Articulating Reasons

AN INTRODUCTION TO INFERENTIALISM

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I. Strategic Context: The Nature of the Conceptual

This is a book about the use and content of concepts. Its animating thought is that the meanings of linguistic expressions and the contents of intentional states, indeed, awareness itself, should be understood, to begin with, in terms of playing a distinctive kind of role in reasoning. The idea of privileging inference over reference in the order of semantic explanation is introduced and motivated in the first chapter. Subsequent chapters develop that approach by using it to address a variety of philosophically important issues and problems: practical reasoning and the role of normative concepts in the theory of action, perception and the role of assessments of reliability in epistemology, the expressive role distinctive of singular terms and predicates (which, as subsentential expressions, cannot play the directly inferential role of premise or conclusion), propositional attitude ascriptions and the representational dimension of concept use, and the nature of conceptual objectivity. Although the discussion is intended to be intelligible in its own right—in each individual chapter, as well as collectively—it may nonetheless be helpful to step back a bit from the project pursued here and to situate it in the larger context of theoretical issues, possibilities, and approaches within which it takes shape.
The overall topic is the nature of the conceptual as such. This choice already entails certain significant emphases of attention: within the philosophy of mind, on awareness in the sense of *sapience* rather than of mere sentience; within semantics, on specifically conceptual content, to the detriment of concern with other sorts of contentfulness; within pragmatics, on singling out discursive (that is, concept-using) practice from the background of various other kinds of skillful doing. The aim is to focus on the conceptual in order to elaborate a relatively clear notion of the kind of awareness of something that consists in applying a concept to it—paradigmatically by saying or thinking something about it.

Addressing this topic requires making a series of choices of fundamental explanatory strategy. The resulting commitments need to be brought out into the open because they shape any approach to the conceptual in such important ways. Making this background of orienting commitments explicit serves to place a view in a philosophical space of alternatives. Features of an account that otherwise express nearly invisible (because only implicit) assumptions then show up as calling for decisions, which are subject to determinate sorts of challenges and demands for justification. The major axes articulating the region inhabited by the line of thought pursued here can be presented as a series of stark binary oppositions, which collectively make it possible to map the surrounding terrain.

1. *Assimilation or Differentiation* of the Conceptual?

One fork in the methodological road concerns the relative priority accorded to the *continuities* and *discontinuities* between discursive and nondiscursive creatures: the similarities and differences between the judgments and actions of concept users, on the one hand, and the uptake of environmental information and instrumental interventions of non-concept-using organisms and artifacts, on the other. We can ask how sharp this distinction is—that is, to what extent and in what ways the possibility of intermediate cases can be made intelligible. And more or less independently of the answer to this question, it is possible for theorists to differ as to whether they start by describing a common genus and go on to elaborate differentiae (whether qualitative or in terms of some quantitative ordering by a particular kind of complexity), as opposed to beginning with an account of what is distinctive of the conceptual, which is only later placed in a larger frame encompassing the doings of less capable systems. Of course, wherever the story starts, it will need to account both for the ways in which concept use is like the comportments of nondiscursive creatures and the ways in which it differs. Theories that assimilate conceptually structed activity to the nonconceptual activity out of which it arises (in evolutionary, historical, and individual-developmental terms) are in danger of failing to make enough of the difference. Theories that adopt the converse strategy, addressing themselves at the outset to what is distinctive of or exceptional about the conceptual, court the danger of not doing justice to generic similarities. The difference in emphasis and order of explanation can express substantive theoretical commitments.

Along this dimension, the story told here falls into the second class: discontinuities between the conceptual and non- or preconceptual are to the fore. The discussion is motivated by a concern with what is special about or characteristic of the conceptual as such. I am more interested in what separates concept users from non-concept users than in what unites them. This distinguishes my project from that of many in contemporary semantic theory (for instance, Dretske, Fodor, and Milikan), as well as from the classical American pragmatists, and perhaps from the later Wittgenstein as well.
2. Conceptual Platonism or Pragmatism?

Here is another strategic methodological issue. An account of the conceptual might explain the use of concepts in terms of a prior understanding of conceptual content. Or it might pursue a complementary explanatory strategy, beginning with a story about the practice or activity of applying concepts, and elaborating on that basis an understanding of conceptual content. The first can be called a platonist strategy, and the second a pragmatist (in this usage, a species of functionalist) strategy. One variety of semantic or conceptual platonism in this sense would identify the content typically expressed by declarative sentences and possessed by beliefs with sets of possible worlds, or with truth conditions otherwise specified. At some point it must then explain how associating such content with sentences and beliefs contributes to our understanding of how it is proper to use sentences in making claims, and to deploy beliefs in reasoning and guiding action. The pragmatist direction of explanation, by contrast, seeks to explain how the use of linguistic expressions, or the functional role of intentional states, confers conceptual content on them.

The view expounded in these pages is a kind of conceptual pragmatism (broadly, a form of functionalism) in this sense. It offers an account of knowing (or believing, or saying) that such and such is the case in terms of knowing how (being able) to do something. It approaches the contents of conceptually explicit propositions or principles from the direction of what is implicit in practices of using expressions and acquiring and deploying beliefs. ‘Assertion’, ‘claim’, ‘judgment’, and ‘belief’ are all systematically ambiguous expressions—and not merely by coincidence. The sort of pragmatism adopted here seeks to explain what is asserted by appeal to features of assertings, what is claimed in terms of claimings, what is judged by judgings, and what is believed by the role of believings (indeed, what is expressed by expressings of it)—in general, the content by the act, rather than the other way around.

3. Is Mind or Language the Fundamental Locus of Intentionality?

Concepts are applied in the realm of language by the public use of sentences and other linguistic expressions. They are applied in the realm of mind by the private adoption of and rational reliance on beliefs and other intentional states. The philosophical tradition from Descartes to Kant took for granted a mentalistic order of explanation that privileged the mind as the native and original locus of concept use, relegating language to a secondary, late-coming, merely instrumental role in communicating to others thoughts already full-formed in a prior mental arena within the individual. The period since then has been characterized by a growing appreciation of the significance of language for thought and mindedness generally, and a questioning of the picture of language as a more or less convenient tool for expressing thoughts intelligible as contentful apart from any consideration of the possibility of saying what one is thinking. The twentieth century has been the century of language in philosophical thought, accelerating into something like a reversal of the traditional order of explanation. Thus Dummett defends a linguistic theory of intentionality: “We have opposed throughout the view of assertion as the expression of an interior act of judgment; judgment, rather, is the interiorization of the external act of assertion.” Dummett’s claim is emblematic of views (put forward in different forms by thinkers such as Sellars and Geach) that see language use as antecedently and independently intelligible, and so as available to provide a model on the basis of which one could then come to understand mental acts and occurrences analogically: taking thinking as a kind of inner saying. Such a view just turns the classical early modern approach on its head.

Davidson claims that to be a believer one must be an interpreter of the speech of others, but that “neither language nor thinking can be fully explained in terms of the other, and neither has
conceptual priority. The two are, indeed, linked in the sense that each requires the other in order to be understood, but the linkage is not so complete that either suffices, even when reasonably reinforced, to explicate the other. Although Davidson shares some important motivations with Dummett's purely linguistic theory, in fact these two views illustrate an important difference between two ways in which one might give prominence to linguistic practice in thinking about the use of concepts. Davidson's claim, by contrast to Dummett's, serves to epitomize a relational view of the significance of language for sapience: taking it that concept use is not intelligible in a context that does not include language use, but not insisting that linguistic practices can be made sense of without appeal at the same time to intentional states such as belief.

The line of thought pursued here is in this sense a relational linguistic approach to the conceptual. Concept use is treated as an essentially linguistic affair. Claiming and believing are two sides of one coin—not in the sense that every belief must be asserted nor that every assertion must express a belief, but in the sense that neither the activity of believing nor that of asserting can be made sense of independently of the other, and that their conceptual contents are essentially, and not just accidentally, capable of being the contents indifferently of both claims and beliefs. In the context of the commitment to the kind of explanatory relation between those activities and those contents mentioned above, this approach takes the form of a linguistic pragmatism that might take as its slogan Sellars's principle that grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word. James and Dewey were pragmatists in the sense I have picked out, since they try to understand conceptual content in terms of practices of using concepts. But, in line with their generally assimilationist approach to concept use, they were not specifically linguistic pragmatists. The later Wittgenstein, Quine, and Sellars (as well as Dummett and Davidson) are linguistic pragmatists, whose strategy of coming at the meaning of expressions by considering their use provides a counterbalance to the Frege-Russell-Carnap-Tarski platonistic model-theoretic approach to meaning.

