

On Normative Pragmatics: A Comparison Between Brandom and Habermas

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RESUMEN

En la revista *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. LVII, 1997, apareció una discusión sobre el libro de Brandom (1994) *Making it Explicit* que incluía artículos de John McDowell, Gideon Rosen, Richard Rorty y Jay F. Rosenberg. El artículo de Rorty dio comienzo a un interesante debate entre Jürgen Habermas y Robert Brandom sobre el problema de la objetividad de nuestras afirmaciones de validez. Habermas dedicó un capítulo completo de su libro *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (1999) a la *scorekeeping theory* de Brandom y éste le ha respondido recientemente en el *European Journal of Philosophy* (2000). Este volumen incluye la versión inglesa del texto de Habermas. Los dos modelos se basan en el análisis de la interacción social y presentan una teoría del significado desde un punto de vista wittgensteiniano: el significado de una expresión corresponde a su uso lingüístico. Al mismo tiempo, tales modelos están estructurados de manera que no caigan en el relativismo. En este contexto voy a discutir tres temas: (1) la relación entre pragmática y semántica; (2) la objetividad de nuestras afirmaciones de verdad y (3) el estatuto de los hechos y de las normas.

ABSTRACT

In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LVII., 1997, it was included a discussion on the book by Robert Brandom *Making It Explicit* (1994) with papers by John McDowell, Gideon Rosen, Richard Rorty and Jay F. Rosenberg. Rorty's paper opened a very interesting debate between Jürgen Habermas and Robert Brandom on the problem of the objectivity of our validity claims. Habermas dedicated a full chapter in his book *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (1999) to the *scorekeeping theory* of Brandom, and Brandom recently replied to Habermas' criticism in the *European Journal of Philosophy* (2000). This volume includes the English version of the text by Habermas. The two models are based on an analysis of social interaction and present a theory of meaning, from a Wittgensteinian point of view: the meaning of an expression corresponds to its linguistic use. At the same time, they are structured to overcome relativism. In this context, I'll discuss three topics: (1) the relationship between pragmatics and semantics; (2) the objectivity of our truth claims and (3) the status of facts and norms.

I. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

The aim of this paper is to clarify the role of social practices in the explanation of meaning of linguistic expressions. The comparison between Brandom

and Habermas is justified, as both of them make use of a model of interaction, from the Wittgensteinian point of view, of a theory of meaning based on the use of linguistic expressions. In this case, the minimum unit is the speech act. According to Brandom, a normative pragmatics begins with an account of social practices for identifying to identify the particular structure they *must* exhibit, in order to qualify as specifically linguistic practices. And he continues considering what different sorts of semantic content those practices can confer on states, performances and expressions. Habermas maintains that it is possible to find universal structures or presuppositions, that allow comprehension and rational consent among speakers.

The deontic scorekeeping model describes the structure of social practices, that are inferentially articulated. This fact means that social practices can confer propositional contents on expressions and performances that play suitable roles in those practices. Brandom's theory presents two different but related sides: a pragmatic side, in which he investigates the significance of the speech-act, referring to the normative roles that govern the keeping of deontic score; a semantic side that clarifies the contents of discursive commitments, referring to the inferential substitutional rules. "The essential point is that philosophical semantic theory incorporates an obligation to make the semantic notions it appeals to intelligible in terms of their pragmatic significance" [Brandom (1994a). p. 145]. The goal of a philosophical semantic theory is, therefore, to show how the content is associated with expressions or states.

In the scorekeeping theory, opinion, states, attitudes and performances are intentionally contentful in virtue of the role they play in inferentially articulated, implicitly "normative" practices. They provide "reasons" recognised by others through the pragmatic significance of associating states with intentional contents.

We can thus notice that Habermas and Brandom share the pragmatic point of view of an analysis of the presuppositions of communication: they reconstruct the presuppositions of communication. The "background" of our linguistic and social practices is made of cognitive and linguistic capacities¹. Habermas' conviction for introducing the concept of "background" of communicative action is the following: "The communicative action is inherent to a lifeworld that secures a covering against the risk of dissents through a massive background consent" [Habermas (1988). p. 85]. Habermas varies the phenomenological concept of lifeworld according to his formal pragmatics. First, the background differs from the shared knowledge of the propositional content, that emerges in the performance of a speech act. In the performance of a speech act the sentence specifies not only the propositional content but also the sense of the linguistic use of the expression. The performative proposition expresses therefore a validity claim. We can individuate two kinds of knowledge that depend on the linguistic competence and on the context of the use. These two forms of knowledge refer to a lifeworld as a horizon of com-

prehension among speakers. Habermas' problem is to understand whether this lifeworld is totally indeterminable, once we abandon the phenomenological (Husserl) or the representational (Searle) analysis. This result can be avoided if we postulate a coincidence between lifeworld and the unavoidable presuppositions of the consent. In this sense the speakers must: a) pursue without mental constraints their illocutive ends, b) subordinate their consent to the acknowledgement of criticisable validity claims, c) be available to undertake commitments, that influence the development of the interaction.

