

## Changing One's Mind: Philosophy, Religion and Science

Yael Gazit\*

# Talking with tradition: On Brandom's historical rationality

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2020-0135>

received February 28, 2020; accepted July 29, 2020

**Abstract:** Robert Brandom's notion of historical rationality seeks to supplement his inferentialism thesis by providing an account for the validity of conceptual contents. This account, in the shape of a historical process, involves the same self-integration of Brandom's earlier inferentialism and is similarly restricted by reciprocal recognition of others. This article argues that in applying the synchronic social model of normative discourse to the diachronic axis of engaging the past, Brandom premises a false analogy between present community and past tradition, which obscures the important differences between the two axes. This is explored by looking closely at how Brandom's own engagements with the past exemplify his historical rationality. Taking its cue from Brandom's critics, the article shows that Brandom's own discourse with tradition is not, and cannot be, dialogical and, in accordance, that historical rationality is not, and cannot be, governed by the same social structure of inferentialism. The article concludes with the implications of such a claim on Brandom's thesis as a whole and on the role of tradition in the process of normative change, in light of it.

**Keywords:** Brandom, historical rationality, philosophy of history, Pippin, hermeneutics, tradition, normative change, social relations, Habermas

## 1 Introduction

In *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, Robert Brandom presents his notion of historical rationality to provide an account for the validity of conceptual contents and the process of their becoming.<sup>1</sup> This account adds a vertical diachronic dimension to Brandom's philosophy of language, which supplements the social synchronic model of normative discourse that he detailed in his earlier inferentialism thesis.<sup>2</sup> To construct the new account, Brandom uses his already established thesis and depicts the two pieces of his philosophy as reflecting each other, in a sense. As in the earlier work on inferentialism, Brandom argues that practices are the only viable materials to account for conceptual content; therefore, past uses are all there is to determine future uses. And as his previous work shows in detail, social relations govern those practices and restrict one's use of a concept, thus persisting in the historical process among past, present, and future.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the historical rationality involves one's engagement with the past, or in Brandom's words:

---

1 Brandom, *Tales*, 6–17.

2 Introduced in Brandom's classic of 1994, *Making it Explicit*, and later in *Articulating Reasons*.

3 In *Tales*, Brandom presents a very short and sketchy introduction of the notion. The application of inferentialism to the historical dimension is already there, but its details and its full scale are disclosed only later, in his Woodbridge lectures of 2008, which were published in the following year as the first part of *Reason in Philosophy*. This article, therefore, draws mainly

---

\* **Corresponding author: Yael Gazit**, The Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas, School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Science Studies, Tel Aviv University, Israel, e-mail: [yaelgazi@tauex.tau.ac.il](mailto:yaelgazi@tauex.tau.ac.il)

talking with tradition. However, depicting the historical process as a diachronic version of inferentialism bears some problematic consequences. This article argues that by applying the social synchronic model of normative discourse to the diachronic axis of engaging the past, it premises a false analogy between present community and past tradition, which obscures an important difference between what can be gained by either. To see why, we need to look closely into Brandom's own vertical practice, namely, on his own engagements with the past and how he accounts for them. This article suggests that Brandom's explanation for his unconventional interpretations of the Mighty Dead presents a novel and insightful approach to the past, which is not dialogical as he suggests it to be, and, therefore, not an application of inferentialism in the diachronic axis, as his notion of historical rationality requires it to be. This claim is shown to reflect on Brandom's new notion and his thesis as a whole. It also emphasizes the differences between the two axes and illuminates the putative role of discussing tradition within the process of normative change.

The article begins by laying out the two main arguments found in *Tales* in order to show that they in fact collide with one another. First, it introduces the notion of historical rationality, claiming it is indeed a diachronic version of the synchronic model of inferentialism in Brandom's view. The relations of reflection between the two are not Brandom's main concern but rather a methodological assumption of his that needs to be made explicit.<sup>4</sup> The article then presents Brandom's "hermeneutical" approach, of which he justifies and expresses through his own engagements with the past.<sup>5</sup> While Brandom never says so explicitly, his account legitimizes the acts of appropriation, by which the reader can enlist the past for her needs and render the great thinkers of the past precursors for her present views. As these engagements are meant to demonstrate the practice involved in the historical process as depicted by historical rationality, their explanation and Brandom's notion of historical rationality are ought to be consistent with each other. However, as the article then moves to show the former deems past engagements as dialogical (as present engagements are), while appropriation deems it not. To justify the latter claim, the article primarily follows two lines of critique. First, I follow one of the few responses to Brandom's argument of appropriation, offered by Robert Pippin,<sup>6</sup> which I combine with Menachem Fisch and Yitzhak Benbaji's work.<sup>7</sup> This first line of critique ends by concluding that there is inconsistency inherent in *Tales of the Mighty Dead* and shows interesting implications such a claim has. However, it employs a concept of dialogue as enabling normative change, one that is alien to Brandom's work. In order to show that appropriation is nondialogical by Brandom's own light, I follow the criticism submitted by Jürgen Habermas<sup>8</sup> and its subsequent advancement by Jeremy Wanderer,<sup>9</sup> which focus on the participants of dialogue rather than its purpose. This second line of critique proposes a seemingly small adjustment to inferentialism, which Brandom himself accepts, therefore suggesting that an argument exists from within his own framework. Both lines of reasoning reveal the asymmetry of the social relations in the synchronic and diachronic spheres, resulting in differences within the relevant communities of each. Despite their shared conclusion, both lines are necessary.

The article concludes by suggesting that Brandom's philosophical picture does not collapse due to the asymmetry that the combined lines of reasoning show. It suggests, instead, that the rejection of the analogy between the synchronic and diachronic spheres merely calls for the refinement of the thesis as a

---

on that work, and more specifically, on the third lecture (78–108). Note that the argument of historical rationality is also found in Brandom's latest masterpiece *A Spirit of Trust* (especially in 583–635). As it is presented by a meticulous reading of Hegel's *phenomenology*, the analogy the article takes issue with is less explicit in the book than in the lectures, although it is nonetheless implicit in it as well.

<sup>4</sup> As explained in the previous footnote, the argument of *Tales* would be understood by its later version of the Woodbridge lectures.

<sup>5</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 90–118.

<sup>6</sup> Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel."

<sup>7</sup> Fisch and Benbaji, *The View from Within*.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel: On Robert Brandom's Pragmatic Philosophy of Language."

<sup>9</sup> Wanderer, *Robert Brandom*; "Brandom's Challenges."

whole. This refinement would accommodate the two axes working together to fulfill one another than simply one reflecting the other. Consequently, it would redefine the role of tradition in both determining conceptual concepts and the process of changing one's mind.