4. The Genus of Conceptual Activity: Representation or Expression?

Besides this issue about the original locus of the conceptual, there is an issue about how to understand the genus of which it is a species. (As I have indicated, this is no less urgent for theories that concern themselves in the first instance with what is distinctive of the conceptual species of that genus than it is for those adopting the assimilationist order of proceeding.) The master concept of Enlightenment epistemology and semantics, at least since Descartes, was representation. Awareness was understood in representational terms—whether taking the form of direct awareness of representings or of indirect awareness of representeds via representations of them. Typically, specifically conceptual representations were taken to be just one kind of representation of which and by means of which we can be aware. This orienting thought remains active to this day, surviving the quite substantial transformations required, for instance, for naturalistic and broadly functional accounts of awareness by and of representations. The result is a familiar, arguably dominant, contemporary research program: to put in place a general conception of representation, the simpler forms of which are exhibited already in the activity of non-concept-using creatures, and on that basis elaborate ever more complex forms until one reaches something recognizable as specifically conceptual representation.

This representational paradigm of what mindedness consists in is sufficiently ubiquitous that it is perhaps not easy to think of alternatives of similar generality and promise. One prominent countertradition, however, looks to the notion of expression, rather than representation, for the genus within which distinctively conceptual activity can become intelligible as a species.
To the Enlightenment picture of mind as mirror, Romanticism opposed an image of the mind as lamp.\textsuperscript{4} Broadly cognitive activity was to be seen not as a kind of passive reflection but as a kind of active revelation. Emphasizing the importance of experimental intervention and the creative character of theory production motivated an assimilation of scientific to artistic activity, of finding as constrained making—a picture of knowing nature as producing a second nature (to use Leonardo da Vinci’s phrase).

The sort of expressivism Herder initiated takes as its initial point of departure the process by which inner becomes outer when a feeling is expressed by a gesture.\textsuperscript{5} We are then invited to consider more complex cases in which attitudes are expressed in actions, for instance, when a desire or intention issues in a corresponding doing, or a belief in saying. So long as we focus on the simplest cases, an expressivist model will not seem to offer a particularly promising avenue for construing the genus of which conceptual activity is a species (though one might say the same of the representational model if attention is focused on, say, the imprint of a seal on a wax tablet). But a suitable commentary on the model may be able to repair this impression somewhat.

First, we might think of the process of expression in the more complex and interesting cases as a matter not of transforming what is inner into what is outer but of making explicit what is implicit. This can be understood in a pragmatist sense of turning something we can initially only do into something we can say: codifying some sort of knowing how in the form of a knowing that. Second, as is suggested by this characterization of a pragmatist form of expressivism, in the cases of most interest in the present context, the notion of explicitness will be a conceptual one. The process of explicitation is to be the process of applying concepts: conceptualizing some subject matter. Third, we need not yield to the temptation, offered by the primitive expressive relation of gesture to feeling, to think of what is expressed and the expression of it as individually intelligible independently of consideration of the relation between them. At least in the more interesting cases, specification of what is implicit may depend on the possibility of making it explicit. And the explicit may not be specifiable apart from consideration of what is made explicit. On such a view, what is expressed must be understood in terms of the possibility of expressing it. Such a relational expressivism will understand linguistic performances and the intentional states they express each as essential elements in a whole that is intelligible only in terms of their relation. According to such an approach, for instance, one ought not to think that one can understand either believing or asserting except by abstracting from their role in the process of asserting what one believes (that is, this sort of expressivism has as a consequence a relational linguistic view of the layout of the conceptual realm).

Understanding the genus of which the conceptual is a species in representational terms invites a platonist order of explanation. That it does not demand one is clear from the possibility of psychologically or linguistically functionalist accounts of representational content. Nonetheless, expressivism is particularly congenial to a pragmatist order of semantic explanation, as is indicated by the formulation of the relation between what is implicit and what is explicit in terms of the distinction between knowing how and knowing that. The account presented in the body of this work is one kind of constitutive, pragmatist, relationally linguistic, conceptual expressivism. The commitment to trying to make expressivism work as a framework within which to understand concept use and (so) conceptual content sets this project off from most others on the contemporary scene. For a representational paradigm reigns not only in the whole spectrum of analytically pursued semantics, from model-theoretic, through possible worlds, directly counterfactual, and informational approaches to teleo-semantic ones, but also in structuralism inheriting the broad outlines of Saussure’s semantics, and even in those later continental thinkers whose poststructuralism is still so far mired in the
representational paradigm that it can see no other alternative to understanding meaning in terms of signifiers standing for signifieds than to understand it in terms of signifiers standing for other signifiers. Even contemporary forms of pragmatism, which are explicitly motivated by the rejection of platonist forms of the representational paradigm, have not embraced or sought to develop an expressivist alternative.

5. Distinguishing the Conceptual: Intensionalism or Inferentialism?

I am not in this introduction pretending to argue for any of the methodological commitments I am rehearsing. My aim is to offer a quick sketch of the terrain against the background of which the approach pursued in the body of this work (and at greater length and in greater detail in Making It Explicit) takes its characteristic shape—to introduce and place those commitments, rather than so much as to begin to entitle myself to any of them. I said at the outset that I am particularly interested in what distinguishes the conceptual from the nonconceptual. This is not a topic that has attracted as much philosophical attention in contemporary circles as I think it deserves. Insofar as there is a consensus answer abroad, I think it must be that the conceptual (or the intentional) is distinguished by a special sort of intensionality: intersubstitution of coreferential or coextensional expressions or concepts does not preserve the content of ascriptions of intentional states, paradigmatically propositional attitudes such as thought and belief. (This is a datum that is relatively independent of how that content is construed, whether in representational terms of truth conditions or of propositions as sets of possible worlds, or as functional roles of some sort, in information-theoretic terms, assertibility conditions, and so on.) Quite a different approach is pursued here.

The master idea that animates and orients this enterprise is that what distinguishes specifically discursive practices from the doings of non-concept-using creatures is their inferential articulation. To talk about concepts is to talk about roles in reasoning. The original Romantic expressivists were (like the pragmatists, both classical and contemporary) assimilationists about the conceptual. My way of working out an expressivist approach is exceptionalist, focusing on the differentiae distinctive of the conceptual as such. It is a rationalist pragmatism, in giving pride of place to practices of giving and asking for reasons, understanding them as conferring conceptual content on performances, expressions, and states suitably caught up in those practices. In this way it differs from the view of other prominent theorists who are pragmatists in the sense of subscribing to use theorists of meaning such as Dewey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Dummett, and Quine. And it is a rationalist expressivism in that it understands expressing something, making it explicit, as putting it in a form in which it can both serve as and stand in need of reasons: a form in which it can serve as both premise and conclusion in inferences. Saying or thinking that things are thus-and-so is undertaking a distinctive kind of inferentially articulated commitment: putting it forward as a fit premise for further inferences, that is, authorizing its use as such a premise, and undertaking responsibility to entitle oneself to that commitment, to vindicate one's authority, under suitable circumstances, paradigmatically by exhibiting it as the conclusion of an inference from other such commitments to which one is or can become entitled. Grasping the concept that is applied in such a making explicit is mastering its inferential use: knowing (in the practical sense of being able to distinguish, a kind of knowing how) what else one would be committing oneself to by applying the concept, what would entitle one to do so, and what would preclude such entitlement.

What might be thought of as Frege's fundamental pragmatic principle is that in asserting a claim, one is committing oneself to its truth. The standard way of exploiting this principle is a platonist one: some grip on the concept of truth derived from one's
semantic theory is assumed, and an account of the pragmatic force or speech act of assertion is elaborated based on this connection. But the principle can be exploited in more than one way, and linguistic pragmatism reverses the platonist order of explanation. Starting with an account of what one is doing in making a claim, it seeks to elaborate from it an account of what is said, the content or proposition—something that can be thought of in terms of truth conditions—to which one commits oneself by such a speech act.