Brandom underlines rather the primacy of the performative attitude of the speaker. Assuming this, we can answer the question "what are we doing when we consider something true". In scorekeeping terms, opinion, states, attitudes and performances are intentionally contentful in virtue of the role they play in inferentially articulated, implicitly normative practices. They provide reasons recognised by others through the pragmatic significance of associating states with intentional contents. The idea pursued by Brandom is that the state or status of "believing" is essentially related to the linguistic performance of "claiming". Beliefs can be modelled on a kind of inferentially articulated "commitment". When we assert something we undertake or acknowledge "doxastic" or "assertional" commitments. This fact implies a change in the notion of representational content. Contents become "propositional contents" defined by the "discursive practices".

There is a practical attitude of acknowledging the assertional significance of a performance, by which we can understand the pragmatic significance of assertional speech acts, the normative status of assertional commitments and the possession or expression of propositional semantic contents. The practices treated here are inferential practices. They are interpreted as the game of giving and asking for reasons. That is why inferring is considered as an aspect of an essentially "social" practice of communication.

In linguistic practice there are two sorts of deontic statuses: "commitment" and "entitlement". The notion of normative status and that one of significance of performance, that alter normative status, can be understood in terms of the practical attitude of taking and treating someone as committed or entitled. To the normative statuses of commitment and entitlement correspond two practical deontic attitudes: attributing them (to others) and acknowledging or undertaking them (by oneself). Of these, the attribution is fundamental. We can look at social practices as games, in which each participant presents commitments and entitlements. At the same time, this presentation as performance alters the deontic statuses. The significance of performance is consequentially related to deontic attitudes. Practitioners keep score on deontic status by attributing those statuses to others and undertaking them themselves. Only assertional commitment as claiming relates to liability to demand for justification and reliability in the responsive acquisition of assertional commitments.

There are three dimensions that structure inferential practices. The first two are: 1) the “committive” or “commitment-preserving” inferential relation; 2) the “permissive” or “entitlement-preserving” inferential relation. An example of the first is the deductive inference and one of the second is time inductive empirical inference. In this context we have also relations of “incompatibility”. Two assertable contents are incompatible in case the commitment to one precludes the entitlement to others. Thus commitment to the content expressed by the sentence “The swatch is green” rules out entitlement to the commitment that would be undertaken by asserting the sentence “The swatch is red”. The second dimension concerns the distinction between the “concomitant” and the “communicational” inheritance of deontic statuses. To the concomitant inheritance corresponds the “interpersonal” use of a claim as a premise. In this case when one is committed to a claim is at the same time committed to other concomitant commitments as consequences (the same for entitlements and incompatibility relations). To the communicative inheritance corresponds the interpersonal use of a claim, because the undertaking of an assertional commitment has the social consequences of licensing or entitling others to “attribute” that commitment. The third dimension has to do with two aspects of the assertion as endorsement. The first aspect is the “authority” to further assertion. The second one is the “responsibility” through which an assertion becomes a reason that permits the inheritability of entitlements in social contexts.

Asserting is the fundamental speech act. Asserting is doing two things. First asserting is “authorising” further assertions (inferential consequences and communicational consequences). Second, it is “undertaking” a specific task: “responsibility”. The responsibility emerges from the entitlement to the commitment expressed by the performer’s assertions. The entitlement to this claim can be justified in two ways: 1) by giving reasons for it; 2) by appealing to the authority of another asserter. In this sense we can recognise two mechanisms for fulfilling the responsibility to demonstrate entitlement: the communicational mechanism (interpersonal/intracontent inheritance of entitlement to a propositional commitment) and the justificatory one (intrapersonal/intercontent inheritance of entitlement to a propositional commitment).

According to Habermas, we can observe a problem in Brandom’s methodological strategy. This problem arises from an ambiguity in the relation between pragmatics and semantics: it seems contradictory to state that social practices confer conceptual content to states and expressions and that material rules of inferences confer, at the same time, that content. Habermas writes: “The perspective of the participant who reconstructs from the inside the linguistic practice doesn’t allow the speaker to talk about truth, but about how truth appears to him” [Habermas (1999), p. 146].

Recently, Sebastian Rödl [Rödl (2000)] wrote a paper on Brandom’s conception of normativity. In particular he focused on the fact that normative

attitudes institute normative states. In this sense the latter supervene on the former. The criticisms of Rödl are addressed to Brandom's pragmatic point of view, according to which: "[...] talk of commitments can be traded in for talk of undertaking and attributing commitments" [Brandom (1994a), p. 297]. In this sense, the conception of supervenience is so reinforced that normative statuses are reduced to normative attitudes. There can be a tension in the two ways Brandom considers the justification of a linguistic expression. On the one hand, he refers to normative attitudes, on the other, he introduces a theory of meaning that possesses its own normative concepts. If the norms are instituted then a normative theory of meaning cannot be expressively independent. But if we maintain the thesis of the independence, the interpreter cannot be considered, for logical reasons, a participant of the game consisting of asking and giving for reasons. I nevertheless don't see any difficulty in Brandom's point of view: in order to distinguish between correct and wrong expressions, we can refer to the scorekeepers attitudes in the game of asking and giving for reasons, whose correctness is given by the rules of material inference.

