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A DEFENSE OF AN INFERENTIALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY: COMMITMENTS, INCOMPATIBILITIES, AND ENTITLEMENTS

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Keywords: Metaphilosophy. History of Philosophy. Appropriationism. Contextualism. Brandom.

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Resumo: Mesmo que neguemos qualquer tipo de excepcionalismo à filosofia como empreendimento intelectual (ver Williamson, 2007), parece fácil conceder que, pelo menos no que diz respeito às relações com sua própria história, a filosofia é diferente de outros campos do conhecimento (ver Williamson, 2018). No entanto, questões relacionadas ao escopo, papel e validade da história da filosofia para a atividade filosófica são tão antigas quanto a própria filosofia, além de se tornarem relevantes no chamado *parting of ways* entre as tendências analítica e hermenêutico-fenomenológica. No entanto, é possível dizer que, pelo menos desde a segunda metade do último século, temos visto uma inflexão importante sobre o lugar e a importância da história da filosofia na filosofia contemporânea: tanto por causa da "virada histórica" na filosofia analítica, com obras de Strawson, Sellars e, mais recentemente, Brandom, servindo como bons exemplos desse movimento, quanto pelo interesse recentemente renovado em questões de metafilosofia. Um exemplo desse segundo movimento é o debate entre os chamados apropriacionistas e os contextualistas. Portanto, este artigo tem como objetivo analisar os dois principais argumentos contra as reconstruções racionais - o GTRC e a acusação de anacronismo - e oferecer uma defesa de uma abordagem inferencialista para a história da filosofia, com base no trabalho de Robert Brandom, que é simultaneamente aberto a certo contextualismo, bem como estabelece parâmetros para as reconstruções racionais.

Palavras-chave: Metafilosofia. História da Filosofia. Apropriacionismo. Contextualismo. Brandom.

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A DEFENSE OF AN INFERENTIALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY: COMMITMENTS, INCOMPATIBILITIES, AND ENTITLEMENTS

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Abstract: Even if we deny any kind of exceptionalism to philosophy as an intellectual enterprise (see Williamson, 2007), it seems easy to concede that, at least concerning relations with its own history, philosophy is different from other fields of knowledge (see Williamson, 2018). However, questions regarding the scope, role and validity of the history of philosophy for philosophical activity are as old as philosophy itself, as well as becoming relevant in the so-called "parting of ways" between analytic and hermeneutic phenomenological trends. However, it is possible to say that, at least since the second half of the last century, we have seen an important inflection about the place and importance of the history of philosophy in contemporary philosophy: both because of the "historical turn" in analytical philosophy, with works by Strawson, Sellars and, more recently, Brandom, serving as good examples of such a movement, and due to the recently renewed interest in questions of metaphilosophy. An example of this second movement is the debate between the so-called appropriationists and contextualists. Hence, this paper sets out to analyze the two main arguments against rational reconstructions - the GTRC and the causation of anachronism - and offer a defense of an inferentialist approach to the history of philosophy, based on Robert Brandom's work, which is simultaneously open to certain contextualism, as well as establishing parameters for rational reconstructions.

Keywords: Metaphilosophy. History of Philosophy. Appropriationism. Contextualism. Brandom.

Introduction[2]

Even if we deny any sort of exceptionalism when it comes to philosophy as an intellectual enterprise – as a paradigmatic case, see Williamson, 2007 –, it seems easy to concede that, at least regarding the relations philosophy has with its own history, it is different somehow in comparison to other fields – for instance, the same Williamson now in Williamson, 2018 (p. 98-110). However, issues concerning the scope, role and validity of the history of philosophy for doing philosophy are as old as philosophy itself. Looking from a more recent standpoint, such a set of problems was also an important part of the broader "parting of ways" (see Friedman, 2000) between analytic and hermeneutic phenomenological

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trends in contemporary philosophy, being well-known the anti-historic stance one of the trademarks of the former during part of 20th century. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that, at least since the second half of the last century, we have seen an important shift concerning the role of such questions in contemporary philosophy. Firstly, even analytic philosophy passed through a "historical turn" (see Reck, 2013) stressing the philosophical relevance of the understanding of both its own history and the possible connections to the history of philosophy broadly conceived, having in Strawson's (1966) and Sellars' (for example, 1975) works, and more recently in Brandom's (2002; 2019), good examples of it. At the same time, present-day renewed interest in metaphilosophical questions brought to the surface, once again, the debates about how we should approach the history of philosophy in a philosophically fruitful way. Hence, beyond the quarrel about the validity and importance of the history of philosophy for dealing with current discussions about philosophical problems, there is a whole set of issues concerning the most profitable way to do it.

