

# READING BRANDOM

*On Making It Explicit*

*Edited by*  
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The second way in which I develop Dummett's underlying insight is systematically to distinguish between circumstances of appropriate application that entitle one to apply the concept in question, and those that commit one to do so, and correspondingly between those consequences of application that one is entitled to draw and those one is committed to draw. From my point of view, Dummett's restriction, evident in the first of the passages I quote just above, of the circumstances of application just to those that entitle one to apply it, and of consequence of application just to those one is committed to, runs together two quite different distinctions. Again, the result is to complicate the picture beyond what one might want to contemplate. But splitting the single normative status of appropriateness into the two notions of commitment and entitlement results in a theory with substantial expressive and explanatory advantages. Indeed, I argue that it is exactly this move that makes it possible to rectify the most damaging failings of traditional assertibility theories (of both Dewey's and Dummett's sort) and to render intelligible the objectivity of empirical conceptual contents within the confines of a normative account of the use of such concepts.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, I believe – and I think that Dummett's own text here offers ample reason to concur – that he ought to regard *MIE* as I always have intended it: as offering friendly amendments to and (admittedly “complicated”) developments of his own ideas.

### Notes

- 1 “Expressive vs. Explanatory Deflationism about Truth,” in Richard Schantz (ed.), *What Is Truth?* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 103–19.
- 2 In chapter 8 of *Making It Explicit*, and chapter 6 of *Articulating Reasons*.

## REPLY TO MICHAEL KREMER'S “REPRESENTATION OR INFERENCE: MUST WE CHOOSE? SHOULD WE?”

Robert Brandom

Michael Kremer's essay exhibits a comprehensive understanding of the complex way that various lines of thought in *Making It Explicit* interlock and support one another. He does not try to evaluate the treatment of any one topic (singular terms, existential commitments ...) in isolation from others, perhaps discussed in quite distant parts of the book, that bear on it. This willingness and ability to engage with the whole work makes Kremer both an unusually reliable expositor, and a particularly telling critic.

He is certainly right to see inferentialism as approaching Kantian thought from a rationalistic direction. And he is right that one principal locus of that rationalism is agreeing with Frege that objects can be given to us in a way that depends only on the inferential articulation of propositional contents. Kremer thinks this is an “error” of Frege's, whereas I regard it as an insight. I think Frege is exactly right to address the question of whether numbers are objects by investigating whether numerals can be properly introduced as singular terms. If so, and if they figure essentially in some true claims, then they succeed in referring to objects. I suspect that the reason this seems wrong to Kremer is that he, like Kant, is fixated on *empirical* objects as the paradigm of objects. Semantic reference to and knowledge of *them* surely does require some analog of intuition. But as I see things, Frege introduced a much more abstract notion of object, and with it, of reference, than had previously been available. In Kantian terms, it is a purely “formal” concept of object. One advantage of theoretically proceeding this way – by first defining a very abstract and generic concept, and then specializing it to the empirical case – is that we get a much better grip on what role “intuition” or some analog must play in order to be the way *empirical* objects are “given to us” semantically and epistemically. (In the end, does Kremer think numbers are *not* objects? If they are, does he think they are *not* “given to us”? Or does he think they are *empirically* given to us?) The pragmatist-Wittgensteinian point that we have to get the concept of empirical object (of “middle-sized bits of dry goods”) first, and then extend and generalize against that practical background says nothing against the intelligibility of the concept of object in general that we can arrive at in that way, nor against its availability for a *theoretical* order of explanation of the sort I am recommending.

So I resist the charge that I "overlook" Kant's insistence on the necessity of sensible intuition for empirical objects to be given to us. Rather, with Frege, I want to work to begin with with a more general concept of objects and of what it is for them to be semantically "given to us", in the sense that we can make claims and have thoughts about them.<sup>1</sup> The contribution of "sensuous intuition" to the semantic availability of objects "given to us" empirically is then to be accounted for by showing how the demonstratives used in *noninferential reports* (which are the results of exercising reliable differential responsive dispositions subject to reliability inferences by scorekeepers) can initiate *anaphoric token-recurrence chains* that play the role in *substitution inferences* of genuine singular terms.<sup>2</sup> Working in this top-down way, we can see at each stage exactly what are the criteria of adequacy that the higher-level notion places on the lower-level one that plays the role specified by the higher level (for instance, material inference on subsentential substitution, substitution inference on anaphoric chains).

