

The Analytic Neo-Hegelianism of John McDowell & Robert Brandom

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The historical origins of the analytic style that was to become dominant within academic philosophy in the English-speaking world are often traced to the work of Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore at the turn of the twentieth century, and portrayed as involving a radical break with the idealist philosophy that had bloomed in Britain at the end of the nineteenth. Congruent with this view, Hegel is typically taken as representing a type of philosophy that analytic philosophy assiduously avoids. Thus, while Hegel's writings are regarded as indirect, metaphorical and "darkly Teutonic", analytic philosophers usually think of themselves as prizing the clarity of plain speech, except when making use of the precision of scientific logical notation. This analytic directness, furthermore, is usually seen as consonant with the increasingly "naturalistic" outlook of analytic philosophy, especially as practiced in the United States. In contrast, Hegel is seen as regarding philosophical thought as mysteriously engaging with a content that is somehow generated out of the mind's (or "spirit's") own activities, linking philosophy more to art and religion than natural science. Moreover, it is usually accepted that Russell had shown Hegel's bizarre metaphysical doctrines to be based on a few fundamental logical mistakes, even if the details of Russell's criticisms have been largely forgotten.¹

Analytic philosophers might then find it odd when members of its clan start to refer to Hegel in positive terms, and indeed, try to relate contemporary developments within analytic philosophy to Hegelian precedents. Nevertheless, in the last decade of the twentieth century this happened in the case of two important analytic philosophers, John McDowell and Robert Brandom. If nothing else, the claims of McDowell and Brandom suggest something of the complexity of the relation that analytic philosophy actually bears to its philosophical past, and in particular, to the idealist tradition of the nineteenth century. We are reminded that analytic philosophy was fed *not only* by earlier forms of empiricism and common sense realism but also by the rationalist and arguably Kantian orientation of the founder of the logic on

¹ See, for example, Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1914), p. 48.

which it has always drawn, Gottlob Frege.² Indeed, Frege and Wittgenstein, are now sometimes spoken of in relation to those distinctly “continental” roots of analytic philosophy which coexisted with those established in the soil at Cambridge by Russell and Moore.³

McDowell and Brandom both appeal to the Kantian heritage of analytic philosophy, but in extending this heritage to *Hegel* they go far beyond other more modest attempts to reconcile analytic philosophy with Kantian idealism. Kant has always maintained a certain authority within the analytic world—within moral philosophy, especially—but *Hegel*? In what follows I will sketch something of the respective paths that have taken McDowell and Brandom from issues at the centre of analytic debates to the devil’s lair, and after that will offer some thoughts about the possibility of further reconciliation of these seeming antithetical approaches to philosophy.

John McDowell: From the problems of empiricism to Hegel’s absolute idealism

McDowell commences his major work of 1994, *Mind and World*, by alluding to a dilemma that has been at the center of many analytic philosophical disputes throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Analytic philosophy has been afflicted by an “interminable oscillation”⁴ between two opposed and equally untenable positions. One attempts to secure thought about the world in some passively received “givens” of perceptual experience, the other, rejecting the idea of “the given”, leaves the application of concepts in judgment seemingly unconstrained.

In 1956, the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars had provided what many consider to be the definitive critique of the first position.⁵ Empiricists had traditionally

² On the Kantian roots of Frege’s philosophy see, for example, Hans Sluga, *Frege* (London: Routledge, 1980) and Robert Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

³ See, for example, Gottfried Gabriel, “Frege, Lotze, and the Continental Roots of Early Analytic Philosophy,” in Erich Reck (ed.), *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴ John McDowell, *Mind and World*, second paperback edition with a new introduction (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 9 and *passim*.

⁵ Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, with introduction by Richard Rorty and study guide by Robert Brandom (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997). This had been first delivered as “The Myth of the Given:

tried to justify perceptual judgments by grounding them in the mind's capacity to passively record the bare givens of experience—an idea found in both Russell and Moore with the notion of “sense data”. But Sellars argued that it was useless to try to base the justification of judgments on something that was *non-conceptual*: a judgment, having propositional content, can only be justified by something to which it bears the right *logical* relation—something that *itself* has propositional content. Later, Donald Davidson was to make the same point with the idea that the only thing capable of justifying a belief was *another* belief.⁶ Any notion of non-conceptual bare-presences known with certainty and capable of grounding knowledge has to be given up.

However, while McDowell endorsed Sellars's classic criticism, he nevertheless pointed to the inverse danger awaiting the critic of the given, one he saw threatening in the work of Davidson himself. Abandoning the idea of a non-conceptual given capable of rationally constraining the application of concepts in perceptual judgments can lead to the embrace of an equally implausible position in which concept application is simply unconstrained. Thus for the *critic* of the given, “exercises of concepts threaten to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game.”⁷ Davidson had attempted to hold onto the idea of the world's constraining “friction” on thought, by stressing the *causal* constraints exercised by the world on judgment, but this, claimed McDowell, could not capture the *normative* role that experience plays in providing thought with its objective purport. What is needed is a way of maintaining the idea of experience as exercising *rational*, and *not simply causal*, constraint on belief. Hence McDowell appealed to a “minimal empiricism” free of the “mythical” interpretation of the given as some non-conceptual “ultimate ground” or “bare presence” to which we can gesture in justifying our claims. Experience, then, if it is to be capable of providing rational constraint on thought must be *already* thoroughly conceptual, and it was *this* idea that pointed McDowell in the direction of Hegel.

Three Lectures on Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind” at the University of London in 1956.

⁶ “The trouble we have been running into is that the justification seems to depend on the awareness [of having the sensation], which is just another belief. ... The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes.” Donald Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,” in Dieter Henrich (ed.), *Kant oder Hegel?* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983), pp. 427–8.

⁷ McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 5.

