

Truth and Expressive Completeness

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Robert Brandom claims that the theory of meaning he presents in *Making It Explicit* is expressively complete—i.e., it successfully applies to the language in which the theory of meaning is formulated. He also endorses a broadly Kripkean approach to the liar paradox. I show that these two commitments are incompatible, and I survey several options for resolving the problem.

0. Introduction

Robert Brandom's *Making It Explicit* is a very long book by most standards.¹ One reason for the length is the complex theory of meaning it contains, but another is Brandom's stated goal to show that the theory of meaning can account for the unique semantic features of the vocabulary he uses to formulate the theory itself. If a theory of meaning satisfies this goal, then it is, in Brandom's words, *expressively complete*. In what follows: (i) I explain his motivation for this objective and his strategy for accomplishing it, and (ii) I argue that his commitment to a broadly Kripkean approach to the semantic paradoxes prevents his theory from achieving it. I conclude by considering his options for resolving this inconsistency.

1. Expressive Completeness

1.1 What is Expressive Completeness?

Let us begin by examining what Brandom means by 'expressive completeness'. The topic first appears in the introduction:

The aim is twofold: to make explicit deontic scorekeeping social practices that suffice to confer conceptual contents on nonlogical sentences, singular terms, and predicates in general; and to make explicit the deontic scorekeeping social practices in virtue of which vocabulary

¹ Brandom (1994); hereafter all citations are to this work unless otherwise specified.

can be introduced as playing the expressive roles characteristic of a variety of particular logical locutions. How much logical vocabulary is worth reconstructing in this fashion? In this project, neither more nor less than is required to make explicit *within* the language the deontic scorekeeping social practices that suffice to confer conceptual contents on nonlogical vocabulary in general. At that point it will have been specified what practices a theorist must attribute to a community in order to be interpreting its members as engaging not just in specifically *linguistic* practices but in linguistic practices that endow them with sufficient expressive power to say how their practices confer conceptual content on their states, attitudes, performances, and expressions. That is, they will be able to express the theory offered here, (xx).

The main points are: (i) Brandom is presenting a theory of deontic scorekeeping practices, (ii) this theory is supposed to explain how linguistic expressions acquire content, and (iii) language users with certain expressive resources should be able to formulate Brandom's theory and use it to explain the meanings of their linguistic expressions. Thus, he is presenting a theory of meaning; it does not matter for my purposes what a deontic scorekeeping practice is or how it confers content on linguistic expressions. He wants his theory of meaning to work well for both logical and non-logical vocabulary, but he thinks that since these two kinds of vocabulary play quite different roles in a deontic scorekeeping practice, the theory of meaning has to treat them differently. (For the record, logical vocabulary for Brandom includes not just traditional logical terms (e.g., 'not' and 'all'), but also semantic terms (e.g., 'true'), normative terms (e.g., 'ought'), pragmatic terms (e.g., 'says'), and mental terms (e.g., 'believes')). As Brandom says, one part of the theory of meaning explains the meaning of non-logical vocabulary (i.e., it will explain how a deontic scorekeeping practice confers content on non-logical vocabulary), while another part of the theory of meaning explains the meaning of logical vocabulary.²

To understand why Brandom's theory of meaning has these two parts, one has to appreciate his somewhat idiosyncratic views on logical vocabulary:

[A]n *expressive* theory of logic is presented here. ... Logical vocabulary endows practitioners with the expressive power to make explicit as the contents of claims just those implicit features of linguistic practice that confer semantic contents on their utterances in the first place, (xix).

According to Brandom, logical terms are tailor-made for use in a theory of meaning because their characteristic role in language is to express the way in which words acquire their meanings. For the purposes of this paper, I assume that he is right about this. His views on the expressive role of logical vocabulary motivate his account of the meaning of logical vocabulary:

² See also 641 for another discussion of expressive completeness.

Explaining the features of the use of logical vocabulary that confer its characteristic sort of semantic content is accordingly explaining how the sort of expressive power the theorist requires to explain the features of the use of *non*logical vocabulary that confer semantic content on it can become available to those whose linguistic practice is being theorized about. It is this fact that sets the expressive scope of the project pursued here, (xx).