One remarkable *tópos* for such discussions is the clash between the contextualism and appropriationism standpoints (see Della Rocca, 2015; Garber, 2015a; 2015b; Mercer, 2019). Revisiting and explaining in detail those methodological and hermeneutical positions are not my goal here. Instead, I have a narrower objective. Departing from two main criticisms made by defenders of contextualism (I am thinking explicitly in Mercer's arguments), which usually play a major role in the debate – the "Getting the Things Right Constraint" (GTRC) and the anachronism charge –, I want to present some features of Robert Brandom's inferentialist approach to the history of philosophy as a defense of such a hermeneutic perspective which, as far as understand it, is not another form of the "old" rational reconstruction but is a semantic stance and, as such, an inferentialist historiography is both immune to those criticisms and can provide some good answers to them.

1 Rational reconstruction and its discontents: two main criticisms

Departing from the Kantian distinction between *quid juris* and *quid facti*, late 19th century-early 20th century philosophers derived some analogous differentiations which would work both as philosophical and metaphilosophical-hermeneutical stances. Hence, whether Lotze's distinction between genesis (*Genese*) and validity (*Geltung*) or Frege's separation between psychological and logical (see Frege, 1997, p. 90), but also Russell's differentiation between a psychological explanation of a given philosopher (in such a case, Leibniz) and "[…] what he holds to be a body of philosophic truth" (Russel, 2005, p. xx), what we have is an interpretative approach whose main goal is unveiling – Beaney prefers "exhibiting" (2013, p. 253) – the logical structure or scheme of a body of knowledge under any form of literary costume. So far, so good.

However, such a move entails at least two theses about the "[…] bodies of knowledge or conceptual schemes" (Beaney, 213, p. 253) which could be – and, in fact, were – seen as deeply controversial, namely: (1) the independence and even the precedence of logical structure over the actual "literary costume", and (2) derived from it, the possibility that such logical structure and its contents can be rearranged, rectified and amended for matching other criteria (clarity, connections with another set of claims, etc.).

Both claims raised a lot of discussion during the last decades and the matter seems to be far from settled. Especially when it comes to the task of interpreting canonical philosophers from the past, the clash is pretty evident: by claiming that we could, at least as an interpretative mental experiment, separate the logical content from the form, it seems to be taking the risk of saying the actual form of such content is unnecessary or even superfluous. And as we know, for those who engage in the history of philosophy, such a stance is not only something like a heresy, but it is one of the biggest mistakes one can do when it comes to reading texts. It is mainly against that set of consequences that the defenders of what has been called "Contextualism" raised their weapons. As I've mentioned earlier, my purpose here is not to fully discuss the criticism but take two arguments that are paradigmatic in that discussion, namely, the Getting The Things Right Constraint (GTRC) and the charge of anachronism against the so-called

"Appropriationists". The reason for picking them is twofold: they epitomize the core of the usual criticisms and are present in recent discussions on the theme (see Mercer, 2019 and the special issue of Hungarian Philosophical Review (2022) entirely dedicated to the subject).

1.1 What does "right" mean?

The question about how to understand and evaluate philosophers' ideas through reading or listening to them brings to the surface the problem of how it would be possible to accurately grasp their theoretical positions. Of course, the debate about "getting the things right" (GTR) when it comes to reading texts from the past is not new – in fact, there is a venerable tradition that spans from Augustine to Schleiermacher – but has got new chapters during the 20th century, especially after what we could name as the historical turn in analytic philosophy (see Reck, 2013). Different approaches have been championed since then according to distinct emphasis on the historical context and the thematic or problematic aspects. Currently, one can say we have on the one hand, philosophers who understand the GTR as a hermeneutic principle that can be matched primarily by accurate contextual reconstruction, which mainly means the understanding of historical and textual layers of the interpreted object and, on the other, those who are not primarily concerned to the GTR as the guiding principle since they have as their main goals the logical reconstruction of