According to McDowell, Hegel's predecessor, Immanuel Kant, had been on the verge of a philosophy that would be free from the type of intolerable oscillation besetting contemporary analytic philosophy. But with his idea that a form of non-conceptual representation—"intuition"—was required to provide concepts with their empirical *content*, Kant was himself still ensnared in a version of the myth of the given. This was because he regarded empirical intuitions as issuing from the impact of a supersensuous reality *beyond the mind*—a reality to which concepts could not stretch. Hegel, however, following the critique of Kant by Fichte and Schelling, had rejected the dualism of intuition and concept, and along with this had "urged that we must discard the supersensible in order to achieve a consistent idealism".⁸

It is common for analytic philosophers to regard the German idealists' abandonment of Kant's idea that concepts must be constrained by some non-conceptual given as precisely the move that leads to the result that McDowell captures with the metaphor of thought's "frictionless spinning in a void",⁹ but on McDowell's account, that reaction is indicative of an approach held hostage to the myth of the given. In fact, Hegel's approach shows just how thought *can* be responsive to the world in virtue of what is presented in experience. Following Hegel, claims McDowell, we must think of the world itself as "made up of the sort of thing that one can think",¹⁰ and to think of the world in this way requires us to reject the image found in Kant that the "the conceptual realm has an outer boundary" beyond which concepts cannot stretch. This is just what Hegel did in his "Absolute Idealism", and when we grasp this philosophy as capable of showing us the way beyond the oscillation of analytic philosophy "we have arrived at a point from which we could start to domesticate the rhetoric of that philosophy".¹¹

Perhaps the most obvious parallel to the Sellarsian "critique of the myth of the given" that can be found in Hegel is the theme that runs through the first three chapters of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which Hegel aimed to demonstrate the inadequacy of the idea that knowledge can be founded on the pure givenness to consciousness of "objects" of various kinds. In the first of these chapters, "sense-certainty", the particular object given to consciousness is meant to be a simple non-

⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

⁹ Ibid., p. 11 and *passim*.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 27–8.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 44.

conceptualized singular item, perhaps something akin to Kant's idea of an empirical intuition considered in isolation from any concept, or its early analytic equivalent, the "sense datum" postulated by Russell and Moore and supposedly known immediately in "acquaintance".¹² Not surprisingly, Hegel's way of proceeding here was different to that of Sellars, but there are clear correspondences, with Hegel attempting to show that the very idea of a singular presence as knowable in its "singularity", and hence, non-conceptually, collapses in contradiction, with the object of sense-certainty coming to be replaced by a more complex object purportedly given in experience. The epistemological outlook of sense-certainty had conceived of the pure "this" as given in an immediate way without the participation of any general concept, but, effectively drawing on the rationalist idea of the difference between perception and *apperception*, Hegel suggests that such a "this" is at the same time *taken* by the experiencing subject *as* an instance of a more general category—we might say, taken as an *instance* of "thisness". In the object that comes to replace it, the object of the shape of consciousness that Hegel calls "perception" (*Wahrnehmen*), the fact that it instantiates some general kind is made explicit, and so this object is effectively conceived as an Aristotelian substance—what Aristotle had referred to as a "*tode ti*", a "this such". The *implicitly* conceptual nature of the content of sense-certainty has been replaced by the *explicitly* conceptual nature of the content of perception.

In Hegel's account, the concept of such a pure self-subsistent object of "perception" with its particular categorical constitution undergoes a similar collapse and is replaced by a conception of something much more like a theoretically posited object found in modern scientific explanations of the world—the notion of a "force", for example. This outlook Hegel calls, "the understanding". Thus what *ultimately* exists for the understanding are no longer simply everyday things perceived as instances of kinds: the understanding's "objects" are not "perceived" directly at all, but *posited* as explanations of certain observable effects. Indeed there seems something characteristically "modern" in Hegel's "understanding", and the contrast between "the understanding" and "perception" appears to align with the difference that Sellars talked of in terms of different "scientific" and everyday "manifest"

¹² See, for example, Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 12. Russell had believed that Kant's account of intuition was essentially in agreement with his position on sense-data. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

images of the world.¹³ While the contents of *both* perception and the understanding are “conceptual”, they are nevertheless conceived as conceptual in different ways. Perception is conceptual in that its object will be conceived as a “this such”—an instance of some conceivable *kind*. In contrast, the content of the understanding, I suggest, is primarily *propositional*.

One of the founding texts of analytic philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, commences with the claim that the world is made up *not* of objects but of “states of affairs” or “facts”,¹⁴ and this seems to signal at the level of *logic* a distinction similar to that which Hegel attempts to capture with his distinction between the contents of perception and the understanding. Aristotle had thought of the world as made up of objects (“primary substances”) that instantiated “kinds” and that were individuated by differentiating attributes. Hence he employed a “subject-predicate” or “term” logic, the basic units of which referred to the kinds of things objects instantiated on the one hand, and the attributes that distinguished those instances on the other. In contrast, the Stoics had thought of the basic units of logic as whole *propositions* (a content that could be true or false) rather than separate *terms*. By the end of the nineteenth century, Gottlob Frege managed to *unify* these hitherto separate “term” and “propositional” logics in his revolutionary predicate calculus, however, and Wittgenstein’s conception of the world as basically one of “facts” or “states of affairs” reflects this logical revolution. In short, for Wittgenstein and Frege, the “objects” of the world are no longer conceived as “Aristotelian” (that is, instances of kinds), but as components of “facts” or “states of affairs”.¹⁵ Hegel, of course, was philosophising well before the changes in logic from which the modern analytic movement emerged, but, I suggest, he signals the *type* of change that was in the air with his distinction between the objects of perception and the posits of the understanding. McDowell, following Frege and Wittgenstein in their approach to logic, fails to capture Hegel’s distinction.

In accordance with the *Tractatus*’ injunction, McDowell thinks of the components of “the world” as thinkable “facts”, *but he also* thinks of such

¹³ Wilfrid Sellars, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,” in *Science, Perception and Reality*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 5 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), §§ 1 & 1.1.

¹⁵ This is reflected in the so-called “context principle”—that names have a meaning only in the context of a proposition—as discussed in the next section.

propositional contents as just what the mind is open to in *perceptual experience*. That is, McDowell follows Hegel's criticism of sense-certainty in affirming the *conceptual* nature of perceptual experience, but he *ignores* the differences in the *ways in which* cognitive content can be conceptual that Hegel signals in the difference between perception and the understanding. For McDowell (but not Hegel), perceptual content is not only *conceptual* but *propositional*.