## 2 The two arguments of *Tales*

The conception of historical rationality, briefly introduced at the outset of *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, aims to complete the inferentialism thesis of *Making It Explicit*.<sup>10</sup> Inferentialism identifies concepts with their use and their contents with the inferential junction in which they stand in the “space of reasons.” The role a concept may or may not play in other judgments – its consequences and its incompatibilities – is its meaning, to which one is committed and responsible when applying that concept.<sup>11</sup> This is the same responsibility one assumes in *rationally integrating* the new commitment into one's unity of apperception. Drawing on Kant, the endorsement of a new commitment to the space of reasons is bound by three norms: critical, ampliative, and justificatory, which order the same extraction and exclusion of inferences introduced above. Rationality is thus defined by Brandom in accordance with the applications of these norms, as being consistent, whole, and warranted.<sup>12</sup> This, however, is not a wholly private affair, just as concept application is not up to one's own commitments or to one's *normative attitudes*. If it were a private affair, concepts from the representational vocabulary and concepts such as *fact* and *truth* would not be intelligible. What renders them intelligible nonetheless are the social relations of the linguistic practices. These relations allow the incorporation of one's normative attitudes with others', as they reciprocally recognize each other as entitled and authoritative, in a “game of giving and asking for reasons.” In discursive dialogue, which is shaped by the model of scorekeeping in Brandom's early work, normative *statuses* are constituted, to which one's attitudes can be wrong.<sup>13</sup> Social relations thus enact restrictions and govern conceptual norms. However, despite the meticulous nature of this thesis, Brandom finds it lacking, for it assumes an already up and running system of determined conceptual norms and does not explain their current content.<sup>14</sup>

The conception of historical rationality, in which Brandom supplements his philosophical picture, is a historical version of inferentialism, added to what can now be deemed as the synchronic sphere of social relations. As with inferentialism, practices are the only viable materials for such an account; therefore, past uses determine future uses and not any *apriority* or *given* that is external to practice. This, Brandom

<sup>10</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 12–4.

<sup>11</sup> Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 89–91; *Articulating Reasons*, 46–49.

<sup>12</sup> Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, 33–8.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 141–3, 181–3; *Articulating Reasons*, 80, 165–6. In his later work, Brandom abandons the scorekeeping model and replaces it with Hegel's reciprocal recognition model, e.g., *Reason in Philosophy*, 66, 70–2. In both cases, the social dimension in which the linguistic practices are embedded forbids the undesirable situation of “what seems right to me would be right,” as Wittgenstein puts it (*Philosophical Investigations*, 92), which McDowell deemed (in a different sense, but as that can be applied here just as well) “a frictionless spinning in a void” (*Mind and World*, 11). For the problem in Brandom, see *Making It Explicit*, xvi–xvii, 6–7, 30–1, 607; *Articulating Reasons*, 30–1; *Reason in Philosophy*, 64, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 12–3; *Reason in Philosophy*, 81–4. To this claim, which motivates Brandom's supplementation of the historical rationality introduced next, two interesting responses can be found among Brandom's critics. The first is Jeremy Wanderer who claims that any such supplementation is unnecessary and that Brandom's discontent with inferentialism is unjustified (Wanderer, *Robert Brandom*, 201–8). It should be noted that Wanderer's response focuses only on *Tales*, in which the argument is not fully developed, as previously mentioned, and sometimes seems to be merely rhetorical (e.g., Brandom, *Tales*, 30, 90). The second response is Ronald Loeffler's who points out that the temporal perspective that historical rationality adds is already present in Brandom's early discussion of anaphora (Loeffler, *Brandom*, 216–8). Loeffler does not say this in criticism, but if his claim is true, then the temporal need only be made explicit within inferentialism, thus not missing from it, as Brandom claims. In what follows, I take Brandom's claim for the supplementation of historical rationality as is, in order to examine how he accounts for it by using his existing thesis, and what it amounts to as a result. This inquiry will yield a third, alternative, claim as to the relations between the two parts of Brandom's philosophy.

suggests, is akin to the common law, where the only available materials for present rulings are past rulings. In fact, what the common law judge *does* in considering past rulings to set a norm is precisely what one does in Brandom's act of integration. The judge creates a *rationale* from past rulings as she privileges some and ignores others, a process that involves the same acts of extraction and exclusion of consequences and incompatibilities of integration that constitute the rational self and rational judgment in the synchronic sphere. Therefore, the common law not only resembles the process by which conceptual norms are determined, but it is the very model for it. In the view of historical rationality, concepts gain their content and validity due to a process of reconstructing past cases into a coherent line of thought. This reconstruction shows that the content at hand has already been implicit in past thoughts all along, namely, it constitutes a tradition for it. However, similar to rationality in the synchronic sphere, Brandom argues that it needs to be governed and constrained by social relations via reciprocal recognition. Thus, the judge's ruling, and its rational, is genuinely rational only because it occurs within such relations played out by past and future. The judge recognizes the authority of former judges when treating their rulings as precedents and recognizes the authority of future judges as she petitions for acknowledgment of her own. These social relations constitute entitlement and normative statuses in the same manner as synchronic normative discourses.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned in Section 1, Brandom does not make it his aim to draw the historical rationality as a mirroring diachronic image of the synchronic inferentialism. However, in using his inferentialism and its prime elements to draw out the elements of the historical process, as shown above, Brandom depicts the two axes and their two theses as parallel to one another and takes on a commitment to the similarities between them. In his new philosophical picture, the same act of integration is exercised in both the synchronic and diachronic spheres, whether the new concept to be integrated is of a live conversation or a past text. And in both cases the same social relations restrict the integration, whether they are constituted in a discursive engagement with a contemporary interlocutor or with past (and future) figures. Consequently, the processes of the two different spheres are similarly rational. The (similar) rationality of the historical process, to put it differently, is the result of, and depends on, the full and proper application of inferentialism to the vertical historical sphere, in Brandom's view.

However, the application of the synchronic model of normative discourse to the diachronic axis arguably conflicts with another line of thought implicit in *Tales*, a "hermeneutical" argument for appropriation. It is only implicit, as the book's explicit aim is to present and illustrate the notion of historical rationality. The book begins with a short introduction of the concept and shifts to sketching a historical trajectory that presents the sort of reconstruction that historical rationality involves. Comprising Brandom's readings of six philosophers, stretching from Spinoza to Hegel, the book provides a demonstration of how a tradition of thought is found and formed out of past thinking.<sup>16</sup> However, Brandom achieves this by using *his own* thought as an example and by reconstructing a tradition of *inferentialism*, which results in the book making two further claims. First, by employing his own brand of inferentialism, as the historical narrative shows it to have always already been implicit in the thought of the Mighty Dead, Brandom presents inferentialism as proving itself to be rational and justified. Second, and more importantly for the purposes of this article, in Brandom's use of the past for his purposes, philosophical engagement with the past is rendered *appropriation*, as it exemplifies the enlisting of past philosophy for one's own interests and needs. Brandom does not use this term, nor articulate a general comprehensive thesis to philosophical engagement with its past, but he includes a defensive justification for his interpretive acts halfway through the book,<sup>17</sup> which lays out a rich argument that presents it as appropriation and validates it as such.

Drawing on his inferentialism yet again, Brandom argues that the meaning of a past philosopher's text is a matter of the readers' response; it is dependent on the commitments they bring to it. Just like any other

<sup>15</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 13–4; *Reason in Philosophy*, 84–90.

