

# *Preface*

## Linguistic and Rational Pragmatism: The Philosophies of Wittgenstein and Brandom

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WITTGENSTEIN CAME TO CHANGE FOREVER how philosophy is done, at least in the eyes of a vast majority of philosophers inspired by his teachings. He did away with the last vestiges of innocent speculation about metaphysics, ontology and epistemology they say, once philosophers had learned to see language as the objective background for private thought, a lesson that cannot be forgotten. As P. M. S. Hacker puts it, philosophers before Wittgenstein were spinners of wonderful webs of philosophical illusion, while Wittgenstein was the paradigmatic destroyer of these. From this point of view, it is therefore a legitimate question about the work of any philosopher offering explanations after Wittgenstein if he is providing new insights rather than spinning new illusions. All the more, if the thinker claims that his explanations are built on crucial aspects of Wittgenstein's work: how does the new approach stand up to the many challenges the use of philosophical language faces and simultaneously beware of becoming bewitched by it?

Robert B. Brandom is very much aware of these challenges. As María José Frápólli reminds us in her introductory remarks to the Interview contained in this volume, he “has been enormously generous in stressing at almost every step of the development of his general view that he stands on the shoulders of giants like Kant, Hegel, Frege and Wittgenstein; and he acknowledges being impressed by the works of Dummett, Sellars, Rorty, Davidson and quite a few others. But still, his proposal involves a clear discontinuity with the standard approaches to language and

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normativity proper of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Inferential pragmatism implies a reinterpretation of almost everything that is important in philosophy". If this is right, then it seems also right to put the philosophy Brandom is proposing to Wittgenstein's litmus test. It is my hope that this issue has succeeded in putting together some of the right questions and providing some illuminating reflections on some aspects of interest.

The present volume is divided into four sections, grouped roughly into articles dealing with the general outlook of Brandom's philosophical proposal and how it compares to Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as a healing from philosophical delusions, in the first section. The second section is meant for reflections dealing more specifically with language philosophy. In the third section you will find articles which discuss very specific topics of logic, epistemology and mathematics. The last section is the written version of an Interview with Professor Brandom conducted mainly by María José Frápolli.

Most of the articles speak for themselves and each of them is presented with an abstract. You will also find a brief description of each author at the end of the article, as well as an address and means to reach them.

The discussion begins in the **first Section** with a short piece, written more than ten years before *Making It Explicit*, in which **Robert Brandom** sets up many of the key elements for his monumental undertaking of re-writing analytic philosophy by exorcising the representationalist aspects of the urge for a semantic theory. It is followed by a critical assessment by **John McDowell** about Brandom's picture of Wittgenstein; the article was included with the idea to display some of the perceived tensions between Wittgenstein's and Brandom's philosophies before the discussion properly starts. It is followed then by an extended paper written by **Robert Brandom** specifically for this issue, dedicated to adding clarity to the question of how the author's philosophy is inspired by Wittgenstein and where and why he parts ways with him. The remaining pieces in the first section, which take up the larger portion of this monograph, all deal with general questions of how the two philosophies and their view of human practice compare, or how Brandom's reading of Wittgenstein might be disputed.

You will find here a incisive discussion by **Simon Blackburn** not only of several aspects which unite and separate, respectively, the philosophies of Wittgenstein and Brandom (the notion of representation not being primitive, philosophy as

description or as theory, Wittgenstein's wordly pragmatism vs. Brandom's intra-linguisticism), but also Brandom's merit in working out the details of a normative realism that separates him from other expressivists.

**Leila Haaparanta** also finds in her discussion many similarities in Wittgenstein and Brandom, but perceives there to be more ethical overtones and a normativity of actions in the latter's language philosophy, while she asserts that Wittgenstein's is a normativity primarily of language. In her discussion of Brandom's treatment of ethical vocabulary she also sees many parallels to Wittgenstein's view of it.