What might be thought of as Frege’s fundamental semantic principle is that a good inference never leads from a true claim(able) to one that is not true. It, too, can be exploited in either of two reductive orders of explanation. The standard way is to assume that one has a prior grip on the notion of truth, and use it to explain what good inference consists in. Rationalist or inferentialist pragmatism reverses this order of explanation also. It starts with a practical distinction between good and bad inferences, understood as a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate doings, and goes on to understand talk about truth as talk about what is preserved by the good moves.

6. Bottom-up or Top-down Semantic Explanation?

According to such an inferentialist line of thought, the fundamental form of the conceptual is the propositional, and the core of concept use is applying concepts in propositionally contentful assertions, beliefs, and thoughts. It claims that to be propositionally contentful is to be able to play the basic inferential roles of both premise and conclusion in inferences. Demarcating the conceptual realm by appeal to inference accordingly involves coming down firmly on one side of another abstract methodological divide. For it entails treating the sort of conceptual content that is expressed by whole declarative sentences as prior in the order of explanation to the sort of content that is expressed by subsenten-
tial expressions such as singular terms and predicates. Traditional term logics built up from below, offering first accounts of the meanings of the concepts associated with singular and general terms (in a nominalistic representational way: in terms of what they name or stand for), then of judgments constructed by relating those terms, and finally of proprieties of inferences relating those judgments. This order of explanation is still typical of contemporary representational approaches to semantics (paradigmatically Tarskian model-theoretic ones). There are, however, platonistic representational semantic theories that begin by assigning semantic interpretants (for instance, sets of possible worlds) to declarative sentences. Pragmatist semantic theories typically adopt a top-down approach because they start from the use of concepts, and what one does with concepts is apply them in judgment and action. Thus Kant takes the judgment to be the minimal unit of experience (and so of awareness in his discursive sense) because it is the first element in the traditional logical hierarchy that one can take responsibility for. (Naming is not a doing that makes one answerable to anything.) Frege starts with judgeable conceptual contents because that is what pragmatic force can attach to. And Wittgenstein’s focus on use leads him to privilege sentences as bits of language the utterance of which can make a move in a language game. I take these to be three ways of making essentially the same pragmatist point about the priority of the propositional. Again, the connection between propositionism and pragmatism in the broad sense of approaching meaning from the side of use is not a coercive one, since a functionalist version of this approach might privilege contents associated with subsentential expressions. Inferentialism, however, is an essentially propositional doctrine.

In this respect, inferentialism and expressivism dovetail neatly. For the paradigm of expression is saying something. And what can play the role of premise and conclusion of inference is a saying in the sense of a claiming. Expressivism, like inferentialism, directs our attention in the first place to propositional conceptual contents. A
further story must then be told about the decomposition of such contents into the sort of conceptual contents that are expressed (in a derivative sense) by subsentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates. (And about their subsequent recomposition to produce novel contents. Such a story is presented in Chapter 4.) Representationalism, by contrast, is motivated by a designational paradigm: the relation of a name to its bearer. In one standard way of pursuing this direction of explanation, one must then introduce a special ontological category of states of affairs, thought of as being represented by declarative sentences in something like the same way that objects are represented by singular terms.

Rationalist expressivism understands the explicit (the sayable in the sense of claimable, the form something must be in to count as having been expressed) in terms of its inferential role. Coupled with a linguistic pragmatism, such a view entails that practices of giving and asking for reasons have a privileged, indeed defining, role with respect to linguistic practice generally. What makes something a specifically linguistic (and therefore, according to this view, discursive) practice is that it accords some performances the force or significance of claimings, of propositionally contentful commitments, which can both serve as and stand in need of reasons. Practices that do not involve reasoning are not linguistic or (therefore) discursive practices. Thus the ‘Slab’ Sprachspiel that Wittgenstein introduces in the opening sections of the Philosophical Investigations should not, by these standards of demarcation, count as a genuine Sprachspiel. It is a vocal but not yet a verbal practice. By contrast to Wittgenstein, the inferential identification of the conceptual claims that language (discursive practice) has a center; it is not a motley. Inferential practices of producing and consuming reasons are downtown in the region of linguistic practice. Suburban linguistic practices utilize and depend on the conceptual contents forged in the game of giving and asking for reasons, are parasitic on it. Claiming, being able to justify one’s claims, and using one’s claims to justify other claims and actions are not just one among other sets of things one can do with language. They are not on a par with other ‘games’ one can play. They are what in the first place make possible talking, and therefore thinking: sapience in general. Of course we do many other things as concept users besides applying concepts in judgment and action and justifying those applications. But (by contrast to the indiscriminately egalitarian picture presented by contemporary neo-Romantic theorists such as Derrida) according to this sort of semantic rationalism, those sophisticated, latecomer linguistic and more generally discursive activities are intelligible in principle only against the background of the core practices of inference and assertion.

7. Atomism or Holism?

Closely related to the issue of top-down or bottom-up semantic explanation is the issue of semantic holism versus semantic atomism. The tradition of formal semantics has been resolutely atomistic, in the sense that the assignment of a semantic interpretant to one element (say, a proper name) is taken to be intelligible independently of the assignment of semantic interpretants to any other elements (for instance, predicates or other proper names). One does not need to know anything about what other dots represent, or what blue wavy lines represent, in order to understand that a particular dot stands for Cleveland on a map. The task of formal semantics is the bottom-up one of explaining how semantically relevant whatsths can systematically be assigned to complex expressions, given that they have been assigned already to simple ones. Atomism adds that the assignments to the simple ones can be done one by one. By contrast, inferentialist semantics is resolutely holistic. On an inferentialist account of conceptual content, one cannot have any concepts unless one has many concepts. For the content of each concept is articulated by its inferential
relations to other concepts. Concepts, then, must come in packages (though it does not yet follow that they must come in just one great big one). Conceptual holism is not a commitment that one might be motivated to undertake independently of the considerations that lead one to an inferential conception of the conceptual. It is rather a straightforward consequence of that approach.

8. Traditional or Rationalist Expressivism?

The heart of any expressivist theory is of course its account of expressing. What is expressed appears in two forms, as implicit (only potentially expressible) and explicit (actually expressed). To talk of expression is to talk about a process of transformation of what in virtue of its role in that process becomes visible as a content that appears in two forms, as implicit and then as explicit. As I indicated above, traditional Romantic expressivism took as its paradigm something like the relationship between an inner feeling expressed by an outer gesture. The rationalist expressivism informing the present account is quite different. Where, as here, explicitness is identified with specifically conceptual articulation, expressing something is conceptualizing it: putting it into conceptual form. I said at the outset that the goal of the enterprise is a clear account of sapient awareness, of the sense in which being aware of something is bringing it under a concept. On the approach pursued here, doing that is making a claim or judgment about what one is (thereby) aware of, forming a belief about it—in general, addressing it in a form that can serve as and stand in need of reasons, making it inferentially significant. The image of conceptualizing the unconceptualized is a familiar focus of philosophical attention, and it has given rise to a familiar panoply of philosophical pathologies. The rationalist expressivist course pursued here is distinguished by the particular strategy it employs for understanding the relation between the merely implicit and the conceptually explicit.

That strategy depends on a constellation of related inferential ideas. The first and most fundamental idea, already mentioned above, is a way of thinking about conceptual explicitness. To be explicit in the conceptual sense is to play a specifically inferential role. In the most basic case, it is to be propositionally contentful in the sense of being fit to serve both as a premise and as a conclusion in inferences. According to the relational linguistic view, to be thinkable or believable in this sense is to be assertible. The basic way of working out the pragmatist explanatory strategy is to understand saying (thinking, believing . . . ) that such and such (that is, adopting a propositionally contentful attitude) in terms of a distinctive kind of knowing how or being able to do something. Inferentialism picks out the relevant sort of doing by its inferential articulation. Propositional (and more generally conceptual) contents become available to those engaging in linguistic practices, whose core is drawing conclusions and offering justifications. Merely reliably responding differentially to red things is not yet being aware of them as red. Discrimination by producing repeatable responses (as a machine or a pigeon might do) sorts the eliciting stimuli, and in that sense classifies them. But it is not yet conceptual classification, and so involves no awareness of the sort under investigation here. (If instead of teaching a pigeon to peck one button rather than another under appropriate sensory stimulation, we teach a parrot to utter one noise rather than another, we get only to the vocal, not yet to the verbal.) As a next stage, we might imagine a normative practice, according to which red things are appropriately responded to by making a certain noise. That would still not be a conceptual matter. What is implicit in that sort of practical doing becomes explicit in the application of the concept red when that responsive capacity or skill is put into a larger context that includes treating the responses as inferentially significant: as providing reasons for making other moves in the language game, and as themselves potentially standing in need of reasons that could be provided by making still other moves. The first advantage that this rationalist pragmatism claims over earlier
forms of expressivism is provided by this relatively clear inferential notion of conceptual explicitness.

