Abstracts of Lecture Series and Individual Lectures

Bob Brandom

Abstract of *Vocabularies of Reason*, the 2025 Samuel Pufendorf Lectures:

What is it to live, as we do, in the space of reasons? Reporting work from a recent book, these lectures explore how reasons show up from the perspectives afforded by different ways of talking about them. The emphasis throughout is on the *relational* character of reasons: in particular, the relations of implication and incompatibility. These show up as articulating essential norms governing the *use* of declarative sentences to make claims, underwriting practical assessments of rational defenses of claims, by giving reasons for them, and rational challenges to claims, by giving reasons against them. The same reason relations show up in a different guise in truth-maker theories of the *meaning* of declarative sentences. In addition to these pragmatic and semantic vocabularies for talking about reason relations, I consider logical vocabularies for making reason relations explicit (recommending one as the best at that), and introduce a new formal language for talking about and manipulating the conceptual roles sentences come to play by standing in reason relations. Considering the relations among these perspectives on reasons yields a sketch of a higher form of rational self-consciousness.

Abstract of Lecture 1: *Reasoning and Representing*

This lecture introduces and develops the idea that the crucial representational relation between discursive practices and the world they make it possible for their participants to make claims *about* can be understood to begin with at the level of relations of consequence and incompatibility, rather than at the level of using terms and predicates referring to objects and relations, or even at the level of the facts that the basic uses of declarative sentences purport to state. In a bilateral model of a minimal linguistic practice, relations of implication and incompatibility show up in normative form, as some constellations of commitments to assert and deny sentences preclude entitlement to others. In a truthmaker semantic framework for specifying how the world must be for various sentences to be true or false, relations of consequence and incompatibility show up in the alethic modal metaphysical form of the impossibility of the states resulting from mereologically fusing various sets of truth-making and falsity-making states. These accounts can be arranged so as to be systematically isomorphic--to share a conceptual structure articulated by those reason relations. Such a view has illuminating historical antecedents.

Abstract of Lecture 2: *Logic and the Structure of Reasons*

What is the relation between material reason relations of implication and incompatibility in general and specifically *logical* relations of consequence and inconsistency? Unlike traditional logically valid reasons, good reasons more generally can be defeasible. In spite of this structural mismatch, it is possible to use the tools of logic to make explicit even the most radically substructural reason relations. The logic NMMS (for Nonmonotonic, Multisuccedent), introduced in a sequent-calculus metalanguage, is expressively complete for the reason relations of (almost) any base vocabulary of material reason relations among logically atomic sentences. Perhaps surprisingly, it is just a version of classical logic, and the purely logical consequence relation it determines is monotonic and transitive, even though the reason relations it codifies and expresses explicitly are not.

Abstract of Lecture 3: *Roles and Reasons*

For semantic inferentialists, the division of candidate implications into good and bad has a significance parallel to that of the traditional division of sentences into true and false. The move from truth values to truth conditions (extension to intension) is paralleled by the inferentialist's associating each implication with its *range of subjunctive robustness*: the premises and conclusions that can be added to it to make it good (if it is not) and to keep it good (if it is). Assimilating and ordering implications according to inclusions among their ranges of subjunctive robustness makes it possible to interpret sentences by pairs of the conceptual roles they play as premises and as conclusions in implications, both good and bad. Operations on such conceptual roles make it possible to formulate semantic connective definitions that are sound and complete for the maximally expressively powerful logic NMMS introduced in the previous lecture. That procedure turns out to generalize to all connective definitions formulated in a suitable sequent-calculus metavocabulary. Any constellation of material reason relations that can be captured by logical vocabulary can be semantically interpreted in implication-space terms. This novel correlation of proof-theoretic and model-theoretic specifications of reason relations articulates a more fine-grained self-consciousness of the semantogenic rational relations that confer conceptual content on the sentences that stand in those relations.