Assuming the modern Fregean approach to logical form, McDowell requires that the contents of perceptual experience are propositional for his minimally empiricist attempt to retain some experientially given rational constraint on judgement. This need disappears, however, in Brandom's account, as in *his* Hegelian development of Sellars's thought, the constraining influence on thought played by the world *via* perceptual experience is replaced by constraints exercised by others when they hold one's utterances to socially instituted norms. At this point then we might switch our attention to Brandom's version of "Pittsburgh neo-Hegelianism" in order to pursue further the purported parallels between contemporary analytic philosophy and Hegel's idealism.

Robert Brandom: From the problems of "representationalism" to Hegel's "inferentialism"

In 1994, the year of the publication of *Mind and World*, Robert Brandom, a colleague of McDowell's at the University of Pittsburgh, published a work, *Making It Explicit*, which also made strong claims as to the relevance of Hegel for analytic philosophy.¹⁶ In developing his appeal to Hegel in that book, however, Brandom has invoked quite different aspects of Hegelianism, and drawn on rather different consequences from Sellars's critique of the myth of the given than those leading to McDowell's "minimal empiricism".

Making It Explicit is fundamentally a work in philosophy of language and philosophical semantics, and among its heroes are the key thinkers of the "continental" roots of analytic philosophy, Gottlob Frege and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

¹⁶ Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). See also his *Articulating Reasons* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). Brandom develops his inferentialist reading of Hegel in *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Influenced not only by Sellars but also by Richard Rorty's deployment of Sellars's ideas in his 1979 critique of analytic philosophy, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*,¹⁷ Brandom refers to Hegel as the forebear of his own attack on the dominant "representationalist" paradigm within analytic philosophy's attitude to meaning. Representationalists classically think of words as names for worldly things, events, or states of affairs. However, the representationalists' picture, claims Brandom, has been undermined within analytic philosophy along with the myth of the given, and in contrast he puts forward his so-called "inferentialist" approach to the semantic content of words.

Like McDowell, Brandom philosophizes in the wake of Frege's revolutionizing of logic in the late nineteenth century, finding the origins of his own inferentialist semantics in Frege's early approach to semantics from which Frege himself retreated in later work and which has been overlooked by most of his analytic followers. For an inferentialist the meaning of words is seen as coming not from any one-to-one "representational" relation existing either between the words and things or properties (as with Aristotle) or between the contents of judgments and "facts" (as with most followers of Frege), but from the patterns of inference within which asserted sentences stand. Brandom focuses on Frege's "context principle"—the principle that "the meaning of a word must be asked for in the context of a proposition, not in isolation"¹⁸—that had been exploited by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*.¹⁹ Starting with this idea that the primary semantic units in language are not individual words, but sentences with full propositional content, Brandom then, following Wittgenstein in his *later* writings,²⁰ thinks of *sentences* as in turn gaining *their* meanings by the roles they play in "language games". This move not only broadens the contexts appealed to in the "context principle" but makes it clearer that the meaning of structures such as sentences are to be thought of in terms of the *pragmatics* of language *use*, and brings analytic philosophy into contact with the

¹⁷ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

¹⁸ Michael Beaney (ed.), *The Frege Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 90.

¹⁹ "[O]nly in the nexus of a proposition has a name meaning", Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 3.3.

²⁰ Especially, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text, with a Revised English Translation*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001).

naturalistic pragmatism of American philosophy, a pragmatism that itself in its nineteenth-century form had been influenced by the thought of Hegel.

Sellars *too* had looked to the role played by sentences in language games, but his interest was in the somewhat rationalistically conceived language games involving the making of assertions and the asking for and giving of *reasons* for them. To give reasons for my assertion of sentence *S* is to place the content of *S* in an “inferential” relation to that of the sentence that I offer *as* its reason, and so Brandom now has a way of *widening* the context of the “context principle”. The word may have a meaning in the context of some *S*, but *S* itself has its meaning in the context of a wider slab of actual or potential discourse, the totality of linked sentences which stand in inferential relations to *S*. Not only do words not stand in one-to-one or one-to-many relations with objects, properties or relations, neither do sentences stand in one-to-one or one-to-many relations with “facts” or “states of affairs”. The network of meaning-giving relations connects words in virtue of the inferential relations standing between the sentences within which the words appear, an image found in Quine’s widely influential image of the “web of belief”.

This standpoint now provides a perspective from which the history of modern philosophy looks very different from accounts standardly given within analytic philosophy. If one favours an inferentialist semantics over a representationalist one then it will be the views of Leibniz rather than, say, Locke, that will appear as an early anticipation of the correct view. From among Leibniz’s inheritors, Brandom points to Kant as the thinker who most clearly grasped the “primacy of the propositional” in semantics—the idea that the “fundamental unit of awareness or cognition, the minimum graspable, is the *judgment*.”²¹ But Kant’s version of rationalism, in its appeal to the role of empirical intuitions, still held on to the idea of something (some mental equivalent of an independent sub-sentential unit of language) *given*—a notion in tension with Kant’s insight into the primacy of the propositional. But from the inferentialist perspective, the idea of *needing* to secure the empirical content of a concept by appeal to something like the intuitions with which it becomes linked becomes redundant.

The idea that concepts gained empirical content in virtue of the fact that they were found in judgments that were inferentially linked within a network of judgments,

²¹ Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, pp. 159–60.

thinks Brandom, had been implicit in Kant's notion of the unity of judgments within the "transcendental unity of apperception".²² But the inferentialist move was only made explicit by Hegel who abandoned Kant's dualism of intuitions and concepts and so was able "to complete the inversion of the traditional order of semantic explanation by beginning with a concept of experience as inferential activity and discussing the making of judgments and the development of concepts entirely in terms of the roles they play in that inferential activity."²³ Such an inferentially mediated conceptual holism is just the outlook expressed in Hegel's classic claim that "the syllogism is the truth of the judgment".²⁴

Once more the easiest way to initially align Brandom with Hegel is to appeal to the opening chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As we have seen, Hegel's transition from sense-certainty to perception involved a radical change in the categorical structure of the very object supposedly "given" to a passively conceived receptive consciousness, and further changes are found between the objects of perception and the understanding. I have described the objects of Hegel's "Perception" chapter as classically Aristotelian—a perceptual object is an instance of a kind about which some perceivable property is predicated in such a way that such a property is seen as excluding some contrary properties. Aristotelian "term" logic, however, is not so easily adapted to the sorts of judgments involved in the more mediated structures of the understanding. Rather than *single* contentful judgments being at issue as in perception, in the understanding what comes to the fore are the inferential relations *between* judgments, and here a *propositionally* based logic is more appropriate. (One should recall that the items connected in Aristotelian

²² "The subtlety and sophistication of Kant's concept of representation is due in large part to the way in which it is integrated into his account of the inferential relations among judgments." Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, p. 92.