Pragmatism about the conceptual seeks to understand what it is explicitly to say or think that something is the case in terms of what one must implicitly know how (be able) to do. That the relevant sort of doing is a constellation of asserting and inferring, making claims and giving and asking for reasons for them, is the essence of rationalist or inferentialist pragmatism about the conceptual. But once such an inferential notion of explicitness (propositional or, more generally, conceptual contentfulness) has been put in place, we can appeal to this notion of expressing (what is explicit) to understand various senses in which something can be expressed (what is implicit). The inferentialist picture actually puts in play several notions of implicitness. The first is what is made explicit by a claim or becomes explicit in it: a proposition, possible fact, what is said (sayable) or thought or believed. But in another sense we can talk about what still remains implicit in an explicit claim, namely, its inferential consequences. For in the context of a constellation of inferential practices, endorsing or committing oneself to one proposition (claimable) is implicitly endorsing or committing oneself to others which follow from it. Mastery of these inferential connections is the implicit background against which alone explicit claiming is intelligible. Actually drawing inferences from an explicit claimable (something that can be said, thought, and so on) is exploring the inferential relations that articulate its content. Since in saying that things are thus-and-so, for instance, that the cloth is red, one is not in the same sense saying (making explicit) that it is colored and spatially extended, those consequences count as only implicit. Since they articulate the content of the original saying, they are at least implicit in it. 'Implicit' is once again given a relatively clear inferential sense, but one that is distinct from the sense in which the fact that the cloth is red (to which one can reliably respond differentially) is made explicit in the claim. In different but related senses, an explicit claim has implicit in it:

1. properties governing inferential moves to and from the commitments to the claimable content in question;
2. the other claims that are inferential consequences of the first one, according to the practical proprieties mentioned in (1); and
3. the conceptual content of the claim, which is articulated by the inferences in (1).

These notions of implicitness are direct products of the basic inferential model of explicitness.

9. Is the Semantic Task of Logic Epistemological or Expressive?

One standard way to think of logic is as giving us special epistemic access to a kind of truth. Logic is for establishing the truth of certain kinds of claims, by proving them. But logic can also be thought of in expressive terms, as a distinctive set of tools for saying something that cannot otherwise be made explicit. Seeing how this can be so depends on making a further move: applying the original model of explicitness to the inferential consequences that are implicit (in the sense just considered) in any explicit claim. According to the inferentialist account of concept use, in making a claim one is implicitly endorsing a set of inferences, which articulate its conceptual content. Implicitly endorsing those inferences is a sort of doing. Understanding the conceptual content to which one has committed oneself is a kind of practical mastery: a bit of know-how that consists in being able to discriminate what does and does not follow from the claim, what would be evidence for and against it, and so on. Making explicit that know-how, the inferences one has implicitly endorsed, is putting it in the form of a claim that things are thus-and-so. In this case a central expressive resource for doing that is provided by basic logical vocabulary. In applying the concept lion to Leo, I implicitly commit myself to the applicability of the concept mammal to him. If my language is
expressively rich enough to contain conditionals, I can say that if Leo is a lion, then Leo is a mammal. (And if the language is expressively rich enough to include quantificational operators, I can say that if anything is a lion, then it is a mammal.) That Cleo is a cephalopod is good (indeed, decisive) evidence that she is not a lion. If my language is expressively rich enough to contain negation, I can make that implicit inferential component articulating the content of the concept lion explicit by saying that if Cleo is a cephalopod, then Cleo is not a mammal.

By saying things like this, by using logical vocabulary, I can make explicit the implicit inferential commitments that articulate the content of the concepts I apply in making ordinary explicit claims. Here the original inferential-propositional model of awareness (in the sense of sapience) is applied at a higher level. In the first application, we get an account of consciousness—for example, that Leo is a lion. In the second application we get an account of a kind of semantic self-consciousness. For in this way we begin to say what we are doing in saying that Leo is a lion. For instance, we make explicit (in the form of a claimable, and so propositional content) that we are committing ourselves thereby to his being a mammal by saying that if something is a lion, then it is a mammal. An account along these lines of the expressive role distinctive of logical vocabulary as such is introduced in Chapter 1 of this book. It is applied and extended in subsequent chapters to include such sophisticated locutions as normative vocabulary (in Chapter 2) and intentional tropes such as some uses of ‘of’ and ‘about’ (in Chapter 5), which are not usually put in a box with conditionals and negation. Inferentialism about conceptual content in this way makes possible a new kind of expressivism about logic. Applying the inferential model of explicitness, and so of expression, to the functioning of logical vocabulary provides a proving ground for the model that permits its elaboration at a level of clarity and exactness that has (to say the least) been unusual within the expressivist tradition. Two dimensions along which philosophical payoffs can be expected from this fact are explored in Chapters 4 and 5, which present an expressive account of the nature and deduction of the necessity of the use of singular terms (and predicates), and an account of the expressive role characteristic of explicitly intentional and representational vocabulary, respectively.

Conditional claims—and claims formed by the use of logical vocabulary in general, of which the conditional is paradigmatic for the inferentialist—express a kind of semantic self-consciousness because they make explicit the inferential relations, consequences, and contents of ordinary nonlogical claims and concepts. It is possible to use the model of (partial) logical explicitation of nonlogical conceptual contents to illuminate certain features of ordinary making explicit in nonlogical claims. For instance, the conceptual content of a concept such as red has as a crucial element its inferential circumstances of appropriate application (which, recall, are appealed to in the broadly inferential notion of content, since in applying the concept, one implicitly endorses the propriety of the inference from the concept’s circumstances of appropriate application to its consequences of application, regardless of whether those circumstances are themselves specified in narrowly inferential terms). Part of the practical skill that forms the implicit background of knowing how against which alone a broadly inferentialist semantic theory can explain the practice of explicitly claiming that something is red, then, is the capacity noninferentially to respond appropriately and differentially to red things. Chapter 3 discusses how this part of the implicit background of explicit application of concepts of observables can itself be made explicit, in the logical sense, by first tracking it with a corresponding reliability inference and then codifying that inference with a conditional. In inferentialist terms, the reliability inference conceptualizes the initially nonconceptual capacity to respond differentially to red things. Once it appears in this inferential guise, the aspect of the content of the concept red that is still implicit (in
another sense) even when presented in the form of a reliability inference can be made explicit by using a conditional, just as for any other inferentially articulated aspect.

This development of the relation of expression between what is explicit and what is implicit is guided throughout by the fundamental idea of demarcating the conceptual by its specifically inferential articulation. At the first stage, that idea yields an understanding of the end result of making something explicit in a claimable (judgeable, thinkable, believable), that is, propositional content, of the sort expressed by the use of basic declarative sentences. At the second stage, the same inferentialist idea leads to an expressive model of the conceptual role distinctive of logical vocabulary, which serves to make explicit in the form of claimables, (paradigmatically, conditional ones) the inferential relations that implicitly articulate the contents of the ordinary nonlogical concepts we use in making things explicit in the sense specified at the first stage. At the third stage, the notion of the expressive relation between what is explicit and what is implicit that was developed at the second stage in connection with the use of distinctively logical concepts is applied to illuminate further the relation between what is explicit in the sense of the first stage and what is made explicit thereby. The result is an account with a structure recognizable as Hegelian: a rationalist, expressivist account of (a kind of) consciousness (namely, sapient awareness) provides the basis for a corresponding account of (a kind of) self-consciousness (namely, semantic or conceptual self-consciousness), which is then called upon to deepen the original story by providing a model for understanding the sort of consciousness with which the account began.