Let me consider now Habermas' theory of meaning in the *Erste Betrachtung* of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* [Habermas (1981)]. Habermas stresses a triple relation between a linguistic expression and a) what we intend to say, b) what we say and c) her linguistic use in the performance of a speech act. In this context we can notice the influence of the speech act theory (Austin and Searle) on Habermas' conception of the linguistic meaning. This theory considers, at the same time, the intention of the speaker, the interpersonal relation and the language/world relation. The acceptance of a speech act refers to the propositional content of an expression on the one side, and to constraints that are fundamental for the consequences of the interaction on the other. In this sense, the interlocutor understands the expression (its meaning), assumes a position (saying yes or no) on the validity claim brought up by the speaker and — according to the reached consent — he directs his action according to commitments fixed by conventions. In order to explain the relation between the semantic and the pragmatic dimensions of a speech act, we must clarify which conditions allow its acceptability. The acknowledgement of a validity's claim is related to the grammatical correctness of the expression, to the sincerity of the speaker and to the adequacy of the reasons that support it.

I don't think that these theses are substantially different from those of Brandom, as both theorize with the game of giving and asking for linguistic and social reasons. The first step to follow is to consider a fundamental innovation of Sellars' game of giving amid asking for reasons that Brandom introduces. Weakening the "strong inferentialism" of Sellars, he introduces the social role of the scorekeeper. Sellars maintains that reliable differential dispositions are only a necessary condition for observational knowledge. In this sense, a performance elicited by RDRD counts as knowledge, as endorsement

if the reporter undertakes a commitment, if he can justify his token inferentially by giving reasons. Brandom criticizes the epistemological internalism of Sellars: the claim that the observer must be able to justify it inferentially and the reliability involved in justifying that claim. Regarding the first point, Brandom invokes the notion of deference (intracontent\interpersonal justification); regarding the second, he argues that reliability is a property of inference and doesn't involve the reporter's endorsement of a claim. It seems clear to me that, in the case where we can't overlap, for different reasons, (normally we overlap on the fact that the cat has four legs) we have an intersubjective structure that allows the improving of our knowledge [Brandom (1994a), chapter 4].

II. THE PROBLEM OF OBJECTIVITY

The scorekeeping model shows that propositional content is given by inferential social practices. This model is based on the fundamental thesis that all sorts of conceptual content are essentially inferentially articulated. Speakers' attitudes, through the mechanism of anaphora as the structure of a repeatable token, confer conceptual contents on singular terms and predicates. In this context, the conception of "substitutional triangulation" is fundamental: "The conceptual content expressed by a sentence depends on its place in a network of inferences relating it to other sentences: the conceptual content expressed by a singular term depends on its place in a network of substitutions relating it to other terms" [Brandom (1994a), p. 426]. In this sense picking out an object by the use of an expression means that the same object can be picked out in some other way — "that some commitment-preserving substitutions involving that expressions are in order".

In Brandom's opinion, deixis presupposes anaphora. Anaphora is the linguistic mechanism in which we form a connection between repeatable contents and non-repeatable deictic actions. In this sense, no tokens can have the significance of demonstrative unless others have the significance of anaphoric dependents. This fact means that when we use a demonstrative we use a special kind of anaphoric initiator. Anaphora plays a fundamental role also in the interpersonal communication because the contents of the claims (deployed nomologically in intrapersonal reasoning) must be understood as having been conferred by public practices of deploying claims dialogically in interpersonal reasoning (conversation). "The capacity of those in the audience to pick up a speaker's tokening anaphorically, and so to connect it to their own substitution-inferential commitments, is part of what makes it possible for them to understand the speaker's utterance by extracting information from it. Anaphoric connections among tokenings that are utterances by different interlocutors provide a way of mapping their different repertoires of

substitutional commitments onto one another — a structure scorekeepers can use to keep track of how each set of concomitant commitments relates to the others” [Brandom (1994a), pp. 474-5].