philosophers' claims having in mind current problems and a contemporary standpoint. The scenario I just have depicted seems to be a fair description of how it is usually seen nowadays. As Mercer (2019) puts it, the main difference between those two groups of philosophers rests in the acceptance or rejection of explicit criteria, namely, the GTR constraint (GTRC), which can be rendered as follows: "Historians of philosophy should not attribute claims or ideas to historical figures without concern for whether or not they are ones the figures would recognize as their own" (p. 530). However, framing that difference in such terms seems to be controversial, for at least two reasons.

Firstly, relying on the idea of a "right", and, consequentially, a "wrong" interpretation demands that one must provide a parameter to judge between the two. Well, if our goal is precisely to adjudicate philosophers' positions concerning a given subject, how can we be able, ultimately, to admit as criteria what they would or would not "recognize as their own" in advance? In other words, in order to be able to distinguish between those claims one would recognize as their own and those one would not, we should know in advance what type of claims one could accept. But that is precisely what we are looking for. Here one could still say that we could find at least some guidelines for that differentiation assuming internal consistency as a hermeneutical presupposition. However, against what must the consistency of a statement be checked? If the answer to the last question depends in any sense on a sort of exclusivism regarding what a philosopher wrote or said, then the judgment between "right" or "wrong" interpretation cannot be done unless we solve a second problem.

The "GTR constraint", as Mercer puts forward in the quotation above, draws its main idea from the classical Skinner's formula: "[…] no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done" (Skinner, 1969, p. 28)[3]. Hence, we can understand that a "right" interpretation or account of someone's beliefs is what one could accept as a "correct description" of his beliefs. However, when it comes to philosophers from the past, for whom we cannot actually ask if a given statement or interpretation matches what they consider to be a "correct description", interpreters usually resort to their works in order to proceed with the evaluation. Up to this point, it seems that the main hermeneutic principle is a sort of coherentism, i.e., the new claims coming from the interpreter must be coherent with others we already know and, this is the important core of it, such a coherence shall be assessed against a background of the philosopher's previous claims, which can be found exclusively in his works. But how should we understand the concept of someone's "work"? What should be taken into account? Before we get to consider an answer to that question, let us take a look at

[3] As the text continues, Skinner himself acknowledges the possibility that an external observer may be "[…] in a position to give a fuller or more convincing account" (1969, p. 29) of the other's thought. However, such a better account cannot be built or made upon elements not available to the interpreted author.

the second type of criticism directed against rational reconstructions which, in fact, is deeply connected to the one I am dealing with now, namely, the danger of anachronism[4].

1.2 In defense of time-travel philosophy

The idea behind the accusation of anachronism is quite straightforward and does not seem to demand a sophisticated philosophical explanation. It seems to be obvious that something is wrong when we look at the past through today's lenses and interpret and evaluate the sayings and actions of people from the past against our standards. In a broader scenario, discussions about anachronism are the order of the day. Every now and then, politicians, artists, authors and thinkers from past ages are judged, usually by what are seen as reprehensible moral stances nowadays. Consequently, one could discredit Aristotle for taking slavery as rooted in nature or Hume for saying he had good reasons to think that black people are inferior. However, some would defend such past figures precisely by saying that, in doing that, we would be projecting our current views on men and women who would be justified by their cultural and moral contexts and circumstances, i.e., by evaluating them in such a manner, one is indulging in anachronism. Hence, anachronism is a sort of barrier that would prevent us from disrupting time (and place) variables when confronting ideas from the past.

The general straightforward depiction of the role of anachronism in hermeneutic debates given above gets another detail and theoretical layers when it comes to the interpretation of past philosophers, precisely because it is combined with the GTR argument I have been discussing so far. Combined with that bundle of hermeneutic presuppositions which would make us able to get things right, including Skinner's *motto*, avoiding anachronism became a type of dogma when it comes to dealing with the history of philosophy. In the same spirit as Martial Guéroult's and Victor Goldschmidt's systematic structuralism[5], anachronism is supposed to prevent us from penetrating the borders of a philosophical system or work. However, such a move also precludes two important hermeneutic moves, namely, assessing their truth and taking them as a source of philosophical contributions to present questions.