In this passage, Brandom claims that logical vocabulary allows us to formulate a theory of how *non-logical vocabulary* acquires content, whereas in the previous passage, he made the same claim about linguistic expressions in general (not just the non-logical ones). Below I discuss whether the more general claim is correct. Either way, Brandom also claims that to explain the meaning of logical vocabulary is to give an account of how to introduce logical vocabulary into a linguistic practice. Thus, the part of his theory of meaning that explains the meanings of logical terms will be an account of how these terms can be introduced into a linguistic practice.

To summarize, Brandom's theory of meaning has two parts: one that applies to non-logical vocabulary, and one that applies to logical vocabulary. The first part explains how non-logical vocabulary acquires content by explaining how it is used in a deontic scorekeeping practice. The second part explains how logical vocabulary acquires content by explaining how it is introduced into a deontic scorekeeping practice. I call the first part of the theory of meaning, the *basic theory*, and the practice it describes, the *basic practice*. I call the second part of the theory of meaning the *extended theory*, and the practice it describes, the *extended practice*. The basic practice has no logical vocabulary, but the extended practice has enough logical vocabulary to explain how non-logical vocabulary acquires content; that is, the extended practice has enough logical vocabulary to formulate the basic theory. Brandom wants his theory of meaning (the whole thing, presumably) to be expressively complete, which means that the members of the deontic scorekeeping practice (the extended one, presumably) can formulate his theory of meaning (the whole thing, presumably).

At this point, one might have the following worry. The whole theory of meaning is not expressively complete because the members of the extended practice have access only to the basic theory, not the extended theory. For the whole theory to be expressively complete, the members of the extended theory must be able to formulate the extended theory as well.

Brandom's solves this problem by insuring that the logical vocabulary introduced into the basic practice has a special characteristic: it is in *expressive equilibrium*. A logical term is in expressive equilibrium if it can be used to make explicit the implicit norms that are responsible for conferring content on it. Brandom's example of expressive equilibrium is the conditional found in Frege's *Begriffsschrift*: "[Frege] finds, in the two-valued conditional, an expressive equilibrium: the inferences in virtue of which that conditional means what it

means can themselves be expressed and codified by the use of that conditional,” (114). Brandom continues:

One thread running through the later chapters of this work is the attempt to achieve an analog of the expressive equilibrium Frege achieves in the propositional fragment of the *Begriffsschrift*. The challenge is to show how not only the semantics, but the pragmatics outlined in the first four chapters can be made explicit, in terms of vocabulary that is introduced by specifying practices of using it that are sufficient to confer on it the content that is then employed in making explicit precisely those practices and that content. The ideal is that the theory should specify practices sufficient to confer on the various locutions considered all the kinds of content required to state the theory itself, (116).

Here Brandom claims that the logical vocabulary he uses to formulate his theory of meaning should be in expressive equilibrium. We can conclude that logical vocabulary not only makes explicit the ways in which non-logical vocabulary acquires content, it makes explicit the ways in which logical vocabulary acquires content. That is, logical vocabulary makes explicit the ways in which all vocabulary (non-logical and logical alike) acquires content. Again, I am not going to quibble with these claims. The final sentence of this passage reaffirms his commitment to arriving at an expressively complete theory of meaning.

We are now in a position to see that Brandom’s theory of meaning purports to achieve expressive completeness in the following way. The extended practice has enough logical vocabulary to express the basic theory. Because the logical vocabulary introduced into the basic practice is in expressive equilibrium, it can be used to explain not only how non-logical vocabulary acquires content, but how logical vocabulary acquires content as well. That is, the logical vocabulary introduced into the basic practice can be used to state not just the basic theory, but the extended theory as well. Hence, the entire theory of meaning (both the basic theory and the extended theory) can be formulated by the members of the extended practice. Therefore, the theory of meaning is expressively complete.

1.2 Motivation for Expressive Completeness

Why does Brandom impose the expressive completeness condition on his theory of meaning? Although Brandom never gives an explicit justification for the condition, I find several reasons that are specific to his project in *Making It Explicit*. However, it seems to me that there is an obvious reason for adopting it as a condition on any theory of meaning: a theory of meaning should be able to explain the meanings of all the terms it uses. If a theory of meaning uses some term whose meaning it cannot explain, then that theory of meaning is clearly inadequate. Of course, if a theory of meaning does a poor job of explaining the

meaning of *any* term, then that counts against it, but if a theory of meaning cannot explain the meaning of a term required to state the theory itself, then that is especially troubling. The difference is analogous to the difference between a theory having a false consequence and a theory being self-refuting; self-refutation is usually (and correctly) taken to be a symptom of a deep problem.