Interpersonal anaphora forms the objective content of an expression by the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions. These kinds of ascriptions correspond to the difference between “of” and “that”, but we must not consider them as a difference between kinds of beliefs or contents of beliefs. When the interpreter *ascribes* a truth claim *p* to the speaker, he raises implicitly a truth claim for the speaker’s assertion. Contemporary, he distinguishes between the attribution of a truth claim, that has the form of a *de dicto* description, and the acknowledgement of this truth claim, picked up by the interpreter in the form of a *de re* description. In Brandom’s opinion, the function of *de re* ascriptions is to make explicit which aspects of what the ascriber says express the substitutional commitments that are being undertaken. *De re* specifications of the conceptual content of ascribed commitments also express the non-perspective-relative notion of “objective correctness”, a notion corresponding to the conviction that “objects and the world of facts that comprise them are what they are regardless of what anyone takes them to be” [Brandom (1994a), p. 594]. In this sense “Objectivity is a structural aspect of social-perspective *form* of conceptual contents” [Brandom (1994a), p. 597]. At the same time Brandom writes: “The difference between objective normative status and subjective normative attitude is construed as a social perspective distinction between normative attitudes [...]. The permanent possibility of a distinction between how things *are* and how they are *taken* to be by some interlocutor is built into the social-inferential articulation of concepts” [Brandom (1994a), p. 597]. There could be a tension in Brandom’s theory because he sometimes seems to acknowledge a distinction between what can be instituted by practices, and what can impose external constraints on such practices.

A possible solution to the problem of objectivity can be the function of perceptual experience. This experience has to do with the reliability of the processes of the beliefs formation. The platonic distinction between opinion and knowledge is inherited by the justified true belief theory (JTB). Brandom’s argumentation start from some observations about the internalist point of view: “What I call the ‘Founding Insight’ of reliabilist epistemologies is the claim that true beliefs can, at least in some cases, amount to genuine knowledge even where the justification condition is not met (in the sense that the candidate knower is unable to produce suitable justifications), provided the beliefs resulted from the exercise of capacities that are *reliable* producers of true beliefs in the circumstances in which they were in fact exercised” [Brandom (2000a), p. 97].

There is a gap between the classical JTB theories and the theories of reliability of knowledge: the first ones presuppose that the knower can inferen-

tially justify the belief, while the second ones don't need to have this capacity. Brandom's aim is to try to save the formal structure of the JTB by making it compatible with reliabilism. In order to do this, he must weaken two tendencies of reliabilism: the "Conceptual Blindspot" and the "Naturalistic Blindspot". The former doesn't allow a correct distinction among authentically perceptible beliefs, that require the application of concepts and reliable responses to environmental stimulus: "I claim that an essential element of that distinction is the potential role, as both premise and conclusion in reasoning (both theoretical and practical) that beliefs play" [Brandom (2000a), p. 109]. The latter as "naturalised epistemology" puts beliefs and knowledge at the same level and, therefore, it explains beliefs and truth in naturalistic or physicalistic terms. In this context the problem is the applicability of the notion of "objective probability": "An objective probability can be specified only to a reference class [...]. But proper choice of reference is not itself objectively determined by facts specifiable in a naturalistic vocabulary" [Brandom (2000a), pp. 112-3].

We can then consider the idea of reliability as correctness of a precise type of inference; this fact represents the "Implicit Insight" of the epistemological reliabilism. In this sense, we could explain the relationship between belief and knowledge given that to have knowledge means to do three things: attributing a commitment (it serves both as premise and conclusion of inferences relating it to other commitments), attributing entitlement to that commitment, and the undertaking of that commitment by oneself. This is the complex game of the social practice of asking for and giving reasons. Reliabilism is a form of externalism, because reasons that support beliefs are external to reasons possessed by the knower. Brandom speaks about an "assessor of knowledge" rather than about a "subject of knowledge". The most important consequence of this thesis is: "Reliabilism points to the fundamental *social* or *interpersonal* articulation of the practices of reason giving and reason assessing within which the question of who has knowledge arises" [Brandom (2000a), p. 120].

In Habermas' opinion, the conception of Brandom seems to assume a form of conceptual realism, that entails consequences for the role of the perceptual experience in the acquisition of knowledge. Concepts are not epistemological intermediaries standing between subjects and world, because the material of thought is itself conceptual until it is governed by the inferential rules of expressions. The perceptual experience seems here to assume a mediating role, in virtue of which it is not ever possible to consider perception as a fruitful relation with a world, that corrects our mistakes².

In order to avoid this result, Habermas distinguishes between communicative action in ordinary praxis and reflexive communicative action in rational discourse. This move allows him to consider the experience of the objective world as that archimedean point that makes our beliefs fallible, as it

possesses a “revisionäre Kraft”. Let’s consider now the interpretation of the truth predicate in the *Diskurstheorie* [Habermas (1996)]. I will refer to the essay of 1996 *Rorty’s pragmatische Wende*. We can take into account the fundamental theoretic points in order to understand the passage from an epistemic conception to a pragmatic one. In the pragmatic framework, Habermas specifies the transcendence that the truth claim possesses in every-day life and in rational discourse (*Diskurs*). As a general, preliminary remark, we must focus on the status of the objective world, that depends on the interpreting use of ordinary language. The description is not the result of a convergence of thoughts or representations of various people. Rather it refers to a cultural and linguistic life-world (*Lebenswelt*), in which the members of a communication’s community already stay before they start to understand each other about the world. This fact means that in the framework provided by the linguistic turn the existence of the world is never called into question. Indeed, from Wittgenstein to Peirce the argument of performative autocontradiction gets rid of the Cartesian doubt.

