Normative Binding

1 The Problem

When a lion defeats another lion and takes over the latter's pride of lionesses, he kills the cubs.[1] This is, presumably, a successful reproductive strategy, but is it morally wrong? Of course not. Should we forgive the lion? No! There is nothing to forgive. It has done nothing wrong. It cannot. Nor can it do anything right. The lion is not bound by any moral norms. It is just doing what comes naturally to it.[2]

Homo sapiens is different. Men occasionally kill the child of a new partner's earlier relationship. We condemn this as murder since humans, unlike lions, are bound by the laws of morality.

Yet, are not lions bound by their nature to act the way they do? In what way are humans different? What exactly does it mean to be bound by the norms of morality, or any other norms, for that matter?

St. Paul says that slaves should obey their masters.[3] One way that slaves might follow this norm is by being bound by chains. In this case it is physically impossible for them to act otherwise. An alternative is the whip: the threat of punishment can make it psychologically impossible for the slave to disobey.

Paul's point, however, is to offer a reason why slaves should obey their masters: in doing so, slaves are obeying a divine command. But why should we obey God? One reason might be to avoid the pain of an eternity of hellfire, just as the slave avoids the whip. Alternatively, rewarding the obedient with an eternity of happiness might also make it psychologically difficult to stray from the norms.

That we obey norms purely for reward or from fear of punishment is a demeaning view of humanity. Surely, as Dennett says, we can do better than that! What if, instead, we obeyed God, because obeying God is the right thing to do? God *should* be obeyed. But what is the force of *this* norm? Why should we obey God's commands? Because God commands it?!! (Cf. One is morally obliged to be moral because it is immoral not to be.)

To avoid this vicious circularity, a Platonist might claim that there is an eternal *eidos* of God, that sets the norm for what is right, namely obedience to divine command. If the *eide*, however, can determine what is normative, then we can dispense with God as an unnecessary intermediary and simply claim that we are directly bound by an eidetic norm -- in my example, that murder of one's partner's children being morally wrong.

Even if we leave aside the questions of why such a transcendent *Ideal* does not apply to lions, and whether it applies to humans in all cultures and historical periods, there remains the fundamental problem of how, even if I recognize the *eidos*, I am bound by it. What if I know and accept that the *Ideal* person, the *eidos* of a person, doesn't kill children, but I simply don't care about being an ideal person? Can I not have a cognitive grasp of the norm without being myself bound by it? Perhaps sociopaths or *Ubermenchen* are like that.

My concern is not with how people can disobey a norm they acknowledge -- Aristotle's problem of "*akrasia*." Of course, anyone can do wrong. But one cannot disobey a norm unless one already acknowledges it as binding. Remember the lion! Lions cannot be forgiven! The law does not pardon those who are "not criminally responsible due to mental illness." In such a case, there is no crime to pardon. Pardoning or forgiving someone's wrong action, or one's own, requires that they are already bound by the norm. My problem is not with how one can do wrong, or right. Doing either requires that we be bound by a norm. My problem is to figure out what it is to be bound by a norm in the first place.

While it is easier to exhibit the circular and regressive problems in the case of moral norms, these are *not* the topic of this paper. My concern here is with cognitive norms. When I ask you for the sum of the angles in a triangle, you should answer -- you are bound to answer -- "two right angles" not "three." That's the mathematically correct answer, the geometrical norm. Mathematical norms bind my assertions, including my assertions to myself, my mental judgments. Pre-mathematical children, like parrots, might utter the sounds "2+2=5" but are not doing anything mathematically wrong, since they are as innocent of mathematical norms as lions are of moral ones. Once they have matured and learned their geometry, however, they are bound by the norms of mathematics. Only then can they get things right, or, by disobeying the norms, get things wrong. While I used to be strapped in school for incorrect answers in geometry class, as an adult, being bound by mathematical norms is not based on the force of chains or fear of punishment. What, then, is it based on? How does such binding work?

More generally, and more crucially, I am concerned with the norms of reason. Someone says, "Some refugees are rapists, so all refugees are dangerous." I object, “That's a logical fallacy. It's unreasonable!” If the person responds, "I don't care about you academic logicians and your norms of rationality. That's what I believe! Why should I care about the norms of reason?" Could a stay in prison, or a million dollar reward bring such a person to care about such norms?

Why *should* anyone be bound by the norms of reason? Clearly, offering reasons to convince someone to be reasonable is circular and fails to convince. My issue in this paper is not what the norms of reason are, nor how some reasonable people can commit errors -- *akrasia*. The question is, what is it for a person to be bound by the norms of reason. How do we get to be bound by norms in the first place? How do norms bind?

