

Class Fifteen: Kukla and Lance on Brandom and the Declarative Fallacy

Doing Things with Words - Ryan Simonelli

March 1, 2022

1 Quick Recap and Context

- **Brandom's Basic Project:** Give an account of linguistic *meaning*—what one *says* in assertorically uttering a sentence—in terms of linguistic *use*—what one *does* in assertorically uttering a sentence.
 - **The Details:** The “move” one makes in assertorically uttering a sentence is understood in terms of the change in *commitments* and *entitlements* that oneself and others bear towards that assertion and various others.
 - * **Example:** In saying “Polly’s a parrot,” I *commit myself* to the claim that Polly’s a parrot and also its inferential consequences, such as the claim that Polly’s a bird, that Polly’s an animal, and so on. I *preclude myself* from being *entitled* to the claim that Polly’s a cardinal, that she’s a reptile, and so on. I also *entitle you* to the claim that Polly’s a parrot (and its consequences, if you recognize them).
 - **An Important Feature of the Account:** The only types of “moves” that we specify here—with respect to which our normative statuses change upon the making of an assertion—are *other assertions*. Indeed, these are the only types of moves wto which Brandom appeals at all. That’s why Brandom speaks of his account of discourse as an “ideal *Sprachspiele* [language game] of assertion,” (644).
- **A Wittgensteinian Critique?:** “Don’t let it bother you that languages (2) and (8) [the “slab” languages] consist only of orders. If you want to say that they are therefore incomplete, ask yourself whether our own language is complete a whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in to it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be regarded as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses,” (§18).
 - **Brandom's Response:** The slab languages *aren't* really languages precisely because they aren't languages in which one can *say* anything—asserting isn't a move that can be made in these “language games” and, as such, they aren't really *language* games. To run with Wittgenstein's metaphor against Wittgenstein, language *has a downtown*. “Asserting, which comes as part of a package with inferring and inferential relations among claimables, is downtown in the city of language,” (316).
- **An Austinian Critique?:** Isn't this just the kind of “constative fallacy” that Austin brings up in the beginning of *How to Do Things with Words*—overlooking the possibilities of the various things we do with language that aren't simply asserting things?
 - **Brandom's Response:** Well, it's not that I'm *overlooking* the other things we do with language; I'm *intentionally bracketing* them to consider the “core” of language—assertional practice—through which conceptual content is conferred.

2 Brandom's Lack of Personal Speech Acts

- **The Structure of Assertion:** Assertions are essentially *agent-neutral* both in their *input* and their *output*. That is, they are such that *anyone* can (in principle) be entitled to them, and, when made, they make a claim upon *everyone*.
 - **Question:** What about assertions that involve the first-person "I"? Kukla and Lance say that Mark's saying "I am sick of crappy Mexican food" is his asserting the same thing as what Quill asserts when they say "Mark is sick of crappy Mexican food." Isn't this exactly what Wittgenstein denies with his conception of the "'I' as subject," which clearly seems to be the sort of use of the first-person in this example?
 - * **A Response on Behalf of Kukla and Lance:** Insofar as we acknowledge Wittgenstein's point about "I am in pain" or "I am sick of crappy Mexican food," this amounts to thinking that what one does in uttering these sentences *isn't simply making an assertion*. Insofar as we *stipulate*—as Brandom essentially does—that the only speech acts are assertions, then the act Mark performs in saying "I am in pain" is indeed the speech act that Quill performs in saying "Mark is in pain."
- **Second-Personally Structured Speech Acts:** Some speech acts *don't* have this sort of agent-neutral status—they are *essentially agent relative*. For example:
 - **Imperatives:** If I say to you "Close the door," this speech act is essentially targeted at *you*, and it has an agent-relative output in the sense that it is *specifically you* who is now normatively compelled to close the door (insofar as I have authority).
 - **Vocatives or "Hails":** If I see you on the street and I say "Hey! How's it going?" this is a type of speech act that second-personally *recognizes* you and *calls for reciprocal recognition*. That is, I'm recognizing you and calling upon you to recognize me back.
- **The Necessity of the Second Person:** "We cannot engage in a Brandomian practice of imputing and assuming entitlements and commitments unless (at a bare minimum) we are able to responsively *recognize* other speakers, their claims, and their normative position in the game of giving and asking for reasons, and to actively *take up* and *accord* normative statuses ourselves," (118).
 - **Note:** Kukla and Lance take it that they could criticize Brandom on these grounds as well, without going into perception (and they do, in 'Yo!' and 'Lo!'), but they focus on perception in this paper because they think it will get particular traction against him.

