

Hegel- Jahrbuch 2013

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Hegel und die Moderne

Zweiter Teil

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Akademie Verlag

HEGELIAN BACKGROUND OF BRANDOM'S ACCOUNT OF LOGIC

Since the rise of analytic philosophy at the beginning of 20th century, its relation to Hegel's heredity has been predominantly critical¹. Both the founding fathers of linguistic analysis, Russell and Moore, overtly opposed Hegel (more precisely, British neo-hegelianism) in their attempts to clear philosophical language from conceptual muddle and logical confusions. And most of later analytic philosophers, despite all the differences between their particular views, generally continued along the lines set by Moore and Russell – in the way that they tried to distance themselves both from Hegel's ideas and from his mere style of philosophizing. However, some prominent thinkers adopted the stances opposite the main, neo-positivist current in philosophical analysis and compellingly showed the insufficiency of analytical apparatus in explaining the philosophical problems of meaning and understanding. Thus, Ludwig Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* stresses the necessity of resorting to the practice of »using« language and to the concept of »forms of life«, William van Orman Quine in *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* defended a holistic view of meaning, while Donald Davidson, in his various papers, subscribed to the coherence theory of truth and knowledge.² The most significant work in this context, however, is, above all, the seminal essay by Wilfrid Sellars *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, in which Sellars explicitly declared to be inspired by Hegel's critique of »immediacy« and to attack, from that point of view, the »classical« (mainly Russellian) »sense data theories«. ³ Although only few of such philosophers were directly influenced by the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the tendencies mentioned above allowed Hegelian ideas to gradually enter analytic philosophy and, consequently, led to what Paul Redding calls »the return of Hegelian thought«. ⁴

In discussing the »Hegelian turn« or »the return of Hegelian thought« within contemporary analytic philosophy, Redding appeals mostly to such philosophers as Wilfrid Sellars, Gereth Evans, John McDowell and Robert B. Brandom. Yet, it should be conceded that this turn gained its most developed, thorough and systematic form in the work of Brandom. It also ought to be granted that the principal work of Brandom's analytic rethinking of Hegel still remains his *Making It Explicit*⁵ (1994), which sets out at length the inferential conception of meaning, understanding and communication. But although Brandom repeatedly declared himself to be under Hegel's pervasive influence, in *Making It Explicit* he decided not to elaborate in great detail on strictly historical questions; instead, he put forward a comprehensive and systematic semantic theory held in a Hegelian »spirit«.

1 Cf. Peter Hylton, »Hegel and Analytic Philosophy«, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. F. C. Beiser, Cambridge 1993, 445–485.

2 Cf. Donald Davidson, »A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge«, in: *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. Lepore, Oxford 1986, 307–319; »On the Very Idea of Conceptual Scheme«, in: *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford 1984, 183–198.

3 Wilfrid Sellars, »Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind«, in: *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. I, eds. H. Feigl, M. Scriven, Minneapolis, MN, 1956, 253.

4 Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, Cambridge, MA, 2007.

5 Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, Cambridge, MA, 1994.

Indeed, he did also publish several important articles on particular problems in Hegel (some of them are included in *Tales of the Mighty Dead*⁶ and *Reason in Philosophy*⁷), but his project of writing a book devoted distinctly to the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is still awaiting its accomplishment. The aim of this paper is to indicate some typically Hegelian themes in their linkage with Brandom's overall theoretical enterprise. A particular stress will be put on the specific understanding of logic by Brandom and on showing its Hegelian sources.