Brandom puts it this way: "The urgent task becomes understanding how it is possible for us to commit ourselves, to make ourselves responsible to a norm that settles the correctness of what we do."[4]

In this paper, I present first Brandom's own response, based on his interpretation of Kant and Hegel. Secondly, I examine two illustrations from mathematics in the light of these considerations. In the last part of the paper, I argue that by its very nature a cognitive self, in making judgments about objects -- intentionality -- is thereby bound by communal norms of meaning.

2 Brandom's Solution

Brandom's solution to the problem of how an autonomous self can be bound by norms involves, first, an interpretation of Kant's understanding of an autonomous self, and secondly, of Hegel's understanding of norms.

Kant

Kant distinguishes between motion in accordance with a rule and following a rule. (By "Kant" I mean Brandom's interpretation of Kant -- I will be saying nothing about Kant, or about Hegel, in my own voice in this paper.) Planets move in accordance with the laws of mechanics, but humans act on the basis of their concepts of rules or norms.[5] ("Rule" is Kant's word for norm.) What makes us rational beings is that -- unlike planets, slaves coerced by chains, or those driven by desire for reward or by fear of punishment -- we follow rules freely, whether in action (morality) or cognition (reason).

How is this possible? Does following a rule not make one heteronymous, not autonomous? Does the authority of a rule not constrain me and restrict my freedom? No! Only if the rule is laid down by someone else. When I make a rule for myself, I do not lose my autonomy. A free being is a self-legislating being. Freedom is precisely the capacity to bind myself by a norm that I myself adopt.[6]

Binding oneself creates freedom. To see this, Brandom offers two analogies. When a child ceases to be a legal minor, when she reaches the age of majority, she gains the capacity to sign legal agreements, that is, to commit herself to being constrained by the contracts she freely agrees to. Far from reducing her freedom, this capacity allows her to get a credit card, borrow money, receive a driver's licence, buy a house or get married. Her freedom is vastly increased by her new power to constrain herself. Brandom's second analogy is learning a language. What one learns is to follow the linguistic rules, the phonetic, grammatical, and semantic norms without which one's utterances would be unintelligible. While these rules constraint, adopting them greatly increases one's freedom to interact and communicate with others, as well as to talk to oneself, to think. One becomes a linguistic being. These analogies help us to see that it is the capacity to take responsibility for one's commitments that establishes one as an autonomous self.[7]

Brandom's Kant rejects the idea that a self is a substance, a thing-in-itself that submits -- or not -- to an external rule. Selfhood is a capacity, not a thing. Brandom interprets Kant's Transcendental Unity of Apperception as a task, as an undertaking. What I must do in cognition is commit myself to judgments that are coherent, that can be unified rationally. It is this undertaking that constitutes the self, the Unity of Apperception, in the first place. Being a self is a commitment to two responsibilities: to ensure that any new belief I adopt does not contradict the previous beliefs I already have; and to consider what the further implications of that belief are. Binding myself to carrying out these responsibilities is what makes me a self.[8]

Imagine, for instance, that I am already committed to the belief that the cat is on the mat. A black streak out of the corner of my eye inclines me to say the

cat just ran out the door. I cannot just accept this new belief while continuing to hold the previous one. Either I reject the streak as an optical illusion -- maybe it was an eye floater -- or I have to renounce my belief that the cat is on the mat. It would be incoherent to hold that the cat is on the mat and also out the door. Commitment requires coherence. What could the commitment that the cat is on the mat be if it did not exclude the belief that the cat is outside? If my commitment that the cat is on the mat is compatible with anything whatsoever, it is simply not a commitment in the first place. To give up on coherence is to give up on commitment. To do so would be to abandon the Unifying of Apperception. I would no longer be a free, autonomous self.[9]

But why is this pair of beliefs incoherent? Note that the incoherence between the cat being on the mat and being outside is not due to any contradiction in formal logic. Rather it is based on the concept of a cat. Part of that concept is that, as a physical object, it cannot be in two places at the same time. The concept "cat" excludes bilocation. Without conceptual constraints like these, it would make no sense to speak of incoherence or coherence. Without determinate conceptual contents there is nothing for which I am taking responsibility; without it I would be committed to nothing -- I would not be binding myself. Without the anchor of concepts, there could be no Unity of Apperception, no autonomous self.[10]

Where, for Kant, do such determinate empirical concepts come from? Could they be eternal or innate? Cats? Mats?! In Brandom's opinion, Kant does not offer any adequate account of the origin or status of such concepts. Kant seems to just assume, in the fashion of Rationalists (Leibniz?) that they are just there, just given.