3 Perception, the Speech Acts that Express It, and Their Necessity

- **The First-Personal Nature of Perception:** A perceptual episode is *essentially first-personal*. A perceptual episode I have is distinctively *mine*.
- **Recognitives:** Speech acts that express first-personal recognition of some object or event in the world.
 - **Example:** Suppose I see a rabbit in the bush, and I say, "Oh, a rabbit!" This act is not simply *reporting* the presense of a rabbit, as you might if you hear me say this and say, to someone else, "There's a rabbit in the bush" without seeing it yourself. Rather, this act *expresses recognition* of the rabbit.
 - * **Note on the Example:** Kukla and Lance use the example "Lo, a rabbit!" and this is actually a special kind of *ostensive* recognitive ("Lo" is shorthand for "Look"). One might think this example complicates things a bit, since one might think that ostensive speech acts involve something like an imperative element. So I've modified the example to the simple non-ostensive recognitive.
 - **Not Assertions:** A recognitive such as "Oh, a rabbit!" is not itself an assertion. It's not itself true or false. It *licenses* assertions (or instance, "There is a rabbit in the bush"), but it is not itself one.

- **Non-Transferrable:** In Brandom's account, one of the basic feature of an *assertion* is that, in making it, I entitle you to perform *that very same speech act*. This is not so with recognitives. If I say "Oh, a rabbit!" I entitle you to the *assertion* that there's a rabbit (e.g. you may say "There's a rabbit in the bush"), but I don't entitle you to perform that *recognitive*; in order to say "Oh, a rabbit!" *you need to see it yourself*.
- **Contrast with Traditional "Expressives":** Traditional expressives like "Boo!" and "Yay!" don't have a place in the "space of giving and asking for reasons," but recognitives, which express recognition of objective things in the world, clearly do, licensing assertions.
- **The Necessity of Recognitives:** Kukla and Lance provide the following argument for the necessity of recognitive speech acts:
 - **The Necessity of Perceptual Entitlement:** There are various ways to come to be entitled to some claim. Two basic ways, for Brandom, are the following:
 - * **Testimonially:** I could *inherit* my entitlement to some claim from someone who makes that claim and is themselves entitled to it.
 - * **Inferentially:** I might licitly *infer* to some claim from some other claim to which I am entitled.

But, crucially, if these are the *only* ways of acquiring entitlement, the whole practice hangs in the air, never making contact with the world. In order for language to be *about* the world, another way to acquire entitlement is required:

 - * **Perceptually:** I can come to be entitled to some claim by *first-personally recognizing* the state of affairs that makes it so.

Perceptual episodes serve as anchors that connect the linguistic practice to the world.
 - **The Necessity of Speech Acts that Express Perceptual Entitlement:** "We must be able to distinguish, within language, between those empirical claims that are merely inherited through the passing on of an inference or reassertion licenses, and those that function as the termination of a set of claims in *someone's* receptive contact with the external world," (125).
 - * **The Myth of the Given:** If speech acts that explicitly mark perceptual episodes *aren't* present within the language, then questions of perceptual warrant and the justification *can't be raised*, and this would be an instance of what Wilfrid Sellars calls "The Myth of the Given."

4 Brandom's Response

- **The Basic Response:** All the perspectivalty we need is built right into the scorekeeping framework developed in *Making It Explicit*. Sure, speech acts always *can* be introduced to explicitly mark the first-personal nature of perceptual reports (and other aspects of the perspectival structure built into the scorekeeping framework), but it's not clear that they need to *already be there*.
 - **Perception, on the Brandomian Model:** Someone makes an assertion as the exercise of a "reliable differential responsive disposition," and they're taken to be entitled to that assertion on the basis of their having been taken to exercise such a disposition. Given the grounds on which this entitlement is attributed, it is necessarily attached to *them*.
- **Question:** Are Kukla and Lance and Brandom simply talking past each other?