In *Articulating Reasons* Brandom declared that one of the chief aims of his philosophical inquiries was »to introduce [...] a way of thinking about semantics that is different from more familiar ones, and on that basis also a new way of thinking about logic«⁸. The difference he has in mind concerns mainly two things: first, his understanding what logic is, and, second, the question of the status of formal logic as well as its role in human reasoning. In fulfilling both of these tasks, he develops an account that is close to the ideas of Hegel. As to the first aspect, for Brandom logic is not a set of abstract rules and procedures that can be formally demonstrated and that determine – from outside – the standards of human rational thinking; rather, logic is something that constitutes the process of determining and developing conceptual content. It is more basic than traditional formal account in the sense that Brandomian logic does not have to depend on abstract forms. Ultimately, the latter can be just generated on the basis of the former. As to the second aspect, Brandom places logical vocabulary and thus formal rules in the context of human discursive and normative practice. Logical patterns are not *a priori* givens. Their status is not abstract and independent of this practice. They emerge from human linguistic activity and are rooted only in it. In his depiction of the discursive game of giving and asking for reasons, Brandom shows how the logical (i. e. formal) emerges from the non-logical (i. e. non-formal), from our mere mongering of concepts. As a proponent of such a view, he puts himself in opposition to most of analytic tradition. Instead, he comes back to Hegel. In what follows, the crucial Hegelian motifs in Brandom will be pointed out and described.

The central Hegelian theme to be shown, the one that is constitutive of Brandom's semantic project, seems to be taken directly from Hegel's philosophy of right: this is the notion of *recognition*. In the interpretation of the author of *Making It Explicit*, recognition has its application not only in the legal or political sphere, but also underlies basic *epistemological* and *practical* human activity. Accordingly, it constitutes the source of *normativity* in our using and forming of concepts. The mere concept of recognition also implies that normativity is closely connected with *intersubjectivity* – due to the fact that it is impossible for me to address the act of recognition to myself⁹; on the contrary, I always strive for acknowledgment from others and possibly grant my recognition to those who try to obtain it from me. According to Brandom, a very similar *pragmatic* process takes place in our linguistic practice. The interaction between participants in discourse relies on undertaking and ascribing two sorts of deontic statuses: *commitment* and *entitlement*, which would correspond respectively to the act of demanding of recognition and to the act of giving it to someone. One person, by saying something, commits oneself to what they said and thus entitles other speaker to vindicate their commitment. In doing so, they seek to achieve entitlement to their statement from others. What exactly am I – as a discourse participant – committed to when saying something? This depends on the speech act I make, but paradigmatically the situation looks as follows:¹⁰ I advance an *assertion* and, by doing this, commit myself to justify it when challenged. In other words, I become obliged to *give reasons* when *asked* for them, and to show the *inference* from these reasons to the asserted conclusion. At the same time, my interlocutor ascribes to me such a commitment, and if the reasons

6 Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, Cambridge, MA 2002.

7 Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA 2009.

8 Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, Cambridge, MA 2001, 45.

9 Cf. Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, chapter II: »Autonomy, Community and Freedom«, 52–77.

10 Cf. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, chapter III.

I gave as a justification are acceptable, then they also ascribe to me an entitlement to the advanced assertion. As we go along, I make other assertions to which I am also committed and possibly entitled by others. In case I hold two incompatible beliefs/assertions – i. e. when my commitment to one statement precludes my entitlement to another one¹¹ – the interlocutors may indicate the discerned incompatibility and withdraw their entitlement to one of my commitments. Then, I am obliged to revise my beliefs and my justifications in order to make them possibly consistent. The discourse participants continuously *keep score* on me: on my commitments, entitlements and on appearing incompatibilities. Their attitudes towards me inform me, in a way, about the moves I should further make in a linguistic game. In turn, on my part, I also *keep score* on others, I grant my entitlements to other speakers, challenge some commitments, and indicate their incompatibilities. We all take part in the inferential *game of giving and asking for reasons*, which is also the game of mutual *scorekeeping*. Such a practice is a dynamic one. It does not lead to fixing any static and conclusive system of beliefs. Our commitments, entitlements can change and evolve during the discourse. Similarly, our concepts and their meaning can be developed and changed as we go along.