Hegel

Hegel criticizes Kant on just this point and offers a solution. He claims that we must move beyond individual autonomy to community. Concepts are neither just given nor are they the exclusive domain of autonomous selves. This is a false dichotomy. Conceptual norms get established by the reciprocal recognition of free selves within an historical society.[11]

For Brandom's Hegel, language plays a central role in the life of a community. Communication is impossible unless linguistically expressed judgments -- assertions -- make sense to others. If I assert that the cat is on the mat, others hold me committed to rejecting the assertion that the cat is outside. If others find me asserting that the cat is both on the mat and outside, then communication breaks down and, if this happens often enough, others will treat me as linguistically incompetent, they will ignore what I say, and effectively exclude me from the community of speakers. I may continue to make sounds, but they will be gibberish; no one will hold me responsible for any commitments. That is, I will lose the authority to make assertions.[12]

So for Hegel/Brandom, the incoherence of my two claims is not based on some eternal or innate concept of cat, but on the practice of my linguistic community for which what is meant by a "cat" is something that cannot be in two places at once. A condition for there being language is that speakers be held by others to communal norms of coherence. The Kantian principle that

coherence constitutes the unity of an individual Transcendental Unity of Apperception is not enough; the whole community must undertake the project of coherence.[13]

This is not, of course, to reject the autonomy of individuals. Hegel aims to go beyond Kant, not to regress to coercion or heteronomy. Community standards must themselves be accepted by individuals. This is the relationship of reciprocal recognition. I must freely accept the authority of the community to determine the norms of coherence. In choosing to assert, "The cat is on the mat," I accept the authority of others in the community of English speakers to hold me committed to the implication that the cat is not outside. I am free not to speak English, but if I do decide to assert, "The cat is on the mat," I am, by that very action, granting others the authority to call me on it if I also say the cat is outside. Otherwise, it is not *that* assertion; it is not an assertion whose content concerns the position of the cat. I am free to make assertions or not, but I am not free to determine the meaning of the assertions. I cannot communicate in English if by "the cat is on the mat" I try to express the notion that there is a pink elephant in the corner. To be this assertion in English, it must mean what English speakers mean by it. It is the community that sets the conceptual norms that bind individual speakers.

This structure is reciprocal in two ways. First, in taking responsibility for my assertions I am submitting to the authority of others; but when others speak to me, I have the authority to hold them to their commitments. Secondly, in the evolution of these norms, of the meaning of concepts, I have as much right as other members of the linguistic community to modify them. If one day when placing my bets on a roulette table I jokingly say, "Now the cat is on the mat!" implying that there is now no way to change my bet, the phrase may be taken on by other players, go viral and eventually become a legitimate meaning within the community. Perhaps the phrase will spread beyond the casino and English speakers who say, "the cat is on the mat" will be held by others to be committed to not backing out. The development of concepts and their meanings is an ongoing communal history in which each speaker has a right to contribute. Indeed, according to Brandom, almost every use of an assertion involves at least some slight change of meaning.

The Brandomian view, then, is that all normativity is social. Only the reciprocal recognition of members of a linguistic community can establish norms that bind subjects in a way that is compatible with them remaining autonomous.

3 Mathematics

Such a social and historical account of meaning and normativity flies in the face of the traditional view in Western philosophy and science that concepts are universal and independent of human history and culture. Mathematics is the hard case. From the time of the early Greeks, mathematical concepts have not only been thought to be unchanging, but have themselves been taken as the paradigm for all belief that qualifies as "real" knowledge, as science. Platonic forms, their objectivity and eternity, were modelled on mathematical certainties. That the norms of monogamy or even the definition of "cat" might

be cultural could perhaps be swallowed, but surely mathematics transcends all cultures and historical periods!

In this section of the paper, I want to explore the plausibility of Brandom's account of norms and binding with respect to two case studies in mathematics: geometric figures and numbers.

Euclid's *Elements* (c. 300 BCE) demonstrated, in Proposition #32, that the sum of angles in a triangle equals two right angles. The proof, based on the definition of parallel lines, is simple and clear to all.[14]

Euclid's theorem is a paradigm, one of the exemplary models, of scientific clarity and certainty. The assertion -- or even the thought, the judgment -- that the sum is two right angles, is universally correct. The concepts of equality, line, right angle, and parallel, as well as the logical steps of the proof, are objective: they do not appear to depend on Euclid's personality or social status, on the Greek language, nor on the historical situation in 300 BCE. Of course, there is no coercion: anyone is free to say that the sum of triangles is three right angles if they want to. But they'd be wrong. What the geometric concepts do is set binding norms that determines what is right and wrong for everyone. This appears to have nothing to do with any community, or with what commitments others hold me responsible for. All rational thinkers are universally bound by these concepts. So is Brandom's position untenible?

