

## BRANDOM'S CHALLENGES

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One helpful way of thinking about the overall project undertaken in *Making It Explicit* (MIE), one suggested by Brandom himself, is to consider it in the context of a broadly interpretationist approach to rationality.<sup>1</sup> To be rational for the interpretationist is to be interpretable by us rational beings. To turn this interpretationist criterion of rationality into an account of rationality, contends Brandom, one needs to say something about the structure of our own discursive practice in virtue of which it deserves to count as rational. The central task undertaken in MIE attempts to provide just such an account. Using a gameplaying model, it outlines the structure of a set of performances within a social practice that, it is claimed, is both necessary and sufficient for the practitioners to be playing the 'game of giving and asking for reasons'. Brandom's "bold conjecture"<sup>2</sup> is that these two notions of rationality coincide, so that any set of performances within a social practice exhibiting this structure will be interpretable by us.

On this way of thinking, MIE attempts to extend the interpretationist programme by *filling in* a crucial lacuna in extant versions. In this paper, we consider whether MIE can be thought as extending interpretationism by *amending* a feature central to extant versions. In the interpretationist programme, the interpreter is typically conceived as a theoretician; in Brandom's model, the theoretician is replaced with the figure of deontic scorekeeper. One difference between these, noted by Brandom, is that the latter need not engage in explicit theoretical hypothesis formation in the course of interpretation.<sup>3</sup> We will focus on another seeming difference not explicitly acknowledged: while the relationship between theorist-cum-interpreter and interpretee is typically conceived as a third-personal relation, the relationship between scorekeeper-cum-interpreter and interpretee seems to be a second-personal relation. (The somewhat idiosyncratic manner in which these terms are used here is discussed later on.)

This difference is just a 'seeming' one at this stage, as there is a tension in Brandom's writings regarding this suggestion that will concern us here. On the one hand, Brandom adopts the phrase 'I-Thou' to characterize the relationship between interpreter and interpretee as the basic social structure in MIE. The positive characterization of I-Thou relations found there is primarily negative: its function is to mark the rejection of accounts of the sociality of linguistic practice based

on I-We relations, that construe the notion of the social in terms of a broader linguistic community of which the speaker is a part. I-Thou accounts, in contrast, contend that

linguistic practice and therefore intentionality [is] essentially social ... in the sense that it can be made intelligible only in the context of mutual interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

The choice of the phrase 'I-Thou' to capture this relation, combined with a description of the model of mutual interpretation replete with interpersonal talk of deferral, challenging, person-based authority and the like, all suggest that the relationship of mutual interpretation between interpreter and interpretee is second-personal.

On the other hand, almost nothing is made of this second-personal relation in the fine detail of the gameplaying model described in *MIE*, leaving the suspicion that the relation between interpreter and interpretee is not second-personal, despite the I-Thou terminology utilized. Brandom appears to affirm this suspicion in his post-*MIE* writings, most notably in the course of a lengthy exchange with Jürgen Habermas. Habermas criticizes what he terms 'the objectivist account of communication' found in *MIE* that

identifies the interpreter with a public that assesses the utterance of a speaker – and not with an addressee who is expected to give *the speaker an answer*. Every round of new discourse opens with an ascription that the interpreter undertakes from the observer's perspective of a *third* person.<sup>5</sup>

Brandom accepts this as "on the whole a fair characterization",<sup>6</sup> while rejecting the suggestion that an objectivist account of communication has the problematic implications that Habermas claims. Since the conception of the second-personal relation employed here is, subject to an important clarification, the relation between a speaker and an addressee who is expected to give the speaker an answer, Brandom's acceptance of Habermas's characterization all but confirms the suspicion that the relation of mutual interpretation between interpreter and interpretee in *MIE* is not second-personal.

There are (at least) two different routes that one could take to resolve this tension between the language employed in *MIE* and the fine detail of the account. The first regards the employment of I-Thou vocabulary as unfortunate, and rejects the suggestion that a second-personal relationship between interpreter and interpretee plays any essential role in *MIE*. The second treats the omission of explicit discussion in *MIE* of a second-personal relationship between interpreter and interpretee as unfortunate, and seeks to supplement the extant model with an account of the second-personal that, it claims, is implicit in Brandom's account all along. Although it may be possible to read *MIE* in both ways, my suggestion here is that there are good reasons for favouring the latter route as the one that Brandom ought to take.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion proceeds by following up a side remark made by Brandom in the course of his response to Habermas. Noting that there are some elements of his account of communication that do not fit the objectivist tag, he suggests that

we might think of the fundamental notion of a challenge, which supports the characterization of discursive practice as ‘a game of giving and asking for reasons’.<sup>8</sup>

The suggestion is useful, for thinking about the notion of a challenge as it features in *MIE* provides a succinct expression of just the tension we are interested in exploring. First, the notion of a challenge plays a central role in Brandom’s model. Second, the speech act of challenging is essentially second-personal. Third, the account of challenging offered in *MIE* does not capture this second-personal dimension of challenging. These three claims are developed and defended in turn, before considering their implications for understanding Brandom’s attempt to extend the interpretationist programme. More specifically, I argue that Brandom needs to, and can, supplement the account of challenging found in *MIE* to include a second-personal relation (sections I–III), that one could extend the same strategy of supplementation to include the speech act of asserting (section IV), and that reflections on the epistemology of testimony provide reasons for so doing (Section V).