Although there is a great number of speech genres, different speech acts or language games, the *essence of language* and, thus, of all discursive practice is making speech acts and inferences. Actually, both of them are interrelated: on the one hand, inference depends on assertion, since only assertion can serve equally as premises and conclusion in inferences; on the other hand, assertion has both its meaning and pragmatic force only when used in the practice of inferring. Asserting and inferring constitute the essence of language in the sense that every other speech act or language game depends on it, e. g.: asking questions is understandable only against the background of assertions that could be a possible answer for it, giving an order is conceivable only against the background of possible assertions describing the state of affairs after fulfilment of this order, etc. According to inferentialism, the practice sketched above lies at the core of semantic contentfulness. Indeed, it is an indispensable basis for the appearance any meaningful content.¹²

Against the backdrop of mutual recognition between speakers, however, the question of soundness or validity of performed inferences arises. After closer examination of the game of giving and asking for reasons, it will turn out that the validity of these inferences is not based on any formal patterns. At the point of departure, what the participants in discourse have is not formal logic, but only their dispositions to take some deontic attitude to others, i. e. to ascribe (and to refuse or withdraw) commitments and entitlements. Therefore, there are no logical givens to be discovered, and there are no other institutions or judges to decide from outside – from an external, extra-discursive point of view – which inference is good and which one is not. The ones who make the inferences sound are the scorekeeping speakers themselves.

This epistemic situation also corresponds well to some of Hegel's ideas from the *Philosophy of Right*, where he claims that what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.¹³ In Hegel, this referred principally to the political sphere and meant that »social institutions aspire and tend to achieve a fundamentally rational form«,¹⁴ that their rationality progressively actualizes itself. The same can be referred to the epistemic level of Brandom's conception, in which our actual discursive practice gradually develops its immanent rationality despite the fact that not every actual justification is acceptable and correct as it stands. Rationality, both in Hegel and in Brandom, manifests itself not only in the faculty of deducing and analyzing, but primarily in the ability to constitute and legislate principles. These principles can be revised and changed during human, discursive interaction. Here,

11 Cf. *ibidem*, 169.

12 *Ibidem*, 167–168.

13 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. S. W. Dyde, Kitchener 2001, »Author's Preface«, 10–20.

14 Kenneth Westphal, »The Basic Context and Structure of Hegel's Philosophy of Right«, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 234.

it should be underlined that the rational constitution of rules and principles is not a matter of only individual intellectual activity, but is a fundamentally social matter. On the one hand, individuals depend on society and acquire their conceptual resources and inferential abilities only in a social context. On the other hand, they participate, at the same time, in social practices and either perpetuate or try to modify them according to their own needs and their conception of life, action etc. They collectively form social reality. As a consequence, there is a mutual influence between the social and the individual. Brandom's scorekeeping game expresses just this idea.

As to Brandom's description of inferential, linguistic practice, the question »How is inferring possible at all, if there are no external criteria of correctness?« arises. The answer would be as follows. During the discourse, the participants pay close attention not to the form, but rather to the content: they infer not formally, but *materially*. They proceed, for example, from »That is red« to »That is *not* blue« or from »That is red« to »That is coloured« etc., without basically complying with the laws of logic. And the very possibility of carrying *material inferences*, especially of the former type (from »That is red« to »That is *not* blue«), is closely connected to the next Hegelian notion, namely the principle of determinate negation – which Brandom associates with his concept of »incompatibility«¹⁵, or »material incompatibility«¹⁶ and which plays a central role in his whole account.

The concept of *determinate negation* is another, distinct Hegelian motif that underlies Brandom's inferentialist project. According to Hegel, for any property and for any conceptual content to be specified – to have a determinate meaning – this property or concept has to occur in opposition to some other properties or concepts. »For they are only *determinate*« – as Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – »in so far as they *differentiate* themselves from one another, and *relate* themselves to others as opposed«;¹⁷ and some pages later he gives a vivid example of this, saying that: »white is white only in opposition to black, and so on«.¹⁸ In just this sense, it is possible to say, as Hegel does, that *all determination is negation*. In Brandom's view, the principle of determinate negation weighs in favour of the inferential conception of meaning, in which any propositionally specified content stands in the relation of incompatibility with another propositional meaning. It therefore leads to two conclusions that speak for Brandomian inferentialism: first, that we can always make an inference from one sentence to another that is incompatible with it; and, second, that the meaning of the first sentence is partly determined by the meaning of the second – by means of the inferential relation of incompatibility.