Although MIE is principally a constructive rather than a critical enterprise, Kremer correctly identifies one of the lines of objection to representationalist orders of semantic explanation that is implicit there as consisting in a complaint about its relative neglect of the question of *understanding*. He points out that there are good reasons to think that this lack is not satisfactorily remedied even by the way in which material proprieties of inference can be represented within intensional possible world semantics. (I think of the development of this sort of semantics for non-logical expressions – paradigmatically by David Lewis, for instance in "General Semantics",<sup>3</sup> as well as by Kaplan, Stralaker, and Montague – as the "second wave" in the modal revolution. The first was Kripke's supplying a semantics for modal logic in the form of completeness proofs for all the better-behaved ones in terms of the algebraic properties of accessibility relations between possible worlds, and the third being his use of the apparatus to discuss the semantics – and in a wholly new sense, the metaphysics it expresses – of proper names and demonstratives.) He then mounts a sophisticated argument for the conclusion that there is a corresponding deficiency in my account of representation: only a formal, and not a material, conception of the representation of objects is, he thinks, provided. While the conclusion of this argument chimes with that of the complaint that I have forsaken Kant for Frege in "overlooking" the role of intuition in giving objects to us, the objection here is internal to my account. I explicitly adopt a methodological strategy of treating what he and I agree is a necessary condition on singular representational purport – namely, playing the syntactic role of being substituted for and the semantic role of having a *de jure* symmetrically substitution-inferential significance – as also a sufficient condition of genuine singular-termhood. He agrees that something is defined this way, but thinks that it is only a *formally*, and not a *materially* adequate notion of singular representational purport.

Kremer's first attempted counterexample is the pair 'Benjamin Franklin' and 'an American'. These both fit syntactically into the same places (preserving sentencehood on intersubstitution), but semantically are involved in asymmetric inferences: the inference from "The inventor of bifocals is Benjamin Franklin," to "The inventor of bifocals is an American," is a good one, but not the other way around.

But in chapter 6, on singular terms, I am working in a regimented language without quantificational expressions such as 'an American'. They are introduced only in chapter 7, on the basis of the prior discussion of singular terms. The justification for this procedure is that I claim that the two kinds of expression are not on the same semantic level: one must already be able to understand the use of genuine singular terms in order to understand the use of quantificational expressions. This is to endorse a Fregean rather than a Quinean order of semantic explanation. Quine started with quantifiers and bound variables, and introduced proper names and definite descriptions on that basis. But this procedure requires working in a very strong metalanguage, and ignores the question of how it is to be understood. Frege sees, properly, that the notion of *complex predicate* (in Dummett's terminology) that is required for quantification is available in principle only as the result of substitutional decomposition of sentences formed with simple predicates and genuine singular terms – which must, accordingly, in a *philosophical* as opposed to a merely formal semantics, in principle be made available *first*, before quantifiers are introduced. The account of singular terms presented in chapter 6 of MIE is part of a constructive project in a regimented language that is built up in stages, not part of a project that starts with a full-blown natural language and analyzes it. The strategic justification for this procedure is that the whole of part two of MIE is conceived of as having the task of showing how the conceptual raw materials assembled in part one suffice, in principle, to introduce a whole panoply of familiar semantic structures: semantic vocabulary such as 'true' and 'refers', singular terms and simple and complex predicates, identity locutions, demonstratives and pronouns, definite descriptions, proper names and propositional attitude ascriptions *de dicto* and *de re*. In the context of that project of stepwise construction, it is perfectly legitimate to work in a context in which quantificational locutions have not yet been constructed. Once they have been introduced (in chapter 7), they are available for analytic work also. So when the full apparatus is in play, the very fact that we have two expressions that are syntactically substituted-for intersubstitutable saving sentencehood, yet involved in asymmetric substitution inferences, warrants the conclusion that at least one of them is a quantificational expression. And that diagnosis would be confirmed by seeing how 'an American', but not 'Benjamin Franklin' can serve to initiate two sorts of anaphoric chain: one behaving quantificationally, the other not (since 'an American' can also serve to introduce anaphorically a particular person – see the discussion of 'a Republican Senator' in chapter 5).

Unlike many who have considered the MIE treatment of singular terms, Kremer realizes that the fact that synonyms such as "a is a bachelor" and "a is an unmarried male", though they do stand in symmetric intersubstitution relations, also stand in asymmetric relations to other expressions, such as "a is a male". The definition "singular term" being considered requires that such expressions stand only in symmetric substitution-inferential relations. That is why expressions at the same level of a hierarchy of genera and species, such as 'feline' and 'canine' do not qualify: they both stand in asymmetric relations with terms such as 'mammal'. As Kremer puts the point:

*T* is a class of singular terms if and only if any correct substitution inference involving two members of *T* is symmetric, and there is no class of subsentential items *S* such that every member of *T* is caught up in an asymmetric substitution-inferential relation with some member of *S*.