Despite this starting point we must regard our knowledge as fallible; if it is called into question, it requires a foundation. According to Habermas, this means that the standard of objectivity of knowledge refers rather to public justification than to private certainty. The term truth becomes a concept of three-polar validity. If the validity (*Gültigkeit*) of fallible assertions is the validity (*Geltung*) for a public, if truths are accessible in the form of a rational acceptability, then the question as to whether and how the truth of an assertion can be isolated from the context of its justification arises. However, Habermas’ theory of truth is not based on a notion of coherence in the sense of Rorty [Rorty (1986)]. Habermas doesn’t think that the truth predicate is redundant. He proposes an original variant of the “cautionary use” of the truth predicate that shows how we connect an unconditioned claim to the truth of an assertion beyond all available evidences. Despite this fact, evidence, which we confirm in the justification’s context, must be sufficient in order to find (*ber-echtigen*) our truth claim.

The problem is to explain the fact that a successful justification of *p* according to our standards shows the truth of *p*, despite the fact that truth is not a success standard and doesn’t depend on the “justifiability” of an assertion. The instance that warrants incontrovertibly the truth claim is the structure of the lifeworld, which is grounded on intersubjectively shared beliefs. In ordinary practice we can’t use the language without acting. Communication takes place through speech acts that are embodied in interactions and connected with instrumental actions. As interactive and intervening subjects, we are already in touch with those things about which we make assertions.

We can now clarify the relation between truth and justification through the distinction between truth and rational acceptability. Here Habermas’ turn from an epistemic to a pragmatic version of the consensual truth theory

emerges. The explanation of this turn is placed in a different interpretation of discourse's ideal conditions. According to *Diskurstheorie*, a truth claim valid for p indicates the fact that truth conditions for p are fulfilled. Only the practice of discourse can decide whether this is the case or not, because we don't possess a direct access to the uninterpreted truth conditions³. But the circumstance in which truth conditions are fulfilled doesn't become itself the epistemic circumstance from which we can decide if these conditions, which we must interpret through appropriate reasons, are fulfilled.

In the last step, we can present the concept of discursive fulfilment of the truth claim, that explains the pragmatic interpretation of the truth predicate. In ordinary practice, socialized individuals are led by action's certainties. These remain certainties as long as accepted knowledge remains unproblematic. To this situation corresponds the grammatical fact that when we assert p in performative behaviour, we must believe that p is unconditionally true, even if in reflexive behaviour we can't exclude that in another moment, or in another place, reasons and evidences that might weaken p could present themselves. Despite this fact, the pragmatic concept of truth clarifies the fulfilment of the truth claim in rational conditions of discourse. In this way, Habermas tries to explain what could convince us to accept rationally an assertion. The argumentative practice leads through a peculiar "unforced constraint of the best argument" to a specific *change of perspective*. When participants in the course of argumentation reach the conviction that they have exhausted the potential of all possible criticisms against p , that they possess adequate information and that they have taken into account all relevant reasons, the motives for the prosecution of the argumentation are exhausted. From the perspective of the agent, who has previously assumed a reflexive behaviour in order to reconstruct a partially broken agreement, the resolution (*Entproblematisierung*) of the controversial truth claim indicates the possibility to return to the behaviour of the participant, who has a naive relation with the world. In this sense, the justified truth claim comes back to the life-world, the standpoint from which actors refer to something in one's objective world. "Here it's a question of formal presupposition that neither prejudices any determinate contents — nor suggests the end of the 'correct image of the «nature of things»', that Rorty always connects to a realistic intuition. Because agents must get to the bottom 'of' the world, they can't help but being realist in their life-world. And they also must be so, because their linguistic games and practices prove in their execution, until these work without surprises" [Habermas (1996), p. 735].

In Habermas' opinion, facts refer to a world as a whole of objects, about which we can determine or assert facts. So we can identify the relation between truth and objectivity: the concept of the objective world refers to what individuals themselves, who are able to speak and act despite their interventions and creations, don't make, so that they can resort to objects,

which can be identified as the same objects in different circumstances. In discourse, where only reasons count, objectivity (which in ordinary praxis refers to the resistance of a world which is not at our disposition) concerns world's identity and presents two aspects: discursive fulfilment of unconditioned truth claims and consideration of facts. It's important to stress here, that where the identity of the world comes into play, participants to argumentation refer to the objective world only in an indirect way.

