

Wittgensteinian and other Commitments

Reflections on some aspects of the work of Robert Brandom

To Mark LeBar and everyone in the internet
discussion-group on Brandom, whom I repeatedly
bothered with Wittgensteinian qualms

Robert Brandom's work is the most important contribution to systematic philosophy elaborated during my life-time. To mention only the three most important books for my discussion: His first book, *Making it Explicit* (1994; *MIE*), is the sustained attempt to elaborate in detail one of the central research projects of Analytical Philosophy, a theory of meaning for a natural language (English). According to his own avowal it took him 18 years to accomplish it.¹ In a volume containing historical essays, *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (2002; *TMD*), he reconstructed the genealogy of the inferentialist semantic position exposed in *MIE* during the modern period of philosophy since Descartes. And in his John-Locke-Lectures, *Between Saying & Doing* (2008; *BSP*) he presented another systematic contribution to the philosophy of language, which he says is broadly compatible with *MIE*, but independent of it and relating to it as an „orthogonal enterprise“. (*BSP*, XIII).

In the following critical discussion I describe the Wittgensteinian commitments in Brandom's work and look at the tensions with other commitments, which a systematic theory at the same time is bound to undertake and to play down. The central tension to be identified and elaborated on is between a purely descriptive conception of *philosophy as reflective conceptual clarification* in Wittgensteins accounts of language-games for the purpose of dissolving philosophical problems and *systematic semantic theorizing*. Brandom is well aware of this tension, but claims to have overcome it successfully. By my lights these two options in nowadays' philosophy still are alternatives between which a choice is to be made.

I.

The most general contexts of Brandom's project in *MIE* are (in descending order of generality) Literature, Philosophy and Theory of Meaning (for a natural language).

Mentioning the first context is not trivial. Brandom is explicit in characterizing his book as

¹ *BSP*, XIII.

belonging to „creative nonfiction writing“, in which philosophical works are a „peculiar genre“. (MIE, XI) But that it is not trivial elucidates only from the *differentia specifica* 'philosophical', which constitutes the next-general context.

Since Plato's critique of writtenness it is not self-evident that philosophy is given in writing. Even Brandom himself does not philosophize exclusively in written form. Being a Professor and a teacher², much of his philosophizing is presented orally. It is worth to dwell a moment on the alternative of orality and writtenness. Since Plato, the core of philosophizing has been *reflective conceptual clarification* – trying to understand explicitly what we all know implicitly as speakers of languages and as actors. And the most modest aim of conceptual clarification is clarifying *someone's* understanding dialogically. (That's why Plato, being critical of writtenness, when he wanted to use this form, wrote *dialogues*.) Augustine has given the paradigmatic example for the need of such dialogical clarification in an 'I-you'-context when he formulated his question concerning the concept of time: 'quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerentem explicare velim, nescio.' We all insofar know, what time is, as we can use temporal determinations and expressions and act according to them, but asked to explicate this implicit understanding we are at a loss and must try hard. Both, Kant and Wittgenstein³, who besides Frege are named as the most important influences on the normative pragmatics of Brandom's project (MIE, XIII), have referred to Augustine's formulation as paradigmatic for the core task of philosophy.

Brandom's work is not only *reflective conceptual clarification*. It gives a theory of meaning for a natural language (English) with *explanatory* aspirations. The project of a theory of meaning can be seen as one of the central research projects of Analytical Philosophy arising from the foundational work of Frege and the early Wittgenstein, pursued in bits and pieces by Logical Empiricism and Carnap, coming to theoretical self-consciousness in the work of Quine, Davidson and Dummett.

Brandoms sees this tradition moving „decidedly on a slant“ (MIE, XII), because it takes the concepts of representation and reference as foundational and moves to explicate the inferential aspects of meaning in terms of them. He does it the other way round, taking the concept of inference and 'inferential articulation' as basic and moving to explicate representation and reference in terms of them. An interesting question is, why this project is not seen as moving on the converse slant of the dominant representationalist one. It can be seen so from the vantage point of the third option for the clarification of meaning: *reflective conceptual clarification*. Brandom acknowledges this third option, if only in a footnote:

2 Indeed, I have been told, that he was given an orality-implying nick-name: 'the preacher'.

3 Kant: 'Über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze ...' (1764), A 79. Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations* para. 89 c.

„ ... the representationalist and the inferentialist – these alternatives are not exhaustive. Other possibilities include treating neither representation nor inference as explanatorily prior to the other. One might then go on to explain both in terms of some third notion. *Or one might eschew reductive explanations in semantics entirely and remain contented with describing the relations among a family of mutually presupposing concepts – a family that includes representation, inference, claiming, referring, and so on.*“ (MIE, 669 footnote 90)

The quoted possibility italicized by me I believe to be Wittgenstein's. From his perspective both, the representationalist and the inferentialist 'order of explanation', can be seen to move on a conversely corresponding slant by aspiring to „reductive explanations in semantics“. The Wittgensteinian option gives *reflective conceptual clarification* by merely describing language-games.

This for Brandom is no philosophical ('theoretical') option precisely because it is *not theoretical and explanatory*, but *purely descriptive*. This is why Brandom ascribes to Wittgenstein a „theoretical quietism“ (MIE, XII) which he abhors, but he does not discuss Wittgenstein's reasons for eschewing a theoretical semantics in his own sense, among them not at least the pursuit of a different aim in philosophy:

„...we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our consideration. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And the description gets its light ... from the philosophical problems. ...“⁴

Wittgenstein's different aim in philosophy, as underlined in the quotation, is the dissolution of philosophical problems in quite specific senses⁵.

