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1. Introduction

1 Robert B. Brandom begins the first chapter of *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* with the provocative claim that "what we are is made as much as found, decided as well as discovered" (Brandom 1994: 3). Grappling with the question of what we are, he contends, is the primary task of philosophy (Brandom 2009: 18). As a post-linguistic turn pragmatist, his answer to the question is that what "we" are is up to us: the community that comprises "we" is the "Community of those who say 'we' with and to someone, whether the members of those different particular communities recognize each other or not" (Brandom 1994: 4). In other words, "we" is self-reflexively constituted by the act of "we"-saying. From this first step, Brandom builds a vast philosophical system that begins from and depends on the claim that we are concept- or vocabulary-mongering creatures. As a result, rather than in wonder, as Socrates would have us believe, Brandom claims that "philosophy begins in logic" (Brandom 2009: 12). Philosophy is the discipline concerned with reflection on who we are, where who we are is defined discursively, and thus is concerned with reasoning about reasoning.

2 In this article, I interrogate how Brandom's understanding of "we" ought to be understood in light of the historical exclusion of women from the sorts of rational practices and abilities that are integral to it, an exclusion that has been thoroughly explored by feminist philosophers who engage with the tradition, but which Brandom for the most part ignores, despite his own engagement with that same tradition. Elsewhere, I have defended the approach of Brandom's *Doktorvater,* Richard Rorty, for its usefulness in addressing just this issue. Specifically, I have suggested that a Rortyan pragmatism provides tools to address the problem of "epistemic exclusion" (Dieleman

2012a), tools that are missing from the "Kantian pragmatisms" of Jürgen Habermas and Hilary Putnam (Dieleman 2013).[1] What I intend by the term "epistemic exclusion" is exclusion from epistemic practices, i.e., "the situation of being denied – on unjust grounds – the ability or opportunity to challenge and create the epistemic norms and practices of a community" (Dieleman 2012a: 91). This concept draws from and builds on the concept of epistemic injustice: "What is at issue is figuring out how to access, deploy, and, where necessary, alter the norms that constitute an epistemic imaginary from which one is excluded" (*ibid.*: 94). Though I will not engage at length with Rorty's position here, this paper can be seen as adding to the list of Kantian pragmatisms against which I would defend a Rortyan approach that is less Rationalistic, more Romantic, and thus more fruitful for addressing gender-based epistemic exclusion.

3 This article can also be seen as corroborating and building upon recent work by Matthew Congdon and Lynne Tirrell, who similarly note that the problems of epistemic injustice are relevant to, but largely ignored in, Brandom's project. They show that Brandom's account cannot accommodate the fact that entrance into the space of reasons, and the space of reasons itself, is vulnerable to differences in power. For example, Congdon opts to defend John McDowell's approach over Brandom's because the latter's is not "rationally vulnerable to experiential episodes capable of warping the topography of intelligibility" (Congdon 2015: 85). On Brandom's approach, according to Congdon, "our socially established epistemic practices exhaustively determine the layout of the space of reasons" *(ibid.)*. As a result, all the inequalities and injustices that are reflected in these epistemic practices are likewise instantiated in the space of reasons.

4 Lynne Tirrell also expresses concern that the space of reasons presumes an equal standing among participants that does not in fact exist. According to Tirrell (2018: 24),

> Brandom's default-and-challenge structure makes sense within the game of giving and asking for reasons amongst social peers, all more or less equal participants in a particular game or practice. Once social inequality is part of a practice, the view requires careful moderation. Oppressed people often face default challenges.

5 Tirrell introduces the idea of "flipping the F-switch" (*ibid.*: 5), which, on the view she develops, changes (deontic) scorekeeping itself by establishing different rules for different genders. Using the analogy of pre-1975 basketball, where all the rules of the game were changed for women, from the number of players allowed on the court, to the number of times the ball could be dribbled before being passed or shot, she shows that what Brandom ignores is the fact that "whether someone's speech acts count as moves within a language game [...] depends upon the person's available game-assigned powers" (*ibid.*: 10).

6 Though Brandom's Hegelianism goes some of the way to responding to the concerns that I have expressed about Kantian pragmatisms, and that Congdon and Tirrell have identified in Brandom's own project, my claim in this paper is that it does not go far enough. Where Congdon and Tirrell have shown that Brandom neglects the power differences that can deny entry into and limit participation in the space of reasons, I add to their critique by suggesting that this neglect results from a failure to grapple with the historical and ongoing realities of exclusion that non-male genders face. That is, I contend that Brandom's theory of discursive normativity, where norms and novelty depend on a particular understanding of the space of reasons, does not provide the necessary theoretical tools to understand the historical exclusion of women from

that space, or to explain how they have gained or might gain access to it. As Genevieve Lloyd points out

> [...] contemporary philosophical preoccupation with the requirements of rational belief, the objectivity of truth and the procedures of rational argument, can make it difficult for them to see the import of criticisms of broader cultural ideals associated with Reason. (Lloyd 1993: 109)

7 In other words, Brandom neglects the realities of epistemic injustice, and this neglect results from his failure to account for both the theoretical and actual exclusion of women from Reason. In this sense, one can see Brandom's account as committing the sins of ideal theory, i.e., constructing a theory from idealized starting assumptions, as identified by Charles W. Mills (2005). Understood as an essay in ideal theory, Brandom's account neglects empirical realities – a point made by Axel Honneth, who writes

> [...] Brandom's reconstruction of Hegel's argument operates at such a distance from any empirical suppositions concerning the genesis of recognitive relations, that it is hard to see how it might be translatable into the terms of current empirical findings. (Honneth 2021: 719)

8 Indeed, it is possible that the "peculiar moral thinness" (*ibid.*: 720) of Brandom's account is a result of this empirical thinness.