In order to clarify Brandom's view, I underline the ways in which he avoids two consequences (as Brandom calls them) of the conceptual realism: "epistemological passivity" and "semantic passivity". Regarding the first, taking into account that facts are true claims, we must also consider that: "The conceptual articulation of facts is such that the most basic ones must have the structure of attributing properties and relations to objects. That is the part of what it means to say that facts are about objects — not of course, in the same sense in which linguistic *expressions* are about objects, but in the way the claims they *express* are about objects" [Brandom (2000b), p. 358].

Regarding the second, we must consider the game of *de dicto* and *de re* attitudes: the paradigm of the reconstruction of the beliefs' attribution is the conditional. We can consider for example the conditional: "that is pink and this is darker than that then this is red". What is incompatible with such a conditional (if p then q) is what is simultaneously compatible with its antecedent, p , and incompatible with its consequent, q . This paradigm refers to the ascription in scorekeeping terms and this is why conceptual contents are perspective. With the use of *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions it results ascriptions of the form " S believes that $F(t)$ " and those of the form " S believes of ' t ' that $F(it)$ ", that make explicit specific aspects of the difference of social perspectives. *De re* specifications identify "what" an ascribed belief is about or in Brandom's terms: "what individual, according to the ascriber, it is, whose properties must be investigated in order to determine whether the ascribed belief is true" [Brandom (1994a), p. 584].

In order for us to understand how *de re* and *de dicto* attitudes work, I consider a Brandom's example. He considers the sly prosecutor, who characterises his opponent's claim by saying: "The defence attorney believes a pathological liar is a trustworthy witness". We can imagine that the defence attorney hotly contests this characterisation: "Not so; what I believe is that the man who testified is a trustworthy witness". To which the prosecutor might reply: "Exactly, and I have presented evidence that ought to convince anyone that the man who just testified is a pathological liar". If the prosecutor were being fastidious in characterising the other's claim, he would make it clear who is responsible for what: The defence attorney claims that a certain man is a trustworthy witness, and the prosecutor claims that that man is a pathological liar. The disagreement is about whether this guy is a liar, not about whether liars make trustworthy witness. Using the regimentation sug-

gested above, the way to make this explicit is with a *de re* specification of the content of the belief ascribed. What the prosecutor ought to say is: “The defence attorney claims of a pathological liar that he is a trustworthy witness”. This way of putting things makes it explicit the division of responsibility of the commitment involved in the ascription. That someone is a trustworthy witness is part of the commitment that is attributed by the ascriber; that the individual is in fact a pathological liar is part of the commitment that is undertaken by the ascriber “*S* believes that *F*”.

III. FACTS AND NORMS

The last point I want to consider is a consequence of the conceptual realism Habermas ascribes to Brandom: the levelling of the normative and the factual realm. This levelling causes some problems for the justification in the moral field. According to Habermas, Brandom considers all the communicative practices as assertions, also those that don't rely on facts but on aesthetic, ethical, moral or juridical discourses. “Fact-stating talk is explained in normative terms, and normative facts emerge as one kind of fact among others. The common deontologic scorekeeping vocabulary in which both are specified and explained ensures that the distinction between normative and non-normative facts neither evanesces nor threatens to assume the proportions of an ultimately unintelligible dualism” [Brandom (1994a), p. 625].

J. F. Rosenberg [Rosenberg (1997). p. 179-87] noticed that Brandom stresses a distinction between two different supervenience theses: “[...] the claim that settling all the facts specifiable in *nonnormative* vocabulary settles all the facts specifiable in *normative* vocabulary, on the one hand, and the claim that settling all the facts concerning normative *attitudes* settles all the facts concerning normative *statuses*, on the other” [Brandom (1994a). p 47]. Rosenberg concludes that there is a tension in Brandom's theory because “[...] he sometimes *seems* to acknowledge *external constraints* on such practices, the way the world is” [Brandom (1994a), p. 186].

Indeed, Brandom focuses on the distinction between *non-normative* facts and normative facts: “One important way of distinguishing regions of fact is by the vocabulary needed to state them. This is how we pick out physical facts, mathematical facts, intentional facts, the problematic category of semantic facts, and so on. Normative facts are those whose statement requires normative vocabulary. That is, vocabulary that plays a distinctive expressive role: codifying commitment to patterns of practical reasoning. Normative facts, true normative claims, are a distinct kind of fact” [Brandom (2000b), p. 365].

A farther thesis of Brandom that clarifies the applicability of the scorekeeping theory to the practical reasoning is the following: giving and asking

for reasons is possible only in the context of making and defending claims. It emerges here the importance of the role of the propositional content in the fulfilment of a commitment to action. It is indeed possible to explain the role of beliefs without the necessity of referring to practical reasoning, but it is impossible to do the contrary. To form an intention (undertaking a commitment) always requires to know what must be true in order to reach the success of that intention. Brandom's concept of action is based on two fundamental ideas. First, the analysis must move from normative states and attitudes corresponding to beliefs and intentions. Brandom modifies the Davidsonian approach, that eliminates intentions in favour of primary reasons as beliefs and desires [Davidson (1984)]. This move allows the interpretation of desires, expressed in a normative vocabulary, as beliefs and intentions, because practical commitments are inferentially articulated like the doxastic ones.