As many of you know, Euclidean geometry faced many challenges over the centuries, especially from the Arabic mathematicians, such as Ibn Al-Haytham (Alhazen, 11th century). The problems came to a head in 1854 when Riemann developed alternative, non-Euclidean geometries. In elliptical geometry, for instance, the sum of angles in a triangle turn out to be more than two right angles -- despite our "transparent" proof above. The triangle, for instance, made up of the equator and the longitude lines that run through Dublin and Winnipeg, which meet at the north pole, has a sum of angles equal to three right angles. In elliptical geometry, such as geometry on the surface of a sphere, the triangle is still made up of three straight lines, where the concept "straight" still means "shortest distance between two points" as it did for Euclid. Nevertheless, triangles on the surface of a sphere all contain more than two right angles.

Euclideans might object, "That's not what we mean by the concept straight." Riemannians can respond, "But it is what *we* mean by straight." Euclidean geometers hold each other to a certain commitment: If you say the lines that make up a triangle are straight, then they hold you responsible for maintaining that a triangle has a sum of angles equal to two right angles. Riemannians do not hold each other responsible for this implication. Euclideans say: you are using the words "straight" and "triangle" in a different way than we do; you do not mean the same thing by these concepts as we do; you are not taking responsibility for the implications built into our concepts; you are not obeying our norms; you are not a true Euclidean; you are not one of us. They are right: the Riemannian community binds its members to different commitments; it sets different norms for the implications of assertions. They are Riemannian geometers, not Euclidean geometers.

So even in the paradigmatic and hard case of geometry, the Brandomian account is still plausible.

Lets examine a second mathematical field: arithmetic. Surely that 2+2=4, or that there is an infinity of primes, cannot depend on a particular mathematical community?[15]

Think of numbers as solutions of equations. Solve 3x=9: the answer is the number 3. Solve x^2=4; solution x=2. Solve x^2=1; Solution x=1. Now solve x^2=-1: Solution -- there is no solution! Since (+1)*(+1) = (+1) and (-1)*(-1) = (+1), the equation x^2=-1 has no root, no solution. There is no number such that multiplied by itself would give (-1). Note that *if* there were such a number, its square *would be* -1 and 5 times the square of such a number *would be* -5. But it's not, because there can be no such a number! The claim that five times the square of such a number *would be* -5 is talking about something totally fictitious and imaginary. It is nonsense.

Well, that is one way - the traditional way -- of looking at things. In the mid-18th century Euler, Gauss and others gradually developed another approach. Why not think of such fictitious, *would be*, numbers as just one more class of numbers and figure out their mathematical relations? Call such *as if* numbers "imaginary" if you like, but they turn out to be very useful. A couple of centuries later, such numbers are in common use. Electrical engineering would nowadays be extremely cumbersome without them and quantum mechanics would be totally impossible.[i]

From a Brandomian perspective, we could say that 18th century mathematicians faced a choice about how to treat each other. They could have chosen to reject as incompetent anyone who asserted that x^2=(-1) has a solution: "she is talking nonsense;" "he doesn't understand the concept of a number." Historically mathematicians eventually chose to grant membership in the mathematical community to those who asserted that the root of x^2=-1 is *i*, (*i* is short for √-1) but came to hold such people responsible for being committed to $(5i)^2$= -25, and all the other implications the new relations involved. Instead of exiling such people who spoke of imaginary numbers as foolish -- as Descartes appears to have done in the 17th Century -- by the end of the 18th Century a new community of Complex Mathematicians developed who bound each other to new norms of correctness and a new world of (now legitimate) objects.[ii]

To conclude, even the hard case of mathematics -- of geometry and of numbers -- can be understood in a Brandomian manner as a community setting norms to which anyone who wants to be a member of the mathematical

i The historical evolution still shows up in our clumsy contemporary nomenclature: A "complex" number is made up of "real" and "imaginary" components.

ii With this approach to the nature of numbers, we could look back and see that we can give a similar account of "irrational" numbers, negative numbers, and even of "rational" numbers. As Leopold Kronecker (1823–1891) said, "God created the natural numbers [1, 2, 3, etc.] Everything else [-5, 0, 1/3, √2, pi, i] is the work of man." Wittgenstein, who offers a similar account of numbers, claims that even the natural numbers make sense only within a community with rules for what would count as the action of counting.

community must learn to bind herself. For her to choose to be a mathematician is for her to autonomously accept the authority of the mathematical community and thereby to freely grant them the right to hold her responsible for the implications of her commitments.