9 To substantiate my claims, in Section 2, I will examine why one might be skeptical of whether Brandom's account can provide an understanding of women's exclusion or an explanation of women's inclusion, given its emphasis on reason(s). Though I cannot hope to do justice to the vast scope and complexity of Brandom's philosophy here, I will provide a broad-strokes overview that I hope will suffice for clarifying existing reasons for skepticism. In Section 3, I will consider two cases Brandom offers to show when and how normativity can be extended beyond discursive creatures – the bodies of brothers, and omens – to see whether either can offer clarity for the case of women's exclusion. I contend that his efforts to demonstrate how normativity is extended beyond a discursive community do not provide the lever needed to pry open space for recognizing women. In other words, the extensional recognitive logics of normativity highlighted by Brandom are not useful for understanding or explaining whether or how women might come to be included in or recognized as denizens of the space of reasons. In Section 4, I will turn from the recognitive aspects to the recollective aspects of Brandom's account to see if resources more useful for this project are available there. This is a position recently made by Santiago Rey, who claims that the recollective aspects of Brandom's theory reveal the emancipatory potential of his theory. I will agree with Rey's claim in general, but argue that Brandom's account does not go far enough, for a recollective, reconstructive story that takes gender into account ought to lead to more significant adjustments to the theoretical articulation of the space of reasons itself.

2. Recognition and Exclusion

10 In *Perspectives on Pragmatism,* Brandom identifies three interconnected questions that he thinks post-linguistic turn pragmatists must provide answers for. These are the demarcation question (how are linguistic practices and abilities to be distinguished from nonlinguistic ones?), the emergence question (how can a naturalistic account of language explain the transition from nonlinguistic to linguistic practices and abilities?), and the leverage question (how might we characterize and explain the

"bonanza of new abilities and possibilities that language opens up"?) (Brandom 2011: 26-7). One of the challenges Brandom sets for himself is to answer the demarcation question in a way that permits satisfactorily answering both the emergence and leverage questions; he responds to this challenge by combining pragmatism with rationalism. In other words, he aims to combine the pragmatist emphasis on a naturalistic understanding of the emergence of language, and the "bonanza" of novel practices and abilities that having a language makes possible, with *rationalist* criteria for distinguishing the linguistic from the nonlinguistic. By "rationalist" here, Brandom intends the "core practices of giving and asking for *reasons*" (*ibid*.: 30). This, he claims, is what distinguishes the sapient, i.e., we concept- or vocabulary-mongering creatures, from the merely sentient, i.e., those creatures of mere "organic feeling" (Brandom 2009: 10).

11 Thus, sapience, or the ability to participate in discursive practice, denotes "practically knowing one's way about in the inferentially articulated space of reasons and concepts" (Brandom 2009: 10; 2011: 30).[2] This practice, for Brandom, is irreducibly normative. Language use is a paradigm case of an "implicitly normative practice" (Brandom 1994: 165). It is not just that asserting is a practice that involves inferential relations and conceptual content (explained by Brandom's inferential semantics), but that, in asserting, one is participating in a practice that is imbued with normative statuses, such as commitment and entitlement (explained by Brandom's normative pragmatics). As he puts it,

> The significance of a speech act is understood in terms of how it is understood by those who hear it, how they keep score on how it alters what the speaker is, in their eyes, committed to, responsible for and entitled to, what they take the speaker to have authorized in the way of further claims, for instance those that are inferential consequences of the claim the original speaker made. (*in* Pritzlaff 2008: 372)

12 In short, in participating in discursive practices, one enters into a normative space, characterized by undertakings and attributions of commitment, entitlement, authority, and responsibility.

13 The space of reasons, because it is normative in this sense, is also a social space. The normative statuses of commitment (e.g., I stand by my claim that *p*) and entitlement (e.g., I am entitled to claim that *p*) are "social statuses, instituted by individuals attributing such statuses to each other, recognizing or acknowledging those statuses" (Brandom 1994: 161). Because the institution of normative statuses is a social affair, we can understand the space of reasons in terms of recognition. What we do when we engage in the practice of deontic scorekeeping is acknowledge that others are members of our community. As Brandom puts it,

> In specifically recognizing people, in keeping deontic score on them, we are all the time constituting various sorts of virtual communities, recognitive communities to be sure, constituted by the specific respects of recognition, corresponding to the normative statuses that we recognize them as having, that we attribute to them. (*in* Pritzlaff 2008: 376)

14 For Brandom, recognition is the (complex of) normative attitude(s) where we hold someone or something to have normative statuses, such as rational responsibility, i.e., the fact of, as well as the quality of, their responsiveness to reasons. These normative statuses are thus social statuses – they are the result of standing in recognitive relations to others: "Taking something to be subject to appraisals of its reasons, holding

it rationally responsible, is treating it as some*one:* as one of *us* (rational beings)" (Brandom 2009: 3).

