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BOOK REVIEW

## **Kenan Šljivo (auth.). Inferentialism and Epistemology: A Cognitive Theoretical Reading of Robert Brandom's Philosophy. (Philosophical Investigation, Croatian Philosophical Society, Zagreb, 2021, p.190. )\***

**Karlo Gardavski<sup>1</sup>**

The two central questions addressed by analytical philosophy (logic, epistemology, philosophy of language, cognitive science), from its beginnings to the present day, are questions of truth and meaning. Analytical philosophy attempts to explain what the relationship between different language models is, as well as how their properties relate to extralinguistic objects. Originally, the meaning was supposed to present the connection between a particular language model and extra-linguistic objects. Therefore, linguistic generalities represent or refer to objects as evidence for the correct use of linguistic units (Frege, Russell, early Wittgenstein, Carnap), and this theoretical approach became known as referential semantics. This theoretical approach has been attacked by philosophers such as late Wittgenstein (language games, critique of private language, normativity), Quine (critique of two dogmas of

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<sup>1</sup> K.Gardavski

University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Philosophy, Dept. of Philosophy  
Scientific and Research Incubator  
Franje Račkog 1, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina



[karlo.gardavski@gmail.com](mailto:karlo.gardavski@gmail.com)

empiricism, ontological relativity, naturalized epistemology), Davidson (critique of the third dogma of empiricism, teaching about holism of meaning, radical interpretation), who introduce the philosophy of pragmatism into analytical philosophy. The problems of meaning and truth have received their pragmatic reinterpretation, where truth and meaning are not constructed by rigid correspondence of linguistic entities and outside linguistic objects, but by an analysis of the use of language within communicational communities. Thus, logic itself as an explanatory instrument undergoes change where, from the point of formalistic rigidity of the logic of logical atomism, it moves towards modal, deontic, and situational logics, etc.

Robert Brandom's inferential semantics is theoretically opposed to referentialism. Inferentialism arose as a synthesis of certain projects of analytical philosophy and the philosophy of pragmatism. Brandom retains the analytical (logical) model of language analysis, rejecting logical reductionism and formalism. For Brandom, logic should be an organ of semantic self-awareness, which will explicate inferential connections in our use of conceptual content within a communicative community. Thus, he argues that the analysis of meaning is directed towards the analysis of inferential relations between conceptual units, as evidence for the meaning and significance of the conceptual content. Meaning and truth are interdependent.

In his book *Inferentialism and Epistemology: A Cognitive Theoretical Reading of Robert Brandom's Philosophy*, the author Kenan Šljivo intends to present inferentialism as a strategy which enables us "to make explicit what is implicit in our epistemic practice". Epistemic and linguistic practices cannot be separated. The author uses inferentialism to understand epistemic processes and issues. An inferential analysis of the conceptual structures of our language should lead to the epistemological and cognitive content of these structures. And inferentialism is offered as an answer to the question of the connection between concepts and cognitive content.

*Inferentialism and Epistemology: A Cognitive Theoretical Reading of Robert Brandom's Philosophy* consists of five chapters: the first part of the book entitled as "Semantic Framework of Inferentialism" presents the authors (Gerhard Gentzen, Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Christopher Peacocke, and Willfrid Sellars) who influenced Brandom's teaching on semantic theory; in the second part of the book "Brandom on Meaning and Intentionality" the author analyzes the basic directions of Robert Brandom's inferentialist program; the third part of the book entitled as "Consequences of Brandom's Normative Turn for Epistemology" focuses on the expansion of the inferentialist program into the sphere of epistemology; the

fourth part of the book “Semantic, Structural and Pragmatic Properties of Implication as the Central Concept of Inferentialism” deals with the explanation of the implication as the central concept of inferentialism (material implication), and the author places the implication in the epistemological context; within the fifth part of the book “Recognitive Practice of Identification of Representation of Meaning” the author presents his principle - cognitive equivalence of implication - which serves to re-recognize the epistemic structures of the conceptual content used in any communicative act.