## I The importance of challenges in a Brandomian linguistic practice

Not every social interaction between sentient beings that are able to differentially respond to their environment is a Brandomian social practice. Such a social practice involves the exchange of socially significant performances governed by norms which are recognized by practitioners. To recognize the norms is not to obey them but to have the practical ability to adopt a normative attitude (such as positive or negative sanctioning performances) towards such norm-governed performances.<sup>9</sup> Participants within the practice are said to exhibit various normative statuses, with each socially significant move in the practice altering the normative statuses exhibited by at least some practitioners. Practitioners not only *undertake* normative statuses themselves through socially significant performances, they also *attribute* those normative statuses to others. That is, participants are both *gameplayers* capable of undertaking normative statuses, and *scorekeepers* capable of tracking appropriate changes in statuses attributed and undertaken following socially significant performances. This distinction between scorekeeper and gameplayer, between the practical attitudes of attributing and undertaking normative statuses, lies at the core of the I–Thou construal of sociality that is the focus of our discussion.<sup>10</sup>

Not every social practice is a Brandomian linguistic practice. Such a linguistic practice is any social practice whose structure includes the speech act of asserting.<sup>11</sup> A central task undertaken in *MIE* is to outline the minimal structure a set of performances within a social practice must have for that practice to include the speech act of asserting.

Suppose that we have a social practice which includes two perspectives (gameplayer and scorekeeper), two varieties of deontic status (commitments and entitlements) and two varieties of deontic attitude (attributing and undertaking). What would it be for this social practice to include the speech act of asserting? More specifically, what would a scorekeeper have to do to treat a particular performance as a successful instance of asserting? A quick way into Brandom's response is to consider his account of what one is doing in treating someone as a knower with regards a particular claim  $p$ .<sup>12</sup> The account closely follows the tripartite structure of the traditional JTB analysis of knowledge, albeit transposed into a socio-pragmatic key. According to the account, in treating someone as knowing that  $p$ , the scorekeeper attributes to the gameplayer a commitment to  $p$  (corresponding to the belief condition in the classical account), attributes an entitlement to that commitment (corresponding to the justification condition), and undertakes the same commitment herself (corresponding to the truth condition). Since Brandom treats asserting as a kind of "implicit knowledge claim",<sup>13</sup> the connection with asserting is direct: in specifying what it is for a scorekeeper to treat someone as a knower, we specify the ideal outcome of a successful instance of a speech act of assertion.

Part of what is involved in asserting is a kind of authorizing, authorizing the scorekeeper to attribute that commitment (and others that are inferential consequences) to the gameplayer, and authorizing the scorekeeper to undertake those (and others that are inferential consequences) herself. As a result of the assertion, the scorekeeper (and other gameplayers) inherits an entitlement to reassert the original claim on the gameplayer's say-so: "The authority of an assertion includes an offer to pick up the justificatory check for the reassertions of others."<sup>14</sup>

The authority depends on the gameplayer having the entitlement to that commitment himself, so the asserter implicitly implies the entitlement too. Part of what is involved in asserting involves undertaking a kind of conditional-task responsibility: to demonstrate entitlement to the commitment when appropriately *challenged* to do so. Demonstrating entitlement to a commitment when so challenged can be done in one of two ways: the first is by asserting another claim from which the challenged commitment can be appropriately inferred (Brandom calls this 'content-based authority' for asserting the original claim), while the second is deferring to another who asserted the claim (Brandom calls this 'person-based authority' for asserting the original claim).<sup>15</sup> Entitlement has a 'default and challenge structure', so that attributing entitlement to a commitment is the position taken by the scorekeeper ('default') unless there is some reason for thinking otherwise ('challenge').

It is, therefore, not possible for there to be a Brandomian linguistic practice that does not include the speech act of challenging. Remove the possibility of challenging, and the dimension of responsibility associated with the speech act of asserting falls away, as one cannot undertake a conditional-task responsibility if the condition for undertaking the task can never, in principle, arise. In such a case, so too does talk of assertings authorizing further assertings, for the authority associated with asserting depends entirely on the associated justificatory responsibility ("these are coordinate and commensurate").<sup>16</sup> Since a Brandomian linguistic practice is one that includes

the authority and responsibility structure associated with the act of asserting, a structure that requires the possibility of challenging the asserted claim, there can be no linguistic practice that does not incorporate the act of challenging.

Early on in *MIE*, Brandom describes challenging as “an auxiliary sort of speech act”, lumping it together with other auxiliary acts such as querying (the act of asking someone whether they are committed to a claim).<sup>17</sup> The implication seems to be that just as it is possible for there to be an up-and-running linguistic practice that does not include the speech act of querying, there can be a linguistic practice that does not include the speech act of challenging. The argument here has shown that the speech act of challenging is not an auxiliary act in this sense.<sup>18</sup>

## II Challenges as second-personal

Although there are many different acts referred to as challenges in everyday parlance, our focus is on challenging as an act that plays the functional role in a Brandomian linguistic practice just indicated. Three features essential to Brandom’s challenges emerge from that discussion. The first (C1) is that the successful act of challenging must provide the condition requiring the challenged asserter to undertake the task of demonstrating entitlement to the asserted claim. The second (C2) is that the effect of a successful challenge, according to a scorekeeper, is to remove the default entitlement associated with a claim, suspending entitlement to the claim pending successful defence. The third (C3) is that the challenge itself must be an act that can be performed appropriately or inappropriately; it must be susceptible to being challenged itself, so that successfully challenging the challenge is one way of restoring the default entitlement to a claim.

The central claim defended in this section is that any account of the speech act of challenging will be incomplete unless it incorporates a second-personal relation between challenger and challengee.

By an account of a speech act, I do not mean an account of the intentions or other attitudes associated with challenger and challengee under idealized circumstances, nor of the conventional-institutional setting in which the speech act occurs. Rather, as used here, an account of a speech act specifies the idealized function of that speech act as it would feature in a Brandomian linguistic practice. This is done by describing, in structural terms (i.e. in terms of its authority and responsibility structure broadly construed), the ideal outcome of a successful instance of the act in the context of its performance in an up-and-running instance of such a practice.