<sup>16</sup> Brandom states this explicitly at the end of his introduction, in *Tales*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 90–118.

concept, the meaning of the text depends on the concepts within its vicinity, its place within the net of commitments, or, as Brandom also puts it, on *the collateral premises* with which the concept is interpreted (understood) and by which it is integrated. In Brandom's view, one can choose which collateral premises to interpret the text with, and all choices are therefore equally legitimate. The possibilities diverge into two groups: one can take the author's net of commitments as background for the interpretation, which Brandom terms *de dicto* specification of content, or they can use any other set of commitments, which Brandom terms *de re* specification of content. The former can be seen as akin to the hermeneutical purport to better understand the author's intended original meaning, which is indeed, in Brandom's inferentialism, the very inferential connections the concepts of the text have to the author's net of commitments. But, as Brandom tellingly reiterates, this does not grant the *de dicto* specification any superiority, neither with regard to the truth of meaning nor with regard to anything else. The *de re* specification, he writes, has "at least an equal claim to illuminate the commitment undertaken."<sup>18</sup>

The *de re* specification of content has almost no constraints by itself, except for the standing obligation to properly derive the meaning from the background commitments of choice. The interpreter can "select, supplement, and approximate" the texts as she deems fit, as Brandom names his method and describes its use.<sup>19</sup> This understanding grants legitimacy to the most explicit acts of appropriation, ranging from what may seem as minor deviations from "the original meaning" (or the *de dicto* specification) to full ventriloquism. These different attributes, however, have no bearings once the *de re* specification is properly understood. For the *de re* specification does not aim for *de dicto* interpretation; and in accordance, it does not need to meet its demands and should not be evaluated in comparison to its outcomes. Likewise, the notion of appropriation employed in this article purports to depict the act of making something one's own by taking it into one's realm (integrating it within one's commitments), and not to point out the negative implications this notion normally carries as an inappropriate act of (*de dicto*) interpretation. On the contrary, a closer examination of appropriation shows its importance and value, as it is, in fact, part of the very rationality of historical progression in Brandom's system. In appropriation, the interpreter can approach the past with her decision, find in it "target claims" that would best suit her decision, and create out of it a tradition that would present precursors to her present thought, just like the common law judge reconstructs a rationale as introduced above.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Brandom's explanation for his unconventional interpretations goes far beyond a hermeneutical account and far beyond the views of Hans-Georg Gadamer, on whom Brandom draws.<sup>21</sup> As part of a rational historical process, the engagement with the past does not merely involve the reader's perspective, and its implementation in interpretation is not just a legitimate act, as Gadamer acknowledged and argued for in his classical *Truth and Method*.<sup>22</sup> Rather, in Brandom's view, the valid act of such implementation is also a necessary validating act, which renders appropriation the very heart and center of his conception of engagement with the past.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 95–6, 99–100, 102.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 111–2.

<sup>20</sup> Brandom terms this specific kind of *de re* interpretation *de traditione*; *Tales*, 107–9.

<sup>21</sup> Brandom's entire argument is framed by Gadamer's pivotal insights. Brandom claims at the outset that inferentialism provides philosophical grounds to those insights, without which they are mere "platitudes" (Brandom, *Tales*, 92–4) and, accordingly, goes on to introduce his own view by providing each "platitude" its fitting inferentialist ground. This sort of working out of past thought to argue for one's own exemplifies, in small scale, the appropriation that Brandom practices in the other readings of the book, and the sort of reading he advances toward this very argument. For an illuminating analysis of Brandom's appropriation of Gadamer, see Lafont, "Meaning and Interpretation."

<sup>22</sup> Gadamer's pivotal idea of "fusion of horizons" purports to account for just that (*Truth and Method*, 2004, 305).

<sup>23</sup> Interpreting Brandom's "hermeneutical" account as shortly suggested above diverges not only from Gadamer's view but also from the very hermeneutical purport, and the historiographical efforts to establish proper methods to intellectual history. Likewise, it diverges from other interpretations of Brandom's work that take it to contribute those efforts. Marshall's detailed work of comparison between Brandom's and Skinner's views ("The Implications of Brandom's Inferentialism for Intellectual History") and Harrelson's use of Brandom's work as grounds for contextualism ("Inferentialist Philosophy of Language and the Historiography of Philosophy") both focus on Brandom's inferentialism and draw its implications for, and within the limits of, historiography. Thus, Marshall's interpretation does not address the appropriation Brandom argues for to begin with, and



Even though Brandom does not refer to historical rationality in his argument for appropriation, the two ideas are intertwined. The two arguments, in accordance, are supposed to be coherent and consistent with each other. This demand can also be drawn from their shared ground, for both arguments, as shown, derive from Brandom's inferentialism thesis. But, as this article now turns to argument, the demand is not fulfilled. Interestingly, that which prevents the arguments from consensus is brought to the surface by Brandom himself, through an additional claim made in his "hermeneutical" account. In an attempt to gain another Gadamerian insight, Brandom claims that the encounter with past text is a dialogue. Drawing on chapter 8 of *Making It Explicit*, he explains dialogue with the past as the dialogical discourse of his inferentialism thesis,<sup>24</sup> and in accordance, he titles the entire first section of *Tales* "talking with tradition." While this phrase could have been considered *just a metaphor*, and the working out of Gadamer's insight just a way to "play nice with Gadamer," the notion of historical rationality renders the dialogical nature of the engagement with the past a serious commitment. As a historical version of the social synchronic practice and relations, the notion of historical rationality indeed entails the similarity of the past engagements to the present ones, and with it their dialogical essence. Hence, the Gadamerian insight Brandom adds to his "hermeneutical" account coheres with his account of the historical process as its consequence. However, a problem arises when this insight is combined with the idea of past engagement as appropriation introduced by Brandom's account up until this supplementation. The claim for a dialogical engagement with the past, in accordance with Brandom's argument for historical rationality, is inconsistent with Brandom's argument of appropriation, for appropriation cannot be considered dialogical, and it is a mistake to regard it as such. I will now argue as to why.

### 3 Dialogue and appropriation

Many philosophers have found Brandom's interpretations problematic.<sup>25</sup> While their criticism vary, all had associated the problems they found, and the mistakes they uncovered, with the appropriative character of Brandom's reading. Some had merely pointed it out, others had rigorously condemned it. Yet, none of them addressed Brandom's justification for his appropriative acts, except for Robert Pippin. Before diving into his criticism of Brandom's reading of Hegel, Pippin confronts and disputes Brandom's account for reading texts by arguing that the principle of "selection" in his method of "selection, supplementation, and approximation," introduced above, ignores the unique character of Hegel's work as a theory of everything.<sup>26</sup> While this is not a criticism of Brandom's method, but, at best, of the viability of applying it specifically to Hegel, it attests to a deeper disagreement between the two philosophers. Pippin holds to a different approach to past philosophy. This is reflected in the footnotes of this discussion, in which Pippin presents Brandom's definitions of *de re* and *de dicto* and adjusts them to his convenience, and in an account of his own for philosophy's engagement with its past, which is sketched out briefly in the introduction of his latest book, *Interanimations*.<sup>27</sup> In what follows, I present Pippin's account to enrich his criticism and show that it stems from a fundamental tension that Pippin presumes between appropriation and dialogue. While this article does not follow Pippin's approach to past philosophy, nor his condemnation of appropriation, it argues nonetheless that his presumption of tension between dialogue

---

Harrelson addresses it to reject it based on ethical considerations and standards of historical writings. The proposed interpretation, and the great philosophical values of appropriation as a way of engaging the past, is deliberated in detail in Gazit, "Appropriation, Dialogue, and Dispute."