He continues:

The problem with this approach, however, is that it makes the question whether a class of items is a class of singular terms *depend on what other subsentential items are available within the language*. But perhaps our language is *expressively impoverished*. Thus, it might turn out that what look to be singular terms in our language are really just common nouns occupying the lowest level of an unfinished hierarchy of genera and species, such that in an extended form of our language, each of these putative singular terms turns out to contain below it several objects picked out by the singular terms of the extended language.

But in the cases in question, the expressive impoverishment requires that the species in question precisely *not* stand in a *hierarchy* of genera and species. For if they do, then there will be asymmetric species-to-genus but not genus-to-species substitution inferences. And in *that* case, the expressions do not at all *mean* what they do in English. In particular, they cannot be being used to *classify* particulars as falling under *kinds* – since those kinds would stand in asymmetric inclusion relations. And notice that we are not just talking about what *primitive* predicates or sortals are available in the language. If we have any other terms that can be *combined*, for instance, logically, with ‘feline’, we will get terms such as ‘domesticated feline’ (‘feline and domesticated’), which will stand in relations of subordination (or – if we have ‘or’ – superordination) with ‘feline’ and so stand in asymmetric inferential relations with it. Thus the sort of expressive impoverishment Kremer is envisaging is *very* radical: logical vocabulary is precluded, as well as *any* related classifiers. How would one justify the claim that the original terms served to *classify* at all?

While it might be hard to say just what the terms *would* mean in these bizarre contexts, it does not seem to me that the conclusion that they are indicating some strange kind of particular is one we can rule out. I think rather that such a situation is like what happens with the downward Löwenheim-Skolem theorem. It tells us that we can find countable models satisfying theories that say that there are an uncountable number of things. The conclusion to be drawn from this ‘paradox’ is that ‘uncountable’ in the languages under the countable-model interpretation does not mean uncountable. The expressive impoverishment of the language under that interpretation makes it mean something else – something hard to translate into English. From an inferentialist point of view, what Kremer points to is the way what is expressed by one locution can, indeed, depend on what other vocabulary is available in the language. But surely it is not an untoward result that if ‘canine’ and ‘feline’ existed in a language in which they stood in no relations of subordination or

superordination to other sortals (since any such relations would underwrite asymmetric substitution inferences), they would have to mean something *quite* different from what they do in languages in which such relations *do* exist. Indeed, I think they would be *unintelligible* as *classifying* at all.

Kremer’s final argument concerns the notion of representational success, rather than representational *purport*. In particular, he addresses the broadly inferential understanding I offer of *existential commitment*. He raises a number of insightful points. But his objections depend on assuming that we antecedently know what we mean by ‘exists’ when it is used in contexts as different as numerical and physical existence. The point of my discussion was to try to say explicitly what that implicit understanding comes to. To this end, I claim that whenever we use ‘exists’ in a definite sense, we are implicitly making reference to a class of *canonical designers*. So, for instance, when I claim that there exists an even prime number, and there does not exist a greatest proper fraction, what I am doing is committing myself to the correctness of *some* Peano successor numeral  $\acute{e}nu$  such that “ $\acute{e}nu$  is even and prime” is true, and to there being *no* such successor numerals  $\acute{e}nu$  and  $\acute{e}mù$  such that “ $\acute{e}nu/\acute{e}mù$  is the greatest proper fraction” is true.<sup>4</sup> The claim is that this is exactly the *same sense* of ‘exists’ that I am using when I say “The winged horse Pegasus does not exist.” The difference is that the *parameter* that such claims are implicitly relativized to, the set of canonical designers, is terms specifying *occupied spatio-temporal regions accessible from here-and-now*. It is true that I do not offer analyses also of Peano successor numeral (but I suppose we agree that others have done that), nor of occupied spatio-temporal regions accessible from here-and-now. Kremer is right that I would look to the use of demonstratives were I to try to fill in the latter notion. And here it seems to me entirely licit that, in keeping with the overall score-keeping methodology of MIE, I say only what it is for some scorekeeper to *take* a demonstrative (applied as the result, according to the scorekeeper who endorses the corresponding reliability inference) of exercising a reliable differential responsive disposition, and do not pretend to say in a general theoretical fashion what it is for such a taking to be correct. Doing that is, according to the theory, just adopting another substantive scorekeeping perspective. It is true that more could be said about how the adequacy of such perspectives are to be normatively assessed. To do that would be to talk about the sort of evidence there is for endorsing various reliability counterfactuals. No doubt such a discussion would involve some of the sorts of considerations Kremer wants to see included under the heading of “taking seriously Kantian sensuous intuitions”. But I do not see that any of these facts impugn the account of the significance of existential commitments in terms of substitution inferences and canonical designers. And there are no grounds that I can see to conclude that the semantic apparatus of inference, substitution, and anaphora is expressively incapable in principle of incorporating the sorts of considerations that Kremer misses.