A complete account captures everything pertaining to the speech act fulfilling that function within the practice, i.e. all those features essential to making it the speech act that it is. While a complete account should incorporate all features that are both necessary and sufficient for the inclusion of the speech act in a linguistic practice, it may well omit many features that we typically associate with the speech act in our actual, everyday linguistic interactions. Even if, for example, a particular kind of speech act is always made by certain verbalizations that have a particular kind of syntactic and/or semantic structure, or involve certain kinds of grammatical

expressions or mood, these aspects need not feature in a complete account if it is possible in principle for there to be a Brandomian practice incorporating this act shorn of these features.

A speech act is second-personal in the sense used here when it is addressed to another, where the reciprocal act of acknowledgement of the address is an essential part of the act that it is.<sup>19</sup> A successful second-personal act does not merely aim to have some effect on the normative status of another, nor just for the other to respond to that change in status. It requires the addressee to recognize the address in her subsequent performances, where the recognition in practice of the address itself is addressed towards the addresser in return. This act of recognition need not take the form of an explicit judgement by the addressee, to the effect that 'I have been addressed by you in this manner and hereby respond appropriately'. It can, for example, take the form of the addressee undertaking performances appropriate to her new normative status on the authority of the original addresser, to whom she will defer if challenged about its appropriateness. In this manner, a second-personal address binds together me and you in a particular normative nexus that constitutes our second-personal relation in this instance.<sup>20</sup>

By way of clarification, let us contrast this way of conceiving the second-personal with that suggested by Habermas in his critique of Brandom. Habermas distinguishes the relation that obtains between speaker and listener (his third-personal relation) from the relation that obtains between speaker and hearer (his second-personal relation), and illustrates this distinction with reference to an example in *MIE* that involves a courtroom exchange between prosecutor and defence attorney.<sup>21</sup> Habermas comments:

Certainly, in the courtroom the judges hearing the case and the jurors listening to it are the ones who in a sense are keeping account of the progress of the discussion and forming a judgement as to who is scoring what points in order to be able to say in the end, for example, how the statement of the controversial witness is to be assessed. During the dispute, however, a reaction is required not from the listeners but from the parties directly involved who address utterances to one another and who expect each other to take positions.<sup>22</sup>

Three distinct aspects combine to form Habermas's conception of the second-personal relation between speaker and hearer. First, he makes this distinction between listening (of judge and jury) and hearing (of prosecutor and defence attorneys) in terms of the expectations of the participants in the communicative interchange. Second, as a result of these expectations, the speech act targets a specific audience, the hearer(s), in a way that is different from anyone else overhearing ('listening to') the performance. Third, the expectation draws the hearers into a critical, interactive dialogue with the speaker, which provides for the joint social integration between communicants that, according to Habermas, is the main aim of communicative interaction.

The notion of the second-personal used here is very different. It is rooted, not in the expectations of speaker and hearer, but in the structural role that the speech act plays in a linguistic practice. Further, even though it may be that the structural role played by the speech act targets a particular audience (in the sense of altering the normative status associated with the target audience in a way different from others), the fact that a certain audience is so targeted is not what makes the act second-personal. Suppose there was a speech act – we will call it, not quite at random, ‘A’ing – for which there was simply no distinction between hearer and overhearer in terms of the audience targeted by the act.<sup>23</sup> That is, as a matter of its structural role in a linguistic practice, a successful instance of ‘A’ing affects the normative status associated with anyone and everyone whenever and wherever they encountered it. It is most likely that anyone performing such an act (an ‘A’er) will not have any awareness of most of the people so affected, and will not enter into an interactive dialogue with them. Nevertheless, the relationship between ‘A’er and audience could be second-personal on our account, if as a matter of its structural role it addresses anyone who comes into contact with the act, calling on them to respond in practice in a suitable manner that includes the recognition of the address.

Some may find it peculiar to talk of an untargeted, though addressed, act as involved in an I–Thou relation between addresser and addressee, since it makes nothing of relations of intimacy or acquaintance or awareness or face-to-face interaction that are often taken as essential to this relation. Whether this is a peculiar usage or not, the normative nexus forged between addresser and addressee as the result of a successful instance of the act is significant. I address you by performing the act, calling on you, among other things, to recognize the address in your subsequent doings. Your recognition of the address in your subsequent doings is an intrinsic part of the act that it is, binding us together in this instance in a normatively significant I–Thou relation. As a result, the addressee, once bound, cannot *ignore* the address; she can only *reject* it. That is, if she has recognized the address, but fails to respond appropriately, she is not passively ignoring the address but actively refusing it. The hallmark of a second-personal speech act is that once it is recognized as the act that it is, it cannot be ignored.<sup>24</sup>

To claim that the speech act of challenging is second-personally addressed is, therefore, to claim that it is an addressed act: a challenge addresses the challengee in such a way that the reciprocal act of acknowledgement of the address is an essential part of the act that it is. Such mutual recognition is central to the act achieving one of its core functions in a Brandomian practice, namely, requiring an asserter to undertake the task of demonstrating entitlement to the claim (C1). In making an assertion, an asserter undertakes the responsibility of defending the claim if appropriately challenged, either by asserting another claim inferentially related to the challenged claim, or by deferring justificatory responsibility to another claimer, or by challenging the challenger. Failure to adequately shoulder this responsibility removes the authority to reassert associated with the assertion. There are two ways of failing to adequately shoulder this responsibility: one is to provide an insufficient defence of the claim and one is to remain silent in face of the challenge. (C1)

requires that no response has the same effect as a poor response. The reason that no response has the same effect as a poor response is because silence is treated as an active rejection of the challenge and not merely as passively ignoring it. We have seen that it is the hallmark of a second-personally addressed act to turn silence into a response by removing the possibility of not responding at all. If so, challenging must be second-personally addressed.

