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Scorekeeping in a defective language game*

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One common criticism of deflationism is that it does not have the resources to explain defective discourse (e.g., vagueness, referential indeterminacy, confusion, etc.). This problem is especially pressing for someone like Robert Brandom, who not only endorses deflationist accounts of truth, reference, and predication, but also refuses to use representational relations to explain content and propositional attitudes. To address this problem, I suggest that Brandom should explain defective discourse in terms of what it is to treat some portion of discourse as defective. To illustrate this strategy, I present an extension of his theory of content and use it to provide an explanation of confusion. The result is a theory of confusion based on Joseph Camp's recent treatment. The extension of Brandom's theory of content involves additions to his account of scorekeeping that allow members of a discursive practice to accept different standards of inferential correctness.

Keywords: Borderline cases, confusion, default and challenge, indeterminacy, inferential standard, semantic position, scorekeeping commitments, vagueness.

1. Introduction: Deflationism and defective discourse

Defective discourse poses problems for broadly deflationist accounts of language. I will pause here to admit that I do not have a good definition of 'defective discourse'. However, I can provide some examples of it: vagueness, ambiguity, confusion (in a technical sense to be explained below), category mistakes, presupposition failure, and reference failure.¹ I should say that I am not using 'defective' in the pejorative sense; these uses of language are defective in the sense that they differ from what many philosophers have taken to be the way language ought to work.

By ‘broadly deflationist accounts of language’, I have in mind explanations of paradigmatically semantic phenomena (e.g., truth, meaning, reference, predication, quantification, validity, etc.) that do not accord relations between linguistic entities (e.g. sentences, propositions, subsentential expressions, etc.) and non-linguistic entities (e.g., objects, states of affairs, facts, “reality”, “the world”, etc.) explanatory roles. For example, deflationist theories of truth do not employ a notion of correspondence between truth bearers and truth makers. Some employ the Tarski equivalences (e.g., “the cat is on the mat’ is true’ is equivalent to ‘the cat is on the mat’) as implicit definitions of ‘true’ and include a “That’s all folks” claim to the effect that there is nothing more to the concept of truth than these equivalences; others use anaphoric relations to account for the use of ‘true’.² For the rest of the paper I will use the term *linguistic deflationism* as a general term for theories of semantic phenomena that eschew representational relations as explanatory primitives. I should emphasize that my definition of ‘linguistic deflationism’ is stipulative. Many people who call themselves deflationists would reject linguistic deflationism. I use it because I aim to show that even this doctrine has the resources to explain defective discourse.

One might wonder *why* defective discourse poses a problem for deflationary accounts and not for ones that are more traditional. The reason is that, on a traditional (i.e., non-deflationary) account of language, our expressions correspond to worldly things. Our sentences mean what they do and have the truth values they do because of the way their components “hook onto” the world. A relation (often called *reference*) links each “normal” singular term to an object in the world and a relation (often called *denotation*) links each “normal” predicate to a set of objects in the world. On this traditional account, one explains defective discourse in terms of nonstandard relations between linguistic entities and the world. For example, it seems that there are some objects (e.g., people who have some hair but not much) such that vague predicates (e.g., ‘bald’) are neither true of nor not true of them. According to the traditional account, vagueness can be explained in terms of a nonstandard relation that partitions the world of objects into those that do fall under the predicate in question, those that do not, and those that are borderline cases.

Deflationists cannot accept the same strategy because they cannot explain vagueness in terms of the relations between vague predicates and objects. Thus, one problem for the linguistic deflationist is to account for defective discourse (vagueness in this example) in some other way. A deeper problem for linguistic deflationists is that the traditional picture of language is so ingrained that the various types of defective discourse have come to be defined in terms of non-

standard relations between linguistic and non-linguistic entities. Thus, it can seem that a linguistic deflationist cannot characterize defective discourse at all. It is quite difficult to save the phenomena if one cannot even identify what needs to be saved.

The literature on these two problems is rather patchy. Deflationism came to prominence as a doctrine about truth and has since spread (slowly) to other debates about language. Accordingly, most of the debates about deflationism and defective discourse center around whether deflationism about truth (which I will call *alethic deflationism*) can account for the types of defective discourse that pertain to truth. One debate worth mentioning is whether alethic deflationism is compatible with nonfactualism in general and expressivism in particular (cf. Blackburn 1998). Another issue is whether alethic deflationism is compatible with various prominent approaches to the semantic paradoxes (cf. Simmons 1999). An example from outside the debates surrounding truth is Anil Gupta's (1999) argument that conceptual role theories of meaning (which count as a type of linguistic deflationism) cannot explain expressions governed by inconsistent or incompatible rules. Of particular importance are Hartry Field's writings on referential indeterminacy (where one cannot assign a unique representational relation to some singular term or predicate). He is one of the few alethic deflationists to address the problems posed by defective discourse (Field 2001: ch. 6–10; cf. Leeds 2000).

If linguistic deflationism is to be a tenable doctrine, it must be able to explain both the difference between normal and defective discourse in general, and the various types of defective discourse in particular. As a linguistic deflationist, Robert Brandom faces these challenges. One of the goals of this paper is to present a general strategy he can use to address them. Demonstrating this claim for each type of defective discourse is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I show how he can explain one type of defective discourse: confusion.

The rest of this paper contains three main sections. In section two, I discuss Brandom's deflationist theory of content in *Making It Explicit*, which consists of a semantic theory and a pragmatic theory. My discussion focuses on the account of scorekeeping that figures at the center of his pragmatic theory. I pose some questions, present a few complaints, and propose a couple of additions. Section three concentrates on Joseph Camp's theory of confusion. Section four links the discussion of confusion in section three with Brandom's account of scorekeeping presented in section two. The goal of section four is to provide an outline of the pragmatics of confusion. To do so, I suggest an extension of Brandom's theory of content that allows members of a discursive practice to endorse different

standards of inferential correctness. This extension explains how participants in a scorekeeping practice can change the way they keep score and it explains these changes in terms of the scorekeeping practice itself. My thesis is that this extension allows Brandom to give a deflationary account of confusion.