4 Intentionality

These mathematical examples illustrate not only that adopting a concept involves binding ourselves to communal norms; it also illustrates that by doing so we gain access to objects. Our assertions can be about Riemannian triangles or the imaginary number *i* only because we are so bound. Only by being bound do our judgments have intentionality. The remainder of this paper is an exploration of this point.[16]

"Intentionality" is defined by Husserl as the essential characteristic of all consciousness, that it is "about objects." McDowell speaks of it as "openness to the world."[17] [18] For Brandom, a representation is intentional when it "purports to be about the world."[19]

Brandom, however, distinguishes two kinds of consciousness: *sentience* and *sapience*. *Sapience* is what distinguishes *Homo sapiens* from other animals, who have only *sentience*. Sapience (*ratio*, *logos*, thought, apperception) is the capacity to make judgments and assertions capable of being true or false. While both are intentional, I think it is a serious mistake to model sapience on sentience. Let me explain why.

An eagle in the sky may see a mouse on the ground. This is pure sentience: the mouse is an independent object in the grass that is visible to the eagle's eye (and brain) in the sunlight.[iii] Following Plato, most Western philosophers have used this notion of sentience as a model for thinking about sapience. They think of concepts (triangles, numbers) as objects like mice, except that they are invisible to bodily eyes and live, not in the grass, but in some ethereal world beyond space, time and change. Luckily, humans have an invisible eye of a spiritual nature -- the Mind's Eye -- which, beyond Plato’s cave, can intuit these invisible objects by the Natural Light (Descartes’ term). This tradition thinks of sapience as like sentience, except for being immaterial. I call this the optical metaphor for sapience.[20]

The optical metaphor is seriously misleading when used to understand the intentionality of sapience. The sentience analogy brings with it a model of intentionality based on *presence*. Husserl holds that intentionality can only be described, not explained. According to Husserl, finding myself referring to a world, intuiting ("intellectual seeing") objects *present* before us, is the ultimate given, a foundation presupposed by any explanation. The analysis of sapience I am offering gives an alternative account of sapient intentionality. Unlike the eagle's sentient mental state that sees a mouse present before it, when I assert or judge that an object is a Euclidean triangle, when I apply the concept of triangle to it, I am not grasping an *eidos present* before me, or intuiting an innate idea with the inner Eye of the Mind.[21] What I am doing is promising to

iii This is a caricature of sentience, one that I think must ultimately be rejected. However, it is the caricature, not the reality, that is at the basis of the Western optical metaphor.

also judge and assert that the figure has a sum of angles equal to two right angles (and other such implications.) That is, I am acknowledging my membership in the Euclidean community and binding myself to those commitments Euclideans hold me responsible for.[iv]

My assertions are intentional in so far as they are "about" objects. To be an intentional self is for me to commit myself to accepting that it is the state of the object that determines the truth or falsity of my assertions. The truth of my claim that $5i^2 = -5$, or the falsity of my claim that $5i^2 = +10$, depends on the nature and state of the mathematical objects I'm referring to. But what objects I am referring to, such as *i*, a triangle or a cat, depend on the concepts I can wield. To say I can wield a concept, such as a Riemannian triangle, is to say that I have bound myself to the implications that the Riemannian community holds me responsible for when I refer to a triangle. Only by binding myself to the community's conceptual norms can my assertions be about triangles; only by such binding can I set up the triangle as the standard for the truth of my assertions.[22] What objects there are for me, what my judgments can refer to, what intentionalities I can exercise, depend on how I bind myself. Communal binding, not *presence*, is the source of intentionality. [23] [v] [24]

It is crucial to distinguish the community's role in constituting meaning from any relativism of truth. "The cat is on the mat" is not true because of social dictate. What makes the assertion true is the objective fact that the cat is on the mat. What would make it false would be the cat being outside. What the authority of the English-speaking community dictates is that "The cat is on the mat" is about the state of the cat, not about imaginary numbers or about a pink elephant. The community determines the intentionality of the assertion, what it is about, not its truth or falsity. It is the cat's state that determines the truth or falsity of the assertion, not majority opinion. If I assert the cat is on the mat, while every other member of the community insists that the cat is outside, I might be right and all their beliefs be false. The role of the community is to determine what in the world I am talking about -- the cat and not an elephant or a triangle. My assertion is about the fact that the cat is on the mat because when I make this assertion my community holds me responsible for commitments such as "a small feline in on the ground," and "the cat is not outside." It is the conceptual content of the assertion -- what it