A good illustration of this point is to contrast the act of challenging with the act of requesting reasons.<sup>25</sup> The requester, unlike the challenger, implies no reason for doubting the assertion, but asks the asserter to provide reasons nonetheless. Suppose that it is possible to recognize a request as a request and yet merely ignore it. The point here is that challenging is not like that: ignoring a challenge is rejecting the address.<sup>26</sup>

In summary: to say that a speech act is second-personal is to say that as a matter of its structural role in a linguistic practice it is an addressed act, such that the recognition-in-practice of it as the act that it is binds addresser and addressee in a normative relation that precludes the possibility of ignoring the address. Any act in which interlocutors are bound in such a manner is a second-personal act. For an act to play the role of challenges in a Brandomian practice is for it to require the asserter to respond. In treating an act as a challenge, the challengee cannot ignore the address. The speech act of challenging is, thus, as a matter of its structural role in a linguistic practice, a second-personal act, and any account of the act that fails to incorporate this will be incomplete.

### III The incomplete account of challenging in *MIE*

We are not provided with an account of the speech act of challenging in *MIE*, complete or otherwise. We are, instead, provided with some suggestive remarks and the following scorekeeping example:

For A to treat C's challenge of B's assertion of p as successful is for A to respond to it by withholding attribution of entitlement to B for that claim, pending B's vindication of it ... This has the effect of making the assertion unavailable (according to A's score) to other interlocutors who might otherwise inherit entitlement to commitments to the same content testimonially from B.<sup>27</sup>

The example is not given from the perspective of challenger or challengee but a third party (A) keeping score on C's challenge to B. It provides a 'before and after' snapshot of a scorekeeper's deontic scorecards following a successful instance of an act of challenging, an act that occurs out of the camera's view.

Closer reflection on the example reveals not just that the act of C challenging B is out of view; it need not even take place. The example involves an interaction between C and A, following a prior interaction (assumed though not described) between B and A. There is no mention of, nor, it appears, need there be, any



interaction between B and C. In treating B's asserting that p as a successful one, A attributes both a commitment and a default entitlement to B so that A would treat anyone overhearing B's act as themselves entitled to reassert p on B's authority. In treating C's subsequent challenge as successful, A removes the default entitlement to p so that, as a result, A no longer treats anyone else as able to inherit entitlement to p on B's say-so, pending vindication. Neither B nor C need have any awareness of each other or their claims, nor need C's claim be targeted at B, for A to treat C's challenge of B's assertion of p as successful.

It is one thing for A to treat C's assertion as a challenge to B's assertion and another thing for C to challenge B. We have argued that a Brandomian practice must incorporate the latter, for it is this act that provides the condition requiring B to undertake his responsibility to defend the assertion. Further, we have argued that achieving this requires the act to be second-personally addressed, something lacking in the former. As a result, although the two may be identical from a scorekeeping perspective, a complete account of a Brandomian linguistic practice should incorporate both. Brandom's discussion of challenging, here and throughout *MIE*, only considers the former and is therefore incomplete.

Highlighting this omission is not to challenge Brandom, especially since we have shown in Brandomian terms just what needs to be done to supplement the account of challenging. The omission itself does, however, raise the suspicion that he would reject such a supplementation. Brandom is an ambitious theorist, notoriously so. Why, if the claims made here are correct, is he content to leave his account of linguistic practice incomplete in this manner?

This suspicion is based on the assumption that Brandom's explanatory ambitions in *MIE* include the aspiration to provide a complete account of all those speech acts essential to a social practice being a linguistic one. If this were the case, then the incompleteness with regards the act of challenging could be taken to imply rejection of the supplementation advocated here. There is, however, a more restricted reading of Brandom's explanatory ambitions in *MIE* that accounts for his toleration of this incompleteness, even if he would accept the supplementation with regards challenging proffered here. Brandom states in the preface to *MIE* that his ambition

is to begin with an account of social practices, identify the particular structure they must exhibit in order to qualify as specifically linguistic practices, and then consider what different sorts of semantic contents those practices can confer on states, performances, and expressions caught up in them in suitable ways.<sup>28</sup>

The first two stages comprise Brandom's normative pragmatics, which aspires to use an idealized artificial practice to model an up-and-running linguistic practice. The third stage comprises Brandom's inferentialist semantics, which aspires to use this model of linguistic practice to give an explanatory account of the semantic content associated with performances within the practice. One plausible way of

understanding the relationship between pragmatics and semantics is to treat the first two stages as limited by the third. On this understanding, Brandom does not seek to provide what we earlier termed a *complete* account of those speech acts whose presence is both necessary and/or sufficient for that practice to be a linguistic one. An incomplete account will suffice, provided that it provides enough of a model of linguistic practice so as to deliver an explanation of semantic content.

A central strategy deployed throughout *MIE* is to introduce or explain a particular concept by noting the difference that the introduction of the concept into a practice would make to a scorekeeper keeping score on the practice. The motivation provided for the adoption of the scorekeeper's perspective is typically glossed under the heading of a pragmatized 'phenomenalism'.<sup>29</sup> The discussion here suggests another reason for adopting this scorekeeping perspective when introducing a concept. Adopting the scorekeeping perspective will suffice if the pragmatic ambitions of the work are limited by the overarching goal of explaining an inferentialist semantics, since what is required for this explanatory task is easily captured by considering the 'before and after' snapshots of the scorekeeper's deontic scorecards. Brandom adopts such a scorekeeping perspective when introducing the concept of a challenge into a linguistic practice. Since the second-personal relation essential to the speech act of challenging playing its function in a Brandomian linguistic practice is not directly relevant to issues of an inferentialist semantics, its omission in *MIE* need not imply the rejection of this featuring in a complete account of the speech act of challenging.

#### IV Asserting as challenging

Apart from its specific implications for understanding the speech act of challenging, there is a more general lesson to be learnt from this extended reflection on Brandom's challenges. Our discussion motivates an approach to *MIE* that treats the pragmatic ambitions of the work as limited by overarching semantic concerns, thereby leaving room for supplementation of the pragmatic features of the model where necessary. The pragmatic supplementation advocated for the case of challenging has implications for the broader tension within *MIE* between the second-personal language used and the scorekeeping model described. Specifically, it suggests that we should take the I-Thou language seriously, treating the relation between deontic scorekeeper-cum-interpreter and interpretee as second-personal.

