EXTENDING AUTONOMY, FROM THE PRACTICAL TO THE PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL :
HOW TO THINK THE « WE »

Brandom and social practices from *Making it Explicit* to *A Spirit of Trust*

INTRODUCTION

- What are *we*? What are and who are the *we*-sayers?

- Brandom delivers an analysis of « the social practices that distinguish *us* as rational, concept-mongering creatures » (MIE, p.xi)

- What role does Brandom grant to social practices? An unexplained explainer?

INTRODUCTION

- Brandom lays out an analysis of the *social nature* of normativity. The good understanding of norms brings out their social nature.

  - *Criticism of regularism : normativity involves the deontic gap between what is taken as correct and what is correct.*

  - *Criticism of regulism : normativity involves knowing how to do something and not just that something is the case.*

- Grasping norms from social practices : neither sheer coercive structure, nor explicitly deontic orders

- Norms permit the justification *of mutual expectations* to pursue novel ends.

- From MIE to AST, there's a shift from practices-expressing norms to historically-determined norms.

- My argument consists in saying that there is a shift in the kind of sociality and individuality that Brandom sees as pivotal : from being subject *to norms* to being *normative subjects.*

OUTLINE

1. Setting the stage : What is it to be a *we*-sayer? How does the "We" get built?
2. Cognition as recognition
3. Rethinking modern autonomy

What is it to be a *we*-sayer? How does the "We" get built?

- Normativity rests on a certain articulation between the I and the We, between the individual and the group he belongs to.
  - For norms to obtain, there should be a rule-sanctioning social group. For otherwise, whatever seems right to anyone would be right.

- But the question duplicates itself :
  - *Not only are our discursive practices subject to norms but the kind of norms we should be sensitive to is also itself a normative question.*

- Brandom develops two forms of sociality in MIE. But both are raising issues :

1. I-We : There are *norms* sanctioned by the community – but we fail to see how these norms can be *social* norms.

2. I-Thou : Individuals can engage into meaningful *social* interactions – but we fail to see how these social interactions can be *norm*-governed.

1. I-We : There are norms sanctioned by the community – but we fail to see how these norms can be *social* norms.

(Against Kripke : community-wide version of the dispositional, regularist theory)

- There are norms sanctioned by the group but anyone who disagree with the group will be deprived of any justification to denounce the consensus.
  - *Disagreement brings about social exclusion for the question of who belong to the group is a factual question.*

2. I-Thou : Individuals can engage into meaningful *social* interactions – but we fail to see how these social interactions can be norm-governed.

- Norms have to do with the problem of coordination of actions. To Habermas, Brandom uncritically assimilates norms of rationality to norms of action.

- The argument is : *to be affected by a reason* is not the same thing *as to be obliged by a norm*.
  - *Norms of actions can only be criticized in the light of a nonnormative description of state of affairs.*

- Question is : how can the game of giving and asking for reasons be normative *all the way down? Meaning : comprising the theoretical sphere of reasons as well.*

Cognition as recognition

- In MIE, Brandom tried to reconcile two conditions that seem difficult to meet at the same time :
  - *The pragmatist condition, i.e., that we conceive of propositional content in the light of what we do when we commit ourselves to following them*
  - *The rational condition, i.e., that we can still secure an objectively rational notion of correctness*

- Brandom resorted to the Kantian grammar of autonomy to meet these two conditions :
  - I am only obligated to what I can *rationally* obligate myself to.

- This means that the *rational* content of the obligation must somehow be presupposed or, at least, that I know of it before acting.

- The argument of cognition as recognition : shift from the acknowledgement of the authority of norms (MIE) to recognition of the content of norms (AST)

- Decidedly Hegelian picture of autonomy – modernity as based on a two-fold process:
  - *Rationalization : what is true of something depends on what else is true (auxiliary hypotheses, laws of nature, and so on)*
  - *Socialization : to know what follows from what depends on what is recognized as the correct norm of justification.*

- Cognition as recognition is the achievement of self-consciousness : "The same structure that governs the relation between representings and representeds on the cognitive side of relations to objects governs the relation between normative attitudes and normative statuses on the recognitive side of relations to other objects" (MIE, p.348)

- **What implications does such a notion of cognition as recognition bear for thinking about autonomy?**

Pre-modern autonomy (contiguous structure) :

Autonomy	Heteronomy

Modern autonomy (replicated structure, cognition as recognition) :

Autonomy (Autonomy / Heteronomy)	Heteronomy

1. Pre-modern autonomy : autonomy as adjoining heteronomy

- Triadic structure of desire :
  - An attitude (hunger, thirst)
  - A responsive activity (eating, drinking)
  - A significance (food, beverage)

- If what was held to be an edible item actually fulfills my desire, then the significance that the object has is indeed the significance that I have attributed to the object, at least implicitly, as a means to an end, namely the satisfaction of my desire.