Trying to take issue with Brandom on the interpretation of Wittgenstein presupposes that one takes account of his explicit, unconventional views on the interpretation of philosophical views and works in *TMD* Chapter 3.

4 Cp. *Philosophical Investigations* para. 109.

5 As far as I can see I was the first to interpret in detail Wittgenstein's standing formula of 'the philosophical problems' (which, as is well known, appears already in the 'Preface' of *TLP*). Cp. *Wittgenstein's Revolution*, Ch. 1. (accessible on www.emlange.weebly.com) I argue there, that Wittgenstein's use of the phrase 'the philosophical problems' in *TLP* not only derives from Russell's *The problems of philosophy* (1912), but also mainly designates the Russelian trias of modern philosophical problems: realism vs. idealism, scepticism and solipsism. In Wittgenstein's later work 'the philosophical problems' are given a wider use, but it still relates to the *Tractarian* definition of philosophical problems as those which result from misunderstanding the logic of our language.

II.

Brandom's views on interpretation are unconventional in comparison with several hermeneutical conceptions in that they grow out and are backed by his own explicit theory of meaning. The central distinction, on which he builds, is between interpretation *de dicto* and interpretation *de re*. The distinction relies on his account of the attribution of propositional attitudes in these two ways, which plays a most important role in the final chapter of *MIE*. There it carries the burden of showing, that his theory of meaning combining a pragmatics in score-keeping terms of undertaking and attributing doxastic commitments and entitlements with an inferentialist semantics of their content, can account for the objectivity of concepts.

Put crudely, the distinction between interpretations *de dicto* and *de re* comes to this: *De dicto* specifications of views of an interpreted author see them in the context of *his* collateral beliefs or doxastic commitments, specifications *de re* take the views of the interpreted in the context of collateral beliefs or doxastic commitments *of the interpretor himself*, investing into the elaboration of the interpreted views that the interpretor takes to be true.

Interpretation *de re* certainly has a most legitimate place in the context of theory-construction. But in every other context it provokes the question, whether it really is an interpretation of the views of the interpreted author. The interpretation of historical philosophers and their works, when they are individuated by use of their names, belongs to the tasks of *interpersonal* understanding. And when the views, for instance, of Wittgenstein are taken in the context of what Brandom takes to be true, in how far can it be said, that it is Wittgenstein who is being interpreted rather than McWittgenstein or some other fictional character? Brandom is bound to accept Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* as an interpretation of Wittgenstein, but, as has been shown by Wittgenstein scholars⁶ *ad nauseam*, it is not. Kripke's Wittgenstein is a fusion of philosophical personalities, aptly to be called *Kripkenstein*.⁷

Since there is no use to quarrel about interpretation-theoretical commitments⁸, I am going merely to describe some of the uses Brandom makes of Wittgenstein's views in constructing his theory, taking issue with a few only, where I believe that Brandom gets it wrong – not Wittgenstein's views, but the topics they are views on.

6 Cp. G.P. Baker & P.M.S. Hacker: *Scepticism, Rules & Language*, Oxford 1984; E.M. Lange: 'Übereinstimmung bei Wittgenstein', still accessible on www.emlange.weebly.com.

7 Brandom himself once characterizes Kripke's 'interpretation' as giving „Kripke's Wittgenstein“ (*MIE*, 603). But this cannot be taken as a stand-off because according to his conception all interpretation is mere attribution and the ways of interpreting differ only in the sets of collateral commitments of which to make use is seen to be legitimate. In this conception of interpretation there is nothing like an interpretational proof which shows an attribution to be true.

8 I myself subscribe almost completely to the views expounded in Reinhart Brandt: *Die Interpretation philosophischer Werke*, Stuttgart 1984.

III.

Brandom is paying great *general* tribute to Wittgenstein's extraordinary place in the philosophical problematic common to them both by writing of „the vantage point won for us by the later Wittgenstein“ (*MIE*, 73) and even of „our Wittgensteinian philosophical world“ (*TMD*, 210). All the more remarkable is it, that Brandom in his retrospective reconstruction of the genealogy of his inferentialist position (in *TMD*, in contrast to the first two chapters of *MIE*) leaves Wittgenstein out. The only other philosopher of comparable importance to Brandom not treated there is Kant, but in his case the fact is at least being commented on. (*TMD*, 46).

In *particular*, Brandom endorses two fundamental commitments of Wittgenstein. The first concerns „one dimension of Wittgenstein's pragmatism“ and is consequent upon a slogan attributed to Wittgenstein: 'meaning is use'. His project Brandom takes to give a 'theory of use': „to explain the *meanings* of linguistic expressions in terms of their *use* ...“ (*MIE*, XII). Brandom acknowledges that Wittgenstein is not guilty of the slogan attributed to him, if only by the way. When discussing interpretations *de dicto* und intellectual history, which he acknowledges to be a demanding discipline, he writes the following concerning the interpretation of specific terms:

„I have heard specialized uses of the terms defined so that an *expert* is someone who knows a great deal about these things, but only a *scholar* is in a position responsibly to make negative existential claims about them all: 'Wittgenstein nowhere says >Meaning is use< (though he said things like >Don't look to the meaning, look to the use<) ...“ (*TMD*, 99)

Brandom probably does not aspire to be a Wittgenstein scholar, but he certainly is an expert. Nevertheless he is correct in the negative existential claim. Even at the place, where Wittgenstein most conspicuously comes near to the slogan attributed to him (*PI* para. 43), the claim 'meaning of a word is its use in language' is restricted to a large class of cases and denied for all. It is a question of Wittgenstein scholarship to answer which cases form the rest.⁹ (By the way, 'use *in language*' in *PI* para. 43 gives a holistic and therefore 'inferentialist' constraint.)

