanding in the narrow sense.

At this point we should not make much of this. If Brandom does not have a distinction between narrow and broad understanding, there is no tension to talk about. The second tension cannot be removed that easily. Moreover, it also shows that Brandom needs the distinction, so his position suffers from the first tension as well. I maintain that, contrary to what he says, he cannot avoid selecting a privileged set of inferences. Differently put, intension cannot include all legitimate inferences involving the claim; it cannot contain more than a privileged set. Let us start from the fact that Brandom's account is normative. The inferential roles which give content to our claims contain the inferences we should perform or approve rather than the ones we actually perform or approve. So inferential roles are specified normatively, not factually. The norms they embody are instituted by our social practices. Brandom has a sophisticated picture of how this is done, but the details are not interesting for our purposes. What matters is something that Brandom does not see,

namely, that socially instituted norms cannot extend to all inferences which we agree with. There are inferences which are novel in the sense that they do not follow a socially established pattern, yet do not shift the meaning of expressions. Here is an example. You walk along the rails, and find part of a snake with the head and without the tail on the left side, and part of a snake with the tail and without the head on the right side. You would probably infer that it was the train which has cut it into two. If you draw this inference, you use ›snake‹, ›rail‹, ›train‹ or ›cut‹, etc. in the usual sense. You neither change their meaning, nor extend it. Nevertheless, you do not simply say what you are expected to say given the inferential role of the expressions. You put things together in a novel way. And when the audience understands you, they capture these novel connections.

Of course, it is technically possible to construe the intension of the claim ›The train has cut the snake into two‹ in such a way that it includes that the conditions described entitle one to assert the sentence. But it is very implausible that the intension of this claim actually includes such a clause. Intensions are sustained by the normative practice of the community, and the inference is novel exactly because it is not included in that practice. Talking of trains cutting snakes into two is so peripheral that it cannot come to be part of a norm. One might try to include this in the intension by making intension more abstract, as referring not to snakes and trains but soft and hard objects, pressure, sharp edges, etc. But doing this would be developing a theory of mental representation, rather than doing what Brandom does, analyzing the discursive practice of a community.

Brandom has resources to explain novelties, but one cannot appeal to them in this case. One is to say that a particular performance involving a concept may be novel for an individual who has not completely mastered the concept (*ME* 636, cf. 39–41). When it comes to technical terms of a profession or a discipline the norm is set by the experts, and the laymen have limited understanding. But the snake inference is not novel in this way: it does not demand expert knowledge. The other explanation Brandom may give stems from his view that norms are present in the form of dispositions (*ME* 636, cf. 28–29, 35), and dispositions outrun their actual manifestations. This may indeed account for the fact we find certain inferences good even though we have never met them before.⁹ Yet it does not apply to this case. It is true that we are disposed to approve the snake inference. The problem is that this disposition

⁹ This is the core of Brandom's solution to the Kripkenstein paradox. Meaning is rooted in normative dispositions which decide between right and wrong usage even in cases we have not encountered before.

cannot be explained by socially instituted norms. The inference is too special to fit any socially established general pattern precisely. Since it also diverges from those patterns, the fact that we endorse it cannot be explained simply in terms of those patterns. The socially established norms do explain why we do not reject it – it does not clash with the patterns –, but do not explain why we are disposed to accept it.

This inference is just one example which does not seem to be part of the socially sustained inferential role of the claim it involves. There are an enormous number of good inferences of this kind. Inductive inferences are sensitive to context: they may be defeated or reinstated by changes in a lot of different circumstances. Some of those circumstances are so well-known in the speech community that we have every right to include them in the intensions – as pieces of collateral information affecting the commitments and entitlements conferred by the given claim. For instance, everyone knows that ›x is a smart and hardworking student‹ entitles one to the claim that ›x is likely to get a good grade‹. Everyone knows that this entitlement is undercut by information that x was asked about the only topic he did not study, or that he was sick on the day of examination. But there is an indefinite number of circumstances which may undermine the inference, and for many of them we have not been prepared. We are smart, so we can see their relevance, but this ability is not a matter of language learning or enculturation. Social practice, which is necessarily limited, cannot foresee all the conditions under which we may affirm or deny a sentence.

The two tensions have the same root. On the one hand, Brandom describes language as a social game subject to norms. If one often and strongly violates these norms, he is not playing the game. On the other hand, Brandom is aware that playing the game alone is not always sufficient for understanding. But one cannot account for both perspectives in terms of the same conceptual apparatus. If intension belongs to »language in the strong sense«, it cannot be invoked to explain the sort of understanding which requires ingenuity. If inferential roles are sustained by social norms, they cannot include all good inferences. Summing it up: the social-normative conception of inferential role comes with a narrow conception of understanding, and the ambition to use it to explain understanding in the broad sense must be given up.

It is important to see that this tension does not undermine Brandom's reply to the issue of intersubjective understanding. His crucial move is to replace the transportation model with the scorekeeping model, and the tension we found does not threaten that move. It does not show that the scorekeeping model as such is wrong, it is a problem merely for a particular version of the scorekeeping model.

Moreover, the tension can be resolved. I would like to finish with two remarks on how. First, to preserve the social-normative character of inferential roles is to maintain some distinction between narrow and broad understanding. Social regulation is necessarily limited. Socially instituted inferential roles cannot provide detailed instruction on how a claim has to be understood in all possible situations. Therefore, such inferential roles cannot account for all instances of understanding. So there must be room for a different conception. Brandom, indeed, tacitly acknowledges this by explaining certain instances in terms of extension. However, he does not see the difference between the two parts of his account because what matters for him is that both involve score-keeping, and he does not pay much attention to what we rely on when we are engaged in scorekeeping.

Second, since normative regulation cannot specify all the good inferential moves one can make with a concept, Brandom has to face Quine's question: how do you decide what inferences are privileged? But answering this does not force him to distinguish between inferences which flow from the meaning and inferences which are supported by collateral information. As we have seen in the previous section, his intensions may make essential reference to collateral information. In fact, he is in good position to answer to Quine's challenge. He does not demand that inferential roles be unrevisable. Moreover, he analyzes social norms in terms of I-thou relations (*ME*, 38–9), which means roughly that social norms arise from specific interactions between particular individuals. This would allow him a good deal of flexibility. He does not have to assume that there is a specific list of privileged inferences which are binding for everyone. He may allow that the privileged set does not have sharp boundaries and its membership can be assessed differently by different members of the community.