²³ Ibid. In particular, Brandom finds in Hegel's methodological use of the combination of "mediation" and "determinate negation", ideas about the implicit structuring of the linguistic practice of the asking for and giving of reasons which are at the heart of his own rationalist pragmatism. In this way, the post-Fregean inferentialist movement towards a type of conceptual holism found in Wittgenstein, Sellars, Quine, Davidson, Rorty, and others effectively reprised the move found within post-Kantian idealism away from Kant's focus on judgments towards Hegel's on inferences.

²⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 669.

syllogisms are the *terms* into which propositions or judgments are resolved, rather than those propositions or judgments themselves.²⁵)

As earlier noted, in Hegel's time there had been no simple way to formally represent the resolution of a proposition into its constituent parts such that "propositional" and "term" logics could be in some way unified. Unifying such traditionally opposed approaches was one aspect of Frege's later achievement in logic. But Frege's subsequent way of extracting *something like* the original subject–predicate structure out of a given proposition (by adapting the mathematical form of analysis into "argument" and "function") was to produce a purported subject–predicate structure that was wholly different to the one of traditional term logic. For Frege, argument terms were fundamentally conceived as *singular* terms, but singular terms, such as proper names, had officially been denied a role in Aristotelian syllogisms. In Aristotle's syllogistic logic, the subject term of a judgment must include some "sortal" term to capture the *kind* to which the object belonged, as can be seen in the fact that the two judgment forms permitted have subjects that, in respect of "quantity", are either "universal" (as in "All Greeks are mortal") or "particular" (as in "Some Greeks are bearded"). Adapted to perceptual judgments about individual objects, one could use a form of judgment like, say, "*This Greek* is mortal" within a syllogism, but "officially" syllogistic reasoning excluded properly *singular* judgments as in "*Socrates* is mortal". Thus the object picked out by an argument term in Frege's analysis, when that term is thought of as a singular term, could not be thought of as of the same categorical type as the object of Hegel's "perception", which is to be treated as an instance of a universal, a "this such". But it was perfect for thinking of what was picked out in "the understanding".

Brandom, however, challenges the standard *representationalist* understanding of Fregean argument terms as "singular terms" that can be mapped in a one-to-one relation to individual worldly entities. Following the dictates of the context principle, one can construe the semantic properties of singular terms in terms of the *role* they play in sentences. To talk of singular reference was, as Quine had put it, "only a picturesque way of alluding to the distinctive grammatical roles that singular and general terms play in sentences. It is by grammatical role that general and singular

²⁵ See, Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, bk 1, in Aristotle, *The Categories, On Interpretation, and Prior Analytics*, ed. and trans. H. B. Cooke, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938).

terms are properly to be distinguished”.²⁶ One might think of the naming relation as absolutely fundamental to language, but Quine’s radical critique of the primacy of the denoting of singular terms was in fact an extension of a challenge to our most basic assumptions about language that had been part of the analytic movement since its inception.

From the earliest application of Fregean logic to philosophy by Russell, analytic philosophers had used Fregean propositionally based “predicate calculus” to reinterpret (“regiment”) the logical form of sentences of ordinary language. Russell had classically done this both for what in Aristotelian logic were treated as universally affirmative judgments (as in “*All Greeks are mortal*”) and for sentences whose subjects were definite descriptions (as in “*The teacher of Plato was mortal*”). Especially with the latter case, Russell had been trying to address the problem of non-referring terms, as with his celebrated example, the definite description “the present king of France”.²⁷ But such a technique of reinterpreting the apparent “subject” term of the sentence was just what was later extended by Quine to include proper names. For Quine, a proper name such as “Pegasus” was to be treated as a predicate, in this case, the verb “is-Pegasus” or “pegasizes”.²⁸ In earlier cases of such regimentation, the point had been to show that a sentence such as “All Greeks are mortal” shouldn’t *really* be thought as being “about” what the subject term apparently names, here *all Greeks*. Because Russell had schematized the sentence as a universally quantified *conditional* (roughly, for all things, “if that thing is a Greek, then it is mortal”) the sentence itself should be thought of as “about” the totality of things (effectively, the whole universe, over which the quantifier “ranged”). Russell’s original point had been that it was erroneous to think of “All Greeks are mortal” as structurally akin to “Socrates is mortal”, but Quine was to undercut the very contrast by treating “Socrates is mortal” in *just the same way!* For Quine, “Socrates is mortal” was to be effectively treated in terms of a bound quantifier that “ranged” over a domain of discourse, and as stating that if something is found that *socratizes*, then that thing is

²⁶ W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object*, (Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, 1960), p. 96, quoted in Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, p. 361. As Quine had earlier put it, a singular term “need not name to be significant”. *From a Logical Point of View*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 9.

²⁷ See Russell’s classic paper from 1905, “On Denoting”, in Bertrand Russell, *Logic and Knowledge: Essays 1901–1950* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956).

²⁸ Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, p. 8.

mortal. In fact, as Quine was well aware,²⁹ his move of treating proper names as predicates could be seen as having a precedent in the way that medieval scholastic logicians had got around Aristotle's prohibition on using singular judgments within syllogisms. In the context of syllogisms, the sentence "Socrates is mortal" could be treated as having the logical form of a universal judgment on the grounds that, like "All Greeks are mortal", it is *exceptionless*.³⁰ But as we have seen, treating something simultaneously as a singular and a universal was just what Hegel had claimed operated within "sense-certainty".