I do not intend to get into a detailed debate about those two aspects, but a few remarks on them are necessary. Firstly, the view that philosophical theories and works must be understood and interpreted only by their own standards and looking only for internal coherence excludes questions like "Is it true?" from the set of questions one could address to a theory or work. In other words, if the only set of auxiliary or collateral premises we can use for interpreting a philosopher from the past must be found inside the borders of the philosopher's

[4] I present another perspective on this debate, drawing from Brentano, in Ferreira (2022).

[5] The classic *tópoi* for systematic structuralism in the history of philosophy are Gueroult's *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons* and Goldschmidt's *Questions platoniciennes,* in the famous essay "Temps historique et temps logique dans l'interprétation des systèmes philosophiques." For a good summary of the main lines of it, see Crocco (2005).

work or historical context (whose borders are themselves very hard to delineate)[6], then we cannot collate it with "data" beyond it (i.e., any other set of auxiliary premises) to evaluate if what he says is true, which means the quest for truth is always system/theory relative.

Furthermore, beyond the quest for truth, questions like "How is it related to x?", "x" being a problem or theme of present-day philosophy, are also *a priori* forbidden, since they violate the time-context barrier. From that perspective, there are two main ways of being anachronistic, namely, soft and hard anachronism

One can be accused of soft anachronism whenever she looks at a past philosopher's thought departing from theoretical interests which are posterior in time, trying to figure out what would be the stance or position adopted by the interpreted philosopher. On the other hand, hard anachronism seems to be even more dangerous, since it happens when one starts out from a current problem or set of problems, which could not be available to the philosopher from the past (due mainly to the temporal gap) and look into his theoretical commitments for any contributions he could provide to the current *status quæstionis*. As I am depicting it, the main difference between soft and hard anachronism rests upon how one engages a philosopher from the past in current discussions; if only to reframe or translate his ideas and thoughts in a contemporary (from the interpreter's chronological point of view) fashion or to turn the philosopher from the past into a theoretical agent or player in the present. Of course, one can do both and the "hard" form includes the "soft" one, but not the other way round: one can only entertain the question about if Aquinas would be an actualist in metaphysics ("actualism" being a contemporary term of art, non-existent during Aquinas' lifetime), but could go deeper and try to see if and how Aquinas' account of the notions of *existentia* and *esse*, as well as his arguments about such an ontological difference, can contribute to the current debates on such topics.

At this point, as one can suppose, it is clear I do not think either the "getting things right" approach or the criticism against anachronism as depicted above are fully defensible as hermeneutic perspectives, especially if they are used to rule out their "opposites" candidates. But does it mean that getting things right – without quotation marks – does not matter at all? Or that "everything goes" when it comes to manipulating what philosophers from the past wrote or thought? Absolutely not. There is a safe and profitable way of doing "time-travel" philosophy, as well as there is a way of trying to get things right beyond those strict boundaries, namely, assuming what I am calling "inferentialist historiography" mainly based upon Robert Brandom's inferentialism.

[6] I am leaving aside the serious problem of the "demarcation" of those borders.

2 De Dicto and De Re historiography

When it comes to the question of how to read and interpret texts, rivers of ink were poured. From Augustine to Schleiermacher, from Gadamer to the present-day discussions between "contextualists" and "presentists", the whole set of problems I am dealing with here is not new and one can hardly say that those problems are solved. Thus, I do not intend to claim I am presenting new solutions or bringing new light. What I do intend here is making some remarks to bring to the surface some ideas, presuppositions and clues which sometimes become obstacles to the task of interpreting others' ideas when they become unclear or remain in the shadow.

There is a very simple question, almost a naïve one, which must be kept in the foreground of that quarrel, whose answer is usually seen as so obvious and so self-evident that it is never really asked; namely: what do we intend when we are interpreting others' ideas? Of course, we can have other formulations of it, like: "What are our goals when we read someone's texts?"; or: "What do I want to achieve by interpreting x?". Notice that in all the examples I am deliberately avoiding the use of the term "meaning", in questions like: "What is the meaning of what I am reading?". It does not mean (unintended pun) that I think trying to "discover" ("or create") meaning is not important or should not be part of what we do, at least as a regulative principle, when we are interpreting or trying to understand other's ideas. Rather I think a very important dimension of the quarrel I have mentioned above involves not being explicit as to what our objectives are.