15 In sum, practices of giving and asking for reasons, and the normative attitudes and statuses that constitute such practices, are what distinguish sapience from sentience. Between them exists a clear line, though the emergence of the former from the latter, to be consistent with pragmatism, must be naturalistically explained.[3] These normative attitudes and statuses comprise recognition, which, on Brandom's reading of Hegel, is reciprocal. Proper, non-defective recognition is "an equivalence relation," such that each discursive practitioner recognizes himself, but also must be recognized by everyone he recognizes (more on defective and non-defective recognition below). For Brandom, it is what language allows language-users to *do* that is relevant, and one of the key things that language allows language-users to do is give and ask for reasons and, in so doing, adopt normative attitudes and instantiate normative statuses.

16 In claiming to participate in the rationalist tradition, and in relying on Hegel for developing a theory of normativity premised on reciprocal recognition, Brandom wades into debates about criteria, such as sapience and sentience, reason and feeling, that traditionally have demarcated abilities and even human nature along gendered lines.[4] It is Hegel, after all, who remarks, "Women are educated – who knows how? – as it were by breathing in ideas, by living rather than by acquiring knowledge. The status of manhood, on the other hand, is attained only by the stress of thought and much technical exertion" (Hegel 1963: 264). It is no surprise that Brandom's appeal to "reason" and "rationality" to distinguish "us" from others – despite its being filtered through the social process of recognition – will be problematic for many feminists who see the very notions of "reason" and "rationality" as historically loaded against non-male genders. What is a surprise, perhaps, is that – despite occasional nods in the relevant direction (see below) – there is little evidence that Brandom has seriously engaged with these concerns.

17 Some of these are concerns about the rationalist tradition, and about how Hegel's contribution shapes it. For example, Genevieve Lloyd suggests that Hegel sets the stage "for woman to be presented as being what she truly is only by virtue of what lies beyond her," and "relates femininity to comparatively immature stages in the advance of Reason" (Lloyd 1993: 73). On her reading, the complementarity of male and female character and associated characteristics, like reason and passion, universal and particular, public and private, was progressively shaped by thinkers from Descartes through Hume, Rousseau and Kant, and picked up by Hegel to be incorporated into his system. As a result, Hegel contributes to and carries on a tradition that associates maleness with Reason and femaleness with its opposite(s):

> The obstacles to female cultivation of Reason spring to a large extent from the fact that our ideals of Reason have historically incorporated an exclusion of the feminine, and that femininity itself has been partly constituted through such processes of exclusion. (*Ibid.*: xix)

18 Similarly, Seyla Benhabib examines Hegel's place in this philosophical trajectory. She reads Hegel in his historical context, and against his "discursive horizon" (Benhabib 2002: 283), asking whether and to what extent his philosophy responds to the changing dynamics of gender of his time. She argues that the Hegelian dialectic is shaped by "disapproval of and antagonism toward efforts of early female emancipation" (*ibid.*: 284). As a result, he consigns women to the private sphere of the family,

constitutionally incapable of transcending its bounds and emerging into the world of universality. Moreover, these gendered differences are read into the very nature of what it means to be human; Hegel does not escape the philosophical tendency to equate maleness with rationality, and rationality with humanity in turn: "Hegel not only assigns particularity, intuitiveness, passivity to women, and universality, conceptual thought, and 'the powerful and the active' to men, but sees in men the characteristics that define the species as human" (*ibid.*: 287). She contends that "There is no way to disentangle the march of the dialectic in Hegel's system from the body of the victims on which it treads. Historical necessity requires its victims, and women have always been among the numerous victims of history" (*ibid.*: 296).

19 Brandom is likely to disagree with these readings of Hegel, and also with many feminists' critiques of Hegel's use of *Antigone*.[5] For Brandom, the lesson to be learned from Sophocles's play is a lesson about normativity; it is a lesson that occurs at a higher level than the conflict between human law and divine law, between the family and the polis, or between woman and man (Brandom 2019: 485). The lesson to be learned is that the transition from the pre-modern to the modern is captured by coming to understand that norms and normative statuses are not given by nature but rather instituted by normative attitudes and practices. The conflict in *Antigone* is acute because "both sides implicitly acknowledge that recognition-by-burial *confers* the normative status in question" rather than simply discovering it as natural *(ibid.)*. It is this acknowledgement that moves us beyond the pre-modern belief that normative statuses are immediate, that natural properties determine normative proprieties. It signals a move into a space where recognition becomes salient. Thus, from Brandom's perspective, feminist critics mistakenly fault Hegel for strengthening and reifying the association between maleness and Reason, and thus unjustifiably eject him from the place he deserves in "the feminist pantheon" *(ibid.)*.[6]