Of course, Brandom's form of endorsement of Wittgenstein's pragmatism is a point of fundamental divergence from Wittgenstein at the same time, because Wittgenstein eschewed semantic theorizing (cp. *PI* para. 109). Brandom accords this to Wittgenstein's 'theoretical quietism'

⁹ I tried to answer this question in an extended excursus on aspect-seeing in my study-commentary on the *PI*, Paderborn 1996; and, in a shorter and still accessible version, in: 'Ludwig Wittgenstein', in *Die deutsche Philosophie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Darmstadt ²2015, 311 ff.

in general: „Wittgenstein, the principled theoretical quietist, does not attempt to provide a theory of practices, nor would he endorse the project of doing so.“ (*MIE*, 29) But Wittgenstein offered specific arguments for being 'quietist' with respect to semantic theory (*PI* para 120-1), which Brandom does not bother to address. Wittgenstein argues (as did Brandom's hero Michael Dummett¹⁰), that the distinction between object- and meta-language cannot but metaphorically be applied to natural language, because for clarifications of everyday's meanings one has to use already „language full-blown ... (not some sort of preparatory, provisional one)“. Brandom in spite of this thinks to have a „theoretical meta-language“ available, which is normative in character and takes 'attribution of deontic attitude' to be the fundamental theoretical concept. (*MIE*, 182, 196)

The second most important commitment of Wittgenstein Brandom endorses he takes from the former's regress-of-rules argument. Brandom's reading of it forms the starting point of his extended theoretical project and he calls it „one of the fundamental insights from which the present approach proceeds.“ (*MIE*, 509) From *PI* para. 201 Brandom draws the conclusion, that rule-following cannot proceed according to explicitly formulated rules 'all the way down'. At the end there must be rules and norms which are implicit only in participating in a practice. One of the first formulations of the point in Brandom reads thus:

„... Wittgenstein argues that proprieties of performance that are governed by explicit rules do not form an autonomous stratum of normative statuses, one that could exist though no other did. Rather, proprieties governed by explicit rules rest on proprieties governed by practice. Norms that are *explicit* in the form of rules presuppose norms *implicit* in practices.“ (*MIE*, 20)

And the uptake of this point taken from Wittgenstein again is from the start connected to a criticism: „The regress argument does not by itself provide such a conception of proprieties of practice; it just shows that without one we cannot understand how rules can codify the correctnesses that they do.“ (*MIE*, 22) And, of course: „Wittgenstein, the principled theoretical quietist, does not attempt to provide a theory of practices...“ This is therefore Brandom's program in the pragmatics-part of his theory: „to come up with an account of norms implicit in practices that will satisfy the criteria of adequacy Wittgenstein's arguments have established.“ (*MIE*, 29-30)

Now, the lesson Brandom draws from the regress-of-rules argument is susceptible to two different readings. The presupposition of implicit proprieties by explicit rules can be taken to be valid for particular and basic cases ('locally') or in a generalizing way and across the board

10 Dummett: *Frege-Philosophy of Language*, 1974, 608.

('globally'). If one looks at Wittgenstein's own formulation in *PI* para. 201 I take it to be evident that Wittgenstein wanted his claim to be understood locally. The decisive proposition reads:

„...what we thereby show is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call 'following the rule' and 'going against it.'“

The words I have underlined in the quotation are characteristically left out in a context, where Brandom just wants to give the gist of Wittgenstein's argument. Then he can be read thus:

„Calling a rule that governs the application of another an 'interpretation', Wittgenstein argues that >there must be some way of following a rule that does not consist in an interpretation, but in following or going against it in practice<. The possibility of making norms explicit in the form of rules, which determine what is correct and incorrect by *saying* what does and does not qualify, depends on an underlying possibility of discriminating norms implicit in the practice of *doing* things correctly and incorrectly and responding to such performances non-linguistically as correct and incorrect.“ (*TMD*, 327)

The quotation within the quotation, which I have marked by using the different style '> ... <', is presented as a literal quotation of *PI* para. 201 in footnote 19 (*TMD*, 403). Comparison with the quotation from Wittgenstein's text I gave immediately before shows that this is incorrect.¹¹ And the words I have underlined in Brandom's comment on the putative quotation ('responding to such performances *non-linguistically*') contrast sharply with the words underlined in second place in the literal quotation of *PI* para. 201: „what we *call* 'following the rule' and 'going against it.'“

Of course, Brandom cites Wittgenstein quite correctly in other places (for instance in *MIE*, 21). But I take the passage from *TMD* to be symptomatic for what Brandom really wants to take out of Wittgenstein's words. If I am correct in this, Brandom understands Wittgenstein's claim in contrast to its intended sense in a global way.