2. Brandom's linguistic deflationism

I first want to clarify the sense in which Brandom's account of language is deflationist. Brandom contrasts his overall explanatory strategy with the dominant one in philosophy of language and mind, which takes representational relations between linguistic items and worldly items as primitives. It explains content, truth, and inference in terms of these relations. By contrast, Brandom takes inference as a primitive in his semantic theory and uses it to generate an account of content, truth, and representation. At no point does he employ relations between linguistic entities and worldly entities to explain the way language works. His theories of truth, reference, and predication are all deflationist; truth conditions play no role in his theory of content. Furthermore, he does not smuggle in representational relations in the form of intentional vocabulary because he explains all of it in inferential terms as well. Thus, if anyone faces the problems posed by defective discourse, he does.

2.1 Brandom's theory of content

The heart of *Making It Explicit* is a theory of discursive practice. We are all familiar with discursive practices, for they are the practices in which participants behave in a way that is sufficient to confer content on some of their performances, mental states, and products. Although 'content' could use a sharp definition, I am not going to provide one. Suffice it to say that 'content' is used in a way that is similar to the way 'meaning' is used, except that where 'meaning' applies to linguistic entities alone, 'content' applies to mental ones as well (e.g. mental states, attitudes, etc.).

Brandom divides his theory of content into two parts: semantics and pragmatics. One of his fundamental commitments is that one should explain the former in terms of the latter, which is a descendent of the view that meaning should be explained in terms of use. Thus, semantic phenomena (content, truth, reference, validity) are explained in terms of the way the things that bear content are used (Brandom 1994: ch. 1–2).

I will address Brandom's semantic theories and pragmatic theories in turn. His semantic theory belongs to a family called *conceptual role semantics*. Members of this family explain meaning or content in terms of the conceptual role of the thing that bears the meaning or content. Brandom's version takes the conceptual role of a content-bearer to be its role in inference. He takes the primary content-bearers to be sentence tokens and the primary notion of inference to be material inference, which is a relation between two content-bearers that holds (in part) because of the content they bear (as opposed to formal inference which holds because of the form of the content-bearers). Thus, the content of a sentence token is its inferential role.

Brandom distinguishes between three types of inferential relations: commissive, permissive, and incompatibility (I will explain these terms when I turn to his pragmatic theory). Accordingly, the inferential role of a sentence has three parts — one for each of the inferential relations in which it participates. We can think of the incompatibility role as a set of ordered pairs of sentences that are incompatible. The commissive and permissive parts can each be thought of as sets of inferential antecedents and inferential consequents. The antecedents of a sentence are the sentences from which one can infer the sentence in question (let us call it *p*) and the consequents are the sentences that one can infer from it. The antecedents of *p* form a set whose members are sets of sentences from which *p* follows. The consequents of *p* form a set of ordered n-tuples. The first member of each n-tuple is a sentence that follows from *p* and the other members of each n-tuple are the premises besides *p* needed to derive the first member. Thus, the inferential role of a sentence *p*, will be: {*p*'s commissive antecedents, *p*'s commissive consequents, *p*'s permissive antecedents, *p*'s permissive consequents, *p*'s incompatibilities}. The inferential role of a sentence depends on both which sentences are available to serve as auxiliary premises and which inferences are correct. Brandom assumes that each member of a discursive practice takes everyone else to agree on the latter (Brandom 1994: ch. 2). (I will reject this assumption in section four.)

Brandom's pragmatic theory takes as primitives the notions of *deontic status* and *deontic attitude*. Statuses come in two flavors: *commitments* and *entitlements*. The former are similar to responsibilities and the latter are similar to permissions. There are three types of attitudes: *attributing*, *undertaking*, and *acknowledging*. One may attribute, undertake, and acknowledge various commitments and entitlements.

There are several different kinds of commitments that correspond to aspects of discursive practice. *Doxastic commitments* correspond to assertions

and beliefs, *inferential commitments* correspond to reasons, and *practical commitments* correspond to actions. The members of a discursive practice keep track of each other's commitments and entitlements. Brandom adopts Lewis's (1979) explanation of this behavior in terms of scorekeeping. At a given moment in a conversation, the score is just the commitments and entitlements associated with each participant. Each member of the conversation keeps score on all the participants (including herself). Every time one of the participants undertakes (implicitly adopts), acknowledges (explicitly adopts), or attributes (takes another as if he adopts) a commitment or entitlement, it changes the score. I will refer to these as *scorekeeping actions*.

Brandom bases his pragmatic theory on the idea that the use of a linguistic item is the way it changes the score of a conversation. Because Brandom emphasizes the normative dimension of content, he defines the *pragmatic significance* of a sentence as the way it *should* affect the score of a conversation in which someone utters it. Pragmatic significance has two aspects — the circumstances of application and the consequences of application. The former consists of the scores of conversations in which it is legitimate to utter the sentence in question. The latter is the scores that should result from a legitimate utterance of it (Brandom 1994: 180–198).

There are two important senses in which Brandom's semantics answers to his pragmatics. First, the inferences that constitute the content of a sentence are explained in terms of commitments and entitlements. A *commissive inference* is one for which if one is committed to its premises, then one should be committed to its conclusion as well. If one is entitled to the premises of a *permissive inference*, then one should be entitled to its conclusion too. Two sentences are *incompatible* if commitment to one precludes entitlement to the other. The participants of an inferential practice acknowledge inferential commitments by using some sentences as reasons for others. Second, given the force of an utterance, the content of the sentence uttered determines its pragmatic significance. That is, once the members of a discursive practice determine that a given utterance has a certain force, they can use the content of the sentence uttered (its inferential role) to determine how it should change the score of the conversation (its pragmatic significance).