As proper names had provided the paradigm form of the way we think of ourselves as picking out or "representing" entities able to be "given", in Quine's hands post-Fregean logic came to disrupt radically the "representationalist" dimensions of language by attacking the basic referential notion of naming. As he put it, names were "altogether immaterial to the ontological issue".³¹ Thus Quine could regard physical objects as "posits" which explain sensory experiences, and "comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer".³² Congruent with this it would seem that the closest thing in natural language to what, in Quine's logical language, is a *referring term* is a relative pronoun, such as "who" or "which", serving merely to tie predicate terms together.³³ Quine maintained the independence of this elimination of reference from the question of the actual ontology to which one subscribed, but it neatly fitted his strongly scientific conception of the world in which one can secure the truth value of the sentence *without* committing oneself to

²⁹ Thus "logicians in past centuries ... commonly treated a name such as 'Socrates' rather on a par logically with 'mortal' and 'man', and as differing from these latter just in being true of fewer objects, viz. one". Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 181.

³⁰ Quine's move was, of course, more radical. For the medievals, this was a matter of *accommodating* singular judgments within the framework of a term logic. For Quine, it effectively amounted to the *elimination* of the distinction between singularity and universality.

³¹ Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, p. 12.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 44–5.

³³ "To be assumed as an entity is, purely and simply, to be reckoned as the value of a variable. In terms of the categories of traditional grammar, this amounts roughly to saying that to be is to be in the range of reference of a pronoun. Pronouns are the basic media of reference; nouns might better have been named propronouns." *From a Logical Point of View*, p. 13. See the detailed discussion of this point in D. S. Oderberg, "Predicate Logic and Bare Particulars", in David S. Oderberg (ed.), *The Old New Logic: Essays on the Philosophy of Fred Sommers* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

the existence of things apparently referred to *in that sentence*.³⁴ For example, one might want to think of the sentence “the walls are bright yellow” as stating a truth *even if* one didn’t include the terms “walls” and “yellow” among the terms of one’s ultimate explanatory theories.

I have suggested that understood in this way, the reinterpretations of the nature of our referring terms going from Russell to Quine would give an analytic analogue of the idea Hegel is pursuing with his account of the passage from the “shape of consciousness” called “perception” to that of “the understanding”. With Quine, those apparently representational assumptions about the nature of what is given to consciousness in “perception” have now been thoroughly undermined: judgments might seem to be “about” the everyday things we consciously use them of, but they are *really* about some posited “whatever” it is (elements of our best scientific explanations) that ultimately secures the *truth* of those judgments. It was just this radical detachment of the ultimate *references* of our judgments from the experientiable objects that they are naively taken to be *about* that motivates McDowell’s concern to find something that stops thought’s “frictionless spinning in the void”. In McDowell’s account, however, it leads to the idea—problematic from *both* Hegelian *and* analytic perspectives—that the contents of *perceptual* experience are fundamentally *propositional*. In Brandom’s account, however, we find a solution to this problem that invokes ideas from Hegel’s solution to the problems of “the understanding”, not by retreating to any “minimal empiricism”, but by *moving forward* to Hegel’s treatment of *self-consciousness* in the next chapter of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Brandom thus appeals to the intersubjective pragmatic infrastructure that, in his theory, underpins what we might think of as the mind’s capacity to be “about” the world, an account that he links to Hegel’s famous “recognitive” account of “spirit [*Geist*]”.

Hegel and Brandom on the Recognitive Infrastructure of Intentionality

In Hegel’s account of *understanding* as a shape of consciousness, such a consciousness had come to the *self*-understanding that the object which it had *taken* as

³⁴ See, for example, Quine’s discussion of accommodation of “half-entities in a second-grade system” in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 24.

given was, in fact, in no sense “given” at all, but rather “posited” by itself—in Quinian terms, the value of a bound variable, some *whatever* that was responsible for the patterned events of one’s experience. In Hegel’s telling of this story, consciousness responds to the realization that what was previously thought to be “given” is actually an *active posit* with the idea that such an object must be *its creation*. Thus in this new orientation, the assumption from which “consciousness” had started has been reversed: at the start of the series sense-certainty, perception and the understanding, the “given” *object* was conceived as the “truth” of consciousness itself, but now consciousness has come to regard *itself* as “the truth” of its object.³⁵ This new cognitive state is thus properly understood as a form of *self-consciousness*, and as *productive* of its object it is understood as a primarily *practical* rather than *theoretical* intentional state. This is the starting point from which Hegel commences in Chapter 4 “The Truth of Self-Certainty”, which comprises section B of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Self-Consciousness”.

In this chapter the analysis becomes focused on the same internal contradictions of a now *practical self-consciousness* that had earlier plagued the shapes of *consciousness* in chapters 1 to 3. Self-consciousness takes its object to be really *nothing more than that which it wills*, and its immediate form, “self-certainty”, is that of a type of immediately appetitive and devouring subject, but this form of self-consciousness too will be revealed to be self-contradictory. Consider a primitive appetitive subject who desires some singular “this” and, devouring it, satisfies its appetite. In annihilating the previously independent object (the “this”) it annihilates the very thing that allowed it *to be* conscious of itself *as* a desirer. From the failure of this, Hegel thinks, this self-consciousness will somehow come to see that the only stable “mediating” object for it would be one that maintains its independence in the relation, and the only thing capable of *that*, on this model, is *another* self-consciousness.

It is this lesson that is worked through in the now famous passage from a unitary *desiring* self-consciousness to the duality of *mutually recognizing* ones in the

³⁵ “The *necessary advance* from the previous shapes of consciousness for which their truth was a Thing, an ‘other’ than themselves, expresses just this, that not only is consciousness of a thing possible only for a self-consciousness, but that self-consciousness alone is the truth of those shapes.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), ¶ 164

“master-slave” section of the *Phenomenology*.³⁶ In this section Hegel ultimately comes to focus on the nature of the relationship that holds between the two self-consciousnesses, the relationship of mutual “recognition” or acknowledgement—*Anerkennung*. It is in these passages that Hegel first suggests that definite patterns of such relationships of recognition actually constitute what he refers to as “Spirit” [*Geist*].³⁷ Recognition is by its very nature a *reciprocal* affair, but this is not at all at first apparent to the members of the relationship of master and slave. Thus the master regards his slave as a mere thing-like instrument of his will whose dependent nature stands in stark contrast to his own independence. However the master is in fact *dependent* upon his slave for that “free” recognition which he needs in order to be the properly “spiritual” [*geistig*] being that he takes himself to be. Both master and slave must eventually learn that the master’s independence is equally dependent upon that passive material objectivity he recognizes in his slave, and that the slave’s objectivity in truth harbours an active, independent subjectivity that *he* recognizes in his master. Like the earlier instances of objective givenness, this particular instance of the recognitive relation will be shown to be self-contradictory, will collapse and be replaced by some other, more complex form.