The second idea regards the consideration of *non*-inferential relations (based on perception in theoretical reasoning and on intentional action in the practical one) that are explained according to the scorekeeping theory: "1) Observation (a discursive entry transition) depends on reliable disposition to respond differentially to states of affairs of various kinds by acknowledging certain sorts of commitments, that is, by adopting deontic attitudes and so changing the score. 2) Action (a discursive exit transaction) depends on reliable disposition to respond differentially to the acknowledging of certain sorts of commitments, the adoption of deontic attitudes and consequent change of score, by bringing about various kinds of states of affairs" [Brandom (2000a), p. 83].

When the intention follows the model of belief practical reasons are considered as reasons; however, when the action follows the model of perception practical reasons become causes. This last possibility founds the distinction between acting "with" a reason and acting "for" a reason. We can't therefore maintain "someone who acts with a certain intention act for a reason", because it is always possible to undertake doxastic and practical commitments without being entitled by reasons. According to Brandom: "What makes a performance an action is that it is, or it is produced by the exercise of a reliable differential disposition to respond to, the acknowledgement of a practical commitment" [Brandom (2000a), p. 84].

Brandom argues that the problem of Davidson, who moves from a Humean strategy, is that he doesn't consider the acknowledgement of different practical commitment. As a result, the concepts of desire, good and ought remain underdetermined. In Brandom's opinion our understanding of practical reasoning is based on three ideas: the levelling of practical and doxastic commitments, the conception of practical reasoning as relating beliefs as premises to intentions as conclusions and the conception of actions as "discursive exit transitions" analogous to perceptions as "discursive entry transitions". The model of action based on perception underlines the fact that acknowledgements of commitments can cause and be caused. In this sense the Kantian

rational will is not a capacity to derive action from a conception of law, but from the acknowledgement of a commitment. We can now distinguish between two kinds of intentions: “prior intentions” that entail practical commitments to perform actions according to general descriptions, and “intentions in action” as acknowledgement of practical commitments, that consist of intentional actions under demonstrative specifications.

Habermas wants to demonstrate that assertional speech acts don’t explain the regulative use of language. In this context, a fundamental question emerges: is the “responsibility” that agent bears for his action *exhausted* by the epistemic justification responsibility? As we have seen, Brandom stresses a difference between justified practical project and justified epistemic claims: this difference dissolves in the case of moral reasons, that need universal validity. But beliefs in this case don’t play a relevant role, as, by Habermas, the reasons that justify moral action have a different epistemic quality to factual reasons. We can notice the justification that bank employees ought to wear neckties relies rather on “strong evaluations” than on factual arguments. In the case of moral reasons it seems reasonable to appeal to a conception of justice that allows the universalisability of corresponding interests.

Let me see how Brandom explains Habermas worry in considering normative facts as ultimately unfounded. He maintains that we can understand the category of facts in the context of a story that contains them together with an account of discursive practices. This result doesn’t imply that there weren’t facts before discursive practices. In order for us to avoid misunderstandings, we must clarify that this “facts” are indeed “*nonnormative facts*”. Brandom is therefore forced to introduce a wider notion of “concept”: “Concept is not strictly a normative concept in the sense given to that term in *Making it explicit*; for its use does not *codify* commitment to a pattern of practical reasoning. It is a normatively *significant* concept, since its use has immediate normative *consequences*: for instance, if *c* is a concept, then there is a difference between applying it correctly and incorrectly. But *nonnormative facts* can have normative consequences” [Brandom (2000b), p. 368].

Though Brandom specifies the acknowledgement of different kinds of practical commitments (prudential, institutional and moral), Habermas thinks that it is necessary to reconstruct an epistemic point of view in moral field, that has as his proper scope the agreement of the participants. Even if Habermas and Brandom share a cognitivist position. Habermas moves from the ontological difference between facts and norms. Assertions and normative sentences like imperatives are binded to validity’s claims that are fulfilled in rational discourses. The objective world and the social world are however ontologically different. Social reality is immediately related to normative validity’s claims, thus a claim of justness is immanent to the norm, whether truth claims are not immanent to entities but to the speech acts, through which we refer to them in order to reproduce state of affairs. Norms depend

on the interaction between speakers; facts exist independently from their being or not asserted in true sentences [Habermas (1983), chapter 3].

A consequence of these observations is that claims of justness lack the reference to an objective world, in this sense the fulfilment of a claim of justness is related to the acceptability under ideal conditions: “We contribute to the fulfilment of validity’s conditions of moral judgements and norms with the construction of a world of orderly interpersonal relations. The absence of ontological connotations doesn’t prejudice however the claim of universal and unconditioned validity. This one is valued as regards a background of social behaviours and relation of mutual acknowledgement, that can be accepted as just from all the participants” [Habermas (1998), p. 188]. In order to construct a world of just relations between agents several conditions must be fulfilled: complete inclusion of participants, just division of duties and rights of argumentation, communicative situation without constraints and behaviour oriented to the agreement from the side of the participant.