A reason for Brandom in particular to adopt this condition is his championing inferential semantics over representational semantics. Roughly, a representational approach explains the semantic features of a word or sentence in terms of what the word or sentence purports to represent, while an inferential theory explains semantic features in terms of relations between sentences. Of paradigmatically representational locutions, Brandom writes:

This chapter looks to specify the actual expressive role played by the technical terms ‘true’, ‘refers’, ‘denotes’, and their cognates. ... It also argues that once this expressive role is properly understood, it becomes clear that representational locutions are not suited to play the role of primitives in a semantic theory. Nailing down this point requires looking at their actual expressive role, which is not capturable in the sort of representational semantic theory that uses these notions as primitives; it is therefore necessary to work in another one, (284-5).

The idea seems to be that a representational theory of meaning cannot explain the meaning of representational vocabulary. Thus, in order to insure that one of his major criticisms of his chief rival does not also apply to his theory, Brandom imposes the expressive completeness requirement. He aims to show that an inferential theory of meaning can explain the meanings of the terms it employs.

It seems to me that several of Brandom’s positive doctrines depend on expressive completeness as well. In particular, his theory of intentionality³, his account of the explicit discursive scorekeeping stance⁴, and his views on the relation between norms and regularities⁵ all depend on the claim that his theory of meaning is expressively complete. Rather than documenting these claims, I present the final passage of the book as evidence of just how important expressive completeness is to Brandom:

Pursuing the ideal of expressive completeness requires working out an account of the practices of using various particular logical locutions—paradigmatically those used to express inferential, substitutional, and anaphoric commitments and those used to ascribe discursive commitments to others. In the end, though, this expressive account of language, mind, and logic is an account of who *we* are. For it is an account of the sort of thing that constitutives itself as an expressive being—as a creature who makes explicit, and who makes itself explicit.

³ 55-62, 631-636.

⁴ 639-643.

⁵ 18-55, 626-631, 645-649.

We are sapients: rational, expressive—that is, discursive—beings. But we are more than rational expressive beings. We are also *logical, self-expressive* beings. We not only make *it* explicit, we make *ourselves* explicit *as* making it explicit, (650).

What more needs to be said?

2. Expressive Completeness and Internalizability

Despite the fact that I have presented expressive completeness as a condition on theories of meaning in general, Brandom’s formulation of it depends on some of the peculiarities of his approach. For example, he talks about reconstructing the way vocabulary can be introduced into a deontic scorekeeping practice so that the members of that practice can come to acquire that vocabulary. Moreover, his account of the expressive role of logical vocabulary is involved as well. Without a detailed account of these views, it will be difficult to formulate a compelling argument for my objection. However, I do not have the space to give these views the attention they deserve. Instead, I formulate the primary argument concerning Brandom’s theory of meaning in terms of an alternative notion—internalizability.

Before introducing the notion of internalizability, we must follow Dummett in distinguishing between a theory of meaning and a semantic theory:⁶

Theory of meaning: a theory that specifies the nature of meaning; theories of meaning provide necessary and sufficient conditions on semantic theories.

Semantic theory: a theory that specifies the meanings of the sentences of a particular language or languages.

Theories of meaning tell us what meaning is, and semantic theories assign meanings to sentences; thus, a theory of meaning will provide conditions on semantic theories, and semantic theories provide evidence for or against a theory of meaning (for example, if a semantic theory that attributes truth-conditions to sentences has implausible consequences when applied to a sentences containing certain vocabulary, then that counts against a truth conditional theory of meaning). The following is a definition of ‘internalizable’ for semantic theories:

A semantic theory *T* that purports to specify the meanings of the sentences belonging to a certain language *L* is *internalizable for L* if and only if there exists an extension of *L* such that all the sentences that compose *T* can be translated into sentences that belong to the extension of *L* and *T* correctly specifies the meanings of all the sentences of the extension of *L*.

⁶ Dummett (1991: 20-22); Dummett uses ‘meaning-theory’ instead of ‘semantic theory’, but the distinction is the same.

Roughly, if a semantic theory requires a distinction between object language and metalanguage, then it is not internalizable for any language.

Another bit of terminology will make the definition of ‘internalizable’ much more manageable:

A semantic theory T is *descriptively complete for L* if and only if T provides a correct assignment for every sentence of L .