In Brandom’s account, this idea of the fundamental nature of this intersubjective recognitive relationship is worked out within a theory of the pragmatics of language use. Within the Brandomian framework, we might then think of a problem analogous to McDowell’s “frictionless thought” and the master’s unilateral self-ascription of free agency. For example, a speaker *might* think that, like Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty, she could mean by her words *whatever* she wanted them to mean. Such a conception of verbal “mastery” would be in relation to one of total dependence or subservience on the part of that speaker’s interlocutor. But drawing on ideas from the later Wittgenstein’s conception of “rule-following”, Brandom *denies* the conceptual possibility of any isolated individual “instituting” of the type of semantic relation that we regard as relating words to world. In Brandom’s account, interlocutors thus stand in the same relations of “reciprocal recognition” that Hegel finds at the heart of all human relations, even the apparently asymmetric ones of slavery. While there is nothing simply “given” from the world to *normatively*

³⁶ Ibid., ch IV, “A. Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage”.

³⁷ Ibid., ¶ 177.

constrain the semantic content of our claims,³⁸ there are norms concerning the way words are put together and used in contexts that are beyond the “legislative” powers of any individual speaker. The “norm-instituting” practices responsible for the semantic relations that enable our words to bear on the world are necessarily *social* ones, at the heart of which are relations of reciprocal recognition.

Thus, the way that I string words together and apply the resulting sentences is not answerable to things or facts in the world as commonly understood. In my speaking I am only answerable to my interlocutor as a recognized bearer of the social norms which we co-institute in the very process of conversing. When I utter, for example, “Socrates is ugly”, my sentence does not confront some independently real “fact” in the world that determines its truth value. (A “fact” for Brandom is just a true proposition, the content of an *utterance* that is true, and its truth, in turn, is explained in terms of what is preserved in correct *inferences*. From Brandom’s conceptually holistic point of view, to talk of something that *makes* the utterance true would be to talk of the world as a whole.) Rather, if it “confronts” anything in particular, it will be something like *your* disposition to give utterance to some *contrary* content, for example, “Socrates is beautiful”! Such a response will challenge my “entitlement” to my original words, and so challenge me to reveal their “title” by coming up with a reason backing up my statement. I might, for example, say something like “Socrates has an offensively snub nose”, an assertion which is meant to stand in the appropriate inferential relation to my earlier one. But here the response will be appropriate only if there is consensus on the legitimacy of the pattern of “material inference” from “Such and such has a snub nose” to “Such and such is ugly”, and, of course, my entitlement to *that* assumption could be further challenged.

For Brandom, the discipline of logic is what results when we reflectively give challengeable expression to the social norms that govern our inferential practices in a way analogous to that in which expression has here been given to our *aesthetic* norms. *Making such norms “explicit”* is, he thinks, ultimately what Hegel was doing in his massive *Science of Logic*.

³⁸ There will always, of course, be some *causal constraint* exercised by the world in our perceptually based verbal responses to it, but the conflation of this with the idea of *rational constraint*—i.e., that to which we could appeal in justification—was just what Sellars had attacked as the “myth of the given”.

We might then sum up some of the ways in which the so-called “Pittsburgh Neo-Hegelianism” of McDowell and Brandom approximates but remains distinct from the thought of the historical Hegel. McDowell, in his critique of the “myth of the given”, takes over from Hegel the idea that the content of experience is fully *conceptual*. But McDowell departs from Hegel in equating the *conceptual* nature of perception with the thesis that perceptual content is *propositional*, thereby collapsing what Hegel distinguishes as *perception* and *the understanding*. Like McDowell, Brandom’s Hegelianism derives from Sellars’s critique of the “myth of the given”, but largely bypassing perceptual experience, he concentrates more on the idea that the semantic contents of our judgments are derived from their inferential relations in the “space of reasons”. And taking this “space of reasons” as grounded in historically changing social practices of assertion, questioning, and reason giving, he thereby interprets Hegel’s key concepts of “recognition” and “spirit” or “Geist” in terms of his own “social pragmatics”. But the same objection that was raised for McDowell might be raised for Brandom as well: relying exclusively on the logic of Frege for his “inferentialist” approach to semantic content, Brandom seems also to have eliminated any structural distinction between perception and understanding as “shapes of consciousness”.

Dialectical Logic and Ontology

Of course, in relation to the entirety of the systematic content of Hegel’s philosophy, the work of the “Pittsburgh Neo-Hegelians” bears on relatively few aspects of Hegel’s thought. Nevertheless, what they *do* bear upon are surely those parts that are central to his overall system, and this had certainly not been usual in cases where analytic philosophers had engaged with Hegel’s work. In particular concrete areas of his philosophy, especially in the area of political philosophy, Hegel has not lacked analytically trained sympathetic readers, but this has usually been at the expense of those areas being detached from Hegel’s systematic “logical” concerns. Hegel himself had insisted on the logic at the heart of his system, and that was the logic that Russell had dismissed as antiquated and responsible for faulty metaphysical assumptions. Attempts such as those of McDowell and Brandom which, drawing on modern post-Fregean logic, attempt to rehabilitate just those core logical areas of Hegel’s thought for which he has been traditionally dismissed, deserve to be taken seriously. This said,

however, one does not find much in the work of either that engages with that aspect of Hegel's logic for which he is probably most well known—the so-called “dialectical” nature of his logic with its controversial claims about the nature of “contradiction”.³⁹ We might, therefore, ask after the possibility of making sense of Hegel's dialectic within an otherwise analytic version of Hegel's logical thought. Indeed, it may be that the structural distinction between perception and the understanding that is largely effaced by McDowell and Brandom is particularly relevant here.