II. Historical Context: Rationalism, Pragmatism, and Expressivism

At the very center of this account is its rationalism: the pride of place it gives to specifically inferential articulation, to playing a role in practices of giving and asking for reasons. It provides the answer I offer to the question how to demarcate the distinctive realm of the conceptual. Specifically linguistic practice is picked out (and recognized as discursive) by its incorporation of inferential-and-assertional practices: attributing and undertaking commitments to the propriety of making certain moves and occupying certain positions whose contents are determined by their places in those practices. The resulting rationalistic pragmatism is importantly different in just this respect from that of other semantic pragmatists such as Dewey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Quine, and Rorty. Again, rationalistic expressivism has important conceptual resources and advantages denied to traditional Romantic expressivism. This version of expressivism offers a framework within which it is possible to do detailed semantic work (the argument presented in Chapter 4 is emblematic). And that same framework makes possible an expressivist approach to logic, which provides potentially important new insights—for instance, into the expressive role distinctive of normative vocabulary (discussed in Chapter 2), and the expressive role distinctive of intentional or explicitly representational vocabulary (discussed in Chapter 5).

Empiricism has been the fighting faith and organizing principle of philosophy in the English-speaking world since at least the time of Locke. Its distinctive twentieth-century form, developed by thinkers such as Russell, Carnap, and Quine, joins to the classical insistence on the origin of knowledge in experience an emphasis on the crucial cognitive role played by language and logic. A central goal of this book is to introduce a way of thinking about these latter topics—and so about meaning, mind, and knowledge—that swings free of the context of empiricist commitments that has shaped discussion within this tradition.

In turning away from empiricism I do not mean to deny that consideration of perceptual practices must play a crucial role in our epistemology and semantics. What might be called platitudinous empiricism restricts itself to the observations that without perceptual experience we can have no knowledge of contingent matters of fact, and more deeply, that conceptual content is unintelligible
apart from its relation to perceptual experience? These are not controversial claims. (Indeed, I think it is very difficult to find any philosophers who have ever disputed them, including the most notorious candidates. But I will not try to support that claim here.) The theoretical and explanatory commitments of philosophically substantial empiricisms go well beyond these platitudes. My main target is the semantic theory that I see as underlying empiricist approaches to meaning, mind, knowledge, and action. Empiricism is a current of thought too broad and multifarious, with too many shifting eddies, backwaters, and side channels, to be confined within the well-defined banks of necessary and sufficient conditions. Its general course, though, is marked out by commitment to grounding theoretical and practical reasoning and concept use in the occurrence of episodes we immediately find ourselves with: sense experiences on the cognitive side, and felt motivations or preferences on the active side. In the forms I find most objectionable, having these experiences is thought of as not requiring the exercise of specifically conceptual abilities. It is understood rather as a preconceptual capacity shareable with non-concept-using mammals. Its deliverances are accordingly conceived of as available to explain what concept use consists in, and as providing the raw materials conceptual activities work on or with. (Traditional abstractionist and associationist strategies are just particular ways of working out this line of thought; many others are possible.)

Classical empiricist philosophy of mind takes immediate perceptual experiences as the paradigm of awareness or consciousness. Classical empiricist epistemology takes as its paradigm of empirical knowledge those same experiences, to which it traces the warrant for and authority of all the rest. As the tradition has developed, it has become clearer that both rest on a more or less explicit semantic picture, according to which the content of experience, awareness, and knowledge is to be understood in the first instance in representational terms: as a matter of what is (or pur-
normative significance (the genus of which cognitive significance is a species) consists in the application of concepts. One must already have concepts to be aware in this sense. Of course, this immediately raises the question how one could come to be a concept user unless one could already be aware of things. But to this a pragmatist such as Sellars can reply with a story about how initially merely differentially responsive creatures can be initiated into the implicitly normative social practice of giving and asking for reasons, so that some of their responses can come to count as or have the social significance of endorsements, of the making or staking of inferentially articulated claims.9

Besides rejecting empiricism, the rationalist pragmatism and expressivism presented here is opposed to naturalism, at least as that term is usually understood. For it emphasizes what distinguishes discursive creatures, as subject to distinctively conceptual norms, from their non-concept-using ancestors and cousins. Conceptual norms are brought into play by social linguistic practices of giving and asking for reasons, of assessing the propriety of claims and inferences. Products of social interactions (in a strict sense that distinguishes them merely from features of populations) are not studied by the natural sciences—though they are not for that reason to be treated as spooky and supernatural. In conferring conceptual content on performances, states, and expressions suitably caught up in them, those practices institute a realm of culture that rests on, but goes beyond, the background of reliable differential responsive dispositions and their exercise characteristic of merely natural creatures. Once concept use is on the scene, a distinction opens up between things that have natures and things that have histories. Physical things such as electrons and aromatic compounds would be paradigmatic of the first class, while cultural formations such as English Romantic poetry and uses of the terms ‘nature’ and ‘natural’ would be paradigmatic of the second.

The relations between these categories is a complex affair. Physical, chemical, and biological things have natures rather than histories, but what about the disciplines that define and study them? Should physics itself be thought of as something that has a nature, or as something that has a history? Concluding the latter is giving a certain kind of pride of place to the historical, cultural, and conceptual. For it is in effect treating the distinction between things that have natures and things that have histories, between things studied by the Naturwissenschaften and things studied by the Geisteswissenschaften, as itself a cultural formation: the sort of thing that itself has a history rather than a nature. Grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word—and uses of words are a paradigm of the sort of thing that must be understood historically. In this sense even concepts such as electron and aromatic compound are the sort of thing that has a history. But they are not purely historical. For the proprieties governing the application of those concepts depend on what inferences involving them are correct, that is, on what really follows from what. And that depends on how things are with electrons and aromatic compounds, not just on what judgments and inferences we endorse. (To say that is to say that our use of the corresponding words should not be thought of as restricted to our dispositions to such endorsements.) Understanding the relevant sort of dependence—the way what inferences are correct, and so what we are really committing ourselves to by applying them, and so what their contents really are (the contents we have conferred on them by using them as we do), as opposed to what we take them to be—is a delicate and important task. Some essential raw materials for it are assembled in the final three chapters of this book. Chapter 4 offers an account of what it is to talk about objects. Chapter 5 tells what it is to take our talk to be about objects. And Chapter 6 shows how the structure of reasoning makes it possible to understand subjecting our claims to assessments according to a kind of correctness in which authority is invested in the things we are talking about rather than in our attitudes toward them. None of these is a naturalistic account.
In addition to rejecting empiricism and embracing nonnaturalism, the rationalistic semantic theory introduced here is unusual in not taking representation as its fundamental concept. A methodological commitment to beginning an account of concept use (and so, eventually, of conceptual content) with reasoning rather than representing does not require denying that there is an important representational dimension to concept use. Indeed, the unusual explanatory starting point has the advantage of bringing into relief certain features of conceptual representation that are hard to notice otherwise. The final three chapters highlight some of these, while beginning the process of cashing the promissory note issued by an inferentialist order of explanation—that is, offering an account of inferential relations to objects in terms ultimately of inferential relations among claims. Of course, noninferential language entry moves in perception and language exit moves in action play a crucial role in the story too. But the specifically inferential articulation of the acknowledgments of propositional commitments that result from observation and result in intentional performances are to the fore in understanding the cognitive and practical normative significance of the reliable differential responsive capacities exercised in those processes.

I call the view that inferential articulation is a necessary element in the demarcation of the conceptual ‘weak inferentialism’. The view that inferential articulation broadly construed is sufficient to account for conceptual content I call ‘strong’ inferentialism. The view that inferential articulation narrowly construed is sufficient to account for conceptual content, I call ‘hyperinferentialism’. The difference between the broad and the narrow construal of inferential articulation is just whether or not noninferential circumstances of application (in the case of concepts such as red that have noninferential reporting uses) and consequences of application (in the case of concepts such as ought that have noninferential practical uses) are taken into account. The broad sense focuses attention on the inferential commitment that is implicitly undertaken in using any concept whatever, even those with noninferential circumstances or consequences of application: the commitment, namely, to the propriety of the inference from the circumstances to the consequences of application. The view endorsed here is strong inferentialism.