A semantic theory T is *internalizable for L* if and only if there exists an extension L' of L such that T is expressible in L' and T is descriptively complete for L' .

The latter definition is equivalent to the one given above, but it uses the notion of descriptive completeness. Now we extend the notion of internalizability from semantic theories to theories of meaning:

A theory of meaning T is *internalizable* if and only if there exists a semantic theory T' such that T is compatible with T' and T' is descriptively complete for the language in which T is formulated.

Notice that for semantic theories, internalizability is a relation between a semantic theory and a language, while for theories of meaning, internalizability is a property. In addition, the last definition mentions compatibility; I assume that a semantic theory T' is *compatible* with a theory of meaning T if and only if the meanings T' assigns are consistent with the claims T makes about meaning (e.g., T' explains meanings in terms of truth conditions, and T assigns truth conditions).⁷

If a theory of meaning is internalizable, then there is a way of assigning meanings to the sentences that compose the theory that meets the conditions implied by the theory of meaning; that is, the theory of meaning can explain the meanings of its own sentences. Clearly, if a theory of meaning is expressively complete then it is internalizable; otherwise the members of the deontic scorekeeping practice would not be able to use it to explain how the use of their linguistic expressions confers content on them. Thus, internalizability is a necessary condition for expressive completeness; if a theory of meaning is not internalizable, it is not expressively complete.

3. Brandom on Truth and the Liar Paradox

Despite the fact that Brandom studiously avoids appealing to representational notions like truth and reference in his theory of meaning, he

⁷ The notion of internalizability is developed in more detail in Scharp (MS); note that in the more detailed treatment, I distinguish between descriptive completeness and descriptive correctness. I ignore that distinction here for simplicity.

recognizes that he needs to explain the meaning of sentences containing ‘true’ and ‘refers’. His view is that these terms function as anaphoric proform-forming operators. To explain what this means, I focus on the case of truth. For Brandom, just as ‘he’ is a *pronoun* that inherits its content from an antecedent (e.g., ‘John’), “snow is white’ is true’ is a *prosentence*, and it inherits its content from an antecedent (in this case the antecedent is ‘snow is white’). Prosentences can also inherit their content from sentences quantified over (e.g., ‘everything Helen said during the lecture is true’). Thus, Brandom endorses a version of the prosentential theory of truth.⁸

Everyone who works on truth is familiar with the liar paradox, which pertains to the following sentence:

(1) (1) is false.

Using minimal logical resources and some seemingly obvious principles about truth, one can show that (1) is both true and false. Thus, from intuitively obvious assumptions via intuitively obvious inferences, one derives an obviously unacceptable conclusion. This paradox has proven to be extremely difficult to handle in part because the principles involved are so well entrenched. As a result, it is equally difficult to present a consistent and plausible theory of truth.

To avoid having an inconsistent theory of truth, Brandom adopts an approach to the liar that was proposed by fellow prosententialist Dorothy Grover.

In “Inheritors and Paradox,” Dorothy Grover elaborates an anaphoric approach to semantic paradoxes for the closely analogous anaphoric treatment of ‘... is true’ discussed above. Grover finds that the natural condition on anaphoric grounding yields an interpretation coinciding in general with the sentences that Kripke assigns a semantic value to at the minimal fixed point, the interpretation he takes to provide the most natural model for the intuitive concept of truth. Her remarks can be applied to the present construction by means of the crucial analogy between the pronomial account of reference and the prosentential account of truth, (321-2).

This passage makes clear that Brandom wants to use Grover’s approach not just for the liar paradox but for the related paradoxes that affect the notion of reference as well. Brandom does not say much more about the semantic paradoxes than this. However, a bit more about Grover’s approach is necessary before we can see why it is incompatible with Brandom’s expressive completeness requirement.