For Brandom, the paradigmatic use of a sentence is an assertion. Consequently, his model of discursive practice is one in which the members make various assertions. He assumes that this model can be extended to include all the other types of speech acts. When a person makes an assertion, she sets off a chain reaction of scorekeeping actions by each member of the conversation.

Three important features of assertions govern these scorekeeping actions. First, when someone makes an assertion, she acknowledges a doxastic commitment. She also undertakes all the commitments and entitlements that follow from the one acknowledged. Second, a successful assertion (i.e., one in which the asserter is entitled to the commitment acknowledged) entitles others members of the conversation to undertake the same commitment. Successful assertions present commitments for public consumption. Third, the asserter takes responsibility to justify the assertion by giving reasons for it should the need arise. In general, assertion displays a *default and challenge structure* in which many assertions carry default entitlement that another member of the conversation can challenge (Brandom 1994: 167–179).

2.2 Scorekeeping example

In this subsection, I describe a conversation in which three people keep score on one another according to Brandom's (1994: 190–191) pragmatic theory. Assume that there are three people, A, B, and C. We can think of the score at any given moment as a set whose members are sets of commitments and entitlements. A number of complications arise immediately. Because each member of the conversation will have different beliefs, they will have to keep a separate score on each participant. Further, Brandom's pragmatics distinguishes between three different attitudes: attributing, undertaking, and acknowledging. Each scorekeeper must separate the commitments and entitlements associated with every other participant into those undertaken and those acknowledged. (A scorekeeper does not make this distinction for herself because it only makes sense for commitments she has attributed to others.) Thus, a set of ten sets represents the score kept by each member of our three-person conversation. For example, for B the score is: {{B's commitments acknowledged}, {B's entitlements acknowledged}, {A's commitments acknowledged}, {A's commitments undertaken}, {A's entitlements acknowledged}, {A's entitlements undertaken}, {C's commitments acknowledged}, {C's commitments undertaken}, {C's entitlements acknowledged}, {C's entitlements undertaken}}.

Assume that A utters a sentence token, *p*. Assume also that B determines that A's utterance has the force of an assertion, and that B understands *p* (i.e., B knows its content). B must first attribute a doxastic commitment to A (which goes under A's commitments acknowledged). I will use '*p*' both as a name for the sentence A asserted and as a name for the commitment A acknowledges by making the assertion (I will discuss this convention in the next subsection).

Next, B attributes to A all of the commitments that are commissive consequences of p together with the rest of A's commitments (these will go under A's commitments undertaken). That is, the commitments that follow from p by commissive inferences (according to B) will depend on what other commitments B takes A to have undertaken and acknowledged. B must then perform an incompatibility check on A's commitments. If B finds any incompatibilities then he must subtract entitlement from the incompatible commitments. B must then attribute entitlements to A's commitments that follow by commissive inferences from the commitments B takes A to be entitled to. During this process, B must continue to perform incompatibility checks to make sure that he does not attribute entitlements to two incompatible commitments.

B's next step is to attribute entitlements to A's commitments that follow by permissive inferences. That is, B looks at the commitments he takes A to be entitled to, he figures out which commitments follow from these by permissive inferences, and he attributes entitlement to these commitments (which go under A's entitlements undertaken). It is important to note that B might take A to be entitled to commitments that A has not undertaken. In other words, B might place on the list of A's entitlements undertaken, entitlements to commitments that B has not placed on A's list of commitments undertaken. For example, A might have uttered 'the barometer is falling and the sky is getting cloudy'. Then, once it comes to the step currently under consideration, B might attribute to A an entitlement to the commitment associated with 'it will rain soon' even though B does not attribute this commitment to A. If the latter commitment does not follow by commissive inferences from something A has said (so the commitment is not one she has undertaken), but it does follow by permissive inferences (so she has undertaken entitlement to it), then this situation will occur.

Finally, B must evaluate A's entitlement to p . A can come to be entitled to p in a number of different ways. First, A might have default entitlement to p . This can occur when A asserts p as an observation report of something for which A is a reliable reporter. One can be default entitled to a claim that is just "obvious" in some sense (e.g., 'monkeys do not grow on trees'). Second, A might be entitled to p because p follows by commissive inferences or permissive inferences from other commitments to which A is entitled. Third, A might be entitled to p as testimony. That is, A might acknowledge p because she has attributed the commitment associated with it and entitlement to that commitment to someone else, from whom she inherits it by testimony. If B decides that A is entitled to p , then B attributes an entitlement to A (which might go under either of the lists

of A's entitlements depending on how A came to be entitled to p). B then takes himself and the other members of the conversation (C in my example) to be free to acknowledge the same commitment and, if one of them does, he or she will then inherit the entitlement to it as testimony. However, if B decides that A is not entitled to p , then he can either stop scorekeeping and wait for the next assertion to be made or he can challenge A's assertion. We could, of course continue with the example but I want to make some comments and raise some questions.

2.3 Comments on the scorekeeping example

This example demonstrates how the content of a sentence-token determines its pragmatic significance. That is, the inferential role of a sentence-token determines the way it should change the score of the conversation in which one utters it. In the example, A consults the commissive inferences, permissive inferences, and incompatibilities that link p to the other sentence tokens of the language (p 's content) in order to determine which commitments and entitlements should be attributed, acknowledged, and undertaken by the participants of the conversation (p 's pragmatic significance).

