Abstract

This dissertation is an exposition and critique of Robert Brandom’s theory of discursive objectivity. It discusses this theory both within the context of Brandom’s own systematic philosophical project and, in turn, within the ideas and questions characteristic of the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition in German philosophy. It is argued that Brandom’s attempt to articulate a theory of the objectivity of discursive norms (and hence also of the content of discursive attitudes) resembles J.G. Fichte’s development of themes central to Kant’s philosophy. This “Fichtean” approach to the problem of objectivity is then compared and contrasted to that of G.W.F. Hegel. Though Brandom, Fichte and Hegel share the desire to derive an account of the conditions of objectivity from the social character is discursive practices, Hegel offers a version of this project that differs with respect to the nature of self-consciousness, sociality and truth. It is then argued that Brandom’s theory suffers significant internal inconsistencies that could be avoided by adopting a more “Hegelian” approach to these three themes. More specifically, Brandom’s own project requires that he recognize the necessity and irreducibility of firstperson and second-person discursive attitudes, as well as that he recognize the role of “IWe” social practices for discursive objectivity. Furthermore, he must include in his explanations some form of natural teleology and hence he must abandon his deflationary approach to semantic explanation. However, Brandom’s methodological and metaphysical commitments prevent him from doing so.