One might notice that the anaphoric antecedent for a sentence like (1) is that very sentence. In order to determine the content of (1) (according to the

⁸ See Grover, Camp, and Belnap (1976) where the prosentential theory was introduced; see also Brandom (2002).

prosentential theory of truth), one must first determine the content of (1)—an impossible task. Thus, in cases like this, there is no antecedent with a content of its own for the prosentence to inherit. Grover argues that, for this reason, (1) does not have any content whatsoever.⁹ Moreover, the same result holds for any sentence that does not inherit its content from independently contentful sentences. In the literature on the liar paradox, these sentences are said to be *ungrounded*. Thus, Grover claims that ungrounded sentences are meaningless.¹⁰

Kripke was the first to give a rigorous definition of groundedness as part of his highly influential approach to the liar paradox, according to which paradoxical sentences are neither true nor false.¹¹ Grover remarks on the similarity between the prosentential theory of truth and Kripke's approach to the liar when she writes, "it is interesting to note that [the set of occurrences of sentences that acquire content independently and grounded inheritors] corresponds, roughly, to that set of sentences to which Kripke has assigned a truth value at the smallest fixed point," (Grover 1977: 599). The smallest fixed point is an artificial language Kripke presents to illustrate his views on truth; in the smallest fixed point, only grounded sentences have truth values, and all the ungrounded sentences are truth-value gaps (i.e., neither true nor false). However, Kripke stops short of saying that ungrounded sentences are meaningless—he thinks they are meaningful, but they lack truth values.¹² Nevertheless, Grover and Kripke agree that a solution to the liar paradox requires one to identify the ungrounded sentences of a language, and they both use Kripke's definition of groundedness.

To sum up, Brandom proposes a prosentential theory of truth and endorses Grover's approach to the liar paradox, which was designed for a prosentential theory of truth. Grover's approach to the liar paradox appeals to Kripke's distinction between grounded and ungrounded sentences, and her approach implies that all ungrounded sentences are meaningless. Therefore, Brandom endorses a broadly Kripkean approach to the liar paradox, with the added twist that the sentences Kripke identifies (i.e., the ungrounded ones) are meaningless.

4. The Objection

At last we are ready to see why Brandom's views on the liar paradox are incompatible with his commitment to expressive completeness as a condition on

⁹ Grover (1977).

¹⁰ Notice that although all paradoxical sentences are ungrounded, not all ungrounded sentences are paradoxical; e.g., 'no sentence is both true and false' is ungrounded, but not paradoxical (it quantifies over all sentences—including itself—but no paradox results from trying to assign a truth value to it—it is obviously true).

¹¹ Kripke (1975).

¹² Kripke (1975: 699-700).

his theory of meaning. The problem stems from the fact that Kripke's theory of truth, like almost all theories of truth, cannot apply to the language in which it is formulated upon pain of contradiction. That is, Kripke's theory of truth has to be formulated in a language (i.e., the metalanguage) that is expressively richer than the language to which it applies (i.e., the object language). If Kripke's theory were applied to the language in which it is formulated, it would be inconsistent for the following reason. Recall that Kripke's theory implies that sentence (1) is a truth-value gap, and consider the following sentence:

(2) (2) is either false or a truth-value gap.

An argument analogous to the one mentioned above shows that (2) is both true and either false or a truth-value gap. Thus, Kripke's theory has to be restricted so that it does not apply to languages with the resources to construct sentences like (2), which give rise to what is called a *revenge paradox*. The result is that although his theory employs the concept of a truth value gap, it cannot apply to a language that contains a word expressing this concept (likewise for several other concepts it employs—e.g., groundedness, paradoxicality, and exclusion negation). Kripke, of course, freely admits this fact about his theory:

It seems likely that many who have worked on the truth-gap approach to the semantic paradoxes have hoped for a universal language, one in which everything that can be stated at all can be expressed. (The proof by Gödel and Tarski that a language cannot contain its own semantics applied only to languages without truth gaps.) Now the languages of the present approach contain their own truth predicates and even their own satisfaction predicates, and thus to this extent the hope has been realized. Nevertheless the present approach certainly does not claim to give a universal language, and I doubt that such a goal can be achieved. First, the induction defining the minimal fixed point is carried out in a set-theoretic meta-language, not in the object language itself. Second, there are assertions we can make about the object language which we cannot make in the object language. For example, Liar sentences are *not true* in the object language, in the sense that the inductive process never makes them true; but we are precluded from saying this in the object language by our interpretation of negation and the truth predicate. ... The necessity to ascend to a meta-language may be one of the weaknesses of the present theory. The ghost of the Tarski hierarchy is still with us, (Kripke 1975: 714).

Because Kripke's theory of truth does not apply to any language capable of expressing it, the semantic theory Kripke offers is not internalizable for any language.