I want to discuss both the first step of the process in which B attributes a commitment to A, and my use of ' p ' as a name of both a sentence and a commitment. Brandom's explanation of the first step is: "To begin with, [B] must add p to the list of commitments attributed to [A]" (Brandom 1994: 190). What exactly does B add to the list? Is it a sentence token? If so, then in what sense is the list to which it is added a list of commitments? Here is what I take to be the answers to these questions (although I am not certain of them), which are somewhat Davidsonian in spirit.³ The actors in this example are not actually adding anything to a list. There is no list. At least there is no list that the participants alter. The participants in the example neither explicitly nor implicitly add commitments to lists. We, the theorists who are trying to get a better understanding of what it is the participants are doing when they engage in conversation, keep the list. We have a list of the commitments A has undertaken; or, better, we have a list of the commitments B has attributed to A. We keep the list and pretend that B is keeping it. The list consists of sentence tokens (in some hypothetical sense, because I am not actually keeping such a list and I doubt you, the reader, are either). Thus, when Brandom says that B adds p to a list of commitments, what he means is that we, the theorists, in an attempt to understand what B and A are doing, keep a hypothetical list of the commitments B has attributed to A, and we hypothetically write the sentence token

corresponding to the one A uttered on this list, and we pretend that B did this. In other words, we, the theorists, are keeping score on them, and by doing so are treating them as scorekeepers so that we can better understand what it is to be a scorekeeper.

How does B figure out that A's utterance is an assertion? What is it for B to understand *p*? How does B know which commitment to attribute to A? These are difficult questions and Brandom must be careful if he is to provide convincing answers to them. He cannot just assume a notion of content from the start if his scorekeeping pragmatics is to ultimately explain what content is. It seems to me that Brandom's account of perception might be able to answer the first question and possibly the second by providing an account of what it is to be a reliable reporter of speech acts and contents. An answer to the second question will also require an account of *scorekeeping invitations*. That is, B understands the sentence A uttered if he takes A's performance to be an invitation to keep score on her. Whether B *correctly* understands the sentence A uttered will be a matter of what constitutes successful communication — an issue that I cannot take up here (cf. Scharp 2003). I assume that an answer to the third question would be that, barring any evidence to the contrary, B would pick the commitment that he would acknowledge if he were to assert *p*. However, if he has reason to believe that he and A understand *p* differently, he will have to pick a commitment that he would acknowledge if he were to assert a sentence of his language whose inferential role is sufficiently similar to what he takes to be the inferential role of *p* for A. I know of no good way to say what 'sufficiently similar' means here because it will depend on the context and the intentions of those involved.

I should note that this example illustrates only the basic model of discursive practice. Brandom extends it in several different ways. He accounts for the commitments undertaken and acknowledged in perception by explaining perceptual reliability in terms of a special kind of inference. To account for action, Brandom introduces *practical commitments*, which are involved in inferences and can have entitlement associated with them. He treats actions as acknowledgments of practical commitments and presents a rudimentary action theory in terms of this idea. He uses a notion of *substitution* to extend his account of inferential role from sentences to subsentential expressions and a notion of *recurrence* to extend it from subsentential expressions to context-sensitive performances. Brandom (1994: ch. 4, 6 and 7) also introduces scorekeeping actions to account for all of these subsentential semantic phenomena. In this paper, I can deal only with the sentential level.

3. Camp's theory of confusion

In this section, I discuss the phenomenon of confusion, which will serve as my example of defective discourse. I have purposely avoided defining 'confusion' because one of the issues at stake in this paper is whether a deflationist can say what defective discourse consists in without invoking relations between language and the world. To give the reader some idea of what I am talking about, I can say that a person is *confused* if he thinks that there is one thing when really there are two (or more). The things in question can be objects, properties, concepts, propositions, etc. This rough definition takes 'is confused' to apply to people. I will also apply it to expressions, sentences, and arguments. An expression is confused if, by virtue of using it, a person counts as confused. A confused sentence is one that contains a confused expression; a confused argument is one that contains a confused sentence.

Camp (2002) considers a person, Fred, who dumps some ants into an ant farm. Although Fred sees one large ant go into the cage, he misses a second one. Fred then decides to use 'Charlie' as a name for what he takes to be the only big ant in the ant farm. Fred does not know that there are two ants in the ant farm and, due to some fact about large ant behavior, they are never visible together. To help clarify matters, it will be helpful for us to have the names 'Ant A' and 'Ant B' for the two big ants in the ant farm. One can characterize Fred's confusion by uttering 'Fred has confused ant A with ant B', or 'Fred thinks that ant A is ant B' (Camp 2002: 27–29).

Camp argues for several conditions on theories of confusion. First, confusion should not be explained in terms of false belief; the fact that Fred is confused is not a matter of his having false beliefs of any kind. Second, a theory of confusion should be compatible with a policy of *inferential charity*. Although, due to his confusion, many of Fred's arguments concerning the denizens of the ant farm will appear unsound, we must not treat him as if he is poor at logic. His reasoning skills did not change when he purchased the ant farm and dumped the ants into it. We should not evaluate his inferences according to a standard that interprets him as committing basic logical errors. A consequence of the demand for inferential charity is that confusion is distinct from ambiguity. There is no inferentially charitable way to treat Fred's use of 'Charlie' as ambiguous. Another consequence is that one must refrain from attributing truth values to Fred's confused sentences if one is to be inferentially charitable. Every scheme for attributing truth values to Fred's confused sentences will somehow treat Fred as if he is poor at assessing the weight of evidence (Camp 2002: 31–36, 38–46, 49–54, and 71–78, respectively).

In accordance with the policy of inferential charity, Camp explains confusion in terms of adopting semantic positions. When another person, Ginger for example, utters ‘Fred thinks that ant A is ant B’, she is not attributing some mental state to Fred. Instead, she adopts a semantic position toward Fred and his confused sentences. When Ginger adopts a semantic position toward Fred, she alters her standards of inference; she decides to be inferentially charitable to Fred in a certain way. Characterizing the sense in which Ginger decides to be inferentially charitable will provide a theory of confusion.

Camp advocates a particular logic by which one should evaluate the inferences of the confused. Because Camp argues that truth values are inappropriate for confused sentences, he must present an inferential standard by which one can evaluate a confused person’s inferences that does not define validity in terms of truth preservation. Instead, he defines validity in terms of profitability preservation. In particular, an inference involving confused sentences is valid if and only if it preserves profitability, where a sentence is profitable if and only if believing it will contribute to the achievement of one of the believer’s goals (Camp 2002: 122–124).