- Weak autonomy : I am autonomous just insofar as the world does not thwart my desire.

Note : there can be degrees, I can be more or less autonomous or heteronomous according to how the world lends itself to my responsive activity (or thwarts it).

2. Modern autonomy (replicated structure, cognition as recognition)

- The argument is :
  - *In recognitive practices, what is at stake is not so much the implicit attribution of significances corresponding to the desiring attitude but the institution of epistemic norms that are authoritative over our practices.*

- Brandom takes it that recognition involves the institution of epistemic norms that are authoritative over what we can do <u>as well as over what we can be committed to believing</u>.

Rethinking modern autonomy

- Modern autonomy is essentially normative. It is autonomy reduplicated with itself in relation to society. It involves, therefore, re-establishing heteronomy *within the scope of autonomy*.

- Modern autonomy is normative because it rests not on a moral imperative but on social expectations.

- Modern autonomy demands not just that we can justify what we do (as subject to norms) but that we can claim our right to what we do (normative subjects)

Why is the Kantian picture of autonomy flawed?

- It remains a prisoner of mastery.

- It ignores the recognitive dimension of any cognition.

- It falls short of understanding autonomy articulated as much theoretically as practically.

But how can autonomy also be articulated theoretically?

■ This is just what follows from a normative notion of autonomy. Why? Because justifying a norm of action is not only to institute my authority over the rule (as a practical agent), it is also to defend my right to that authority.

What does this mean for conceptualizing action? How to think about practical reasoning?

- This implies admitting the *social* character of any action.

- Intention (any pro-attitude) is not a psychological state distinct and independent from action. Intention reveals itself in and throughout action.

- Pro-attitudes only make explicit inferential commitments from a premise to a conclusion in a piece of practical reasoning. Therefore, pro-attitudes do not supplement an otherwise flawed or irrational reasoning.

- As a consequence : pro-attitudes play a role in justifying or producing actions. But, insofar as they justify actions, they also play a role in producing and justifying further beliefs that are just as important in articulating the content of the action.

- Taking into account the theoretical articulation of autonomy is taking into account the social nature of action.

Example : a group of workers going on strike to pressure employers to meet their grievances.

- *What kinds of pro-attitudes are used to account for this action?*
- *How do these pro-attitudes make explicit what the strikers are actually doing?*
- *And how is this determination of the practical reasoning attributed to the strikers subject to the interplay of perspectives involved in this situation?*

■ There are different stances according to the content of pro-attitudes that is recognitively instituted to express what the strikers are doing.

1. **Instrumental norm of preference** : whoever wills the end, wills the means. (socially detrimental opinion)

■ Whatever means are necessary to make the employer back down is what they are willing to do : threaten the employer, wreck production lines, harm customers while picketing and so on

2. **Institutional norms** : what they can be willing to do is to be licensed by those who share the same social status

■ Workers go on strike because each share a certain status with the others, which makes them mutually supportive, with a view to achieving certain ends (in this case, improving their working conditions).

3. **Unconditional norms** : what they can be willing to do is to be licensed by norms that should matter to anyone.

■ Asserting their right to their labor to the point of even depriving themselves of their salary

- Each norm, by producing a new description of the action, alters the authority that they have over their actions and their right to that authority. *It all hinges on the kind of pro-attitudes that is recognitively instituted to express what has effectively been done.*

- Normative autonomy does not demand that we can justify the norm of the action of what we did – as if the norm of action were merely found or came as a package with the action. Normative autonomy demand that we can justify our entitlement to that norm of action.

- Recognition is the institution of a conceptual content that gives individuals the right to exercise authority over what they do, i.e. to take responsibility for it.

  - *Consequence : To take the full measure of modern autonomy is precisely to take the full measure of what is heteronomous within autonomy.*

- The kind of conflicts that characterizes modern autonomy is not a conflict between two independently autonomous individuals.

- It is a conflict between individuals *as much as within each individual.*

- *What is conflict-stricken is not just the action that any individual exert over another individual. The very authority that one individual has over one's actions is also conflict-stricken.*

Conclusion

- Modern sociality : I in We and We in I, that duplication of the polarity autonomy/heteronomy with the scope of autonomy itself.

- Does Brandom understand its own radicality when it comes to thinking about autonomy as practically and theoretically articulated?