3. Extending Recognition

20 Even if we grant that Brandom's interpretation of Hegel's use of *Antigone* more accurately captures what Hegel intended, this interpretation does not provide a clear answer to the question of how women might (have) progress(ed) from being excluded to being included in the space of reasons. As noted above, in *Making it Explicit,* Brandom elucidates what is required for "'we'-saying" by offering a "theoretical account of what it is in practice to treat another as one of us," which, for him, involves placing "ourselves and each other in the space of reasons" (Brandom 1994: 4-5). The space of reasons is a discursive space, but also a normative space; rationality is discursively articulated because it involves inferential reasoning. But it is also, again because it involves inferential reasoning, normatively laden. In asking for reasons from others, and in providing reasons to them when asked, normative statuses of authority, responsibility, commitment, and entitlement are instantiated.

21 Though this rational, discursive normativity is ontologically primary for Brandom, arising as it does from our very nature as discursive creatures, it does not exhaust the terrain of normativity. At various points, he hints at how the sorts of norms enumerated above can extend beyond discursive creatures to include non-discursive creatures, objects, or phenomena. Thus, even though "the practices of the [discursive] community are the *fons et origo* from which all normative significance flows" (Brandom

2023: 59), such that man is the measure of all things, the field of normativity is not fully traversed by the doings of this discursive community. It might be the case that the method by which normativity is extended beyond a discursive community provides the lever needed to pry open theoretical space for understanding and explaining how women might go from being excluded from to included in the space of reasons.

22 The interpretation of *Antigone* that Brandom offers depends, in part, on the ability discursive beings have to assign normative statuses to non-discursive beings and thereby construct them as authoritative. "*Discursive* authority," Brandom claims, "the sort of authority that provides *reasons* for us to believe what is claimed, can in principle only be possessed or exercised by those who participate with us in our practices of giving and asking for reasons: persons, not things" (*ibid.*: 104). However, Brandom cautions, "I do not think that all authority must be of this fundamental [rational] kind. Once implicitly normative social practices are up and running, derivative sorts of normative statuses, parasitic on the basic ones that characterize discursive practitioners, become possible" (*ibid.*: 57). Interlocutors, on the view he develops, "can confer other, parasitic sorts of normative significance on things that are not themselves capable of giving and asking for reasons" (*ibid.*: 57-8). Though Brandom is referring in these passages to the normative statuses involved in representation (more on this below), the same basic logic can apply to recognition. Can the various extensional logics Brandom introduces, by which normative statuses are extended beyond the community of discourse, provide a way to respond to the worry I note above? That is, can his extensional logics provide a way to understand the liminal space non-male genders occupy, or to explain how women might make the transition from non-rational to rational?

23 Feminist engagement with Sophocles's *Antigone,* and with the use Hegel makes of it, is voluminous, to say the least. Indeed, as Catherine A. Holland notes, the play "occupies a privileged position in modern political thought, for it has provided modern thinkers with an opportunity to reflect upon the place of women with respect to both the state and the household" (Holland 1998: 1108). I will take this opportunity to reflect upon the place of women not with respect to state or household, but with respect to the recognitive community, and not by considering Antigone herself, but rather by evaluating how it is that Polyneices becomes, on Brandom's reading, a member of the community. I take this approach because, if it is the case that women are (initially) excluded from rational recognition, then there must be a story to tell about how they might or have come to join that community. So the question is whether there is a logic of extension in Brandom that can tell that story for us.

24 As noted above, Brandom sees Hegel's reading of *Antigone* as being about recognition, where the act of burial is "the concrete, practical bearer of recognitive significance" (Brandom 2019: 481). In other words, it is a performance that highlights the relevance and importance of normative attitudes for instantiating normative statuses. It is Antigone's attitude and her act that changes the status of Polyneices from mere (non-normative) body to (normative) community member; it constitutes the relevant normative status. Burial, Brandom notes, "constitutively recognizes someone as not merely a dead animal, but as a member of the community – a member with a particular status: a *dead* member of the community, an honored ancestor" *(ibid.)*. Brandom does not dwell on the nature of the normative status conferred upon Polyneices, about what sort of authority an "honored ancestor" might have, but it's clear that the membership

in question is of a different sort. Antigone's brother does not become a member of the *discursive* community; he cannot have normative attitudes or participate in practices of giving and asking for reasons in the same way that living members of the community can. He can be recognized, but cannot recognize others in the sense intended by Brandom. If this is a way to understand how women come to be (taken as) members of the community, as capable of existing and moving about in the space of reasons, it is a diminished form of membership, to be sure.