Camp uses Belnap’s (1992) useful four-valued logic to track profitability. This logic uses four semantic values: Y, N, ?, and Y&N. Camp uses a story about two people, Sal and Sam, who are authorities on the properties of the ant farm (e.g., they are not confused about ant A and ant B) to illustrate the intended interpretation of these semantic values. The idea is that their opinions are indicators of profitability for Fred. Let us rejoin Ginger in her attempt to find a way to be inferentially charitable to Fred. Ginger should begin by assigning semantic values to Fred’s sentences in the following way. Assume that Fred utters a confused sentence, *p*, with the term ‘Charlie’ in it. Ginger should substitute ‘ant A’ for ‘Charlie’ and ask Sal whether the resulting sentence is true, and she should substitute ‘ant B’ for ‘Charlie’ and ask Sam whether the resulting sentence is true. If they both say, “Yes” or one says, “Yes” and the other says, “I don’t know” then Ginger should assign Y to Fred’s sentence. If both say, “No” or one says, “No” and the other says, “I don’t know” then Ginger should assign N to Fred’s sentence. If both say, “I don’t know” then Ginger should assign ? to Fred’s sentence. If one says, “Yes” and the other says, “No” then Ginger should assign Y&N to Fred’s sentence.

The semantic values are grouped as follows: if a sentence is Y or Y&N, then it is at-least-Y and if a sentence is N or Y&N, then it is at-least-N. Ginger can now use the following standard to evaluate Fred’s arguments: an argument is valid just in case it preserves at-least-Y (i.e., if the premises are at-least-Y, then

the conclusion is at-least-Y) and the absence of at-least-N (i.e. if the conclusion is at-least-N, then one of the premises is at-least-N). Using the interpretations of the semantic values, one can generate truth tables for the logical connectives. The implications deemed valid by this standard are exactly those deemed valid by the Anderson-Belnap system *Efde*. Thus, according to Camp (2002: 125–157), the logic of confusion is a relevance logic.

One of the most important consequences of Camp's theory is that two fundamental aspects of understanding come into conflict in the presence of confusion. Understanding someone requires both evaluating her beliefs for truth and evaluating her arguments for validity (or strength). Understanding someone involves both a grasp on whether to accept or reject her beliefs and a grasp on her reasons for her beliefs. In normal discourse, these two elements go hand in hand: one decides whether to accept another's beliefs by consulting her reasons and assesses another's reasons by deciding whether to accept her beliefs. Camp argues that confusion frustrates this fundamental symmetry. One can make decisions about accepting a confused person's beliefs by attributing truth values to them, but then the confused person's reasons will be obscured. One can evaluate a confused person's arguments with Camp's confusion logic, but then the confused person's beliefs will be incomprehensible. When attempting to understand a confused person, one faces a dilemma: either attempt to evaluate his beliefs at the expense of making him irrational or try to appreciate his arguments at the cost of rendering his beliefs unintelligible. One cannot be both doxastically and inferentially charitable to a confused person at once.

4. Inference, scorekeeping, and confusion

The point of this section is to present an extension of Brandom's theory of content. At the semantic level, the extension allows members of a discursive practice to disagree about which inferences are correct. It will also allow them to adopt different semantic positions (i.e., use different standards when evaluating inferences). At the pragmatic level, the extension allows scorekeepers to acknowledge, undertake, and attribute inferential commitments to one another. Although Brandom's model already includes inferential commitments, he assumes (to simplify the theory) that each member of a discursive practice attributes the same ones to everyone else. The extension also introduces a new type of status: scorekeeping commitments. These allow scorekeepers to change the way they keep score on one another.

These additions allow Brandom's model of content to explain what it is to adopt a semantic position. When a person adopts a semantic position, one commits oneself to an inferential standard for use in assessing someone's inferential behavior. I explain adopting semantic positions in terms of acknowledging scorekeeping commitments. The reason for this strategy is, of course, to comply with his principle that pragmatic phenomena should explain semantic ones. Once complete, the extension of Brandom's theory of content will provide an explanation for the difference between normal and confused discourse, and it will yield a pragmatic version of Camp's theory of confusion.

I present the extension of Brandom's theory of content in two parts: the account of inferential commitments and the account of scorekeeping commitments. They are combined to explain what it is to adopt a semantic position in general and the semantic position appropriate for the confused in particular. The following are three reasons his theory needs the extension.

First, people disagree on which inferences are correct. Brandom explains this disagreement in terms of differences in beliefs. According to Brandom, people disagree about which sentences follow from a given sentence not because they accept different inferences but because they accept different potential premises. One's views on what follows from some claim will depend on both the inferences one endorses and the sentences one has available to use as premises (Brandom 1994: 357). However, people also disagree about which inference rules are correct. One cannot explain this disagreement in terms of differences in beliefs. If Brandom's theory of content is to describe actual discursive practices then it will have to allow practitioners to endorse different inferential standards.

Second, discursive practitioners adopt semantic positions with respect to one another. We do not hold each other to the same inferential standards. The standard one uses for assessing inferences varies from person to person and context to context. If Brandom's account of discursive practice is to be realistic, it must capture this important aspect of our inferential behavior. There is a difference between treating someone as if he is inferring incorrectly according to his own standards and treating him as if he has adopted the wrong standards. One needs to look no farther than common philosophical debates for evidence of this phenomenon. For example, it is *appropriate* for a classical logician to treat an intuitionist as if he has made a simple logical error if the intuitionist's argument employs double negation, even though the classical logician accepts this inference rule. On the other hand, it is *inappropriate* for an intuitionist to treat a classical logician as if she has made a simple logical error if the classical logician's argument employs double negation, even though the intuitionist

rejects this rule. The debate between intuitionists and classical logicians that we find in the philosophical literature is one in which each finds faults with the other's inferential behavior. However, they take one another to have adopted the wrong inferential standards. An account of adopting a semantic position allows Brandom's model of discursive practice to explain this phenomenon.