Firstly, because shedding some light upon what we have as our interpretive goals help us to evaluate, balance and make explicit what we can name as our "semantic responsibility". By semantic responsibility, I mean taking due responsibility for the interpretive consequences of our interpretative role (which, as we will see, may vary). For instance, if what I want when reading Aquinas is to know whether we could name his metaphysical stance "actualism" or not, it must be clear – not only for me, but also for any possible interlocutor – what are the rules of the game I am playing and, therefore, what are the meaning and extension of my hermeneutic moves. Following the example above, if it is clear I am making "a *comparison* between a 20th-century metaphysical stance and Aquinas' metaphysical stance regarding the ontological status of non-actual entities," it is hard to support, for instance, an anachronism charge, if by it one means I am putting into Aquinas' mouth words he could never use, mainly because I am comparing two metaphysical positions regarding what I – the interpreter – explicitly take as stances about the same subject, namely, "the ontological status of non-actual entities."

Here, the anachronism watchman could make the objection that it is precisely here that the problem lies, namely, Aquinas and I are not talking about the same subject. The following question "Why not?" could get two different types of answers: (a) because due

to the fact, actualism is a 20th-century philosophy term; Aquinas, in the 13th century, could never think or talk about that; or (b) because actualism deals with non-actual entities in a different way than Aquinas did, he is not talking about the same subject. Clearly, (a) does not apply for two reasons: (a') the supposed tangency point is not in the use of the term in itself, but in what it could mean (and what it means leads us to the (b) answer), and (a") the comparison only makes sense as a comparison starting from the fact we are assuming some kind of difference between the two compared items; here, the difference consists precisely in their chronological distance. In other words, (a) cannot be a problem or an accusation if we have clearly stated the difference – here, the chronological one – as an initial presupposition that shall rule our comparison.

Concerning the second type of answer, however, things become even more interesting, because in trying to prove (b), one must provide reasons to differentiate between Aquinas's approach to non-actual beings and 20th metaphysicians', which is precisely our initial goal. Actually, such a form of accusation of anachronism, in order to provide reasons, does the very thing it would like to prohibit. If one says that Aquinas' distinctions between *esse* and *existentia*, and between *essentia* and *existentia,* depend on the ontological difference between God and creatures, and not on the ontological status of possible entities or worlds and, therefore, Aquinas is not talking about the same subject as 20th-century actualists or non-actualists, one is making a hermeneutic move in the game of comparing Aquinas and actualism, namely, providing an argument against such an identification. From here, whether we provide a counterargument or acknowledge the truth of that one, we are going further on the task of "comparing a 20th-century metaphysical stance and Aquinas' metaphysical stance regarding the ontological status of non-actual entities".

On the contextualist defender of the GTRC's side, the accusation could be formulated in the following terms: whether one reckons that Aquinas is an actualist or not, such an enterprise is doomed from the start, since it cannot, by its very perspective, grasp what Aquinas, as a historically determined philosopher, thought. Now the one who is trying to evaluate Aquinas's metaphysical standpoint, against the background of actualism, finds himself in a very odd situation: if by the accusation of not getting things right (in this case, Aquinas' thought) one means "the historically determined philosopher thought", with his contextual circumstances taken in a hard Ortega y Gasset's fashion – "I am myself and my circumstances" –, of course then it is true, mainly because that was not the explicit goal from the beginning. But if the accusation of not getting things right means that one cannot grasp what Aquinas thought by putting it against the metaphysical background of actualism, the interpreter then should ask: "Why not?"; and we are, once again, facing two horns very similar to those presented for the anachronism watchman.

At this point, both the GTRC and the anachronism watchmen could be a little bit confused about that sort of rabbit hole in which they end up supporting the very standpoint they would like to defeat. But more than simply displaying a kind of dead end of those criticisms, what interests me is to focus on the reasons why, in those two cases above, the question "Why not?", when it seeks to grasp the reasons by which some statement is or is not accurate[7] concerning a philosopher from the past, seems to lead us to a theoretical place where we are, somehow, constrained to see a rational connection between certain propositions, ideas, or statements and, mainly, how it can be a valuable tool for doing the history of philosophy.