This suggestion will have greater plausibility if we can extend the same strategy of supplementation advocated in the case of challenging to other speech acts, especially the core Brandomian act of asserting. This is a bold proposal, especially as asserting is typically considered to be a paradigmatically impersonal speech act as it is an untargeted act. Our earlier discussion of the now not-so imaginary act of 'A'ing revealed that the issue of second-personal address is, however, distinct from the issue of targeting. To claim that asserting is untargeted is to claim that a successful act of asserting affects the normative status associated with anyone and everyone, whenever and wherever they encounter it. To claim that asserting is second-personally

addressed is to claim that it addresses anyone who comes into contact with the act, calling on them to respond in practice to the act in a suitable manner that precludes the possibility of passively ignoring it. To ask whether asserting is second-personally addressed is, therefore, not to dispute that it is untargeted.

Brandom tends to talk of asserting in terms suited to a third-personal relation between asserter and audience, telling us, for example, that it involves the placing of a claim in a “public arena ... available for others to use in making further assertions”<sup>30</sup> or that “assertions are fundamentally fodder for inference”.<sup>31</sup> The current question is whether the third-personal construal of asserting as the making available of the claim as evidence implied by these images requires a second-personal supplementation, parallel to that advocated for the act of challenging.

This question of a parallel between the accounts of asserting and challenging in *MIE* is brought to the fore by Brandom himself, when he suggests that the simplest way to introduce the speech act of challenging into a linguistic practice is “to require that the performances that have the significance of challenging entitlements to assertional commitments themselves be assertions”.<sup>32</sup> According to his inferentialist semantics, two claims are incompatible with each other if commitment to one precludes entitlement to the other. Two incompatible assertions made by two interlocutors have the same scorekeeping result, from the point of view of a scorekeeper, as a challenge from one interlocutor to the other.

Is Brandom suggesting that we should equate, for the purposes of delivering an account of linguistic practice, the speech act of challenging with the act of producing an incompatible assertion? Or is he merely saying that, for the purposes of keeping score, the effect on the scorekeeper’s deontic scorecards of an incompatible assertion by C and a challenge from C to B are the same?

Earlier we identified three features (C1–C3) essential to a speech act successfully playing the role of a challenge in Brandom’s system. It is clear that the act of another gameplayer making an assertion that a scorekeeper treats as incompatible with another assertion has two of these three essential features (C2, C3). First, as we have just seen, the effect of an incompatible asserting is to remove the default entitlement associated with the challenged claim pending vindication (C2). Second, an asserting is just the kind of thing that is itself susceptible to being challenged, so that one way of vindicating the challenged assertion is to cast aspersions on the entitlement to the challenging assertion (C3). The central question is whether a contradictory asserting has the third feature identified as essential to challenges, that it provides the condition requiring the original asserter to demonstrate entitlement to the claim (C1). Since we have, at the end of the preceding section, identified being second-personally addressed as a feature necessary for an act to achieve this, a key issue is whether an act of asserting is second-personally addressed.

The remainder of this paper aims to motivate returning a positive response to this question. I first sketch an attractive position in the literature concerning the epistemology of testimony, and argue that Brandom can endorse this position, provided that he treats asserting as second-personally addressed.

## V The epistemology of testimony

Despite much neglect in the past, epistemologists have finally begun to take seriously the fact that we know most of what we know because we accept the word of others. On one reading of this still burgeoning literature on the epistemology of learning from testimony, a basic distinction to be made is between evidentialist and non-evidentialist accounts.<sup>33</sup> For the evidentialist, an assertion transmits knowledge from speaker to audience by providing evidence for the proposition asserted. For the non-evidentialist, an assertion functions to get an audience to believe the proposition, while transferring justificatory responsibility for the audience's belief to the speaker. One attractive version of non-evidentialism has been dubbed 'the assurance view', according to which telling someone something provides the intended audience with an assurance that the belief is true.<sup>34</sup>

Brandom is touted by some as a proponent of the assurance view, although the suggestion is tentative and typically relegated to a footnote.<sup>35</sup> One reason for both elevation and relegation in this manner may stem from the fact that, while he rejects some of its underlying assumptions, his account respects the core insight of the assurance view.

### 5.1 *A problem for the assurance view*

Extant versions of the assurance view struggle to retain the basic insight that makes the view so appealing while delivering an account that is satisfactory from an epistemic perspective.

The basic insight is that there is a difference between believing what someone says, and believing a person who is saying something.<sup>36</sup> In both cases one ends up believing what is said, although in the latter the primary object of belief is the person speaking, and belief in the proposition asserted follows from this. In believing a speaker, and not just what she says, speaker and hearer stand in a particular interpersonal relationship, as a result of which the hearer cedes epistemic authority for his belief to the speaker. In coming to believe what someone says, in contrast, no such authority is ceded; the hearer comes to believe what the speaker believes based on reasons available to him, even if these differ from those available to the speaker. The basic insight that there is a difference between believing a person and believing what they say is appealing as, among other things, it conforms to features characteristic of our moral-psychological interactions with others in (better: through) conversation. For example, as Anscombe noted, we sometimes experience "injury and insult" when, despite having made a claim, others do not come to believe us.<sup>37</sup> On the assurance view, this is a case in which the asserter is slighted as the proffered assurance is not accepted.