**Paul Horwich** attacks the very basic idea of normativity as primary notion to account for the conceptual content of assertions, traced by Brandom from Kant through Frege, Wittgenstein and the Pragmatists to himself, and maintains instead that Wittgenstein's explanation of meaning as use is best understood as promoting a naturalistic view about meaning that does not rely on semantics and normativity. His paper is described in line with a discussion that began in his book *Meaning* (1998), and continued in *Reflections on Meaning* (2005), as well as in *Wittgenstein's Metaphilosophy* (2012).

**Manuel de Pinedo** defends in his article the strand of quietism in the later Wittgenstein's philosophy, invoking the work of John McDowell, and sees much and exciting philosophical work to be done while avoiding any attempt to embark on the construction of philosophical theories. His paper is written in Spanish and echoes a work previously published in English under the title "Whistlin' past the graveyard: Quietism and philosophical engagement" in *Philosophos* (11:2, 2007).

**Danielle Macbeth** takes aim at the I–Thou sociality Brandom presents in *Making It Explicit* as the only means to make sense of ourselves as rational beings, able to distinguish between how norms are applied and how norms should be applied, and opposes it to what she describes as Wittgenstein's I–We sociality and which she takes to be the only way to really understand ourselves as rational beings answerable to truth.

**Bernhard Weiss** starts his article by looking at Brandom's "bold conjecture", as Jeremy Wanderer calls it, which is the idea that assertions are to be seen as normative statuses of commitments and entitlements and compares it to Wittgenstein's thinking about normativity. In particular the notion of scorekeeping is put to the test. Following McFarlane, Weiss finds Brandom's account wanting and suggests instead a model involving a practice of policing that does not require

keeping record and knowing the relevant context.

**Daniel Kapolkas** argues that Brandom's accounting for knowledge overlooks a contentful mental state arising from perceptual experience which makes his theory unable to find a satisfactory way to deal with the phenomenon of seeing aspects. A further difficulty arising from the failure to account for perception is identified as the inability to justify attributions of reliability to observers to make observation reports.

**Tomasz Zarebski** builds on Rush Rhees' critique of Wittgenstein's claim that language has no essence. The unity of language must be maintained, and as the vehicle to do this Rhees proposes the notion of conversation. Though he does not develop a full theory, the author thinks that while relying on holism, propositionalism and essentialism, Rhees also proffers a rudimentary form of inferentialism, establishing an interesting background to the much fuller developed ideas of Brandom.

**Florian Franken Figueiredo** attacks in his paper the way Brandom construes Wittgenstein's view of what is involved in following a rule. While Brandom relies on mutual interpretation of implicit norms involved in discursive commitments, Figueiredo maintains, Wittgenstein's answer is that at bottom there is no justification for following a rule beyond tacit agreement on bedrock practices.

The first section includes another piece in Spanish by **Ana María Giraldo Giraldo** raising the question if Brandom's philosophy adheres in all its aspects to the autonomy of grammar, a notion Wittgenstein maintains throughout his mature philosophy and Brandom explicitly agrees to the principle. She takes a look in particular at the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions in chapter 8 of *Making It Explicit* in order to understand how we ascribe propositional attitudes.

**Jordi Fairhurst's** work revolves around moral discourse in Wittgenstein and Brandom and how their different approach to pragmatics affects their view of meaning and truth of moral vocabulary and discursive practices. While Wittgenstein dismisses the notion of truth and falsity in moral discourse, Fairhurst finds that Brandom exhibits in his philosophy a weak version of moral cognitivism.

A third paper in Spanish co-authored by **Freddy O. Santamaría** and **Simon Ruiz Martínez** discusses the notion of community underlying Wittgenstein's and Brandom's philosophy, a topic also raised by the contribution of Danielle Macbeth.

In **my** paper I pretend to establish that there is a philosophical strand that runs

from Kant to Frege, Wittgenstein and Brandom, which is not always fully appreciated and still worthwhile exploring and that, in spite of much scepticism, several key aspects of the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein were recovering Fregean conceptions that were misunderstood or under-appreciated in the subsequent development of logic and analytic philosophy during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I also try to show that Fregean ideas are present both in Wittgenstein's and Brandom's work, but that it is different aspects of Frege's philosophy which are picked up, respectively, by the later Wittgenstein and by Brandom, leading perhaps to conflicting positions.