Although the book is divided into five chapters, it can be presented thematically in two parts. Namely, in the first thematic part the author unites the first four chapters of the book and exposes Brandom's inferentialist program; the author starts off with the influence of various philosophical teachings that had a big impact on Brandom's own formation of philosophy of inferentialism and goes all the way to describing the spread of inferentialism in the domain of epistemology (its processes and problems). The fifth chapter of this book presents the second thematic part and is the author's extension of inferentialism in the domain of epistemology. Through the principle of cognitive equivalence of implication, it expands the teaching of inferentialism within epistemology.

The five philosophers who have explicitly influenced the development of Brandom's analytically normative idiom in his semantic teaching are Frege, Genzen, Wittgenstein, Peacocke and Sellars. Their teachings contributed to Brandom's understanding of the problem of meaning and were the basis for building his inferentialist teaching. Frege had an impact with his teaching on conceptual content (which Brandom uses for inferential purposes); Genzen had an influence on Brandom with his idea of the calculus of natural deduction in which the goal was to formally present logical reasoning and logical connectives (conjunction) between logical concepts (Brandom calls Genzen's model hyperinferentialism). Furthermore, Sellars' teaching on inferential practice had a big impact on Brandom's thought, where, according to Sellars, in order to reach meaning within language there are rules that can be articulated inferentially (material implication), language is a sum of norms that are parts of a language game, and to explicate meaning one must know the norms that are part of practical activities. Wittgenstein influenced Brandom with his learning about language games (the word has meaning only in the context of its use and that the use of certain words has its social origin), critique of private language, and learning on norms or conditions of the use of a word, which are always implicit in language practice and need to be explicated. Peacocke inspired Brandom with his determination theory, where he explains how it is

possible to offer an explanatory perspective for understanding of concepts (their semantic values) within a conceptual content that will not be empirical.

In order to present Brandom's inferentialist theory, we have to explain the three key concepts that underlie this theory; namely, these are: the concept of conceptual content, (Frege) its inferential role (Frege, Genzen, Sellars) and its use value (Wittgenstein). Although Brandom still maintains an analytical approach in language analysis, he does not keep the classical analytical techniques because their basis is reductive. The basis for understanding inferentialist semantics lies in the concept of the inferential role of conceptual content. Within linguistic (inferentialist) games, the notions of content may be in the position of premise or conclusion, i.e., the position of conceptual content depends on the conditions and consequences of its application. Inferential roles show that Brandom's inferentialism is an expressive organ of discursive language practice, that is, that logical analysis is an expressive means of language practice. Inferentialist strategies can explicate a network of inferential conditions of a single conceptual content only from the use of that conceptual content. Only when we turn to linguistic practices is the articulation of meaning and truth value possible. Turning to pragmatics should mean that to understand the meaning of concepts one needs to turn to social linguistic practices, within which it is only possible to explain the immanent norms of linguistic behavior. By moving in the direction of pragmatism, Brandom prevails over the classical analytical approach to the problem of meaning and instead sets a new analytical-pragmatic matrix. Brandom positions his analytical-pragmatic matrix in the model of "strong inferentialism".

What forms the basis of Brandom's logical vocabulary is the implication (conditional) as the logical connective of all conceptual units. With the help of logical vocabulary, whose central term is implication, it is possible to make reconstructions and constructions of all conceptual contents. That is, the logical vocabulary should express (explicate) all the inferential relations of conceptual units in language practice that are immanent in it.

The implication that Brandom advocates is not formalistic. For Brandom, in natural languages it is not possible to confine oneself only to the formal properties of implication, because the content must also be brought into implicit connections. As the philosophy of inferentialism explores the expressive power of vocabulary, it gives us the ability to systematize a series of inferential commitments as part of that vocabulary to which people commit by accepting certain conceptual content. The semantic value of a vocabulary's words can only be evaluated from its use. Within discursive practices, Brandom seeks to explicate inferential connections, not

by using formal implications, but by using material ones (Sellars). Material implication should explain the conditions of practical use of terms and consequences. Or, to put it in Wittgensteinian manner, there are no rules before use. Only from the context of the use of conceptual units is it possible to articulate inferential connections. Material implication is the basis of a logical vocabulary that should explore inferential connections in conceptual content.