The difficulty facing those wishing to develop the assurance approach is to turn this insight about interpersonal relations between people into something that has epistemic, as opposed to, say, moral, significance. Suppose that the correct framework for thinking about the interpersonal relation involved in believing someone invokes the relation of

trust between interlocutors. While trust is a feature central to everyday social intercourse, and discourse surrounding this relation is deeply suffused with moral overtones, it is hard to relinquish the suspicion that the trusting agent is an epistemically irresponsible agent. This is particularly difficult for the assurance theorist who wishes to highlight not only the relationship of trust between speaker and hearer, but also for this relationship to do epistemic work, by treating the assurance as providing a distinctive kind of reason for belief. As Jonathan Adler puts the difficulty:

That the moral bond of speaker and hearer would not provide any independent epistemic weight seems right, since the bond does not affect the likelihood of truth of what the speaker asserts. Still, the moral bond imposes a constraint or bind on the hearer which is a pressure toward acceptance, and acceptance is an epistemic judgment. The result is troubling.<sup>38</sup>

There are two assumptions shared by extant versions of the assurance view that contribute to their difficulty in retaining the basic insight in face of such troubling suspicions. The first is that proponents of the view operate within a broadly Gricean framework, in which the account of the speech act in question is made in terms of the intentions of the teller. The second is that such accounts make a sharp distinction between hearer and overhearer: although others overhearing the act can use the claim as evidence for the proposition claimed, only the audience to whom the person intends to offer her assurance can accept the assurance and thereby come to believe the person. These two features account for the change in terminology used in introducing the assurance view some paragraphs back, from a focus on the speech act of asserting to a speech act of telling. Unlike assertings, telling is what we have here termed a targeted act, and extant versions of the assurance view of testimony focus only on the act of telling and not the act of asserting.

These two assumptions, and the narrowed focus on tellings, invite a parallel between the act of telling and the act of promising, wherein telling is seen as a kind of promising that the belief is true. In telling, the teller gives the tellee her word that the claim is true; in recognizing the assurance and taking it up, the tellee believes the claim on the teller's say-so, even when the tellee has no other reason for believing that *p*. Promising this parallel may be in helping to capture the basic insight of the assurance approach, it also leads the assurance theorist into the kind of trouble that Adler raises. If *X* promises *Y* that she will buy lunch, then *X*'s act of promising gives *Y* a reason to act in ways that depend on *A* buying lunch. Promising creates a reason for *Y*'s subsequent actions precisely because the existence of the reason for acting depends on something under *X*'s control, her will. According to the parallel, if *X* tells *Y* that Arsenal's performances in recent games have been abysmal, then *X*'s act of telling gives *Y* a reason to act in ways consonant with that claim. But here the parallel seems to break down, for it is hard to see how telling could create reasons for so acting, since whether or not there is such a reason is something outside of *X*'s control.<sup>39</sup> Many opposing fans have tried to will such a fact about Arsenal into existence, but football-supporting bliss is, alas, not so easily achieved.

### 5.2 *Brandom as non-evidentialist*

There is little doubt that Brandom falls within the non-evidentialist camp regarding the epistemology of testimony. This is not to say that he denies the possibility of treating someone's asserting as evidence for a claim. Suppose, for example, that I treat a person as an expert with regard to a particular kind of claim, based on prior experience of reliable correlations between that person making claims of this sort and the veracity of the claims made. My justification for coming to believe what they say on a particular occasion could be made explicit in the form of a reliability inference from the premises that S asserted that p and that S is an expert on such matters to the conclusion that p. In this instance, I am *not* deferring responsibility for justification to the other person (who may have no idea of her reliability, nor even endorse the claim); I am treating her claim as evidence for the claim made.

What makes Brandom a non-evidentialist, rather, is that he explicitly rejects the contention that the only way to fulfil the epistemic responsibility as regards a commitment undertaken is through such intercontent-intrapersonal justificatory means. Contrasted with such a content-based authority is a person-based authority that appeals to an intracontent-interpersonal communicational dimension. Others treating S's claim as an asserting can reassert the claim, while deferring the justificatory responsibility for the claim to S herself. This is so even if the audience has no idea of S's reliability in this regard or has no other evidence favouring the claim.<sup>40</sup>

The audience is not limited to those the speaker intends to communicate with, but to anyone coming into contact with the claim. Brandom's non-evidentialism about testimony, therefore, applies to all assertings and is not limited to the narrower case of tellings.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the parallel between promising and asserting embraced by proponents of the assurance view is far less tempting. Promising targets a particular audience to whom the promiser has agreed to 'bind his will', giving the targeted audience reasons for relying on him to perform in this way. Person-based authority in the case of asserting is very different, stemming not from assurance offered, but from the authority and responsibility structure of any up-and-running linguistic practice. Specifically, it rests on a dynamic conception of the way in which entitlement to a commitment can be acquired and lost in such a practice. A commitment may have a 'positive justificatory status' in a variety of ways, including having been exhibited as the conclusion of an inference, defended interpersonally by deference, or simply by default (a *prima facie* entitlement). Only a social practice with such a structure is properly characterized as a linguistic practice. It is, therefore, the structure of the game of giving and asking for reasons, and not the fact that an assurance has been offered, that permits, under certain circumstances, an epistemically responsible subject to assert that p simply on the say-so of another.<sup>42</sup>

Can such an account of the epistemology of testimony, one that is non-evidentialist without embracing the assurance view, capture the difference between believing a person and believing what the person claims? Brandom's distinction between person-based and content-based authority appears to reflect just that; in deferring justificatory responsibility to another, one believes her, and not only

what is claimed. This, however, falls short of the insight proponents of the assurance view hope to provide. Person-based authority, at least as it is described in *MIE*, appears to be just another way of restoring default entitlement to a claim and thereby fulfilling one's epistemic responsibilities and little is made of the relationship forged between deferrer and deferee. Why, for example, should we sometimes feel injury and insult when our assertion is not accepted, if asserting is not a kind of offering assurance?