**The second section** concentrates more specifically on questions related to the notion of language. It contains only one piece written in Spanish by Juan José Acero which is the only one in the monograph not making mention of Brandom at all. A brief summary of it follows below.

**Vojtěch Kolman** reminds the reader of Wittgenstein's advice to always read his *Philosophical Investigations* against the background of his *Tractatus*, in particular, when it comes to changing the picture metaphor to the game metaphor of language. Rather than viewing the reduction by Brandom of Wittgenstein's motley of language games to the one and only game of giving and asking for reasons as a shortcoming which makes it difficult to account for the cognitive difference of human experience, for instance in art, the author suggests that both Wittgenstein and Brandom may be seen as taking the picture and game metaphors to be part of a single concept of reflexivity or self-consciousness in a Hegelian spirit.

**Giacomo Turbanti** begins his discussion by reminding the reader that a key move in Wittgenstein's transition from the *Tractatus* to his later philosophy was denying that language has an essence, while Brandom holds that what distinguishes human language is that it is built around assertions as its downtown. The author notes that Rebecca Kukla's and Mark Lance's recent attempt to generalize Brandom's normative pragmatics to a wider range of discursive practices creates tensions with the latter's approach to rational pragmatism. Turbanti explores how these tensions between the different approaches to explain the conceptual content of linguistic practice may or may not allow for a unitary account of rationality.

**Pietro Salis** also takes issue with one of the most characteristic differences between Wittgensteinian linguistic and Brandom's rational pragmatism, i.e. the fact that language is a motley for the former and moulded around assertions for the

latter. The author asks whether Brandom's insistence on a downtown for language is a step backwards from Wittgenstein pluralistic view of language. He reaches the conclusion that Brandom's proposal, far from being an obstacle to a comprehension of language as a multifaceted practice, opens up new possibilities to a philosophical pluralism based on explicit principles.

The second section concludes with an article by **Marcos Silva** which provides a discussion inspired by a Brandomian view of the notion of inferentialism present in the *Satzsysteme* Wittgenstein developed during his verificationist middle period. The author discusses further how Wittgenstein proposes to deal with negation in relation with material incompatibilities and propositional sense.

**The third section** is dedicated to questions of logic, mathematics and algorithms. The article by **María José Frápolli** discusses problems arising within the corpus of Brandom's philosophy around the impossibility under first person accounts to distinguish knowledge from belief under a pragmatist reading of the Gettier problem. She finds that the pragmatic aspects of the Gettier cases has not received enough attention, a void her paper is meant to fill, drawing on Ramsey as well as Brandom, by showing the importance of the third person perspective displaying normative notions as a semantic feature derived from their pragmatic aspects.

The contribution by **Juliet Floyd** provides a comparison of a version of Cantor's diagonal argument by, respectively, Wittgenstein and Turing. The article has been previously published and is presented here in a bilingual version with an addition establishing a connection to Brandom's philosophy. The objective of the author is not only to discuss the details of Wittgenstein's way of dealing with Cantor's diagonal argument but also to throw light on Wittgenstein's influence in Turing's anthropological approach to the foundations of logic.

The monograph ends with an **interview** Brandom granted María José Frápolli and me for *Disputatio* in the summer of 2018.

I shall dwell a bit more on the article by **Juan José Acero "Wittgenstein vs. Chomsky: To Shorten the Distance"** reflecting on the compatibility of Wittgenstein's and Chomsky's philosophy of language, which has been included even though it does not mention Brandom, because I think that it shines an additional light on the discussion we wish to encourage here by showing how a purely scientific approach to language philosophy might be shown to be entirely compatible with the way in which Wittgenstein discusses language. Brandom himself is not hostile to the

scientific angle of such an investigation. An additional interest might be brought in by Brandom's ideas about a relationship describable in terms of algorithms for making explicit in a restricted language the norms that govern a richer language, as presented in his *Between Saying and Doing* which also makes reference to Chomsky's computational approach to syntactic relations between different vocabularies.