iv A better metaphor for sapience is promising. If I promise you $10, I take responsibility for paying you $10, a commitment enforced by our community which maintains that promises should be kept. A promise is not an object I see, not even an internal object present to the mind; it is a relationship to someone, a relationship that can exist only within a community that has established norms for this kind of action. Even if, by some quirk of my subconscious I come to think that I am not committed, others will see to it that I am held responsible for paying the $10. Otherwise, my reputation -- my ability to make further promises -- will be ruined. Promising is not an action I can take all on my lonesome. I might utter the words, but they only have the nature of a promise within a community that accepts me as trustworthy, as an entity capable of binding myself. Sapience is a social relationship more like promising than like seeing.

v Perhaps one could argue that Husserl's claim that the source of all intentionality can ultimately be traced to Transcendental Intersubjectivity already prefigures this position. While Brandom's account of intentionality is not incompatible with Husserl's on this point, Brandom moves the process from the realm of mystical magic to practical, social relations of authority and responsibility.

"means" -- that has been outsourced to the community, not the truth value of the assertion.[25]

Outsourcing in this way does not undermine autonomy, but it does requires us to distinguish two kinds of autonomy. I am free to assert truly that the cat is on the mat or assert falsely that it is not. This is, however, a secondary freedom. It is based on my more fundamental freedom to speak English, or not. Choosing to speak English is primary autonomy, and is a precondition for asserting anything about the cat. Similarly, I have primary freedom to adopt the norms of Euclidean geometry, or the norms of Riemannian geometry. Only when I have done so, do I have the secondary freedom to speak truly or falsity about the number of right angles in a triangle. Primary freedom is the freedom to bind myself to norms. It is what makes me a member of the community, makes me sapient. It is what gives me access to conceptual meaning, to intentionality, and to objects.

Intentionality is therefore fine-grained. I am not simply intentional or non-intentional. Accepting the conceptual norms established by the Euclidean community gives me the authority to refer to triangles, but not to imaginary numbers or cats. In other words, there are different kinds of selves with varying types of intentionality. A person who has mastered the concept of cat may not have bound himself to the norms of the Riemannian community and so, while he can refer to cats, he can make no judgments about Riemannian triangles; such objects are unavailable to him; they are not in his world. He is not a "Riemannian self" and so that brand of intentionality is not among his capacities.[vi]

5 Conclusion

Selves, then, buy themselves intentionality at the cost of binding themselves to the norms of a community. Selves are beings that wield concepts with determinate meanings, concepts that give them access to a world of objects that determine the truth value of their assertions. The capacity to make assertions and judgments about objects, that is, sapient intentionality, is the ability to commit oneself to the implications that the community holds one responsible for when such assertions are made. Since it is holding individuals responsible for their commitments that constitutes autonomous selves, norms and selves are two sides of the one coin. Norms do not bind selves from the outside: being bound by norms is what constitutes a self. Selves and communal norms are co-eval: what it is to be a self is just to be bound by norms.

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vi I have claimed elsewhere that, *pace* Brandom, intentionality is not limited to linguistic beings. Indeed, I hold that all living beings, even amoebas, have a kind of intentionality: they live in Umwelten made up of objects appropriate to their organisms and they are governed by norms of a functional, organic nature. Hence the distinction that I (and Brandom) have been making between sentience and sapience is not as hard and fast as this current discussion might make out. See: Thompson, 2014 “The Self as an Evolved Organism that Lives in a Pragmatically Defined World.”

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1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infanticide_%28zoology%29
2 Nature is red in tooth and claw, says Tennyson. (Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, 1850.)
3 *Ephesians 6:5-9*, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free."
4 Brandom, "Pragmatic Themes in Hegel's Idealism," 165-166.