Why is this important? Wittgenstein's picture connects with a perspective on the learning of

11 A certain slackness in references to Wittgenstein is not uncommon in Brandom. For another example: In *From Empiricism to Expressivism* Brandom asserts twice (pp. 17, 61) that 'Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences' (TLP 4.111) is the only proposition occurring verbatim in both the TLP and the PI. This is *sloppy* because in PI para. 109 the proposition does not occur *verbatim* (and, as far as I could see, nowhere else). And if quotation counts as an occurrence of a proposition it is *also incorrect*: TLP 4.5 is quoted (and extensively commented on) in PI para. 134. Brandom's neglect of this has also unfortunate consequences: It hinders him to trace Sellars' 'metalinguistic' treatment of a priori and categorical concepts not only to Carnap, but to Wittgenstein's TLP, by which Carnap confessed to have been influenced. Wittgenstein's concept of a formal concept (TLP 4.126 sqq.) inspired Carnap's metalinguistic treatment of semantic concepts.

language and the acquisition of concepts.¹² He suggests that the performance-correcting words 'correct' and 'incorrect' (normatively specializing 'yes' and 'no' as the fundamental possibilities of comment) play an essential role in these processes. And to them a linguistic technique can be connected (a 'joint' to the language-games added) that again is foundational for more elaborate language-learning and concept-acquisition, after a certain basis has been laid by simple behavioristic training ('Abrichtung')¹³: the technique of *explaining* ('teaching') the meanings of words, expressions and the contexts of their use. The way for learning by explanations of meaning is cleared as soon as, after a phase of „ostensive teaching of words“, the trainee has learnt to ask „what the name is“. (*PI* para. 6)

There is no mention of explanations of meaning in Brandom's theory. But on Wittgenstein's view there is an *internal* connection between the concepts of *meaning* and *explanation of meaning*: „The meaning of a word is what an explanation of its meaning explains.“ (*PI* para 560) Proof of it is, that explanations of meaning in a certain form can be substituted for what they explain (cp. *PG* IV.59 c).

Of course, Brandom's neglect of explanations of meanings is due to his methodological commitment to use a regimented 'meta'-language containing only normative expressions, not intentional and semantic expressions as well, which belong to the *explananda* of his theory. But this is to say, that the design of the theory from the start dispenses with a claim to being descriptive of our actual linguistic and conceptual practice. It is content to construct a normative „model of ... (discursive) practice“ (*MIE*, 196), which elsewhere is acknowledged to be „simplified“ (*MIE*, 490), of a language centering around the language-game of assertion as definitory of what he calls an 'autonomous discursive practice' (ADP). And in it the *internal connection* of *meaning* and *use* is articulated at the cost of its other internal connections with *explanation* and *teaching*.¹⁴

IV.

Having mentioned the concept of ADP gives opportunity to make explicit, that Brandom's

12 Cp. *Zettel* para. 412: 'I connect the concept of *teaching* with the concept of *meaning*'. (own translation). And remember how prominent a role questions of learning and teaching play in the beginning of *PI*. (para.s 1-32). – What Brandom has to say about language-learning and concept-acquisition largely comes from Sellars – cp. *TMD*, 360-2. Although learners are said to have to acquire reliable differential response dispositions not only to environmental stimuli, but to linguistic utterances of others too, no level is specified, at which there can be a question after (the meaning of) a name, for instance.-- *MIE* in contrast allows of no genetic perspective, because it „takes for granted a set of inferentially articulated norms as an already up-and-running enterprise.“ (*TMD* 12)

13 Cp. *Zettel* para. 419: 'The foundation of any explanation is training. (This is what educators should keep in mind.)' (own translation)

14 In *PG* II.23 Wittgenstein lists all the internal relations that hold the concept of meaning in place, although only implying that 'explaining' is a form of 'teaching'.

theory-construction does by far not depend on Wittgensteinian commitments only. In his pragmatics Brandom takes up ideas of Frege, Dummett, David Lewis (who is responsible for the idea of 'score-keeping'), Dennett and Davidson (from whom the interpretational 'I-thou'-context of score-keeping is derived). In his inferentialist semantics Brandom builds on Frege and Dummett again, but also, among others, on Sellars.

It is from the latter arguments in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* that Brandom's concept of ADP is a generalization. One of Sellars' central arguments shows that the 'look' and 'seeming'-talk of traditional epistemology cannot play the foundational role claimed for it, because the respective claims *withhold* assertational force from what is said to look so-and-so or to seem-to-be and therefore *presuppose* language-uses in which assertional force is endorsed. 'Look'-talk therefore is said not to form 'an autonomous stratum in language' or a 'language-game that could be played though no other is'. The concept of ADP is the generalization of 'autonomous stratum'. And it is worth remarking, that Brandom's use of 'language-game' – a term invented by Wittgenstein as an aspect-illuminating metaphor to highlight the family-resemblances of language-use to the playing of games according to rules – is much more derived from Sellars ('Some Reflections on Language-games') than from Wittgenstein. As a theoretician Brandom is thoroughly inimical to building concepts out of metaphors.

The concept of ADP is ill-defined and can be syllogistically shown so with the help of the concept of a 'vocabulary', which Brandom uses extensively and admits of being ill-defined (*BSP* 225), by arguing from 'an ADP is a deploying of relevant vocabularies' as major premise. The concept of a 'vocabulary' presumably is derived from the case of 'logical vocabulary', which can be defined precisely relatively to a certain concept of logic. Kant defines logic as the field of study, in which one abstracts from *all* content of our thought, concentrating exclusively on its form. Logical vocabulary then is the set of form-constituting expressions. But Brandom does not rely on Kants concept of logic. He writes under the presupposition, that truth-functional propositional and predicate logic is the general *elementary*¹⁵ logic. Michael Wolff has shown, that truth-functional logic presupposes a non-truth-functional one, from which the truth-functional connectives and operators can be derived (but not *vice versa*), and that quantification-theory is not purely formal in Kant's sense in that it presupposes three postulates – the principle of excluded middle; the principle arbitrary sufficient justification (which leads to the interpretation of the hypothetical 'if-then' as 'material conditional'), and the presupposition of a non-empty universe of discourse – that cannot be shown to be valid purely formally.¹⁶ The truly general *elementary* logic according to Wolff