Robert Brandom strains Wittgenstein's view of philosophy in several aspects, not the least by severing the direct link between practice and meaning as he constructs an expressively more powerful target language by *algorithmic* means, as proposed in particular in *Between Saying and Doing*. Another kind of stress is put on Wittgenstein's linking the meaning of words with their use by Noam Chomsky theory of generative grammar. Basic grammar is for Chomsky a question of computation irrespective of any semantic aspects, as in the automaton language Brandom analyses in his investigations just mentioned, appealing to Chomsky's early investigations in the 1950s. It seems interesting therefore, to have a look not only at how Brandom's approach may look by Wittgensteinian lights but also Chomsky's.

It is generally understood, says the author, that Chomsky takes language to be an entirely natural faculty which should be studied by means of natural sciences, while for Wittgenstein it is a social phenomenon that cannot be usefully studied without taking into consideration the normative behaviour of the language community in question. For Wittgenstein, language is a cultural, not a natural product. For Chomsky, nothing like the rules as supposed by language philosophy since Frege exist: that is, there is no *objective* dimension to language (in a Fregean sense), but the language behaviour is just the result of the evolution of the neurological structures. Another source of conflict between a view of language inspired by Wittgenstein and one inspired by Chomsky's theory is the notion of word meaning as use. The author suggests that for Chomsky "meaning is use" is not what we want to know when we ask for the meaning of a word. Chomsky, we might conclude, sides with the people —Putnam and Kripke come to mind— who think we know the meaning of a word when we know all or most of what there is to know about the thing the word stands for, except that Chomsky rather identifies the cognitive structure with neurological connections and that it is these which are of interest here. Wittgenstein would reply, Acero thinks, that the underlying neurological structures that may or may not accompany the understanding of a meaning don't concern the philosopher.

A further difference between Wittgenstein and Chomsky is illustrated with the help of “Kripke's Paradox” about rule-following. While Wittgenstein reaches the conclusion that at rock bottom following a rule is a social praxis which is followed and not subject to interpretation, Chomsky sees here a structure of the “mind/brain” at work.

What we are dealing here with, the author says, are two different metaphors of language. For Chomsky, the language is a mirror of the mind *without* the intention to imply, however, the presence of a language of the mind that is translated and expressed by a perceptible public language. What language reflects as a growing domination, he proposes, is a state of maturation of the language faculty in the mind/brain. Just as Wittgenstein, Chomsky does not hold that the only function of language is to communicate ideas.

One essential element frequently overlooked when comparing Wittgenstein and Chomsky and thus a main culprit of the frequent hyperbolization of their differences into total incompatibility, the author asserts, is Chomsky's rationalism. Grammar, as Chomsky understands it, is *one* of the ingredients of human understanding. A child understands when his innate or I-language capacity has fully matured and is thus capable of understanding and producing the external or E-language, as Chomsky calls them. He maintains that the universal grammar together with other mental faculties normally gives form to the language competence and creativity manifest in the linguistic practice of a speaker and would be impossible without the tight interaction between these different, separate and autonomous faculties, which are, however, not entirely distinguishable in their contribution to overt language behaviour. On the other hand, the *syntactic* structures that make up the language faculty are entirely internal to the speaker and are not modified in any way by the natural and social environment of the speaker, according to Chomsky. A major mistake of Chomsky's critics like Crispin Wright or Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, the author thinks, is not to distinguish clearly enough between the computational and the conceptual systems, producing thus a completely distorted story about the language philosophy of Noam Chomsky.

