

Explicating as Distancing

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Logical locutions are characterised by Brandom as having two interlinked features. The first is that the abilities required to deploy such locutions are algorithmically elaborated from the abilities required to participate in an autonomous discursive practice. The second is that such locutions function to make explicit what is implicit in the performances and claims that feature in such an autonomous discursive practice.

Brandom endorses the following extension of this conception: it is possible for there to be an autonomous discursive practice that lacks logical locutions. This has been dubbed the 'layer-cake picture' of sapience, in the sense that, as in a layer-cake where each lower layer is able to stand independently of the one above it (but not the other way round), the layer of rationality in Brandom's model of sapience is able to stand independently of the logical layer (but not the other way round).

Many critics of Brandom have found this layer-cake picture unintelligible. According to these critics, the ability to make reasons explicit as reasons is required to be able to criticize them. Any social practice in which performers lack critical abilities, such as one lacking the logical locutions required to make reasons explicit, is not really a rational (discursive) practice at all.

This paper explores Brandom's uneasy relation to a (Kant-inspired) tradition that provides an obvious home for such a critique, a tradition for which the notion of rational freedom requires the ability to distance oneself from brute impulses. Brandom sometimes conveys the impression that his model of discursive practice should be treated as a development of the way of thinking about freedom captured by this tradition. The discussion here suggests instead that his model constitutes a significant departure from this tradition.

More specifically, it is argued that:

- (a) the notion of explication receives an alternative treatment when viewed within the trajectory of this tradition,
- (b) this treatment mandates the abandonment of the layer cake picture of sapience to which Brandom is committed, and that
- (c) abandoning this picture need not undermine the insight afforded by the conception of logical locutions as elaborated from, and explicative of, an autonomous discursive practice.

What emerges is an alternative understanding of explication as distancing, in which the abilities required to deploy rational and logical abilities are independent though interdependent aspects of our sapience. According to this, not every exercise of rationality need involve the deployment of distinctively logical locutions, but unless one has some logical capabilities that could be deployed, thereby allowing for critical self-reflection upon such an exercise, these exercises would not be instances of rationality.

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