<sup>24</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 108–11.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Haugeland, "Reading Brandom Reading Heidegger;" DeVries and Coates, "Brandom's Two-Ply Error;" McDowell's article "Why is Sellars's Essay Called 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind?'" (in his book, *Having the World in View*, 221–38); Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel."

<sup>26</sup> Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel," 381–2.

<sup>27</sup> Pippin, *Interanimations*, 1–10.

and appropriation has solid philosophical grounds that rest in his conception of dialogue at the heart of his approach.

Pippin distinguishes hermeneutical approaches to past philosophy, of extracting the original meaning of the texts, from what he depicts as *philosophical* engagements with the past. These engagements, that he terms “interanimations,” are philosophical dialogical encounters with the past. They are worthy in his view, and they are philosophical, because they revive the great historical figure of the past as present interlocutors in a *dialogue*, who, as such, can pose a challenge to the reader and contribute to her thought.<sup>28</sup> This requires the reader’s investment in the text (by “giving her blood to the ghosts”) and her philosophical willingness to be challenged by them.<sup>29</sup> From this description, it is clear that from Pippin’s point of view, interanimations fall under Brandom’s definition of *de re* and, accordingly, explains his favoring of *de re* when faced with Brandom’s distinction. The *de dicto*, recall, is a parallel variation of hermeneutical interpretation that attempts to expose the author’s intents, whereas the dialogical engagement Pippin is advocating for is distinctive precisely in its divergence from such attempts. However, as he presents Brandom’s *de re* in the footnotes of his criticism, Pippin gives away his non-Brandomian commitment to hermeneutics nonetheless. Pippin rearticulates Brandom’s definition, writing that the *de re* reading must be “guided by *some* insight of a historical author,”<sup>30</sup> which is to claim, if to put it in Brandom’s vocabulary, that *de re* necessitates a prior *de dicto* act. Posing this demand means that not doing so, and unwittingly attributing an alien thought to the ghost, let alone deliberately ignoring his explicit ones as in Brandom’s *selection*, is an inappropriate act of interpretation in Pippin’s view.<sup>31</sup>

But there is a more substantial problem with appropriation for Pippin – one that does not result from the merely unestablished but common presupposition that proper interpretation does not involve appropriation or that appropriation is bad. Appropriation, in Pippin’s view, is a dangerous obstacle to successful interanimations. Confusing reading-in with reading-out, or acting as *pirates*, as Pippin refers it (and as perhaps he refers to Brandom himself, as now can be said), is a major stumbling block on the way to dialogue with the dead.<sup>32</sup> Pippin tellingly warns of it, but he does not say how to avoid it, except by a laconic demand for “historical and scholarly preparation.”<sup>33</sup> In fact, and more importantly for the purposes of this article, he does not even explain the problem to begin with. He does not say why interanimation and appropriation are not compatible. Nevertheless, an explanation can be traced back to

---

<sup>28</sup> Pippin explains that this view has been criticized by historians and philosophers who object the very approach to history and that his thesis is meant to reply them (*Interanimations*, 7). However, the main ideas of this view are widely accepted in other fields, such as literary, and appear in different forms in the works of many other philosophers. Depicting the engagement as dialogue is shared by Brandom and Gadamer, as mentioned but also by Bennett (Learning from six philosophers, 1), Beaney (“Two Dogmas of Analytic Historiography,” 610), and others. The possibility (and aim) to change one’s mind by the engagement is implicit, for example, in McDowell’s view (*Having the World in View*, 255).

<sup>29</sup> Pippin, *Interanimations*, 2–4. Pippin quotes the metaphor of Ulrich von Wialmowitz–Moellendorff (1908).

<sup>30</sup> Pippin, “Brandom’s Hegel,” 402, n. 5.

<sup>31</sup> The Pippinian *de re* is thus constrained by a core of original meaning, as it were, unlike the *de re* Brandom introduces as shown above. In this demand, Pippin in fact presents a somewhat similar view to that which Brandom presents in his inferentialism, regarding contemporary discursive exchange. In chapter 8 of *Making It Explicit*, Brandom argues that a successful exchange necessitates both *de dicto* and *de re* perspectives. Pippin’s claim against Brandom’s engagement with the past can therefore be put in terms of inconsistency in Brandom’s view, as the claim of this article. For it implies that what Brandom demands in the discursive exchange is not realized in the exchange with the past. However, Pippin does not point to this inconsistency, and his criticism seems to rather stem from his own conceptions of proper interpretations and engagements. In what follows, I develop Pippin’s criticism in his own terms, and apply it to Brandom’s picture. In the next section, I present an argument that is more akin to the claim found implicit in Pippin’s criticism, by examining Brandom’s demands for discursive exchanges. In either case, I do not adopt Pippin’s critical stance, as mentioned above.

<sup>32</sup> Pippin introduces the pirates in *Interanimations*, 3–4, without mentioning Brandom (and without mentioning the pirates in his criticism). In fact, concluding that Brandom is a pirate according to Pippin is despite and counter to Brandom’s reading of Hegel serving an example of interanimation in Pippin’s book (“Brandom’s Hegel” is the second essay of *Interanimations*, 29–62. In the introduction, Pippin writes that all essays of the book consider “excellent examples of fruitful, genuinely philosophical engagements with historical figures,” 7).

<sup>33</sup> Pippin, *Interanimations*, 4, 5, 7.

Pippin's account by recalling the notion of dialogue that he employs. The dialogue of interanimation is where a philosophical challenge is presented, which is liable to change one's mind. Thus, a conflict between interanimation and appropriation can be depicted as that which lies between the possibility of being challenged and an appropriated figure. From here, it takes only one small step further to conclude that appropriation prevents Pippin's form of engagements because a challenge cannot be posed by an interlocutor that is not other than oneself! Even though Pippin states that a dialogue "can be created within a single mind,"<sup>34</sup> his issue with appropriation, together with his conception of dialogue as enabling a change of mind, is far more consistent with the opposite view, according to which, a challenge to oneself requires an external interlocutor.

Pippin does urge us to seek criticism from without – this is how he relates his discussion of dialogue back to engagement with the past – but an external challenge is needed, in his view, only because of a quantitative limitation of human imagination, as it can only envision a finite number of critical dialogues by itself.<sup>35</sup> In the short argument suggested above, however, the need for external interlocutors is the result of a rather qualitative and essential limit, which indeed prevents one's changing of mind by her own or by her reflection alone. This limit is the limit of *self-criticism*, which Menachem Fisch and Yitzhak Benbaji present in their work. Normative self-criticism, they argue, can only get us so far. In self-reflection, we can prioritize our norms and troubleshoot for consistency, but we cannot deem the norms themselves wanting. This claim results from three major commitments: (a) to the kind of identification of criticism and rationality on which Popper insisted, (b) to the neo-Kantian interpretation of framework dependency, and (c) to the requirement that normative frameworks also be subject to rational scrutiny. While following Popper, all our commitments are rational insofar as they can be subjected to criticism, his conception of criticism as the exposure of problems neglects its normative nature and obscures the complexity of his demand. Criticism judges states of affairs to be right or wrong – i.e., to deviate or not from what we deem appropriate – by reasoning from norms to which those we criticize are assumed to adhere to. Criticism and, hence, rationality are, therefore, framework dependent by definition, which accordingly entails the problem and limits of any attempt to criticize ourselves or to consider our framework rational.<sup>36</sup>

