project, about Brandom’s views about what is required for a pragmatist to be an analytic philosopher. Brandom’s ‘pragmatists’ are thinkers like Wittgenstein and Dewey whose approach to logic and the analysis of meanings involves the descriptions of our practices in using words and concepts, identifying functions and uses.

One theme in his embrace of analytical philosophy is that this pragmatist approach can find room for ‘algebraic semantics’, formal semantics and rigorous uses of formal logic in studying language. As we saw, what makes ‘analytic pragmatism’ analytic is the fact that it is theoretical and systematic, freely making use of logic and Tarskian approaches to formal semantics. Some readers are likely to be uneasy about this, feeling that once they are presented with formal rigour and systematic ambitions, the originality and importance of much of Wittgenstein’s work is likely to be submerged. It is slightly curious that Brandom’s discussion of the pragmatists ignores the pragmatists who do just what the analytic pragmatist obtains credit for doing, notably C.I. Lewis and Peirce. Indeed, Peirce’s insistence that philosophy requires ‘minute logical analysis’ which exhibits ‘mathematical exactitude’, his development of systems of first-order logic and modal logic, and his pragmatist claim that the ultimate determinants of meanings are habits of inference and expectation which supplement definitions set out as necessary and sufficient conditions, suggest that Brandom’s pragmatist successor to analytical philosophy was already available by the turn of the century. We might conclude that Lewis and Peirce are analytic pragmatists; or we might conclude that the concern with systematic rigour is not sufficient for capturing the spirit of analytic philosophy. Perhaps Peirce’s is not an analytical philosophy because he saw a place in philosophy for a system of speculative metaphysics reminiscent of Schelling in order to vindicate his realism; and the systematic nature of Lewis’s approach to philosophy may explain why his work is seen as less ‘analytical’ than that of those who were influenced by him. But the suggestion that there is even more continuity between the pragmatists and analytical philosophy probably offers yet more support to Brandom’s thesis. But to suggest that at least some of the pragmatists had already headed in the direction that Brandom wants is to pursue.

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Belief about the Self: A Defense of the Property Theory of Content

By Neil Feit

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In this short, clear and engaging book, Neil Feit defends the unorthodox view that the contents of beliefs and other cognitive attitudes are properties, and not, as is usually held, propositions. The core of his argument has to do with de se beliefs, beliefs about
the self. Based on examples and arguments due to Perry (1979), Lewis (1979) and Chisholm (1981), along with considerations about internalism and physicalism, Feit offers a battery of arguments for the conclusion that the contents of de se beliefs cannot be propositions and therefore must be properties. For reasons of uniformity and simplicity Feit then extends this conclusion to all beliefs. So, according to Feit, the content of the de se belief that I am a philosopher is the property of being a philosopher, and my having this belief consists in my self-ascribing this property. For de dicto beliefs, believing that \( p \) is self-ascribing the property of being such that \( p \), and for de re beliefs, believing that \( x \) is \( F \) is (roughly) self-ascribing the property of bearing some relation of acquaintance \( R \) to something that is \( F \). For example, to have the de dicto belief that all men are mortal is to self-ascribe the property of being such that all men are mortal. To have the de re belief that Socrates is mortal is to bear some relation of acquaintance \( R \) uniquely to Socrates, and to self-ascribe the property of bearing \( R \) to something that is mortal.

Two of Feit’s arguments about de se belief are based on familiar examples, Perry’s messy shopper example and Lewis’s two gods example. These arguments depend on a rejection of what Feit calls ‘first-person propositions’. First-person propositions are belief contents that are available only to a single subject, e.g. the first-person proposition that I am a philosopher is something only I can believe or even entertain. Feit objects to the ‘very idea of a first-person proposition’ (13), arguing that such propositions are ‘implausibly ad hoc’ (31), and they violate ‘the idea that cognitive contents are objective, shareable entities’ (86). But one could have similar concerns about Feit’s own notion of self-ascription. Perry’s messy shopper ascribes the property of making a mess to himself when he sees himself in a mirror, but he does not yet self-ascribe this property. So self-ascribing a property is not the same as ascribing a property to oneself. What is it, then, to self-ascribe a property? Feit does not tell us; he thinks self-ascription is primitive. Note that, like first-person propositions, self-ascription is restricted to a single subject; just as only I can believe first-person propositions about myself, only I can self-ascribe properties to myself. To handle de se beliefs, then, both the orthodox doctrine of propositions and Feit’s property theory have to introduce something mysterious and ‘unshareable’, i.e. first-person propositions or self-ascription, and so it is unclear how much of an explanatory advantage we gain by adopting the property theory.

A more basic problem for Feit’s property theory is that properties cannot determine the truth values of beliefs and therefore cannot fulfill a central role of belief contents. To see this, let us look at another of Feit’s arguments, which aims to show that the doctrine of propositions is inconsistent with internalism, the view that psychological properties supervene on intrinsic physical properties. If the property theory is neutral about internalism, as Feit maintains, then we have reason to prefer the less committal property theory.

The argument is based on an example. Suppose Tim and Tom share all of their intrinsic physical properties, both come to believe ‘I am a millionaire’, and all of Tim’s beliefs are true but Tom is not a millionaire. Here is the argument (46):

1. Assume for reductio that (a) internalism and (b) the doctrine of propositions are true.
2. :: Tim and Tom share all of their psychological properties [from (1a)].
3. :: Tim has a belief with a given content if and only if Tom does [from (2)].
For every proposition $P$, Tim believes $P$ if and only if Tom believes $P$ [from (1b) and (3)].

All of Tim’s beliefs are true.

All of Tom’s beliefs are true [from (4) and (5)].

Tom falsely believes that he is a millionaire.

All of Tom’s beliefs are true, but not all Tom’s beliefs are true [from (6) and (7)].

One might wonder, though, why the same argument does not apply to Feit’s property theory [just substitute ‘property’ for ‘proposition’ in (1) and (4)]. Feit’s answer could only be that the inference from (4) and (5) to (6) comes out invalid on the property theory. Even though Tim and Tom self-ascribe exactly the same properties, the truth values of their beliefs can be different. But this just highlights the fact that the properties you self-ascribe do not determine the truth values of your beliefs. This is a good reason for thinking that properties can not be belief contents, since, as Feit himself emphasizes, determining the truth value of a belief is ‘the job of the content of your belief’ (73).

The real problem here is the simple fact that properties do not have truth values and so are not suited to be the contents of beliefs. Feit is aware of this problem, of course, but he underestimates its seriousness. He thinks that the fact that ‘a given property is true of the things that have it’ (24) is enough to make sense of the ‘platitude that the contents of our beliefs and desires are capable of being or false’ (24). But, the fact that a property is true of an object does not make the property true or false. It is rather something like the pair of the object and property that has a truth value, and such a pair looks an awful lot like a proposition.

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References

Learning from Words

BY JENNIFER LACKEY

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While much of our knowledge relies on testimony or the words of others, until recently few philosophers had much to say about the nature of testimony or how we learn from another’s words, but testimony has now become a popular topic. Jennifer Lackey’s Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge is a useful and intelligent guide, a well informed and appreciative but critical and provocative commentary on a large and growing body of literature.