The two external reasons given above are related. I argued that if Brandom's theory is to account for the fact that humans endorse different inferences, then it has to allow scorekeepers to acknowledge, undertake, and attribute inferential commitments to one another. Further, not only do people endorse different inferences, but we also evaluate others according to different standards of what counts as a good inference. The two phenomena go hand in hand. If I can attribute inferential commitments to you that are different from those I acknowledge, then I need a way of judging whether you have followed your own inferential commitments. Semantic positions fit the bill. By adopting a semantic position on you, I assess your arguments according to inferential standards that I might not accept. Thus, allowing scorekeepers to disagree about inferential correctness and allowing them to adopt semantic positions go hand in hand. A discursive practice in which scorekeepers acknowledge, undertake, and attribute inferential commitments is one in which scorekeepers adopt semantic positions.

Third, extending Brandom's model to include semantic position taking allows him to account for defective discourse without sacrificing linguistic deflationism. I will not be able to argue for this claim in any detail. Instead, I show how it allows him to explain confusion. Before doing so, I would like to present the general strategy. Brandom needs to explain defective discourse using only the limited resources of linguistic deflationism. My suggestion is that *he should explain defective discourse in terms of what it is to treat some bit of discourse as defective*. He (1994: 206–212 and ch. 8, respectively) has already used a similar strategy to explain both perceptual reliability and the representational dimension of propositional content. One treats some discourse as defective by adopting a different semantic position with respect to it. That is, one assesses the arguments that involve defective discourse according to a different standard. A theory of each type of defective discourse should follow the same strategy. For example, a theory of vagueness for Brandom should be an account of the semantic position one adopts when one assesses arguments that involve vague expressions. In pragmatic terms, it should be an account of the scorekeeping commitments one acknowledges and the inferential commitments one uses when one keeps score on someone who is using a vague term.

4.1 Inferential commitments

My goal in this subsection is to extend Brandom's scorekeeping pragmatics to conversations in which participants endorse different inferences. The way to accomplish this is to permit scorekeepers to keep track of each other's inferential commitments. An *inferential commitment* is a type of deontic status that one can undertake, acknowledge, or attribute; it is just like a doxastic commitment or a practical commitment in this respect. One can be entitled to inferential commitments as well. There are, of course, differences between inferential commitments and doxastic commitments. One expresses a doxastic commitment by uttering an assertion, while one expresses an inferential commitment by treating one doxastic commitment as a good reason for another. It might seem that one could express an inferential commitment by asserting that one sentence follows from another. Although I do not want to rule this out, I do not want the possibility of expressing inferential commitments to depend on the presence of logical vocabulary. I want a model of scorekeeping that incorporates differences of opinion about inferential commitments from the start.

I need to address a number of other issues surrounding inferential commitments. First, do they participate in inferential relations? That is, can one infer one inferential commitment from another? It seems to me that the answer is *yes*. For example, an inferential commitment expressed by <<something is flat \therefore something is flat>>⁴ follows from the inferential commitment expressed by <<something is flat and brown \therefore something is flat>>. This issue is important for formulating the norms that govern scorekeeping practice. For example, Apu might want to say that if Manjula is a reliable observer of red things, then he is too. Recall that inferential commitments explain the status of observational reliability. Thus, Apu's formulation of the scorekeeping norm expresses an inferential commitment that holds between two inferential commitments. The fact that inferential commitments participate in inferences implies that scorekeepers must keep track of the inferential commitments acknowledged and those undertaken by each member of a conversation.

Another issue is the way in which one can come to be entitled to an inferential commitment. We can extend the default and challenge structure to them in a straightforward way. When someone makes an assertion, is challenged on it, and makes another assertion that is intended to serve as a reason for the first, a member of the audience can challenge the asserter in two different ways. An audience member can make a *doxastic challenge* in which he challenges the asserter to demonstrate entitlement to the doxastic commitment expressed by his second assertion; or an audience member can make an *inferential challenge*

in which he challenges the asserter to demonstrate entitlement to the inferential commitment expressed by his use of the second assertion as a reason for his first.

One might make a case for the claim that one can have default entitlement to an inferential commitment based on one's status as a reliable reporter. However, it seems doubtful that a member of a discursive practice that does not contain logical vocabulary will be able to provide a satisfactory response to an inferential challenge. Nevertheless, a scorekeeper in such a discursive practice can register the fact that he does not endorse the inferential commitment undertaken by the asserter. In a more advanced discursive practice, one can justify inferential commitments and inherit them by testimony. (Debates about intuitionism provide a number of good examples of each of these discursive phenomena.)

One important consequence of this addition to Brandom's scorekeeping pragmatics is that propositional content will be doubly perspectival. Brandom is already committed to the view that people who acknowledge different doxastic commitments will disagree about the inferential role of a claim (i.e. its content). If one accepts the claim that scorekeepers can differ on which inferences they endorse as well, then propositional content will be relative to a set of doxastic commitments and to a set of inferential commitments.

4.2 Scorekeeping commitments

I need to introduce a new type of commitment into Brandom's pragmatic theory to explain what a scorekeeper is doing when she adopts a semantic position. A *scorekeeping commitment* is a type of practical commitment — a commitment to action. That is, one performs an action by acknowledging a practical commitment. By acknowledging a scorekeeping commitment, one performs a special type of action — one keeps score. Undertaking a scorekeeping commitment is a way of saying, "I am going to keep score in such and such a way". It is a commitment to future scorekeeping actions. One can, of course, change the way one keeps score. In this case, one acknowledges a new scorekeeping commitment.

For the most part, scorekeeping commitments obey the rules for practical commitments. Thus, one can acknowledge, undertake, and attribute scorekeeping commitments. They participate in inferences and are susceptible to entitlement as well. The fact that scorekeeping commitments participate in inferences implies that scorekeepers will have to keep track of the scorekeeping

commitments acknowledged and those undertaken by each member of a conversation.