The author maintains that Wittgenstein and Chomsky do *not* think of the mind and the language in ways that are irreconcilable. The apparent incompatibility is based on confusions about the targets Wittgenstein's philosophy and Chomsky's language theory, respectively aim at: both talk of grammar, but use this expression



to mean entirely different aspects of language and thus refer to entirely different kinds of investigation. While Chomsky is dealing essentially with the computational or algorithmic aspects of language, Wittgenstein considers this a question for empirical sciences and deals with conceptual aspects of language and its practice. The rules that govern the computational aspect are different and independent from the rules that govern the conceptual system. While the computational rules are essentially internal to the individual, the rules that govern the conceptual system are not necessarily impervious to social modulation. Chomsky does *not* deny that here, in the conceptual aspect, the type of influences that Wittgenstein has in mind are actually governing. However, it would be a mistake, the author maintains, to think that the use of words is completely determined by the conceptual system. The cognitive components of linguistic expressions are not determined only by use but also have a genetic origin.

What Chomsky's innate principle allows for is that we follow some rules blindly. Thinking of the “Kripke's paradox” mentioned above, there is nothing in the later Wittgenstein that would contradict the existence of a faculty to follow rules without being conscious of them. In this respect as well as for many other aspects, Wittgenstein's and Chomsky's view of language do not collide even if their words seem to, because they concern entirely different areas of enquiry. The different areas of interest of Chomsky and Wittgenstein, however, far from being separated by unsurmountable trenches, share sometimes permeable borders and regions of overlap: the author suggests that both convinced Wittgensteinians and convinced Chomskyans might see key aspects of each other's language concepts to be acceptable without need to abandon any aspect of their convictions.

Let's come back then, for a moment, to Brandom. There are, according to Chomsky, three systems which interact: a maximally simple computational system is associated with expressions of the phonetic–phonological system and with expressions of the semantic–pragmatic system. This last one seems to show that also Chomsky sees what Brandom calls the *Meaning–Use–Analysis (Between Saying and Doing)* and that his rejection of a connection between meaning and use is thus restricted to the computational aspects of language, mediated by the biological language capacity humans share. In both cases, the systems have to deal with different types of stimuli which they therefore must be able to process and respond to them. In the article “Some Strands of Wittgenstein’s Normative Pragmatism, and Some Strains of his Semantic Nihilism” contained in this volume, Brandom reminds

us that Kant sees human autonomy — “our possession of the authority to make ourselves responsible, to bind ourselves by conceptual norms” as an ontological fact, while “Hegel takes a large step to naturalizing this fundamental discursive normativity by treating the possession of this normative status as a social achievement”. However, while Brandom agrees thus also with Wittgenstein that the language capacity must be seen essentially as a normative and hence a social question, he relies also on algorithms to explain in detail the progress from the vocabulary of a basic language (or with non-discursive practical abilities) to the vocabulary of a meta-language, both when it comes to human expressive capacity and artificial intelligence (see *Between Saying and Doing*). As Simon Blackburn notes in his contribution to this issue, “[a]lgorithms require deductive relationships”, and the source of these relationships may seem open to questioning in Brandom’s account. Blackburn goes on to question how the weaker vocabulary might be able to describe the practices without the use of vocabulary available only in the richer vocabulary. While for Brandom the basis for his algorithms is non-discursive intentions based on practical abilities and his theory construction relies on the “iron triangle” of pragmatics, syntax and semantic, Chomsky starts with syntax; for him, the innate language faculty is the result of nature selecting a biologically optimal design for the architecture of language, manifest in its computational efficiency. We are born, one might want to add, with the natural curiosity to learn what we need for our integration into our community, among other things, our mother tongue. It is an open question and certainly subject to scientific investigation, how far this biological disposition already predetermines some of our linguistic reactions that eventually might even swap over into semantics. Some aspects of this thinking bears resemblance to the teleosemanticists, in particular Ruth Millikan, a way of thinking Brandom also finds worth considering in the essay I mentioned before. The example brought by Acero of what is meant by “I paint my house brown” (outside, if nothing else is known, but —with more context— it could be inside) seems to point in such a direction. Now, while neither Wittgenstein nor Brandom would be interested in investigating the neural underpinnings of normative practices, their philosophical proposal is at least entirely compatible with Chomsky’s findings, as Acero points out.

A final note of caution might be in place: Most of the articles published in this volume have been subjected to minor corrections and modifications since they were first put online. To make sure you have the latest version, please refer to the current online version or download the article anew.

The editor




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