This argument provides the philosophical grounds for the idea, which was also voiced by Popper himself,<sup>37</sup> and most vigorously by Habermas,<sup>38</sup> stating that only in dialogue with people that hold different commitments can a person be said to rationally change her mind. The attempt to reach critical dialogue by an act that incorporates appropriation – an act that interprets the text in one's own image and liking – is the negative picture of this claim, as it were. According to Fisch and Benbaji's problem of self-criticism, it is simply impossible. Hence, Fisch and Benbaji's argument can be said to provide the very philosophical grounds for Pippin's claim against appropriation; it can fill in the missing inference from Pippin's account, in which only the conclusion shows itself in the form of a warning. Placed within Pippin's view, the problem of self-criticism explains why appropriation cannot induce a genuine challenge, and why it therefore stands in the way of successful interanimations. But what if it cannot be placed within Pippin's view? One could reject attributing an argument to Pippin that is not his own. One could argue, moreover, that it cannot *be* his own. The article puts aside Pippin's remarks on the ability of the mind to create a dialogue on its own, and on the mere quantitative limit of imagination as a reason to seek criticism from without, for being inconsistent with the proposed argument. However, given more weight to those remarks, their inconsistency with the proposed argument can evince for Pippin's inability to incorporate the latter into his existing views and to endorse it as an explanation of his own. Nevertheless, whether this is correct or not, the argument is compatible, in its general form, to Brandom's philosophical picture, to which Pippin's criticism was meant to apply to begin with (and one can add that with the suggested

<sup>34</sup> Pippin, *Interanimations*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7.

<sup>36</sup> Fisch and Benbaji, *The View from Within*, 202–7.

<sup>37</sup> E.g., in *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 1, 235–9.

<sup>38</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Also committed to this idea, following Habermas, is Friedman in *Dynamics of Reason*.



adjustment it suits that purpose even better). This is only in general terms, however, as the very concept of dialogue that brought the problem of self-criticism and Pippin's criticism together is not consistent with the concept that Brandom deploys.

Differences in the conception of dialogue of both could mean that behind Pippin's criticism lurks an even more fundamental dispute: not only is Brandom's approach not dialogical, but his concept of dialogue is also mistaken. This might not affect Pippin's criticism, but it is highly relevant to the article's take on it, for what is at stake is not Brandom's act of appropriation in light of *some* concept of dialogue, but rather his own attribution of both appropriative and dialogical characters to the engagement with the past. The argument against it, if it draws on Pippin, must, therefore, be double layered, starting by challenging Brandom's conception of dialogue. In Brandom's view, recall, dialogue is the discursive engagement that serves to constitute normative statuses insofar that Brandom's coherentist picture would not be "a frictionless spinning in a void."<sup>39</sup> However, as Ronald Loeffler argues, the activity of such engagement – of tracking each other's language moves (as Brandom describes it in his scorekeeping model), or the recognition of another and the petitioning for recognition of oneself – can disclose to the participants that there is a *possibility* of them being wrong, but not that one of them *is* wrong.<sup>40</sup> This situation can be explained by Fisch and Benbaji's criticism of Brandom, who argue that his model does not account for norm modification to begin with. Brandom's aim for unity favors confirmation over conflict and challenge, thus making room only for limited critical demand to "weed out material incompatible commitments"<sup>41</sup> that can achieve consistency, but not deep normative change. In accordance, Brandom's picture presents an extremely thin concept of dialogue.<sup>42</sup> Once enriched to include the possibility of being genuinely challenged, as by the enrichment Fisch and Benbaji propose, Pippin's criticism as introduced above can apply, showing that engaging the past (by appropriation) is incompatible with the (proper) conception of dialogue (as enabling the changing of one's mind).

Note, however, that Fisch and Benbaji themselves do not take their argument to suggest that dialogue cannot be conducted with the past as this article does. On the contrary, their argument against Brandom's thin concept of dialogue is all inclusive in a sense, as it applies, in their view, to both engagements with the present *and* the past and needs to be corrected in accordance with both spheres. Just like Pippin, they maintain that there can be dialogue with past figures and, more specifically, that one can be challenged by past figures and, therefore, have their mind changed by dialoging with tradition. This is most evident when Fisch criticizes Brandom's notion of historical rationality itself on the same lines that motivated him and Benbaji in their earlier work to develop their critical notion of dialogue. Fisch writes "But despite its seeming promise, a closer look reveals several problems. [...] In engaging her predecessors, Brandom's common-law judge is not forging a new norm at all, but seeking justification for one to which she is already committed [...] this form of intersubjective engagement is wholly (and admittedly) tendentious!"<sup>43</sup> Like in Pippin's view, subjecting the engagement with the past to the same criticism of the engagement with the present shows that Fisch and Benbaji fail to distinguish the inner workings of the two spheres. Like the article argues to be the case with Brandom's notion of historical rationality as an application of inferentialism to the diachronic sphere, they build their arguments on presupposed similarities between the social interaction with the past and present, which might hold for analogical speech, but not for drawing the consequences they do, such as the possibility to change one's mind by engaging the past alone. Brandom's inferentialism could indeed benefit from the rich conception of critical dialogue they suggest, but it has already been shown that it cannot be had in the engagement of the diachronic sphere.

In fact, once understood as appropriation, the engagement with the past seems to rather cohere with Brandom's own conception of dialogue, prior to any enrichment, with its original emphasis on unity and

<sup>39</sup> As McDowell criticizes Davidson's coherentism in *Mind and World* (e.g., 11).

<sup>40</sup> Loeffler, *Brandom*, 209-212.

<sup>41</sup> Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, 36. This, recall, is one of the three norms of integration.

<sup>42</sup> Fisch and Benbaji, *The View from Within*, 197–202, 206–7.

<sup>43</sup> Fisch, *Creatively Undecided*, 80.

confirmation. The self-confirming activity that was problematic in the synchronic sphere is suited here nicely with Brandom's hermeneutic method that allows the enlisting of past figures to one's own needs and with the notion of historical rationality that requires it. This is also evident when Brandom promotes his way of engaging the past and encourages more historical stories to be told in order to *confirm* as many target claims as possible.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, we cannot call engagement with the past "a Brandomian dialogue" either. While one perspective and its mirror do not suffice to constitute a critical challenge as argued above, nor are they suffice to create a normative status and therefore constitute what Brandom considers dialogue. To see why, we need to closely examine Brandom's inferentialist conception of discursive exchange. Brandom explicitly states that the constitution of a normative status necessitates two different perspectives in a dialogue, but he does not say what that amounts to. His application of this discursive model to discourse with past and future figures obscures it even more. Nevertheless, holding both commitments – for two perspectives, on the one hand, and for similar social relations in the synchronic and diachronic spheres, on the other – illuminates something else. It brings to light the more fundamental commitment of Brandom's thought to a similarity between the *communities* in both spheres. The following section shifts focus in accordance and moves from the conception of dialogue itself to the specification of its participants. This would also be a shift from an external argument to Brandom's picture to one that takes his own notions and terms. This additional short but important argument draws on Jürgen Habermas's criticism of Brandom's inferentialism, and Jeremy Wanderer's take on it, to argue, as before, that the notion of historical rationality should not, and indeed cannot, be a simple reflection of inferentialism. This argument, however, will show it is so *in Brandom's own light*.