25 A similar case, and a similar lesson, can be retrieved from Brandom's example of an omen or oracle which has the normative status it does "in virtue of the practical attitudes of the community members, who *make* it authoritative by *taking* it to be authoritative" (Brandom 2023: 58). This is a derivative sort of normative status, possible only when the normativity of discourse is "up and running." As with Antigone's brother, this doesn't mean that such things as omens are invited into or given standing in the space of reasons. In fact, in this case, the authority granted to the omen is not a recognitive authority, but rather a representational authority (more on this in Section 4 below). But in neither case is reciprocity possible. Though both Polyneices and omens are granted normative statuses, they are not the normative statuses possessed by subjects. Though they have authority, they do not have *discursive* authority, and this is what is required, on the reading of Brandom offered here, for specifically non-defective recognition.

26 In *A Spirit of Trust,* Brandom contrasts the recognitive relations of celebrities with their fans, on the one hand, and among chess players, on the other. The point of this comparison is to illustrate "the metaphysical irony of Mastery" (Brandom 2019: 343), i.e., what he thinks is a central point in Hegel's *Phenomenology,* namely, that "the traditional subordination-obedience structure of normativity [exemplified by the Master-Servant relation] institutes defective normative statuses and normative subjects" (*ibid.*: 340-1). The defect arises from "the glittering but spurious ideal of pure independence, authority without corresponding responsibility" (*ibid.*: 341). The defect in the normative statuses instituted by the recognitive relation between a celebrity and their fans is represented by the pathology of the celebrity, whose low opinion of their fans must ultimately be a low opinion of themselves (*ibid.*: 342). The irony of mastery (or celebrity) is that

> [...] the one who has existentially constituted himself as superior makes himself wholly dependent, for who he really is, on the ones he has constituted as subordinates. He is recognitively responsible to the recognitive authority of those subordinates. (*Ibid.*: 343)

27 The normative statuses that inhere in a community of "good" chess players, by contrast, are nondefective because the community balances authority and responsibility:

> My recognitive attitudes can define a virtual community, but only the reciprocal recognition by those I recognize can make me actually a member of it, accord me the status for which I have implicitly petitioned by recognizing them. My attitudes exercise recognitive authority precisely in determining whose recognitive attitudes I am responsible to for my actual normative status. (Brandom 2019: 342; 2023: 77)

28 As he notes, "The institution of self-conscious normative subjects [...] requires that recognitive authority and recognitive responsibility be coordinate and commensurate" (Brandom 2019: 344). The lesson of Hegel's asymmetrical master-servant relationship is that "What is metaphysically required to constitute a non-defective self-consciousness

is to be recognized (respected, admired) by those one recognizes (respects, admires)" (*ibid.*: 343). Without this symmetry, recognition is defective.

29 Brandom's comparison of celebrities and chess players is intended to illuminate the difference between defective and non-defective forms of recognition, which are distinguished by the absence or presence of symmetry in the recognitive relationship, respectively. A lack of symmetry – which also characterizes the relationship between Antigone and Polyneices, and the relationship between omens and the meanings we attach to them – suggests that the extension of normative statuses beyond the discursive community is not helpful for understanding women's exclusion or explaining women's inclusion. Derivative normative statuses are a second-best kind of recognition. This reveals a grey area that Brandom misses, namely, the normative status of women and other historically marginalized groups. Is the authority that such groups possess "fundamental" or "derivative" (Brandom 2023: 57)? Is their membership in the community given to them, as is the dead body of Polyneices by being buried by Antigone? Or do they achieve a normative status without becoming members of a community? On his reading of Hegel, the "decisive move to modernity will be acknowledging the significance of normative *attitudes* and *practices* in instituting norms and normative statuses" (Brandom 2019: 485). This is Brandom's understanding of normative statuses as *social* statuses. Yet the role of these attitudes and practices in relation to non-male genders and other marginalized groups remains opaque. In the end, the place of non-male genders seems not to be captured by the recognitive membership conferred upon dead brothers, nor by the representational authority granted to omens.

30 Brandom notes in an interview that the Hegelian notion of recognition "creates a flat community, in which everyone recognizes everyone else. Hegel thought that that ideal was something we were implicitly committed to as a condition of our being able to speak – and, so, to think – at all" (*in* Pritzlaff 2008: 368). However, Brandom also acknowledges that this Hegelian notion of "general recognition" can be more finely articulated, with more specific kinds of authority and responsibility (*ibid.*: 366). As Tirrell puts it in her attempt to use inferentialism to make sense of derogatory terms, "Which commitments a speaker may make depends on the speaker's social, cultural, and linguistic context" (Tirrell 1999: 46).[7] Similarly, when it comes to social and political institutions, Brandom thinks a more complex set of recognitive relationships is required, where individuals are also recognized in the various roles and positions that they occupy. For example,

> I recognize someone as my president in one respect and recognize in another respect someone as my ambassador in part because he is recognized in yet another respect by the one I recognize as my president and the ones I recognize as my senators. (*in* Pritzlaff 2008: 368)

31 So, Brandom does acknowledge that recognition in the political realm will complicate the "flat" community that the Hegelian model makes possible, but it is an institutional context that he imagines, in which roles and positions are formalized. The context in which roles and positions are informal, brought about and maintained by socio-cultural forms of recognition or their lack, falls outside the scope of his analysis.