Inferentialism of any sort is committed to a certain kind of semantic holism, as opposed to the atomism that often goes hand in hand with commitment to a representationalist order of semantic explanation. For if the conceptual content expressed by each sentence or word is understood as essentially consisting in its inferential relations (broadly construed) or articulated by its inferential relations (narrowly construed), then one must grasp many such contents in order to grasp any. Such holistic conceptual role approaches to semantics potentially face problems concerning both the stability of conceptual contents under change of belief and commitment to the propriety of various inferences, and the possibility of communication between individuals who endorse different claims and inferences. Such concerns are rendered much less urgent, however, if one thinks of concepts as norms determining the correctness of various moves. The norms I am binding myself to by using the term ‘molybdenum’—what actually follows from or is incompatible with the applicability of the concept—need not change as my views about molybdenum and its inferential surround change. And you and I may be bound by just the same public linguistic and conceptual norms in the vicinity in spite of the fact that we are disposed to make different claims and inferential moves. It is up to me whether I play a token of the ‘molybdenum’ type in the game of giving and asking for reasons. But it is not then up to me what the significance of that move is. (And I do not take the case to be significantly different if I play such a token internally, in thought.)

As I have already remarked, inferentialism also carries with it a commitment to the conceptual primacy of the propositional. Thus inferentialism semantic explanations reverse the traditional order:
beginning with properties of inference, they explain propositional content, and in terms of both go on to explain the conceptual content expressed by subsentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates. Chapter 4 describes how this last step (which has not been much attended to by recent inferentialists such as Sellars and—on my reading—Dummett) might be accomplished.

The rationalist form of expressivism pursued here also involves rejecting conventional wisdom about the nature and philosophical significance of logic. Logic is not properly understood as the study of a distinctive kind of formal inference. It is rather the study of the inferential roles of vocabulary playing a distinctive expressive role: codifying in explicit form the inferences that are implicit in the use of ordinary, nonlogical vocabulary. Making explicit the inferential roles of the logical vocabulary then can take the form of presenting patterns of inference involving them that are formally valid in the sense that they are invariant under substitution of nonlogical for nonlogical vocabulary. But that task is subsidiary and instrumental only. The task of logic is in the first instance to help us say something about the conceptual contents expressed by the use of nonlogical vocabulary, not to prove something about the conceptual contents expressed by the use of logical vocabulary. On this picture, formal properties of inference essentially involving logical vocabulary derive from and must be explained in terms of material properties of inference essentially involving nonlogical vocabulary rather than the other way around.

Logic is accordingly not a canon or standard of right reasoning. It can help us make explicit (and hence available for criticism and transformation) the inferential commitments that govern the use of all our vocabulary, and hence articulate the contents of all our concepts.

Finally, the views presented here turn on their head prevailing humean ideas about practical reasoning. According to this common approach—which is very much in evidence in Davidson's writings on action, and of rational-choice theorists and others who approach the norms of rationality through decision theory or game theory—the norms governing practical reasoning and defining rational action are essentially instrumental norms, which derive their authority from intrinsically motivating preferences or desires. Those states are the empiricist analogs, on the side of agency, to the preconceptual episodes of awareness to which epistemic authority is traced on the side of cognition. Chapter 2 offers an account in which statements about what an agent prefers or desires are interpreted instead as codifying commitment to certain specific patterns of practical reasoning, selected from among a wide variety of patterns that are codified by the use of other normative vocabulary. The concepts of desire and preference are accordingly demoted from their position of privilege, and take their place as having a derivative and provincial sort of normative authority. Endorsement and commitment are at the center of rational agency—as of rationality in general—and inclination enters only insofar as rational agents must bring inclination in the train of rational propriety, not the other way around.

So I am putting forward a view that is opposed to many (if not most) of the large theoretical, explanatory, and strategic commitments that have shaped and motivated Anglo-American philosophy in the twentieth century: empiricism, naturalism, representationalism, semantic atomism, formalism about logic, and instrumentalism about the norms of practical rationality. In spite of my disagreements with central elements of the worldview that has animated analytic philosophy, I take my expository and argumentative structure and the criteria of adequacy for having made a claim with a clear content, argued for it, and responsibly followed out its consequences resolutely from the Anglo-American tradition. I do not think those standards need be taken to entail or be warranted only by this one constellation of ideas. Indeed, although the enterprise I am engaged in here is not happily identified with analysis of meanings in a traditional sense, it is properly thought of as pursuing a recognizable successor project. For what
I am trying to do is in a clear and specific inferential sense make explicit what is implicit in various philosophically important concepts. Among the examples treated in the following pages are concepts such as conceptual content, logic, ought, reliable, singular term, what is expressed by the ‘of’ or ‘about’ of intentional directedness, and objectivity.

Sellars once said that the aim of his work as a whole was to begin moving analytic philosophy from its human phase into a kantian one. The full implications of this remark include reverberations contributed by many of the chambers and corridors of the Kantian edifice. But at its heart, I think, is the conviction that the distinctive nature, contribution, and significance of the conceptual articulation of thought and action have been systematically slighted by empiricism in all its forms. Although the addition of logic to the mix in the twentieth century was a promising development, there was from Sellars’s point of view a failure to rethink from the beginning the constraints and criteria of adequacy of the enterprise in the light of the expressive power the new formal idioms put at our disposal. The result was the pursuit of traditional empiricist visions by other means—ones that could not in principle do justice in the end to the normativity of concept use that finds its expression variously in the distinction between laws of nature codifying inferential relations among facts, on the one hand, and mere regularities regarding them, on the other, and in the difference between acting for a reason and merely moving when prompted. The more promising alternative is to focus to begin with on the conceptual articulation of perceptually acquired and practically pursued commitments and entitlements rather than on the experiences and inclinations with which we simply find ourselves. That kantian strategy is a better one for the same sort of reasons that lead us to expect that one will learn more about a building by studying blueprints than by studying bricks.

My teacher Richard Rorty has described the enterprise to which this volume is a contribution as an extension of Sellars’s: to make possible a further transition from a kantian to a hegelian approach to thought and action. The justice of this characterization can be understood in terms of the strategic options already rehearsed here. First, I am interested in the divide between nature and culture. In this context we can identify the realm of the cultural with activities that either consist in the application of concepts in judgment and action or that presuppose such capacities. The Geisteswissenschaften have as their proper aim the study of concept use and things made possible by it—activities of which only concept users are capable. One of my principal goals is to present and explore the consequences of a particular sort of principle of demarcation for the realm of culture, so understood. Although of course cultural activities arise within the framework of a natural world, I am most concerned with what is made possible by the emergence of the peculiar constellation of conceptually articulated comportments that Hegel called “Geist.” Cultural products and activities become explicit as such only by the use of normative vocabulary that is in principle not reducible to the vocabulary of the natural sciences (though of course the same phenomena under other descriptions are available in that vocabulary). Indeed, the deployment of the vocabulary of the natural sciences (like that of any other vocabulary) is itself a cultural phenomenon, something that becomes intelligible only within the conceptual horizon provided by the Geisteswissenschaften. The study of natures itself has a history, and its own nature, if any, must be approached through the study of that history. This is a picture and an aspiration that we owe to Hegel.

A second dimension of Hegelian influence is his pragmatism about conceptual norms. One of Kant’s great insights is that judgments and actions are to be distinguished from the responses of merely natural creatures by their distinctive normative status, as things we are in a distinctive sense responsible for. He understood concepts as the norms that determine just what we have made ourselves responsible for, what we have committed ourselves to and what would entitle us to it, by particular acts of judging and acting. Kant, however, posed many hard questions about the nature
and origins of this normativity, of the bindingness of concepts, out of the familiar phenomenal realm of experience into the noumenal realm. Hegel brought these issues back to earth by understanding normative statuses as social statuses—by developing a view according to which (as my colleague John Haugeland put the point in another context) all transcendental constitution is social institution. The background against which the conceptual activity of making things explicit is intelligible is taken to be implicitly normative essentially social practice.

Pragmatism about the norms implicit in cognitive activity came down to us in the first half of the twentieth century from three independent directions: from the classical American pragmatists, culminating in Dewey; from the Heidegger of Being and Time; and from the Wittgenstein of the Philosophical Investigations. In trying to work out how the insights of these traditions (partly common, partly complementary) could be applied to make progress within contemporary philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, however, I found myself driven back to Hegel's original version. For unlike all three of these more recent sorts of social practice theory, Hegel's is a rationalist pragmatism. By contrast to their conceptual assimilationism, he gives pride of place to reasoning in understanding what it is to say or do something.