As the following argument shows, the commitment to a Kripkean approach to the liar renders Brandom's theory of meaning expressively incomplete. Let T be Brandom's theory of meaning, and let T' be a semantic theory that is

compatible with Brandom's theory of meaning (i.e., T attributes meanings—inferential roles—to particular sentences of particular languages). Let M be a language in which T is formulated. The question is whether T assigns the right meanings to the sentences of M; I argue that it does not.

Kripke's theory of truth is part of T because T uses it to identify meaningful sentences (recall that T implies that ungrounded sentences are meaningless). Since T includes Kripke's theory of truth, Kripke's theory of truth and the semantic theory implied by his theory of truth are expressible in M. Moreover, Kripke's semantic theory is part of T (i.e., the semantic theory compatible with T); otherwise T would not be able to determine which sentences are even meaningful, much less attribute the right meanings to them. However, Kripke's semantic theory is not internalizable for M (otherwise it would be inconsistent); thus Kripke's semantic theory is restricted so that it does not apply to M. Therefore, no semantic theory that includes Kripke's semantic theory applies to M; in particular T does not apply to M. In other words, T does not attribute the right meanings to sentences of T because it does not attribute any meanings to them. Therefore, no semantic theory compatible with Brandom's theory of meaning attributes the right meanings to the sentences that compose his theory of meaning. Hence, Brandom's theory of meaning is not internalizable. Given the relation between internalizability and expressive completeness, his theory of meaning is not expressively complete—his theory remains forever inaccessible to those in the deontic scorekeeping practice it purports to describe.

We can summarize the objection by saying that Brandom's theory of meaning implies that ungrounded sentences are meaningless, and it uses the account of groundedness given by Kripke's theory of truth; however, one cannot use this account of groundedness for languages that can express Kripke's semantic theory (assuming Kripke's theory of truth is consistent). Therefore, one cannot use Brandom's theory of meaning to explain the meanings of sentences that belong to a language in which Brandom's theory of meaning is formulated.

5. Consequences

What is Brandom to do? The obvious choices are to give up on the expressive completeness requirement or give up the Kripkean approach to the liar paradox. Given the centrality of the expressive completeness requirement to his overall project, it is clear that he should give up the Kripkean approach to the liar paradox.¹³ However, if Brandom wants to retain his expressive

¹³ One might think that there are independent reasons to think that Brandom's theory of meaning (as it is presented in *Making It Explicit*) is not expressively complete. In *Between Saying and Doing* (Brandom, Forthcoming), Brandom presents a theory of modality that is sorely lacking in *Making It Explicit*. If the theory of meaning in *Making It Explicit* requires

completeness condition, he has some work to do—it is not just a matter of surveying the approaches to the liar paradox and picking the right one. The problem Kripke’s theory faces is ubiquitous—everyone wants a theory of truth that does not give rise to revenge paradoxes, but no one knows how to construct one. Recently, several approaches have appeared that are promising, but even so, the news is not good.

Tim Maudlin and Hartry Field have each proposed approaches to the liar paradox that do not need to be formulated in an expressively richer metalanguage.¹⁴ Brandom could replace Kripke’s theory with either Maudlin’s theory or Field’s theory. However, there are two major problems with this change. First, some of the sentences that compose these theories are ungrounded. Thus, they are not available to Brandom since he claims (following Grover) that all ungrounded sentences are meaningless.

There are independent reasons for thinking that Brandom should avoid any theory of truth that implies all ungrounded sentences are meaningless. For example, lots of obviously meaningful sentences are ungrounded (e.g., ‘no sentence is both true and false’). If Brandom wants to do justice to our intuitions about meaningfulness, then he should adopt a theory of truth that does not have this consequence. In addition, whether a sentence is grounded is not determined by its meaning. That is, one can specify two sentence tokens of the same type that have the same sentential meanings, the same subsentential meanings for their subsentential parts, and the same referents for their singular terms, but one is grounded and the other is not. Groundedness can depend on virtually any fact one can imagine, while meaningfulness does not. Thus, if one accepts that ungrounded sentences are meaningless, then one has to accept that whether a sentence is meaningful can depend on virtually any fact that one can imagine, and that is radically implausible.¹⁵ Therefore, Brandom should avoid any approach to the liar that implies ungrounded (or even paradoxical) sentences are meaningless.