15 Benson Mates has codified this presupposition in the title of his textbook (Oxford UP 1965).

16 Cp. Michael Wolff: *Abhandlung über die Prinzipien der Logik* (Frankfurt am Main 2007); *Einführung in die Logik*, München 2006.

already contains modal notions (among them 'true' treated as a modal notion), whereas in the context that takes truth-functional logic as elementary modal operators constitute a different calculus (of higher order). Brandom himself gives a formal semantics of inference and incompatibility that is directly modal (*BSP*, Ch. 5), but in general uses an intensional *expressive* concept of logic as the vocabulary that makes explicit proprieties of inference implicit in normal discursive practice. For this he pays the price that the concept of logical vocabulary becomes vague (because modal, normative and even intentional idioms are attributed an expressive and, insofar, logical function relative to a fact-stating base vocabulary).¹⁷

In the end Brandom considers, whether a natural language is a vocabulary, „in which everything can be said“ and therefore an ADP (*BSP* 227). This is again a point of contact with Wittgenstein and his insistence, that for clarifications of meaning „language full-blown“ must be used and not a provisional or preparatory one. (*PI* para. 120). In his characteristic style he puts a rhetorical question to motivate his position, one of only two complete sentences italicized in *PI* (*Well then, how is another one – sc. language – to be constructed?*) The intended answer is: Through explanation of its expressions in normal language. And this points to an explanation of meaning for 'language' as an „universal base vocabulary“ (*BSP* 225) – natural language is the universal medium of expression and representation, because it makes it possible to explain all its expressions insofar as they can be explained at all. In this it contrasts with other media of expression and representation (painting, sculpture, theatre etc.). When something has to be clarified with respect to them, it is language, that must be used. But if something linguistic has to be clarified, if anything, language itself provides the means of clarification.

Wittgenstein himself did not develop this concept of language. After having given up the *Tractarian* conception of language as the set of all propositions (4.001) and settled for the conception of 'family of language-games', he was sceptical with respect to every other use of 'language' than the colloquial one as collective noun ('Sammelname') for natural languages (German, English, Latin, etc.¹⁸). But his insistence on the internal relation of 'meaning' and 'use in language'/'explanation of meaning' makes such an explication possible.

V.

Wittgenstein, too, talked and wrote of 'autonomy of language' or, rather, 'autonomy of grammar'.

17 As to the later Wittgenstein, he seems to me to be non-committal about the question: what the *elementary* logic of our linguistic practice is. His intensional concept of logic survives from the *Tractarian* period: Logic is the most general condition of sense or understanding. But compare for a reconstruction of a development of Wittgenstein's views on logic G.P Baker: *Wittgenstein, Frege & the Vienna Circle*, Blackwell 1988.

18 Cp. *PG* X.137 b.

It is instructive to take a look at his conception, because it is related to three essential points of divergence from Brandom's conception: (1) it is related to a 'problem of philosophy' Wittgenstein was concerned about from early to late (and being related to the task of dissolution of philosophical problems is the central point distinguishing the Wittgensteinian conception of philosophy from a 'theoretical' one); (2) it concerns a central dimension of Wittgenstein's conception of language and its transformation from early to late and so is representative for the self-critical character of Wittgenstein's philosophy; (3) it turns on the central descriptive divergence between Brandom and Wittgenstein concerning explanations of meaning. I treat of all three aspects in one train of thought.

The problem of philosophy, in the context of which talk of an autonomy of language comes up, is the putative alternative between realism and idealism. It is one of the three philosophical problems *TLP* primarily was meant to dissolve (the other two being scepticism and solipsism). In *TLP* the conception of language is heteronomous because the structure of language officially is understood to depend on the structure of reality or the world. The world is the totality of facts (1.1), language is the totality of propositions (4.001). Facts decompose into states of affairs and these in turn into absolutely simple objects, propositions decompose into elementary propositions (being truth-functions of them; 5 – 5.01) and these in turn into names. The whole metaphysical system rests on the relation of names to objects. As is well known, Wittgenstein in *TLP* uses two expressions for this relation: names are said to represent ('vertreten') objects in elementary propositions (3.22) and they are said to mean the object (3.203: „The object is its meaning.“) Both characterizations relate to different perspectives – 3.22 is said, so to speak, from the perspective of the object – it is represented by the name; 3.203 is said from the perspective of the name – the name means the object. Now, this is one of the places in *TLP*, where the numbering system of its propositions is carrying argumentative weight. As Wittgenstein explains in the footnote at the beginning of *TLP*, the numbers of its propositions indicate their 'logical weight'.¹⁹ According to this, 3.22 is 'weightier' than 3.203, because it is an elucidation of third, not only of fourth order. What is shown thereby is that representation comes before naming, the 'realist' aspect of the relation object-name precedes the 'idealist' aspect of the relation name-object. That is how language is seen to be dependent on the structure of reality. Reality has to be represented in order to make it possible to mean it. Evidence for this interpretation is to be found in the *Notebook* 1915. In the rich inventory

19 Respect for Wittgenstein's intentions with the numbering system not only helps to discern some argumentative structure in the seemingly proclamatory text at several places; deciphering the numbering system is a presupposition of getting a grip on the structure of the text as a whole, which is not to be read in a linear fashion. Although I have been relegated for it to life-long membership in the minor clergy only, I am still convinced to have made the correct proposal for understanding *TLP*'s numbering system in: *Wittgenstein und Schopenhauer*, Paderborn 1989, Ch. 1 (accessible on www.emlange.weebly.com). Curiously, it has been received in a philosophy 'comic' (John Heaton & Judy Groves: *Wittgenstein for Beginners*, Icon Books 1994, 30-1).

of forms in *TLP* one form is conspicuously missing: Wittgenstein nowhere uses the category 'form of a name'. But he does use the category 'form of an object' extensively. Forms of names are missing in *TLP* because Wittgenstein thought names to, so to speak, 'absorb' the form of objects.²⁰

Now, this is a kind of dissolution of the realist-idealist controversy, because both aspects are said to be necessary for the relation of language to reality. But, of course, it has a realist bias.