## 4 Game participants' specification and past philosophers

When Jürgen Habermas criticizes Brandom's scorekeeping model, he depicts it as aiming for consensus, as Brandom does. Unlike the line of critique of the previous section, he argues that the intersubjective exchange that the model tries to capture is lacking, not a critical notion of dialogue (or, at least, this is not the subject of his criticism, even if it will be implied eventually) but rather a second person. According to Habermas, Brandom presents the entanglement of the perspectives that are involved in the practice of scorekeeping and recognition as those of the first, second, and third person, but he in fact favors the third person and neglects the second. This is evident in Brandom's example of a courtroom, where the persons to recognize the defense attorney's claims are the jurors, the public, and the judge.<sup>45</sup> Brandom's choice to exemplify the intersubjective exchange shows that the paradigmatic case of intersubjective exchange is, in his view, indirect communication. According to Habermas, this is fundamentally wrong. Communication must be direct in his view, because a discursive intersubjective exchange requires a reaction. Not from listeners in a courtroom as Brandom's example presents, but from hearers who are expected "to give the speaker an answer" and parties that are "directly involved who address utterances *to one another* and who expect each other to *take positions*."<sup>46</sup> Without a genuine second person, the game that Brandom describes is one in which agents reciprocally *inform* one another and that, in Habermas's view, does not amount to communication as it should. Communication strives to reach an understanding, and understanding for Habermas is the *sharing of some same knowledge of the world*. Brandom's practice of informing cannot achieve that.<sup>47</sup> Seemingly, this criticism does not fit perfectly into the lines of this article. It focuses on the silent third person, with which this article does not take issue and rests on a conception of communication (and dialogue) that diverges from the critical conception of Pippin, Fisch, and Benbaji, which this article

<sup>44</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 16, 95.

<sup>45</sup> Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 505.

<sup>46</sup> Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel," 342–7, 345 (quote).

<sup>47</sup> Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel," 346–7.

follows. Nevertheless, Habermas's criticism presents a demand for an active, responsive interlocutor who takes positions and replies, which points out some essentials in the specification of the participants in the scorekeeping game that are highly relevant to the issue at hand. When separated from its foundations and original aim, Habermas's criticism may begin to suggest as to why past philosophers cannot be considered part of the game in the same way contemporaries can.

Unlike the strategy just mentioned, when Brandom faces Habermas's challenge he does not separate and put aside the founding origins of the claim. Agreeing with Habermas's description of his model, he rejects it as criticism, claiming that it registers as a problem for Habermas only because his conceptions of communication and understanding are wrong to begin with. Brandom therefore disputes Habermas's idea that communication has a goal at all, and that his conception of understanding be taken as its goal. The sharing that communication (and understanding) aims for, he argues, is not the kind of "sameness" exhibited by marching soldiers who share the same movements as Habermas has in mind, but the kind of difference shared in the mutual coordinated exchange of two dancers performing a dance. With this argument Brandom refutes the grounds of Habermas's criticism and dismisses himself from a direct confrontation with the specific demand for a responsive second person in communication. Instead, he underlines the *expectation* for responsiveness and argues against Habermas that expectations and intentions are propositional attitudes that cannot be used to explain assertional practice, as they presuppose it.<sup>48</sup> In closing, Brandom's reply leaves the original claim unattended, in what Jeremy Wanderer deems to be "too quick" a "dismissal of Habermas's challenge."<sup>49</sup> In Wanderer's view, the distinction that Habermas points to between listener and hearer is intuitive as well as relevant for Brandom's project, even though Brandom dismissed it together with Habermas's entire critical argument. This distinction should be followed, Wanderer claims, and it should be incorporated into Brandom's work.<sup>50</sup>

Wanderer suggests replacing the propositional attitudes of Habermas's criticism, which do not fit Brandom's framework and prevent him from gravely considering the argument, by talking of the structural role of a second personal speech act. More specifically, Wanderer suggests we talk of the second person as *addressed*, as distinguished from *targeted*. Wanderer argues that to address, unlike to target, is to call for recognition of one's address. This, when the one recognizes the address, forges an immediate and significant normative relation between an addresser and an addressee. The addressee, *as* an addressee, is bound in this relation and hence cannot ignore the address. This does not mean that she cannot not respond, in Wanderer's account, but rather that her lack of response is itself a response, once the relation is forged. This is a crucial point, for her inability to ignore the address renders all her responses active moves in the scorekeeping game. Targeting, Wanderer argues, may be suitable to describe the scorekeeping listeners, but only by addressing can a speaker initiate the game and achieve the needed reciprocal act from another for his assertion.<sup>51</sup> Wanderer's account, which intends to establish speech acts as the second personally addressed in order to distinguish them from those that are not, argues, therefore,

<sup>48</sup> Brandom, "Facts, Norms, and Normative Facts: A Reply to Habermas," 362–4.

<sup>49</sup> Wanderer, *Robert Brandom*, 170.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 170–2. Another criticism against Brandom's dismissal of Habermas's argument is found in Baynes's article, "Gadamerian Platitudes' and Rational Interpretation." Baynes takes a different argumentative path than the one introduced next, but like Wanderer, he aims to show the value of Habermas's claims and the need for a second person in the discursive exchange. Interestingly, Baynes frames his argument by tying Habermas's position to Gadamer's views, on the one hand, and pointing out Brandom's remarks on Gadamer in *Tales*, on the other. In Baynes's view, Brandom cannot accept Gadamer's model of dialogue and at the same time reject Habermas's (Gadamerian) criticism. This framing brings together Habermas's criticism and Brandom's account of his engagement with the past, as this article suggests doing in order to examine the latter and the historical rationality it inherently relates to. However, Baynes does not peruse this direction, and as his interest lays in Brandom's inferentialism, he needs not either. It should be noted, however, that in building on Brandom's remarks on Gadamer without considering the context of historical rationality, Baynes overlooks Brandom's goal and commitments, and with it, Brandom's appropriation of Gadamer, thus resulting in him framing his argument by a contradiction that is not necessarily there (for Brandom's commitment to Gadamer does not necessarily entail the consequences of Habermas's).

<sup>51</sup> Wanderer, "Brandom's Challenges," 96–103, 114.

for the more radical claim, that an assertion which is not addressed in fact falls out of the game, as it were, or at least it does so on the speaker's end. For, as Wanderer explains in different words, whether the speaker's assertion may or may not be tracked by listeners, it is clear that it cannot be *challenged* by them. The second person as an addressee is necessary for the game and its purport.

This latter way of putting forth the argument might echo the one from the previous section and indicate accordingly to a step out of Brandom's picture, or an additional criticism implicit in it as before, but Wanderer does neither. The word "challenge" that he uses is employed in Brandom's sense of the word, as the act of asking for reasons, without which statuses cannot achieve entitlement or confirmation. His argument shows that this act cannot be gained by targeting, but only by address. Accordingly, only by addressing can one get the desired entitlement for one's assertion. In using the Brandomian terms and notions, Wanderer stays within Brandom's framework, and his argument, as it seems, merely supplements it with the missing distinction between listener and hearer that Habermas pointed out and Brandom (too quickly) rejected. Wanderer thus only elucidated the game and does not call for its change – and Brandom's response of agreement to his article could be taken as evidence that he too found no essentials being attacked there.<sup>52</sup> However, by this elucidation, and with its reliance on Habermas, Wanderer's argument sets the active, responsive, second person as a necessary condition for entitlement and status constitution, one that is not explicitly present in Brandom's inferentialism. This condition, as shown next, cannot be met once we move out of the synchronic sphere and engage the past instead.