Exploring the totality of Brandom's philosophy of language would get us too far from my purposes here. However, I think it is possible to reconstruct some of its main aspects which provide us the necessary framework for understanding the hermeneutic approach which emerges from his theses. The keystone can be seen in Brandom's inferential concept of rationality; for such a model, "[…] to be rational is to be a producer and consumer of reasons: things that can play the role of both premises and conclusions of inferences. So long as one can assert and infer, one is rational" (TMD, 2002, p. 6)[8].

The centrality of inference in Brandom's thought has several ramifications in logic and semantics, but for my purpose of shedding light on the underlying hermeneutic structure for making explicit theoretical commitments, it is fundamental to notice that the task of specifying the content of a claim or a statement means to specify their inferential relations. In Brandom's words,

> To specify the inferential content associated with a sentence, one must, to begin with, indicate the role it plays (in relation to the contents expressed by other sentences) in three different sorts of broadly inferential structure: committive inferences, permissive inferences, and incompatibilities. Doing so is saying what it follows from, what follows from it, and what it precludes or rules out (Brandom, MIE, 1994, 188; see TMD, 2002, 7ff).

Hence, there are three basic *genera* of relations between propositions in the inferential framework, namely, commitment, entitlement and incompatibility. It is important to have in mind that one of the main aspects of that inferential structure is its normativity. Recognizing the inferential connections between propositions means also recognizing the "deontic" aspect of such connections under penalty of losing the very meaning of rationality itself. Hence, we

[7] Harrelson (2014, p. 8) affirms that the type of philosophical historiography which follows from Brandom's inferentialism should abandon adjectives like "accurate", "correct", or "faithful." I do not think it is a necessary consequence of Brandom's approach. Accuracy and correctness are perfectly mensurable against a set of explicit hermeneutic rules or auxiliary premises, as I will further elaborate later.

[8] See also Sellars' (1953) classic approach to material inferences (as not being enthymemes in disguise).

could say that those three kinds of inferential relations are the privileged form of rationality as understood through the inferentialist prism[9].

As a consequence of the concept of rationality above, taken together with the thesis that the content of a sentence depends on the role it plays in the web of inferential relations with other sentences, "[i]nterpreting states, performances, and expressions as semantically or intentionally contentful is understood as attributing to their occurrence an ineliminably normative pragmatic significance" (MIE, 1994, p. xiii)[10]. Therefore, we can say that in order to correctly interpret someone's utterances, one must be able to keep a "score" of that set of relations that maps those attributing modes which happen as commitments, entitlements and incompatibilities. And necessity is implicated not only in the fact that the very act of interpreting essentially demands the act of scorekeeping the inferential attributions, but mainly in the fact that those tracked attributions are not only descriptive about what are the contingent nodes in the inferential web of connections, but they track what they must be. Necessity relies upon the rules of material inferences, but also upon the social norms of linguistic use and expression. Thus, we can say that those two sets of rules and norms, namely, the pragmatics of the well-trained user of a language, play for Brandom the same role as transcendental deduction plays for Kant, i.e., displaying the normative source from which all normativity emerges.

If we understand the normative aspect of inferential attributions, we are apt to (1) grasp the rational strength and the general meaning of inferential commitments, entitlements and incompatibilities:

> **Commitment**$_{=df.}$ the mode of attribution which consists of deductive material inferences;
>
> **Entitlement**$_{=df.}$ the mode of attributions which consists of permission to infer "b" from "a";
>
> **Incompatibility**$_{=df.}$ the mode of attribution which consists in ruling out or precluding the entitlement of one claim from another[11].

And (2) understand the *deontic* aspect of such attributions since they do not depend on the expression nor on the acknowledgment by the subject to whom such propositional attitudes are attributed. In a very illuminating excerpt, Brandom says:

[9] For Brandom's account of the inferential conception of rationality, see TMD, 2002, p. 6ff.

[10] Moreover, it is also interesting to notice that the inferentialist view about rationality makes explicit what reason inserts into the natural world, namely, those normative connections; in fact, as Brandom says, "[t]he natural world does not come with commitments and entitlements in it; they are products of human activity." (MIE, 1994, p. xiv).