In his self-critique Wittgenstein relinquishes this realist bias. The connection of language to reality is now discussed in the context of explanations of meaning, especially ostensive explanations of meaning. According to this account, expressions ostensively explained are 'calibrated'²¹ to objects serving as paradigms. In *TLP* names did not admit of explanations of meanings, only of circular 'elucidations'. (3.263) Now explanations of meaning are thought to be available across the board. Because explanations of meanings, including ostensive ones, are always normative, prescriptions, language as admitting of explanations of meanings across the board ceases to be heteronomous and becomes autonomous, all the more so, as the paradigms in ostensive explanations are best seen as „part of the *language*“, although „they do not belong to spoken language“ (*PI*, para. 16):

„The connection between 'language and reality' is made by way of explanation of words, - which belong to grammar, so that language remains self-contained, autonomous“ (*PG* IV. 55 c ; own translation)²²

Because objects as paradigms are 'normative' entities belonging to grammar, language is autonomous and self-contained.²³

20 In *Notebooks 1914-1916* the third but last paragraph of 1915 (70/70e) is almost saying so: „A name designating an object thereby stands in a relation to it which is wholly determined by the logical kind of the object and which signalises that logical kind.“ 'Determined' in *TLP* has become 'represented' (3.22), 'signalise' has become 'mean' (3.203). 'Almost' is needed in qualifying this piece of evidence, because *TLP* l.c. does not speak of 'logical kinds'.

21 This expression is due to David Pears: *The false Prison*, Oxford 1989, who explicates, that 'calibration to standard objects' and 'agreement in judgements' are, according to Wittgenstein, the main stabilizers of meaning in communication. (Vol. II, 368; 480)

22 German: „Die Verbindung zwischen 'Sprache und Wirklichkeit' ist durch die Worterklärungen gemacht, - welche zur Sprachlehre gehören, so dass die Sprache in sich geschlossen, autonom, bleibt.“ 'Sprachlehre' is an old German expression for 'grammar', translating literally as 'teaching of language'. It implies that the use of language is a normative enterprise and that explanations of meaning are explications of the norms implicitly regulating linguistic practice. Language or grammar, the explication of the norms of language, according to Wittgenstein is autonomous because the normative is irreducible to the causal and factual. – Wittgenstein's unusual wide use of 'grammar' nevertheless is quite determinate – to the 'grammar' of expressions belong „all conditions of understanding (of sense)“ (German: „alle Bedingungen des Verständnisses (des Sinnes).“) *PG* IV.45 c.

23 Brandom argues that reference to singular objects is best thought of according to „a *tactile*, rather than a *visual*, model“ (*MIE* 583). Wittgenstein's conception of ostensive explanation shows one way to do so. – In his *Study Guide* to Sellars: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Harvard UP 1997, 155-159) Brandom criticizes ostensive explanation on Sellarsian grounds with respect to sections 33-35. This critique in the context of the positivist conception of 'Konstatierungen' seems to rest on a misunderstanding of ostensive explanations as claims. But they are norms. I have not been able to find out, whether Brandom's systematic claim, that deixis presupposes anaphora (*MIE*, 464-68) also is predicated on the assumption, that deictic utterances always are claims. If not, I cannot but

This is the way the dissolution of the realist-idealist-controversy now goes. The idealist is relying on the fact, that reality is given to us only through concepts of our own making. The realist is relying on the fact, that whether our propositions are true or false, depends on reality, not on us. But both adversaries presuppose the unwarranted assumption, that only one of the alternatives can be true. This is wrong – both can be true in different respects. The idealist is right concerning explanations of meaning and concept-formation; the realist is right concerning description and knowledge of reality. (Cp. *PI* para. 402)

In Wittgenstein, talk of autonomy of grammar (language) is well defined, because extensively explained. For the concept of ADP in Brandom we have only the metaphorical explication as 'language-game that can be played though no other is'.

VI.

In turning to natural language as ADP in the end, Brandom testifies to the fact, that the conception derived from Sellars does not really admit the Wittgensteinian plural 'language-games'. In the end there is only one ADP.

In Sellars conceptions of 'language-entrance' (perception) and 'language-exit' (action)-rules, a philosophical systematic deriving from Aristotle and Kant is projected on language.²⁴ It takes the dualism of the cognitive (theory) and the practical (practice) as foundational. And since action is construed as the undertaking of a commitment by executing it, the cognitive and assertational is given pride of place.

This construction is in stark contrast to Wittgenstein's conception of language as a family of (countless²⁵) language-games. Wittgenstein did not take the cognitive and the practical as the basic contrast; in his thought the distinction between 'sense or meaning' and 'truth-vs- falsehood' and, generalizing to non-indicative language-uses, 'satisfaction-vs- non-satisfaction' plays the analogous role. It digs deeper and thereby makes room for a plurality of language-games. Where do belong, in the Sellars-Brandom-construction, expressions of feelings, aesthetic evaluation, moral appraisal, advertising and religious pronouncements and so many more language-games?

confess my disbelief about the systematic claim.