Looking at Brandom's historical rationality, which purports to be a reflection of inferentialism, Wanderer's condition seems absent altogether, if not plainly contradictory. As with the argument against Brandom's notion of dialogue, the attempt to improve and refine Brandom's inferentialism discloses its limited scope to the synchronic sphere and, consequently, discloses the fundamental asymmetry between that sphere and the diachronic one, which lies counter to Brandom's argument. The act of second personally addressing another, which is crucial to the proper constitution of a normative status in Brandom's own light, cannot be fully carried out once the supposed addressee is a dead figure. For the fruitful act of address – one that yields a normative bound and initiates the scorekeeping game – must be recognized by the addressee, which, in turn, must be active and responsive on her own right, in a way that a dead figure cannot be. The act of address by itself is seemingly independent of the realization of its communicative purport. One can, and often do, address the sun, the flowers, the absent, and indeed the dead, as Jonathan Culler and Barbara Johnson stress in their works on lyrics and rhetoric, and as they define the lyrical/rhetorical device of *Apostrophe*.<sup>53</sup> This device, however, is an act of address that not only *meets* no recognition from its addressee but also *purports* no recognition, to begin with. It is not meant to achieve a response, an answer, or a challenge, but rather to "posit an attentive universe," as Culler writes, one that is "*potentially* responsive."<sup>54</sup> Johnson's definition brings out this point with greater vigor, as she writes "*Apostrophe* is a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness."<sup>55</sup> *Apostrophe*, it seems, aims to animate the inanimate *by* the act of address, not *for* the address to be received and recognized.<sup>56</sup>

Whether this kind of address should be categorized as different, partial, or otherwise, calls for greater deliberation. However, without a real possibility to be answered by another, it will not suffice for the successful discursive engagement needed in Brandom's picture. Addressing the absent is, in fact, not very different from the problematic targeting of the silence third person, which originated Habermas's criticism and Wanderer's amendment. As their arguments had been shown to make explicit, recognition, confirmation, and challenge necessitate a responsive addressee, with emphasis on her independent ability

<sup>52</sup> Brandom, "Reply to Jeremy Wanderer's 'Brandom's Challenges'," 315.

<sup>53</sup> Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*; Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion."

<sup>54</sup> Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 216. My emphasis.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," 30.

<sup>56</sup> However, it does assume that a responsive reply is part of the definition of the act; otherwise, it would not have had the effect of animation.

to take positions.<sup>57</sup> This claim conflicts with both Brandom's and Pippin's claims to engage the dead as they engage contemporaries, and accordingly with their claims to benefit normative statuses and the change of one's mind from engagements with the past. Yet, they both can be said to implicitly share it. Pippin's reviving of the dead, and his objection to ventriloquism, is motivated by the very aim to be answered by the dead rather than merely animating them as in *Apostrophe*, and Brandom's *de re* specification of content aims likewise for a conversation with a second person, and not for the hermeneutic *de dicto* of a third-person interpretee. Neither, however, sees that it cannot be. Pippin's attempt to avoid appropriation renders his position hermeneutical at its core and hence not second personally addressing his historical figures. But even if he would have been addressing them, he was still bound to be ignored, in a nonresponsive way, by those he wishes to address. On Brandom's part, he never claims to engage the ghosts themselves. For him, the dialogue with the past is between "text-and-context on one hand, and interpreter on the other."<sup>58</sup> But that merely emphasizes the lack of a second-person addressee in his engagement with the past as well. Once we recall that the context of the left side of the clause is dependent on the interpreter of the right side, as appropriation implies, it becomes clear that there is no *second* person to face the interpreter. The engagement with the past comes at the cost of a different second perspective, which is clearly crucial for the second-active-responsive-person to be.

Brandom, as mentioned previously, recognized the need for two different perspectives in a discursive exchange. This is insisted upon in *Making It Explicit*, and in his very reply to Habermas, where he demands a discourse in which "the distinctness of perspectives is maintained and managed."<sup>59</sup> It is, in fact, what he tries to emphasize that persists in interpretation in the two-side quote above. But Brandom's attempt to apply the social relations of contemporary engagements to engagements with the past, as he does in the quote, overlooks the engagement's necessary condition set by Wanderer. In Brandom's own view, a significant dialogue needs a genuine second person that can respond in her own right, from a genuinely different perspective. This demand, which must be met in engagements with the past according to Brandom's conception of historical rationality as a diachronic version of inferentialism, cannot be met in the appropriation that the very same conception of historical rationality calls for.

## 5 Conclusion and implications

As the article had shown in two different lines of reasoning, the relations with the past differ from the social relation with contemporaries. To claim that they do not is to premise a similarity between past tradition and present community; it is to assume that past figures can play the role of a second person, as addressees, as Habermas and Wanderer's criticism pointed out, and to presuppose that past figures can pose a genuine challenge as contemporary interlocutors do, as Pippin and Fisch and Benbaji's critiques made explicit. But why is such a long argumentation necessary to say the obvious? Surely, Brandom does not think that past figures are just the same as live ones, nor that they can participate in a real dialogue or be talked with. I am also confident that Gadamer did not intend so in the original claim on which Brandom draws upon, and that Pippin does not conduct *séances* when he engages the great philosophers of the past. Would placing all these verbs and nouns in quotation marks not solve the problem and save the complexity of the arguments? This question rehearses the possible claim that was raised in the first section of this article and that all is only a metaphorical speech. Brandom's notion of historical rationality, it was argued in reply, implies that it is not. The application of the synchronic model on the diachronic axis is the

---

<sup>57</sup> Even if this position is expressed by ignoring, as Wanderer stresses. This idea helps further illuminate the difference between the two kinds of addressees: that of *Apostrophe* and that of Brandom's picture. For while my colleague's ignoring my assertion will be a move in the game, the flowers ignoring it – if they can be said to ignore at all – will not affect my scorekeeping.

<sup>58</sup> Brandom, *Tales*, 109.

<sup>59</sup> Brandom, "Facts, Norms, and Normative Facts: A Reply to Habermas," 363.



very substance of that account, and the social relations, in particular, play a significant role in both. These relations that are established in discursive exchanges, namely, in dialogues, constitute the normative statuses with respect to which one can be wrong. Hence, they constitute the most important element in the Brandomian picture, without which it is neither intelligible nor rational. Considering the relations of the diachronic sphere as merely metaphorically similar to the ones of the synchronic sphere is giving up any real bite to them, and hence giving them up altogether. And that contradicts Brandom's very understanding of the historical rationality.

