

## Pragmatism and Intentionality

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Wilfrid Sellars famously described his philosophical project as that of ushering analytic philosophy out of its Humean and into its Kantian stage, meaning by this that the time had come to acknowledge the importance of Kant's motto "intuitions without concepts are blind" and start to draw some of its consequences.

Rorty, by analogy, described Brandom's project as that of ushering analytic philosophy out of its Kantian and into its Hegelian stage, meaning by this that the time was ripe for acknowledging the importance of another motto, "all constitution is social institution," and start to draw some of its consequences.

Curiously enough, neither of these characterizations mentions Pragmatism or any of the pragmatist philosophers. Yet, Brandom presents his recent views as a form of analytic pragmatism. We'll try to see what this means in a specific case, that of intentionality.

Now, the task of this introduction is twofold: (i) to situate Brandom's approach to intentionality on a larger map, thus giving a sense of the geography of the territory; and (ii) to highlight some distinctive features of Brandom's meaning-use analysis of intentionality as a pragmatically mediated semantic relation. This will require clarify some central aspects of the treatment of intentionality in MIE too.

Note, though, that since the request is to make the introduction in a power point format, what I want to do here is simply to list the points that deserve special attention and assemble some of the raw material, leaving the connections among them to the presentation itself. So, think of this more as a preview of the real movie.

I. When I speak of a map, I do not speak metaphorically: I mean a real map, though of quite a special kind. For we shall start with Haugeland's picture of the debate on intentionality as it is presented in his All Stars Team.

Next, we shall examine the significance of a distinction that, following Stalnaker, Brandom draws between two fundamental orientations with respect to intentionality, "accordingly as rational agency or linguistic capacity is taken as primary". (Brandom takes the latter).

Having a sense of where Brandom stands in the debate, we'll be able to look in more detail at some features of his account of intentionality in MIE. In particular the following:

*Notion:* "Intentionality in the sense of the propositional contentfulness of attitudes, not in the sense (if that should turn out to be different) of the directedness of sense". (MIE 7)

*Concern:* with original intentionality.

*Higher and lower grades:* "this inquiry is directed at the fanciest sort of intentionality, one that involves expressive capacities that cannot be made sense of apart from participation in linguistic practices" (MIE 7). Question: What to make of the lower grades of intentionality? "What is needed is to tell a story about practices that are sufficient to confer propositionally contentful intentional states on those who engage in them, without presupposing such states on the part of the practitioners (MIE 7)

*Simple intentional systems vs. interpreting intentional systems:* the former are systems whose behavior is interpretable by ascribing intentional states to them; the latter are systems capable of ascribing intentional states to others and to themselves. The usual approach starts from intentional systems; Brandom holds that interpreting intentional systems come first: "Simple, nonlinguistic, instrumental intentionality can not be made fully intelligible apart from considerations of the linguistic practices that make available to the interpreter (but not to the interpreted animal) a grasp

of the propositional contents attributed in such intentional interpretations (MIE 155). (Analogy with Sellars).

Main thesis: Interpreting intentional systems do not derive their intentionality from the outside, as it were, but from each other. (Here we'll go into some details).

II. Turning to BSD, Brandom offers the following characterization of the main lines of a pragmatic way of thinking about intentionality, interpreted as a nested sequence of claims:

P1] The most fundamental kind of intentionality (in the sense of directedness towards objects) is the *practical* involvement with objects exhibited by a sentient creature dealing skillfully with its world.

P2] The most basic form of such activity is a Test-Operate-Test-Exit cycle of perception, performance, assessment of the results of the performance, and further performance—that is, a process or practice consisting of an open-ended sequence of feedback-governed performances.

P3] Feedback-governed practices are 'thick', in the sense of essentially involving objects, events, and worldly states of affairs. Bits of the world are *incorporated* in such practices, in the exercise of such abilities.

P4] The specifically *semantic* intentionality displayed in language-use, engaging in *discursive* practices, deploying an autonomous *vocabulary*, should be understood both as a development of and a special case of the sort of basic *practical* intentionality exhibited already by the kind of feedback-governed transactions mentioned in the first three theses.

P5] One cannot understand the two poles of specifically semantic or discursive intentionality—their representing activities and the objects and objective states of affairs they represent—independently of the semantic intentional relations they stand in to one another, and then somehow bolt together those ways of understanding the relata to understand those relations between them. One must rather start with an understanding of the thick practices engaged in and abilities exercised, and abstract from or dissect out of that an understanding of the two poles of the semantic intentional relations those practices and abilities institute establish.

We'll briefly rehearse these claims, and try to see whether they alter in substantial ways the views put forward in MIE, in particular with respect to its main thesis.

## References

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