As to the second type of above-mentioned inferences, i. e. the transition from »That is red« to »That is coloured«, the very possibility of this can be based on Hegel's *holism*, which is, ultimately, also connected with the principle of determinate negation.¹⁹ According to Hegel, concepts gain their determinateness only within a comprehensive, holistic system; they can become definite only on account of their relations to other conceptual content.²⁰ Although the most fundamental relation is the one of material incompatibility (the counterpart of Hegel's »determinate negation«), in Brandom's reading, there is necessarily another relation, namely that of material consequence (the counterpart of Hegel's notion of »mediation«). The inference from »That is red« to »That is coloured« is an example of just the latter one. And this is based on material incompatibility in the sense that it can be reformulated only in terms of incompatibility in the following way: everything that is incompatible with »That is coloured« is also incompatible with »That is red«.²¹ In this way, in Brandom's

15 Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 189–190.

16 Brandom, »Holism and Idealism in Hegel's *Phenomenology*«, in: *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, 180–181.

17 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford 1977, 69

18 *Ibidem*, 72.

19 For a closer discussion of it, see Brandom, »Holism and Idealism in Hegel's *Phenomenology*«, 182–186 et passim.

20 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§ 161, 162.

21 Cf. Brandom, »Holism and Idealism in Hegel's *Phenomenology*«, 180.

interpretation, both Hegel's »mediation« and »determinate negation« are interrelated, and – using the inferentialist terminology – all material consequence relations can be technically expressed by material incompatibility ones. As a result, both of them constitute semantic holism, which may be recognized as a next main Hegelian anchorage in the conception laid out in *Making It Explicit*.

The characteristic feature of Brandom's inferentialism is that his semantic holism is closely tied with semantic propositionalism. Propositionalism says that the basic semantic unit is not a subsentential term, but a whole declarative sentence understood as a proposition. The meaning of subsentential terms, predications etc., is not autonomous, but is derived from the meaning of the whole sentence; it depends on the role it plays in the entire sentential unit. But what, in turn, constitutes the meaning of the proposition? In such a holistic view, the meaning of one sentence is determined through the inferential relations to other sentences. In this way, the inference, a claim and reasons for it, constitutes the context in which propositions, judgments, or assertions achieve their significance. This feature also corresponds to Hegelian considerations on the nature of judgment and syllogism included in the *Science of Logic* (Book III), namely, that the syllogism has to be regarded as the »truth« of the judgment, not as something that consists of judgments.²² Such a claim can be legitimately named the »context principle«,²³ according to which terms gain their significance in the context of the judgment, and judgments also get their meaning in the context of the inference. Although some formulations of the *context principle* can be also found in other philosophers (mainly in Kant, but also in Frege and later Wittgenstein), its most explicit version is embedded in Hegel. Thus, this can be agreed to be the next, distinct Hegelian motif adopted by Brandom. On that basis, we can ascribe both to Brandom and to Hegel three interrelated stances: inferentialism, propositionalism and holism.

In Brandom's view, inference is a sort of practice exercised by language practitioners who ascribe to themselves deontic statuses of commitment and entitlement. There are three types of such inferences:²⁴ 1) *commitment-preserving inferences*: if one is committed to p , one is also committed to q (e. g. if I am committed to »That is red«, then I am committed to »That is coloured«); 2) *entitlement-preserving inferences*: if one is entitled to p , then one is conditionally entitled to q (e. g. if I am entitled to »The match is dry« then I am provisionally entitled to »The match will light if struck«); 3) *incompatibilities*: two claims are materially incompatible in case »commitment to one precludes entitlement to the other«²⁵ (e. g. if I am committed to »That is red« then I am not entitled to »That is blue«). What is typical of these kinds of inferences is that they are *materially* correct or incorrect: they are correct or incorrect on account of their *content* and *non-logical vocabulary*, not of their logical form.