In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell notes of the three self-evident logical principles, the laws of *identity*, *contradiction*, and *excluded middle*, that rather than being laws primarily pertaining to *thoughts*, they should be regarded as laws pertaining to *existence*—laws “that things behave in accordance with”.⁴⁰ Perhaps nothing about Hegel's way of thinking here concerns analytic philosophers as much as his apparent *denial* of just these three laws. When Russell talks of the law of contradiction, he refers to what is often called the law of *non-contradiction*: “Nothing can both be and not be.”⁴¹ But when *Hegel* invokes the law of contradiction he means it *literally*: it is the law that “*everything is inherently contradictory*”,⁴² and with this attacks the purported “first law of thought ... $A = A$.”⁴³ This conception of identity and the associated law of *non-contradiction* are, for Hegel, characteristics of “reflection” and “the understanding” rather than speculative “reason”, and are expressions of what he calls the “affirmative principle” that he attributes to Plato, but from which he exempts Aristotle: “While ... with Plato the main consideration is the affirmative principle, the Idea as only abstractly identical with itself, in Aristotle there is added and made conspicuous the moment of negativity, not as change, nor yet as nullity, but as difference or determination”.⁴⁴

Among the most immediate roots of Hegel's dialectical logic is surely the subject matter that is covered in “Division Two” of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*,

³⁹ I have explored Brandom's approach to the role of contradiction in Hegel in *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 7.

⁴⁰ Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 72–3.

⁴¹ Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 72.

⁴² Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 439.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁴⁴ Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, vol. II, p. 140. It should be noted here that that aspect of Aristotle that Hegel has in mind here is his conception of God as “*noesis noeseos noesis*”, “thought thinking itself”.

“The Transcendental Dialectic”, in which contradiction is linked to the unfettered operations of inferential reason. Kant’s basic argument there is well-known: metaphysics had classically sought knowledge of the world as it is “in itself” on the basis of inferential reasoning from pure concepts alone, thus applying concepts *beyond* those limits that had been established earlier in “The Transcendental Analytic”. Properly, concepts, both empirical and pure, should be thought of as applying to contents that are given in “intuition”, a form of representation that in being both “singular” and “immediate” stands in contrast to the “general” and “mediated” nature of conceptual representation. For Kant, inferential reasoning can aid in the unification of knowledge, as when we posit entities that explain certain observable phenomena.⁴⁵ But there are definite limits to this, such that a potentially rational explanation of appearances can be extended to posit some ultimately non-appearing entity as in classical metaphysics. That something has gone wrong in such forms of thought, Kant thinks, is signaled in the fact that it falls into irresolvable “antinomies”.

In Chapter II of the “Transcendental Dialectic”, the “Antinomies of Pure Reason”, Kant tracks how attempts at achieving “absolute totality in the synthesis of appearances”, an “allegedly pure (rational) cosmology”, will fall into contradictorily opposed views which seem intrinsically resistant to any rational resolution.⁴⁶ Ultimately, Kant’s diagnosis of such problems of metaphysics amounts to the claim that in all such metaphysical claims the distinction between intuition and concept as different representational forms has been effaced. While concepts and intuitions both in some sense *unify* manifolds, the modes of unification are clearly different. Traditionally, concepts have been conceived as unifying knowledge by grouping particulars under some general concept as when we bring particular cats under the genus “cat”, or when we bring the genus itself under some higher one, such as “mammal”. Certain features of the behaviour of my cat “Socrates” might be explained by features possessed by cats in general, but in turn cats may share features with all other mammals, and so on. Here the unity achieved will be a “distributive” unity among *judgments* about cats and other things, and Kant warns us against confusing

⁴⁵ This happens, for example, when a physician posits the presence of some underlying aetiological agent causing the pattern of symptoms identified as a certain disease.

⁴⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A406–8/B432–5.

this type of conceptually mediated unity with the unity that we think of as given *in intuition*—the unity of some experienced spatio-temporal *object*: my cat Socrates, for example. We may not normally be tempted to think of the genus “cat” as a large cat-like empirical object, but this seems to be the type of error that, according to Kant, leads us to think of the world as a whole as a type of object about which we can have conceptual knowledge. Thus Kant distinguishes the “**distributive** unity of the use of the understanding in experience” from a “collective unity of a whole of experience”,⁴⁷ and thinks we are led to confuse these types of unity on the basis of what he calls “transcendental illusion”⁴⁸ or “transcendental subreption”.⁴⁹

Kant’s warnings about these traps of reasoning using traditional syllogistic logic indeed seem to converge with Russell’s critique of the faulty metaphysics that he saw resulting from traditional logic—the critique that motivated his practice of reinterpreting the logical structure of traditionally conceived universal affirmative judgments. For Russell, we should not think of the logical structure of “all cats have two kidneys” on the model of “Socrates has two kidneys”. “All cats” do not, in short, name or refer to some kind of *thing*, that is considered as the object about which “has two kidneys” could be predicated. On Kant’s diagnosis, traditional metaphysics seems to conceive of its task along these lines, and the result is its falling into contradiction. Moreover, Kant’s diagnosis of the problems here seems close to Russell’s concerns about confusing the apparent subjects of universal judgments with *singular* things. In “transcendental subreption”, concepts are confused with intuitions, and concepts, it will be remembered, are general representations, while intuitions are singular. In standard set-theoretic interpretations of Frege’s logic, a concept corresponds to a class of entities while singular representations refer to members of such classes, and Russell famously pursued the paradoxes and antinomies that resulted from confusing these two ideas.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., A582/B610.

⁴⁸ Ibid., A293–303/B349–359.

⁴⁹ In the “Inaugural Dissertation”, Kant had called a “metaphysical fallacy of subreption” a “confusion of what belongs to the understanding with what is sensitive”. Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, ed. and trans. D. Walford and R. Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 408.

⁵⁰ Thus, in 1902, Russell conveyed to Frege the bad news of the inconsistency afflicting one of the axioms of his attempt to ground arithmetic in logic. The axiom required that one think of a certain expression as containing a term that simultaneously played the role of *function* with a particular argument, and *the*

We have glimpsed *something* along the lines of this phenomenon already in Hegel's account of "sense-certainty". The singular "this" of experience was, at the same time, taken by the experiencing subject *as* an instance of a more general category, *thisness*. The object of sense-certainty was meant to be irreducibly singular but at the same time it instantiated a type of universality, and thus became embroiled in the type of dilemma that, according to Kant, affected metaphysical thought traditionally conceived. But while Kant seemed to have regarded the self-contradicting thought of metaphysics as avoidable, Hegel considered this "dialectic" as an essential dimension to any self-reflecting thought at all. And, as an essential dimension of thought, it is thereby regarded as an essential dimension of the objects presented to us *in* thought.