[11] See Brandom, TMD, 2002, p. 7-8.

> According to one usage, I believe only what I think I believe, what I take myself to believe. I do not believe things behind my back; my sincere avowals are authoritative with respect to what I believe. According to another usage, however, I believe the consequences of my beliefs, whether I think I do or not. For my acknowledged beliefs can commit me to more than I acknowledge; *so I can end up with beliefs I do not know I have. Also, my actions, perhaps together with avowed preferences, may commit me to certain claims* (Brandom, MIE, 1994, p. 507. Italics are mine).

Therefore, we have some important consequences, both for the understanding of what "meaning" means for the inferential model of rationality, and for the discussion about those two criticisms, GTRC and anachronism:

a. The meaning of a claim or a set of claims can only be fully unfolded when we keep a score of its connections to other claims or sets of claims through those three types of inferential relations;

b. Since the process of making explicit the whole map of commitments, entitlements and incompatibilities of a claim or set of claims can only be done in time, that process is necessarily historical.

c. Therefore, from (a), whatever the meaning of "getting things right" is, it must include a scorekeeping of inferential commitments, entitlements and incompatibilities of a claim or a set of claims, as well as, since (b), the understanding of a claim or a set of claims must be necessarily open, in time, for new evaluations against different sets of auxiliary premises, including those that will come to be in the future.

Those three consequences open the space for exploring the two categories of ascriptions which Brandom puts forward, namely, De Dicto and De Re.

2.1. De Dicto and De Re Ascriptions

Of the several results of Brandom's inferentialism, his account of the distinction between De Dicto and De Re ascriptions, as well as its possible consequences for understanding the history of philosophy in a more kaleidoscopic way, are among the most impactful.

The notion of intentional content as inferential commitment presented above allows us to normatively (deontically) bind being rational to accepting ascriptions of propositional content following inferential rules. It means that being rational includes having to accept what is inferentially connected to our claims as an inseparable dimension of the meaning of what we think and communicate. Hence, Brandom's account of the forms of ascriptions,

namely De Dicto and De Re, helps us to clarify our inferential commitments for ourselves – make them explicit – but also to understand the length and the scope of what we think and say.

A good entry point for the distinction between De Dicto and De Re ascriptions, i.e., "[…] propositionally explicit attributions" (Brandom, MIE, 1994, p. 504), is the difference between *substitutional* and *inferential* commitments (see Brandom, Mie, p. 506). When the ascriptions depend on the set of collateral or auxiliary propositions which, according to the ascriber, the target of the ascription acknowledges as being committed to, we have a De Dicto ascription. (see Brandom, MIE, 1994, p. 506). The acknowledgment of the target of ascription plays the role of a sort of semantic warranty that the ascription works well as a substitution of the original claim. However, when the ascription is made drawing inferences considering the set of auxiliary propositions that the ascriber takes as true or endorses, but the target of the ascription may or may not take as true or endorse, we have a De Re ascription. Here, the content which is being specified is taken as inferentially *really* following from one's claim, whether one acknowledges it or not. The point of De Re ascription is that the ascriber does not need outside acknowledgment as a sort of warranty; such warranty is given by his own set of auxiliary claims plus the inference rules.

Consider someone's following ascriptions about triangles:

(1) "S believes that the sum of the internal angles of every triangle equals 180º";

If such a person is familiar with angular measurements and classifications, as well as with basic laws of arithmetic, she can acknowledge that

(2) "S believes that the sum of the internal angles of every triangle equals two right angles"

follows from (1) and, in fact, works as a good substitutional statement, since she knows, by being familiar with angles classifications, as well as with basic laws of arithmetic, and having them as a valid set of auxiliary propositions, that "right angle" means the same as "90° angle" and that 90 x 2 = 180. However, differently from us, our ascription target is not familiar with Euclid's *Elements*. She does not have Euclid's axioms and propositions in her set of auxiliary premises. Notwithstanding, whether she acknowledges it or not

(3) S is committed to the truth of Euclid's proposition I. 32.

Thus, (2) is a De Dicto ascription, insofar (3) is a De Re.