Brandom's discussion of the act of deferral is told from the viewpoint of the scorekeeper, so that as the result of a successful instance of deferring the scorekeeper turns to the original asserter to defend the claim.<sup>43</sup> Following our discussion of the speech act of challenging, we could adopt the same strategy of supplementation here with regards the speech act of asserting to provide a positive account of the relationship between deferrer and deferree that genuinely merits it being called a person-based relation. Suppose that asserting is a second-personally addressed speech act. If so, asserting that *p* calls for reciprocal recognition of the address and is not simply placing a claim in a 'public arena' as 'fodder' for inferences by others. Once taken up by someone, the reciprocal recognition of the address binds asserter and assertee in a normative nexus that, among other things, precludes the possibility of ignoring the address and allows the latter to defer to the former if challenged to do so.

This interpersonal bond forged between asserter and assertee is a normatively significant I-Thou relation. Inappropriate subsequent performance is not merely a violation of the norms governing a speech act or governing rational discourse, but additionally a violation rooted in the distinctive norms governing this second-personal relation and thereby a violation addressed directly from me to you. If, for example, the asserter fails to respond adequately to challenges, there is a sense in which she has harmed each and every member of the audience separately, as a result of the reciprocal relation that binds each of them, and this is a violation directed at each of them. If, for example, a member of the audience responds inappropriately to an asserting, such as by pretending to ignore the address that she has recognized or by wilfully mis-assessing its epistemic import, it is an injustice that has its distinctive roots in the second-personal relation forged and is a rejection that is directed at the asserter. The 'injury and insult' experienced in such cases has this distinctive quality of being directed at the other in a way that reveals its home in the second-personal relation forged through reciprocal recognition of the address.<sup>44</sup>

In sum, a non-evidentialist view of the epistemology of testimony that does not endorse the assurance view has the potential to embrace the core insight of the assurance view, that there is a difference between believing a person and believing what they say that is reflected in our moral-psychological interactions with others, while avoiding the concerns noted, with one proviso: *that it treats the speech act of asserting as second-personally addressed*. It is worth stressing the tentative tenor in which this conclusion is offered, even if the argument is developed more fully. While we have motivated taking the I-Thou language seriously for both the acts of

challenging and asserting, the arguments in favour of so doing differ in strength. For challenging, it was argued that being second-personally addressed is necessary for the act achieving its function in a Brandomian linguistic practice. For asserting, it was argued that being second-personally addressed coheres with core aspects of the act as it features in our linguistic practices, although it was not claimed that this need be the case for any linguistic practice, nor was it suggested that the proposal proffered is the only way of incorporating the core feature of the non-evidentialist view. In the case of asserting, therefore, the paper is best viewed as dangling a bait to see whether Brandom bites, whereas, for the case of challenging, it contends that he is already hooked.

## VI Conclusion

Pragmatic and semantic theorizing throughout *MIE* takes place by considering matters from the perspective of a deontic scorekeeper. The scorekeeper does not stand outside the practice upon which she is keeping score, although she may occupy the status of an overhearer, rather than an active participant, with regard to a conversation taking place in the practice. The question considered here is whether the relationship between gameplayer and scorekeeper is best thought of as a second-personal relation, in which the recognition-in-practice of addressed speech acts binds them in a normative relation that precludes the possibility of the scorekeeper ignoring those acts.

In the first part of the paper, we argued that Brandom's account of the speech act of challenging is incomplete, and showed, in Brandomian terms, how to supplement the account so that it incorporates a second-personal relation between challenger and challengee. In the second part, we considered whether such a strategy of supplementation could be extended more widely, so that Brandom's project could be seen as advocating an amendment of the interpretationist programme centred on a second-personal relation between interpreter and interpretee. More specifically, we considered whether the speech act of asserting is second-personally addressed. One reason for an affirmative answer was provided: treating asserting as second-personally addressed allows for the development of an attractive, non-evidentialist account of the epistemology of learning from testimony

We earlier rejected Brandom's description of challenging as an auxiliary sort of speech act, if it is taken to imply (as the context suggests) that there can be an up-and-running linguistic practice that does not include an act that serves the functional role characteristic of challenges. If one takes the bait just dangled, however, and treats the speech act of asserting as second-personally addressed, then it emerges that challenging is an auxiliary sort of speech act in the different sense that the functional role played by challenging can be taken over by asserting. Challenging is, as a matter of its structural role in a linguistic practice, a targeted and addressed speech act. Asserting is, if one takes the bait, an untargeted and addressed speech act. Brandom's challenges thus emerge as a kind of targeted asserting; an auxiliary act that is not a necessary feature of linguistic practice.