If one wants to discuss the influence of Brandom inferentialism on epistemology, it is best to do so from Brandom's inferential reinterpretation of Immanuel Kant. Brandom approaches Kant's teaching from the direction of its validity for the philosophy of pragmatism. According to Brandom, Kant makes a turn from the Cartesian concept of certainty to the concept of necessity. The central point of this reinterpretation is within transcendental analytics (Kant) - where the synthetic power of reason is only understood from the power of judgment. The judgment is always guided by some rules (norms). Thus, the subject matter of our judgment is always evaluated with respect to norms in our discursive practice. The reason why Brandom reinterprets Kant lies in the idea that Kant's teachings when observed through the magnifying glass of pragmatism can be used to explain human rationality. Normativity is the basis from which Brandom understands rationality as a discursive practice in which implicit norms become explicit through linguistic practice - and which consists of giving reasons for the specific use of language in a particular context. The rationality advocated by Brandom requires mastery of conceptual content and norms implicit in discursive practice - logical capacities are rational capacities. Brandom terms this kind of rationality as expressive rationality. This type of rationality has no traces of empiricism.

The deontic vocabulary in Brandom's philosophy is an instrument for understanding the practical side of discursive practice involving the intersubjective dimension of evaluation. The basic normative term of deontic vocabulary is commitment. People within language practice treat each other as if they were committed to something. Only in communication do the participants treat each other as those who commit to something else. The task of deontic vocabulary is to give importance to the social background of language practices. That is, the social standard is important for us to evaluate deontic concepts. The epistemological consequence of this teaching is that the concept of objectivity and truth is only possible from the perspective of intersubjective-communicative practice.

From the perspective of the social context (or the communicative act of discursive practice), according to the author, it is necessary to explain the function of the implication, and to reconstruct the notion of truth. Brandom works from the

perspective of compatibility / incompatibility – because both perspectives must have certain standards by which they will be recognized within the language. That standard concerns socially acceptable matrixes of rationality – as a structure of objectivity. When the two concepts are not placed in a cause-and-effect relationship (inferential articulation), there is no objectivity, no truth, and thus our discursive practice has no cognitive value either.

The author argues that the determination of the cognitive value of our conceptual content is only possible in intersubjective and communicative practice. Here we must explain truth, rationality, meaning, reference, etc. through a certain principle, which should help us to recognize the logical and semantic normativity, and which are necessary for the cognitive evaluation of our concepts. If we go in this direction, we reject the conception of an epistemologically omnipotent and strong Cartesian subject who, through self-reflection, reveals his own cognitive abilities and certainty. The concepts of rationality and truth are determined in the domain of a communicative community (Apel, Habermas, Rorty). The requirement placed on participants in one community is to understand each other. At this request, the author brings to our attention Davidson's understanding of communication through interpretations. Davidson is important for understanding the author's basic idea of the text because thoughts and their content are the basis for explicating the epistemological values of the semantic features of language. The use of a word within a language is a way to determine its semantic properties. In communication between speakers of a community, speakers evaluate (interpret) each other's attitudes that are always given in a context. For Davidson, interpretation is only possible by employing that which he terms as the charity or the principle of recognition of truth. From this perspective, the author wants to move in the direction of the recognition of the inferential aspects of our linguistic practice, or the recognition of the inferential foreign linguistic generality that is the basis of an intersubjective epistemology. In order to achieve the minimum requirement of semantic interpretation, the author uses the teaching of Hilary Putnam's stereotypes (*The meaning of "meaning"*). Stereotypes are those that need to be recognized in the communicative community. That is, it is now necessary to examine how the normative structures of language practice can be recognized if they have a social background in their basis. With his teaching (on the problem of meaning), Putnam wants to point out the importance of the linguistic community in the constructions of certain scientific concepts. Namely, for Putnam, in linguistic communities, the phenomenon of division of linguistic work occurs, where, for example, the scientific community is left to create extensions of certain (scientific) concepts. The rest of the language community learns and uses these terms. In order

to use these terms, one must commit to some certain criteria. These criteria aim to oblige the speakers of one language to stereotypical patterns of use of certain terms, in order to be able to communicate with other speakers. The question that Šljivo attempts to answer, and which is built on the previously presented teachings, is: What is the epistemic normative value of scientific semantic stereotypes as a compress of inferential derivations of conceptual content?