As definitions of both forms, we can have:

De Dicto$_{=df.}$ an inferential conceptual interpretation or specification of a claim through appealing only to collateral premises or auxiliary hypotheses that are coacknowledged with that claim (see Brandom, TMD, 2002, p. 97).

De Re$_{=df.}$ an inferential conceptual ascription of what really inferentially follows from the premises, even against a different background or starting from a different set of auxiliary hypotheses that are now supplied by what the interpreter, rather than the author, holds to be true (see Brandom, TMD, 2002, p. 109).

Now, two more aspects are especially relevant to my aims here. Firstly, since De Re ascriptions make explicit what one *should* acknowledge as an inferential consequence of her sayings and thoughts, such a form of the content specification is normative, which means, they are an inescapable part of the meaning of what one is saying or thinking, and bringing them to the surface is essential to unfold such a content. Therefore, De Re ascriptions are not only an accidental or contingent consequence, but it is absolutely necessary for the uncovering of others' beliefs. In Brandom's words, "[b]eing able to understand what others are saying, in the sense that makes their remarks available for use as premises in one's own inferences, depends precisely on being able to specify those contents in de re, and not merely de dicto, terms." (Brandom, MIE, 1994, p. 513).

Secondly, it means that, when it comes to understanding and evaluating past philosophers' thought in a deeper and broader manner, De Re ascriptions are not an optional tool or a fun way of playing with some other philosopher's texts, but an essential aspect of doing history of philosophy, unless we are ready to leave aside a large chunk of what those philosophers have to say. [As Brandom says, "It follows from this way of thinking about meaning that besides encompassing de dicto intellectual historiography, we ought also to acknowledge the legitimacy of de re textual interpretation." (Brandom, TMD, 2002, p. 102)]

Postscriptum on a presupposition: Inferentialist Historiography as a Descriptive Historiography

Considering those two main arguments against all the types of rational reconstructions when it comes to the history of philosophy, it seems to me that, besides the arguments in themselves, there is a presupposition that is not always explicit but is always "in motion" somehow. As I see it, the hidden part of the iceberg can be described as a sort of "feeling" which can be grasped properly using P. F. Strawson's famous distinction between "descriptive" and "revisionary" metaphysics (Strawson, 1959, p. 9-14). What partially moves the critics of

something along the lines of an inferential historiography of philosophy is that they feel it as a sort of "revisionary" enterprise, as if the "reconstructor" were some type of "reformer" trying to shake the ground underneath their feet. That type of feeling starts a spark of defensiveness against what they see as an enemy of orthodoxy. However, I do not think that "revisionary" *Stimmung* is a necessary feature or even a consequence of an inferentialist approach to the history of philosophy. On the contrary, the idea behind it is unfolding what is considered to be "already there". *Inferentialist historiography is, actually, descriptive historiography.* We can use the same words Strawson uses in descriptive metaphysics to describe an inferentialist approach to the history of philosophy:

> If there are no new truths to be discovered, there are old truths to be rediscovered. For though the central subject-matter of descriptive metaphysics does not change, the critical and analytical idiom of philosophy changes constantly […]No philosopher understands his predecessors until he has re-thought their thought in his own contemporary terms; and it is characteristic of the very greatest philosophers, like Kant and Aristotle, that they, more than any others, repay this effort of re-thinking (Strawson, 1959, p. 10-11).

Therefore, an inferentialist approach to the history of philosophy cannot be seen only as a mere form of rational reconstruction as such a form of reconstruction is traditionally understood. The difference that makes a difference is that by mapping commitments, entitlements and incompatibilities, we are not only extracting the logical form (and logical content) from their literary costume, but inserting them into the "space of reasons" (Sellars, 1997; Brandom, 1995). It means identifying and connecting claims (by philosophers from the past, for instance) in a meaningful chain where claims made would be reasons for other claims or would be reasons for them (see Brandom, 1995). As I said before, this is not violence to the text, but a necessary way to unfold and assess the meaning of a text[12]. Furthermore, that is precisely the meaning of the intrinsic historicity of philosophy, which is, by the way, one of the lessons we learned from Hegel.

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[12] As a practical example of application, consider the exercise I did on Kierkegaard, in Ferreira (2019).

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