## Notes

- 1 See Brandom (2002, pp. 1–17).
- 2 Brandom (2002) and (2005, p. 238).
- 3 *MIE*, pp. 508–9.
- 4 *MIE*, p. 659, fn. 50.
- 5 Habermas (2000, p. 345). Italics in original.
- 6 Brandom (2000, p. 362).
- 7 Both options constitute sympathetic readings of *MIE*. A more critical strategy would follow the second option in treating the omission of the second-personal relation in *MIE* as unfortunate, while following the first option in rejecting the suggestion that a second-personal relation plays any essential role in *MIE*. A claim to this effect was made in passing by Kukla and Lance, during a paper delivered to the Space of Reasons conference (Cape Town, July 2004).
- 8 Brandom (2000, p. 362).
- 9 These sanctioning performances are also performances within the practice, and are therefore the subject of normative attitudes themselves.
- 10 “Its basic building block is the relations between an audience that is attributing commitments and thereby keeping score and a speaker who is undertaking commitments, on whom a score is being kept.” (*MIE*, p. 508)
- 11 E.g. *MIE*, p. 172.
- 12 For the purposes of this essay, we have simply helped ourselves to the notion of semantic content. Brandom, of course, aspires to use an antecedent intelligible account of a linguistic practice to explain, perhaps reductively, the notion of semantic content.
- 13 *MIE*, p. 200.
- 14 *MIE*, p. 175.
- 15 Brandom also allows for a third, based on reliability inferences, though these introduce issues of empirical content best ignored here. (Cf. Wanderer, 2008, pp. 187–200.)
- 16 *MIE*, p. 179.
- 17 *MIE*, p. 193.
- 18 An alternative sense of ‘auxiliary’ is considered later on.
- 19 My thinking about the second-personal is indebted to the discussion in Darwall (2007), and I have appropriated some of his language in the next few paragraphs. This appropriation is partial: I have been influenced by his account of second-personal address and not by his account of second-personal reasons, even though Darwall’s presentation treats these as coming together. This is not merely reflective of different interests, but of a basic difference in the framework in which we approach the notion of second-personal address. This difference will not be explored further here, although it is worth noting, as it has ramifications for the current discussion. Specifically, Darwall rejects the role of the second-personal outside the realm of practical reasons.
- 20 Compare: it is to “view a pair of distinct agents as joined and opposed in a formally distinctive type of practical nexus. They are for me like the opposing poles of an electrical apparatus: in filling one of these forms with concrete content, I represent an arc of normative current as passing between the agent-poles, and as taking a certain path.” (Thompson, 2004, p. 335)
- 21 *MIE*, p. 505.
- 22 Habermas (2000, p. 345).
- 23 By the hearer–overhearer contrast, I do not just mean the distinction between addressee and ratified participant in the conversation (such as between lawyers and the judge and jury in the Habermasian discussion), but the difference between addressee and any eavesdropper whomsoever (cf. Goffman, 1981, p. 131, discussed in Clark and Carlson, 1982, p. 332).
- 24 The terms ‘ignoring’ and ‘rejecting’ are used here as terms-of-art, reflective of a difference suggested by their etymology that does not reflect some of their current uses in

English. It should be stressed that I am merely describing the phenomena here (viz. the recognition of the direction of a speech act functions to draw the recognizer into active engagement with the act) and not attempting to explain why this is. The explanatory task is undertaken in other work.

- 25 Cf. Austin (1979, pp. 76–81).
- 26 This is a stipulation, used to highlight the role of the second-personal in challenges. It does not imply that there could not be a linguistic practice in which, as a matter of its authority and responsibility structure and not merely a matter of social politesse, requests ought not to be ignored and so doing is seen as a good enough reason to remove the default entitlement associated with the act of asserting. In such a practice, requesting would be second-personal too. In everyday practice, requesting reasons normally implies a challenge, as the motivation behind the request is typically some kind of incredulity towards, or distrust of, the claims made. The act of requesting here does not have such implications. One difference is that when the request is a truncated challenge it is possible for the challengee to respond with a counter-challenge. The point in the text is that one can respond to a request for reasons by simply ignoring and thus not mount a defence or issue a counter-challenge.
- 27 *MIE*, p. 193.
- 28 *MIE*, p. xiv.
- 29 E.g. *MIE*, pp. 291–2.
- 30 *MIE*, p. 170.
- 31 *MIE*, p. 168.
- 32 *MIE*, p. 178.
- 33 A more usual distinction made in the literature is between reductionist and anti-reductionist approaches; I concur with Moran's (2005) assessment that the divide between evidentialist and non-evidentialist is more basic.
- 34 Ross (1986); Moran (2005); Hinchman (2005).
- 35 In addition to the references to Brandom in Moran and Hinchman, see also Owen (2006, p. 105, fn. 1), Adler (2006), Watson (2004, p. 73, fn. 7).
- 36 E.g. Moran (2005, p. 2).
- 37 Anscombe (1979, p. 150), cited in Moran (2005, p. 27).
- 38 Adler (2006).
- 39 I do not mean to imply any originality in raising this problem, nor that assurance theorists are unaware of this. A good discussion is Watson (2004).
- 40 *A worry*: Deferral is a way of achieving interpersonal, intracontent justification, contrasted with intercontent, intrapersonal justification achieved by an act of justifying through providing reasons. The distinction between intrapersonal and interpersonal content seems to be undermined by Brandom's inferentialism, according to which the semantic primitive at the sentential level is the inferential role associated with a sentence, i.e. the materially correct inferences that that sentence enters into. (Brandom sometimes talks of the inferential role of a sentence as 'curled up' in that sentence, so that in making one claim explicitly, one is making claims involving others that, although not explicitly made, are implicitly contained in it). If so, how is one to understand the distinction between intracontent and intercontent, where the latter just is 'curled up' in the former? *A solution*: It is possible to use the notion of deferential potential itself to ground the distinction. Suppose that A asserts that p, and B, but not A, is committed to the material entailment from p to q. Under a *de re* specification by B of A's commitment, A is committed to q. In putting forward the claim p as inferential fodder for B, A licenses B's claim that q, even if A disavows such a commitment. Even though this claim is licensed by A's assertion, B could not defer to A to justify the commitment to q, although he could to p. One could thus introduce a range of possible tokening performances that B would treat as appropriate to defer to A as a result of her original tokening of p. (See *MIE*, pp. 530–9.) Performings within this range may differ from A's tokening of p in various respects, but they are all performances that B treats as authorized by A's tokening of p, such that if B were to perform in such a manner it would

be appropriate to defer to A to justify the performance. We have thus generated a group of performance types that all share this common deferential potential, which makes sense of the idea of intracontent justification by deferral. (This idea of deferential potential could be developed into an account of the role of meaning ascriptions – see Shapiro, 2004.)

- 41 This is not to deny the difference between tellings and assertings but to deny that the epistemologies of learning from these differ.
- 42 The specific circumstances that permit C to believe that p on B's say-so involve a case where C treats B as having asserted a claim with the same content, and C has no commitments incompatible with either the claim asserted (p) or with another claim that acts among B's reasons for believing that p. Anyone overhearing the asserting in such circumstances can acquire positive justificatory status for commitment to the asserted claim by deferring to the asserter (*MIE*, p. 192).
- 43 E.g. *MIE*, p. 192.
- 44 I develop these sketchy claims about testimonial injustice further in Wanderer (ms.)

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