It is worth emphasizing here the crucial shifting of stress from form to content in Brandom's account. For here those accustomed to the prevailing view on logic could disagree with Brandom, claiming that, in fact, every good inference is a logical inference, since even material inferences can be treated as enthymematic. Enthymematic inference is not formally valid as it stands, when only explicit premises are taken into account; yet, when implicit, hidden premises are also considered, the whole reasoning turns out to be valid. Accordingly, a formalist philosopher would say that the above inference: from »That is red« to »That is coloured« has an additional, hidden premise »If that is red, then that is coloured«, and, as a result, it has a logical form of *modus ponens*: $[p \wedge (p \rightarrow q)] \rightarrow q$. But even so, the question is which of the two options (either material or formal one) is more fundamental. Brandom chooses the former approach: »We need not treat – he writes – all correct inferences as correct in virtue of their form, supplying implicit or suppressed premises involving logical vocabulary as needed. Instead, we can treat inferences such as the inference from »Pittsburgh is to the west of Philadelphia« to »Philadelphia is to the east of Pittsburgh«, or from »It is raining« to »The streets will be

22 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford 1977, 669.

23 Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, 114.

24 Cf. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 168–169.

25 Ibidem, 169.

wet«, as *materially* good inferences – that is, inferences that are good because of the content of their *non-logical* vocabulary«. ²⁶

A good reason for Brandom's giving primacy to the material, rather than to the formal, is that the notion of formal validity – or the mere concept of logical form – can be defined in terms of material correctness, while the converse route of explanation is not possible. Namely, according to Brandom, formally valid inferences may be understood as: firstly, inferences which are materially correct, and, secondly, which cannot be turned into materially bad ones by substituting non-privileged for non-privileged vocabulary in their premises and conclusions²⁷. In this definition, by non-privileged vocabulary Brandom means simply non-logical vocabulary, whereas privileged vocabulary is the one that constitutes logical form – i. e. that proves to be invariant under any substitution. In this way, logical vocabulary, and thus logical form, is a derivative of material inferences and as such cannot be thought of as independent and fundamental for our thinking. For Brandom, logical vocabulary serves as a means of elucidating implicit inferential commitments, of expressing the content of our concepts and as a tool that helps to express our material reasoning in an explicit, logically valid structure.

Brandom sees it as follows: »In applying the concept *lion* to Leo, I implicitly commit myself to the applicability of the concept *mammal* to him. If my language is expressively rich enough to contain *conditionals*, I can say that *if* Leo is a lion, *then* Leo is a mammal. (And if the language is expressively rich enough to include quantificational operators, I can say that *if anything* is a lion, then it is a mammal.) That Cleo is a cephalopod is good (indeed, decisive) evidence that she is not a lion. If my language is expressively rich enough to contain *negation*, I can make that implicit inferential component articulating the content of the concept *lion* explicit by saying that *if* Cleo is a cephalopod, then Cleo is *not* a mammal«. ²⁸ Accordingly, in this view, conditionals codify inferences as claims, transfer our commitments into a form of assertions and present them in a clause » $p \rightarrow q$ «. The basic task of negation is to codify incompatible commitments. Consequently, every concept that is materially incompatible with another one can be articulated with negation and preceded, in formal notation, by the symbol » $\sim p$ «. ²⁹ Both of them serve to express conceptual content in an explicit way.

The above discussion shows that Hegelian the inspirations in Brandom's philosophical work, especially in his considerations concerning logic, are deep and widespread, though not always direct and literal. Both philosophers develop a philosophy of logic rather than logic in a strict, formal sense; they show the social, discursive basis for various types of logical inferences. For both of them, logic is not simply the abstract forms, but, rather, it is a practice of reasoning, of exchanging reasons, that generates these forms. And in this sense, it does not entirely depend on formal rules. The proper, fundamental logic is a process of determining conceptual content, and this process is deeply embedded in human, social, discursive activity. Both Hegel and Brandom explore the same general line of thinking about logic, but they do it using different conceptual apparatuses and from different philosophical and historical perspectives.

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²⁶ Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, 85.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 55.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 19–20.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 147.