4. Recollection and Progress

32 In the preceding section, I focused on Brandom's account, in which adopting normative attitudes towards others as discursive creatures involves adopting and attributing normative statuses, such as authority and responsibility. This amounts to recognizing others as members of our community, as part of the "we" who exists and moves about in the space of reasons. Because, as feminist philosophers have rightly noted, women historically have been excluded from this space, I also examined – but ultimately rejected – cases where Brandom considers how these normative statuses can be extended beyond already-discursive creatures, in case they provide theoretical tools to understand the mechanism(s) by which non-defective recognition can be secured. However, recognition represents only the social dimension of reason, and it is paired by Brandom with the historical dimension of reason: recollective reconstruction. It may be that this piece holds the key to successfully explaining how the exclusion of women from the space of reasons might be overcome.

33 As Brandom notes in *Pragmatism and Idealism* (2023), the social dimension of Hegel's thought, i.e., recognition, only explains the attitude-dependence of norms. The normative status of Polyneices, for example, depends on the normative attitude of Antigone. However, appreciating that norms depend on attitudes is only one side of the coin; to avoid alienation, it is important to also appreciate that attitudes depend on norms. In other words, attitudes are norm-governed, and they must be so in order to evaluate and respond to the attitudes adopted. For example, the normative attitude of Antigone must be responsive to settled norms about the significance of burial. To make sense of how norms are settled, Brandom invokes the historical dimension of Hegel's thought, i.e., recollection. This is the aspect that Santiago Rey identifies as key for identifying the "underlying ethical dimension" and "critical and emancipatory potential" of Brandom's approach, and so it might prove useful for thinking through how progress regarding women's exclusion can be explained (Rey 2024: 4, 2).

34 Rey contends that it is recollective rationality, which is diachronic, rather than recognition, which is synchronic, that does the heavy ethical lifting for Brandom:

> For all the importance of the recognitive axis of conceptual determinacy, the truth is that it is Brandom's account of recollective rationality that sets the stage for his progressive narrative of semantic edification. If the social dimension guarantees the objectivity of norms, their most basic bindingness and legitimacy, the historical axis embeds that initial determinacy in a larger context that includes previous applications of concepts, as well as a developmental rational story that ties normative life together and gives us a horizon from where to judge our current practices and orient ourselves in the future. (*Ibid.*: 8)

35 In *Pragmatism and Idealism,* Brandom's reason for turning to recollection is to revive representation from Rorty's attack on it. He contends that

> The same normative 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 subjects. (Brandom 2019: 348)

36 On Brandom's reading, Rorty is mistaken when he concludes from his social pragmatism about norms that "nothing nonhuman can exercise authority over us, that we cannot be responsible to any nonhuman authority" (Brandom 2023: 54); that "only parties to our conversations, only participants in our practices, can have normative

statuses" (*ibid.*: 55). This is to accept alienation, which he thinks Rorty embraces when he endorses irony. He claims that Rorty, in endorsing irony, adopts the first point about the social institution of norms, but neglects the second point, about the authority of norms over our attitudes. Chief among the kinds of norms that govern attitudes, on Brandom's reading of Hegel, are those that capture "the authority of represented states of affairs over representings of them in thought and talk" (*ibid.*: 87). Thus, by providing an account of representation that does not run afoul of the principles of post-linguistic turn pragmatism that Brandom endorses, he can complete the Hegelian picture and avoid the risks that attend alienation.

37 On his telling, representation, i.e., the authority exercised by that which is represented over representings of it, is forged when a "retrospective recollective rational reconstruction of a sequence of phenomena culminating in the facts as one currently takes them to be" is offered (*ibid.*: 95). In short, we tell ourselves a story about how we progressively came to be justified in saying now that we know something to be the case. By engaging in this expressive project, what has all along been implicit in prior commitments emerges to become fully explicit. By analogy, Brandom appeals to the notion of the chain novel introduced by Ronald Dworkin (Brandom 2019: 661-3; 2023: 89-92; see Dworkin 1982). As in case (or "judge-made") law, according to this reading, judges engage in a process whereby they simultaneously make and find norms (Brandom 2019: 746). That is, a judge depends on a norm from precedent cases and, by applying it, renders its content more explicit and promotes it for future decisions. In Brandom's words, a judge

> [...] must retrospectively rationally reconstruct the tradition as progressive, so as to reveal within it a trajectory that he can construe as the gradual revelation, the gradual unfolding into explicitness, of principles that can be seen retrospectively to have been implicit all along. It is by formulating such an implicit principle that the judge can justify his decision in a particular case. He, in that way, makes himself responsible to the past decisions and that responsibility to those past decisions is the basis on which he asserts authority for his current decisions. But that authority is not unchallengeable, for he, in fact, petitions future judges for recognition of that authority which they will grant precisely insofar as they think he has done a good job in rationally reconstructing the tradition he inherited and actually has found a principle that can be seen to have been implicit in the decisions that were made before. (*in* Pritzlaff 2008: 368-9)[8]