24 Another source of this is the classification of language-uses according to the direction of fit with reality – in theoretical uses, if there is lack of fit between claim and reality, the claim has to be withdrawn or changed; in practical uses in case of lack of fit reality can be changed as well. The observation originally seems to be due to Anscombe's book on *Intention* (1957), § 2: „In some cases the facts are, so to speak, impugned for not being in accordance with the words, rather than *vice versa*.“

25 Cp. *PI* para. 23. This is a place, where Wittgenstein's German text should be emended. He uses 'unzählig' which literally means 'indefinitely many', where he means 'zahllos' which should be rendered 'not sensibly to be counted'. My English-German Dictionary tells me that 'countless' means 'zahllos', whereas 'unzählig' should be rendered as 'innumerable'; so the English translation actually has emended the text.

In Wittgenstein's pluralistic conception of language as family of language-games the game of assertion is one important game among many others, that are important for other purposes. The function of the assertational game is to make explicit, clarify and thematize the claims implicit in other language-games. In the default-and-challenge structure of our normal language uses, which Brandom acknowledges as Wittgenstein's correct picture of the giving and asking for reasons in language (see below), the game of assertion is of second order. This insight could be assimilated to the theoretical conception of Brandom, if he would make a distinction of levels proposed by another philosopher striving for an universal pragmatics, Habermas, between acting and discoursing ('Handlung und Diskurs')²⁶ Doing this would agree with the global reading of the consequences of Wittgenstein's regress-of-rules argument Brandom endorses.

VII.

One problem Brandom's theory wants to solve is the conferral of *determinate* conceptual content on expressions and claims. Problems of indeterminacy and determinacy in his context come from Quine, of course, (and from Hegel). And in one context, where he explains this connection he can be read thus:

„Quine rejects Carnap's sharp separation of the process of deciding what concepts (meanings, language) to use from deciding what judgements (belief, theory) to endorse. For him, it is fantasy to see meanings as freely fixed independently and in advance of our applying those meanings in forming fallible beliefs that answer for their correctness to how things are. Changing our beliefs can change our meanings. There is only one practice – the practice of actually making determinate judgments.“ (TMD, 214)

The part of the last sentence underlined puts the difference to Wittgenstein in a nutshell. With respect to our actual linguistic practice the claim, that there is only the one practice of making determinate judgements is a descriptively hopeless regimentation. If it is meaningful at all (because to deny that some of our utterances are explorative only is senseless; it cannot account for the existence in language of the language-games of putting questions), it is so in the context of narrow philosophical and theoretical commitments only.

Brandom should have taken notice of the fact that problems of (in)determinacy do not relate to

²⁶ Habermas lacked the resources to elaborate his proposal in a convincing way, because he thought the theory of *Speech-Acts* of Searle as the way to implement it.

Quine and Davidson only, but to Wittgenstein as well.

As is explicitly stated in *TLP*, its whole ontology of objects and states of affairs – and therefore its theory of the proposition as well – depends on the postulate of determinacy of sense. (*TLP* 3.23: „The postulate of the possibility of the simple signs is the postulate of the determinateness of the sense.“) One of the most important results of Wittgenstein's self-critique is the insight, that what matters concerning sense is not determinacy but determinability. This is where his concept of explanation of meaning has its systematic place. Use of language in communication or cognition in everyday contexts is neither made impossible nor so much as endangered by most of our usual expressions being vague, if unclarities and misunderstandings can be met with explanations of meaning, which help a speaker to make himself understood. And that's the way our normal communication goes.

The internal connection of meaning and explanation of meaning in normal discourse is present already in *TLP*:

„The meanings of the simple signs (the words) must be explained to us, if we are to understand them.

By means of propositions we explain ourselves (German: verständigen wir uns).“ (4.026)

Because Wittgenstein subscribed to a version of the language-of-thought-hypothesis in *TLP*, he could not take advantage of this insight in what he said about the use of language. But when the insight had been won that there is no need for and no sense in the postulate of absolute determinacy of sense, he could and did elaborate on what was an early insight already.²⁷

VIII.

Wittgenstein, though he calls explanation of meaning „a language-game in its own right“ (*PI* para. 27), could well have accepted the point of Quine against Carnap that Brandom endorses. This is because of another Wittgensteinian commitment taken over by Brandom. He calls it the 'default-and-challenge structure' of entitlement in our normal communication – and takes it to describe the „picture of the practices of giving and asking for reasons that Wittgenstein suggests“. If one had to

²⁷ The interpretational points on Wittgenstein and his development are substantiated in my books on Wittgenstein. It is one of the general shortcomings of the reception of Wittgenstein in the English-speaking world, that almost nobody (with the exception of, perhaps, David Pears) has a clarified and elaborated account of Wittgenstein's thought as developing from *TLP* to *PI*. The whole of Part I of *PI* can be read as a self-critique of Wittgenstein's 'old way of thinking' (*PI*, Preface) in *TLP*. And the formal object of this self-critique is the constructive model in *TLP* of language use centering around a conception of quantification-theory as giving the deep structure of our propositions and as the operative language of thought in all meaning and understanding. Or so I argue in my interpretational books on Wittgenstein.

justify his utterances and claims 'all the way down' a regress would result comparable to the regress of rules. But: „If many claims are treated as innocent until proven guilty – taken to be entitled commitments until and unless someone is in a position to raise a legitimate question about them – the global threat of regress dissolves.“ (*MIE*, 176-178) This practice according to live-and-let-live precepts is relevant not only to claims, but to the 'meanings' in which they are expressed as well. Explanations of meaning in normal communication are necessary only when unclarity or misunderstanding has to be removed and therefore never 'all the way down'. But they have to be available as possibilities that are connected horizontally to the substantial language-games (and not relegated to a semantical language-game of higher order, making explicit ex post what is only implicit in normal communication and the deontic score-keeping it is structured by), if communication is to be secured by the possibility of removing hindrances to understanding from case to case 'on the spot'.