IV. CONCLUSION

Finally, I’ll summarise the main points I have discussed and then I’ll draw some conclusions. First, I analysed the relationship between semantics and pragmatics: from this relationship it emerges the shared intention of Habermas and Brandom to make explicit the implicit norms that enable the comprehension between speakers. In Brandom’s opinion, norms are binded to the rules of material inference in semantics and to representation in pragmatics. In Habermas’ opinion, norms are conditions of success of a speech act, that has a propositional content (common for all the validity’s claims) and a force (different as regards the expressed validity’s claim). The problem here seems to be Brandom’s primacy of the performative attitude, that indicates the acceptance or the rejection of reasons without postulating a criterion of truth, through which it could be possible to judge the correctness of a linguistic game.

The first point entails the second one: the relationship between objectivity and truth. Habermas maintains that the interaction among interpreter and speaker is not sufficient in order to explain the objective proprieties of the propositional content. According to him, objectivity is given by a relation with an objective world, that *resists* against our explanations and therefore clarifies the fact of fallibilism. I maintain nevertheless that Brandom explains very clearly how the contents of our thought go beyond the attitudes of endorsement or entitlement we have towards those contents. The objectivity of our thought is indeed a particular aspect of the normative structure of rationality. What is requested here is that the commitments and entitlements the practitioners “associate with ordinary empirical claims such as ‘the swatch is red’ generate incompatibilities for these claims that differ suitably from those

associated with any claims about who is committed to, entitled to, or in a position to assert something. The recognition of propositional contents that are objective in this sense is open to any community whose inferentially articulated practices acknowledge the different normative statuses of commitment and entitlement” [Brandom (2000a), p. 203].

These observations allow the possibility to adopt a third-person perspective towards one’s attitudes as one would do towards the attitudes of others: in *de re* specifications we find the structure of objective propositional contents [Brandom (1997)].

The last point concerned the difference between facts and norms that entails important consequences in the moral field. As we have seen, Habermas maintains that beliefs don’t play a relevant role in practical discourses. This thesis supports his critic to Brandom’s assimilation of norms to facts. This assimilation entails the consequence that true normative sentences represent facts as descriptive sentences [Habermas (1999), p. 222]. In the case of Habermas, a moral theory must reconstruct a neutral perspective of justice (as John Rawls does), that allows a genuine consent among speakers who move from a background of different evaluations.

I think the comparison on this moral point can be situated in the field of ethics, as we consider the possibility of a right linguistic action and not moral reasons. The problem seems to be that Brandom doesn’t consider that epistemic situation in which we try to reach “in common” a genuine consent. This epistemic situation is important in ethics because it is a fact that we don’t start from different beliefs but from different evaluations. Moral reasons are therefore a result of the mutual perspective that we undertake in common as a neutral point of view, detached from our own desires and preferences. How can we avoid the fact that we live and act in different forms of life?

I try to see if the scorekeeping theory can answer this question. Suppose that *A* intends to save people victims of an internal war, as he acknowledges that it is just to avoid murders. This result is given from the belief that normally in wars people are killed. But for *A* to save people *A* must himself venture on a war against the army of a tyrant. Then *A* can’t but acknowledge the practical commitment only acknowledging a contradictory doxastic commitment. How can we solve this dilemma? I think that with the perspectives of speaker and scorekeeper in *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions, it can emerge the solution in the light of the collateral beliefs of the participants: for example that *A* possesses arms that are highly radioactive, or that there are other ways to stop a war.

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Notes

¹ For an examination of the concept of “background” in Habermas see Preyer, G., (1996), Matthiessen, U., (1983) and Giovagnoli, R., (2000).

² McDowell noticed that the strong inferentialism of Brandom makes the empirical content totally unintelligible, as it lacks the relationship between perception and fact from the perspective of the reporter: “So the fact that *P* is not present in that perspective as the rational constraint it must be on deciding whether to say that *P*. And that is indistinguishable for saying it is not present in that perspective as the fact it is. Such a perspective is not what it was supposed to be, the perspective of someone who can observe that *P*. The perceivable facts are not in its view, and they cannot be brought into its view by putting it in a context of deontic scorekeeping” [McDowell (1997), p. 161].

³ See [Brandom (1994b), pp. 175-178]. In this paper Brandom criticizes the criterium of truth in the success semantics of J. S. White. He postulates the success of an action based on the “no impediments clause”. But this condition presupposes the agent’s knowledge of true and false beliefs. First, it remains unexplained the way in which we can decide whether a belief is true or false; second, it is impossible to associate truth conditions to helmets because the world “is a precarious place, and our grip is incomplete”.

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