At the most general level, Kremer is concerned to insist that “inference without representation is empty”. I agree – in the sense that there cannot be inferential (and hence broadly assertional) practices, the kind of practices that confer *propositional*

content, unless those contents exhibit a *representational* dimension. For it is a central claim of *MIE* that it is only in the context of deontic scorekeeping practices articulated by the distinction of social perspective between *attributing* a commitment (in the first instance, to someone else) and *acknowledging* it (oneself). And that distinction of social perspective is what is made explicit by the representational locutions of everyday language that are the basis for philosophers' more technical ones. These are the locutions that we use to distinguish what we are saying or thinking from what we are talking or thinking *about*: terms such as the 'about' of "John was talking about lions" (but not the 'about' of "the book is about 700 pages long"), and the 'of' of "I am thinking of a number between 1 and 10", (but not the 'of' of "the pen of my aunt"). One of the things we discover in part two of *MIE* is that if something is propositionally contentful in the sense of being suitably inferentially articulated, it *does* therefore, whether we know it or not, represent how things are. If in addition, its inferential role involves the right kind of *substitution* inferences, then it represents *particulars* as having properties and standing in relations. The bold (which just is to say antecedently implausible) claim is that nonetheless, in the *order of explication* we can make explicit enough of the inferential articulation of propositional contents to show that it entails the answerability of those contents to what they in that normative sense count as being *about*, *without* having to have yet said anything at all about representation. The idea of inference without representation turns out to be unintelligible. But we show that by talking about propositional content to begin with in purely inferential terms, and come to see that in doing so we have assembled all the raw materials needed to make sense not only of the expressive dimension of such content (what it let us say), but also the representational dimension (what it lets us talk about).

### Notes

- 1 I consider a still more general concept of object in "The Significance of Complex Numbers for Frege's Philosophy of Mathematics", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Winter 1996, pp. 293-315, reprinted as chapter 9 of *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 2 Noninferential reports, reliable differential responsive dispositions, and reliability inferences are discussed in the first half of chapter 4 of *MIE*. Substitution inferences and singular terms are discussed in chapter 6. Demonstratives, anaphoric chains, and the role of token-recurrence structures in substitution inferences are discussed in chapter 7. The account of aboutness and representation in general is in chapter 8.
- 3 "General Semantics", *Synthese*, 22 (1970), pp. 18-67. Reprinted in Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman (eds), *Semantics of Natural Language* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1972) and in his *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- 4 I am, of course, using 'true' here to form a proposition, to express the class of claims to which I am committing myself.

## REPLY TO BERNHARD WEISS'S "WHAT IS LOGIC?"

Robert Brandom

The two classical problems in the philosophy of logic are the demarcation problem and the correctness problem.<sup>1</sup> The first is to answer the question "What is logic?" if the sense of saying what is distinctive of logical vocabulary or logical concepts. How are they to be demarcated from non-logical ones? Is second-order logic? Are modal operators logical operators? Is the set-theoretic epsilon logical vocabulary? The second is to say what the correct logic is: is it classical logic or intuitionism? Is it some modal logic (if so, which one?) and non-modal logic is just a fragment of it? Moreover, the demarcation question is an expressive one: the expressive role distinctive of logical vocabulary is to make explicit in propositional form the broadly inferential relations in virtue of which non-logical locutions mean what they do. More specifically, in the language of *Between Saying and Doing*,<sup>2</sup> it is to be both elaborated from and explicative of such inferential relations. On this account, the question of correctness lapses. No reasonably well-behaved logic is any more correct than any other (though some – such as classical logic – have other distinctive virtues such as being able to specify in their own terms the inferential roles of their own vocabulary). The right question is rather which aspects of inferential role do the various kinds of vocabulary serve to make explicit. Thus the classical two-valued conditional lets us say that an inference is good in the sense that it does not have true premises and a false conclusion. (Admittedly, this is a pretty weak endorsement of an inference, but it is still an important good-making property of inferences. Those that do not have it are bad.) The intuitionistic conditional lets us make explicit assessments of an inference as good in the sense that there is a recipe for turning a proof of its premises into a proof of its conclusion. C. I. Lewis's hook of strict implication lets us claim that an inference is good in the sense that it is impossible for its premises to be true without its conclusion being true. And so on. I take it that there is no definite totality of dimensions along which we might want to assess the goodness of inferences, and so no definite totality of possible logical vocabulary.

This explicative semantic role distinctive of logical vocabulary puts demands on how it can be introduced. We ought to be able to introduce it (specify how it is correctly to be used) by elaborating the use of the non-logical vocabulary it serves to explicate. The proprieties of material inference characteristic of the use of non-logical vocabulary should settle how it is correct to use the logical vocabulary. And