IX.

Brandom acknowledges that Wittgenstein thematizes inferential aspects of meaning, but thinks that representational ones prevail in his thought. (*MIE* 656 footnote 17). But in *Articulating Reason* Brandom distinguishes between hyper-, strong and weak inferentialism. The first holds that inferences in the *formal* logical sense are sufficient for the determination of conceptual content, the second that *material* inferences are necessary and sufficient for it, the last that inferential relations whatsoever are necessary, but not sufficient for the conferral of conceptual content.

In *MIE* Brandom endorses strong inferentialism, but on occasion he also can be content with investing weak inferentialism only (cp. *BSP* 111 footnote 18). Concerning the later phase of Wittgenstein's philosophy it must be said, that holding the propositional context-principle of word-meaning to be senseless (*PR* II.14 a), – because a non-postulatory solution to the colour-exclusion problem of *TLP* (6.3751) showed it necessary to take language-games (at first: propositional systems) as the fundamental units of meaning, not isolated propositions, – shows him to be a weak inferentialist. And the inferential aspects of meaning that weak inferentialism acknowledges are by no means relegated to a minor rank compared to the representationalist ones.

X.

It is to Brandom's great credit that he not only acknowledges Wittgenstein's method of internal

clarification of sense as a viable alternative to semantic theorizing (as has been shown above in section I), but also admits that philosophical clarification of meanings has to start the Wittgensteinian way and remains dependent on this starting-point (*BSP* 215-6). This for him belongs to the hermeneutical platitudes that co-define pragmatism. Relating to them he can be read:

„I accept all of these pragmatist claims about the distinctiveness and basicness of ordinary hermeneutic understanding of discursive performances and their products. Should we conclude that the analytic project (sc. of semantic theorizing) is just a mistake? I don't think so. For this pragmatist line of thought does not entail that many aspects of discursive practice might not *also* be susceptible to understanding of the sort I have called 'algebraic'.“ (*BSP* 213)

Brandom l.c. then goes on to recommend analytic semantic theorizing, which is admitted to be constructive, not descriptive, because it achieves the highest analytic value of clarity along both the dimensions of definiteness and perspicuity. But if it is only *also* possible to clarify meaning in the algebraic understanding of constructing a formal theory, then the Wittgensteinian internal clarification of sense in hermeneutic understanding, on which the algebraic understanding is acknowledged to remain dependent (*BSP* 215-6), is not only a viable alternative, but even self-contained. And this raises the question: Why enter into constructive theorizing at all?

Brandom has an answer to this question too. He believes the algebraic understanding – „this algorithmic-constructional method (building complex things by applying well-defined operations to simpler things)“ – to be „a very good, perhaps superlative, way of securing clarity of understanding“ and therefore to represent „the 'gold standard' of understanding generally“. (*BSP* 214)

Here the reminder does not seem to be superfluous, that in monetary affairs belief in the gold-standard of currencies has proven to be superstitious. And Brandom's metaphor cannot be cashed out. The gold-standard of a currency was the promise that notes and coins could be changed into gold any time. But Brandom admits that algebraic understanding is not available everywhere, and, where it is, it „contains an appeal to a base vocabulary whose use is *not* held in place algebraically, but depends on *another* sort of practical mastery and understanding.“ (*BSP* 215)

Brandom's commitment to the algebraic gold-standard of understanding should be taken as a personal one. And he himself shows it to be so, too:

„David Lewis propounded a view of philosophy that was inspiring to me when I was a student, and inspires me still. He thought that what philosophers should do is lay down a set of premises concerning some topic of interest as clearly as possible, and extract consequences

from them as rigorously as possible. Having done that, one should lay down another, perhaps quite different set of premises, and extract consequences from them as rigorously as possible. The point was not in the first place to endorse the conclusions of any of these chains of reasoning, but to learn our way about in the inferential field they all defined, by tracing many overlapping, intersecting, and diverging paths through the terrain. That is how we would learn what difference it would make, in various contexts, if we endorse some claim that figures as a premise in many of the inferences, and what might entitle us to a claim that shows up as a consequence in many of the inferences. Actually plumping for and defending any of these theses is then a subsequent, parasitic, and substantially less important stage of the process. The principal aim is not belief, but understanding.“ (BSP 225-6)

In seeing understanding and sense, not belief and truth, to be the principal aim of philosophy this Lewisian conception of philosophy is in concord with the Wittgensteinian one. And seeing commitment to it as a personal affair is too:

„Work in philosophy is rather work upon oneself. On the own conception.
On how one sees things. (And what one demands of them).“ (BT 407, own translation)²⁸

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²⁸ German: „Die Arbeit in der Philosophie ... ist eigentlich mehr die Arbeit an Einem selbst. An der eignen Auffassung. Daran, wie man die Dinge sieht. (Und was man von ihnen verlangt.)“