Again, Dewey and James, the early Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein each resisted, in his own way, the representational semantic paradigm. But none of them evidently provides an alternative paradigm that is structurally rich enough and definite enough either to do real semantic work with—or of the sort done by model-theoretic developments of representationalism, including possible worlds semantics—or to provide an account of the distinctive function of logical vocabulary. Hegel's rationalistic, inferentialist version of the Romantic expressivist tradition he inherited, it seemed to me, holds out the promise of just such an alternative paradigm. Hegel's version of expressivism is further attractive in that it is not only pragmatic and inferentialist about the conceptual but also relational, in the sense that the implicit and the explicit are each at least in part constituted by their expressive relation to each other. The inferentialist understanding of explicitness is just what is needed to make an expressive alternative to representationalism viable. As I put the point above, rationalist expressivism understands the explicit—the thinkable, the sayable, the form something must be in to count as having been expressed—in terms of its role in inference. I take Hegel to have introduced this idea, although he takes the minimal unit of conceptual content to be the whole holistic system of inferentially interrelated judgeables, and so is not a propositionalist.

Finally, this rationalist expressivist pragmatism forges a link between logic and self-consciousness, in the sense of making explicit the implicit background against which alone anything can be made explicit, that is recognizably Hegelian. For it offers an account of a kind of consciousness, awareness in the sense of sapience, which underwrites a corresponding account of a kind of self-consciousness: semantic or conceptual self-consciousness. This notion of what is made explicit by the characteristic use of specifically logical vocabulary then makes possible a new appreciation of the sort of consciousness with which the story begins.

I think this is a constellation of ideas that has the prospect of enlarging the frontiers of contemporary analytic philosophy. My hope is that by slighting the similarities to animals which preoccupied Locke and Hume and highlighting the possibilities opened up by engaging in social practices of giving and asking for reasons, we will get closer to an account of being human that does justice to the kinds of consciousness and self-consciousness distinctive of us as cultural, and not merely natural, creatures.

III. Structure of the Book

The six chapters that make up the body of this work present ideas and arguments drawn from or developing out of my 1994 book Making It Explicit. There is nothing in them that will come as a surprise to anyone who has mastered that work. They were
originally written as lectures, each intended to be intelligible in its own right, apart from its relation to the others. I had in mind audiences that had perhaps not so much as dipped into the big book but were curious about its themes and philosophical consequences. The lectures have been presented individually on many occasions, to many audiences, whose penetrating questions and lively discussion have helped me avoid at least some errors and to groom and streamline the presentations. The lectures were also written with an eye to mutual reinforcement and cumulative effect for those occasions when I was afforded the opportunity for a more extended presentation. I delivered versions of all but one (Chapter 3, on reliabilism) as the Townsend Lectures at Berkeley in the fall of 1997, and a different set of five (all but the last) more recently at the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt in the winter of 1999. The ancestors of Chapters 1, 4, and 5 saw the light of day as my Hempel Lectures at Princeton in the spring of 1994. I think experience has proven that the stories told in each of these chapters can stand on their own, and that together they give a good picture of some of the argumentative high points of the approach to language and thought developed at length in Making It Explicit. Where questions arise about the presuppositions and context of these arguments, however, it should be kept in mind that that work is what should be consulted, and should be considered as offering the fullest account I can manage—including about the topics put on the table in this introduction. A number of important motivations, commitments, and developments have had to be omitted in this shorter, simpler book.

Chapter 1, "Semantic Inferentialism and Logical Expressivism," introduces and motivates two basic ideas. The first is that to have specifically conceptual content is to play a certain kind of role in reasoning. The most basic sort of conceptual content is propositional content: the sort of content expressed by declarative sentences (and the 'that' clauses or content-specifying sentential complements of propositional attitude ascriptions). Because contents of this sort are the right shape to be sayable, thinkable, and believable, they can be understood as making something explicit. The claim is that to have or express a content of this kind just is to be able to play the role both of premise and of conclusion in inferences. The second idea is that the expressive role characteristic of logical vocabulary as such is to make inferential relations explicit. Thus conditionals are treated as paradigms of logical locutions. This line of thought makes sense only if one thinks of proprieties of inference as extending beyond those written down by logical form. That is, one must acknowledge that besides inferences that are formally good in the sense of being logically valid, there are inferences that are materially good in the sense of articulating the contents of the nonlogical concepts applied in their premises and conclusions.

In the rest of the book these ideas are applied to shed light on a variety of philosophical issues: normativity and practical reasoning in Chapter 2, the ultimately inferential nature of appeals to the reliability of cognitive processes such as perception in Chapter 3, how the notion of substitution allows the inferential semantic approach to be extended to subsentential expressions (which cannot play the direct inferential role of premises and conclusions) such as singular terms and predicates in Chapter 4, the inferential expressive role characteristic of the locutions that make explicit the intentional directedness or representational aboutness of thought and talk in Chapter 5, and the sort of social-perspectival, dialogical inferential articulation that makes possible the objectivity of conceptual content in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2, "Action, Norms, and Practical Reasoning," extends the inferentialist paradigm in logic and semantics to encompass practical reasoning, culminating in noninferential discursive exit transitions in the form of intentional actions. Thus it combines an inferentialist approach to the contents of intentions with the inferentialist approach to the content of beliefs. It aims to do three things, corresponding to the three pieces of the title of the chapter:
To explain in inferentialist terms the expressive role that distinguishes specifically normative vocabulary. That is, to say what it is the job of such vocabulary to make explicit. Doing this is saying what "ought" means.

To introduce a non-humean way of thinking about practical reasoning.

To offer a broadly kantian account of the will as a rational faculty of practical reasoning.

The empiricist tradition seeks to trace back talk of reasons for action and norms governing action to underlying preferences and desires, which are understood both as intrinsically motivating and as the only sorts of things that can be intrinsically motivating. Thus any complete expression of a reason for action must include a specification of what it is that the agent wants, in virtue of which the reason functions (motivationally) as a reason for that agent. In the story told here, by contrast to this instrumentalist one, preferences and desires are explained in terms of commitments to certain patterns of practical inference, that is, in terms of what is a reason for what, instead of the other way around. Different sorts of normative vocabulary are presented as making it possible to codify, in the explicit form of claims (claimables), commitment to the propriety of different patterns of practical reasoning. Against this background, preferences and desires take their place as one sort of commitment among others, distinguished by its structure rather than by any privilege with respect either to reasons or to motivations for action.

Chapter 3, “Insights and Blindspots of Reliabilism,” follows out the application of inferentialist semantic ideas to observation, that is, to perceptual noninferential discursive entrance transitions. The topic is the taking up into the conceptual order of the reliable differential responsive dispositions—for instance, to respond to red things by applying the concept red—that are essential to the contents of empirical concepts corresponding to observable states of affairs. The issue is approached through a discussion of contemporary epistemological reliabilism, which seeks to put appeals to reliable processes in place of more traditional appeals to inferential justifications—at least in epistemology, and perhaps also in understanding the contents of knowledge claims. Three insights and two blindspots of reliabilism are identified. What I call the Founding Insight points out that reliably formed true beliefs can qualify as knowledge even where the candidate knower cannot justify them. Goldman’s Insight is that attributions of reliability must be relativized to reference classes. The Implicit Insight I discern in the examples used to motivate the first two claims is that attributions of reliability should be understood in terms of endorsements of a distinctive kind of inference. The Conceptual Blindspot results from overgeneralizing the founding insight from epistemology to semantics, taking it that because there can be knowledge even in cases where the knower cannot offer an inferential justification, it is therefore possible to understand the content of (knowledge) claims without appeal to inference at all. The Naturalistic Blindspot seeks in reliabilism the basis of a fully naturalized epistemology, one that need not appeal to norms or reasons at all. To avoid the Conceptual Blindspot, one must appreciate the significance of specifically inferential articulation in distinguishing representations that qualify as beliefs, and hence as candidates for knowledge. To avoid the Naturalistic Blindspot, one must appreciate that concern with reliability is concern with a distinctive kind of interpersonal inference. Appreciating the role of inference in these explanatory contexts is grasping the implicit insight of reliabilism. It is what is required to conserve and extend both the Founding Insight and Goldman’s Insight. Thus, reliability should be understood in terms of the goodness of inference rather than the other way around.