I do not know whether a prosentential theory of truth can be made to work with the idea that ungrounded sentences are meaningful, but I am sceptical. It would require a new account of how sentences acquire their content from anaphoric antecedents. According to a prosentential theory, a sentence like ‘no sentence is both true and false’ acquires its content from all the sentences it quantifies over (including itself), so it would have to inherit its content (in part)

modal vocabulary (and it certainly appears to), then the absence of a theory of modal vocabulary in that work guarantees that the theory of meaning presented there is expressively incomplete. However, Brandom might hold out the hope that once the theory of meaning is augmented with the account of modality in *Between Saying and Doing*, it is expressively complete. It seems to me that this is the right interpretation of his motives. If so, then he still faces the problem I present in this paper.

¹⁴ Maudlin (2004) and Field (2003a, 2003b, 2005, Forthcoming). The details of their theories are irrelevant for my purposes.

¹⁵ The same point applies to paradoxical sentences as well.

from itself. I do not see any way to explain how this occurs. If that is right, then adopting either Maudlin's theory or Field's theory would force Brandom to give up the prosentential theory of truth.

The second problem (with replacing Kripke's theory with Maudlin's theory or Field's theory) is more subtle. Let us assume that Brandom can construct a version of the prosentential theory of truth that does not imply that ungrounded sentences are meaningless and that he replaces Kripke's theory with either Maudlin's theory or Field's theory. Brandom's new theory of meaning would be expressively complete (or at least, the objection presented here would not show that it is not expressively complete). However, there is still a problem with replacing Kripke's theory with either Maudlin's theory or Field's theory: both of them have to be restricted so that they do not apply to certain languages (e.g., languages with exclusion negation). That is, both of these approaches work only for particular artificial languages, and these languages do not contain certain expressive resources (e.g., exclusion negation, other non-monotonic sentential operators, strong truth predicates, idempotent determinacy operators, etc.).¹⁶ Maudlin makes the implausible claim that there is no such thing as these resources (presumably, what we take to be words that express them are meaningless), while Field says that they are meaningful but "not intelligible" (he does not elaborate on what he means by this).¹⁷ If one (e.g., Brandom) is in the business of providing a plausible theory of meaning, then one should probably avoid a theory that clearly does not apply to certain obviously meaningful expressions (e.g., exclusion negation and the rest), even if one does not need them to formulate the theory of meaning itself.

Instead of trading Kripke's theory for Maudlin's theory or Field's theory, there is one other alternative that might work: an inconsistency approach to the liar. On an inconsistency approach, people who possess the concept of truth are led to accept the premises and reasoning involved in the liar paradox by virtue of their competence with the concept of truth.¹⁸ There are several versions of this approach that have been proposed, and they avoid the problems faced by Maudlin's theory and Field's theory. Moreover, given Brandom's comments on words like 'Boche', an inconsistency approach to the liar seems like something he would find plausible.¹⁹ However, it is unclear whether they avoid revenge paradoxes all together. If they do, then one of these might be a good choice for Brandom. It is also unclear whether they are compatible with

¹⁶ There is also the dialethic approach to the liar (i.e., the one that implies that some sentences are both true and false); however, aside from the fact that it implies that some sentences are both true and false, it suffers from the same problems as Maudlin's theory and Field's theory. See Priest (2006) for details.

¹⁷ Maudlin (2004: 44) and Field (Forthcoming: §11)

¹⁸ See Eklund (2002, 2005, Forthcoming), Scharp (2005, Forthcoming a, Forthcoming b), and Patterson (Forthcoming a, Forthcoming b, Forthcoming c), for examples of inconsistency approaches to the liar.

¹⁹ 126, and Brandom (2001).

the prosentential theory of truth (although it seems to me that they are not). Thus, adopting one would probably require a new theory of truth.

One final alternative would be to agree with the inconsistency theorists that truth is a defective concept, and argue that Brandom's theory of meaning need not apply to discourse involving these concepts. This, in effect, would be to decide that he does not need any theory of truth at all. It seems to me that since 'true' is meaningful and Brandom is presenting a theory of meaning, his theory would need to work for 'true'. Thus, I do not see this line of thought as very promising.

In conclusion, Brandom's commitment to producing an expressively complete theory of meaning is incompatible with his choice of a broadly Kripkean approach to the liar paradox—the Kripkean account of groundedness guarantees that his theory of meaning does not apply to any language in which it can be formulated. He does have several options for rectifying this situation, but they all seem to require giving up his prosentential theory of truth. Moreover, the jury is still out on whether any of them can actually do the work he requires of them.²⁰

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