One can distinguish several different types of scorekeeping commitments. There are those that affect how one keeps score on oneself and those that affect how one keeps score on others. (Example of a change in the latter: “I’m going to pay more attention to Otto’s attitudes toward Becky”.) There are those that affect the way one inherits commitments and entitlements from others. (Example: “I’m going to be less gullible”.) Some scorekeeping commitments pertain to the relation between different types of commitments. For example, one can acknowledge a scorekeeping commitment to treat only those who accept the claim that monkeys do not grow on trees as possessors of the concept of a monkey. That is, a scorekeeper might interpret a person’s use of ‘monkey’ as meaning *monkey* only if the scorekeeper attributes to this person the doxastic commitment associated with the claim that monkeys do not grow on trees. Otherwise, the scorekeeper will treat the person’s term ‘monkey’ as if it means something else (or nothing at all). One acknowledges one of these scorekeeping commitments when one calls a sentence “meaning-constitutive”. Similar scorekeeping commitments pertain to attributions of analyticity, definition, etc. There are scorekeeping commitments that are appropriate only for the one who undertakes them and those that are appropriate for everyone in a particular situation. For example, if one member of a three-person conversation realizes that one of the other members is confused on some topic, and realizes that the third member recognizes the confusion as well, then the first will adopt a scorekeeping commitment with respect to how to assess the confused person’s inferences. Moreover, the first treats this scorekeeping commitment as one the other (non-confused) member of the conversation ought to adopt as well. The semantic position associated with confusion is one that is appropriate for anyone who deals with a confused person. This list is far from complete but I hope it helps flesh out the idea of a scorekeeping commitment.

An important issue is entitlement to scorekeeping commitments. As with all commitments, there should be a default and challenge structure associated with scorekeeping commitments. For example, Camp (2002: 191–217) presents a reading of Locke according to which he is confused. A participant in a conversation with Camp might say, “Joe, Locke does not confuse acts and objects, so stop treating him as if he does”. Camp would then have an opportunity to justify his scorekeeping commitment. The way entitlements to scorekeeping commitments are passed from person to person will be a bit tricky. Since scorekeeping commitments are practical commitments, it will depend on the role

entitlement plays for practical commitments. I remarked at the end of the previous paragraph that some scorekeeping commitments will have inheritance structures such that if one member of a conversation entitles himself to one of these scorekeeping commitments, then the others become entitled to endorse it as well. I will have to leave the details for some other occasion.

4.3 Semantic positions

Semantic positions involve standards by which one assesses arguments for validity. (I will follow Camp in restricting my attention to deductive inferences.) I should mention that when someone treats another as confused, she adopts one type of semantic position, and when someone adopts a semantic position, he acknowledges one type of scorekeeping commitment. There are many other types of scorekeeping commitments and many other types of semantic positions.

When a member of a discursive practice adopts a semantic position, she acknowledges a scorekeeping commitment. The content of her scorekeeping commitment is that she will evaluate the inferences of some other scorekeeper according to some standard. Obviously, scorekeepers always employ some set of inferential commitments to assess inferences. Thus, scorekeepers always employ some semantic position or other. We can think of the most common one as a default position. Most likely, the default position will be one that takes everyone to endorse the same inferential commitments. The default position corresponds to a scorekeeping commitment to assess others' inferences according to one's own inferential commitments. When a scorekeeper adopts a different semantic position, she acknowledges a new scorekeeping commitment. She commits herself to evaluate the inferences of another according to some inferential standard that she might not endorse.

4.4 Confusion pragmatics

On Camp's account of confusion, someone who interacts with a confused person should adopt a semantic position, according to which she does not attribute truth values to the confused sentences, and she assesses them according to whether they preserve profitability. The person adopting the new semantic position uses Belnap's useful four-valued logic to track profitability. At the pragmatic level, adopting this semantic position corresponds to acknowledging a specific scorekeeping commitment.

In the interest of space, I have not presented any of the substitution and recurrence structures that allow Brandom to extend his theory of content from the sentential level to the subsentential level. Thus, although confusion is essentially a subsentential phenomenon in that confusion pertains to subsentential expressions, I will deal with confused sentences only.

Let us return to Fred, Ginger, and the ants. Assume that Ginger has decided that Fred is confused. Any sentence Fred utters containing ‘Charlie’, ‘the big ant’, etc. will count for Ginger as a confused sentence. Any argument that contains confused sentences will be a confused argument. In semantic terms, once Ginger has decided that Fred is confused, she adopts a particular semantic position toward him. I will refer to it as the *confusion position*. When Ginger adopts the confusion position, she decides not to attribute truth values to Fred’s confused sentences. (Recall that no such assignment can be inferentially charitable.) Further, she assigns semantic values from Belnap’s useful four-valued logic to Fred’s confused sentences in an effort to assess his arguments for profitability preservation. To do so, she must either have the authority to play the roles of Sal and Sam or else have access to someone who does. Once Ginger assigns the semantic values, she can evaluate Fred’s confused arguments for validity.

In pragmatic terms, once Ginger has decided that Fred is confused, she acknowledges a scorekeeping commitment. It is a commitment to keep score on Fred in a certain way. In order to demonstrate the content of this commitment, assume that Fred utters a sentence, p as the conclusion of an argument whose only premise is q . Assume also that Ginger has decided that p and q are confused sentences. Ginger decides that p is an assertion. She understands its content and attributes to Fred a doxastic commitment that corresponds to it. She follows the procedure illustrated in the scorekeeping example (Section 2.2) up to the stage when she must assess Fred’s entitlement to p . Assume that Fred is not default entitled to it and he has not acquired it by testimony. Ginger must decide whether Fred’s argument, $\langle\langle q \therefore p \rangle\rangle$, entitles him to p .

The scorekeeping commitment Ginger acknowledges has four aspects. First, she refuses to attribute truth values to Fred’s confused sentences. For Brandom’s pragmatic theory, this amounts to a refusal to acknowledge either the doxastic commitments she attributes to Fred (even if he turns out to be entitled to them) or the doxastic commitments that correspond to their negations. Thus, she must disengage from an important part of what it is to treat an utterance as an assertion. Although Fred is making assertions, his commitments are not fit for public consumption.