5 Kant must be able to distinguish the normative constraint characteristic of knowing and acting subjects from the necessitating causal constraint characteristic of the objects they know about and act on. In his terms, he must be able to distinguish constraint by conceptions (Vorstellungen) of laws from constraint by laws. What is the difference between adopting a normative status and coming to be in a natural state? What is the difference between how norms and causes "bind" those subject to them? (Brandom, *Reason*, 62)
6 As Brandom puts it: "There is now authority over me that is legitimate – rather than just coercive constraint –because I endorse and acknowledge it. This is the autonomy thesis by which Kant distinguishes the realm of nature from the realm of rules that bind only in virtue of my acknowledging that I am bound. One is genuinely responsible only for that for which one takes responsibility; one is genuinely committed only to that to which one has committed oneself. To be a self is to be bound by rules that one takes to be binding." (Brandom, *Reason*, 170-171)
7 "Kant's conception of intentionality moves the force or bindingness of normative statuses to the centre of the philosophical stage." (Brandom, *Reason*, 76)
8 "The positive freedom exhibited by exercises of our spontaneity is just this normative ability: the ability to commit ourselves, to become responsible. It can be thought of as a kind of authority: the authority to bind oneself by conceptual norms." (Brandom, *Reason*, 59)
9 "That sort of doing is what makes the concepts both of subject and of object intelligible: as what is responsible for judgments and what judgments are responsible to, respectively. ... Consciousness, in the sense of apperception, a relation between subjects and objects, presupposes and is to be explained in terms of the process of synthesizing a self—the process that is self-consciousness. What now show up as symmetric subjective and objective poles of consciousness (the intentional nexus) are to be understood as corresponding to two aspects of the activity of synthesizing a unity of apperception that can, in the way we have rehearsed, be seen to be necessarily a transcendental, that is, object-representing, unity." (Brandom, *Reason*, 49)

10 As Brandom puts it: "The autonomy criterion says that it is in a certain sense up to us (it depends on our activities and attitudes) whether we are bound by (responsible to) a particular conceptual norm ... However, if not only the normative force, but also the contents of those commitments—what we are responsible for—were also up to us, then, to paraphrase Wittgenstein,

'whatever seems right to us would be right.' In that case, talk of what is right or wrong could get no intelligible grip: no norm would have been brought to bear, no genuine commitment undertaken, no normative status instituted. Put another way, autonomy, binding oneself by a norm, rule, or law, has two components, corresponding to ‘autos’ and ‘nomos’. One must bind *oneself*, but one must also *bind* oneself. If not only that one is bound by a certain norm, but also what that norm involves—what is correct or incorrect according to it—is up to the one endorsing it, the notion that one is bound, that a distinction has been put in place between what is correct and incorrect according to that norm, goes missing. The attitude-dependence of normative force, which is what the autonomy thesis asserts, is intelligible in principle only in a context in which the boundaries of the content—what I acknowledge as constraining me and by that acknowledgment make into a normative constraint on me in the sense of opening myself up to normative assessments according to it—are not in the same way attitude-dependent. That is a condition of making the notion of normative constraint intelligible. We may call it the requirement of the relative independence of normative force and content.” (Brandom, *Reason*, 64)

11 "Wherever a norm can properly be discerned, there must be distinct centres of reciprocal authority and a process of negotiation between them. For this, Hegel thinks, is the nature of the normative as such, the only way in which determinate contents can be associated with norms according to the conception of the normative embodied in the autonomy thesis." (Brandom, “Pragmatic Themes in Hegel's Idealism,” 173-4)

12 “My authority to commit myself using public words is the authority at once to make myself responsible for and authorize others to hold me responsible for determinate conceptual contents, about which I am not authoritative. It is a petition for determinate recognition (attribution of specific commitments) by those I implicitly recognize as having authority, and thereby grant the authority so to recognize me. That is granting them the authority to assess the correctness or success of my rational integrative performances.” (Brandom, *Reason*, 73)

13 “Hegel broadens Kant’s account of synthesizing normative individual selves or subjects (unities of apperception) by the activity of rational integration, into an account of the simultaneous synthesizing of apperceiving individual selves (subjects of normative statuses) and their communities, by practices of reciprocal recognition.” (Brandom, *Reason*, 66)

14

> [Axiom] xii. If two right lines (AB, CD) meet a third line (AC), so as to make the sum of the two interior angles (BAC, ACD) on the same side less than two right angles, these lines being produced shall meet at some finite distance.
>
> PROP XXXII -- Theorem
> If any side (AB) of a triangle (ABC) be produced (to D), the external angle (CBD) is equal to the sum of the two internal non-adjacent angles (A, C),

and the sum of the three internal angles is equal to two right angles.

Dem.—Draw BE parallel to AC [xxxi.]. Now since BC intersects the parallels BE, AC, the alternate angles EBC, ACB are equal [xxix.]. Again, since AB intersects the parallels BE, AC, the angle EBD is equal to BAC [xxix.]; hence the whole angle CBD is equal to the sum of the two angles ACB, BAC: to each of these add the angle ABC and we have the sum of CBD, ABC equal to the sum of the three angles ACB, BAC, ABC: but the sum of CBD, ABC is two right angles [xiii.]; hence the sum of the three angles ACB, BAC, ABC is two right angles.