The article showed that the problem can be said to have been laid out by Brandom himself, as he dedicates an argument to his method of interpretation, which turns out to be the very activity that the reconstruction of historical rationality requires. This brings together two arguments that do not cohere. On the one hand, as a diachronic version of inferentialism, the engagement with the past must be understood as a dialogue in the full sense of the term. On the other hand, as a necessary act of appropriation, engagement with the past cannot be a dialogue and cannot result in the same payoffs of live intersubjective exchange. The argument for appropriation, that zooms in, as it were, on the practice of historical rationality, discloses the problematic analogy between past tradition and present community that lays at its core. In applying inferentialism to the diachronic axis, Brandom, like Pippin and Fisch and Benbaji, follows the analogy (or metaphor) further than its reach. Applying the synchronic model to the diachronic one might indeed work on the individual level, as one can be said to exercise the same self-integration in both axes. But applying the idea and structure to social relations, and presupposing that the historical members of a tradition can be considered a living community to talk with, draws the wrongful conclusion that the same concept of dialogue can be applied to both and that the same things can be gained by both "dialogues." As this article shows, the past cannot actively and independently participate in a dialogue: not in a critical non-Brandomian sense, and not in its own sense according to Brandom; it cannot present a challenge liable to changing one's mind, nor a challenge liable to entitling and confirming one's assertion. The inconsistency inherent to *Tales* thus shows a problem with Brandom's notion of historical rationality, as it is described to bear fruits that it cannot support. This conclusion is important to Brandom's thesis as well as to the other philosophers mentioned in the article and to the commonplace conception of what "talking with tradition" amounts to.

Brandom's thesis cannot be supplemented with the notion of historical rationality as it is envisioned by Brandom, as "talking to tradition" cannot constitute normative statuses. Pippin's view, which seeks to ground and establish the commonly conceived need for, and value of, "talking with tradition" as enabling the changing of one's mind, has been shown to hold no water as well. However, these conclusions do not have to entail the collapse of Brandom's philosophical picture, nor do they imply that one should give up any engagement with tradition as a result. On the contrary, Brandom's philosophical picture can remain intact, and include both spheres, without the diachronic inferentialist social relations he assumes in historical rationality, and the engagement with the past can maintain its important role in the progress of thought. To see how, we can follow Brandom's own comments for the last time. Brandom does not retract his depiction of the two axes as reflecting one another, nor his application of contemporary dialogue to the relations with the past, but toward the end of his Woodbridge lectures he suggests a new metaphor to describe the two, which open the door to a different understanding of their relations. In these sections, Brandom depicts the prospective integration and engagement of inferentialism and the retrospective integration and engagement with the past, as two different perspectives that are "two sides of one coin."<sup>60</sup> This metaphor continues to support the position presented so far, as Brandom regards the two processes of the two axes as two perspectives of the same integration and statuses, but it also supplements it with another crucial property: it indicates that the two are in fact one. The processes of the two axes are "one unitary process" that constitutes a "rational unity," as Brandom explicates his choice of wording.<sup>61</sup> For Brandom, this rationality results from the combined rationality of each. However, if they are one process,

<sup>60</sup> Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, 93.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

as Brandom emphasizes, and they should be taken together, as implied, then their separate status of rationality needs not be a condition for both. The restrictions that were supposed to be constituted by the social relations of the diachronic sphere, and render it rational, might be missing, but they still do persist in the synchronic sphere, where they are properly constituted by social relations with contemporary interlocutors. Understood this way, the historical needs no friction of its own, as it never stands on its own.

Despite that Brandom's notion of historical rationality was shown to lack one of its prime components, his thesis stands if taken as a whole. Once the synchronic axis and the diachronic axis are considered together, as completing rather than merely reflecting each other, there is no essential need for all the payoffs of dialogue to be gained by both. This goes for the possibility to constitute normative statuses, as introduced above but also for the possibility to change one's mind. The second section of the article had shown that an interpretation that involves acts of appropriation cannot result in external criticism, and hence not with the rational change of perspective that many assume it does. Yet, this does not mean that this change cannot occur altogether. The conceptual norms that cannot be deliberated between a reader and an appropriated past are still up for deliberation in the dialogue of the synchronic sphere, where the speaker indeed addresses colleagues – second persons and second perspectives – by whom one can be challenged to either confirm or change one's commitments. Tradition, in this view, is an indispensable part of the way conceptual contents are determined, as well as in the process of normative change. However, in both cases facing the tradition by itself will not have either effect. For tradition to play its part, it must be put in the social dimension of the synchronic sphere and be the subject of, and subject to, a live dialogical exchange.

## References

- Baynes, Kenneth. "Gadamerian Platitudes' and Rational Interpretations." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 33:1 (2007), 67–82.
- Beaney, Michael. "Two Dogmas of Analytic Historiography." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 28:3 (2020), 594–614.
- Bennet, Jonathan. *Learning from Six Philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume*. New York: Clarendon Press, 2001.
- Brandom, Robert B. *Making It Explicit*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Brandom, Robert B. *Articulating Reasons*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Brandom, Robert B. "Facts, Norms, and Normative Facts: A Reply to Habermas." *European Journal of Philosophy* 8:3 (2000), 356–74.
- Brandom, Robert B. *Tales of the Mighty Dead*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Brandom, Robert B. *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Brandom, Robert B. "Reply to Jeremy Wanderer's 'Brandom's Challenges.'" In *Reading Brandom: On Making It Explicit*, edited by Bernhard Wiess, Jeremy Wanderer, 315. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Brandom, Robert B. *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Culler, Jonathan D. *Theory of the Lyric*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- DeVries, Willem A. and Coates, Paul. "Brandom's Two-Ply Error." In *Empiricism, Perceptual Knowledge, Normativity, and Realism: Essays on Wilfrid Sellars*, edited by Willem A. DeVries, 131–46. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Fisch, Menachem. *Creatively Undecided: Towards a History and Philosophy of Scientific Agency*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Fisch, Menachem and Benbaji, Yitzhak. *The View from Within: Normativity and the Limits of Self-Criticism*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011.
- Friedman, Michael. *Dynamics of Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd edn. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Gazit, Yael. "Appropriation, Dialogue, and Dispute: Towards a Theory of Philosophical Engagement with the Past." *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 13:3 (2019), 403–22.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "From Kant to Hegel: On Robert Brandom's Pragmatic Philosophy of Language." *European Journal of Philosophy* 8:3 (2000), 322–55.

- Harrelson, Kevin J. "Inferentialist Philosophy of Language and the Historiography of Philosophy." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22:3 (2014), 582–603.
- Haugeland, John. "Reading Brandom Reading Heidegger." *European Journal of Philosophy* 13:3 (2005), 421–8.
- Johnson, Barbara. "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion." *Diacritics* 16:1 (1986), 28–47.
- Lafont, Cristina. "Meaning and Interpretation: Can Brandomian Scorekeepers be Gadamerian Hermeneuts?" *Philosophy Compass* 3:1 (2008), 67–82.
- Loeffler, Ronald. *Brandom*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018.
- Marshall, David L. "The Implications of Robert Brandom's Inferentialism for Intellectual History." *History and Theory* 52 (2013), 1–31.
- McDowell, John. *Mind and World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- McDowell, John. *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Pippin, Robert. "Brandom's Hegel." *European Journal of Philosophy* 13:3 (2005), 381–408.
- Pippin, Robert. *Interanimations: Receiving Modern German Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol. 1*. London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1974.
- Wanderer, Jeremy. *Robert Brandom*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Wanderer, Jeremy. "Brandom's Challenges." In *Reading Brandom: On Making It Explicit*, edited by Bernhard Wiess, Jeremy Wanderer, 96–114. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd edn. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958.