Second, Ginger treats Fred as if he has undertaken new inferential commitments. These inferential commitments correspond to those deemed valid by the relevance logic associated with Belnap's four-valued scheme. These inferential commitments will most likely be different from the one Ginger acknowledges. Note that Fred would probably not acknowledge these inferential commitments either. However, by virtue of being confused, he has undertaken them (according to Ginger).

Third, she uses these inferential commitments to assess Fred's confused arguments. To do so, she must acknowledge a doxastic commitment to the effect that she has access to an authority on the topic about which Fred is confused. She now consults this authority (which might just be her) and acknowledges doxastic commitments that correspond to the substitutional variants of Fred's confused sentences (the sentences that result from replacing 'Charlie' with 'ant A' or 'ant B'). She uses these doxastic commitments to attribute epistemic values from Belnap's four-valued scheme to Fred's confused sentences. She then evaluates Fred's argument ($\langle\langle q : p \rangle\rangle$) according to the inferential commitments she attributed to him in the second stage.

Fourth, she uses the results of the previous two stages to determine whether she should attribute entitlement to p . If she takes Fred to be entitled to q , and she takes $\langle\langle q : p \rangle\rangle$ to be valid by the relevance logic in question, then she takes Fred to be entitled to p . Remember that she does not take this attribution of entitlement to authorize anyone else to acknowledge p .⁵

It is essential to appreciate that the scorekeeping commitment Ginger acknowledges undermines an important aspect of assertion. Camp argues that when interpreting the confused, there is a tension between two aspects of understanding: assessing reasons and assessing beliefs. Brandom's model of assertion fuses these two components of understanding. He emphasizes the fact that, in general, understanding someone's belief requires not only deciding whether to adopt it, but also appreciating his reasons for it as well. For Brandom, if I think you have a good reason for your belief, then I have good reason to accept it too (other things being equal). In other words, Brandom builds inferential and doxastic charity into his model of assertion. However, in the confusion example, Ginger can think that Fred has a good reason for his confused belief only if she refuses to even consider whether she should accept it or reject it. Inferential and doxastic charity are incompatible in the presence of confusion. If Brandom's model of assertion is correct, then inferential and doxastic charity must coincide in general. That is, one cannot attribute confusion to everyone and still be participating in a discursive practice. Thus, scorekeeping

commitments for confusion must be exceptions to the norm. Adopting the confused position is a discursively advanced thing to do.

5. Conclusion

I have offered a number of general and specific suggestions; the following is my attempt at a summary. Defective discourse poses several problems for linguistic deflationism. Brandom, a linguistic deflationist, offers a model of discursive practice based on a pragmatic theory. Camp presents a theory of confusion based on an account of adopting semantic positions. I have suggested that Brandom can solve the problems posed by defective discourse if he explains them in terms of adopting semantic positions. Instead of arguing directly for this claim, I presented an extension of his model of discursive practice that allows him to explain confusion in terms of semantic positions. The extension has two parts: an account of attributing, undertaking, and acknowledging inferential commitments (Section 4.1) and an account of scorekeeping commitments (Section 4.2). I gave a rough sketch of how Brandom can explain what it is to adopt a semantic position in pragmatic terms (Section 4.3), and what it is that scorekeepers do when they adopt the semantic position appropriate for the confused (Section 4.4).

Of course, there are a number of problems with this proposal that I have been unable to cover. One issue is how to present an account of the content of confused sentences and expressions. That is, one needs a confusion semantics to accompany Camp's confusion logic and my confusion pragmatics. It seems to me that Brandom's explanation of content in terms of inferential role can be extended to permit such an account. Another issue is whether my rough sketch of how Brandom can accommodate semantic positions can be filled out so that it does not conflict with the rest of his theory of content. In particular, he will need pragmatically explicating vocabulary that allow scorekeepers to make explicit the attitudes associated with inferential commitments and scorekeeping commitments (Brandom 1994: 529–613). The extension will also change his account of ingredient and freestanding content (pp. 334–359).

A more general problem is whether this strategy allows him to acknowledge the possibility of hidden defectiveness — cases that are unknown by anyone in the discursive practice. If defective discourse is to be objective (in one sense of this term), then whether some patch of discourse counts as defective cannot depend on someone treating it that way. I think that this challenge can

be met but I cannot say more about it here. A related problem is whether all the examples of defective discourse will be susceptible to this treatment. That is, is it possible to present a theory of vagueness or reference failure in terms of what it is to treat something as a vague expression or as a failed attempt to refer? I think that there is a strong case for a positive answer but, again, it will have to wait for another occasion.

Notes

* I would like to thank John Morrison, Graham Hubbs, and Robert Brandom for helpful comments on an early draft.

1. Although I cannot defend this claim here, I suggest that non-factual discourse (e.g., ethical and aesthetic discourse according to some philosophers) and discourse that typically generates paradoxes (e.g., the semantic, pragmatic, and intensional ones) could be treated as defective discourse as well.

2. See Field (2001: ch. 4) for an example of the former; and Grover, Camp and Belnap (1975) and Brandom (1994: ch. 5) for examples of the latter.

3. Davidson (1984) argues that a theory of meaning should have the form of a Tarskian theory of truth, but he does not claim that humans actually construct Tarskian theories of truth to interpret each other. Rather, the idea is that a Tarskian theory of truth is something used by the theorist to make sense of what is going on when one person interprets another.

4. I use double angle brackets as a systematic way to generate names of arguments. The entries prior to the ‘:.’ are the premises of the argument and the entry after it is the conclusion. Note that this convention individuates arguments only as finely as their premises and conclusions.

5. One consequence of this account of the pragmatics of confusion will be that the notion of entitlement is split into a weak version that does not entitle others to adopt the same commitment and a strong version that does.

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