38 Thus, norms and normative statuses are continually made and found through the process of retrospective, rational reconstruction. Their institution should not, as Thomas Fossen notes, "be understood in a static way, as if there were an initial act of 'making' that first brought the status into being so that subsequently it is simply there, for participants to answer to" (Fossen 2014: 383).[9]

39 The reason the recollective dimension of Brandom's approach appears friendlier to concerns related to social progress is because it pries open space for novelty, thereby further elaborating Brandom's answer to the leverage question noted at the outset. He claims,

> It is an essential feature of the linguistic model that what one gets by constraining oneself by conceptual norms is the capacity to entertain and endorse an indefinite number of novel ends, ends one could not so much as envisage, never mind pursue, before one had the conceptual capacity to formulate and describe those ends. On this view, what is special about discursive practice is [...] that it helps us generate this bonanza of novel potential ends. (*in* Pritzlaff 2008: 378)[10]

40 This is what Rey picks up on in his endorsement of Brandom's theory, including in progressive struggles for social justice:

> Whether it be feminism's introduction of a novel vocabulary to reveal and denounce practices of abuse and misrepresentation, or the current discussion about gender misconceptions and the inclusive use of pronouns, the truth is that we are witnessing a time of increasing semantic self-awareness where entire communities are reflecting on the use of words and the realities they articulate and make visible. (Rey 2024: 16-7)

41 In other words, Rey sees in the historical dimension of recollective reconstruction a space opened up to develop new concepts and, thus, new norms, including new representings.

42 This historical, progressive development of new concepts and new norms intersects with Brandom's inferentialism in the sense that "novel claims have novel inferential consequences, are subject to novel challenges, require novel justifications" (Brandom 2000b: 176). For example, claims that, at one point, would have been novel, such as "women are as rational as men," or "women should be able to own property," enter into the space of reasons and, in being asserted, call for justification. Thus, what Rey points out, quoting Brandom, is that what ultimately matters, both politically and ethically, is

> [...] our capacity to transform the vocabularies in which we live and move and have our being, and so to create new ways of being (for creatures like us). Our moral worth is our dignity as potential contributions to the Conversation. (*Ibid.*: 178)[11]

43 The norm-governedness of our attitudes, and the possibility of novel claims, thus require a particular form of engagement in the space of reasons, i.e., an inferential form of engagement. Brandom offers the example of using slurs or pejoratives. In using a pejorative, we can be called out – held responsible – for the inferences that lead to and follow from it, and ultimately establish new norms to which our attitudes are responsible:

> What philosophers need to do, and have been doing since Socrates, is making explicit those inferences that are implicit in the concepts that we use. [...] Having made that inference explicit, now you're in a position to be critical about it. Logic, and philosophical vocabulary more generally, is the organ of semantic self-consciousness. We can say and ask for reasons for or against something, to make explicit the inferential norms that are implicit in the concepts that we're reasoning with and that shape our thought. (*in* Williams 2013: 380)

44 In short, novelty motivates progress insofar as the novel claim enters into and is taken up within the space of reasons. The process of rational, recollective reconstruction, similar to the judge's process of making a decision, makes implicit norms explicit and, in so doing, brings them into the space of reasons. As Brandom puts it, referring again to the case of pejoratives,

> if you can bring it out into the open as something we can discuss and give and ask for reasons for, then these implicit inferences that are curled up in our concepts don't have power over us anymore. They've come into the light of day where we have the power of reasoning about them. *(Ibid.)*

45 Thus, even though the historical dimension of Brandom's account might seem to offer more opportunities to understand and explain progress by introducing a process by which novelty emerges, that novelty is still answerable to his inferentialism. As a result, the space of reasons, from which non-male genders historically have been

excluded, remains the theoretical edifice in which novelty, and thus progress, occurs. We remain without an explanation of how that exclusion might be, or has been, overcome.

5. Conclusion

46 Can women, like Sophocles's Antigone, adopt a "noble stance, consciously taken" and leave "the family to risk her life in the polis" (Jagentowicz Mills 1996b: 71)? Or is it the case that "when woman leaves the family to experience the universality of the polis [...] man cannot sustain her" (*ibid*.: 73)? In a 2008 interview, Brandom notes, "My ambition is to see what political consequences one might draw from the sort of understanding of discursive practice that I have been pursuing over the last 20 years. But that is a project that is still in its infancy" (*in* Pritzlaff 2008: 381). Despite his efforts to show that "To use a vocabulary is to change it" (Brandom 2000b: 177), the concern remains that, if these political consequences necessarily begin with this understanding of discursive practice, then much work remains to be done. It seems that Brandom has to either deny that women ever were excluded, or to be able to tell a story about how we have come to be included. So far, the tools at his disposal to tell that story seem to be lacking.

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NOTES

1. The notion of "epistemic exclusion" that I introduce in Dieleman 2012a has since been deployed in slightly different ways. See, for example, Catala 2024. See also Dieleman 2017b, 2012b, 2017a, where I engage with Rorty's thought from a feminist perspective, and Dieleman 2023, where I express initial concerns about the theoretical space available for women in Brandom's approach.