The proposal of the hypothesis offered by the author as a theoretical novelty arose from a series of already presented (and which will be discussed later) philosophical research of various philosophers. The research went in the right of postulating the principle that will be the theoretical organ of the interpretation of communicative acts. This principle must be applicable to the identification of scientific terms – and scientific terms should be understood as homologated inferential content. Homologation is the basis of epistemic objectivity. The author's view is holistic (following the footsteps of late Wittgenstein, Davidson, Brandom, etc.) or that in order to determine the semantic value of the concepts used, inferential connections between the concepts must be articulated. The concepts are always inferentially related to other concepts. Brandom understands knowledge as a deontic term or if we attribute knowledge to someone, we attribute an inferential obligation to him. The possibility of understanding the two participants in language practice is based on the idea that language attitudes have a normative structure which has a social origin. Furthermore, recognition of the normativity of language is the reason why a successful communicative act occurs. Conceptual content is thus understandable in relation to other conceptual content, and, like Brandom, the Šljivo moves in this direction of examination, but this time on an epistemological level, examining the inferential structure of conceptual content and characterizing all sequences that constitute it. Thus, scientific concepts as stereotypes can be characterized as rigid constitutive inferences of a communicative scientific community. The author's principle of cognitive equivalence of implication provides an opportunity to understand the cognitive synonymy of inferentially articulated concepts shared by members of a scientific language community. This principle is largely inspired and built upon the foundations of Brandom's philosophy, the ideas of Putnam and Davidson, and, finally, the teaching of Nijaz Ibrulj who came up with the idea of inter-conceptual sequence (part of learning about the principle of the logical). Inter-conceptual sequences should enable the recognition of stereotypical constitutive inferential derivatives. The principle that governs the inter-conceptual level is the principle of multiplication of conceptual content. According to Šljivo, those scientific stereotypes are recognized once again in the communicative act as concepts that, as

a set of constitutive inferences, enable a publicly (in the language community) divisible epistemic relation.

In order to find a tool that will enable the recognition of epistemic communication matrixes, Šljivo turns to the doctrine of mental holism in Davidson's philosophy. However, the author expands this idea and comes up with his own theoretical model of cognitive holism. The author primarily wants to use this concept to explain how the cognitive statuses of the mental are constituted through inferential practices. The author's original epistemological attitude towards the holism of the cognitive has three key characteristics: 1) there are different cognitive states, 2) these states are mutually conditioned, 3) and different cognitive states provide support in the constitution "knowledge of...". Cognitive holism is related to the principle of cognitive equivalence of implication because what is at their core is the cognitive synonymy of spoken words, not just the semantic characteristics of words. Cognition of equivalence includes all recognition(s) of implications in different contexts (communicative). This cognition is an epistemic activity that recognizes a chain of implications in communicative acts (epistemic and linguistic practices cannot be separated). These evaluations of the epistemic activities are the basis for the concept of epistemic objectivity. According to the author, this concept is a requirement for the uniform use of conceptual content that is extended in a single communicative act. Epistemic recognition of speech acts in the communication process is an epistemic act. This means that the evaluation of epistemic practices is intersubjective. The notion of epistemic objectivity is a metatheoretical notion that depends on the recognition of logical and semantic structures of language, because logical and semantic structures, according to the author, refer to cognitive structures in the end. The notion of truth is only possible if there is an intersubjective standard.

Kenan Šljivo proposes the principle of cognitive equivalence of implication as the hypothesis of this book, as it attempts to present and understand inferentialism as a philosophy whose postulates can answer numerous philosophical questions. The author's goal in his project is to think together with Brandom and not to analyze Brandom, especially in the field of epistemology, where inferentialism presented in this way becomes an authentic chapter of analytical epistemology (which is one of the author's goals). In addition to providing a new hypothesis based on Brandom's inferentialism, the book also provides an excellent overview of the most important ideas in Brandom's philosophy.