John Casey, *The First Six Books of the Elements of Euclid* Subtitle: And Propositions I.-XXI. of Book XI., and an Appendix on the Cylinder, Sphere, Cone, etc.,Euclid Release Date: April 14, 2007 [Gutenberg, EBook #21076]

For a more contemporary version of the proof, see: https://proofwiki.org/wiki/Sum_of_Angles_of_Triangle_equals_Two_Right_Angles

15

Theorem: There are infinitely many primes.
Proof.
Suppose that p1=2 < p2 = 3 < ... < pr are all of the primes. Let P = p1p2...pr+1 and let p be a prime dividing P; then p can not be any of p1, p2, ..., pr, otherwise p would divide the difference P-p1p2...pr=1, which is impossible. So this prime p is still another prime, and p1, p2, ..., pr would not be all of the primes.
(https://primes.utm.edu/notes/proofs/infinite/euclids.html)

16 “The aim is ... to say what it is to take or treat a claim as so much as purporting to refer to some object or other. (Brandom, *Reason*, 44, n 14)

17 "I have suggested that it is this integration [into Kantian spontaneity] that makes it possibile for a subject to understand an 'outer' experience as awareness of something objective, something independent of the experience itself. The object of an experience, that state of affairs experienced as obtaining, is understood as part of a whole thinkable world." (McDowell, *Mind and World,* 36)

18 “But in disallowing the question what those conceptual contents are exercised on, I do not disallow the question what the conceptual contents that are passively received in experience bear on, or are about. And the obvious answer, if the question is asked in that general form, is: they are about the world, as it appears or makes itself manifest to the experiencing subject, or at least seem to do so.” (McDowell, *Mind and World*, 39)

19 Brandom interprets Kant as claiming, "For both propositional (and, more generally, conceptual) contentfulness and what it is for our judgments to purport to be about objects (which play the normative role of what those judgments answer or are responsible to for their correctness) are explained in terms of the activity of judging, understood as a process of synthesizing a unity of apperception by rational integration of commitments." (Brandom, *Reason*, 15)

20 I borrow the notion of the optical metaphor for thought from Rorty: "What are the analogies between knowing about mountains and knowing about lines, between knowing Socrates and knowing the Good? When this question was answered in terms of the distinction between the eye of the body and the Eye of the Mind, *nous* -- thought, intellect, insight -- was identified as what separates men from beasts. ... The notion of 'contemplation, of knowledge of universal concepts or truths as *theoria*, makes the Eye of the Mind the inescapable model for the better sort of knowledge. ... [It] is responsible for viewing this sort of knowledge as *looking* at something (rather than, say, rubbing up against it, or crushing it underfoot, or having sexual intercourse with it)." (Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 38)

21 "Bare presence cannot be a ground for anything." (McDowell, *Mind and World*, 19)

22 “The objective form of judgment, Kant says, is 'the object=X,' to which judgments always, by their very form as judgments, make implicit reference. Thought of in terms of the normative pragmatics of judgment, it is the mark of what one has made oneself responsible to by making a judgment. It expresses the objectivity of judgments, in the sense of their having intentional objects: what they purport to represent. The understanding of the intentional directedness of judgments—the fact that they represent or are about something—is through-and-through a normative one. What the judgment is about is the object that determines the correctness of the commitment one has undertaken by endorsing it. ... In endorsing a judgment one has made oneself liable to distinctive kinds of normative assessment. What one is thinking and talking about is what plays a special role, exercises a special sort of authority in such assessments. Representing something, talking about or thinking of it, is acknowledging its semantic authority over the correctness of the commitments one is making in judging. Representational purport is a normative phenomenon. (Brandom, *Reason*, 34-35)

23 “So languages and traditions can figure ... as constitutive of our unproblematic openness to the world." (McDowell, *Mind and World*, 155)

24 “Here is how I think that story goes ... the relations of material incompatibility and inferential consequence among judgeable contents that we have seen are a necessary condition of synthesizing a rational unity of apperception (which is to say judging) already implicitly involve commitments concerning the identity and individuation of objects they can accordingly be understood as representing or being about. Why? The judgment that A is a dog

is not incompatible with the judgment that B is a fox. The judgment that A is a dog is incompatible with the judgment that A is a fox. That means that taking a dog-judgment to be materially incompatible with a fox-judgment is taking them to refer to or represent an object: the same object. (Brandom, *Reason*, 43)

25 “Where Descartes’ semantic concerns center on the nature of representational success, Kant addresses more fundamental questions about the nature of representational purport. What is it, he wants to know, for our ideas so much as to seem to be about something?” (Brandom, *Reason*, 29)