To preserve something of this dialectical structure within analytic philosophy it would seem that we would need to make sense of at least three ideas: first, the idea that "objects" have not fixed but *variable* logical or categorical structures; next, that this variation is not random, but in some way orderly; and finally, that this orderly variation is somehow bound up with the rational working out of the "contradictions" internal to the each of these constitutive structures considered in isolation from the others. Making sense of these ideas from within the framework of analytic philosophy would undoubtedly be a challenge, but perhaps the same resources upon which McDowell and Brandom have drawn might still be useful here.

Hegel's idea in the opening chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of a succession of "shapes of consciousness", when translated into the framework of analytic concerns with issues of reference and meaning, suggests the idea of a plurality of ways of thinking and talking about objects such that grammatically distinct ways correlate with differently structured objects. I have suggested that Hegel's objects of "perception" are conceived basically as "Aristotelian" objects that might typically be thought of as expressed in everyday unreflective discourse with a traditional subject–predicate grammatical structure. But, as we have seen, this discourse can be "regimented" into forms of discourse with overtly different grammatical forms. We might think, then, that when Russell paraphrases a sentence whose subject is a definite description into one whose form is given in terms of quantifiers and variables, that those sentences have in some sense become "about"

argument of that function. Russell's posed the problem in terms of a class of classes that could not be considered members of themselves.

objects with a *different* categorical structure, the “posits” of the Hegelian “understanding”. Of course on *one* way of thinking of this phenomenon, there has been no real change within the nature of the “objects” referred to. The most obvious way to take the activity of analysis is to think of the logical paraphrase as the sentence that truly captures the *actual* logical structure of the object it is about, and that the *non-paraphrased* sentence is not really *at all* about the purported object it *appears* to be about. Russell, after all, wanted to deny that the sentence “All Greeks are mortal” was in any way *about* some collectively conceived object, “all Greeks”. Along these lines, many scientific eliminativists want to deny the reality of many of the objects we purport to perceive and talk about.

This attitude, however, is the attitude that idealism of the Kantian variety opposes. This idealism was, after all, developed on the basis of the idea that the “form” of objects of cognition, including their conceptual form, should *not* be thought of as something that belonged to the objects “in themselves”. Within analytic philosophy, such a distinctly Kantian approach might be thought to be found in those critical of the Russellian view that the logical structure of our thought or talk is dictated to by the logical structure of an independently considered world. Indeed, the very collapse of the idea of reference, initiated by Russell and made explicit in thinkers like Quine and Davidson, itself suggests a collapse of the classically Russellian view. Within analytic philosophy, however, the immediately resulting view is often like that found in Hegel’s “self-certainty”, the type of view McDowell diagnoses as “rebounding” from the myth of the given.

In the view that so rebounds, the objects of thought will be conceivable as capable of variation and change because they are *mere* reflections of the variable and changeable ways in which we talk about them, but McDowell is correct, of course, that Hegel was critical of any such “subjectively idealist” alternative to a pre-critical realism. Hegel’s way of avoiding this type of subjectivism was to appeal to “reason” that he conceived of in terms something like the way that Aristotle thought of a world-pervading “nous”. Different types of objects, then, had to be linked in *logical* ways rather than simply juxtaposed relativistically, and this was achieved by the idea of the *contradictory* nature of objects within any one shape of consciousness or *Geist*, and the idea that these contradictions would be resolved with the passage to some *succeeding* shape. We return again, then, to the peculiar idea of the contradictory nature of such objects, but it should be kept in mind how Kant’s resistance to the idea

that the logical structure of thought reflects, even ideally, the logical structure of *the world considered independent of thought* (that is, considered “in-itself”) opens up the possibility of difference within the ways objects can be logically constituted, and so the possibility of such objects being “contradictory”.

One way this might perhaps be approached within the analytic frame is to take up the theme of the intersubjective nature of language pursued by Brandom, the idea that links to the primacy of the idea of intersubjective recognition in Hegel. Think, for example, of a situation in which I am discussing with an interlocutor the colour of some “object” which we are both currently perceiving. Disagreement may lead us to reflectively place our opposing claims within the “space of reasons”, and we start to bring diverse theoretical considerations to bear on each other’s judgment (the quality of the ambient lighting and the possibility of colour blindness, for example). *Qua* object of “perception”, this object will have the particular logical structure of a substance whose colour is thought of as an immediate perceivable attribute. But this becomes replaced by the *posit* of a more theoretical discourse—the “*whatever*” that is responsible for our *experience* of colour. We want to say that our simply *talking about it* couldn’t have changed the object, and that it is “the same” object discussed in different ways, but if, as Wittgenstein held, “grammar tells us what kind of object anything is”,⁵¹ and here, our logical grammar has changed, then there seems something wrong with expressing our intuition in this way. We have no available unproblematic way of individuating the thing that is supposed to remain the same. From a Russellian perspective, this is surely irrational, but the reasons for this, the idea that there is an unproblematic, *atomistically conceived*, external self-identical *referent* for the sentence, is just what Quine’s development of Russell’s innovations seems to have eliminated.⁵² Quine, we might say, had prised analytic philosophy away from Russell’s Platonic “principle of affirmation”, and put analytic philosophy

⁵¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 373.

⁵² One could say that there is an enduring “external” referent for our changing sentences, the world itself. (After all, once we have Russellized a sentence such as “all Greeks are mortal” into “if something is a Greek, then it is mortal”, there is still *something* that makes the new sentence, if true, true—the world itself). I would suspect that Hegel could be satisfied with this. What we have to avoid is taking this thought any further, and thinking that there was something to be said about *the way* the world is that is responsible for the truth. For this, we have to attribute to the world a form, and then we are back in the problem.

on its path to Hegelianism, even, perhaps, one with a potential for some kind of “dialectical” logic intact.⁵³

⁵³ I would like to thank Stephen Houlgate for very helpful feedback on an earlier version of this essay.