2. There is, of course, much more to be said about this – 1000s of pages more, in fact. To avoid getting lost in the weeds, I leave it at this and focus on normativity. But it's worth noting that Brandom sees this approach as pragmatist in at least two respects. First, he sees the "inferentially articulated space of reasons and concepts" to be entirely compatible with pragmatism because it begins with "*practices* of making claims and giving and asking for reasons" (Brandom 2011: 31). Second, he, like other pragmatists, sidesteps Truth as the key epistemological concept. His inferentialism shifts the traditional epistemological framework, such that he gives center stage to *reasons,* with truth playing nothing more than a supporting role: "we are seekers and speakers of *truth because* we are makers and takers of *reasons*" (Brandom 2009: 176). Echoing Rorty's claim that if we take care of freedom, truth will take care of itself, Brandom writes, "So long as we pay sufficiently close attention to the *reasons* that can be offered for and against various claims, their *truth* will take care of itself – or at least, we will have done everything we can do about it" (*ibid*.: 157). Yet the direction in which these two similar claims are taken are suggestively different: Rorty explains his view in an interview, responding, "if we can take care of freedom by creating a free press, a free judiciary, free universities, and so on, then those who have suffered, or are otherwise aware of, the effects of sexism, racism, and poverty will be able to make these effects known to more people" (Rorty 2006: 112).

3. There exists also, therefore, a clear line between persuasion and coercion, since "we are beings that live and move and have our being in the space of *reasons.* We are, at base, creatures who give and ask for reasons – who are sensitive to that 'force of the better reason'" (Brandom 2009: 174).

4. See Lloyd 1993 in particular, which traces the gendered dynamics of Reason through the Western philosophical tradition.

5. Of course, many feminists who have engaged with Hegel's thought are likely to disagree with these readings as well; there is a lively debate about whether and how Hegel's thought might be harnessed for feminist ends. See the papers collected in Jagentowicz Mills 1996a, for example. However, as Genevieve Lloyd notes, "The struggle for sustained self-consciousness is really a struggle between male selves and others. Women do not – at any rate in their own right – fit into this dialectic as either masters or slaves. [...] We should then expect some oddities in any attempt to apply the relations of recognition between Hegelian selves and others to understanding the condition of women" (Lloyd 1993: 92).

6. This is a view echoed and developed further by Molly Farneth (2013).

7. Tirrell continues, "Specialization of labor and discrete distribution of authority in many communities results in those communities licensing only certain speakers to make certain kinds of commitments. Sometimes we give explicit licenses, as we do in allowing only certain people to prescribe and dispense drugs. Most linguistic licenses tend to be less explicit, but similarly effective" (Tirrell 1999: 46).

8. There is an interesting contrast to be drawn here between Brandom's invocation of the chain novel to explain the rendering explicit of previously implicit norms and Rorty's claim that (ethical) principles are nothing more than summaries of moral reactions (Rorty 2007: 186-7) or abbreviations of past practices (Rorty 1999: xxix). See also Showler & Dieleman (2022: 6-8).

9. It is worth noting that Brandom thinks this recollective rational reconstruction is suitably applied to philosophy itself, too. See Brandom (2009: 112).

10. Brandom remarks that this is a thought he sees as "active in contemporary neo-pragmatists, in particular in the thought of Richard Rorty, who has as one central strand of his thought the transformative capacity of vocabularies" (*in* Pritzlaff 2008: 378). See also his engagement with Rorty in *Rorty and His Critics,* where he notes that "the characteristic feature distinguishing vocabularies from nondiscursive tools is their function in generating novel claims, and hence novel purposes" (Brandom 2000b: 176) and his response to Habermas, where he writes, "discursive practice is a mighty engine for the envisaging and engendering of *new* ends" (Brandom 2000: 363-4).

11. See also (Rey 2024: 13). Even Rorty concedes Brandom's point, writing, "I have been in danger of over-romanticizing novelty by suggesting that great geniuses can just create a new vocabulary ex nihilo. I should be content to admit that geniuses can never do more than invent some variations on old themes, give the language of the tribe a few new twists" (Rorty 2000: 188).

ABSTRACTS

Robert B. Brandom builds a vast philosophical system that begins from and depends on the claim that we are concept- or vocabulary-mongering creatures. Philosophy, he claims, is the discipline concerned with reflection on who we are, where who we are is defined discursively, and thus is concerned with reasoning about reasoning. In this article, I interrogate how Brandom's understanding of "we" ought to be understood in light of the historical exclusion of women from the sorts of rational practices and abilities that are thought to be integral to it. My argument thus corroborates and builds upon recent work suggesting that the problems of epistemic injustice are relevant to, but largely ignored in, Brandom's project. In short, I contend that Brandom's theory of discursive normativity, where norms and novelty depend on a particular understanding of the space of reasons, does not provide the necessary theoretical tools to understand the historical

exclusion of women from that space, or to explain how they have gained or might gain access to it.

INDEX

Keywords: Brandom, Space of Reasons, Exclusion, Women, Epistemic Injustice

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