The last three chapters take up the challenge of explaining the referential or representational dimension of concept use and conceptual content in terms of the inferential articulation that is here
treated as primary in the order of explanation. To make a claim is to purport to state a fact. Chapter 4 offers an inferentialist account of what it is for the facts stated by true claimings to be about objects, and an inferentialist argument to the conclusion that facts must be about objects. An inferentialist pragmatism is committed to a top-down order of semantic explanation. It must give pride of place to propositional contents, for it is expressions with that sort of content that can play the basic inferential roles of premise and conclusion. The utterance of expressions that are suitable to appear in both these kinds of roles can have the pragmatic force or significance of assertions, and so the expressions in question can be identified as declarative sentences. Some further work is needed to distinguish and attribute conceptual content to subentential expressions such as singular terms and predicates, since they cannot serve as premises or conclusions in inferences. Frege's notion of substitution provides a way to extend the inferentialist account of the conceptual content of sentences to these sorts of subentential expressions. It gives us a way of making sense of the notion of the contribution the occurrence of a subentential expression makes to the correctness of inferences it appears in (as an element of a premise or conclusion). For we can notice which substitutions of subentential expressions do, and which do not, preserve the correctness of inferences in which the sentences they occur in play the role of premise or conclusion. In that way, subentential expressions can be accorded a substitutionally indirect inferential role.

Chapter 4, “What Are Singular Terms, and Why Are There Any?” falls into two parts, corresponding to the two parts of its title. The first argues that singular terms and predicates can be distinguished by the structure of the contributions they make to the correctness of substitution inferences involving sentences in which they occur. The second part argues that this is not a contingent or accidental structure. Very general conditions on inferential practice mandate that if inferentially significant subentential structure is to be discerned in sentences at all, it must take the form of singular terms and predicates—that is, that if we are in the fact-stating line of work at all, the facts we state must be facts about objects and their properties and relations. Although in principle it is coherent to conceive of discursive practices that involve only sentential expressions devoid of internal structure, the expressive power of such languages is severely limited. For the productivity and creativity of language depend on the fact that an indefinite number of novel sentences can be produced and understood because they are constructed out of familiar subentential elements. The central argument of the chapter is a derivation of the necessity of a singular term and predicate structure (in the precise substitution inferential sense specified in the first part of the chapter) from just two conditions: that there not be arbitrary restrictions on the carving up of sentences with a substitutional scalpel, and that the language contain the minimal expressive resources of sentential logic, namely, conditionals (or negation). Since, according to the inferentialist expressive view of logic, these are the locations needed to make explicit within the language the material inferential relations in virtue of which ordinary nonlogical sentences have the conceptual contents they do, this means that singular terms and predicates will be substitutionally discernible within the basic sentences of any productive, projectible language capable of the minimal semantic self-consciousness made possible by the use of conditionals. The conclusion is that any language with sufficient expressive power concerning its own conceptual contents—never mind the character of the world it is being used to talk about—must take the form of sentences containing singular terms and predicates. That is, it must at least purport to state facts about objects and their properties and relations. I call this, rather grandly, an expressive transcendental deduction of the necessity of objects. It is certainly the most difficult part of the book, but the argument, though technical, requires no competence beyond familiarity with first-order logic.
At this point, then, we have seen in some sense what it is for our talk to be about objects. Chapter 5, “A Social Route from Reasoning to Representing,” complements this discussion by offering a general account of aboutness. It pursues a double-barreled expressivist and pragmatist strategy. On the expressivist side, it aims to understand what is implicit in what one is doing in terms of the kind of saying that makes it explicit. Here the aim is to understand the activity of representing things as being thus-and-so in terms of the use of the explicitly representational locutions we use to express the representational dimension of concept use. If we put to one side technical, inevitably theory-laden philosophical terms such as ‘denotes’ and some uses of ‘refers’ and ‘represents’, the claim is that the ordinary distinction between what we say or think and what we are talking of thinking about is expressed by using terms like ‘of’ and ‘about’—not in phrases such as “the pen of my aunt” and “weighing about five pounds,” but when used to express intentional directedness, as in “thinking of Benjamin Franklin” and “talking about wolves.” These uses are in turn distinguished as those used to express de re attributions of propositional attitudes in the explicit, claimable form of ascriptions, such as “Adams claimed of Benjamin Franklin that he did not invent the lightning rod” (which might be paraphrased as “Adams represented Benjamin Franklin as not inventing the lightning rod”). In the pragmatist phase of the argument, then, we ask how one must use expressions in order for them to play the expressive role of explicit de re ascriptions of propositional attitude. The argument is completed by answering this question by an account of the inferential role distinctive of such ascriptions. The claim is that they codify certain interpersonal inferential commitments. The result is an account of the role of the explicitly representational vocabulary we use to express intentional directedness as codifying inferential commitments—that is, according to the expressive approach to logic, an account of its specifically logical expressive role.

Chapter 6, “Objectivity and the Normative Fine Structure of Rationality,” offers an argument in two parts, again corresponding to the two parts of the title. First is an argument for a thesis about the norms governing any practices recognizable as including the giving of and asking for reasons—any practice in which some performances have the implicit force or significance of asserting and inferring—that is, according to the rationalist linguistic pragmatist line of thought pursued here, any genuinely discursive or concept-using practices. The claim is that those implicit practical norms must, in order to count as discursive, come in at least two flavors. It must be possible for some performances to have the practical significance of undertaking commitments. For asserting something is committing oneself to it, and the beliefs those assertions express involve a kind of commitment. It is such commitments that, in the first instance, stand in practical inferential relations—such as that by committing oneself overtly (assertionally) to Leo’s being a lion, one thereby implicitly commits oneself (whether one realizes it or not) to Leo’s being a mammal. And it is the contents of those commitments that stand in the semantic inferential relations that can be made explicit by the use of conditionals. But for such a structure of consequential commitment to count as involving assessments of reasons, there must be in play also a notion of entitlement to one’s commitments: the sort of entitlement that is in question when we ask whether someone has good reasons for her commitments. The question whether or not one is committed to a certain claim(able) must be distinct from the question whether or not one is entitled (by reasons) to that commitment.

What I call here the ‘normative fine structure of rationality’ is the constellation of kinds of broadly inferential relations that is generated once we recognize these two sorts of normative status. For now we can discern and distinguish at least three fundamental ones: commitment-preserving inferences, entitlement-preserving inferences, and incompatibilities. The first is a class of materially good inferences (that is, ones whose correctness or incorrectness
essentially depends on or articulates the content of the nonlogical concepts that occur in their premises or conclusions) that generalizes what appears in the formalist tradition of logic as deductive inferences. The second is a class of materially good inferences that generalizes what appears in the formalist tradition as inductive inferences. The third has no classical analog. We can say that two claims are materially incompatible in case commitment to one precludes entailment to the other. (This is a normative relation. One can undertake incompatible assertible commitments as easily and intelligibly as one can undertake incompatible practical ones, for instance, by making two promises both of which cannot be kept. What one cannot do is be entitled to both—indeed, in standard cases, to either—of the incompatible commitments.) This richer practical inferential structure provides important new resources for logic. For instance, one can define the negation of $p$ as its minimum incompatible: it is the claim that is commitment entailed by every claim materially incompatible with $p$. It also provides important new resources for semantics. The final portion of the chapter shows how this structure of reasoning makes it possible to understand subjecting our claims to assessments according to a kind of correctness in which authority is invested in the things we are (in that central normative sense) talking about rather than in our attitudes toward them. Thus, at the end of the discussion we see how inferentially articulated conceptual norms can underwrite assessments of objective correctness of representation.

ONE

Semantic Inferentialism
and Logical Expressivism

I. Introduction

I want to introduce here a way of thinking about semantics that is different from more familiar ones, and on that basis also a new way of thinking about logic. In case that seems insufficiently ambitious, I will introduce these ideas by sketching a different way of thinking about some important episodes in the history of philosophy in the era that stretches from Descartes to Kant. I then explain and motivate the two ideas indicated in the title by putting together considerations drawn from three different thinkers, Frege, Dummett, and Sellars, or, as I think of them, the sage of Jena, the sage of Oxford, and the sage of Pittsburgh. In each case I pick up strands other than those usually emphasized when we read these figures.

II. Representationalism and Inferentialism

Pre-Kantian empiricists and rationalists alike were notoriously disposed to run together causal and conceptual issues, largely through insufficient appreciation of the normative character of the "order and connection of ideas" (Spinoza) that matters for concepts. But there is another, perhaps less appreciated, contrast